



The ●slo Center

Annual
Report

20
21





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Message from the Executive Director

“The misuse of democratic structures has the potential of weakening our institutions, in particular when the number of citizens who engage in politics dwindles.”

2021 was an intense year. While countries still navigated the ongoing pandemic, the democratic decline of 60 nations in 2021 showed the continuous threat to democratic principles, such as representation, rule of law, and respect for human rights. We saw amongst others the democratic collapse of Afghanistan and Burma, the storming of Capitol Hill in the US., and further repression of political freedoms in Russia as a prelude to the illegal attack on Ukraine. Most of these events led to the loss of life and deprivation of individual freedoms, showing the importance of a self-governance system that advocates and creates space for equal representation and respect of all.

During 2021, The Oslo Center went through internal changes to realign itself and enhance the best qualities the organization has to offer. In addition to a new visual identity, together with all staff, a new strategy and vision that emphasizes on political representation, democratic governance, and inclusion was developed. The shift of strategic direction was also accompanied by internal operational changes to support staff in program implementation and enhanced organizational performance. The Oslo Center strengthened particularly its engagement in Eastern Africa to support the oncoming regional strategy. In doing so, The Oslo Center continued its democratic assistance support to emerging and evolving democracies, working amongst others with youth and women to enhance their peaceful participation in political representation.

At home in Norway, more attention was given to acknowledging our boundaries and understanding of democracy and democratic development. Even in the North, democracies continue to evolve and phase new challenges. Increased modernization and digitalization move human interaction and behavior to digital platforms that are less defined and regulated than our physical reality. Manipulation of citizens and information distorts the perceived reality by using democratic channels, such as the media, for autocratic purposes. The misuse of democratic structures has the potential of weakening our institutions, particularly when the number of citizens who engage in politics dwindles. This not only weakens accountability processes but enhances institutional vulnerabilities to manipulation and political distortion. Increasing our partnerships into the private sector in 2021, The Oslo Center is giving more emphasis to the democracies of the future.

Similarly, appreciating the UN's recognition of a healthy and sustainable environment as a human right in 2021, The Oslo Center increasingly engaged with the exploration of a green state. Expanding our private and academic partnerships, we hope to draw on this further as we enter a new year and welcome 2022.



Karolina Olofsson
Executive Director of TOC

Our Strategic Direction

As a democracy assistance foundation, we are passionate about democratic values that create the foundation of strong and sustainable societies. At The Oslo Center, we share the belief in an inclusive and representative democracy, where people are at the center. We seek to support, promote, and strengthen democratic practices by recognizing potential and facing challenges with patience and understanding. This is a unique but challenging operation that requires resilience and persistence. Democratic development is a long-lasting journey, where we stay honored and humble in our path to contribute to an equitable, just, and free society for all.



Vision:

We envision a world where democratic systems are responsive to citizen needs, respecting their meaningful and inclusive participation, human rights, and human dignity.

Mission:

To promote and enhance democratic practices by strengthening good governance, political institutions, and civic spaces.

Green Democracy:

a future-oriented path for democratic governance

Addressing green democracy is a complex and multifaceted task. Unknown boundaries challenge us to define a clear and long-lasting vision for its conceptualization. As a democracy assistance organization, The Oslo Center seeks to engage with this topic to support the development of a sustainable and future-oriented model for democracy. Taking into account democratic sustainability as a core principle, green democracy aims to incorporate environmental transition and systemic durability within institutions and political structures. TOC's approach to green democracy is structural and focuses on intra-institutional building and governance systems.

Green democracies are not about ideology. It is important to depoliticize the subject since it moves beyond political policies to the environment and state integration. Some of the challenges lie in embracing issues that transcend borders and go well beyond political cleavages. It forces us to think holistic rather than nationalistic since climate change cannot be solved by individual nations alone. As we witnessed during the COVID-19 crisis, sustainability in a large sense should not only concern concrete policies but also structures, institutions, and modes of governance. Green democracy seeks to conceptualize structural sustainability to adapt it to a fair and equitable democracy building.

Through different TOC programs, social injustices and environmental issues surfaced in 2021, showing us the need for democratic adjustability. For example, the Youth Assemblies in Kenya, have brought up climate change risks, notably on agriculture, as a threat to citizen inclusion and prosperity. In addition to programmatic integration and support where possible, TOC will also arrange seminars and panel debates on green democracy, to further challenge our understanding of this emerging and complex topic. Facing growing environmental injustices and ecological imbalances between older and developing democracies, a further in-depth structural transition is needed to support the democracies of the future.



2021

Highlights of the Year

During 2021, The Oslo Center programs have achieved several milestones. In this report, we would like to present a few memorable moments of our democratization work in the field.



Launch of the ORPP eCitizen platform

During 2021, TOC has collaborated with the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) in Kenya in developing the eCitizen platform of the ORPP membership services, which was launched in November. This platform is a system for citizens to identify membership status of political parties, join a political party of their choice, and resign from parties. This collaboration will grant Kenyans a system with more transparency and greater access to information to enhance party accountability. These are vital components of the democratization process that further will provide for enhanced citizens participation in Kenya.



Youth League Charter

Through TOC's project working with youth participation in political and electoral processes in Kenya, we have assisted the Amani National Congress Youth League with the development of the Youth League Charter, and Aspirants and Candidates Manual. This Charter legally ensures the Youth League as an entity in the party and enhances the opportunities for the youth to contribute to decision-making processes. The Manual aims to enhance youth aspirants' capacity and increase the electability of candidates in party primaries and general elections.

Prospects for Somaliland, Puntland, and Tanzania

In 2021, TOC engaged assessment missions in Somaliland and Puntland. In collaboration with political parties, civil society, and election commissions, we identified key areas of cooperation for strengthening electoral bodies and political parties in becoming more representative, responsive, and inclusive organizations. Additionally, supporting women's inclusion in decision-making processes and governance were central areas of interest for collaboration. In Tanzania, TOC has been working with political parties to identify strategies to enhance representation and women's participation in decision-making processes and democratic governance.

2021

Public Engagements

TOC has throughout the last year taken initiatives and participated in several collaborations and events. These initiatives have provided the opportunity for debates on democracy-related topics and brought engagement across the society. Below are some highlights of our work promoting global democratic efforts.



The Annual Webinar 2021

The Oslo Center's Annual Webinar 2021, The Legacy of Democracies and Violation of Democratic Standards, addressed the essential topic of democratic resilience and global cooperation. In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, democracies face structural and institutional challenges, driven by public mistrust in governments. In this event, the former UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, participated as a keynote speaker, highlighting the necessity of multilateral cooperation as a cornerstone of democracy-building.



Arendalsuka

Arendalsuka is Norway's largest political gathering, aiming at opening debates on contemporary political challenges and fostering civic engagement towards democracy. On this occasion, TOC hosted a panel debate, Who owns Democracy? Collaboration between Private, Civic, and Public Sectors, in which participants brought up relevant and insightful perspectives on the media, private and public sectors' responsibility and role in defending, supporting, and strengthening democratic development.



Global Democracy Coalition Forum

In December, in line with Biden's Summit for Democracy, TOC, together with 47 democracy organizations, formed the Global Democracy Coalition, convened by International IDEA. The coalition aims to promote democratic initiatives in providing a platform for global conversation between multiple stakeholders to broaden the discussion on democracy challenges. As a contribution to this collaboration, TOC hosted the webinar, Afghanistan: Democratization and Responsible Exiting, highlighting the necessity of a tailor-made approach to democracy development, as in the case of Afghanistan, and to share recommendations to Biden's Summit.



Staff Interview

John Løvdal

Senior Advisor, East Africa

How would you describe TOC's strategic change of direction from 2021 and how do you feel it has benefited the organization's work?

For me, the major change has been to focus even more on what is at the center of democracy – the citizens, and to strengthen the key principles of democracy. The new strategic plan has sharpened our thematic approach and redefined the target groups we are working with.

A stronger focus has been put on both the demand and supply sides within the democratization process, strengthening the capacities and facilitating leveled- dialogue between the two sides. As an example, in engaging with youth at the county level in Kenya, TOC has supported young people's demand for more accountability and transparency in governance. At the same time, our program has worked more strategically with the supply side, that is county-governance structures. We assist them to be more aware of the constructive contributions that youth can give in politics and to ensure that common ground can be found through those dialogues. In this way, TOC's renewal has benefited both our fieldwork and our strategic engagement: strengthening our focus on what democracy support is about and what its key elements are.

What motivates you to work in democracy assistance?

First, as the very roots of democracy are the citizens, it is important for me to contribute to strengthening processes that have the interests of citizens at heart. Secondly, democratic support is essential on a global scale as democracies are under threat. Both old and new democracies are experiencing this and working in the field of democracy support is for me to engage with fundamental values that are important for everyone in order to fulfill our potential and human rights.

What do you believe is more crucial than ever to ensure democratic change?

It is important to support and assist local initiatives aiming at strengthening democratic principles, practices, and resilience. Supporting partners' own democratic journey and aspirations is key.

What is the most important thing to have in mind when working with democracy assistance?

Respect. Respect for partners and for the local context. We must always try to understand where partners are coming from and support the best strategy to achieve their aspirations.

Our Impact in 2021 in 4 Numbers



3139

Total beneficiaries reached



71%

Women reached in the Empowering Women in Politics program that have expressed their bid to run for elections



51%

Women Participants within all of our programs



21

Political parties supported in Kenya



The Oslo Center's Program Work: Inclusion

Inclusion of minorities within the political sphere and democratic space is one of The Oslo Center's main priority program areas. At the core of democracy, fair representation and inclusion of all citizens allows for their needs to be addressed by the government. For citizens to gain ownership of the governance processes, it is elemental that they are part of decision-making processes, and not only serve as targets by policymakers. Our work towards inclusion focuses on empowering women in politics and promoting youths' participation in electoral and political processes. Through our programs, TOC, in collaboration with local partners and actors, aims to promote and support inclusive democratic processes where all citizens, no matter status, are at the very center of the decision-making process.

Youth Inclusion

Lamu Bursary Fund

Working with Youth Assemblies, The Oslo Center aims to support a platform that enhances youth participation in local governance processes to reflect citizen needs. In Lamu, one of the most marginalized communities in Kenya, the Youth Assembly dialogue forum has raised the issues that challenge the education sector. Limited access to existing resources and future opportunities were identified as a core problem to regional development. The Youth Assembly has led the discussion on how this impacts the youth

and the community as a whole. As a result, Youth Assembly members have assisted 200 high school graduates to access existing national government University scholarships. Their ability to articulate these challenges and lobby with key decision-makers, led to the adoption of the amendment bill of Lamu Bursary Fund Act 2019. This has further led to affirmative action that supports students from marginalized communities across all levels of education. The Act has been amended

to provide bursary support to any recognized University and not only public institutions. Thousands of deserving youths that would have been locked out, stand to benefit. The Lamu Youth Assembly's interest, determination, and vision for a more accessible education system has further pushed for the development of the education sector in Kenya.





Women Inclusion

“The EWIP program has given me more strength than ever to pursue a career in politics”.

- Millicent Anyango Abudho

Impact Numbers

997



Youths trained in Youth Assemblies in Lamu and Kwale

1616



Women trained in TOC's programs

Voices from the ground

Millicent Anyango Abudho is from Kisumu County in Kenya and is currently the Deputy Party Leader of FORD-Kenya. Since she was a young girl, she was not afraid of approaching challenges or raising her voice, reasons for why she became involved in politics already during high school. However, her journey from her political engagements during high school to achieving her position in one of Kenya's main political parties has not been easy.

Through the years, Millicent has been vying in several elections, experiencing both ups and downs. Despite several obstacles and losses in previous elections, Millicent is determined to continue pursuing her goals in politics. Since 2019, she has been part of The Oslo Center's program Empowering Women in Politics (EWIP). For Millicent, the EWIP program has given her more strength and courage than ever to continue fighting for her beliefs and strive for her desires. It has been a platform providing her, along with other women, knowledge on campaign messaging, resource mobilization, communication, among many other skills in

order to thrive. Millicent describes the skills she has achieved during the EWIP program as crucial in order to elevate herself professionally.

While pursuing her political career, Millicent is passionate about bringing more women, especially grassroots women, with her in politics. She expresses the importance of having more women leaders, and that women have proven to be good leaders. She emphasizes, therefore the importance of programs such as EWIP in order to provide women a platform to raise their voices and be heard.

In connection to the elections, Millicent has a message to the women who are going for political positions: “I want to tell them to be courageous. I want to celebrate these women, and the strongest among the women who have come out, to make the voice of other women to be heard— **they are the frontliners for the voiceless**. I wish these women all the best in the upcoming elections.”



Political Representation

Political representation constitutes an essential part of any strong democracy and is the basis to ensure accountability and citizens' needs. As political parties are the vehicles for involving citizens in the political processes, The Oslo Center's main areas of operation within political representation focused on legal frameworks and political institutions. In strengthening political parties, we aim to enhance their legitimacy and contribute to the reinforcement of democratization. Supporting an accountable political representation allows advocating for democratic processes and leaderships, encouraging transparency and inclusion in electoral systems, and fosters political dialogue. TOC has through its programs conducted 36 trainings in 2021 to facilitate and strengthen political institutions' responsiveness and youth's knowledge in the political and electoral cycle.



Working with Legal Frameworks

- Supported the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties in Kenya to maintain a **healthy democratic environment** and become more transparent and accountable.
- Assisted in capacity-building, policy dialogue, and **institutional strengthening** of legal bodies.
- Engaged in **electoral preparation** for tolerant and cooperative electoral campaigns.
- Ensured **legal compliance** of political parties, through the work with parties' lists, primaries, campaign financing and trained 149 political party policy committee members.
- Developed regulatory bodies' **capacity-building** notably through law- enforcement and sanctions mechanisms, for strong democracy building.



Political Institutions

“TOC has really helped me sharpen the person I am. I am an introvert person, (...) now people see me as that guy who is engaged, talkative and extroverted.”

- Oscar Ogwel

Impact Numbers



7
Political parties supported



176
Coalition alliance members trained



602
Women aspirants trained



5
Youth wings coached

Voices from the ground

Oscar Ogwel started his political career as an academic secretary, after having studied politics at the university. During the 2013 general elections, he ran as a candidate within KANU (Kenya Africa National Union) political party but eventually lost. However, Oscar was determined to pursue a political career. Later on, he joined the Nairobi County Assembly where he served on the Nairobi County youth board. As he was looking for an inclusive platform for youth and women to express themselves on political matters, he became the youth party leader of KANU and serves today as the Program Administrator.

Oscar advocates for transitioning Kenyan politics towards a more inclusive and democratic system. Highlighting the cleavages between youth and senior, and women and men, he works for a fair and effective evolution of Kenya's electoral structure. In that sense, he has participated in The Oslo Center's ongoing program Strengthening Political Institutions to Enhance Responsiveness, Accountability, and Transparency in the Electoral Cycle. This program has helped him sharpen his understanding of policy issues and political concepts. Providing aspirants

with both key knowledge and technical skills, it aims to support youth to build their political ambitions and give them confidence to engage in elections, especially when progressing among older experienced political figures. TOC's program thereby created a linkage between the different generations within political parties, allowing for a smooth and inclusive transition of political aspirants.

Another essential aspect of this program according to Oscar is bonding and experience sharing between young people from the different counties in Kenya. Oscar feels the program has allowed him to grow from a young aspirant to a more experienced and skilled politician, especially in terms of public speaking and communication skills.

From a personal perspective, Oscar has realized which technicalities were lacking for him to have a chance in politics which has helped him develop into the person he is today. Being an introverted person, he progressively understood what the expectations within the political sphere were and how to use the skills he acquired to serve his project.



Democratic Governance

The Oslo Center's engagement for strengthening democratic governance encompasses three main pillars: intra-institutional strengthening, ensuring public participation, and transparency of political institutions. Democracy assistance covers an in-depth work on the functioning of democratic institutions and their structural models. In regard to this, TOC focused in 2021 on strengthening law-making processes, developing mechanisms for responsive public participation, and facilitating transparency through reforms. Our approach takes into account the key challenge of building democratic systems, responsive to citizens' needs and accountable to the people. Even if institutions, public policies, and law-making processes can appear democratic by nature, our work aims at reinforcing these structures internally and ensuring people are included in the political sphere. During 2021, TOC has worked on building a strong local government in Nairobi through the development of the Open Government Partnership program. Through this program, we have assisted in strengthening the inclusion of vulnerable groups and decreasing the distance between the citizens of the community and the government.

Working with Intra-Institutional Strengthening



- Supporting institutions' democratic performance through enhancing their **transparency, efficiency, and accountability**.
- Cultivating **citizens-responsiveness** and institutional trust.
- Assessing institutions' drivers and barriers for **internal democratic governance** and supporting them in this transition.
- Working for **policy development and operationalization** processes within institutions to strengthen democratic practices.
- Assisting in administrative and **procedural reforms** through technical support and reform guidance.



Transparency

The key to a strong democratic model

Transparency is a cornerstone in inclusive democratic governance as it allows to build stable and long-lasting trust between citizens and political leaders. Transparent institutions are a key component for fostering openness in decision-making processes and mitigating corruption.

Through our work in ensuring transparency in governance, TOC is engaged in institutional reforms, building capacity of civil servants, supporting civic engagement, and inclusive information sharing. Adopting democratic standards and practices is a long-term process that requires institutions' willingness to work openly and accountably towards citizens. Placing transparency at the center of this process is therefore essential for building strong and sustainable democracies. As part of our Open Government Partnership program in Nairobi, a central area of operation has been to promote transparent citizen participation and inclusion in decision-making processes.

Public Participation

Establishment of Multistakeholder Forum

As part of our Open Government Partnership program in Nairobi, Kenya, The Oslo Center participated last year in the establishment of a Multistakeholder Forum (MSF) happening in Mombasa. The forum was inaugurated by the Nairobi City County and supported by the Nairobi County Government, comprising eleven members, including five representatives from the government of Nairobi. The aim of the MSF is to provide an institutional structure of the Nairobi City Action Plan and is, therefore, instrumental in its planning, development, implementation, and monitoring processes.

The Action Plan will seek to enhance Nairobi's citizen participation, public service delivery, and local accountability. The MSF is further structured into thematic groups responsible for various areas which strategically are selected to ensure that the necessary resources and expertise are available. During the event in Mombasa, each committee developed implementation work plans and structures to regularly convene to assess and consolidate the development. Furthermore, the forum created a structure for strategic reporting that will identify progression, challenges, and opportunities in order to strengthen the implementation process.

Our Contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals

2021

Contributing to the United Nations 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, The Oslo Center has developed a new Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learn (MERL) strategy to capture and align our work.



Some Achievements in the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2021:



SDG 5 Gender Equality:

Achieve gender equality and empower all women

- 7** political party women leagues supported by TOC to increase women's participation in political processes
- 20** cascade trainings conducted by political parties' women leagues reaching **602** women aspirants to decrease capacity gaps between genders
- 38** trainings conducted for political party youth and women leagues to promote equal rights and access to public and political office
- 5** political party constitutions reviewed to comply with the 2/3rd gender rule thereby enhancing women's representation in politics

**5 GENDER
EQUALITY**



SDG 16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions:

Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Enhanced 3 Kenyan County Assembly Group's understanding of their role in policy development and providing oversight roles to the county assembly governance structures

Strengthened the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties in Kenya in overseeing the usage of political party's funds and assuring its mandate in regulating the political parties

Building capacity of 2 Youth Assemblies as independent oversight structures to promote effective utilization of public funds

Worked with 7 Kenyan political parties in developing policies, strategies, and manifestos to ensure citizen's participation in decision-making processes

**16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS**





Staff Interview

Phoebe Mungai

Special Advisor, Kenya and Puntland

How do you feel TOC's work contributes to democracy in Kenya?

Even though democracy in Kenya has progressed over the years, it is still a relatively young democracy struggling with several issues such as inclusion, strong institutions, trust, accountability, and legitimacy. TOC has come to this space in order to support stronger democratic practices and to work against these challenges. Inclusion is a challenge across the world. Kenya places at a lower level, specially when it comes to women and youth. At TOC, we believe capacity-building is critical for them to integrate in the political environment and to present themselves as leaders.

What motivates you to work in the field of democracy assistance?

As I define myself as a helper, I seek to and enjoy making a difference in society. I am motivated by pushing on the values I believe in. Working for TOC provides me the opportunity to impact people's lives positively: building a stronger democracy brings stability and opportunities for people to thrive. Lastly, I want to make an impact on society that I can leave beyond my children and their children.

What are some of the challenges you face while working with democracy assistance?

A lot of people don't understand democracy assistance. The importance of it is devaluated. Consequently, funding is not sufficient to reach the complexity of our programs. The results and how we approach them are also a challenge. However, the results exist, even if they are not immediate. For democracy work, it takes time and often appears after programs' implementation.

What do you believe is the most important thing to have in mind when working with democracy?

Having an understanding of the context is crucial when addressing the challenges. You cannot expect change without this perspective. Changing norms, culture, and belief systems is a process. These cannot be transformed in a day, week, or month: working with people requires patience and understanding. However, in order to succeed, these are key elements.

What are some of the major achievements that you have been part of in 2021?

To see the young women that I have been working with dreaming to run for office and see them implement the things we have been training them on. Secondly, the building of coalitions. Our work through adapting an inclusive process in policy development has been essential, as it is one of the critical pillars in achieving a sustainable coalition.

The Resilience of Democracy

“Transparency of information directed to the public is absolutely essential in order to keep citizens’ trust and loyalty towards the government.”

2021 has been a year dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting democracies across the globe. For a democracy assistance organization like The Oslo Center, it is crucial to highlight the importance of democratic resilience and how democratic political systems are able to handle emergencies.

As a member of Club de Madrid – an organization gathering former democratic political leaders to share experience with current political leaders on inclusive and democratic leadership, I had the pleasure to partake in the work of a commission focusing on democracy’s ability to deliver effective responses in crises.

Among the elements stressed out is that leaders must elevate emergency preparedness both on the political agenda and within civil society. Democratic institutions must also have their own preparedness and plans.

In times of crisis, the executive and the government need enlarged mandates for quick and effective reactions. However, it is of importance that such enlarged authority is rooted in the legislative body. As we experienced in Norway, this special equilibrium, combined with frequent consultation by the government of the sitting parties, has been effective.

It is nevertheless primordial that emergency situations do not permanently tilt the balance of powers or damage the rule of law. Parliaments must be able to provide legislative oversight over emergency response at early moments of a crisis; moreover, the independence and ability of courts in such situations ought to be preserved.

Transparency of information directed to the public is absolutely essential in order to keep citizens’ trust and loyalty towards the government. This is fundamental for citizens to follow the measures and restrictions that must be implemented in times of crisis. Countering disinformation is critical. Governments should fill the information space with facts and evidence. A special challenge in this regard is to work with social media.

In times of crisis, democratic resilience is pre-conditioned by the ability of the state to respond to citizens’ needs for health care and social and economic security.

I am convinced that democracy is the best political system to meet these challenges. It is of utmost importance that democracy survives and prevails through crises like pandemics.



Kjell Magne Bondevik,
Executive Chair

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The Oslo Center also received private donations. These contributions have been given without preconditions other than those following TOC's vision and mission, by laws, strategic plan, and good accounting practice. In 2021, TOC has received funding from **James Reimer**, **Havila Holding AS**, **Vestre AS**, **Arne Fredly**, **Valter Jensen og Sønn**, **Nordic American Tankers**, and **Dialog for fred**. The contributions are essential for The Oslo Center to continue the work to advance democratization. We thank all our donors and sponsors for continuously supporting the democracy assistance work and contributing to our mission's fulfillment.

Board Members

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