Consolidated Response

Working With Women Candidates and Women Voters During Elections

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International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics

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 Working with Women Candidates and Women Voters During Elections

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This consolidated response is based on research conducted by iKNOW Politics staff and contributions submitted by the following iKNOW Politics experts: Julie Ballington, Program Officer for Partnership between Men and Women, InterParliamentary Union (IPU); Alvah Hanrahan, International Consultant on Women's Political Participation; Kate CoyneMcCoy, Regional Director, Emily's List; and Alyson Kozma, Senior Program Officer, National Democratic Institute (NDI)

Question

What are some tools and methods used to support women candidates and voters in elections, specifically in conflict and post-conflict countries like Sudan?

- Rabab Baldo, UNIFEM, Sudan

Introduction

Working with women voters and candidates is an essential step towards increasing women's participation in politics and public life. In recent years, women candidates and leaders have used very creative tools to promote their candidacies and to mobilize women voters. This consolidated response highlights some of the most widely used tools to empower and promote women candidates, including providing training, working with political parties, using affirmative action measures, and holding wide public outreach campaigns. The consolidate response also provides several recommendations on how to reach out to women voters before and during elections, proactively engage women in voter registration, and hold voter education campaigns targeting both women and men.

I. WOMEN CANDIDATES

Providing Training and Education Opportunities for Women Candidates

Research findings and surveys indicate that strengthening political campaigning skills of women candidates and aspirants, and providing women with more educational opportunities are key steps in advancing women in politics at all levels. Kate Coyne-McCoy, iKNOW Politics Expert and Regional Director for Emily's List, 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. Ms. Coyne-McCoy highlights a successful video that Emily's List uses during its training sessions to build the self-confidence of women. The video showcases women leaders sharing their experiences and encouraging other women to be confident to run for public offices. (Coyne-McCoy, K. Expert Opinion. 2008) Julie Ballington, iKNOW Politics Expert and Program Officer at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), also advises to focus on providing training to women candidates in fundraising, running an effective political campaign, and confidence building. (Ballington, J. Expert Opinion. 2008)

In some developing countries women and girls are more disadvantaged than men and boys in receiving education. One of the explanations for this is poverty, which makes education unaffordable and forces families to send their children to work instead of school. When families with two or more children have to choose who to send to school, many prefer to invest in education of their sons rather than their daughters as boys are viewed as primary bread-winners in the future. Furthermore, as OXFAM has written: "girls' particular vulnerabilities in terms of physical security, and their exposure to physical violence, are intensified in conflict or emergency situations" (Girls' Education in Africa. p. 3). This can make it unsafe for girls to attend schools, especially if they have to commute long distances. Such tendencies raise illiteracy rates among women and create further barriers for their participation in politics. Referring to the situation in Somaliland, iKNOW Politics Expert and founder of Gender and Development Action organization, Nkoyo Toyo, advises the following:

> "It is important to promote education among women and girls and raise their literacy level across the country. Once a woman is literate and competent, it is easier to negotiate a leadership position for her." (Toyo, N. Expert Opinion. 2008)

Introducing Affirmative Action Measures

In the recent decade, using affirmative action measures such as gender quotas has become a popular tool employed to fasttrack women's political participation. Among other positive outcomes, the introduction of gender quotas create incentives for political parties to nominate women in their candidate lists, play an instrumental role in overcoming sociocultural barriers, and provide a successful entry point for women candidates into politics. Amina Warsame points out that the introduction of affirmative action policies in Somaliland will provide incentives for clans to choose a woman to represent them in politics.

(Warsame, A. 2000) According to the data from the Quota Project, many of the post conflict and transitional countries were able to increase the number of women in politics after

TABLE I

Country	Quota Type(s)	Results last election	% of women in parliament
Afghanistan	Constitutional Quota for National Parliaments ; Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament	68 of 249	27.3%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament ; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level ; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	6 of 42	14.3%
Colombia	*Quotas existed previously or quota legislation has been proposed*	14 of 166	8.4%
Côte d'Ivoire	Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	19 of 223	8.5%
East Timor	*Quotas existed previously or quota legislation has been proposed*	23 of 88	26.1%
Eritrea	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament	33 of 150	22.0%
Ethiopia	Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	116 of 546	21.2%
Iraq	Constitutional Quota for National Parliaments ; Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament	70 of 275	25.5%
Macedonia	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament ; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level ; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	34 of 120	28.3%
Rwanda	Constitutional Quota for National Parliaments ; Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament ; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level	39 of 80	48.8%
Serbia	Constitutional Quota for National Parliaments ; Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament ; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level ; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	51 of 250	20.4%
Sierra Leone	*Quotas existed previously or quota legislation has been proposed*	16 of 124	12.9%

This data was extracted from the Quota Project's database. To see the full list, please visit
http://www.quotaproject.org/country.cfm

introducing some kind of affirmative action measure. As shown in Table I, Afghanistan, East Timor, Iraq, Macedonia and Rwanda have highest percentage of women's political representation among the post-conflict and transitional countries that introduced quotas in their political system. Interestingly, supporters of quotas usually refer to Rwanda as a most successful case of fast-tracking numbers of women in politics. Currently, with 48% of women Members of Parliaments, Rwanda is ahead of even the Scandinavian countries.

Holding Public Outreach Campaigns

Women leaders and candidates have been very creative in using new technologies to promote their candidacies during elections. Utilizing modern media sources has become a very important, if not primary, tool for a successful political campaign. Some women leaders work with resources available locally and nationally, while others utilize various vehicles provided by international organizations.

Women have been very proactive in using culture-sensitive messages to galvanize voters' support. Effective public outreach campaigns account for cultural and societal norms and highlight the benefits of women's political participation for society as a whole. For instance, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) assisted the Jordanian National Forum for Women (JNFW) to create a media campaign for the 2003 Parliamentary elections aimed at overcoming the cultural constraints against voting for women. During this campaign, NDI and JNFW produced TV and radio spots, newspaper ads, T-shirts, posters, and stickers to promote the message of their campaign: "When Women Win, the Country Wins."

Another great example is UNIFEM's the Hau Bele ("I Can") campaign launched in Timor-Leste in 2007. This campaign aimed to achieve popular support for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Some interesting outreach techniques used in this campaign were the collection of ten poster portraits of women from around the nation and a theme song that drew from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to highlight women's rights and the democratic value of their political participation.

Working with Political Parties

Political parties have been gate-keepers of elections for decades. Women candidates and aspirants need to work with political parties to attain decision-making positions and to be nominated in party lists. iKNOW Politics expert and international consultant on women's political participation, Alvah Hanrahan points out that:

> *"Too few women fight their way to the top positions of power within their parties. If they would do this, their high profiles in their parties would go a long way to nominating them to party lists." (Hanrahan, A. Expert Response. 2007)*

Ms. Hanrahan also mentions that women's success in party politics depends on relationships developed over the years within the party and in the civil society. To gain trust and support within the party, Ms. Hanrahan advises women party members to work hard at all aspects of party work, especially in fundraising, and not to be afraid to speak in public. (Hanrahan, A. Expert Response. 2007)

Furthermore, it is important to show political parties the benefits of promoting women within their structures. Based on the experience from Sudan, Julie Ballington says that political parties need to be targeted to ensure that they seek out women candidates, comply with the

quota law, which in Sudan's case is 25 percent of the seats in legislatures, and include women in all decision-making structures of the party, including in candidate nomination at local and national levels. (Ballington, J. Expert Opinion. 2008)

Another mechanism to engage political parties in promoting women candidates is to engage the leaders of the parties. In many cases, leaders play a strong role in informal recruitment processes, and special efforts should be made to reach out to women. One phone call from the leader of the party to a woman civil society leader or local party activist may be all it takes to convince her to run, a method that can be particularly effective at the sub-national or local levels. Leaders also have high visibility, and appearing at a public event beside a woman candidate or mentioning her accomplishments in a speech can go a long way toward promoting her candidacy. For instance, the National Democratic Institute points that a small percentage of women in legislatures in South-East Asia is due to the reluctance of the leaders of the parties to support women party members and to promote them to leadership positions within the parties, which denies women an entry point into politics. (Asia: Strengthening Women Political Leaders in Southeast Asia. 2007)

II. WOMEN VOTERS

Reaching Out to Women Voters through Media

Voter education through media outreach is one of the most successful tools in mobilizing both male and female voters. There are very creative tools and messages used to mobilize women voters, which account for cultural norms, social expectations, access to information resources, and the overall socio-political situation in a country. For example, in the 2002 parliamentary elections in Morocco, NDI concentrated on a media campaign targeted at women voters by producing billboard and TV ads. The ads were 35 seconds long and were aired in both Berber and Arabic. These ads showed a baby playing with a paper ballot while a child's voice narrates, expressing his wishes and ambitions for his future in the areas of education, employment, community service, and healthcare. At the end of the ad, a voice calls on women to vote, suggesting that the child's ambitions could be fulfilled if women participate in the democratic process. This campaign is a great example of how cultural and traditional norms can be used in a campaign to mobilize women voters to participate in elections.

Another example is "Use Your Voice" campaign held by NDI and the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) in the 2003 parliamentary elections in Lebanon. This was a

nationwide media campaign aimed at promoting women's participation in the electoral process. The campaign featured five prominent Lebanese women who appeared on television, radio, public transportation and billboard advertisements. Simultaneously, a voter education billboard that NDI helped develop appeared throughout the country, with the message: "No Card, No Vote! Get your voting card from your town leader today!"

Sometimes using TV ads, billboards and posters may be very expensive, while using radio airtime can be relatively affordable and can provide a better vehicle to target women voters. This is specifically true in the case of conflict and postconflict countries and regions that have scarce Internet and TV access. For instance, from 2006-2008 BBC partnered with local broadcasters and international and national non-profit organizations in Sierra Leone to air radio programs for voters across the country. These programs targeted women and youth as marginalized groups in the country, and provided a forum for people to voice their concerns and to stay abreast of the elections nationwide. Through these collaborative radio programs, BBC involved women in the election processes and prevented violence that might have occurred due to insufficient or false information.

Additionally, there are a great number of short shows and soap operas aired by radio that address important social and political issues, including post-conflict reconstruction and capacity-building. Talking Drums Studio, the project supported and implemented by the Search for Common Ground non-profit organization, airs 15-20 minute soap operas on a broad range of issues, including youth activism, children's rights, good governance, corruption and HIV/AIDS. These soap operas are tailored specifically to the needs of each country and produced in the language most widely-used in that country. This tool may be very efficient in reaching out to women voters and in giving them an opportunity to hear and raise issues important to them.

Educating Voters through Training Programs and Seminars

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. For instance, in post-conflict countries in which security remains a problem, trainings and seminars should be held in safe resource centers not far

from public places. (Women and Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections. 2005. p. 58)

Additionally, it is important to work with men to explain to them the rights of women to vote independently and to participate equally in election processes. According to Gabriele Russo

> *"In many societies, it is common for the head of the household to select the candidate that the entirefamily will vote for, denying women the chance to express their own preferences (proxy or family voting)." (Russo, G. 2007. p.27)*

Therefore, men may play a crucial role in supporting or discouraging women from voting and participating in any stage of the elections. Training programs and seminars specifically targeting men can be instrumental in mobilizing women to vote and in securing their rights to free choice of a political candidate.

Registering Women Voters

Voter registration is a crucial precondition for holding fair and inclusive elections. In many countries, the voter registration process faces challenges due to the lack of accurate census, scarce resources, and high population migration. Additionally,

> *"In some post-conflict environments women have never been officially registered as citizens due to the lack of census updates or because censuses may have been carried out prior to major population movements or the naturalisation of minority communities or foreign citizens." (Russo, G. 2007. p.25)*

An important step is to work with women voters to be proactive in ensuring that their names appear in voter registration lists before the election day. Women need to be well-informed about the location of their registration polls and documentation needed to get registered as a voter. Additionally, the United Nations, based on the experience in Afghanistan, recommends considering religious and cultural sensitivity to women's participation in public processes and recommends using womenonly registration teams and offering women a choice between photograph and a fingerprint during voter registration. (Women and Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections. 2005. p. 51)

Conclusion

Working with women candidates and women voters is an essential step towards achieving gender equality in politics and public life. To promote women candidates and aspirants in politics it is important to create training and educational opportunities for women, help women build successful public outreach campaigns, actively employ affirmative action measures, and work with political parties. It is also vital to reach out to women voters to engage them in political processes and educate them about the importance of their votes. Such work requires careful consideration of socio-cultural norms, political sensitivity, safety, the availability of financial resources, and access to information sources.

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