

**POST PROJECT EVALUATIONS
FOR THE
UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND**



EVALUATION REPORT

UDF-17-739-GLO: Enabling National Initiatives to Take Democracy Beyond Elections

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluator. They do not represent those of UNDEF or any of the institutions referred to in the report.

Authors

This report was written by Jamie Hitchen.

I. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

This report offers an evaluation of the project entitled “Enabling National Initiatives to Take Democracy Beyond Elections” that was implemented by newDemocracy Foundation (nDF) from 1 November 2018 to 30 November 2022 globally and in three country locations: Brazil, Republic of North Macedonia and Malawi. The project benefited from a UNDEF grant of US\$ 250,000 to carry out activities designed to achieve three core outcomes:

- Enhance practical skills and knowledge of alternative models for deliberative democracy among an ecosystem of practitioners, inside and outside government.
- Exemplify how deliberative citizen engagement can resonate with elected representatives.
- Increase global uptake of citizen assembly (CA) models and/or the application of deliberative principles/alternative forms of democratic decision-making.

In the view of this evaluation, the overall objective of demonstrating that complementary democratic models are effective, implementable and practical and lead to trusted long-term decisions because of the legitimacy, desirability and usefulness of participatory, and citizen-oriented, democratic models has been achieved. The interventions at the country level played a key role in changing behaviours not just among ordinary citizens, but also among government officials both during the project and afterwards. In addition, the contribution this project has made to strengthening the tools and knowledge for conducting CAs is another key **impact**. Whilst more could have been done to integrate learnings from the pilots to further strengthen the comprehensive handbook produced, or as addendums to it, the fact that it has been, and continues to be, used by global actors working to promote democracy globally in their thinking and strategizing is a clear illustration of impact.

This also points to the **relevance** of the intervention, which built on growing global momentum for alternative approaches to support (re)engagement between citizens and their governments. Here too, **UNDEF value-addition** was important as its backing for the approach, through the handbook, was instrumental in opening doors at several levels and in getting CA models that could prove the concept in different contexts up and running. Whilst the acceptability of the approach was much higher, initially at least, in Brazil among state officials, given the country’s experience of participatory governance, the appetite shown by citizens to actively participate in all three contexts, reflected not only the relevance of the approaches used, but also of the specific subjects they were tasked with addressing.

The **effectiveness** of the approach taken to running CAs – which combined the use of the project-created handbook, with informal guidance by nDF and a recognition of the need to rely on the contributions of the local partners to ensure the approach was tailored to the context – was key to their success. So too were efforts that sought to secure the buy-in of state/local officials, albeit this was successful to varying degrees across the three contexts as much a result of the existing citizen-state relations as the approach. Though still effective to a degree, efforts to generate increased awareness of CA approaches and to build domestic and regional networks of practitioners, could have been given greater impetus through more coordinated advocacy and media campaigns.

Integrating the pilot project learnings into the developed handbook, or as annexes to do, could have furthered the effectiveness of the document in presenting learnings from new contexts. But the adaptability of the approaches, especially the pivot to using technology to run the

Republic of North Macedonia pilot online given the restrictions on movement imposed by the global pandemic, surely was just one illustration of the project's **efficiency**.

The overall **coherence** of the project's design was strong and clear, with the idea that the handbook, developed consultatively, would become a resource for the pilot projects to use in the implementation of their initiatives being realized, who in turn were more equipped to advance the approach in their everyday work, with two local partners – those in the Republic of North Macedonia and Brazil - having secured follow-on grants to continue their work supporting CAs. The **sustainability** of the interventions has been stronger in those contexts where institutional partners, rather than individual consultants, as was the case in Malawi, ran the CAs. In Brazil and the Republic of North Macedonia in particular the project has not only strengthened the credibility of the CA approach, and the network of practitioners that nDF convenes, it has also given the local partners the tools and experience to become resource hubs for deliberative democracy approaches.

To support and strengthen similar initiatives and interventions in the future, the evaluation highlights key recommendations that emerge from this evaluation which include:

- Expand the resources created through a dedicated and interactive online resource page for CA practitioners, which could be regularly updated with resource aids and case studies and provide a forum for the sharing of practical experiences running CAs in different contexts.
- Build relationships with, and the capacity of, civil servants within government institutions when working on CA initiatives to institutionalize the approach.
- Ensure CAs are delivered by local partners but in collaboration with, or supported by, leading global thinkers, who can provide technical guidance on approaches to deliberative democracy.
- Consider regional programming where CAs could focus on the same issue or related themes in a similar context to strengthen both the fine-tuning of the approaches used and to strengthen the opportunities for building networks.

It also identifies a number of key lessons that should be learned by other projects working on related themes or on initiatives that seek to integrate global knowledge with local practice.

- To enhance sustainability and support the establishment of nascent deliberative democracy networks at country or regional level, partner selection is crucial as they are the actors to take the approach forward. Therefore, in the selection of countries to pilot such projects, primary consideration should be given to the existence of these organizations and their willingness, capacity and interest to advance the issue, as well as the wider attitude towards deliberative democracy models.
- Engaging with civil servants and elected government officials from the outset ensures state-level buy-in for the CA approach which in turn can reduce the risk that it is seen as adversarial, but rather a mechanism that can capture and reflect citizens' perspectives in ways that strengthens state credibility and even legitimacy.
- Documenting how CA initiatives were successfully delivered and the impacts they have in different contexts is a critical tool for increasing public awareness about the ideas behind the approach and can also strengthen expert networks' existing knowledge bases.

II. PROJECT CONTEXT AND STRATEGY

(i) Development context

Inclusive approaches that are designed to increase the participation of citizens in democratic debates on key issues affecting their lives on an everyday basis, beyond simply voting in elections, are growing in prominence globally as trust declines in electoral processes and the governments they produce. Direct democracy models offer a platform through which citizens can have a greater say in shaping the development and implementation of policy, be that on global issues like climate change and migration, or on more everyday concerns linked to service delivery.

Citizen Assemblies (CAs) are one such model that can be used to bring together, a randomly selected group, to learn about, and discuss an issue or issues, with the goal of reaching conclusions about how it can be effectively addressed. Ideally it does this in ways that allow the recommendations or prospective solutions proposed to be actioned. This project, coordinated by the newDemocracy Foundation (nDF) – an independent, non-partisan research and development organisation that aims to discover, develop, demonstrate, and promote complementary alternatives which will restore trust in public decision making – not only sought to create a handbook for guiding such efforts, more globally, but also to run demonstration projects in three distinct contexts: Brazil, the Republic of North Macedonia and Malawi.

“We have a tradition in Fortaleza that goes back to 1980s for engaging citizens, in public policy debates for the city’s development. There were many community associations in place, and these helped create spaces for people to engage, to define things that the government should do around housing in particular. This tradition which comes from the 1980s, was reinforced over time, and the CA model built on this groundwork.”

Municipal government official, Fortaleza, Brazil.

Whilst the city of Fortaleza in Brazil has a demonstrable track-record of participatory governance processes stretching back several decades this was not the case in the Republic of North Macedonia and Malawi where citizens and government officials are more often viewed as adversaries, or as distant, rather than close collaborators. However, and as the project’s programming shows, this does not mean there is not an appetite from citizens, and even, albeit less so, government officials, to be more engaged in collaborative discussions designed to address pressing development challenges.

Furthermore, given that the models for this more deliberative democracy remain untested in some contexts – in fact these were the first CAs in each of the three contexts - these pilots provided an avenue to better understand what approaches are universal and which are context specific. Feeding this into broader global networks of like-minded practitioners – something that nDF is uniquely placed to do as the convenor of a global working group of deliberative democracy practitioners and thinkers – can further strengthen its push to become a more accepted and regularly applied approach in efforts to enhance democratic strengthening approaches globally.

(ii) The project objective

The project was initially to be implemented from 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2020, but it was extended by 25 months due to the interruption caused primarily by the Covid-19

pandemic. Although nDF coordinated the overall implementation it identified, and worked through, local partners to deliver the three pilot initiatives – Delibera Brasil in Fortaleza, the ZIP Institute in the Republic of North Macedonia and an individual consultant in Malawi.

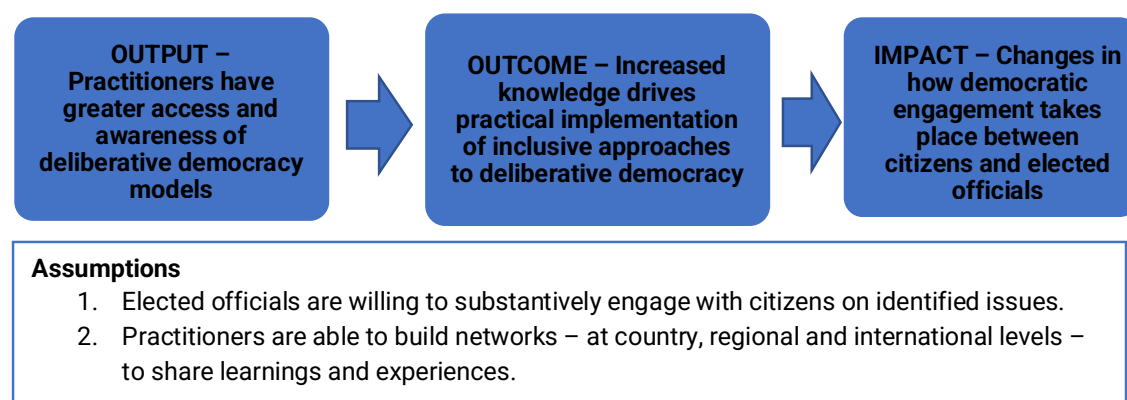
With a total budget of US\$250,000 its overall objective was to demonstrate that complementary democratic models are effective, implementable and practical and lead to trusted long-term decisions because of the legitimacy, desirability and usefulness of participatory, and citizen-oriented, democratic models. Through the development of a practical handbook entitled 'Democracy Beyond Elections' to support the effective utilisation of CA models, and by practically demonstrating their operation and the impacts they could have on a range on issues in differing contexts, the project aimed to:

- Enhance practical skills and knowledge of alternative models for deliberative democracy among an ecosystem of practitioners, inside and outside government.
- Exemplify how deliberative citizen engagement can resonate with elected representatives.
- Increase global uptake of CA models and/or the application of deliberative principles/alternative forms of democratic decision-making.

(iii) Project strategy and approach

The core thinking at the heart of the project's approach was that the combined success of the CA model across the three demonstration sites, visually documented in the case of Malawi, accompanied by the in-depth and detailed handbook guide, would strengthen the appetite for the continuation and expansion of these approaches not just in the three country contexts, but also regionally and globally by showcasing the adaptability of the direct democracy model. Its implicit theory of change was that the increased availability and awareness of resources and guides to support deliberative democracy approaches would lead to an increase in practitioners' knowledge and support ongoing efforts to create successful and inclusive demonstration sites and local networks of practitioners. This in turn would contribute to a normative shift about how democratic engagement takes place between citizens and elected officials in these contexts and beyond.

Figure 1: Implicit Theory of Change



To do this the project sought to engage a wider range of stakeholders beyond just the citizens randomly selected to be members of the assemblies. Representatives of the state - municipal and national level government officials, both civil servants and those elected to political office

- and civil society organisations (CSOs) were a key part of efforts to both ensure that the work of the assembly did not fall on deaf ears and to try and entrench the approach of more direct democracy going forward. The project perceived the need for greater civic participation in democracy as stemming from a mistrust in elections and of how, and for who, governments work, with models like CAs providing a chance for citizens to hear that their voice is being heard, and listened to, when it comes to everyday service delivery challenges they experience.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach was designed to assess the project's outcomes and impacts, and their sustainability, across diverse contexts and levels, from individual, to community and beyond. It also aimed to provide lessons learned and recommendations to inform future deliberative democracy interventions that use the CA model. To further this it sought to gather insights that could support an improved understanding of the relevance of the CA model for enhancing citizens engagement with democracy; the coherence of the designed intervention and how effectively and efficiently it was implemented.

To gather the information required to make these assessments the evaluator reviewed project documents and reporting provided by the Implementing Partner to compare outcomes with targeted objectives and benchmarks (**see Annex 2**). But the main method for collecting information to support the evaluation was semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with project participants. In conducting the evaluation in accordance with the norms and standards developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD), standardized questions (**see Annex 1**) were adapted and tailored based on an initial review of the project documentation available.

In total 23 KIIs were conducted with CA members, government officials and CSO partners across the three demonstration sites – 10 in Brazil, four in Malawi and five in the Republic of North Macedonia - as well as with representatives of the three entities that ran these pilot projects, staff of nDF and a UN official in the Republic of North Macedonia. These were, for the most part, conducted in person and in the interviewees' preferred language, which meant that translators were required in Brazil and for some conversations in rural Malawi.

Two focus group discussions (FGD) with CA members from two of the five project districts – each comprising 10 individuals, with a two-thirds split in favour of women – were held in Malawi. This also provided an opportunity to conduct a brief eight question survey that was designed to elicit an enhanced understanding of how the CA process increased participants' knowledge and awareness of deliberative democracy approaches, as well as their perception of its overall impact. It was not possible to hold similar FGDs in the Republic of North Macedonia and Brazil because many CA members were not available or were widely dispersed across the country (in the case of North Macedonia), but CA members' perspectives were still captured in these contexts through KIIs.

Efforts were also made to conduct the quantitative survey component online using a Google Form with CA participants in both Brazil and the Republic of North Macedonia, but difficulties in identifying the contact details of some members – in Brazil the evaluation came almost five years after the conclusion of the CA's work – and very low response rates, mean that there is insufficient survey data to make a robust assessment and hence the data was not used.

The data that was collected during this fieldwork phase supported the outcome harvesting approach used in the analysis phase, which allowed for the identification and collation of

changes and successes attributable to the project's activities and outputs. In tandem with outcome harvesting, process mapping has been utilized to trace and document the different processes and activities within the project and how they supported the achievement of the targeted outcomes. Efforts have also been made to reflect on whether these changes and impacts occurred across the three demonstration sites or whether they occurred differently in different contexts, and why.

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The key evaluation findings are based on analysis of the data collected and respond directly to the evaluation criteria and questions. Given that the intervention covered three countries, as well as having a more global output, there is also an effort to differentiate where findings were applicable across contexts and where they were unique to a certain locality, and why.

(i) *Relevance*

Enabling National Initiatives to Take Democracy Beyond Elections



An increased appetite for an improved understanding of the role that CA and other direct democracy models can play in strengthening and supporting democratic governance globally was most clearly reflected in the interest that the 'Democracy Beyond Elections' handbook generated. The handbook has been downloaded over a thousand times, republished in full or partially and regularly cited by the OECD and European Commission as well by CSO partners, in their thinking on approaches to direct democracy. This uptake also points to the relevance of the collaborative and consultative approach used to develop the document – drafts were discussed and fine-tuned in conversation with a panel of deliberative democracy experts, both academics and practitioners, from all over the world – to ensure its rigor and applicability.

The approaches used for selecting CA members in the three demonstration sites, adapted to account for context-specific realities, were also particularly relevant.¹ This flexible approach to selection, providing it adhered to the principles of a random sampling as much as possible as this is a core tenet of the CA model, was critical in ensuring that each site had a truly diverse and representative assembly membership. In the view of one respondent in Fortaleza/Brazil, having a "lottery model for selection of participants got us away from having the same people being engaged in participatory initiatives, it brought new citizens from all walks of life who are not the same voices who have been participating and engaging". Although participatory governance models were less well established in other contexts, there was agreement there

¹ In Fortaleza, Brazil, census data was used to randomly select a pool of 200 participants from which 40 could be selected to balance social class, age, gender, etc; in Malawi participants were pooled and randomly selected from social gathering points such as market days, using coloured ribbons with some intervention to ensure a degree of gender equality; whilst in the Republic of North Macedonia invitations were delivered to more than 5,000 households inviting them to participate in the CA, with a random online lottery then done to select from that longlist.



too that the random selection approach for CA members brought with it “fresh voices”, with a greater plurality of perspectives and different experiences that heightened the relevance of the intervention.

Finally, the relevance of the topics selected to be the focus for each CA model – waste management in the case of Fortaleza/Brazil, the use of Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) in five constituencies of

Salima district, Malawi and the response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the Republic of North Macedonia – was viewed positively. During the pandemic there were “so many falsehoods circulating online” explained one CA participant from the Republic of North Macedonia who felt that “any effort that was trying to provide a more accurate understanding of what was going on [particularly around vaccines which became a key focus of the CA’s work] was key”. Whilst there could have been more citizen input into shaping the focus of the CA agenda in all three contexts, there were clear and justifiable reasons for the focus of the interventions in each context, and in Malawi where CDF was relatively unknown, the use of democracy advocates’ expertise brought to the attention of citizens a mechanism that was largely ignored and unknown.

(ii) Coherence

The overall coherence of the project’s design was strong and clear, with the idea that the handbook, developed consultatively, would be translated extensively and become a resource for the pilot projects to use in the implementation of their initiatives. In turn those pilots would provide illustrative examples of the application of approaches to CAs across a range of varying contexts – geographical, but also urban-rural and with regards to levels of participants education. For the demonstration site phase, whilst it made sense to pilot the approach in ways that expand the coverage of CAs, the decision on which countries to focus on – driven more by UNDEF in conversation with UN country offices than the Implementing Partner, and a desire to cover multiple regions – could have done more to account for the potential receptiveness of the country, and the deliberative democracy practitioner networks of the nDF, which were much stronger in Brazil than in the other two contexts. Familiarity with the ideas of deliberative democracy were also much stronger in Brazil than in Malawi or the Republic of North Macedonia, which likely contributed to greater difficulties in getting government officials on board in the latter two contexts.

Brazil’s strong track record and commitment to participatory democracy meant that the CA model, although new in terms of how it was put together, built on an established practice of citizens and governments engaging on key issues. “The idea of engaging people [on city planning] is not new” explained one experienced civil servant, “in fact it was fundamental to the development of our city strategic plan [Fortaleza 2040]”. While another underscored that “the CA in Fortaleza had very good participation and engagement because of this existing culture of the co-creation and citizen criticism of public policies”. Without a similar background of consistent citizen engagement in government processes in Malawi and the Republic of

North Macedonia, acceptance of the CA approach was more difficult to achieve, more so among government officials than citizens.

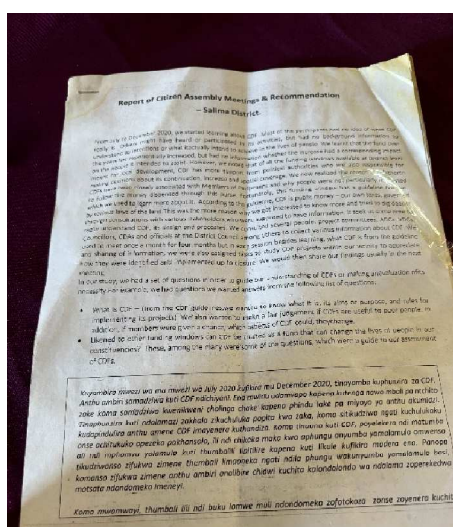
However, more could have been done to strengthen project coherence by creating greater avenues for experience sharing between the local partners and to reflect these in updates to the handbook or an addendum of 'field practitioner notes from three case studies'. Whilst the decision to delay the webinars and seminars aimed at building local and regional networks of advocates until after the completion of the pilot was a good in-project adaptation as it ensured that there were practical examples and experiences to share, more could have been done to ensure the learnings from the three demonstration sites were adequately documented and disseminated at country level, and beyond.

(iii) Effectiveness

The project made significant progress towards fully achieving its outputs and outcomes during the extended implementation period. Local partners in the countries where the pilot projects were being implemented, not only had access to, and used, translated versions of the handbook – at least in Brazil – to support their CA, but also worked to engage key government and CSO stakeholders across a series of in-person and online workshops to heighten their knowledge, skills and understanding about CA approaches. In Brazil Delibera Brasil gave an example of how the handbook was now being used as part of a subsequent distance learning project for engaging public institutions on deliberative democracy models, meaning that it is now “part of the federal government’s learning programme”. The online sessions also provided an opportunity to further share learnings, with the presentation of key takeaways from the Fortaleza pilot shared at a regional ‘Demo.Reset’ conference in Colombia by Delibera Brasil. The global network of like-minded practitioners that nDF convenes also provided a platform for the project’s local partners to engage with like-minded practitioners and to share learnings and for the projects learnings to enhance nDF’s position as global thought-leader on direct democracy approaches.

The second outcome that the project targeted was the delivery of contextually relevant CA pilot projects that not only had citizen buy-in, but that were also able to successfully engage

with elected official or state authorities. In short, this was achieved across all three project sites to varying degrees. In Malawi, despite barriers presented by low levels of education and knowledge of how the CDF worked among CA members, the five CAs – each covering a constituency in Salima district – were able to build the capacity of members to be an effective voice on the issue, that could educate others in their community and strengthen engagement with elected MPs and local council officials. It was the view of one CA member that, “the whole experience empowered us, it gave us knowledge to participate. Previously we thought it was special people who would do this type of project [CDF], but we learned that we too could be part of the process, and we gained skills to help us act”. A sentiment that was backed up by the survey data with participants acknowledging that their knowledge about



Report of CA recommendations in Malawi

citizen driven democratic accountability approaches had gone from an average of 1.2 out of 4 before the project, to 3.7 out of 4 afterwards.

The effectiveness of the local partner in providing an understanding of where CDF money comes from, how it is distributed, and how it is used in the local areas, and how they can follow the money ensured that they would be “better equipped to track the funds being spent”. Perhaps surprisingly, particularly as the CDF is regarded as funds that MPs can use to channel resources to political supporters with a limited degree of scrutiny, several of the MPs were also willing to be engaged by the CAs, seeing more collaboration and transparency on CDF projects as a way in which they could enhance their reputation and visibility in the constituency.



CA deliberations in Fortaleza, Brazil

which “citizens who understood the problem could help us solve it. And such a people generated policy would be better received and more likely to be implemented” contended one municipal official, who was keen to highlight the way in which the approach brought in a range of experts, as well as government officials, to educate CA members about the challenges, the potential solutions and the trade-offs inherent in the decision-making process.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the chance to hear from a range of experts – both communications and medical – through the CA sessions was seen as being a particular effective part of the approach as, given the conflicting information in circulation it provided a shared baseline from which the CA members could deliberate and discuss remedies. However, the CA in the Republic of North Macedonia found it more difficult to effectively engage with the health ministry, due to regular changes in personnel, the political nature of the position and a lack of willingness to consult citizens on the issue. Although the CA’s recommendations broadly aligned with the approaches take by the government, they were unwilling to publicly endorse or commit to them, which reduced the effectiveness of the CA, in the sense that it struggled for external recognition. Backstopping support was provided by nDF, who also remained on hand to support, coach and mentor the local project partners as needed. Just as with the selection of participants, these were not prescriptive conversations, rather a dialogue during which ideas could be discussed and adapted to specific contexts, which ultimately strengthened the effectiveness of the CAs.

“nDF support was critical and vital for the whole operation. Despite the difficult time difference, they made themselves available to address concerns and questions; they shared with us valuable resources, helped us overcome the doubts we had about how to work with people we had never met, and how we would effectively facilitate the discussions. It was always nDF we turned to, and they always had answers or helped us think through answers. We would not have got this far without them.”

ZIP Institute, Republic of North Macedonia.

In Brazil this support was strengthened further by the involvement of Mosaic Lab – a group of community engagement practitioners specialising in high influence deliberative engagement – who “were really good at giving practical examples for more innovative and engaging sessions - for example using speed dialogues to inform CA members about what the city is doing rather than conventional presentations. They were instrumental in making sure the sessions were engaging but also got us to recommendations”, explained the Delibera Brasil representative. According to a view that was shared by one CA participant who commended the way the CA was organized, “it allowed different people to participate and be part of the discussion. We had a chance to identify the challenges and to tell people with power to change them what these were”. Although the staggered sequencing of the three pilots did not allow for ongoing lessons learned to happen between the partners, there was a degree of document sharing between the three contexts which helped with the development of tools fine-tuned to the needs of the local contexts. And clearly the inputs from a range of experts, both those familiar with the context and those with experience of facilitating in engaging and interactive ways, were key in developing these approaches.

The final outcome targeted by the interventions – to build local momentum for the CA model in the three contexts – has been achieved with varying success. In Brazil and the Republic of North Macedonia both partners have successfully secured additional funding from development partners to continue work that uses the model - with Delibera Brasil becoming something of a thought-leader on the subject in Brazil and even elsewhere in the region. This has not been replicated in Malawi, in part because the local partner, which was an individual consultant rather than an organization, lacked the structures to advance the approach onto an institutional level, but also due to the continued limited awareness of the approach, beyond those directly engaged. The documentary produced by the project has been a very useful tool of showing that CA models can work, even in very rural settings with participants that have low levels of formal education, among international audiences, and in that sense have aided nDF’s work on CAs as an approach. However, the lack of screenings in Malawi, alongside the limited attention given to educating a broader audience about the CA approach through local media, in particular radio, or through targeted engagement of prospective practitioners, including CSO groups and local authorities, has weakened the potential for in-country multiplier effects. Media engagement was part of the project’s dissemination approach, but this could have been done more strategically and in a way that was better tailored to each individual context in order to build and sustain momentum for the CA approach, both during and after its functioning.

(iv) Efficiency

The interruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to the project had impacts on the way the budget was spent and the approach used but these were navigated successfully and in ways that did not have a significant impact on project delivery. The increased expenditure on staff time – with nDF contributing additional staff time pro-bono across the 25-month extension -

was balanced by reductions in the need for in-person travel and events. The use of digital approaches, most notably in the Republic of North Macedonia, where the entire CA took place online given restrictions on movement, made a relatively inexpensive process even cheaper. However, whilst this approach was successfully used without a significant drop off in participation, it would not have worked in rural Malawi where in-person sessions were vital to the engagement of participants, reiterating the importance of context specific approaches.

The use of local partners to ensure that the approaches were aligned closely with local realities and networks was a highly efficient approach as these were organizations and individuals with local connections and knowledge that complemented well the practical experience of CAs that nDF had. But even within this there was variation in terms of efficiency that was impacted by levels of previous engagement and the differences of working with an established organisation (like in Brazil and the Republic of North Macedonia) and an individual (in Malawi) who, although he had very good networks and connections in the district focused on, did not have the same institutional structures which, combined with Covid-19 disruptions, led to some “unique implementation challenges”. Nonetheless, all three pilot projects offered good value for money as standalone projects, with the North Macedonia and Brazil interventions going further in that they were able to use the proof of concept to secure additional funding for similar initiatives.

(v) Impact

“The process, brought with it a new approach to citizen engagement: the CA was not only the engagement of people in co-creating knowledge but getting them to come up with recommendations and ideas of what should be done. This was sort of a paradigm shift, an innovation in our tradition of civic education. And I think our first experience created the conditions for the city to become more ready for this model to become part and parcel of our approach to involving citizens”.

Municipal government official, Fortaleza, Brazil.

Following the project’s interventions Fortaleza has utilized the model in other thematic areas – notably to discuss full-time education approaches for youth. Going beyond that, Delibera Brasil has also supported the expansion of the approach to other cities in the country. Changes in behaviour as a result of the project’s interventions were also seen in the Malawian context both among citizen members of the assemblies as well as MPs. After the training provided by the CA sessions about how the CDF should be spent, CA members were going around to check to see what was happening, as one FGD respondent explained, “there is greater community understanding that the CDF money is not just government handout, but for citizens to decide how it is spent, and this has made us more interested in ensuring that it is spent correctly. When we would see the discrepancies that they had been taught about it helped enhance the learning”.

This also contributed to a change in the way in which MPs and district council officials were allocating the funds as they feared that they would be challenged and held to account for acting improperly. One of the MPs who was engaged by the CA members in Salima North West constituency, and who received their presentation of recommendations at its conclusion, explained how he had created a CDF committee, a direct impact and consequence of the

project, “which aims to bring citizens into the CDF decision making process. It provides a forum through which we can engage and solicit citizen input and feedback before deciding on what projects to do. There is even a community representative on the 26-member committee”.

However, this was not consistent across the five constituencies where the CAs were operational, with FGD respondents highlighting an unintended, but negative, consequence of their enhanced knowledge as being their isolation from influential community figures such as MPs, councillors and chiefs. This was because they were seen as “local troublemakers” in the way that they have shone a light onto dubious practices that were, and continue, to take place. “When government is giving out freebies, when it comes to beneficiary identification CA members are left out, we are suffering as a result of our efforts to seek accountability and highlight corruption” explained one FGD respondent.

The unwillingness of the state to engage substantively in the Republic of North Macedonia limited the immediate impact of the CA. Although meetings were held during which the health ministry officials admitted that they broadly supported the proposals that had been reached by the assembly, and that they were in line with what they were thinking and doing, they would not publicly endorse or commit to them. However, and learning from these shortcomings, the ZIP Institute has run subsequent CA projects that successfully built strong working relationships with municipal authorities, offering an example of the deferred impacts that the project has supported through strengthening the awareness of CA models and the supportive role they can play. But this popular momentum could have been strengthened even more, across the three contexts, if greater follow up with CA members – after the CA concluded its work, there was very little feedback or follow up engagement between it and the authorities to show what was being done, even when it aligned with the ideas put forward by the CA – had been built in to the approach.

A final, more cross-cutting, impact has been the contribution this project has made to strengthening the tools and knowledge for conducting CAs. Whilst more could have been done to integrate learnings from the pilots to further strengthen the comprehensive handbook produced, or as addendums to it, the fact that it is being used by global actors working to promote democracy globally in their thinking and strategizing is a clear illustration of impact. The project, through the creation of the handbook and the pilot demonstration sites, as well as through subsequent in-country engagements to highlight the work that was done has also enhanced nDF’s ‘Democracy R&D network’ – of which all the partners of the project are part – as a growing hub for deliberative democracy strategy discussion and debate. It has also reinforced an understanding of key building blocks for a successful CA initiative as being initial and sustained participation of local government officials; engaging and informative CA sessions that elicit citizen engagement; and a local partner with networks and contextual understandings to coordinate and advance the CA model.

(vi) Sustainability

An underlying objective of this project was to provide evidence to support the “proof of concept” when it comes to the CA approach in a range of contexts. Therefore, a discussion of its sustainability, which can be evaluated in a more rigorous way given that the project has been completed for more than two years and some of the interventions took place over five years ago, is as much about the sustainability of the concept and the knowledge it imparted among local partners in the demonstration site countries, and beyond.

Local partners in the Republic of North Macedonia and Brazil have been able to maintain and grow their CA work to cover other themes and locations, in the case of Delibera Brasil this includes regionally. They have also been able to bring the approach of CAs to the fore within municipal authorities' own approaches. "We are discussing how to use this model in public budgeting processes – the CA random selection approach", explained one municipal official, whilst a member of the city's planning institute highlighted the legacy that had been left behind, in terms of knowledge transfer on the CA, issued by the project even though it is not always possible to apply because "participation done properly is expensive and time consuming". ZIP Institute in the Republic of North Macedonia has since implemented a project that has seen strong alignment and partnership with municipal authorities on climate change² and secured funding to support efforts to embed CAs within the work of municipal authorities.³ These initiatives are leading to CAs increasingly becoming "part and parcel of how local government functions and works" according to one respondent. Whilst this has not been the case in Malawi, where the local partner was an individual consultant rather than a local organization, small-scale CDF projects are now more visible in Salima district and people know more about them and are more interested to monitor what is going on as a result of this project.

On the issue of sustainability the project has not only strengthened the credibility of the CA approach, and the network of practitioners that nDF convenes, it has also given the local partners – more so in the Republic of North Macedonia and Brazil where the benefits of partnering with an institute rather than a consultant have been clear - the tools and experience to become resource hubs for deliberative democracy approaches. "We have been approached by other CSOs, who are seeking technical advice on how to implement direct democracy models, we are becoming a resource for others" explained a ZIP Institute representative. Both ZIP and Delibera Brasil staff were keen to stress that they are contributing to regional discussions about deliberative democracy approaches with other like-minded organizations, as a result of the knowledge and experience they acquired through this project. However there has been no uptake of the approach by other CSOs working on governance issues in Malawi, nor an expansion of it beyond the five constituencies focused on by the project, with nDF recognising that "we haven't left the legacy there that we did in the other contexts".

(vii) UNDEF value-add

The two main value additions that UNDEF support provided to this project centre around its ability to open doors at several levels, and the way in which the funding provided a proof of concept for the CA model.

In Brazil and the Republic of North Macedonia, it has opened significant opportunities for the continuation of the approach. "In applying for funding to create CAs focused on climate changes issues, we were able to point to the work done under this UNDEF funded project as an example of our track-record and experience" explained a local partner representative in the Republic of North Macedonia. Not only did it give these partners the experience and knowledge

² The Skopje Climate Assembly saw all 19 of the recommendations proposed by the 65-member citizen assembly adopted in July 2024. For more details see - <https://www.zipinstitute.mk/historic-day-for-deliberative-democracy/>

³ These citizen assemblies will also focus on climate and energy challenges, with European Union funding covering the period 2025-2027. For more details see - <https://www.zipinstitute.mk/empowering-vulnerable-communities-catalysing-climate-action-through-climate-assemblies/>

to conduct CAs but the fact that this support had come from a UN body, gave credence to the idea that CAs were worthy of serious consideration in democracy strengthening programmes.

Delibera Brasil staff noted that the combination of nDF and UNDEF “helped us in approaching and getting the buy-in of the Mayor in Fortaleza”, a sentiment that was shared by nDF who insisted that “if you put a UNDEF brand on it, it really opens a lot of doors. Mayors answer emails in Brazil when they see it is the UN who is wanting to do this [promote/support CAs] – this is the value add that UNDEF can offer if they stay invested in this space and grow their scope”.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These conclusions and recommendations present a comprehensive and balanced summary of the outcomes of the intervention. Drawing on the evidence and findings that emerge from the evaluation’s key findings, the conclusions seek to provide insights into the identification of, and/or potential solutions to, important problems or issues. As much as possible recommendations are feasible and designed to support the intended users of the report – the Implementing Partner, UNDEF project officers and other UN system actors.

Conclusion	Recommendation
Getting key decision makers – particularly those from state authorities, either elected or appointed – engaged in CAs boosts the credibility and impact of the collaborative approach.	CAs should be designed to work collaboratively with government actors to build shared momentum for reform, not in opposition to them. In contexts where the approach is unfamiliar, time and effort should be dedicated to explaining the approach and the value-add it can offer.
Adaptation of globally accepted CA models and approaches to local cultural and political contexts are critical to their relevance and impact .	For CAs to have the biggest impact they should be delivered by local partners in collaboration with, or supported by, leading global thinkers, who can provide technical guidance on approaches to deliberative democracy.
Whilst being a valuable reference tool for the practical implementation of CA pilots, more could have been done to enhance the effectiveness of the handbook created by the project.	Expand the resources created through a dedicated and interactive online resource page for CA practitioners, which could be regularly updated with resource aids and case studies and provide a forum for the sharing of practical experiences running CAs in different contexts.
The diversity of the three CA demonstration sites – in terms of geography and thematic focus – was relevant in that it contributed evidence that the CA model had global applicability. But the coherence of the selection limited the opportunity to build networks and strengthen learning.	Consider regional programming where CAs could focus on the same issue or related themes in a similar context to strengthen both the fine-tuning of the approaches used and to strengthen the opportunities for building regional networks.
CAs in countries which have a more established tradition of citizen participation	When selecting CA pilot sites, understand the context in which they are likely to take

in politics were more effective in ensuring government buy-in and building networks around the approach enhancing the interventions' impact and sustainability .	place and tailor expected outcomes accordingly.
The sustainability of the intervention has been enhanced where the project worked through a democracy-oriented organization, rather than an individual.	Identify local partners first, before the selection of countries, through existing global networks of deliberative democracy practitioners to enhance impact and sustainability.
The documentary produced about the Malawi demonstration site by the project was an effective tool for global engagement but had less impact at the country level.	Alongside the work of the CA, include more sustained communication campaigns – across conventional media, in particular vernacular radio, and social media - at the country level about the CA model, people's experiences of it and the impacts it has before, during and after the intervention.
Those selected to participate in the CAs retained an interest and for the most part attended and actively participated in the sessions due to the relevance of the selection process and tailored content developed to support them.	To further sustain this interest in participatory democracy approaches, create better mechanisms for ongoing feedback loops and engagement between CA members and the authorities about how the recommendations are being implemented on an ongoing basis.
CAs can be done effectively online, offering an efficient and in some ways, inclusive, way of reaching a representative sample of citizens from across a city or even beyond.	The decision on whether to use in-person, online or hybrid CA models should be made based on an assessment of the context, but all can be viable options.
The selection of CA participants does not need to follow a prescribed approach to be effective if it adheres to the core principles of random selection.	Ensure that the selection process also includes screening to capture participants' interest in being a part of the CA before it begins to ensure sustained participation.
Elections and accompanying political changeover of personnel can reset relations and impact on the sustainability of CA interventions.	Focus on building relationships with, and the capacity of, civil servants within government institutions when working on CA initiatives to institutionalize the acceptability of the approach.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED

Based on the conclusions and recommendations presented, key lessons learned from the project that could be applied to like-minded initiatives or projects employing similar approaches include:

- Adapting standardised models that are built on globally accepted principles to local contextual realities is essential for the successful implementation of deliberative democracy approaches. This extends to the selection of members and the approaches used to engage stakeholders and is most effectively done in partnership with a credible local organization that is interested in, or has a track record working on, similar

initiatives. In this case UNDEF's Implementing Partner chose to work with organizations and individuals with local connections and knowledge that complemented well its own practical experience with Citizen Assemblies.

- Providing local actors with an interest in running Citizen Assemblies with access to global networks, knowledge and experts who can offer guidance and learnings from their experiences is key in supporting their successful adaptation. In this project UNDEF's Implementing Partner offered valuable technical support and access to practitioner networks that supported local partner implementation and offered opportunities for sustained engagement around the Citizen Assembly model.
- To enhance sustainability and support the establishment of nascent deliberative democracy networks at country or regional level, partner selection is crucial as they should be the actors to take the approach forward in the aftermath of the project. In the selection of countries to pilot Citizen Assembly projects, primary consideration should be given to the existence of these organizations and their willingness, capacity and interest to advance the issue, as well as the wider attitude towards deliberative democracy models.
- Engaging with civil servants and elected government officials from the outset is a critical strategy that can ensure state-level buy-in for the Citizen Assembly approach which in turn can reduce the risk that it is seen as adversarial, but rather a mechanism that can capture and reflect citizens perspectives in ways that strengthens state credibility and even legitimacy. In this project, all local partners sought to engage state officials as partners in Citizen Assembly processes by providing opportunities for them to attend sessions and/or through regular progress updates.
- Investing the time to consult widely, and with an array of thinkers on approaches to deliberative democracy from across the globe, can create a product that positions the drafters as thought-leaders on the issue, increasing the likelihood that others thinking about how to implement such approaches will reference and consult it. UNDEF's Implementing Partner in this case drew on its existing networks of Citizen Assembly experts and practitioners to produce a robust and widely accepted deliberative democracy implementation handbook.
- The key to the continued engagement of citizens selected to be part of the Citizen Assembly with the process is to ensure that the sessions are well-structured, informative and engaging. Getting the members in the room is an important piece of the puzzle but ensuring that they are active participants is fundamental to their overall output and outcome. In this project local partners, supported by the Implementing Partner, were given resources and guidance that enabled them to ensure adherence to core Citizen Assembly principles but also tailor approaches to contextual realities.
- Documenting how Citizen Assembly initiatives were successfully delivered and the impacts they had in different contexts is a critical tool for increasing public awareness about the ideas behind the approach and can also strengthen expert networks existing knowledge bases. With the publication of a handbook, UNDEF's Implementing Partner has provided a valuable resource that can guide the practical application of deliberative democracy ideals into practice through Citizen Assemblies.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Example evaluation questions and detailed findings

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to the context and needs of project participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did the design of the project seek to tackle or address documented barriers to deliberative democracy approaches? How did the participant selection process ensure the most relevant participants were selected for the CAs? What ensured that the CA focused on issues that were most pertinent in the specific locality of the intervention? What value addition did the local partners add to the demonstration projects?
Coherence	How well did the project “fit”; i.e. to what extent was the project compatible with other projects and programmes in the country, sector or institution?	<p>Internal coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent were opportunities for collaboration facilitated by the design and approach of the project? How were cross-country learnings from the project’s initiatives embedded in the design of this project? <p>External coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the project align with the work of other organisations building support for participatory democracy globally, regionally or nationally? To what extent is the project adding value while avoiding the duplication of efforts?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have the project’s outcomes and objective been achieved? Did the project outputs support and sustain the wider outcomes and objectives of the project? And how was this documented? Where it failed to achieve the outcomes identified in the project document, what explains this? How much did the switch to online engagement, as a result of Covid-19 in the Republic of North Macedonia, impact on the projects effectiveness? Was the project able to deliver its outputs and outcomes in an adaptive and response way?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? How were budget reallocations done to ensure feasibility whilst maintaining the envisaged focus and value-for-money? How were the challenges posed by Covid-19 effectively mitigated? How was knowledge created by the project embedded and used?

Impact	To what extent has the project supported deliberative democracy models and approaches?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project objective been realised? Please give examples from your experience. ▪ To what extent have the handbook and demonstration sites supported the creation of a network of deliberative democracy practitioners? ▪ What are individuals/groups doing differently because of their involvement with this project? Has it contributed to a normative shift? ▪ Were there unintended or negative impacts? What were these?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created space for the creation and effective functioning of deliberative democracy models?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How are better informed groups and networks applying knowledge to strengthen and push for more citizen-engaged democracy? ▪ How has the implementing partner applied project management learnings from this project to enhance its continued sustainability and build relations with key stakeholders in this space? ▪ Are the self-learning training manuals continuing to shape engagements?
UNDEF value added	To what extent was UNDEF able to add value to this intervention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent, and why, was UNDEF support key? ▪ How else could it have added value to the project interventions?

Annex 2: Documents reviewed

Delibera Brasil. 2020. *Conselho Cidadão de Fortaleza (English translation)*.

newDemocracy Foundation. 2018. *Enabling national initiatives to take democracy beyond elections*. <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/2018/10/17/united-nations-democracy-fund-democracy-beyond-elections/>

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Von Reybrouck, D. 2017. *Against Elections: The case for democracy*.

ZIP Institute. 2020. *A North Macedonia Citizen's Assembly on Covid-19*. <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Citizens-Assembly-Process-Design.pdf>

Annex 3: Persons interviewed

18-21 November 2024 (Brazil)	
Larrisa Menescal & Maria Gabrielle Sousa de Santana	Planning and Research Institute (IPPLAN), Fortaleza
Elisângela Teixeira & Elcio Batista	Deputy Mayor, Fortaleza
Carol Morais	CitiNova
Mario Fracalossi	Municipal planning, budget and management office, Fortaleza
Marco Sousa Borges	Conservation Secretariat, Fortaleza
Mr. Ruan	CA member
Ms. Nonata	CA member
Ms. Barbara	CA member
Joaquim de Melo	Banco Palmas
Silvia Cervellini	Delibera Brasil
23-25 November 2024 (Malawi)	
FGD in Salima North	10 CA members
FGD in Salima Chipoka	11 CA members
Ruis Chitsulo	Salima community radio host
Edwin Msewa	Malawi CA project coordinator
Charles Nsentia	Civil society representative
Hon Enock Phale	MP, Salima district
27-30 November (North Macedonia)	
Sead Zeynel	(former) Medical Director, Covid-19 response centre
Refik Nurredein	CA member
Arta Kuli	World Health Organization
Afrodita Bislimi	CA member
Agim Selami	Director, ZIP Institute
December 2024 (Online)	
Nicole Hunter	Managing director, Mosaic Lab
Kyle Redman	Program Manager, nDF
Iain Walker	Executive director, nDF

Annex 4: Acronyms

CA	Citizen Assembly
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CSO	Civil society organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation
FGD	Focus group discussion
KII	Key informant interview
nDF	newDemocracy Foundation
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund