Part Three:
Capacity building for women's political empowerment:
Issues and lessons from the combined Momase and New Guinea Islands Region Women Candidate Training

By Orovu Sepoe – May 2012

INTRODUCTION

The combined Momase and New Guinea Islands Women Candidate Training (WCT) workshop was held from the 05th to 09th March 2012 in Madang.

Participants at the workshop included 15 candidates (see Appendix 1) and their respective campaign managers. Also in attendance were officers from the Department for Community Development (DfCD) namely Brian Nakrakundi; acting Executive Director of the Office for Development of Women (ODW), Jenny Sliviak-Kidu, acting First Assistant Secretary, Gender and Development/Human Rights Division, as well as her support staff.

Although initially, there had been some challenges regarding the logistics and administration of the Madang workshop, the DfCD team and the regional partners did exceptionally well. In my view, the combined Momase and New Guinea Islands (NGI) workshop was far better organised and managed compared to the Southern and Highlands workshops. Travel, allowances, accommodation, meals, workshop venue setting, and all other related operational issues were handled so well that none of these matters stood in the way of actual delivery of the training throughout the week. This was due in large part to the strong leadership of Jenny Sliviak-Kidu and her energetic team of support staff comprising Allan Gene, Cecilia Wrondimi and Norma Aisi. Aisi has been the all-rounder logistics person in the overall WCT strategy. Rebecca Piam, the liaison officer from SPSN complemented the DfCD team with respect to overall oversight of the funding aspect of logistics.

Given the traditionally low numbers of women candidates in elections from NGI, it was decided that NGI be combined with Momase. The regional partner for NGI was the Namatanai Council of Women, with coordination led by Mildred Igo.

The regional partner for Momase region was Soroptimist International based in Lae, Morobe Province. Nelly McLay, the principle coordinator, worked in close association with her Lae-based team and other CSO stakeholders in the region. It wasn’t all smooth sailing as McLay and her team encountered resistance from the President of the Morobe Provincial Council of Women regarding ownership of the WCT program and over the Council’s ‘perceived rights’ of attendance for participants of her choice at the workshop. The involvement of Soroptimist International was questioned and threats of violence and abuse were issued to the coordinating team. Again the “NCW factor” became a major challenge in the implementation of the WCT event.

PARTICIPANTS

It was pleasing to observe full attendance and engagement of participants, both candidates and campaign managers, throughout the entire week of training. The level of enthusiasm and commitment amongst participants was very high.
Most of the participants came from the Momase Region. The NGI participants numbered only two. Although Ruth Mandrakamu, the candidate for Manus Open, withdrew due to compassionate reason, her campaign manager attended and actively contributed to the workshop. A number of participants from East and West Sepik Provinces could not attend due to transport and communication difficulties associated with wet weather and flooding.

Amongst the candidates were prominent and notable women leaders such as Dorothy Tekwie, Leader of PNG Greens Party. Mary Kamang and Sophie Mangai, are both long-time serving Presidents of the Madang and East Sepik Provincial Councils of Women respectively. Kamang was a strong contender in the 2007 National Election, coming 4th place in the contest for the Madang Provincial seat. Another prominent women leader included Florence Stocken Taili, the Deputy Governor of New Ireland Province, who is a candidate for the LLG President seat for Kavieng, New Ireland Province. As in the Alotau workshop, where one such participant attended, New Ireland Province is one of the few Provinces along with Milne Bay where an election of an LLG President is through direct vote by all eligible voters in the District. The District has the same boundary and voting population as an Open electorate.

As in the case of Southern region, the selection of the participants for the combined Momase and NGI workshop was also very good – although there were some complaints after the workshop that three genuine Madang candidates were overlooked. It was difficult to accommodate them for the Port Moresby workshop due to lack of space. Had the WCT strategies plans being delivered on time, a second overflow workshop would have accommodated the additional participants.

Three Momase regional facilitators namely Erigeri Singin, Meredith Tutumang and Nora Kapari attended the Madang workshop. I commend the team for an excellent job in providing support during the training sessions in terms of ensuring timely attendance, focus and commitment from the participants. The fourth CDI trained facilitator Joan Bird, however, could not participate in the Madang workshop although she was in town. She opted to stay out to avoid any further tensions with the Madang Provincial Council of Women.

The CDI trained NGI facilitators, unfortunately missed out in participating in the WCT workshop due to the decision to merge NGI region workshop with the Momase workshop.

**CONTENT AND RELEVANCE OF TRAINING**

This being the final regional brief, it is important that the substantive areas which formed the core of the overall WCT training material be highlighted here. These are presented below as key issues which were posed to participants at all the regional workshops. These issues were raised to encourage serious thinking, to provoke discussions about women’s candidacy, their reasons for contesting and to allow sharing of experiences by former contestants of previous elections.

1. **Why does your candidate want to run for office?**

   This question was posed to campaign managers and intended to have them speak about the qualities of their respective candidates and why voters should vote for their candidate.

   The session on candidate profile allowed both the candidate and the campaign manager to think about ways of raising awareness about the candidate’s experience, their knowledge about their communities and electorate, their qualities and the issues for which the women were contesting to address.
In group discussions, participants gave each other encouragement to be assertive, specific and focussed. It was emphasised that the use of inclusive language in public speeches to appeal to all voters and not just women-focused was important. When highlighting issues, women were encouraged to be specific and to talk about real life situations, experiences and development issues: e.g. the use of bucket toilets in some Provincial District town centres when such sanitation system should be long gone; or the recounting the death of a rural mother from child-birth due to lack of basic health services.

2. Why should women be in decision-making position?

This drew a number of insightful responses from the participants, some of which are listed below:

- “After 36 years of Independence, women have been neglected”.
- “Women have the same democratic rights as men”.
- “Women are and must be equal partners to men”.
- “Have to be in Parliament to solve women’s problems”.
- “We have the right to vote in this land”.
- “Constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities”.
- “We are not only representing women but male population as well; if we are seen to be biased, we will lose”.

3. How does your family feel about your running for public office?

Most participants acknowledged and valued family support for them. However, there were exceptional cases where emotional testimonies from participants told of how their own family members succumbed to money politics and distanced themselves from their own kin or relative contesting and aligned with wealthy candidates.

Most of the participants shared stories about incumbent Members of Parliament who were already dishing out cash to voters. This is not surprising as it is common knowledge that incumbent MPs usually possess a greater stock of resources. For women candidates especially, this is a critical issue.

4. Can you put in the amount of time and money necessary to run a campaign?

This required participants to develop a campaign plan and work on their budget. Participants had to consider what sources of funding they would seek and their estimated campaign budget.

Regarding their campaign plan, the key question posed was: “In two months of your campaign, what can you do with how much resource?” The participants learnt that a campaign plan should include activity plan, timetable and budget or resources such as campaign teams and volunteers. Regarding money and budget, women were encouraged to appoint a finance manager to take charge of this important responsibility. During discussions women shared the common experience that political party funding of women candidates has been limited to a few women and also relatively low compared to men candidates. Given women’s limited resources, participants were challenged to adopt a strategic approach to conducting a cost-effective campaign.

At the training, women acknowledged that “money is a problem” in certain respects. For instance:

1. Corruption and bribery is already happening and widespread. This will influence the voters’ choice when they go to the polls. The issue of corruption and bribery was discussed at length. One participant had this to say; “Whenever rules are broken, reports to relevant authorities fall on deaf ears, or do not get addressed so people do not report cases of corruption and bribery.”
She continued on to say: “It is the churches that are adding to the corruption in the country, and they need to be told to stop. They have been playing politics for a long time.”

The experience of one participant was that she had being offered a top job and significant sums of money to withdraw her candidacy. Another participant told of how a male incumbent offered significant sums of money to five strong opponents to withdraw from contesting against him.

2. Women candidates have to search and look harder for campaign funding. Political parties have been less than supportive and mostly complacent. Dorothy Tekwie told of her party’s fund raising experience that business houses are not willing to support smaller parties like the PNG Greens Party.

In the face of these challenges, the women candidates urged each other to stand strong. To encourage each other, the participants offered some suggestions such as:

- “Although money is an issue, let’s keep our confidence level up and not be weakened by lack of money.”
- “Make the most of your networks including youth, women and church”.
- “Be motivated to address resource limitations”.
- “The key to your campaign strategy is your people’s needs and their endorsement and support of your candidacy”.
- “Review and address gaps in the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC) regarding party funding for women”.
- “It is crucial to instil ownership of the candidates by voters and vice-versa, thereby establishing a strong relationship and mutual trust in the early stages of campaigning”.

3. How did you select your campaign manager?

The selection of campaign managers were based on personal, family and past election or political experience. This is an important aspect of effective campaign given that generally women’s political network may be limited compared to men’s political network and affiliations. This is equally important in terms of reaching out to male voters through male campaign managers.

Women were encouraged to make the most use of their campaign managers. The relationship should be one of complementing each other and to work in a partnership.

4. Are you running as a party endorsed or an independent candidate?

Dorothy Tekwie, PNG Greens Party Leader, revealed that her party was endorsing 50% of women as candidates in the 2012 national general election. This demonstrates the importance and value of women in decision-making and leadership positions in political parties.

Participants expressed that it is, indeed, extremely difficult for women to gain party endorsement with male dominated political parties where decision-making tend to favour men candidates.
One participant succinctly stated; “I have no confidence in political parties because they are dominated by men”. She is opting, instead to conduct a “K1.00 fundraising” amongst the National Council of Women network in the electorate she is contesting.

In the course of group discussion, women were cautioned about party hopping which does have implications for their personal integrity and reputation. It was pointed out that political parties do matter in PNG’s system of government therefore, long term association with and membership to parties should be considered seriously. Most importantly, it is vital to know what principles and policies parties are promoting or stand for, before making a decision to choose which parties to align with.

5. As a candidate, how are you different to other candidates contesting the same seat?

This is where candidates had to do a self-reflection and assessment to highlight their strengths and the difference they can make to their communities and electorate, if they become Members of Parliament. This required women to share;

- Their background;
- Their achievements;
- Their concerns or issues for which they were putting their hands up for; and
- Their key campaign messages, slogans or vote catching statements.

An integral part of the training involved getting the candidates to develop and practice campaign speech covering all of the above, and demonstrating their overall presentation and public speaking skills. In fact, the session on public speaking along with confidence building was invaluable to most of the participants.

In group discussions about presentations at public rallies, one participant highlighted the critical issue of gender role expectations in voters’ perception of women candidates. She reflected on what she believes the voters or the general public expect of women candidates in her Province. “We women must be careful in our public statements and conduct or actions; if we drink alcohol, have unstable marital relationships, wear mini-skirts or tight jean in a village or rural areas, voters will not respect and support us”. By this standard, a good and respectable woman has to conform to cultural norms and societal expectations. Another participant, however, challenged the stereotype and conservative view of women by saying; “We (women candidates) must stand as a leader – not as a women.”

6. Media Access

The key message to participants was to establish relationship with the media. This is crucial in terms of selling a candidate’s profile and message. Access to different forms of media was discussed such as newspapers, radio, television, social media, talk-back shows, mobile access and internet access.

A key question raised was: “how many or which candidates would be sought after by media or receive media coverage attention?” In this regard, the varying extent of media access and coverage between rural and urban setting was discussed. Access to media also had financial implications; for instance, TV campaigns or paid advertisements in newspapers. Amongst the participants, some candidates had already gained popularity through their profession and community work. This placed them in a more advantageous situation compared to others in regard to media access for the purpose of election campaign.
The primary aim of media access is to reach out to the voters; to sell candidate profiles and to highlight their policies. In other words, the most important thing about media access is for ‘you to be remembered and noticed’ by voters.

7. How are you strategising for the use of the LPV system?

Most participants shared the view that in the 2007 national election, LPV was not clearly understood by many candidates and voters. As candidates for the 2012 election, efforts will be made to make the most of the three preferences. Some women recounted that the 1st preference was not taken seriously whilst the 2nd and 3rd preferences were wasted. Participants recognised that strategic alliances have to be formed with other candidates, men or women, both laterally and horizontally, or with open and regional seat candidates. In relation to alliances or cooperation between candidates, women were also encouraged not to compromise their integrity with money politics, bribery and other malpractices.

CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNT

The Madang workshop ended on a high note. Participants, both candidates and campaign managers, appreciated the value of the Women Candidate Training. The success of the combined Momase and New Guinea Islands workshop is attributed to three factors: first, the strong leadership of Jenny Slivak-Kidu and her committed team of support officers from DfCD; second, the excellent effort put into organising and coordinating the Madang workshop by Soroptimist International and the Namatanai Council of Women, under the capable leadership of Nelly McLay and Mildred Igo; and third, the genuineness, commitment and engagement by the participants, both candidates and campaign managers, throughout the training sessions.

The ending was also emotional. An unexpected and minor distraction caused by the macho-speech by an incumbent Madang Open MP soon dissipated with an informal but smart and simple closing ceremony organised by the participants.

At the closing, the generous presentation of gifts by participants to Dr Norm Kelly and I was a heartwarming experience. Culturally, this was an outward expression of the participant’s appreciation of the value of the Women Candidate Training. A short drama by the Morobe participants depicting the typical life style of ordinary women’s pre-occupation with household and family chores reminded everyone of the immense challenges facing women candidates and women in general. Interpretations of the meaning behind the drama about domesticity will vary but for me, the underlying message are; how much of these work is valued and supported in political and public decision-making; and to what extent can women exercise their freedom of choice to participate actively in elections: as voters and candidates?

There are lessons that are common across all regional workshops. However, four issues deserve emphasis in this final WCT brief:

- The need for the National Council of Women and its affiliated members of Provincial Council of Women to be open to working with other CSO women’s organisations so that the women’s movement can be strengthened.

- Although women from diverse backgrounds will inevitably encounter tensions and conflicts, the need to embrace the collective interest of women in fighting for their rights to political voice and to enjoy genuine citizenship should be a binding force in women’s empowerment programs and activities.
- Given its central role in developing national gender policies and women’s programmes, the ODW/DfCD can perform to expectations with appropriately qualified officers.

- In all of the above, external support is needed.

In closing, women candidates do know that the reality of elections in PNG is such that electoral behaviour breaches basic democratic principles such as citizens’ rights and freedom of choice. Such a political environment falls short of PNG Electoral Commission’s message about “Free, Fair and Safe Election”. This is extremely challenging for women and constitutes a major challenge for women participation in the political arena generally but more specifically in limiting women’s chances of succeeding in elections. Despite this, women candidates at the Madang workshop (including the Highlands and Southern regions) are more than determined to run an effective campaign and do so using good governance principles and strategies. This was the overall purpose of the Women Candidate Training Strategy.
### Appendix 1: WOMEN CANDIDATE TRAINING – COMBINED MOMASE AND NEWGUINEA ISLANDS REGION PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Position and Organisation</th>
<th>Seat Contesting/Not Contesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Effo Tannis Mare</td>
<td>Morobe</td>
<td>Community Leader&lt;br&gt;Technical Officer (Forestry)&lt;br&gt;President – Morobe Local Level Government</td>
<td>Finschafen Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Martha Sam Kare</td>
<td>Morobe</td>
<td>Administration Officer&lt;br&gt;NGO Representative - Morobe Provincial Council</td>
<td>Bulolo Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rubbie Tumalac Kamung</td>
<td>Morobe</td>
<td>Research and Consultant Officer&lt;br&gt;(Women, children &amp; youth and welfare officer)&lt;br&gt;Provincial Commissioner – Girls Guide</td>
<td>Morobe Provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rita Sia Mala Saulei</td>
<td>Morobe</td>
<td>Social Worker/Community Worker&lt;br&gt;Women Project Coordinator – Church Group</td>
<td>Tewai-Siassi Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jennifer Baing</td>
<td>Morobe</td>
<td>Business woman/Commercial Farmer</td>
<td>Finschaffen Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mary Kamang</td>
<td>Madang</td>
<td>President – Madang Provincial Council of Women</td>
<td>Madang Provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jill Feareka Garong</td>
<td>East Sepik</td>
<td>Librarian&lt;br&gt;Cooperator - Women in Business, Momase</td>
<td>East Sepik Provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Margaret Apakia</td>
<td>East Sepik</td>
<td>Informal Sector&lt;br&gt;Church Group</td>
<td>Wosera Gawi Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Antonia Ganim</td>
<td>East Sepik</td>
<td>Church Leader&lt;br&gt;Women’s Representative – Local Level Government</td>
<td>Wewak Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sophia Mangai</td>
<td>East Sepik</td>
<td>President – East Sepik Provincial Council of Women</td>
<td>East Sepik Provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Susan Nali Chee</td>
<td>Sandraun</td>
<td>Community Based Worker and VD Committee&lt;br&gt;President - Poui Haro Women's Group</td>
<td>Vanimo Green Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lespina T Wes</td>
<td>Sandraun</td>
<td>Self Employed and Volunteer&lt;br&gt;President - Vanimo Urban Local Level Government&lt;br&gt;Vice President – Vanimo Green Local Level Government</td>
<td>Vanimo Green Open</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Michelle Toni East New Britain</td>
<td>Ward Representative for women to the LLG Chirlady Board of Management, Vunakanau Primary School</td>
<td>Gazelle Open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Florence Stocken Taili New Ireland</td>
<td>Deputy Provincial Governor – New Ireland Province</td>
<td>Murat Local Level Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

- 10 Open Seat
- 04 Provincial Seat
- 01 LLG President