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The Oslo Center - Annual report

PEACE DEMOCRACY HUMAN RIGHTS



THE OSLO CENTER
Peace • Democracy • Human Rights

THE OSLO CENTER VISION

A world consisting of stable democracies
respecting equality, human dignity and human rights.

THE OSLO CENTER MISSION

The Oslo Center is an independent, non-partisan democracy assistance center that
assists the strengthening of democratic political institutions and processes.

A HOLISTIC RESPONSE TO COVID-19

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought extreme and unforeseen challenges. The global crisis affected many individuals directly and indirectly, as observed by the rising unemployment rates, financial and political insecurity.

The need to promote and protect democracies and democratic practices as the best government system to deliver sustainable and inclusive development results is more critical than ever. The pandemic has demonstrated how democracies can be affected and how vulnerable they can be facing complex crises. Additionally, it has also shown that countries with a robust democratic culture have been better at eliciting citizen trust and shared sense of responsibility to adhere to new social distancing norms and public health safety.

In these uncertain times, the Oslo Center has been developing further from 2020, enhancing the reach and strengthening our position within the areas of our work. We have established connections in new countries, and we are ready to initiate more projects in 2021. Despite the pandemic limitations, we have still been able to implement, finalize, and start new programs.

In 2020, we enlarged our reach and initiated dialogue with governments in Uganda, Tanzania, Somalia, and Somaliland. We strive to have continuous cooperation with democratic institutions, such as governments, to resonate the interest to work with democracy assistance. We also acknowledge the importance of network with peer organizations to share different perspectives and develop

combined advocacy internationally, amplifying our common messages towards the European Union.

The Oslo Center embraces opportunities to advocate for democracy and its development. Our organization wants to speak on behalf of those without voices because they have less freedom of speech or are residents of conflict zones. We want to support a broader development for stronger, sustainable, and more peaceful nations. We have an important mission to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the last months, the Sustainable Development Goals have been backsliding. The access to vaccination increased the differences between the countries. This context highlights the value of democracy assistance since the SDG 16 'Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions' is considered a prerequisite for the other goals.

Together with the teams in Oslo and Nairobi, I would like to continue enabling positive democratic changes. From local grassroots activities to the development of the different political parties, we want to build resilient structures for the local societies. The Oslo Center is committed to promoting and strengthening democratic practices where it is needed. We want to acknowledge the valuable and continuous support of our partners and donors that enable the fulfilment of our core mission.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Finn Jarle Rode', written over a white background.

Finn Jarle Rode,
Executive Director of
the Oslo Center

THE DEMOCRATIC STATE DURING COVID-19

The challenges of COVID-19 have been a test on the democratic way of living.

The crisis of 2020 challenged several countries' health, social, and economic sectors of vast proportions. Throughout the year, democratic processes and people's equality before the law were questioned by the limitation of movement, use of personal data to trace infection cases and other human rights limitations. Democracies were defied and, in some cases, faced accelerated processes of backsliding. This global context has also affected the Oslo Center and required adaptation and resilience to continue our work within democracy assistance.

The pandemic has, often on short notice, made it necessary to appoint substantial restrictions on citizens' daily lives worldwide. Consequently, governments and health authorities got a much broader mandate in the state of emergency. Such mandates must be given democratically, through laws approved by the legislature, based on consultations between governments and parliaments during the implementation procedure.

Unfortunately, in some situations, political leaders have used the opportunity to grab more power than necessary. It may also be a temptation for some to keep enlarged mandates of power after Covid-19 when countries return to a more normal situation. Collaboration among nations on democratic principles is imperative to prevent such an adverse development. As we have witnessed several setbacks for democracy throughout the year, increased efforts are needed to bring democratic development down the right path again.

In this scenario, the Oslo Center's mission becomes even more critical: to assist in the development and stabilization of peaceful democratic change in vulnerable societies. Under the pressures of 2020, fragile and emergent democracies have shown delicate and democratic processes that need to be strengthened to achieve sustainable development. The work of democracy assistance is crucial in this process to strengthen the capacity of resilience in democracy.

Despite the challenges of 2020, the Oslo Center has continued supporting democratic development through our current projects and has also initiated new opportunities of enlarging our impact. We look forward to the future and to overcome the challenges brought by the pandemic with a more robust capacity than ever before.



Kjell Magne Bondevik

Kjell Magne Bondevik,
Executive Chair of
the Oslo Center

DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE AS A DRIVER FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE



Throughout the year 2020, the world has encountered a period of global threats to the democratic state.

The quality of democracy has decreased in several countries, and contemporary inequalities have been intensified. Consequently, restrictions have, in some cases, affected elections, the people's right to assembly, freedom of movement, and expression. During these challenging times, the resilience of democracy becomes vital. For fragile societies on both a national and local level to adapt, recover, and grow, democracy assistance is a crucial process. Building on peaceful and inclusive governance, strengthening political institutions is a stepping stone towards a sustainable democracy.

The Oslo Center has continuously supported different actors and mechanisms that have a fundamental role in the democratization process. Our work builds on democracy as a necessary condition to achieve lasting peace, equitable societies, and sustainable development. Accountability and transparency are key ingredients in political institutions for a nation to achieve trust and inclusiveness, increasing citizen participation. Working with

political parties, parliaments, governments, commissions, and civil society creates the necessary platform to ensure commitment to peace, a standard for justice, and the achievement of strong political institutions. Therefore, our core work builds on the Sustainable Development Goal 16 *Peace Justice and Strong Institutions*. The SDG 16 represents overarching objectives, creating a pathway for the achievements of several components of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through this, the Oslo Center has the unique opportunity to initiate a greater impact on societies through a context-appropriate program design and contribute to strengthening the capacity of resilience in democracies and societies.

Political inclusion has been one of the main topics in the Oslo Center's operations, decreasing the gaps of gender, social, and status inequalities in the political sphere. Capacity and confidence-building have remained essential areas to assist in, accelerating the democratization process. Working with political institutions has created the opportunity to assist directly in policy formulation and to promote receptivity to the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Therefore, the Sustainable Development Goal 5 *Gender Equality* and Sustainable Development Goal 8 *Decent Work and Economic Growth* are also reflected in our work.

The Oslo Center always seeks to cooperate and create partnerships to achieve common goals. Being part of collaborations, nationally or internationally, is of great value on all dimensions. Therefore, we value our role in the Sustainable Development Goal 17 *Partnerships for the Goals* and the opportunity to continuously work for promoting peaceful democratic development with our partners.

INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN EMERGING STATES

2020 has been an interesting year that propelled us to rethink our programmatic approach and enabled higher creativity and flexibility levels.

While technology might have provided workable solutions for the global north, it has created a digital divide amongst the most vulnerable populations and invited emerging democracies to rethink their operational abilities to enable consensus and decision making. Whilst some resist technological solutions, it has also created an opportunity for others to connect as never before.

At the Oslo Center, our programs looked at the implications of a digital world on political participation and engagement. Governments, political parties, youth and women representatives needed to think of alternative ways to reach their constituencies and ensure continued consultations, dialogue, and participation to safeguard, regardless of time and change, democratic governance and representation. The need for citizen engagement does not diminish during duress, crisis, or political change, making it even more important to support political and government institutions in democratic processes.

During the last year, elections and postponed elections mark their presence in East Africa. Amidst a very young population, who often feel politically unrepresented and silenced, the Oslo Center's work has focused on strengthening their voices and participation roles by enabling direct linkages with political systems through political parties and youth representation bodies. This helps create a space for youth within the system to cultivate constructive and inclusive dialogue. We invite you to read a bit more about our institutional and citizen inclusive work below.

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT



Emerging countries still face several political challenges in their democratization process. Effective and responsive political institutions are a prerequisite for democratic practices.

In Kenya, the Oslo Center worked in 2020 with Political parties and regulatory bodies, including the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) and the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC). The Oslo Center has been working with political institutions since 2011 and has throughout the years promoted accountability and transparency in political party management by strengthening their internal institutional organization.

The long-outstanding work with political institutions has advanced the professionalism of political parties in Kenya and generated stronger democratic practices in their internal organizational process. The work with political parties involved assisting them on their internal party constitution and strengthening the political parties' capacity to better caucus with their elected representatives at the sub-national level. The Oslo Center also worked with the regulatory bodies to strengthen the office of the political parties. Specifically, the Oslo Center worked with the main six political parties represented in Kenya's parliament.

The political parties' work included revising their party constitutions, strengthening internal democracy, promoting inclusivity in the decision-making process and policy development processes, and most significantly, established a party organ for persons with disabilities. Further, through the Oslo Center support, main parties realized the importance of operationalizing and organizing the county assemblies' groups to better caucus with their elected representatives at the county level. This helps to ensure better citizen representation in the political system.

Additionally, in 2020 the Oslo Center worked with the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties to help it discharge its mandate more effectively. The Oslo Center's work with political parties has continued to create an enabling internal environment within political parties that promote political accountability, responsiveness, and transparent institution. This facility democratic growth and strengthens political stability within the country, which acts as stabilizing components during political change.

The Oslo Center uses a unique approach to democracy assistance that is the backbone of its success. The Oslo Center approach ensures that local ownership of the programs is achieved, and that the organization understands the local context, the actors, and all relevant processes. In other words, whilst the Oslo Center promoted democratic practices and standards, it bases its programmatic approach on local priorities and needs identification. Additionally, the Oslo Center examines the timing of interventions, applies flexibility, and develops tailor-made activities that address the challenges that political parties face while ensuring that impartiality is maintained throughout the assistance.

To summarize, in 2020, the Oslo Center has assisted political parties to become more inclusive of grassroots voices, vulnerable demographics and strengthened their professionalism by enhancing their institutional structures to base their contribution to political events and change on issue-based politics.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN POLITICS

Strengthening the influence of women in politics cannot be effective without engaging political parties. The work with political parties and the Oslo Center's approach, which encompasses the timing, local knowledge, local ownership, and learning by doing, has laid a strong foundation for strengthening women's participation and influence in politics. In 2020, the Oslo Center worked with political parties in Kenya using two avenues; widening space for women's influence and decision making in political parties and building women's capacity to enhance their electability in elections. The Oslo Center worked with women leagues from six political parties to identify and document the structural and socio-cultural barriers to women's participation in politics with clear proposals for change to their party leadership. These barriers identified by women leagues include structural fragilities, low levels of political literacy and technical capabilities, financial constraints, political violence, and intimidation. Women's proposals from four parties have influenced amendments to party legal and policy documents as well



as party structures. For example, women's proposals have influenced the process of appointing women to leadership positions such as Finance Director, Deputy Chairperson, and Deputy Party Leaders. Women have also influenced parties to adopt a policy and research committee to advise the parties on

women's affairs. Moreover, in one particular case, the political party has been encouraged to support the Women's League to conduct training for women aspirants and Women Democrats and develop a Women Charter in restructuring a Women League. In 2020, the Oslo Center trained 80 women from six political parties, which focused on strengthening their communication and political skills. In the realization of the capacity of the trained women in 2020, main parties in Kenya have started to increase the number of women in party committees and decision-making organs. Several trained women have expressed their desire to compete for elective seats in the 2022 general elections and the by-elections.

The Oslo Center's engagement with parties on women inclusion enlightened party leadership on the importance of having the views of women included in party development and the need to tap on the ingenious perspectives of women on policy issues. Political parties' leaders have seen the need to include affirmative action

in party processes like lowering the nomination fees for women candidates and supporting the institutionalization of women leagues by offering office space and partly funding women programs. The Oslo Center's work has advanced this agenda and will continue to support women's empowerment in political systems.



RAISING YOUTH VOICES



The relevance of youth in democratic discourse cannot be underestimated. The youth have a great potential to establish agency and critical mass necessary for consolidating and advancing democracies. The Oslo Center has been engaging

with youth at sub-national structures through the youth assemblies' program in Kenya. The youth assemblies have created space and opportunities for the youth to participate in sub-national governance and decision-making



processes meaningfully. The Oslo Center has assisted the youth in institutionalizing the youth assemblies to give them vital spaces for dialogue, oversight, capacity development, and participation in sub-national policy cycles. The Oslo Center has established two youth assemblies in Lamu and Kwale Counties. The Lamu and Kwale Youth Assemblies have 60 elected parliament members with equal gender representation from 30 wards and 20 nominated members of parliament that safeguard special interest groups, the president, and their deputies. The youth assemblies in the Coastal region resemble the bicameral structure of Kenya's parliament. Through policy cycles and oversight, the youth assemblies demand more accountability, transparency, citizen vigilance, and service delivery satisfaction.



In 2020, the youth assemblies in Kwale and Lamu conducted public forums and identified issues affecting the youth and their communities. This entailed the need for the inclusion of further marginalized people, including persons

living with disabilities. The youth also identified the impact of early marriages and pregnancies on the wellbeing and future of young women. Moreover, the need for functional and operational health facilities appears across the board. The public dialogue forums organized by the youth assemblies create opportunities to harness participation and engagement between states and citizens to increase subnational accountability and public service delivery.

As members of a new generation, the youth assemblies enrich gender mainstreaming through a gender twinning approach in their leadership structures by offering equal representation to women and marginalized citizens. With a unique approach, the Oslo Center supports the youth in creating their vision rather than helping them realize an externally defined goal or objective. This had invited youth to engage and think about themselves as never before and increased their ownership of their future. The success of this project is not only in the programmatic accomplishments but in the increased levels of self-reliance, responsibility, and confidence experienced by youth.

CAPACITY BUILDING

		THEMATIC AREAS
YOUTH ASSEMBLIES	<p>412 </p> <p>YOUTH TRAINED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 26 Activities held in the different counties 8 Inception meetings 9 Operationalization meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Communication Public Policy and Policy Formulation Gender Mainstreaming in Political Spaces Youth Opportunities in the Blue Economy
WOMEN IN POLITICS	<p>80 </p> <p>WOMEN TRAINED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Needs assessment meetings 12 Capacity and confidence trainings 6 Manual development sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget Processes Campaign Planning and Strategies Media Handling and Relations in Political Campaigns Building Grassroot Political Support Network
POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS	<p>17 </p> <p>PARTY CONSTITUTION SEMINARS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24 Technical and political institutional activities 24 Activities on internal political processes 3 Forums with elected leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsiveness, Accountability and Transparency in Electoral Cycle Leadership Capacity Nomination Rules and Procedures Political Participation and Inclusion

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

PARIS PEACE FORUM



During the Paris Peace Forum 2020, the Oslo Center participated with a pitch on the Youth Assemblies, a concept selected as one of the ten most promising governance projects for the Scale-Up Initiative for 2020. The Oslo Center's Special Advisor Edwin Mulimi presented the development and core elements of the project and highlighted the importance of dialogue, consultation, and building consensus as significant components to enhance youth participation and inclusiveness, creating a more democratic space in the society.

OGP PARTNERSHIP

In October, the Oslo Center became a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). The main aim of the partnership is to include the population of Nairobi in the dialogue and policy-making processes, decreasing the distance between the county government and the citizens. Through the development of interactive platforms, the government will better identify the citizens' needs and challenges. As a civil society associate of OGP Local in Nairobi, the Oslo Center will partake in a 2-year action plan with commitments to promote the necessary changes for citizen inclusion.

PROGRAMMATIC EXPANSION

During 2020, the Oslo Center has progressed continuously in the development of a programmatic strategic expansion. The organization has expanded its capacity to work with democracy assistance in new thematic areas. This includes state-building through supporting the strengthening of political institutions, public reforms, and intra- and inter-institution. However, the Oslo Center's role in promoting accountability and transparency has remained central. With the development of new strategic goals, while maintaining core values, the Oslo Center provides a sustainable growth of our impact.

PROSPECTS FOR EAST AFRICA



In the fall of 2020, the Oslo Center traveled to East Africa to enlarge its network and develop new project possibilities. Several meetings with partners were held, creating great opportunities to continue our work in Kenya. The trip contributed successfully to an official invitation from the Electoral Commission of Uganda for collaborations with the Oslo Center. Meetings with prospective new partners and government officials in Somalia, Somaliland, and Tanzania were driven by great enthusiasm and opened up for future projects in 2021.

THE OSLO CENTER STAFF SHARE THEIR PERSPECTIVES:

Given the current threats we have seen towards democracy, what is needed now more than ever to promote an inclusive democratic **CHANGE?**



FINN JARLE RODE
Executive Director

“We need to be aware and act according to the necessities, to strengthen all political institutions, where needed, to safeguard sustainable development all over the world.”



KAROLINA OLOFSSON
Senior Advisor

“Self-honesty and humility. We must be open to listen to all arguments and find ways to include all members of society, especially those that feel unrepresented.”



PHOEBE MUNGAI
Special Advisor

“Democracy is resilient, but its building is challenging. Democracy strengthening is anchored on accountability, transparency, participation, and inclusion.”



BJARTE TØRÅ
Senior Advisor

“Strengthened inclusive and meaningful participation of the diversity of the people in policy decision making, policy implementation and policy accountability.”



STEPHEN MARIBIE
Special Advisor

“Building democracy requires not only strong institutions but also meaningful civic participation where citizens are part of responsible governance.”



SHARON CHELANGAT
Administration and Finance Officer

“An inclusive democracy is a comprehensive economy that stops tinkering on the margins about individuals’ participation in economic policy processes.”



ROBERTA VILELA
Fundraising and Administrative Officer

“The ability to adapt, creating new collaborative tools to enable citizen engagement, and include the different groups in the dialogue and policy-making processes.”



EDWIN MULIMI
Special Advisor

“Political goodwill. Meaningfully integrating diverse perspectives from multisector can enhance collective and shared prosperity while addressing the contemporary challenges.”



ISAAC JUMA
Program Assistant

“Supporting the youth population to realize their potential. As a significant demographic group, they can thrive as relevant agents for sustainable democratization.”



ALEKSANDRA GOCHEVA
Advisor

“Gender-equal societies. Reducing gender inequalities strengthens economies and builds resilience that in turn give everyone a better opportunity to fulfil their potential.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NETWORKS AND ADVOCACY

In 2020, the Oslo Center entered a new collaborative phase with the Nairobi Metropolitan Services (NMS) and the Nairobi City County Assembly to promote Nairobi's open government strategy. The NMS is a citizen-centric public service working to improve the lives of Nairobi residents. The Nairobi City County Assembly is the legislative arm of the County Government of Nairobi city with the responsibilities of law enactments, which provides policy frameworks. Together, the development initiative will work towards the achievement of a strong local government. The network creates a unique foundation for strengthening public participation, open budget process, gender-responsive budgets, and support inclusion of vulnerable groups.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The Oslo Center's partnerships in program implementation are invaluable collaborations to realize our field goals. The partnership with the Youth Assemblies has continued to be essential in our engagement working with youth inclusion in Kenya's political sphere. We want to extend our gratitude to the Office of Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) for their important contributions, working with strengthening political institutions in Kenya. We look forward to continuing our partnerships and are excited about our prospects.

FUNDING

In 2020, the Oslo Center received institutional project funding from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) through Christian Democratic International Center (KIC), Diakonia, and the Danish Embassy.

The Oslo Center also received private donations. These contributions have been given without preconditions other than those following the Oslo Center's vision and mission, by laws, strategic plan, and good accounting practice.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to our 2020 sponsors:

- 14th August Committee Norway
- GoodPlanet Foundation
- James Reimer

We offer the possibility to contribute with a donation through direct contact with our organization or through our website, www.oslocenter.no.

The contributions are essential for the Oslo Center to continue work to advance democratization and enhance our impact.

We thank all our donors and sponsors for continuously supporting the democracy assistance work and contributing to our mission's fulfillment.

ABOUT THE OSLO CENTER

PARTNERS

We believe we can achieve more by enhancing political cooperation and responsible leadership through long-term cooperation, working in partnership, and seeking to complement governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations (UN), and research institutions and other actors.

We have two main groups of partners:

- 1) Partners with whom we implement programs and activities; and
- 2) Partners with whom we collaborate from a strategic perspective.

We maintain contact with a wide range of other local, national, and international networks, organizations, and individuals that are important in executing our programs and activities.

The Oslo Center's focus on partnership is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 17: *"Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize global partnership for sustainable development,"* highlighting the importance of working together to achieve the 2030 Global Agenda.

BOARD MEMBERS

Mr. Kjell Magne Bondevik (Norway) Chairman of the Board.

Former Prime Minister of Norway and Founder and Executive Chair of the Oslo Center.

Mr. Sverre Lodgaard (Norway) Senior Research Fellow,
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

Ms. Eldbjørg Løwer (Norway) Former Minister of Defense and
former Minister of Labor and Administration.

Ms. Turid Leirvoll (Denmark) Party Secretary of Socialist People's Party (SF) in Denmark.

Ms. Elsbeth Sande Tronstad (Norway) Senior Vice President, SN Power.

Mr. Knut Vollebæk (Norway) Former Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Ms. Julie Christiansen (Norway) Former Member of Parliament.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees is an advisory board consisting of 43 (Norwegian and international) members from several parts of the world. The trustee members, both Norwegian and international, bring a diverse background of experience, including national and international politics, international diplomacy, academia, and civil society. In 2020, the Board of Trustees was chaired by the former President of Finland, **H.E. Tarja Halonen**.



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Geitmyrsveien 45B
NO-0456 Oslo
E-mail: post@oslocenter.no
Telephone: +47 23 13 66 70
www.oslocenter.no
Twitter: [@oslocenter](https://twitter.com/oslocenter)
Facebook: [/oslocenter](https://facebook.com/oslocenter)
LinkedIn: [/theoslocenter](https://linkedin.com/company/theoslocenter)