Women in Politics Course

The inaugural course of Women in Politics was conducted on 10-14 November 2008 in Canberra. The course is a train-the-trainer course at the Crawford School of Economics and Government at the Australian National University, and is convened by Dr Sun-Hee Lee.

Objectives

Pacific governments have committed equality for women in political representation through a range of international and regional commitments. The key objective of the course is to build capacity of people who are working toward the goal of getting more women elected in parliaments. The course covers the following key issues of women in politics:

- political parties’ role in promoting gender equality in politics,
- temporary special measures (eg. party quotas and reserved seats),
- electoral and political reforms on women’s representation,
- influencing, lobbying and networking,
- relevant research findings,
- candidate training (eg. election campaign, resource mobilization including campaign fund raising), and
- the role of different actors (the government, parliament, civil society, and academia).

The course aimed to provide Pacific participants with an opportunity to learn more about Australian experiences of and practices in promoting gender equality – how political parties approach this issue differently, what works well and what doesn’t. Participants then develop action plans to move this agenda forward when they go back to their countries.

Learning from each other and sharing ideas on how to translate the course knowledge into practice in the Pacific context are an important part of the course.

Participants

Of 76 applications, eighteen participants were selected from eight countries:

- Papua New Guinea (three)
- Solomon Islands (four)
- Vanuatu (three)
- Fiji (three)
- Tonga (one)
- Kiribati (one)
• Indonesia (one)
• East Timor (two)

Participants included Members of Parliament, local councilors, Government officials, NGO leaders, and a journalist. A number of participants intend to stand in the next cycle elections. CDI is keen to ensure gender balance in all of its courses. Males were strongly encouraged to attend but only one male participated.

Program

Program was organised to cover following topics:

Overall
• Importance of women in democratic politics

Getting elected and re-elected
• How to get elected and re-elected
• How to encourage more women into politics

Leadership
• The role of politicians, how they work, what is expected of them
• Effective leadership/decision making
• Women’s participation and contribution to political processes
• Identifying and developing strategies for women to participate in civic and political life / Rights of women to participate in the political life
• Getting women’s voice heard

Electoral systems and reforms affecting women
• Party quotas and reserved seats
• Political reforms impacting on women’s political participation
• How to improve electoral systems to get more women elected

Lobbying/networking
• How to make parliamentarians focus on women’s issues
• How to lobby for important issues
• Building networks and using networks effectively
• How to convince other women, as a woman leader

Political parties/politicians
• Party politics
• Fund raising
• Strategies to become a successful politician
• Campaigning, influencing voters
• How to cope with changing political world

The role of Government
• The role of government in getting women more elected and improving women’s participation
Speakers

The course was designed to draw experts from three main fields: (1) political parties; (2) private sector; and (3) academia.

Australian Political Party Involvement

The presentations by three main political parties (Labor, Liberal and Greens) were the main attraction of the training. Mr Bob McMullan (Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance) gave an opening speech on key issues of women in politics. Anna Burke, Deputy Speaker (Labor), Clare Moore (Labor), Marise Payne (Liberal), Christine Milne (Greens) presented how parties take different approaches to gender equality as well as personal experiences of getting into politics and getting elected and re-elected.

Other party involvement included presentations by Linda Reynolds (Deputy Federal Director, Liberal Party of Australia) on election campaign and Greg Romanes (the National Fundraising Director for the Australian Greens) on fundraising.

Private Sector and Media

Geoff Leach, Director AusACCESS Australia presented the principles of lobbying and the lobby industry in Australia. This concept was new to participants and many expressed interests in learning more about lobbying.

Philip Eliason (Eliason and Associated) led the session on effective networking and the ways to implement the learning into practice.

Graeme Dobell, veteran ABC journalist with more than 20 years experience covering regional politics, gave a presentation on the role of the media in covering politics and integrating gender equality.

Sofi Ospina, gender consultant, presented the key findings of the 2006 Solomon Islands election diagnostic study. A number of lessons learnt from this study (http://www.cdi.anu.edu.au/x_GEN_D_P/2006_10_SI_diagnostc_study.pdf) are yet to be addressed properly.

Academia

Academic staff at ANU has contributed significantly to the course. Marian Sawer set the scene by discussing arguments for and against having more women in parliaments. Jon Fraenkel led the session on the impact of election systems and political reforms on women’s representation. Chris McMurray presented highly relevant RAMSI survey results on women in politics. Nicole Haley’s presentation on the 2007 PNG election experience provided an interesting contrast to the Solomon Islands experience.

Other CDI lectures were conducted by Sun-Hee Lee, on the women in politics introduction, gender differences in voter behaviour, and how national government, local government, parliament, and NGOs can work together in promoting women in politics.
**Training Format:**

The course is composed of guest speakers presentations followed by discussion, and a visit to Australian Parliament.

Prior to the training, participants were asked to

- **Interview MPs:** to find out the issues that they are most concerned about, what they see as their roles as MPs, their views on women in politics, and any other relevant issues. If a participant is an MP, she/he was asked to interview other MPs to collect information.

- **Interview communities (a few women and men each)** – to find out what issues concern women and men most, whether they are different, if so how.

As part of the course, the participants were required to prepare and present country action plans, which will form the basis for their follow up actions after training. The standard of these presentations was high.

**Course Evaluation**

Over 90 percent of participants rated the course relevant and highly relevant. The sessions participants found most useful included hearing/drawing on the experience of the female Australian parliamentarians and how they overcame challenges. Participants found the course very practical, real and applicable to their country contexts.

Participants suggested the following to be considered in future training:

- longer course to fit all the information,
- better time management and
- more on confidence building and public speaking training

**Conclusion**

The enthusiastic support and involvement of the Australian political parties and their parliamentarians was critical to the success of the course.

Having participants representing three key areas (Parliament, Government and NGOs) has provided an opportunity for a better understanding of each player’s main focus and to discuss how to work together better.

The course produced the following results:

1. strengthened networks with Australian parliamentarians and political parties for future collaborations;
2. country level action plans; and
3. strengthened networks among participants

Over the past ten years, CDI has developed very strong links with parliaments. This link would be very useful to move the women in politics agenda forward. The CDI flagship course, Political Party Development (PPD) covers topics of party financing – fundraising; and campaigning. Closer linkages should be made between these two courses.