2011 Women in Politics Training Course (WIP)

REPORT

The Centre for Democratic Institutions’ fourth Women in Politics Training Course (WiP) was conducted from 23 November to 1 December 2011 in Canberra. WiP is a highly popular course for women intending to enter national or local politics, either as a candidate for election, a party activist or official, or campaign supporter for women candidates. The course was convened by CDI Associate Ms. Monica Costa.

1. Objectives

Despite government commitments to improving women’s representation in the political arena, progress on women’s political representation in the Asia-Pacific region has been limited. This course assists efforts to improve regional indicators on women’s political representation. WiP aims to support the emergence of more gender-balanced political representation. Specifically, the course aims to help improve women’s political representation by:

- enhancing political leadership and practical campaigning skills;
- enabling participants understanding of barriers to women’s political representation in their own countries and region and to develop nationally-specific strategies to overcome these barriers; and
- fostering national and regional networks.

2. Participants

Participants for the 2011 WiP represented a mix of interests and experiences, including women running for political office, advocates for improvements in women’s representation in politics and agents for change inside political parties. Twenty participants from the five CDI priority countries participated in the course including:

- Fiji (2)
- Indonesia (8)
- Solomon Islands (4)
• East Timor (4)
• Vanuatu (2)

The twenty participants were selected from one hundred and thirty four applications, a slight increase on 2010 WiP applications. Applications included Fiji (16), Vanuatu (14), Solomon Islands (25), Indonesia (49), and East Timor (22). A further nine applications from countries outside CDI’s priority list included Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and Sri Lanka. The consistently high numbers of applicants indicate a high demand for this course across the Asia-Pacific region.

The selection process involved the CDI team and applicants were assessed against:

- the potential impact of this training on their work towards improving women’s representation in politics;
- their involvement in political parties and/or expressed interest in entering directly into politics;
- their background in terms of country, political affiliation, age, level of experience and social and regional factors, so as to ensure balance and diversity of course members;
- the quality of their applications.

This year’s course did not include participants from Papua New Guinea because CDI is conducting training courses for women candidates in the 2012 PNG elections.

CDI encouraged applications from young and upcoming female leaders. While CDI remains committed to encourage the participation of men in this training the applications submitted by male candidates were generally weak and did not fulfil the selection criteria.

3. Program structure

WiP covers a broad range of issues, from issues around women’s substantive and descriptive political representation to the practicalities of running election campaigns. The range of topics covered by the training course included:

3.1. Different contexts, similar issues
- Challenges and opportunities for women’s engagement in politics in the region.
- Arguments for and against women’s engagement in politics.
- Diversity of political and electoral systems in the region.

3.2. Paths to getting elected and re-elected
- Campaigning and resource mobilisation strategies.
- Communicating with voters and engaging with the media.

3.3. Electoral systems and reform debates in the Asia-Pacific region
- Electoral systems and their impact on women’s political participation.
- Debates on electoral reform in the Asia-Pacific region including so-called
temporary special measures.

3.4. Influencing change
- Strategies to lobby and network effectively to improve gender indicators in the political arena.
- Role of government, NGOS, academia and female and male political leaders in improving women’s participation in politics and promoting a gender equality agenda.

3.5. Engendering political parties
- Approaches adopted by political parties to getting more women elected and promoting gender equality.

As in previous years, WiP 2011 consisted of a mix of lectures, external site visits, group work and participatory forums with academics, women members of the Australian Parliament, officials from the major Australian political parties and a range of other experts.

4. Speakers

The course drew on a range of experts from four main fields:
(a) political parties,
(b) public and private sectors, 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 (House of Representatives, Labor Party), Senator Sue Boyce (Senate, Liberal Party), and Ms Meredith Hunter (Australia Capital Territory Parliament, Green Party) discussed parties’ different approaches to gender equality and drew on personal experiences of becoming involved in politics and achieving election and re-election. Ms Anna Burke, Deputy Speaker in the Lower House (Australian Labor Party) discussed challenges to women’s leadership and political participation in the Australian context. All of these speakers provided lively and diverse accounts of the challenges to women’s candidacy, drawing on their own political experiences. They also provided an insight into how different parties have dealt with the need to engage more women and to engage in the debate on gender equality issues. Participants welcomed these very personal and inspiring accounts, which were later regularly drawn upon in the general discussion of the course.

Due to the unexpected resignation of the Speaker in the House of Representatives, Mr Harry Jenkins, Ms Kate Ellis (at the time the Minister for the Status of Women) was unable to personally welcome the group to parliament and to Australia as scheduled. Her apologies were directly communicated to the group by her Adviser.
As in previous years, political parties provided additional important support to the training course by making their senior staff available. Ms Linda Reynolds (former Deputy Federal Director, Liberal Party of Australia) led two sessions on election campaigning which drew on her over 20 years of campaign experience and her long involvement with CDI trainings both in Australia and in the Pacific. Ms Karen Brown (fundraising and communications, Tasmanian Green Party) led a session on mobilising resources, both funding and people, drawing on her own experiences in Tasmania. During these sessions, course members discussed the challenges they face in their country in campaigning and resource mobilisation, as well as a framework to take action on these issues.

(b) Private and public sectors, civil society and media

A range of representatives from the public and private sectors, civil society and media were engaged in 2011 WiP course.

This year CDI engaged Red River Strategic Communications to lead a session on becoming a spokesperson. The session involved a discussion on the issues participants face in communicating their issues and stories and included mock interviews and exercises in the production of a press release.

Mr Michael Maley, from the Australian Electoral Commission, led a session which discussed the wide range of the electoral systems in the region. The knowledge gained through this session was highlighted by participants as significant to assist them in engaging in debates on electoral systems in their own countries.

Ms Sherill Whittington, a consultant on gender and governance issues, led a session on the concept of ‘temporary special measures’ (such as quotas for women in political parties and reserved seats for women) and how these measures have emerged in electoral reform debates within the Asia-Pacific region, including the experience of forwarding a temporary special measures in PNG and East Timor.

Ms Sally-Anne Vincent, from AusAID, led a session on the challenges and opportunities faced by women candidates in Solomon Islands. The session focused on the drafting of a bill on temporary special measures in the Solomons and its discussion by the community, Cabinet and Parliament. This stimulated a lively discussion on the challenges faced by women candidates in the Pacific, as well as the obstacles ahead of bringing gender equality issues into electoral reform debates.

Ms Kathy Richards, from the NGO Equality Rights Alliance, provided an in-depth account of networking strategies developed by the Alliance to identify women’s priorities and advocate for their inclusion in the agendas of political parties. In this session participants discussed strategies to influence change in political agendas and policy decision-making.

(c) Academia

As in previous courses, academic staff from ANU other institutions contributed
CDI Director, Dr Stephen Sherlock, led a session on the diversity of political institutions in the region. This session was instrumental in bringing to light the diversity of political systems in the room, as well as some of the commonalities between countries. The session helped integrate a group of three sessions – including one led by the convener and one led by Mr Michael Maley, Australian Electoral Commission – which aimed to draw participants’ attention to the diversity of political and electoral systems in the region and their impact on women’s candidacy. Through these sessions some of the common challenges that women face were highlighted – including money politics, cultural stereotypes and resistance within political parties. These sessions were complemented by the session led by Dr Jon Fraenkel, ANU, on the impact of electoral systems and political reforms on women’s representation. Participants noted that this session build their confidence to engage in electoral reform debates in their countries.

Professor Marian Sawer, ANU, led a session on the arguments for and against having more women in parliament. This session was important to position national debates on women’s candidacy within the broader debates around women’s political representation. Participants engaged in a discussion on arguments used in their countries and raised the issue of women’s political effectiveness.

Dr Iwu Utomo, ANU, brought experiences from Indonesia to illustrate the difficulties and opportunities for improving women’s representation in politics in the region. She drew on her extensive research on values in Indonesia to highlight some of the underlying cultural, religious and historical issues that women candidates have to overcome.

Professor Gabrielle Meagher, University of Sydney, delivered an interesting presentation on gender differences in thinking about policies and elections. Drawing on the example of Australia, this session stimulated an lively discussion on voters’ decision-making and reactions to policies.

Dr Deborah Cummins, Peace and Conflict Studies Institute of Australia (PaCSIA), led a session on the adoption of reserved seats at the local government level in East Timor. This session highlighted some of the challenges that women face once elected through reserved seats and stimulated debate on women’s substantive representation.

(d) Visits

The 2011 WiP training course included two visits (1) observation of Question Time at the Parliament, and (2) a tour of the Museum of Australian Democracy (Old Parliament House).

Observing question time was a highlight for many course members. The visit coincided with the occasion of the resignation of the Speaker in the Lower House, Mr Harry Jenkins, and the election of a new Speaker and Deputy Speaker. This event generated a range of questions from participants on its meaning and the process of electing a new Speaker.
was an extraordinary opportunity to learn about the inner workings of parliamentary process in Australia.

The visit to the Museum of Australian Democracy provided an insight into the history of women’s political representation, including the debates on women’s presence in politics in Australia. The participants had a chance to engage in a role-play about decision-making in Cabinet, allowing them to reflect on the ethical, political, personal, social and economic issues that are involved in policy decision-making.

(e) Participants’ experiences

Ms Monica Costa facilitated sessions focused on participants’ experiences. These sessions adopted participatory methods and covered the following themes:

(1) a discussion on the challenges to women’s candidacy in the region,
(2) a role-play on how to convince a political party to improve women’s representation,
(3) a discussion on the role of civil society in influencing change for the increase of women’s representation in politics,
(4) a discussion on strategies to support women once elected into political office.

5. Country strategies to improve women’s representation in politics

A core outcome of the WIP course each year is the development of country strategies for each participating country. These country strategies outline tangible measures that participants can pursue as a nation-based group on return to their home country to improve women’s representation in politics. The participants were asked to identify an issue for women in politics in their country and devise strategies to address that issue. Strategies included consideration for the resources required, the necessary partnerships between institutions and how to track progress. Course content was used to help their understanding of the issue and improve their strategies.

Country strategies were presented to the group in the final session of the course. The standard of these presentations was very high, as was the interest and input provided by other participants during discussion sessions. Participants identified core issues constraining women’s political success in their countries ranging from flawed democratic processes through to voter bias against women. Strategies chose different avenues to address these issues including:
- development of training modules for candidates and elected officials;
- delivering campaign training for women candidates and their campaign teams;
- lobbying elected women and political parties to improve support for women’s representation;
- mentoring young women interested in politics;
- mobilizing in-country organisations to consider gender issues in electoral and constitutional reform.

Lastly, participants identified areas in which they could collaborate across countries – for example Indonesian and East Timorese participants agreed to work together on the
development of training modules for women candidates. All country strategies are available on the CDI website.

6. Conclusion and acknowledgements

Critical to the success of the course was the interest and enthusiasm that the participants brought with them to Canberra. The 2011 course built on the successes of previous courses. The approach to the course was retained using a mix of lectures, external site visits, group work and participatory forums. Two important revisions to the approach in 2011 were (i) expanding the time allocated for participants to exchange and learn from each others experiences; and (ii) introducing sessions on the diversity of political and electoral contexts in the Asia-Pacific region. As detailed in this report the course was considered a success by all participants and was effective in achieving its three stated objectives as follows:

Enhancing political leadership and practical campaigning skills

Participants were exposed to the challenges of women’s political leadership by hearing the personal experiences of Australian women members of Parliament. Many of these experiences resonated with the participants’ own political journeys. These accounts were highlighted in the course evaluation as an influential and inspiring component of the course. A number of course components were focussed on strengthening campaigning skills including resource mobilisation, campaign planning and engaging with media. The practical focus of these activities asked participants’ to develop an actual a campaign plan, develop a media release and undergo a mock interview. In 2011, as with previous years, this component of the course was identified as a highlight for these women as they start to plan their own campaign. Course evaluations recommended that the course could be improved with the inclusion of male champions from political parties in Australia.

Identifying barriers to women’s political representation and developing nationally-specific strategies to overcome these barriers

The engagement with researchers was critical to building participants understanding of the barriers to women’s political representation in the region. In many cases participants were challenged by research findings from across the region and their own countries. Course evaluations noted that the research component of the course was important for participants to build their confidence to engage in political and electoral reform debates in their own country. As detailed above the development of country strategies was a core output of the course. It allowed participants to translate information learned from course sessions into practical measures to improve women’s political representation in their countries. The quality and complexity of the strategies delivered, as well as the significant debate that these generated within the group, are an indicator of their success.

Building national and regional networks

One the aims of the national strategies was to focus attention on the necessary national networks to improve women’s political representation. Having participants from a range
of institutions brought different perspectives to the discussion and worked well to identify workable and tangible steps that would need to be taken by different stakeholders to affect change. Course members were able to build a high degree of affinity and have committed to maintain contact and support each other both within countries and across the region. While this year’s course expanded the amount of time dedicated to sharing experiences, participants suggested even more time should be devoted to this activity in future courses. This recommendation would further contribute to building regional networks.

The WiP training course was received with great enthusiasm and commitment by guest speakers in academia, civil society, public and private institutions. Their investment and support to this training is very much appreciated. In particular CDI thanks the political parties, and their parliamentarians, for their time and investment in sharing experiences with emerging women leaders in the Asia-Pacific region. These contributions have been critical to the success of the course and have provided inspiration for participants’ day-to-day work in promoting women’s political representation and their political aspirations. The support provided by the Parliament and the Australian Museum of Democracy was highly appreciated. Their staff were extraordinarily helpful in responding to the group’s questions and in providing opportunities for participants to experience democracy in action. CDI also wishes to thank both the Australian Electoral Commission and AusAID for supporting the WiP training course through the direct involvement of their staff.