2010 Women in Politics Training Course (WiP)

REPORT

The Centre for Democratic Institutions’ *Women in Politics Training Course* (WiP) was conducted from 24th November to 2nd December 2010 in Canberra. The course was convened by CDI Associate Ms. Monica Costa.

1. Objectives
In its third year the Women in Politics training course continues to strengthen the capacity of social and political actors in the Asia-Pacific region to improve women’s political representation. This course was developed to support women intending to enter national politics whether as a candidate for elected office, a political party organiser, or similar role in the democratic process.

Progress on women’s political representation in the Asia-Pacific region has been limited despite government commitments to improving women’s representation in the political arena - including adoption of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Millennium Declaration 2000, the Pacific Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (1994), Pacific Plan 2005 and the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015. This course assists efforts to improve regional indicators on women's political representation.

The course offered a unique opportunity for participants to learn and discuss best practices in promoting gender equality as well as share their own country-based experiences. The course explored avenues to translate this knowledge into the context of the Asia-Pacific through the development of national strategies to address challenges faced by women in engaging with the political arena.

2. Participants
Nineteen participants from the six CDI priority countries participated in the course as follows:

- Fiji (2)
- Indonesia (7)
- Papua New Guinea (4)
- Solomon Islands (2)
- Timor-Leste (2)
• Vanuatu (2)

Roughly half of the participants held positions in political parties while the other half was engaged in civil society organizations committed to support improvements in women’s representation in politics. Participants included women interested in running for office in coming elections (both national and local) and those engaged in advocacy efforts to improve women’s representation in politics. In addition to the participants AusAID requested that its Gender Manager in Indonesia would be engaged in the training as an observer. The participation of the Gender Manager was invaluable to the training and allowed for a discussion on avenues to bring donor agencies on board to support initiatives that will increase women’s representation in politics. Unfortunately one candidate was hospitalized a day prior to travelling to Australia and was unable to join the course.

There appears to be a strong demand for this course across the Asia-Pacific region as indicated by the number of applications. Around one hundred and eighty applications were received by CDI including Fiji (10), Tuvalu (1), Samoa (1), Vanuatu (5), Thailand (1), Philippines (3), Mongolia (1), Nepal (2), Kiribati (1), Cambodia (2), PNG (34), Solomon Islands (17), Indonesia (82), Malaysia (3) and Timor-Leste (19). The selection process considered applicants against the potential impact of this training on their work towards gender equality in politics. A particular focus was on people’s involvement in political parties and their expressed interest in entering directly into politics. Consideration was also given to the priority countries identified by CDI.

CDI continues to be committed to ensuring gender balance in all of its courses and males were strongly encouraged to apply. While 13 males applied these applications were generally weak and did not fill the selection criteria.

3. Program structure
Building on the recommendations from 2009 course the course was extended from five to seven days, and ran over the weekend from Wednesday to Thursday. This extension allowed for more in-depth discussions including active exchanges of experiences between participants and specific work on campaigning and involvement with the media. The 2010 Women in Politics training course covered the following topics:

3.1. Context
- The context of women’s leadership and engagement in politics 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 mobilizing resources, media and campaigning).
- Issues to consider in developing a political program and in communicating with voters.

3.2. Leadership
- Role of politicians in supporting women’s leadership roles.
- Role of men champions in supporting efforts to get more women elected.
3.3. Electoral systems and reforms affecting women
   - Temporary special measures such as party quotas and reserved seats.
   - Political reforms and their impact on women’s political participation.
   - Avenues to improve electoral systems to get more women elected.

3.4. Lobbying/networking
   - Strategies to lobby and network effectively to increase the number of women in parliament and move forward gender equality.

3.5. Role of political parties and politicians
   - Approaches by political parties to getting more women elected and promoting gender equality.
   - Role of male and female politicians in supporting women’s engagement in politics 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 four main fields: (a) political parties, (b) NGOs and media, (c) academia and (d) participants’ experiences.

(a) Political parties
Three main Australian political parties (Labor, Liberal and Greens) made presentations to the training group.

Ms Amanda Rishworth (Member of Parliament, Labor Party), Senator Marise Payne (Liberal Party), Senator Christine Milne (Australian Green Party) discussed parties different approaches to gender equality and drew on personal experiences of getting involved in politics and getting elected and re-elected. Ms Anna Burke, former Deputy Speaker and Member of Parliament (Australian Labor Party) discussed women’s leadership and political participation in Australia. Ms Burke provided a lively account of the challenges to women’s leadership drawing on her own experience.

The Honorable Kate Ellis (Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare and Minister for the Status of Women) addressed the role of women in politics and welcomed the group to parliament and to Australia.

At the local level, Ms Trudy Taylor (Councillor, Queanbeyan) gave a rich account of the challenges to women’s success in politics at the local level and the importance of strategizing for success in local politics.

Ms Linda Reynolds (former Deputy Federal Director, Liberal Party of Australia) presented on election campaign drawing on over 20 years campaign experience. Ms Karen Brown (fundraising and communications, Tasmanian Green Party) presented on mobilizing resources both funding and people drawing on her own experiences in Tasmania.

Participants enthusiastically received these personal and lively accounts. The personal
stories provided a source of inspiration to these aspiring politicians and were draw on regularly in general discussion later in the training course.

(b) Private sector, civil society and media
A range of representatives from the private sector, civil society and media were engaged in this training course.

Ms Sherill Whittington, a consultant with significant experience in gender and governance issues led a session on temporary special measures and its potential in the context of the Asia-Pacific region, including how to encourage churches, NGOs, parliamentarians, government, and parties to support temporary special measures. Participants contributed actively to this session with presentations from the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea on their recent experiences with drafting and presenting legislation on reserved seats.

This year Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) provided a significant contribution to the training with a particular focus on strategies to mobilize for gender-sensitive change in policy and institutions. Ms Kathy Richards (Manager, Equality Rights Alliance) provided an in-depth account of networking strategies developed by the Equality Rights Alliance to identify women’s priorities and advocate for its inclusion in the agendas of political parties. Complementing this, Ms Roslyn Dundas (Director, ACT Council of Services) provided a lively account of avenues to lobby for changes in policy as well as her own experience as a young woman elected to a state parliament in Australia (Australian Democrats).

The 2010 training course saw a significant expansion of the media component. This included three distinct elements: a session on press releases, a session on strategies to improve their relationship with the media (led by Catriona Jackson, ANU) and finally mock interviews. Ms Vanessa Alpern, a consultant with extensive experience on democracy and governance programs, led a session on the relevance of media in politics. This session particularly focused on improving participants’ skills to prepare press release. A presentation from a participant (Solomon Islands) opened a discussion on avenues to engender media coverage of the elections. Ms Catriona Jackson Director of the Communications and External Liaison Office at ANU provided a useful account of the strategies to build a good relationship with media. Two journalists, Ms Alexandra Kirk (ABC Journalist) and Mr Nick Butterly (WA News Journalist), led mock interview sessions involving half of the participants. These mock interviews were an important opportunity for the participants to reflect on tips to improve their media performance.

(c) Academia
As in previous courses, academic staff mainly from ANU contributed significantly to the course.

Professor Marian Sawer commenced the training with a discussion on the arguments for and against having more women in parliament.

Dr Sharon Bessell brought to the course the experiences from Indonesia to illustrate the
challenges, and opportunities, for improved women’s representation in politics in the region – including affirmative action measures implemented in Indonesia.

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 communities’ perception of women’s engagement in politics.

Professor Gabrielle Meagher, University of Sydney, made an stimulating presentation on gender differences in thinking about policies and elections.

(d) Visits
The 2010 Women in Politics Training Course included two visits (1) to observe question time at the Parliament, and (2) a tour of the Museum of Australian Democracy (Old Parliament House).

The opportunity to observe question time was a highlight for most participants. The visit to the Museum provided a unique opportunity for participants to get acquainted with the history of women’s political presence in Australia and provided a very good historical account of the debates on women’s presence in politics in the region.

(e) Participants’ experiences
Ms Monica Costa facilitated sessions focused on participants’ experiences related to women in politics. This included (1) a session on the role of NGOs in supporting women candidates, (2) political parties’ contribution to improve women’s representation and (3) the role of men and women as gender advocates.

Participants were asked to prepare short presentations on their experiences in these areas. These sessions offered an opportunity for the participants to share and reflect on their own experiences. Some participants were asked to present in specific sessions for example, Solomon Islands and PNG participants were asked to illustrate their experiences on temporary special measures.

5. Outcomes
The course combined three distinct approaches:
1. presentations by guest speakers followed by open discussions,
2. group discussions around the specific participant-based experiences and practical exercises (e.g. mock interviews),

Drawing on the experience from previous years, participants were asked to prepare for the training including:
- a presentation on a specific issue around strategies to improve women’s
presence in the political arena drawing on their work and their national experiences.

- start the process of identifying a challenge to improve women’s representation in politics and strategies to address this challenge.
- discuss with key social and political actors in country their thoughts on how to involve women in politics and improve their success during elections.

On the last day of the course, participants were asked to present a country-based strategy for collaboration on addressing a specific challenge. Participants were asked to consider how they and their organization could contribute to improve women’s representation. The standard of these presentations was very high with participants focused on practical measures for strengthening collaboration between participants (such as fundraising for women candidates, research, awareness initiatives and training for women candidates).

Significantly the course created a unique opportunity for participants to build relations and networks amongst themselves as well as with Australian political parties and institutions. The group discussed avenues to support the Papua New Guinea participants in their efforts to see the approval of the legislation on reserved seats (to be discussed in early 2011).

Further, CDI undertook a pilot in-course participant feedback study focused on the experiences of women in engaging with political parties in the region. The object is to build on and complement the more quantitative evaluation of CDI’s training activities, including review of this training program for 2011.

6. Conclusion
The third Women in Politics training course builds on the success and the learning from previous courses. In the short-term the course produced the following results:

- built a network among the participants
- strengthened networks between these participants and Australian political parties and institutions
- documented the experiences of women in running for politics in the region
- identified country level strategies for collaboration for addressing challenges to women’s involvement in politics.

Key to the success of the 2010 Women in Politics Training Course was the diversity of experiences brought to the course by the participants... Overall participants were genuinely interested in learning and sharing. 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.

Significantly the enthusiastic support and involvement of the speakers, in particular Australian political parties and their parliamentarians, was critical to the success of the course. Their contributions provided inspiration for participants’ day-to-day work in promoting women’s political representation and their political aspirations. CDI thanks parties’ for their support and active participation in the various sessions. A specific thanks
goes to Hon Kate Ellis - Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare and the Minister for the States of Women.

CDI appreciates the contribution of academics from a range of fields to this training. Research based in-depth analysis supported participants in this learning journey and consolidated or challenged perceptions on women’s involvement in politics.

The support provided by the Parliament and the Australian Museum of Democracy was very appreciated and enabled the participants to grasp how democracy evolves and operates today in Australia. These visits also provided a sense of the services made available by these institutions and led to discussions about the potential services that can be provided by equivalent institutions in their own countries.

A strong indicator of the success of this training is the fact that several participants mentioned their commitment to build a network of alumni in their countries and have made themselves available to publicize this course to candidates into the future. Further several country representatives asked CDI to deliver a similar course in their own countries.