

Consolidated Response

Training as a Strategy to Empower Women in Politics in Latin America

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Introduction

Despite comprising more than 50 percent of the world's population, women continue to lack access to political leadership opportunities and resources at all levels of government. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but a necessary pre-condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Governance structures which do not result in the equal participation of men and women, or their equal enjoyment of benefits from state interventions are by definition neither inclusive nor democratic.

In 2007, recognizing that over the last century women's gains in the political arena have been slow and inadequate, five international organizations came together to make women's political participation their collective priority and devise a strategy that would scale-up each of the organization's efforts to foster gender equality in politics:

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
National Democratic Institute (NDI)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (www.iKNOWPolitics.org) is an online network, jointly supported by the five partner organizations, that aims to increase the participation and effectiveness of women in political life by utilizing a technology-enabled forum to provide access to critical resources and expertise, stimulate dialogue, create knowledge, and share experiences among women in politics.

In just three years, iKNOW Politics has become the leading website on women's political participation. Building on a library of over 5300 resources, iKNOW Politics has captured the combined experience and knowledge of its 92 global experts and 10,000 members from over 150 countries. iKNOW Politics has documented and disseminated the lessons and best practices of women as voters, candidates and elected legislators.

The following is a printed version of one of the most frequently-cited iKNOW Politics knowledge products, based on the combined input from experts and members worldwide. Please visit the iKNOW Politics website to pose a question of your own, contribute to the online discussions, browse the resource library or read additional iKNOW Politics consolidated expert responses, E-discussion summaries, interviews with women leaders, or contact iKNOW Politics at connect@iknowpolitics.org to get in touch with a staff member in your region of the world. iKNOW Politics is available in **English, French, Spanish and Arabic**.

Consolidated Response on Training as a Strategy for Women in Politics in Latin America

This consolidated response is based on research conducted by the iKNOW Politics staff and contributions presented by the following experts: Paz Guarderas, Technical Coordinator, South American Office of the Women's Center and the Quito Metropolitan District; Liliam Landeo, anthropologist; Mireya Reith, Program Officer, Women's Political Participation Team, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI); Pilar Tello, Coordinator of the Training Program for the Peru Office, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA); and Lola Valladares, Coordinator of Governance, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Andean Countries Regional Office.

Question

What is your perception of training as a strategy to empower women in politics? What virtual experiences on training courses in Latin America, can you share with us?

- Luz Mery Arias, Medellin, Colombia

Introduction

Women's participation in politics and public life often depends on their access to education and training opportunities. Research findings and surveys indicate that strengthening women's skills in political campaigning can be a key step in advancing women in politics at all levels. Kate Coyne-McCoy, points out the importance of trainings for women candidates especially in fundraising, message development, working with the media, building voter contact programs, writing campaign plans, and designing targeted methods of voter communication. (Coyne-McCoy, K. Expert Opinion. 2008.) These training sessions can be provided by a number of institutions, including international and non-profit organizations, and grassroots groups. Besides carefully selecting content and methodology for a training course, it is also important to establish collaborative networks between institutions providing training opportunities to achieve more effective results. Such collaboration can be extended to political parties, because it might motivate parties to promote women as candidates in their party lists in the future.

This Consolidated Response highlights the importance of training opportunities for women in politics and describes methodology and content used in some training courses.

Identifying needs for training and empowerment

Liliam Landeo, iKNOW Politics expert, suggests defining training as “a time-structured process that is directed at increasing the performance and/or potential of an individual in different areas. It can be understood as the improvement of skills... training is operational and must be used insofar as the objectives of the desired change in women’s condition and position have been well defined” (Landeo, L. Expert opinion. 2009).

Training processes or “skills improvement” must begin with the identification of the real needs of women who seek to access public spheres. Our expert, Paz Guarderas, indicates:

“In terms of the courses’ content, a point that is very obvious but worth mentioning is that the formation processes must be localized in order to be more significant; in other words, they must arise out of the needs and interests of those who participate” (Guarderas, P. Expert opinion, 2009, p.1).

It is evident that training is fundamental for women’s success in politics. A recent evaluation conducted by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) on its political party programs in this area (“Assessing Women’s Political Party Programs: Best Practices and Recommendations”) arrives at this conclusion. Though the evaluation is based on countries such as Indonesia, Morocco, Nepal and Serbia, its conclusions are also relevant for Latin America, specifically the issues identified as most important for women such as campaign organization, conflict resolution, communications and personal assertiveness. The evaluation’s conclusions further highlight the importance of addressing in training sessions the repercussions that women’s involvement in politics has on their daily life. Regarding this issue, the NDI evaluation indicates:

“As part of this capacity development, respondents describe the need for extended training as more women are newly elected, particularly as these women often have had little or no opportunity to develop the type of specialized skills necessary to succeed in public office positions. Such skills may be office-specific, such as rules of procedures, drafting and passing legislation and budgets, or more generalized, such as public speaking and staff management” (NDI, 2008, p. 16).

Furthermore, diverse survey respondents agreed on the need to link these training processes to women who have already entered the political scene with more general processes to build skills for local leadership positions.

“Respondents urge NDI to reach all women – those already in political leadership positions, those newly elected, and those considering running for elected office – as they contribute to paving paths for women to enter and advance within politics” (NDI, 2008, p. 16).

Another way to use trainings to benefit women candidates and women leaders is to educate voters on their rights to participate independently in election processes. As was mentioned in the previous iKNOW Politics Consolidated Responses, voter education programs targeted at women have become a widely used tool during elections, particularly among international organizations and civil society. Most voter education programs try to demonstrate to women the importance of their votes for society as a whole and their right to vote as an equal member of that society. Organizing such educational seminars and trainings not only requires tailoring messages and content to the socio-cultural background and political situation in each country, but also careful selection and organization of logistics. (Women and Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections. 2005. p. 58)

Training content and methodology

Developing the content of training courses is an important step that needs to account for cultural, social and political realities in every country. While developing course content, it is important to look into the electoral system of the country, role of political parties, general perception of women’s role in politics, and techniques commonly used by other players in politics. In their responses, our experts have alluded to various experiences that are underway in the region. Mireya Reith, mentions the following:

“For women who have long been silenced, the ability to engage in effective public speaking is a prerequisite for their success. In many societies, people are not used to listening to women; women must therefore be equipped with the knowledge and confidence to make themselves heard.” (Reith, M. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 2.)

As mentioned, training processes combine specific content related to the exercise of public offices with more general content. The specific content includes following skills development areas:

- Knowledge of legislative or municipal procedures
- Lobbying techniques
- Strategies to build alliances
- Budget procedures
- Communications techniques
- Parliamentary oratory

The more general content includes:

- Strategies for political mobilization and campaign design
- Conflict resolution
- Oratory in general
- Strategic planning
- Work team management
- Use of internet

Training content

The project “Strengthening the Political Participation of Women Leaders in Ecuador” (UNIFEM-UNDEF-Simón Bolívar Andean University) has organized its pedagogical proposal into four modules:

- 1) self-esteem, leadership and personal development;
- 2) gender and political participation;
- 3) human rights, democracy and equality; and,
- 4) regulatory framework of the institutional design of parochial groups.

Extracts from Valladares, L. Expert opinion.

However, the demands for women’s skills go even beyond the mentioned skills area. Research shows that building leadership skills in women is important to promote women in politics and decision-making processes. Developing women’s leadership skills can help them better understand various styles of leadership, choose the leadership style that best suits them and the socio-political environment, and effectively exercise the chosen leadership style in the political arena. The workshops developed in the countries mentioned in the NDI evaluation also include:

“(1) building awareness of the already existing and valuable leadership roles participants hold in their families and communities; (2) women’s unique perspectives and attributes as leaders; multiple leadership styles and identifying participants’ personal leadership styles; and (3) opportunities and challenges for women leaders” (NDI, 2008, p. 16).

Training methodology is another crucial issue. Experts highlight participatory, analytical and practical methodologies as most commonly used in training sessions in Latin America. Lola Valladares shares the experiences of the project “Strengthening the Political Participation of Women Leaders in Ecuador” (UNIFEM-UNDEF), carried out in conjunction with the Simón Bolívar Andean University: “The starting point was the participants’ knowledge and/or learning. Afterward, the teachers provided conceptual elements and a practice exercise was carried out in which participants read their experience again, based on the new elements provided by the teachers, in order to find solutions and a new meaning. The methodology was participatory, integrating theory and practice, as well as a collective reflection for each theme, combining workshops that analyze concrete cases or situations, group work and talks” (Valladares, L. Expert opinion. 2009).

Training of trainers

“For many respondents, employing a training of trainers (ToT) methodology has proven to be an effective and sustainable way to increase women’s political knowledge, skills and capacity. Furthermore, this method is empowering and inspiring to both women trainers and trainees. ... Creating and strengthening a cadre of women master trainers boosts the trainers’ self-confidence and sense of investment in efforts to increase women’s political participation and build a network of trained women leaders. Trainees, in turn, are inspired by seeing women from their own parties and communities possessing and actively sharing advanced skills and knowledge.”

Reith, M. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 3.

Another interesting example is the Simón Bolívar Andean University at its Bolivian campus, where the NDI has started a Women’s Leadership Institute. Mireya Reith highlights that “For six weeks, Bolivian experts used interactive training techniques on such topics as strategic planning, conflict resolution and negotiation, advocacy, and Internet communication technologies. The participants then put the training into practice in a month-long program in which they applied their newly-acquired skills within their respective organizations” (Reith, M. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 3).

Through the sponsorship of International IDEA, training programs have been held for political party members and leaders. Beyond the direct results of empowerment, iKNOW Politics Expert, Pilar Tello, indicates that among the women who took International IDEA’s

training courses “90% are holding training sessions in their parties and/or communities, to disseminate what they have learned.” (Tello, P. Expert opinion. 2009).

The use of participatory methodologies has multiple effects that go beyond the training processes themselves. These methodologies include sharing the experiences of women’s leadership that motivate more women to get involved in politics and in public activities. In Latin America, there is a rich experience in adult education, which has been inspired by the education principles of Paulo Freire. Some of these include:

- To train is not to transmit knowledge, it is to help discover one’s own skills and to develop them through their exercise.
- All of us know something, all of us are ignorant of something. Training is a process of exchanging knowledge.
- Training processes assume recognition and respect for individuals’ autonomy as a fundamental principle, particularly the way these individuals handle the issues proposed for discussion.
- Training processes are based on the participants’ needs and experiences and aim to provide tools to critically analyze them. (For a summary of the main ideas of Paulo Freire, please see: <http://educacion.idoneos.com/index.php/124370>)

Mapping training to political and socio-cultural environment and spill-over effects

Training that helps women to hold public office effectively accounts for the socio-cultural and political environment in a country or region. Such training may vary from skills for confidence-building, to the practical utilization of various tools, such as the knowledge of certain programmatic issues (i.e. gender and politics, human rights, democracy and equality) and the formative frameworks in force in a country.

It is important to design training courses with the consideration of culture and traditions, as well as political limitations imposed on women in a region or a country. Liliam Landeo mentions that working with indigenous women in multicultural countries requires an analysis of power in relation to exclusion, discrimination and racism and identification of the sources of power that hindered the development and exercise of individuals’ rights both as citizens and humans. Ms. Landeo also mentions that to identify the most important characteristics of women’s current situation, it was necessary to distinguish women as individuals and in a collective group. In the end, this analysis could not be separated from the condition of the

indigenous populations in general, and identified that indigenous women face triple discrimination being a woman, being poor, and being indigenous. This was further complicated by the relationships of power varying between men and women in indigenous communities, and whether the communities were organized through a patriarchal or matriarchal social system. (Landeo, L. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 1).

However, this is only one of the components of a more comprehensive strategy. iKNOW Politics expert, Paz Guarderas reminds us of something that Alejandra Massolo has highlighted before:

“Political training is important but must be accompanied by changes in the electoral systems and in the practices of political parties” (Alejandra Massolo in Guarderas, P. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 1).

One of the unique aspects of Paz Guarderas’ experience participating in the “Women and the City”, Euro-Latin American Center for Political Training, was the connections established with other geographic areas and collaborative tools directed at empowering women in politics. In 2007, the Women and the City Center offered various training activities for more than 600 women politicians, social leaders, local government technical experts and youths interested in entering politics. Among these activities, the course “Leading with a gender perspective” was provided in-person and online, and was aimed to provide participants with conceptual and methodological tools to strengthen women’s political action and leadership. The course also had a goal to reinforce women’s skills in local government management and public administration and in the implementation of gender policies at the local level. (Guarderas, P. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 1). Furthermore, the Center has promoted the creation of a Latin American Network of Local Women Authorities Associations as a strategy to maintain coordination between women politicians. Reaching out to diverse groups to participate in the Center’s courses, made it attractive for the majority since it allowed them to maintain ties beyond Center. This and other initiatives are based on the idea proposed by Marcela Lagarde that the “sorority pacts” are a different way of doing politics and arise from the opportunity to create collaboration networks. (See Guarderas, P. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 2).

Another interesting example, highlighted by Paz Guarderas is the Leadership School of the Association of Women Municipal Leaders in Ecuador (AMUME). This school offers political, legal and emotional counsel through a call center. Ms. Guarderas mentions that training

programs and materials of the school are designed based on questions received from the target audiences through the call center. (Guarderas, P. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 2).

Finally Paz Guarderas mentions that the Women and Cities Center — in conjunction with the Latin American Department of Social Sciences (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, FLACSO) Gender Program in Quito, the Center for Research and Development of Social Movements (CEDIME) and the Simón Bolívar Andean University Human Rights Program — has been working to develop tools that measure the impact of training processes. “In other words, to know to what degree the participants apply the knowledge and skills acquired in courses in their daily work after time” (Guarderas, P. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 2). Acknowledging the importance of training, Ms. Guarderas further highlights the need for changing practices and concepts of patriarchal politics to provide equal opportunities to men and women in political life. She also mentions that some women may find it frustrating to have training opportunities as part of their background but not to be able to go beyond the infamous “glass ceiling” within their political parties (Guarderas, P. Expert opinion, 2009, p. 2.) Mapping of training courses to socio-cultural and political realities of each country or region allows trainers to work with a more targeted and effective training content and methodology.

Conclusions

Training that provides women with skills to hold public office is a key component of women’s empowerment. Training activities must be strongly articulated, along with more general objectives of strengthening the presence of women in public spheres and to remove obstacles that prevent women from consolidating as political leaders. It is important that training courses are designed based on identified needs and demands of women that are on their way to becoming political leaders. Such courses should not be limited to assisting women who are leaders and must include a skills development component for various forms of leadership, such as community, grassroots, etc, in order to contribute to the renewal of political leadership. Additionally, the training agenda must include issues related to the specific situation of women in diverse social, cultural and ethnic contexts, including the challenges women are faced with in daily life.

Training methodology is also a crucial issue. The rich experience that Latin America has in adult education must be recuperated, promoting participatory processes, autonomy and critical conscience. Furthermore, for best results and continuity, training opportunities should stipulate follow-up sessions and be measured through impact monitoring processes.

Some virtual courses on the issues of women's political participation in Latin America are:

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- "Leading with a gender perspective." Had virtual and presential sessions. The initiative was from the Euro-Latinamerican Training Center in Politics "Women and Cities." Barcelona Delegation, Buenos Aires City Government, Quito Metropolitan District, San José Municipality of Costa Rica, Torino Province and UNIFEM. <http://urbal.diba.cat/mujeresyciudad/default.php>
- UNDP Virtual School for Latin America and the Caribbean. <http://www.escuelapnud.org/public/index.php?id=new&artid=144>
- Virtual classroom of the Bolivian Center for Multidisciplinary Studies (CEBEM) <http://conflictosinterculturales.cebem.org/virtual/campus.php>
- Virtual classroom of the Iber-American Municipalists Union (UIM). <http://www.uimunicipalistas.org/campusuim/>
- Virtual course: Gender and Equality in Politics. Fundación Isonomía para la Igualdad de Oportunidades. <http://isonomia.uji.es/generoypoliticas7/index.php>
- Virtual Inter-American Classroom of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights. <http://www.iidh.ed.cr/CursosIIDH%5Fingles/>
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