



Political parties in every society are important actors in the democratic development of a country. They build the link between citizens and the government and aggregate different interests in a society. To support political parties in developing institutional capacity, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Cambodia and the Philippines jointly publish a series of small papers/guidelines on political party development focusing on the organisation of local and national political party structures. They are intended to be used as a manual, providing resources and information for better organisation, sustainability, visibility, efficiency and effectiveness of the work of political parties.

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ADVISORY PAPERS ON POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENT, Volume I Guidelines for Life and Work of Local Organisations of Political Parties



Freedom, justice and solidarity are the basic principles underlying the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). KAS is a political foundation, closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU). As co-founder of the CDU and the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) united Christian-social, conservative and liberal traditions. His name is synonymous with the democratic reconstruction of Germany, the firm alignment of foreign policy with the transatlantic community of values, the vision of a unified Europe and an orientation towards the social market economy. In our European and international cooperation with more than 70 offices abroad and projects in over 120 countries, we make a unique contribution to the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and a social market economy.



**ADVISORY PAPERS ON
POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENT
Volume I**

Guidelines for Life and Work of
Local Organisations of Political Parties

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Preface

Political parties are essential to modern democracies. They are the key actors in national and local elections and play an equally important role in the development, discussion, and implementation of politics everywhere across their country. Their local party activists as well as the elected councillors represent the citizens according to their voting preferences. Political parties structure the social interests in their constituencies, relay and adapt political platforms, and promote the participation of the people. This, of course, can only happen when these local organisations of political parties are well structured, have a full understanding of their functions, play a visible role, and can help improve the daily life of local people.

These Guidelines can be used as a reference and source by locally organised political parties who want to improve their structure and the impact of their actions. They provide information and detail courses of actions to parties seeking the full realisation of their potential. They also advocate for a greater participation and inclusion of citizens by political parties at the local level.

It is the first volume of a series of Advisory Papers developed in cooperation by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung office in the Philippines and in Cambodia. These papers have been especially designed to respond to the needs of political parties in Southeast Asia, and are an example of KAS's commitment to the promotion of local participatory and parliamentary democracy, its values, processes, and institutions.

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ADVISORY PAPERS ON POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENT Volume I

Guidelines for Life and Work of Local Organisations of Political Parties

1. Introduction

A political party is an association of people who share the same interests and a common political idea. A party seeks political influence over decision-makers on the local, regional and national level to the benefit of its electorate and supporters. Distinct from non-political associations, professional civic clubs, self-help groups, development projects or civil society organisations, a political party takes over responsibility in holding a public office. The role of a local organisation of a political party is crucial due to the fact that the party is the direct addressee of citizens' issues and concerns. Local activities can aim at solving issues at the commune, district, and municipal level.

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Given the diverse profile of each community, activities of the local organisation of a political party vary in each district, each municipality and even provinces/regions. However, there are standards and regularities. They have to include primarily events and projects related to political decision-making on local and national levels that are relevant to greater parts of the citizenry, or disadvantaged groups of people of each respective area.

These guidelines explore the character and the objectives of a local organisation of a political party and provide helpful tools for the realisation of projects and events.

The first part describes and analyses the four core activities of a local organisation of a political party. Seeking influence on the decision making process, holding elected officials and representatives of the local level accountable for their decisions and actions, fostering the dialogue with the elected representatives of the regional and national level, and the linking up with important non-party actors like members of the civil society and political activists on certain issues, outline the very distinct objectives for the work on the local level.

The second part concentrates on the ways to achieve the above-mentioned objectives. Hereby, advice is given on recruitment and expansion strategies, as well as on means to strengthen the party with the help of an internalisation process of the party's concepts.

Finally, these guidelines examine the role of the party's relation with the media, the embeddedness of the political party in the social life of the community, and convey specific tools to conduct activities.

2. On the Political Life of the Community

a. Influencing Local Political Decision-making

It is the natural task for a local political party organisation to influence decisions at the commune, municipality/city, district and province level, in the interest of the citizens, or a group of citizens, both in the short- and long-term. A party typically has two types of engagements:

- Bringing issues to the attention of the decision-making bodies, or promote certain decisions on matters that are not under consideration at the respective local government units;
- Preventing the implementation of certain decisions by the local administration or council that are already under preparation, or to influence them in a certain direction.

These efforts to influence political decisions at the local level should not contradict the national party's platform – or the local platforms – if one exists. Under these considerations, the interests of the groups represented by the party must be balanced towards the greater good. There are various possible ways of interventions to bring issues at the forefront:

- The presence of the mayor, or other local decision-makers, at a public forum organised by the party;
- Confidential or public letters addressing local decision-makers;
- Press releases or radio interviews;
- Demonstration/mass actions (by the party itself, or together with respective groups of citizens);
- Utilising other influential citizens close to the decision-makers;
Distribution of flyers, leaflets, brochures, and other printed materials.

It is however imperative to clarify, previous to the initiation of such interventions, what the party exactly hopes to achieve, how, with whom, and at what cost. It is also important to plan exit strategies in case the efforts engaged are not successful. This should be the rule of thumb in all the party's activities, especially in those involving other groups, organisations, associations, or even with other like-minded political parties.

b. Holding Accountable Local Elected Officials or Representatives of Local Administrative Bodies

Closely related to the influencing of the local decision-making process is a second type of activity: holding accountable elected local officials, or representatives of local administrative bodies.

- For an elective party member, regular reports to the local assembly of his/her party are a must. They are to justify his/her performance, actions, and decisions relevant to the party precepts and values. Any deviation or inadequacies

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are to be dealt with by the appropriate party structure. These reports shall be disseminated to the electorate carrying the imprimatur of the party.

- For other non-party elective officials and representatives of the local administrative bodies, party members and other allied groups have the right of the governed to question their performance, plans, priorities, and important decisions relative to the greater good, and hold them to their pre-election promises. This is done during meetings and public discussions (with or without media presence) on the political, economic, social, and cultural development of the concerned area. Their personal behaviour as public servants is likewise open to the scrutiny of those that installed them into power - the voters.

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c. Dialogue with Elected Representatives on the National Level on Specific Laws or Draft Bills, Political Developments or Challenges

From time to time districts/provinces should organise dialogues with Members of Parliament on issues of national and local concerns. This is an opportunity to introduce party advocacies of national significance, and hereby influencing the elective officials' positions – in concert with the parties' National Assembly allies. Information on these events should be sent to the National Secretariat and the party leaders in the National Assembly, giving them the opportunity to build broader constituencies.

d. Linking up with Civil Society Groups, Activists, Sector Representatives, or Faith-based Groups, to Organise Advocacy on Specific Problems

- A party, as an authentic political aggregator of the aspirations of its diverse constituencies, should recognise its role as a link between the citizens and the political decision-makers. It makes therefore sense that the local party organisations align their own advocacies with those of the legitimate civil society organisations, which likewise represent sectors of society with a special interest (labour, youth, etc.). This cooperation can either be formalised and structured (i.e. alliances, partnerships), or informal and tactical, and therefore simply based on punctual shared concerns.
- It is essential the objectives for such a cooperation be clearly set down from the onset, in terms of reference, and stating which role each cooperating partner wants to play, and in which forms cooperation and communication shall be assumed. In any case, it is important to be careful on linkages with groups or organisations whose methods and values are suspect and may be contradictory to those espoused by the party.
- Alliances and networking with civil society and professional organisations, civic clubs, and faith-based groups among others, are vital to the work of a party. An inventory of these groups is a must in all local districts/regions. Their leader-

ship and leading personalities are virtually a gold mine for recruitment of party members. Attempts must be made by local party organisations to reach out to them, and involve them in regular appropriate activities and, where possible, joint public engagements (e.g. a forum on climate change with environmental groups).

3. On Recruitment, Membership Expansion & Internalisation of Party Concepts/Practices

a. Basic Orientation Seminars for Prospective Members

A real political party needs skilled and well-informed fee-paying members to continue to be a relevant political force. Its growth needs to be nurtured through systematic recruitment and injection of new blood and ideas. Therefore, each district party organisation should conduct a full-day basic orientation seminar every 2–3 months to introduce the party, its characteristics, and its platforms to interested citizens. It might make sense – especially in rural districts – that these seminars be conducted in one, two, or three adjacent municipalities. This allows reduced travel time and costs, and perhaps inexpensive venues. The speakers and trainers can be drawn among experienced party members from the respective districts/regions, and prospective party candidates – giving them exposures for the upcoming elections. In exceptional cases, leaders and personages from the national level – party chairman, party president, and the board of advisers – may be invited to grace the occasions. It is wise to increase the frequency of these seminars in campaigning times, as well as choosing higher-ranking trainers as crowd pullers,

A real political party needs skilled and well-informed fee-paying members to continue to be a relevant political force.

b. Enhancement & Advancement of Members on Thematic Issues and Party Characteristics

Each district should organise regular thematic knowledge-deepening or enriching sessions for the new and old members interested to learn more about the party's positions on unfolding issues, its procedures, dynamics, and more importantly the party's root philosophy of governance and its pedigrees. These learning events could be held in form of lectures or symposia, with certified senior trainers from the respective regions, as well as visiting experts. They can be structured as brainstorming sessions and internal dialogue encounters, whose output can serve as a source of material for political strategy. These achievements can serve as parts of the party's constitution, and by-laws or amendments to the national political . This practice should also be institutionalised as a training process and is a must for the party members interested to join future electoral contests.

c. Contributions to Programmatic Discussions within the Party on Certain Issues, or on the Political Platform in General

Every member of the party is encouraged to participate in thematic discussions and to the development of the party's political positions, and to contribute in ideas or suggestions to this continuing process. This can be conducted through emails or position papers to the National Secretariat, as well as through formal or informal meetings and dialogues at the local level regarding specific issues. These concerns could be generated through the initiatives of members, or drawn from those aired and debated in public by the media.

Thematic issues will gain more importance and will be debated more thoroughly as the campaign period progresses. A party supporting these themes will have the opportunity to shape the debate, enhancing the party's profile, and allowing it a broader appeal to the general public as a programme-oriented party, and not a personality-based one.

d. Drafting of Local Political Platforms and Setting up the Internal Thematic Working Groups

- It is absolutely necessary to set up local political platforms in each municipality/city/province a party has filed candidates in. These political platforms should address key concerns to the constituencies placed in each respective area, explain in simple language the solutions promoted by the party, and offer a clear distinction between the party's approach, and the one of candidates from other parties.
- The platform should not contain too many issues, and clarity of priorities should be a hallmark. Before it is finalised and approved by the respective district assemblies, this programme needs to be circulated as a draft to interested citizens, testing its relevance and degree of acceptance. This is a good political practice, as this process makes the citizenry co-author of the programme, which they will probably support during the elections. The formulation of the various thematic positions of the draft for the local political platform can be a major pre-campaigning activity by the members. These working groups may be augmented by contributions from non-member specialists, and experts sympathetic to the party.
- Local political platforms must never contradict the line expressed by the party's national political platform. Moreover, their propositions must have the full support of the respective candidates, as they are the party's front-liners, who will have to defend these positions and precepts. These candidates must therefore be so engrossed in the language and intent of the platform as to present it to the voters with credibility and convincing arguments. Additionally, it has to be kept in mind that candidates are under an intensified scrutiny during the campaigning period.

The formulation of the various thematic positions of the draft for the local political platform can be a major pre-campaigning activity by the members.

e. Internal Strategizing Efforts

- At least once a year, the elected officials of the party in each district should convene for at least a full day a well-prepared meeting, reviewing the recent developments, and laying down the strategy aiming at strengthening the party in the areas where improvement is possible. This includes defining the objectives for the upcoming year and identifying key parameters to successfully reach these goals, specifying various coming activities and their purposes, assigning responsibilities and authority of the leadership and specialist core-members, and putting in place mechanisms for the monitoring of the work.
- These strategy sessions require the participation of the representatives of the party's sector groups, other active party members with influential positions in their respective localities, and the elected party government officials and those seconded in high government offices.
- The monitoring of the implementation of the strategic plan – including updates and amendments – should be part of the agenda of these monthly meetings of the party district-boards.
- These regular strategic conferences should likewise be used as a place for the party leadership to socialise and bond.

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f. Internal Social Events

Every now and then – but at least twice a year – the local party organisation should arrange social events for their members, providing them with the opportunity to strengthen the bonds existing among them in an informal manner, and thereby reducing animosities which might have been growing between party members due to clashes of opinions, approaches, or attitudes in their political work. It can also be the occasion to re-actualise these bonds, with the acknowledgement of a shared commitment to the same cause. These events can have a very different character and – in some cases – may cater specifically to different segments of the membership (i.e. youth, families, etc.). In order to allow members with little financial resources to participate in these events, it is advisable to request well-endowed party sympathisers and some businessmen among the members to co-fund such events. Internal social events can include barbecue parties, food & wine tastings, picnics, mountain climbing, nature walks/hikes, Christmas/anniversary parties, year-end meetings, karaoke visits, encouraging hobbies, etc.

g. Internal Communication with the Party Members

- It is not enough that a local party organisation has regular activities. The involvement of all the members in these undertakings is a feature of their ownership of the party. The purposes of these various endeavours therefore need to be communicated to them unequivocally through emails, cellphone

text messages, announcements through websites and social media, or other electronic means, and in cases where these are not available, at least done through regular monthly newsletters.

- The information should include a review and evaluation of past activities, successes and concerns, as well as an announcement of future events. It is an obligation of the leadership to encourage and motivate the members to be active in these affairs, soliciting not only their support but also ideas and comments.
- As part of a well-placed communication protocol, the creation of local email groups and the use of the social media tools are mandatory where feasible. The same is likewise essential for the dissemination of party themes, precepts, and matters that need to be debated.
- An efficient communication system is also meant to bring the different party structures and components together, and form a like-minded community.

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h. Communication with the Regional and National Party

The districts are the backbone of the party. The basic party work emanates from this level and goes through the whole edifice, in what should be a seamless grid. This is the fundamental principle of the party organisation: growth from the “grass-roots”. The leadership that must come from this level has the duty to ensure the integrity of the structure, with all its components and apparatuses. A communication system and feedback mechanism installed from the outset reinforces this cohesion and harmony.

These are the reasons why meetings of districts/regional assemblies, regional councils, and national bodies of the party should be regularly hold, and consistent reports circulated to all levels. Directives from the national offices need to be clearly communicated to all echelons, and responses immediately conveyed back to the source with commentaries or critiques, if any. Districts are therefore likewise enjoined to send reports, information of activities, and assessments of their political landscape through their respective regions, up to the national level and with the same clarity. Tools for straightforward communication and feedback may be provided through websites, newsletters, advisories, social media, and coaching visits by national officers.

4. Media and Public Relations and the Social Face of the Party

a. Media Events/Presenting the Party or its Platforms and Positions

To gain influence and power at the local level, it is not enough for the respective party organisations to have the best solutions, the most convincing positions, the best reputation among experts and intellectuals, and the most upright personalities. In order to win the support of the majority of the electorate, media, which have generally a wide impact on the masses, have to be convinced by the parties' principles and practices. An orchestrated approach for cooperation, short of recruiting them to the ranks, may persuade them to appreciate the party better. Part of the process of persuasion is for the party representatives to work directly with the media in translating the platforms and positions to a language deemed relevant and comprehensible to local communities. Thus, media can report in simple terms issues, events, and concerns that provide flesh and blood to the theoretical principles contained in the governance platform.

As a result, it is essential that each party district elects a communication officer to systematically coordinate the party's relation with the media, in a way that optimises the benefits for the party itself. The public relation strategy of every local organisation should include:

- The creation of a list of relevant local media contacts and ways of approaching them;
- The setting-up of regular encounters with local media professionals sympathetic to the party;
- The planning of a regular newsfeed and press releases issuance to these contacts from both national & local sources;
- The preparation of press kits, drafting talking points for local radio/TV guest appearances /interviews and production of photographs on political events;
- The translation of the political platforms into simple terms to facilitate local media consumption;
- An engagement in social media;
- The coaching and preparation of party candidates to face local media; and the regular invitation of representatives of the media to local party activities.

As a result, it is essential that each party district elects a communication officer to systematically coordinate the party's relation with the media, in a way that optimises the benefits for the party itself.

b. Organisation or Participation in Social Events with Awareness Building Objectives or Entertainment Features, and Potential Advertising Benefits for a Party

It is not sufficient to only communicate the party's position to representatives of the media. The party's presence and social engagement at the local level is essential to further attract the attention of the public.

- Local citizens' initiatives and projects on environmental, social, or cultural issues infused with entertainment appeal are a good opportunity for local party organisations to announce themselves to the broader public, and gain public attention for the party and its advocacies. The party could co-organise such events, or initiate them, with suitable partners. External social events can include fun runs, the sponsoring of sports and cultural shows, public viewing of televised sport or cultural programmes, parades, fashion shows and exhibitions, book launchings, etc.
- It is important to define the objectives of the party's participation in such events, and to organise the details in a way that these objectives can best be achieved (i.e. create awareness for the environmental party platform, provide exposure to party candidates for the next elections, and gain access to the media to promote recruitment).
- Some of these events must involve the masses, and can be utilised for party fund raising.
- Social events are also an occasion, especially in campaigning times, to reach young and inexperienced and/or floating voters as they bear a more informal character.
- Political and public advocacy activities can be conducted through single lectures or lecture series, round-table discussions, brainstorming sessions, workshops, public forums, working group meetings, public protests or demonstrations, mass actions, etc.

Social events are also an occasion, especially in campaigning times, to reach young and inexperienced and/or floating voters as they bear a more informal character.

c. Tools to Conduct Media and Social Events

- It is advisable to identify in each district or municipality locations where the above-mentioned activities can be arranged without violating non-partisan rules of organisations or institutions, and with minimum cost outlay.
- For public events it can be possible to convince private or public schools, parishes, or other institutions with venues suitable to the party activities that may also involve the general public. Publicly maintained localities, like municipal halls, may likewise be used. Those could also be suitable to forums for political dialogues with citizens, civil society groups, and invited government officials.

- For fund-raising purposes, parks, arenas, wide spaces, and large halls designated for public access can be used for negotiated fees/rentals. Hotels, restaurants and auditoriums can be more expensive alternatives.
- For small private meetings, offices of party members, conference rooms of organisations, or institutions owned/managed by party members, or where they have privileges or special access, may be suitable.
- A local party organisation that does not regularly and consistently organise events is bound to wither and eventually die. Party members, operatives, and the leadership have their private lives to live, with primary responsibilities towards their own families, and concerned with livelihood but serious and effective work in a party structure needs serious commitment. As a result, the political technocracy shall be, in practice, integrated into the daily lives. In fact, it is imperative that regular party activities complement the routines.
- Each party member should be aware of the time constraints and the responsibilities of the commitment, and the burden of the official position. The frequency of the meetings, forums, and other regular activities therefore are subject to negotiations and agreements among and between the members – the reasonable minimum being nevertheless at least a bi-monthly physical engagement. The use of electronic tools (internet, social media, skype, etc.) even enables a daily in situ encounter.
- The funds available to finance local party activities could be from the basic annual membership fees, considering that a certain amount of these fees remains in the national party's coffers. As this amount will probably not cover all occurring costs for the regular local activities, the party's members, business enterprises, or just individuals sympathetic to the party would have to contribute on a voluntary basis. Although these are active concerns of the whole membership, the person responsible for the collection, control, monitoring, and accountability for these funds is the area treasurer.
- The other legitimate fund-raising options are to connect some party activities with the promotion of services or products paid for by business enterprises, and invest in small business projects initiated either by the party or its members themselves, or worthwhile investments and investible instruments. However, in both cases it is of utmost importance that the quality and nature of these products or services and the profit-oriented enterprises and investments do not compromise the reputation of the party, and under no circumstances contradict the principles and values of the party. They need as well the explicit consent and approval of the relevant national structure.

A local party organisation that does not regularly and consistently organise events is bound to wither and eventually die.