

**National Democratic Institute for International Affairs**  
**BOLIVIA: Constructive Citizen Dialogue**  
**Quarterly Report for April – June 2006**

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**Summary**

Taking office in January 2006 as Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales of the Movement to Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS) has delivered on several campaign promises, most notably convening a constituent assembly to rewrite the country's constitution. The much anticipated constituent assembly is widely perceived as the solution to correcting historic political and economic marginalization experienced by indigenous and rural sectors of the population. The constituent assembly will begin with delegate elections on July 2, and opposition forces in Santa Cruz successfully pushed for a national referendum on regional autonomy to be held on the same date. Regional autonomy has yet to be clearly defined, but a "Yes" vote would obligate the incoming assembly to consider departmental decentralization in the new constitution. MAS leaders have speculated that they will build on their 2005 electoral victories and broad support to win an absolute majority in the assembly. However, the electoral system to be used in this election is designed to allow for minority party representation.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) received National Endowment for Democracy (NED) funding to conduct a citizen dialogue program intended to increase constructive cross-sector dialogue between organized citizens – especially indigenous populations – and local leadership, including local officials and political party representatives. NDI is conducting a series of community events, called "Constructing Bolivia through Consensus Building," in La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.

During this quarter, NDI conducted a two-part series of information sharing workshops and community forums, focusing on the July 2 constituent assembly delegate elections and the national referendum on regional autonomy. Through NDI activities, 350 participants increased their knowledge of the July 2 electoral process, and 292 participants representing unique – and sometimes opposing – perspectives, identified points of common interest regarding key issues to be addressed during the constituent assembly. Utilizing NDI's network in Bolivia, participants represented a broad selection of backgrounds and perspectives, including indigenous, women's, youth and Afro Bolivian groups.

During the next quarter, NDI will compile printed bulletins containing community forum working group conclusions and distribute them at a public event to incoming assembly members and political party leaders.

See highlighted above and page 6

## **Background**

Bolivia's first elected indigenous president, Evo Morales of the MAS, took office in January 2006. Morales's indigenous roots and leadership among coca growers, particularly in the Chapare region, have resonated with politically and economically marginalized indigenous and rural sectors. Since taking office, Morales has fulfilled several campaign promises, most notably convening a constituent assembly to rewrite the country's constitution. The much anticipated constituent assembly will begin with delegate elections on July 2, and the assembly will commence deliberations on August 6. Opposition forces in Santa Cruz successfully pushed for a national referendum on regional autonomy to be held on July 2. While the referendum wording does not clearly define regional autonomy, a "Yes" vote would obligate the incoming constituent assembly to consider a new regional order in their constitutional rewrite.

Political parties and other eligible groups registered their candidates by April 3. MAS leaders have speculated that they will build on their 2005 electoral victories and broad support to win two thirds of the 255 assembly seats that would afford them an absolute majority. The assembly candidate registration process revealed divisions among the indigenous groups that had supported MAS in the previous elections. The National Confederation of Qullasuyo Marqas and Ayllus (*Confederación Nacional de Marqas y Ayllus del Qullasuyo*, CONAMAQ) and the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia (*Confederación de Pueblos Indigenas del Oriente Boliviano*, CIDOB) spoke out against the MAS for allegedly excluding indigenous groups from the constituent assembly candidate lists. CONAMAQ and CIDOB represent more than 100 indigenous groups that have played a key role in advocating for the constituent assembly since the 1990s. There is no quota to guarantee indigenous representation in the assembly. However, the electoral system to be used in this election is designed to allow for minority party representation.

During the campaign period that extended from May 2 through June 29, candidates conducted targeted campaigns to garner support in their respective districts. Many citizens, including party and political group representatives, expressed expectations of significant changes for the country and in individuals' lives as a result of the constituent assembly process.

In response to the ongoing challenges that feed citizen perceptions of exclusion and that hinder parties from representing citizen needs, NDI is facilitating community dialogue through its Constructive Citizen Dialogue program. NDI activities have targeted those sectors historically marginalized by the political system to build support for inclusive and responsive democratic processes that incorporate the diverse views of the Bolivian citizenry and bring constructive change for the country.

## **Objective**

- To increase constructive cross-sector dialogue between organized citizens – especially indigenous populations – and local leadership, including local officials and political party representatives.

## Activities

Prior to the December 2005 general elections, NDI held a two-part series of community events, called “Constructing Bolivia through Consensus Building,” in the regions of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. The first workshop provided participants with general, objective information regarding December 2005 general elections, and the roles and responsibilities of each of the elected positions being contested. Building on the first workshop, the second event provided participants space for discussion and the generation of consensus on priority concerns and needs targeting the representatives elected on December 18, 2005.

During this quarter, NDI conducted the second phase of activities following a similar two-part structure and participatory dialogue methodology. Focusing on the July 2 constituent assembly delegate elections and the national referendum on regional autonomy, this phase was called “Debate, Discussion, and Construction of Consensus for the Constituent Assembly.” The second phase of activities included the same target *mancomunidades*<sup>1</sup> and provinces as the first phase. Building on relationships established during the previous phase, NDI worked closely with the municipal governments of the participating *mancomunidades* to coordinate the second phase workshops. This public sector participation contributed to richer discussion at the workshops that included local government representatives, political parties and civil society organizations.

As with the first phase, NDI identified participating civil society groups that represented diverse interests and sectors of Bolivian society, particularly women, youth, Afro-Bolivians, and indigenous peoples. This broad participation provided marginalized and minority groups the opportunity to express their views and ensured that diverse views were expressed throughout the workshops. During the second phase, NDI issued targeted invitations to the leadership of the participating groups, rather than an open, public invitation. In collaboration with the participating political and civil society groups, NDI identified the invitees who served as delegates of their groups. This practice established participants’ commitment to attend both workshops and disseminate the information obtained among their colleagues.

### *Information sharing workshop*

The first workshop served to share general, objective information regarding the July 2 electoral processes and to prepare participants for informed debate and discussion regarding these unprecedented and unfamiliar processes during the second workshop. NDI distributed a booklet entitled, “Let’s Talk About the Constituent Assembly,” which presented information regarding the legal framework of the constituent assembly process and an overview of the content of the current constitution. Each workshop was divided into three components, including:

- Description of the legal framework of the constituent assembly process and delegate elections;

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<sup>1</sup> *Mancomunidades* are informal relationships among provinces in close geographic proximity to one another that have established effective communication channels and that sometimes develop and conduct community development proposals across provincial borders. Working at this level allows NDI greater ease in convening relevant participating organizations and political groups that represent a broader scope of citizen interests than those groups from individual provinces.

- Presentation of the national referendum on regional autonomy and opportunities for participation; and
- Group questions, presentations of local perspectives, and discussion.

Using the booklet as a guide, Bolivian experts presented the information at each event. Oscar Vargas del Carpio, professor and former director of the sociology department at the Major University of San Andrés (*Universidad Mayor de San Andrés*, UMSA), discussed both processes and highlighted the electoral provisions for the representation of minority parties and citizens' right to participate. Bolivian local governance expert Carlos Cordero discussed the role of assembly delegates as representatives of citizens, and he compared regional autonomy in Bolivia with other decentralization models. In La Paz only, sociology professor at the Bolivian Catholic University (*Universidad Católica Boliviana*, UCB) and former Vice Minister of Communication,<sup>2</sup> Rafael Loayza discussed the implications of these processes for a multicultural society.

On June 3, 110 participants gathered in El Alto, La Paz, including residents of urban La Paz, El Alto, and the *Yungas*. During the discussion period, several groups presented their perspectives regarding the July 2 processes and Bolivia's future, including the Afro Bolivian Community (*Comunidad Afro Boliviana*), the youth group Making Bolivia (*Emprendiendo Bolivia*), and the College of Lawyers of El Alto (*Colegio de Abogados de El Alto*). Participants represented: municipal government offices; the political parties MAS, Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*, MNR), Leftist Revolutionary Movement (*Movimiento Revolucionario de Izquierda*, MIR), Democratic and Social Power (*Poder Democrático y Social*, PODEMOS), and Plan Progress (*Plan Progreso*); civil society organizations such as the El Alto Federation of Neighborhood Groups (*Federación de Juntas Vecinales*, FEJUVE), Citizens Against Corruption (*Ciudadanos Contra la Corrupción*), the El Alto Civic Committee (*Comité Cívico*), and the Land and Liberty Movement (*Movimiento Tierra y Libertad*); indigenous groups such as the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Bolivia (*Confederación de Naciones Indígenas de Bolivia*, CONNIOB); and local universities.

At the El Alto session, participants' behavior exemplified the interest in listening to others' ideas expressed by participants in each department. During the question and discussion period, the microphone had been ceded to an MNR constituent assembly candidate. Some participants expressed their disagreement with the speaker's comments, using the Bolivian practice of whistling while the other person is speaking. In an act of group oversight, more than half of the other participants stood to quiet the whistlers, reminding them that all perspectives were welcome at the event. This simple gesture reinforced participants' tolerance for different perspectives and set an important precedent for respecting differences in opinion and consensus building during the second workshop.

In Santa Cruz, 130 participants contributed to the June 8 workshop, representing urban areas and provinces of the largely indigenous Integrated North (*Norte Integrado*). Participants represented: municipal and prefecture authorities; the political parties MAS, MNR, and citizen group PODEMOS; civil society organizations such as local Civic Committees; the National University of the East (*Universidad Nacional de Oriente*, UNO); and indigenous organizations

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<sup>2</sup> Loayza served under interim President Jorge Quiroga.

such as Indigenous Wives of Miners (*Mujeres Indigenas de Mineros*) and leaders of various indigenous communities in the area.

The June 11 event in Cochabamba included 160 participants, representing: the political parties Free Bolivia Movement (*Movimiento Bolivia Libre*, MBL), MAS, MIR, and citizen groups PODEMOS, and Democratic and Patriotic Transformation (*Transformación Democrática Patriótica*, TRADEPA); civil society organizations such as Cochabamba Federation of Neighborhood Groups (FEJUVE), the Cochabamba Civic Committee, and the municipal Oversight Committee (*Comité de Vigilancia*); and local universities. Two local groups presented their perspectives on participation in the constituent assembly, including the Cochabamba Political Forum of Women (*Foro Político de Mujeres de Cochabamba*) and Afro Bolivian youth group Gatherings (*Encuentros*).

### *Community forums*

Building on the first workshop, the community forums provided participants space for discussion and the generation of consensus on priority concerns and needs to be presented to elected constituent assembly delegates as a reference source of citizen feedback. Between the first and second workshops, participants were encouraged to share the workshop information in their home provinces and neighborhoods as a means of facilitating community-driven discussion of resident priorities.

For the second workshop series, Professor Vargas del Carpio and NDI field staff member Douglas Ardiles returned to the target locations to facilitate small group discussions and the generation of consensus regarding four topics: the structure of the state and branches of government; financial systems and economic policies; the agrarian and land distribution regime; and regional autonomy. Each group selected a table moderator and two secretaries to record the table conclusions. To guide discussion, NDI encouraged the tables to indicate each suggested constitutional change and to explain the motivation behind each. In a plenary session, the selected table moderators presented their lists of expectations and strategies to address the challenges associated with each topic. Some of the conclusions included: the creation of a social oversight branch of government to ensure greater transparency of the activities of each branch; creation of an oversight mechanism specifically for congressmen to ensure compliance with their responsibilities; stronger investment in the workforce and productive sectors of the economy; and increased access to the market for micro businesses. Conclusions from all three departments will be compiled in a printed bulletin.

Similar organizations were represented at the community forums as those mentioned above for the first session in each department. Political party, citizen group and indigenous town participants in the series included representatives from the groups that are scheduled to compete in the July 2 electoral processes. See the table below for participation numbers at the community forum workshops.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Workshop 1</b>	<b># participants</b>	<b>Workshop 2</b>	<b># participants</b>
La Paz (El Alto)	June 3	110	June 8	62
Cochabamba (Piñami)	June 11	160	June 22	110
Santa Cruz (KM 37 Norte)	June 8	130	June 24	120
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>400</b>		<b>292</b>

Following the second workshop, participants completed a brief evaluation of the second phase. Participants in all three departments demonstrated varying levels of knowledge regarding the July 2 elections and the constituent assembly process. Most evaluations noted that the workshops provided much needed nonpartisan information and served to dispel misunderstandings. Many participants noted their appreciation for the opportunity to learn about different perspectives in an environment of tolerance and respect for others.

### **Results/Achievements**

*Objective: To increase constructive dialogue between citizens – especially indigenous populations – and local leadership, including local officials and political party representatives.*

- Through the information sharing workshops, 400 participants increased their knowledge of the upcoming constituent assembly process and the July 2 electoral processes.
- At the community forums, 292 participants representing unique – and sometimes opposing – perspectives, peacefully discussed and identified points of common interest regarding key issues to be discussed by the constituent assembly.
- Successful NDI outreach has engaged a broad range of program participants, including indigenous, rural, women's, youth and Afro Bolivian groups, ensuring diverse perspectives at program activities.

### **Evaluation/Conclusion**

Confrontation is a widely accepted mechanism to express political opinions in Bolivia, as evidenced by the prolonged road blockades preceding President Carlos Mesas's definitive resignation in June 2005. In addition to providing much needed information regarding the constituent assembly process, NDI's activities reinforced among participants the basic steps needed to achieve consensus on political issues: coming together with different sectors, listening to others, and accepting differences in opinions. The process of consensus building will extremely valuable during the constituent assembly deliberations and for the referendum to approve the new constitution.

NDI has found the community dialogue methodology to be quite effective at bringing different perspectives together and creating a participatory environment. **As such, NDI adapted the community forum model piloted in this program to conduct a Santa Cruz dialogue event through its USAID funded political party program to facilitate an open discussion about regional autonomy and decentralization.**

## **Future Activities**

In the next quarter, NDI will compile the working group conclusions and lists of priorities generated during the second phase workshops into a printed bulletin for distribution to elected constituent assembly delegates and political party and citizen group leaders and elected officials. This bulletin will be distributed at a public event in Sucre after the August 6 inauguration of the assembly.

With remaining funds, NDI plans to implement a third phase of community workshops in the same geographic target areas to encourage participants to remain engaged in the constituent assembly process. Based on the participatory methodology used for the first two phases, the third series of workshops would engage participants in cross-sector discussions of the key issues being deliberated by the assembly and to reinforce the practice of tolerance that participants have expressed during previous program activities.