

# THE PROMISE OF DEMOCRACY

NIMD Strategy 2021-25



## A word of thanks

The NIMD Multi-Annual Strategy 2021-2025 is the result of a collective effort by many colleagues, with the kind assistance of experts from outside of NIMD. We are grateful for their willingness to share their thoughts on how best to shape NIMD's contribution to democracy in the years to come.

Obviously, our field is constantly changing, and our reflection doesn't stop at the publication of this text. We hope this strategy fuels future discussions, when we will undoubtedly have to adapt to new realities, grateful again for the kind and generous assistance of the wider network.

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Executive Director NIMD

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## The Promise of Democracy

Democracy - in its many forms across the world - is the only governance system founded on the equality of every individual; the only system capable of serving the interests of society as a whole in a fair way. In democracies, the quality of governance improves as the powerful are held to account by the checks and balances of strong institutions, and a free and independent media. Democracy carries the promise that every individual can live with dignity. Democratic leaders have the duty to make this happen.

In spite of recent democratic backsliding in many countries, democratic values still enjoy wide support across the world. Most people share the belief that democracy - in its many diverse forms - is the right, and only, governance system to strive for. Globally, political participation is on the rise, people are standing up for their political rights, for equality, transparency and other democratic values. Political participation is on the rise. These calls for deeper democracy are often driven by young people, especially young women.

It is in these contexts, where an endogenous change process has already started, that NIMD has a strong track record. Here, we can make a difference by supporting those locally driven political processes with a tailor-made response. We create safe environments – outside of parliament – where politicians can get to know each other and build the trust necessary to collaborate. When that trust is strong enough, we assist them in jointly formulating policies to shape their democratic society and reach out to their voters.

## The need for democracy support

Strengthening the political system of countries is more important than ever. When NIMD was founded twenty years ago, democracy support was seen as a necessary endeavour, which should take place alongside the protection of human rights. The validity of this argument has not changed, but there are new challenges that make democracy support even more urgent. Issues like climate change will have implications so far-reaching that their solutions can only be reached effectively with the broadest possible support among society. Countries will not be able to make progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without scrutinizing their political processes and making them more democratic, giving every individual the opportunity to freely elect their political leadership and participate in politics.

The Coronavirus crisis in 2020 has only amplified the need for inclusive democratic systems. Autocratic leaders have used the crisis as an excuse to impose restrictive measures upon their citizens. The crisis has also highlighted how democratic oversight and free media improve the quality of governance. It provides NIMD with yet another argument to focus on strengthening the relationship between citizens and their power holders, and try to help renew the social contract between them.



## Dialogue and inclusion make democracy work

This multi-annual strategy outlines our focal points for 2021-2025. In our endeavours to support political actors and strengthen democracies, we will put a stronger focus on two central aspects of open democracies: inclusion and dialogue.

Inclusion is key to any democracy at any time. But especially now.

Around us, we are seeing the growth of ideologies that justify exclusion; they will inevitably lead to injustice, tensions, violence and possibly even war. We need democratic systems that allow everyone to voice their needs and participate in political decision-making.

Across the globe, people who do not belong to the dominant group in society are persistently excluded. This is most striking in the case of women, who are structurally under-represented with unequal participation in politics, despite making up half of the world's population. Similarly, young people and members of indigenous and other ethnic or religious minority groups are faced with exclusion from political processes.

Democracies will only thrive when women and other underrepresented groups have an equal opportunity to take a seat at the table. For example, it has been shown around the world that conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts are more effective and successful when women are involved. If we want to build a more peaceful, stable world, the voices of women and other underrepresented groups need to be heard.

The second aspect of democracy, dialogue, has been close to our heart right from the beginning. Dialogue allows diverse groups in society to start to understand and respect each other, find common ground and reach compromises where necessary. Traditionally, NIMD has always focused on the dialogue between political parties. Given the growing disconnect between voters and their political representatives, we will add a new dimension to our programme design: dialogue between political actors and their constituents.

The following chapters will expand on how we will focus on inclusion and dialogue in the coming five years.



## The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy

### Vision

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy strives for a world of inclusive democracies that offer equal opportunities for all to be heard, to participate and to take responsibility in politics at all levels.

### Mission

NIMD contributes to inclusive democracies by bringing politicians and society together in dialogue so that they can jointly formulate policies to improve their democratic system. We also support political parties, individual politicians, and political institutions such as parliaments to bring their democratic values into practice and enhance the overall political culture in their country.

### NIMD

NIMD is an International Non-Governmental Organization, which supports democracy. It consists of a global network of country offices and independent partners. The organization was established in 2000 by seven political parties from across the Dutch political spectrum, with the aim of supporting emerging democracies through a multiparty approach.

Our work is centred around dialogue and trust building. Whether it is a formal dialogue platform, an informal gathering, a Democracy School class or an internal training session at a political party office, our intervention strategies are always aimed at bringing people together to collaborate. We understand the complexity of interests in politics and are sensitive to politicians' needs and insecurities when it comes to opening up to each other. That is why our dialogue initiatives often work to create a safe haven amidst all the tensions in the political arena.

All our programmes are guided by their own Theory of Change (ToC), which is based on the context of the country, and constantly analyzed and adjusted during implementation. We take the time to really understand the local context we are working in, and provide tailor-made intervention strategies, together with our committed and knowledgeable partners in the countries.

This results in politically smart programming that looks at both the formal and informal rules of the political game: the political system and the political culture. We do this through the political actors. They are the key to achieving change in the system and culture.



That means that, in our approach, we distinguish between the system, actor and culture level and recognize that they are interrelated. This is reflected in our programming.

Given our mission to connect political parties and the people they represent, we also target non-political actors in the political arena. Our job is to make sure that political actors open up to input from society and that we support their dialogue with actors such as the media, human rights defenders or other civil society organizations.

### The early days of NIMD

Our work started in South Africa, where we launched a programme to bring South African political parties together and support them in defining their new roles after the end of apartheid in the country. The objective of the politicians was clear: they wanted to create a united, non-racist, non-sexist, and democratic society. However, there was no democratic culture to build upon. Not in their own country, nor in the region.

That is when Dutch political parties decided to step up and help improve the democratic culture among South African parties. This had such a positive effect on the level of trust and collaboration between them that South Africa's main political leader, Nelson Mandela, strongly recommended that the Dutch political parties expand their work to other countries. This led to the establishment of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) in 2000.

### Our five guiding principles

Our work is guided by five principles: impartiality, inclusiveness, long-term commitment, local ownership and flexibility. The mix of these five principles enables our network to implement programmes effectively. They also define how we work within NIMD.

**Impartiality** - Our approach is non-partisan and independent. We are not affiliated with any specific political denomination or institution and work impartially with all parties across the political spectrum. However, our impartiality should not be confused with neutrality: NIMD is driven by the democratic values underpinning our vision and mission.

**Inclusiveness** – To NIMD, inclusiveness means that we work with both ruling and opposition parties. They are all welcome to take part in the dialogue on societal issues with an equal voice. The principle of inclusiveness also refers to our focus on fostering equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups to engage in democratic processes at all levels.



**Long-term commitment** - It takes time to contribute to political transformation; strengthen political parties and other actors; help build effective working relations between political forces; and to facilitate trust building. Therefore, we invest in long-lasting relationships with those with whom we work. This applies to our partners as well as the political actors we target.

**Local ownership** - We work with our partners on an equal basis. Our programmes are rooted in the countries where we work and reflect local demands.

**Flexibility** – We adjust our programmes to changing circumstances. This flexibility is crucial to ensure the quality and the impact of our work.



## Global trends

The world has changed considerably in the twenty years since our establishment. In the introduction, we mentioned a few worrying trends: the pushback against democracy, growing inequality, and the growing disconnect between power holders and voters. In this chapter, we will briefly discuss these and other trends affecting democracy. We will also look at the Sustainable Development Goals and how they can provide entry points for our work.

## **NIMD and the Sustainable Development Goals: The case for democracy**

In 2015, the United Nations member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By signing, countries committed to mobilize efforts over the next 15 years to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

Although there is no mention of democracy in the SDGs, democratic systems are key to achieving them. Without progress on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16), most other goals - such as SDG 5 on women's rights, or SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth - will be impossible to reach. The SDGs, in particular SDG 16, therefore underpin NIMD's work.

Apart from highlighting the importance of our work, the SDGs also provide more scope for us to focus on inclusiveness, and the political participation of women, youth and underrepresented groups. By 2030, all forms of poverty, inequality and inequity have to be eliminated. This means that we need to finally start listening to these groups and allow them to bring their needs and ideas to the table.

Moreover, the SDG framework challenges us to reflect on how we can better integrate thematic issues, such as climate change and natural resource management, into our programming. While doing that, we will also need to look at how we operate geographically.

At the moment, we work primarily on the national level. Given the nature of the challenges of the 21st century, the national level will not suffice. We need more international cooperation to fully face up to the many challenges that are international by nature, with a high impact at both national and local levels. NIMD stands ready to support political actors to engage effectively in international fora and collaborate internationally.





## Democracy under pressure

When NIMD started in 2000, liberal democracy was perceived as the inevitable end goal of a country's development trajectory. Other political models were not considered viable alternatives. Today, liberal democracy is under pressure as a political system. In 2019, the quality of democracy decreased in over 80 countries, according to The Economist.

The call for support to democracy is no longer an easily won argument. On the contrary, there seems to be a diverse coalition of the unwilling who are openly questioning (and in some cases actively undermining) the very concept of a democratic society governed by the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Because of this new reality, we will need to make a compelling argument for democracy by showing our results in the public debate. Now more than ever. Democracy works, and we help make it work. All our programmes create space for dialogue and democratic change, from Myanmar to Colombia, and from Mali to Guatemala.

## A growing need to bridge the gap between the population and politicians

In our analysis of the push back against democracy, there is one aspect we have not tackled yet. That is the growing disconnect, or tension, between the electorate and those elected, between the populations and decision makers.

The main reason for this tension is that many countries have experienced an erosion in the credibility of democracy as the most adequate system for egalitarian societies. This erosion is mainly caused by the disillusion felt by many people in countries where the end of authoritarian regimes and the growth of democracy have not met the expectations of social justice and equal opportunities. In some of these countries, elected leaders are perceived to belong to a group of self-serving elites. The exasperation felt by populations increases all the more with the rapidly growing proportion of young people, who need education and jobs.

Another, more subtle reason for this tension can be found in the paradox in our way of thinking about politicians. On the one hand, today's citizens want to have as much autonomy as possible in every choice they make. The information age and the rise of the internet make that possible. For all these informed individuals, it is increasingly difficult to accept that they have to delegate some power to elected politicians who, on top of that, sometimes take unpopular decisions. On the other hand, and this can be called a paradox, people are also demanding guidance in an uncertain world. They are looking for leaders who can offer some certainty and steer them towards a brighter horizon. Every disappointment carries the risk of leading to more frustration and disengagement, while not eliminating the need for guidance.



NIMD can help bridge the gap between the population and politicians. Our network offers support by assisting politicians in finding new ways to connect with their voters and enter into a dialogue with them; a dialogue built on respect, openness and mutual listening.



## **NIMD in 2021-2025: Our strategic objectives**

A focus on inclusiveness and responsive political actors; an increase in thematic multi-stakeholder dialogues; an emphasis on lobby and advocacy; and a potential expansion of our programming to high-income countries. These are our ambitions for the coming years. We have brought them together in five strategic objectives, which are described below.

### **1. Contributing to more inclusive democracies**

Through our programming, NIMD aims to contribute to stronger democracies, with equal opportunities for the active participation of all groups in society, regardless of their background and perceived characteristics, such as age, gender, religion, opinions, sexual orientation and ethnicity.

#### **Women's political participation**

The numbers speak for themselves: Very few countries in the world have achieved gender parity when it comes to political representation. The proportion of women among elected representatives globally is still around 25%. Traditional gender norms and stereotypes, gendered views of how power holders operate, and economic and social restraints are only some of the key barriers keeping women out of politics.

For the next five years, women's political participation will continue to be a priority across all country programming. We will continue to work with political actors to promote and enable direct action to remove the obstacles to the political participation of women. We are developing new tools and methodologies to help us to streamline this work, such as our Gender Roadmap for Inclusive Political Parties.

In addition to this, we will upscale our direct support to women with political ambitions and will actively support initiatives in our programme countries to improve the legislation on women's political rights.

Lastly, we will further invest in contributing to the global and regional debates on women's political participation, together with our partners. As part of this, NIMD considers the role of men to be essential when it comes to promoting women's political rights. They, too, can act as ambassadors and change agents for reaching gender equality in politics.



## Youth and underrepresented groups in politics

There are 3.5 billion people under the age of 30 living in the world today, comprising the largest young population in history. This population has better access to information and education than ever before. Despite this, youth have a very limited voice in decisions that affect their lives directly. In most countries where NIMD works, discriminatory sociocultural norms deny young people access to, and credibility in, the political arena.

This calls for a pro-active response on our side. In 2020, NIMD conducted an analysis of the barriers to the political participation of young people. We gathered best practices and experiences from the network on engaging with young people and supporting their meaningful participation. Based on this analysis, we will further develop specific intervention strategies to increase the participation of youth in politics.

The same goes for other under-represented groups, such as ethnic minorities, or the internally displaced. As the definition and position of these groups are country-specific, we will make sure that our political economy analyses explicitly cover under-represented groups so that we can formulate tailor-made intervention strategies to increase their voice and participation in their democracies.

## 2. Putting the population at the heart of NIMD's work with political actors

As we have seen in the previous chapter, politicians, political parties and other democratic institutions need to reinvent their relationship with the electorate. Inclusive democracies require responsive and accountable politicians, ready to engage in a continuous dialogue with the population.

NIMD has, in the past, placed a lot of focus on dialogue between political actors. We will continue to do so, as the skills needed for this dialogue are crucial for societies to be able to find peaceful solutions among groups with diverging interests. Aside from this 'horizontal' dialogue between political actors, we now also see a need to support the 'vertical' dialogue between political actors and the population at large.

Supporting political actors in developing the skills and attitudes they need to interact with the people in their country will therefore be a top priority in our future programming. We want to support them in their outreach activities towards the population as a whole. From the rural population in the remotest regions to marginalized groups in the capital, from women and youth to minorities: it is this inclusive dialogue that will help political actors to address the needs of the people. This will restore confidence in democratic institutions. We will work on this part of capacity building through dialogue and dedicated training programmes. These programmes will include social media training and



sessions on how to counter 'fake news' and the manipulation of information. Social media have become essential communication channels for political actors at this time.

Working to make political actors more responsive, means that political parties will remain an important target group for NIMD. Parties play a key role in all democracies. But, in order to re-connect with their voters, politicians will need to take a critical look at how their parties are organized and whether that still fits the bill. Just like other sectors, political parties need to innovate to remain relevant. Our network, dialogue platforms and Democracy Schools help them do that.

The decision to focus on responsiveness also implies that we will need to work with actors at all political levels, from regional bodies and national parliaments to provincial and municipal councils. The national level is no longer the standard entry point for NIMD. As we saw in our trend analysis, many issues are – or should be – addressed at a regional or international level. We will continue to conduct thorough political economy analyses to decide on our level of operation.

Finally, the focus on responsiveness means more space for thematic dialogues in our programming. NIMD stands ready to facilitate the inclusive democratic dialogue on issues such as natural resource management or the mitigation of climate change. These are challenges with diverse and often conflicting stakeholders. Political actors need to engage with all of them to reach agreements that will only stand a chance of lasting success if they receive the broadest possible support. Our dialogue platforms aim to enable this type of exchange. Where necessary, we will collaborate with other (expert) organizations to benefit from their thematic know-how and to make our support to democracy as effective as possible.

### 3. Investing in dialogue

NIMD's distinctive feature is our capacity to foster dialogue. NIMD and the partners in our network are experts in bringing political parties and other actors together. As a network, we will need to continue to invest in our dialogue skills as well as expanding these skills to include facilitating multi-stakeholder platforms.

Moreover, the NIMD network is becoming more and more aware of the importance of conflict resolution in our work. Sometimes, existing tensions or conflicts need to be addressed first before parties will agree to come to the dialogue table, or decide to enroll in one of our Schools. Therefore, NIMD will add conflict resolution skills to the training modules for the NIMD network staff.



## 4. Working truly globally

NIMD wants to remain a global player in the coming years. Our global presence is more important than ever, given the calls for democracy all around the world. We firmly believe in the values of democracy and want to support societies as they shape their political system and culture according to these values.

The demand for support to democratic actors such as political parties is not restricted to young and developing democracies. Many established democracies are also struggling with issues such as capacity building, and the need to enable under-represented groups to successfully engage in politics. However, in these countries it is often easier to find proper democracy support. Therefore, our first priority clearly remains to offer our contribution in young and developing democracies, countries that meet the OECD DAC criteria for development cooperation. Meanwhile, we are open to exploring options for assistance to more established democracies. This will depend on the exact needs of a country, and on our assessment of our added value and potential impact.

## 5. Standing up for democracy by highlighting NIMD's results

By highlighting our results, we will step up our lobby and advocacy efforts, and show why democracy and democracy support matter. Raising our profile in the media and the public debate will be part of the strategy. We will also try to strengthen our support base in the Netherlands by investing in our connection with Dutch political parties and their elected representatives. In recent years, our relationship with them has been somewhat on hold. It is time to re-connect.



## **A new role for NIMD in the Netherlands**

The NIMD network will change in the coming years. As of 2021, our network will operate on the basis of the subsidiarity principle, meaning that the design of programmes, and decisions on how to implement them, will gradually be devolved to the NIMD country offices and partners in the countries. This is based on the understanding that decision-making on programme design, priorities and budgeting should be taken at the appropriate organizational level. Since the programmes are implemented by our partners or country offices, who have years of experience and an in-depth understanding of the context they work in, it makes sense to devolve more decision-making authority to our network.

Consequently, the division of responsibilities and roles within the network will change. As an example, the current Programme Management role in the Netherlands will evolve towards a Programme Advisory role. The Programme Advisors will support the teams in the countries with advice, tools, methodologies and best practices gathered from across the network. As a result, knowledge and programme support will be combined in the new structure.

In the Netherlands, NIMD will only handle tasks that cannot be performed adequately at local level by the partners in the network. We see the following roles for our office in the Netherlands:

- Overall NIMD strategy
- Programme advice
- Delivering quality products
- Capturing and disseminating knowledge within the network
- Financial accountability
- Strategic external relations and advocacy (visibility)
- Fundraising

## **Programme advice and knowledge dissemination**

The NIMD network is greater than the sum of its parts. Collecting, (re)packaging and disseminating the wealth of knowledge and know-how of our network, is pivotal in ensuring effective and consistent programming.

When we talk about knowledge, we are referring to capturing what works in our programming. We need to make sure that the whole network can profit from the experiences and lessons learned in other countries, so that they can improve the effectiveness of their own programmes. The office in the Netherlands will lead this process. We are the linking pin between the partners in the network. It is our job to fuel them with the right information, tools and approaches.



As part of this, NIMD in the Netherlands will facilitate an online platform for knowledge sharing (the NIMD Knowledge Hub); offer corporate induction programmes for new colleagues; run trainings (thematic training and training on tools/methodologies); and organize corporate exchange activities for the network.

## Strategic relations, fundraising and advocacy

Fundraising goes hand in hand with communications and international lobby and advocacy. The role of the office in the Netherlands will be to give visibility to our partners and their work in order to open doors to potential donors.

The communication and lobby and advocacy support will consist of different parts. In addition to assisting partners in developing their own communication strategy and communication skills, the support will increasingly focus on helping the network to develop regional advocacy and communication strategies, based on NIMD's corporate lobby and advocacy and communication strategy. This will allow for a stronger collaboration between the network, and open up opportunities to jointly design and implement campaigns, events and other communication activities.

## Finally...

Democracy gives all people a say; it means they are included in the important decisions in their country or communities, and can make their voices heard through dialogue – rather than violence. That dialogue starts in the political arena.

NIMD's strength comes from our network. Our partners and country offices have worked with hundreds of politicians and institutions on all continents, and have the experience, commitment and the in-depth knowledge needed to make an impact.

Together we will continue to stand up for democracy.

Together we can fulfil the promise of democracy.

