



PROMOTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (PWPP)

राजनीतिमा महिला सहभागिताको अभिवृद्धि

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## **WOMEN CANDIDATE TRAINING: CAMPAIGNING FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS**

**Bharatpur, Chitwan  
August 1997**

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# National Democratic Institute For International Affairs

conducting nonpartisan international programs to help promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions



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NDI has supported the development of democratic institutions in more than 60 countries. Programs focus on six major areas:

**Political Party Training:** NDI conducts multipartisan training seminars in political development with a broad spectrum of democratic parties. NDI draws international experts to forums where party members learn first-hand the techniques of organization, communication and constituent contact.

**Election Processes:** NDI provides technical assistance for political parties, nonpartisan associations and election authorities to conduct voter and civic education campaigns and to organize election monitoring programs. The Institute has also organized more than 25 major international observer delegations.

**Strengthening Legislatures:** NDI organizes seminars focusing on legislative procedures, staffing, research information, constituent services, committee structures and the function and role of party caucuses. NDI programs also seek to promote access to the legislative process by citizen groups and the public at large.

**Local Government:** NDI provides technical assistance on a range of topics related to the processes of local governance, including division of responsibility between mayors and municipal councils, and between local and national authorities. NDI programs also promote enhanced communication between local officials and their constituents.

**Civic Organization:** NDI supports and advises nonpartisan groups and political parties engaged in civic and voter education programs. NDI programs work with civic organizations to enhance their organizational capabilities.

**Civil-Military Relations:** NDI brings together military and political leaders to promote dialogue and establish mechanisms for improving civil-military relations.

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**NDI/NEPAL**  
**PROMOTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

**WOMEN CANDIDATE TRAINING: CAMPAIGNING FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS**

**Bharatpur, Chitwan**

**August 1997**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is conducting a multifaceted program designed to increase the political participation of local-level women leaders and activists in eight districts of the Tarai: Chitwan, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Parsa, Dhanusha, Saptari, Sunsari and Morang. NDI has ended the first phase of this USAID-funded program with the conclusion of the local polls in May 1997. In particular, this phase of the program focused on increasing the number and effectiveness of Nepali women seeking to run for the 1997 local elections. In order to implement this program, NDI created a network of almost 90 Nepali women trainers that could provide training to women candidates for local office. These trainers represented the political parties fielding candidates in the local elections and representatives of NGOs and government agencies supporting women's development.

After attending NDI's training-of-trainers (TOT) seminars in February and March 1997, the trainers began to work with the political parties fielding candidates in the Tarai to identify women candidates, and to organize and conduct training for them on effective campaigning techniques. At this point, the date for local elections was not yet fixed. Although the local polls were anticipated for April 1997, national-level debate centering on a more decentralized local government structure could have led to their postponement until as late as October 1997.

Despite this uncertain time frame, the NDI-trained women activists began to conduct training for women candidates within their parties in March 1997, and continued when the government's decentralization plans were enacted by ordinance on April 4, 1997. The new decentralization ordinance provided for one seat out of five, or 20%, to be reserved for women candidates on the ward committees, which form the basis of local government --a dramatic increase from the less than 1% of elected officials who were women in the previous local elections of 1992.

Once the decentralization ordinance was promulgated, the necessity for trained women candidates became greater than ever anticipated as the parties scrambled to field women candidates for the reserved seat, and NDI's cadre of women trainers were poised to respond to this need. On April 9, 1997, the local elections were announced to take place in two phases, on May 17 and 26, 1997. Throughout this time and until a week before the campaigns began in May, NDI-trained women activists conducted 64 training sessions for approximately 3,865 potential women candidates and their supporters from all of the key parties and independents in the eight target districts. Training topics included the work and functions of local government, election laws, the need for increased women's political participation, party policies, message development, campaign planning, voter contact and public speaking.

NDI also designed and distributed materials in time for the elections that would reinforce the Institute's message that 'women can win': 39,000 campaign manuals containing helpful tips and inspirational stories of women political activists in the Tarai, and series of four posters, 30,000 in all,

designed to convince Nepali citizens to vote for women candidates. These materials were distributed in NDI's target districts and throughout Nepal relying upon the networks of local political parties and NGOs, and with additional support from U.S. Ambassador Sandra Vogelgesang and USAID.

The key to NDI's success was to work through the structures and relationships of the local political parties and NGOs. The NDI-trained women party workers collaborated with the leadership of their parties to set the training dates, location and agenda, to identify women who were expected to receive their party's nomination and to conduct training for them. With NDI's support, encouragement and constant persuasion, the dedicated women that NDI trained, known as Party Trainers (PTs), organized training for women candidates on a voluntary basis; some parties organized up to five training sessions throughout the different *chhetras* or regions of their districts. Their efforts were supported by NDI's District Coordinators (DCs) and other field staff who traveled throughout the districts during the months before the elections to assist in this process.

As a result of the combined efforts between NDI, the political parties and local women activists, a massive movement centering on increasing women's political participation was created in the Tarai. Women learned that they can and should expect support from their parties, in the form of training, nominations and positions of leadership. Women party workers and PTs cooperated across party lines to train women candidates in their areas. Women candidates who participated in the training sessions were encouraged to find a network of women who, like themselves, were interested in translating their life's experience into the arena of politics. They gained confidence, organizational skills and were better equipped as they faced the campaign period. The local political parties, most of whom had never collaborated with an international organization before, found that NDI's financially modest approach of working within their limited resources enabled them to take an active role in strengthening their parties' resources, as men and women cooperated to prepare candidates to run. They also appreciated NDI's suggestion for the parties to draw upon their own experts and resource people to assist with the training.

This year's local elections were marked by an unprecedented participation of women as candidates and as volunteers -- and NDI-trained women were at the forefront. Observers believe that the reservation and subsequent influx of women candidates encouraged more women to take an active interest and participate in the campaigns than ever before, often forming the majority of people attending mass meetings and door-to-door canvassing efforts.

While NDI continues to collect information on the women who participated in the candidate training sessions, there are already countless success stories. One DC from Janakpur, in Dhanusha district, where the *pardha* (veil) system for women prevails, recounted how a woman who participated in the women candidate training sessions and could not even get up in front of the group to introduce herself was later seen on top of a campaign vehicle, veil off, leading a group of party activists as they chanted slogans in support of their party's women candidates. NDI intends to share more of these stories, in the form of a tracking study to be completed in November 1997, that will document the experiences of ten women candidates in the Tarai, and by researching the data on the total numbers of women who won in this year's election as they are released by the Election Commission (EC). Included in this report is the data on the number of NDI-trained women ran as candidates and won, based on numbers collected the NDI District Coordinators.

## BACKGROUND

In February and March 1997, NDI conducted three Women Candidate Training of Trainers (TOT) workshops and trained 87 women political party and NGO activists as trainers. The workshops focussed mainly on topics related to organizing an effective campaign, and utilizing the most appropriate training methods to deliver this instruction. The participants in the training came from the eight target districts which NDI chose to implement the Promoting Women's Political Participation (PWPP) program. These selected districts included: Chitwan, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Parsa, Dhanusha, Saptari, Sunsari and Morang, all in the Tarai region of Nepal.

In addition to the NDI staff members, the primary trainers for the TOTs were Ms. Veena Nayyar, the President of Women's Political Watch-India, who served as NDI's principal international faculty member. She was joined by Ms. Madhuri Ale, President of the Janakpur-based Woman Development Service Center, serving part of the eastern Tarai. Numerous Nepali elections experts, party activists and local government officials also served as facilitators and sat on panels to share their firsthand experience in campaigning. Training topics included the work and functions of local government, election laws, attaining party tickets, message development, campaign planning, voter contact, public speaking and training methodologies. For more detailed information on the lesson plans, participants, evaluation and training methods of the TOT, see NDI's report on the NDI Women Candidate Training-of-Trainers, of March 1997.

In addition to gaining a better understanding of effective campaign strategies, the participants in the TOT were also given guidance as to how to organize training for women candidates once they returned to their districts. NDI proposed a two-day agenda of topics to be addressed, training methods that could be used, outlined the steps to organizing training, and built time into the TOT for the trainers to outline a plan and budget for the candidate training. (Appendix 1: The Ten Steps to Organizing Women Candidate Training). Of the 87 women trained by NDI as trainers, only one had ever attended a training program designed to train women political party workers and women candidates.

Armed with their training plans and new campaign strategies, the women party workers, or Party Trainers (PTs), and the nonpartisan women NGO and government agency representatives hired as NDI's District Coordinators (DCs) returned to their districts to organize training. NDI sent letters to each of the political party district presidents who sent women to the TOT to thank them and to reiterate NDI's support for the training of women candidates.

NDI's core field staff also began to travel again throughout the target districts, conducting consultations bringing together the PTs, NDI's DCs, and political party leadership to assist in the identification of potential women candidates and in the organization of the training. For many women in NDI's program, this was their first opportunity to meet and work closely with these local community and political leaders. In these meetings, and in all of the consultations NDI had conducted with the parties since the beginning of the program, NDI's staff always tried to impress upon the

party leadership that the time had come for more women to be on their executive committees at the VDC and district level, to hold party positions, such as *chhetra* presidents, and to receive the party's nominations. When the decentralization ordinance made women's participation compulsory, the parties half-jokingly referred to NDI as 'prophets.' Those who had already involved women in their parties were in the best position to take advantage of the women candidate training opportunities through NDI; those that had not regretted not acting sooner when they were faced with identifying a woman candidate in every ward of every VDC or municipality a month before the campaign period began.