



centre for democratic institutions

2009 Women in Politics Course

Canberra | 7-11 December 2009

The second Centre for Democratic Institutions' (CDI's) Women in Politics (WiP) course was convened by Ms. Monica Costa and conducted from 7 to 11 December 2009 at the Australian National University in Canberra.

1. Objectives

Inaugurated in 2008, The WiP course aims to build the capacity of social and political actors in the region with the goal of improving women's political representation. It is particularly designed for women intending to enter national politics in the Pacific Islands, whether as a candidate for elected office, a political party organiser, or similar role in the democratic process. To achieve this, the course assists participants from the Asia-Pacific region to identify strategies to get more women elected in their countries. The course equips participants with the tools and skills to engage in national politics and leadership at the highest level.

The course covers the following key issues for women in politics:

- political parties' role in promoting gender equality in politics,
- temporary special measures,
- electoral and political reforms on women's representation,
- influencing, lobbying and networking,
- candidate training (e.g. election campaign, resource mobilization including campaign fund raising), and
- the role of different actors (government, parliament, civil society, and academia).

While progress has been limited in the Pacific region, governments across the region have committed to gender equality in political representation at both regional and international levels. These include the *Millennium Declaration 2000* (which considers women's political representation as an indicator of progress), the *Pacific Platform for action for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality* (1994) and subsequent *Pacific Plan 2005* and the *Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015*.

Drawing on these commitments the WiP course offers a unique opportunity for participants to learn and discuss Australian experiences of and practices in promoting gender equality as well as share their own experiences. The course explores avenues to translate this knowledge into the reality of Asia-Pacific contexts. As a result participants are asked to develop and present a national action plan outlining strategies to improve women's representation.

2. Participants

Eighteen participants from 10 countries participated in the 2009 WiP course, being from:

- Fiji (1),
- Indonesia (2),
- Malaysia (1),
- Marshall Islands (1),
- Papua New Guinea (4),
- Solomon Islands (4),
- Timor-Leste (2),
- Tonga (1),
- Vanuatu (1),
- Kiribati (1).

This represented an expansion of the countries involved in this course with the engagement of Marshall Islands and Malaysia. Approximately half of the participants held positions related to politics while the other half was engaged in civil society. Participants include both people that expressed interest in running for politics and those that want to be engaged in advocacy for change in women's representation in politics. This year, for the first time, a UNIFEM staff member from the Timor-Leste country office was engaged in the course as an observer and support to the convener. Two accepted candidates withdrew close to the date of the course making it difficult for CDI to arrange for a replacement.

Close to ninety applications were received by CDI from 17 countries as follows: Ukraine (1), Nepal (1), Mongolia (1), Vietnam (1), Bangladesh (2), Singapore (1), Malaysia (4), Fiji (5), Vanuatu (4), Kiribati (2), Tuvalu (1), Marshall Islands (1), Tonga (1), Solomon Islands (12), Timor-Leste (8), Indonesia (9) and Papua New Guinea (35). The number of applications is a strong indication of the demand for such a course across the Asia-Pacific region. The selection process considered applicants against the potential of this training to support their work towards gender equality in politics and their expressed interest in entering directly in politics. Consideration was also given to the specific national contexts resulting in 75% of the participants being from the Pacific region.

CDI is keen to ensure gender balance in all of its courses and males were strongly encouraged to apply. However the group of participants included only one male.

3. Program structure

Drawing on the experience of the first WiP course the program for the second course covered the following topics:

3.1. Context

- The context of women's engagement in politics and its progress in the region.
- Arguments for and against women's engagement in politics.

3.2. Getting elected and re-elected

- Strategies to get elected and re-elected (including fundraising, media and campaigning).
- Issues to consider in developing a political program and in communicating with voters.
- Strategies to encourage women's involvement in politics.

3.2. Leadership

- Role of politicians (how they work? what is expected of them?).
- Role of men champions in supporting efforts to get more women elected.

- Identifying and developing strategies for women to participate in civic and political life.
- Substantive representation.

3.3. Electoral systems and reforms affecting women

- Party quotas and reserved seats.
- Political reforms and their impact on women's political participation.
- Explore avenues to improve electoral systems to get more women elected.

3.4. Lobbying/networking

- Strategies to make men and parliamentarians more effective in promoting gender equality.
- Strategies to lobby and network effectively.

3.5. Role of political parties and politicians

- Party approaches to getting more women elected and promoting gender equality.
- Role of male and female politicians in getting more women elected and promoting gender equality.

3.6. Government, NGOs and academia's contributions

- Role of government, NGOs and academia in improving women's participation in politics and a gender equality agenda in politics.

4. Speakers

The course drew on a range of experts from three main fields: (a) political parties, (b) private sector and (c) academia.

(a) Political parties

Three main political parties (Labor, Liberal and Greens) made presentations to the training group:

- Ms Anna Burke, Deputy Speaker (Labor) opened the course and set the scene on issues of women's participation and representation in politics in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.
- Ms Ruth Webber (Labor), Ms Marise Payne (Liberal), Ms Meredith Hunter (Greens) discussed parties different approaches to gender equality and drew on personal experiences of getting into politics and getting elected and re-elected.
- Ms Amanda Rishworth (Labor) as the Chair of the Australia/Pacific Parliamentary Friendship Group led a session on steps for success in politics and brought the discussion on the national action plans to a close.

These presentations were a central attraction in the training and were received with significant enthusiasm by the participants. The personal stories that these politicians brought to the course operated as a source of inspiration for participants, particularly aspiring politicians.

Further, Ms Linda Reynolds (former Deputy Federal Director - Liberal Party of Australia) presented on election campaign drawing on over 20 years campaign experience. Mr Greg Romanes (the former National Fundraising Director for the Australian Greens) presented on fundraising.

As part of the visit to the Australian parliament, participants had the opportunity to meet with the Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Bernard Wright, and discussed the inner workings of the parliament.

(b) Private sector, civil society and media

Drawing on the 2008 course experience private sector and media were a key part of the course. Mr Geoff Leach (AusACCESS Australia) led a session on the principles of lobbying and the lobby industry in Australia. Mr Philip Eliason (Eliason and Associated) discussed principles for effective networking. Mr Graeme Dobell, a former ABC journalist, gave a presentation on the role of the media and provided participants with ideas on how to go about engaging the media. Ms Sherill Whittington, a consultant with wide experience on gender and governance issues led a session on the concept of the temporary special measures, its potential in the context of the Asia-Pacific region and how to encourage churches, NGOs, parliamentarians, government, and parties to adopt temporary special measures.

In addition Ms Darriea Turley (President of the Australia Local Government Women's Association) gave a rich account of the challenges to women's success in politics at the local level and the importance of a network to support women in these endeavors. She also provided examples of their current efforts to get more women elected in local government.

(c) Academia

Academic staff mainly from ANU contributed significantly to the course. Dr Merrindahl Andrew introduced the key issues regarding women's representation with a discussion on the arguments for and against having more women in parliaments.

Dr Ron May and Dr Asenati Liki brought to the course experiences from the Pacific illustrating the challenges, and opportunities, for improved women's representation in politics in the region. These speakers drew on the cases of 2007 election in Papua New Guinea, and the recent efforts to promote women's engagement in politics in both Solomon Islands and Samoa. Dr Jon Fraenkel led the session on the impact of election systems and political reforms on women's representation. Dr Chris McMurray presented on the most recent results of the Solomon Islands - RAMSI People's Survey with a specific focus on the perception of women's engagement in politics. This year, Professor Gabrielle Meagher, University of Sydney, was involved in the training. She made an interesting presentation on gender differences in thinking about policies and elections.

Ms Monica Costa facilitated other sessions on political parties and politicians' contribution to improve women's representation; on building a network of support by engaging national government, local government, parliament, and NGOs; and how to contribute to women's effectiveness in politics. These sessions offered an opportunity for the participants to share their own experiences and learn from each other.

5. Outcomes

The course combined:

- presentations by guest speakers followed by open discussions,
- group work, drawing on the experiences from the participants, and focusing on the national contexts and experiences,
- visit to Australian Parliament, including a presentation by the Clerk of Parliament

on the inner workings of the parliament.

In preparation for the training participants were asked to:

- discuss with elected politicians their thoughts on how to involve women in politics and improve their success during elections.
- discuss with communities their thoughts on women's representation in politics and avenues to improve their representation.
- prepare a presentation on specific issues, drawing on their work and their national experiences.
- start the process of identifying strategies to improve women's representation in politics, at both national and local levels.

At the end of the course participants were required to prepare and present country action plans, outlining practical strategies to improve women's representation in politics at both national and sub-national levels. Participants were asked to consider how they and their organization could contribute to improve women's representation. The standard of these presentations was high and participants mentioned to the convener that the opportunity to share had been important for them.

The course also created a unique opportunity for participants to build connections and networks between the participants and their Australian counterparts, be they female MPs, political party members and staff, journalists, senior public servants.

6. Conclusion

The 2009 Women in Politics course built on the success of the inaugural 2008 course.

While the course program worked well with a combination of presentations and group work it has been recommended that the course commence mid-week such that it runs over a weekend (Wednesday to Wednesday) rather than fitting the course into a single working week.

The diversity of experiences brought to the course by the participants, both in terms of their country and sector of expertise was a key element for the success of this course. Overall participants were genuinely interested in learning, sharing and translating this knowledge into practice on their return. There was a high level of affinity between the participants, and it is expected that some of them will maintain contact and support each other. Several country representatives asked CDI to deliver a similar course in their own countries.

The course produced the following results:

- built a network among the participants,
- strengthened networks with Australian parliamentarians and political parties;
- developed country level action plans.

The enthusiastic support and involvement of the Australian political parties and their parliamentarians was critical to the success of the course. Their contributions were inspirational to the participants. CDI thanks parties' support and active participation in the various sessions.