

OUR WORK IN GUATEMALA

## STRENGTHENING POLITICAL IMPACT AND LEADERSHIP THE YOUNG INDIGENOUS LEADER WHO PUSHES FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

"NIMD has given me the tools to strengthen my political knowledge and leadership," says Nanci Paola Chiriz Sinto, a young leader who promotes the collective and individual rights of women and indigenous peoples in Guatemala. At only 21, Nanci was already deeply involved in politics. She became the National Secretary for Youth for Winaq, a political movement with roots in the indigenous communities of Guatemala.

It was in this role, and as the youngest representative of her party, that Nanci first came across NIMD. Her relationship with the organization grew quickly as she took on the role of Coordinator of the Youth Commission of the Permanent Forum of Political Parties, a multiparty dialogue platform supported by NIMD until 2015.



## Sharing experiences and learning from others

In 2014, NIMD invited Nanci to share her experience as National Secretary for Youth for Winaq at the International Seminar for Equity and Political Equality for Women in Honduras. At the event, which brought together young people from across Central America, Nanci described what it means to be a young indigenous woman in Guatemala's political system, one which harbours deep inequality and exclusion under the surface.

Among the participants of the Seminar were many women who were members of two or even three groups facing discrimination in Central America. As well as being women, many were also young and belonged to an ethnic minority. Listening to their stories, Nanci came to understand the barriers many women face when they participate in political campaigns. She understood how difficult it can be to thrive in a political culture where women are expected to stick to the traditional roles of mother, wife and caregiver. With her new understanding of the regional context, she learned the importance of building alliances between women and strategizing together.

The seminar also looked at the challenges that young people across the region face when they participate in politics. Tackling these challenges together with other young and ambitious women made sense to Nanci. With her new knowledge and network, she felt more determined and empowered than ever to stand up for the rights of other young women and indigenous people in Guatemala.

Nanci was also the youngest participant in NIMD's Women's Political Rights conference, held in Tunisia in 2017. She found it enriching to learn from participants in such an international environment outside of her country. As she reflected on their different experiences, she started to understand the scale of the violence faced by women around the world, and the importance of making sure that societies do not see this kind of violence as normal.

"Often, we think that the insults and verbal attacks are just the cost that we, as women, have to pay for participating in politics. Women are fighting against a system which is not only patriarchal but also adult-centrist and racist. Faced with this, we have to come together as women and young people. I had the chance to forge alliances and friendships with other women. Sharing experiences made us stronger. Suddenly, it didn't matter that we were from different political parties or different social groups."

## Opening space for the political participation of women and youth

Looking back, Nanci recognizes the valuable impact that these experiences made on her contribution to politics in Guatemala. She became more confident in herself and in her leadership skills, and she was motivated to have a real influence on the political participation of women and young people within her party. For example, during her party's 2015 convention, Nanci was part of an internal dialogue

process, which successfully led to the appointment of two new members onto the Executive Board as representatives of the Women's Office and the Electoral Affairs office.

This involved many hours of dialogue and negotiation. Nanci recognizes that what she learned from NIMD helped her to set out her approach for the debate. Throughout the process, she contributed to a participative and tolerant environment, where dialogue was valued.

Her new confidence also helped her, as Coordinator of the Youth Commission of the Permanent Forum of Political Parties, contribute to gathering a series of recommendations and suggestions from young people from across the political spectrum. These were used as input to Guatemala's existing National Law on Youth.





The Youth Commission proposed placing the real experiences and wishes of young people at the centre of this law. Since many young people in Guatemala face discrimination, unemployment and marginalization, the Commission felt it was crucial to hear their voices and respond to their needs.

In order to do this, the Commission carried out an analysis. Nanci and her team created dialogue platforms for youth representatives from across the political spectrum. Although it can be very difficult to reach consensus in interparty settings in Guatemala, the young people put their political differences aside and engaged in real discussions on the needs of young people in their country.

The Youth Commission used this session to write a technical report identifying the needs of young people. Among other things, they identified a call for a holistic education, which would include physical, artistic, social and emotional learning.

“It was a very difficult process but it was also enriching, and our input was used in reforms to the law.”

For Nanci, NIMD’s work in Guatemala is crucial. NIMD helped her gain the skills she needed to contribute to the reform. She says it was through the experiences NIMD provided her that she learned the value of tolerance and respect.

“I believe NIMD plays a key role in strengthening democracy in Guatemala, by providing training for political party and civil society representatives. I was part of this process and I gained tools to strengthen my political impact and leadership.”

“The training that NIMD provides for political parties, women and youth gives them the knowledge and skills they need to strengthen Guatemala’s political system.”

## Supporting indigenous women

Nanci now uses her new skills to provide specialist training for indigenous women on human rights, justice, land rights and reporting mechanisms. For personal reasons, she decided to step down as National Secretary for Youth and she is no longer active in a political party.

Despite this, the support and opportunities that NIMD provided her have contributed to her personal and professional development as a young indigenous Guatemalan woman. Having taken part in NIMD’s many dialogues, she is no longer scared to talk publicly and with conviction about her political views and experiences within a party.

Though the progress she sees is incremental, with changes in her participants’ daily lives unfolding over time, she finds it rewarding to be able to support indigenous groups in this way. She emphasizes that “women and indigenous communities are majority in Guatemala” – it is time for them to enjoy the same voice and rights as other groups.

Nanci shows her commitment to Guatemala through everything she does. Her life and her work to promote women’s rights and empower indigenous communities resonate strongly with NIMD. We know that leaders like Nanci are key to strengthening democracy and making a long-lasting impact in their country.



OUR WORK IN UGANDA

## **THE INTER-PARTY ORGANIZATION FOR DIALOGUE** **WHERE BIG AND SMALL ARE EQUAL**

Uganda's Justice Forum (JEEMA) was formed in 1996, despite an ongoing 20-year ban on political parties. When Uganda transitioned to multiparty politics in 2005, JEEMA took up its role as a small opposition party.

Since then the party has never held more than one parliamentary seat, coming out of the 2016 elections with none at all. But changes in electoral districts in 2018 meant JEEMA was able to regain its seat, ending its three-year absence from parliament.



Uganda's political culture is interesting. The country has over 50 registered political parties. Outside of the main few parties, the rest are little known in the mind of an ordinary Ugandan.

This, of course, has a lot to do with Uganda's recent political history. When the country's president, Yoweri Museveni, came to power in 1986 he outlawed political parties.

Although Uganda is now once again a multiparty democracy, the country still has a de-facto one-party dominant political system and a polarized political landscape. Opposition parties have only limited space to influence the political reform agenda. As such, they remain fragile and face several challenges.

But some political parties have weathered the storm and remained politically afloat. One such a party is JEEMA.

## The Inter-party Organization for Dialogue

The Inter-party Organization for Dialogue (IPOD) was pleased to welcome back JEEMA as a member in 2018, when it regained its seat in parliament.

Founded and facilitated by NIMD, the IPOD platform brings together all of Uganda's parliamentary political parties in the spirit of dialogue and cooperation. The dialogue takes place outside of the parliamentary arena, which changes the power balance between the parties. Regardless of the number of seats they have in parliament, parties take part in the IPOD platform as equal members. Any decision taken requires consensus, and all parties have an equal voice. As such, IPOD provides small political parties with a means of political engagement, where they are placed on a level footing with their peers.

## JEEMA's return

Since IPOD only targets political parties with a seat in parliament, JEEMA did not participate in the platform from 2016 to 2018.

The party's Chair, Kibirige Mayanja, was very happy to be able to rejoin the platform, and recognized the opportunities it offers smaller parties like JEEMA. He particularly values JEEMA's participation in the IPOD secretariat. As a member of each party takes part in the secretariat, this space allows all parties to voice their concerns openly to find constructive ways of dealing with the issues that arise.

"What is fascinating is the ability for NIMD to treat all parties as equals. JEEMA with one MP and NRM with over 300 MPs is the biggest take away for me. No one has a bigger voice under IPOD".

According to NIMD Country Representative and IPOD Executive Secretary, Frank Rusa, new additions like JEEMA have the capacity to both strengthen IPOD and contribute to the rich discourse of diverse opinion. "Since the IPOD platform is a safe space to promote important and honest discussions between political parties at the highest levels, a new political party like JEEMA coming in with a unique perspective on national issues is a much welcome addition to this platform".

## The IPOD Dialogue Summit

For JEEMA, one highlight of rejoining IPOD has been the chance to make their voice heard at the IPOD Summit in December 2018. This high-level event brought together Uganda's political party Secretaries General and leaders, including President Museveni, to discuss how to strengthen multiparty democracy.

The Summit was the first of its kind in Uganda. Never before had the party leaders agreed to meet and engage in dialogue together. It was a chance for the political parties to make a real commitment to continued dialogue in the interests of their country.

For JEEMA, a party which often finds it difficult to have a real influence on the future of Uganda, the Summit provided an essential opportunity to make their voice and opinion heard at the highest level.

JEEMA's leader Asuman Basalirwa was therefore excited to put forward his proposals. Despite the momentous occasion, the unique spirit of cooperation and cordial atmosphere made him feel comfortable. He eagerly proposed two practical steps forward.

Basalirwa suggested that IPOD revisit old proposals to guide the council in their debates on the endorsed agenda for reform. His second proposal related to Uganda's Public Order Management Act (POMA), an act which provides a regulatory framework for public assemblies and has come under public scrutiny due to the powers it grants the police force to deny and disperse public meetings. Basalirwa argued that, although the act can be improved, it could

also go a long way to help the practice of politics if all state agencies and political actors adhere to its provisions. Based on this input, the parties agreed unanimously that security agencies, in particular, need to apply this law fairly and objectively across all political actors.

## A long way still to go

While the Summit was a major step forward for interparty dialogue in Uganda, JEEMA, like NIMD, was disappointed to note that not all parties attended. The Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Uganda's main opposition party, decided not to participate due to the restrictions imposed by the ruling party on their freedom of association and assembly.

The withdrawal of the FDC from the Summit has been a major drawback to the IPOD platform. It created worries that any reforms or resolutions reached may not have the full support of all the political parties represented in IPOD. However, the FDC has agreed to adopt the reform agenda and participate in the next stages of the dialogue process.

Looking back at the Summit and FDC's absence, JEEMA Chair Kibirige Mayanja observes that there is still a long way to go, despite an increase in understanding between political parties. "We are still far apart. Some of our colleagues in other parties ignore us because they look at us as a small party. But they forget we have a common interest in growing multiparty democracy in Uganda."

This goes to show that there is still a lot of work to do when it comes to building trust between Uganda's political parties.



## Making a commitment to continued dialogue

The problems that exist in Uganda's political party system will not be solved overnight. But small steps towards working together will make an impact on the country's democratic future.

That's why NIMD hopes that the flagship IPOD Summit will open the door to a next phase of dialogue and legislative reforms which have multiparty backing.

Indeed, at the end of the Summit, JEEMA and all the other participating parties committed to attending future summits in order to continue the dialogue.

For JEEMA, this commitment is a cause for hope. When political groups come together in dialogue, reforms, peace agreements, and nation building all stand a far greater chance of success. What's more, the continued dialogue will give JEEMA an opportunity to play a part in changing the political landscape of Uganda for the better, regardless of their size.



OUR WORK IN ETHIOPIA

## DIALOGUE AMONG POLITICAL PARTIES IN ETHIOPIA RECONCILING POLITICAL RIVALS

Dr. Chanie Kebede became determined to play a role in Ethiopia's development after graduating in economics and development studies from Addis Ababa University in the 1990s. He initially joined politics as a member of the All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO), a political party formed to represent the Amhara ethnic community, who make up roughly a quarter of Ethiopia's population.



The AAPO subsequently faced both mounting internal crises and pressures from the ruling party, which led to the imprisonment of its leader in 1994. The decline of the party forced Dr. Chanie and his colleagues to think of alternatives. He thought establishing a more inclusive, multiethnic party would help pave the way forward for Ethiopia's fledgling democracy, which led him to co-found the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) in 1999.

The EDP was a member of the broader opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), in 2005. Despite its electoral success, the coalition descended into crisis following the imprisonment of several of its leaders in 2005. The EDP then withdrew from the coalition and continued its peaceful struggle for democracy independently. Dr. Chanie was elected to his current position as Chair of the EDP in 2014, which led him to becoming involved with NIMD's work.

GIANCARLO MONTE



## A political crisis unfolds

Ethiopian society has a long tradition of customary dispute resolution in which elders play a key role not only in resolving disputes among parties, but also in ensuring community peace. The elders focus on settling the dispute, reconciling the affected interests, and more importantly healing broken relations and maintaining order in the community. Conflict is viewed not as an individual incident but as a disruption to community peace whose integrity needs to be restored.

Yet despite this rich tradition, the political elite in Ethiopia since the 1960s had sidelined indigenous values. This led to the tragedy of what is infamously known as the "white terror" and "red terror" in 1976; nationwide political violence which

cost hundreds of thousands of young men and women their lives. The simultaneous outbreak of a 16-year civil war further split the country's leadership, and the military regime's insistence on addressing all conflicts by force meant tensions persisted.

Between the ruling party's political hegemony and the shrinking space for political activity, it remained almost impossible to have dialogue and peacefully resolve conflicts. Despite the ruling party's lip service to democracy and political diversity, the lack of political reform and the sidelining of the political opposition culminated in mass public protests in 2015.

## Reaching out through dialogue

It was in this context that Dr. Chanie and his EDP party, along with a few other political parties, decided to participate in dialogue initiated by the ruling EPRDF party in 2016. They saw it as an opportunity to address the mounting pressures related to youth unemployment, social repression, rising corruption and, most importantly, the marginalization of the political opposition. However, the process was fraught with difficulties.

Dr. Chanie says "We knew the dialogue was incomplete from the start." Some of the major political actors decided to withdraw early on in the process, because there was no trusted third party to mediate the dialogue. What's more, the fact that only national representatives were involved meant regional parties were excluded. Other leaders were in exile, having been branded as "terrorists". Nor was the process balanced; it was a fragmented opposition facing a hegemonic regime.

Yet the parties were able to reach some minimum agreements. The ruling party was eventually persuaded to release political prisoners such as journalists and activists. They also agreed to revise the existing electoral law based on first-past-the-post to a mixed system, which added proportional elements to the existing arrangement. However protests mounted in subsequent years, culminating in the ruling party electing new Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed in early April 2018. As a younger leader who was a vocal reformist, his ascendancy marked a dramatic change in direction for Ethiopian politics.

## A fresh opportunity for peace

A new, more inclusive dialogue programme on a code of conduct for parties was opened in 2018, facilitated by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) with its new chair Ms. Birtukan Midekssa. As a far more inclusive dialogue than anything attempted before in Ethiopia, all political parties (including all those that were branded as "terrorists" and were in exile) are now part of the dialogue. NIMD, as a trusted mediator for interparty dialogue, has been invited to support the facilitation of this dialogue through technical expertise, logistical and financial support.

As part of the programme, NIMD provided a training on dialogue and conflict resolution to all political parties in early September 2018. The training provided a framework for the peaceful resolution of conflicts among political parties, so those involved could assess Ethiopia's ongoing dialogue and refine the process. The need for more peaceful and inclusive politics in Ethiopia was what inspired Dr. Chanie to meet NIMD and enroll in the training sessions.

According to Dr. Chanie, "the training added value in improving the country's political culture. We were doing politics in a fragmented context without knowing how best to do it. It helped us discover the other side, understand

its views and interests, and possibly create some common ground and take Ethiopian politics one step further." Effective democratic politics could only take root once the parties could articulate their respective interests, effectively communicate to one another, and reach common ground.

NIMD's training was even more relevant for Dr. Chanie and his colleagues as it complimented the shift towards inclusive dialogue happening at the same time. Dr. Chanie said the NIMD-backed training meant parties were able to debate, agree, and approve their rules of engagement as equals, breaking the cycle of elite dominance. With only two years until the next elections and a rapid reform agenda already underway, maintaining free spaces to train and debate will help other parties keep their and their constituents' voices heard.

The winds of political change in the country and NIMD's intervention to support dialogue and conflict resolution met at the right time in Ethiopia. The dialogue is already bringing results, with the Prime Minister signing the agreed new code of conduct for political parties in Spring 2019. Ahead of the 2020 elections, the dialogue platform will play a crucial role in maintaining momentum behind Ethiopia's democratic reforms.

