

## Expert Opinion

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The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)<sup>1</sup> recently conducted an assessment of the Institute's women's political party programs, entitled "Assessing Women's Political Party Programs: Best Practices and Recommendations",<sup>2</sup> and found that training is a core foundation in developing the capacity and preparedness of women to be successful in politics.

In many countries around the world, women often find themselves in positions in which they have little preparation. Truly developing women's capacity requires teaching them substantive skills to help them prepare to take on decision-making roles and in turn, to help bring other women into leadership positions. As more women are elected and appointed to political leadership positions, assessment participants highlight the importance of capacity development. In the four featured countries in the assessment – Indonesia, Morocco, Nepal and Serbia – women discussed personal and professional growth derived from political trainings including campaigning, conflict resolution and communications which they deemed necessary to effectively compete with their male counterparts. As part of this capacity development, assessment 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. This is linked to the overall expressed

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<sup>1</sup> Since 1985, NDI has organized innovative and targeted programs across the globe to increase the number, effectiveness and popular support of women civic leaders, voters, candidates, political party representatives and elected leaders in the belief that as more women become politically involved, institutions will become more responsive to the needs of all citizens. NDI currently works in more than 60 countries, creating programs that are specifically tailored to women and ensuring that women are a part of every existing NDI program. At any given time, nearly 75 percent of NDI country programs have a dedicated component addressing women's political participation – in legislature, political parties and civil society as leaders, activists and informed citizens. The Institute has also introduced several global initiatives that aim to connect politically active women and help them network freely across time and place. NDI's women's political participation programming focuses on training women as well as on the inclusion of a gender perspective in every NDI program. This dual approach has strengthened the Institute's ability to build women's skills and organize women across ethnic and political lines, as well as create the opportunity for women from diverse backgrounds to converge around shared goals to solve problems in ways that contribute to the development and well-being of their societies.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ndi.org/node/15121>

need for basic skills development and technical assistance for women activists and non-elected leaders, and more frequent trainings, particularly at the grassroots level and with an increased focus on advocacy training. Such a focus will provide more opportunities to greater numbers of women, including those in rural areas, to help increase the number of trained women leaders in the pipeline.

Both through its assessment and the systematic evaluation of its training activities, NDI has found that women in politics desire training on concrete skills, focusing on leadership and communication. “Leadership skills” may mean different things to different people in different contexts. Women’s leadership development seeks to build women’s skills and self-confidence to empower them to take on leadership roles in their families, communities and public life. Leadership trainings are therefore aimed at developing effective leaders and encompass key areas of successful leadership, including: communication, mobilization, coalition building, strategic planning, advocacy, and fundraising. Additionally, these workshops focus on the following: 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. The most highly effective leadership training includes developing skills around public speaking, advocacy, and campaigning. Leadership building efforts and skills-based trainings have a clear and direct impact on women’s competencies and skill-sets; however, it is important not to underestimate the confidence-building element that is inherent in these competencies. One of the most frequently referenced benefits of leadership training programs is the vast increase in self-confidence that participants feel upon completion of the training or program and the sense of empowerment that this conveys.

Trainings that instruct women how to speak publicly, work with the media, and communicate interpersonally, are similarly among the most empowering and inspiring for participants. 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. This is not limited to media venues, but includes parliament and other political venues as key places for women to be heard and for women to gain political ground through effective communication. Based on assessment respondent’s comments, women’s opportunity to become independent, persuasive communicators is often the greatest predictor of her self-confidence level and, eventually, her degree of political engagement. Women in politics are interested in building message development skills, as many feel woefully under-prepared in this area. Women want assistance in developing messages around their particular strengths as women leaders and how to use these perceived positive qualities (more transparent, less corrupt, better listeners, etc.) to make themselves more politically appealing to voters, constituents and other political actors.

Responding to the this demand for specialized skills, NDI, in partnership with the Simon Bolivar Andean University, launched its Women’s Leadership Institute with 35 Bolivian

women representing a variety of political parties, citizen groups, labor unions and NGOs. 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. NDI also provides support to women through regional training academies such as the Maghreb Regional Campaign Academy held in Marrakech, Morocco. Nearly 60 women from Algeria, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar and Tunisia gathered to develop a regional network and to receive pointers from campaign experts and experienced women political leaders such as U.S. Rep. Jane Harman, D-Calif.

Working with politically experienced women, particularly those who have already undergone some political training, NDI has found it critical to training new generations of women political leaders and to helping women mentor and train each other. 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. Training could be tailored for different groups, including women within political parties, members of civil society organizations, and citizens who are interested but not yet involved in politics. Given that training sessions also bring mentoring opportunities for women, strong local women trainers can also serve as much needed role models. 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.

As an example of the ToT methodology, NDI implemented a program to enhance the training available to women inside political parties in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. After conducting an assessment to identify the challenges women activists in political parties face in competing for leadership positions, NDI facilitated further discussion at a regional conference followed by a workshop for core trainers to address those challenges. NDI then supported each of these core trainers to deliver follow-up trainings and activities tailored to specific political needs and interests of political women leaders in their home countries. In the 18 months following the conference, more than 3,200 women in political parties in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao were trained by the core trainers in political leadership skills.

Some additional adult learning principles that are worth keeping in mind when training women in politics:

- Adult women need to understand why they are learning something and believe that the learning process directly addresses their concerns and needs;

- Adult women benefit from training activities that allow them to relate new information and skills to realistic problems and previous experiences;
- Adult women respond positively to a give-and-take training process – not a process where information is just poured by the trainer; and
- Changing the established behavior of adult women requires more than simply providing information through a lecture.

**Resources regarding training women:**

- Materials o guias de capacitacion visitar [http://www.iknowpolitics.org/es/taxonomy\\_menu/4/810](http://www.iknowpolitics.org/es/taxonomy_menu/4/810)
- NDI created a Pocket Guide to Training: <http://www.ndi.org/node/14028>
- Online courses in Spanish: [http://www.redinter.org/secciones.php?id\\_seccion=ODc](http://www.redinter.org/secciones.php?id_seccion=ODc)
- Look for training opportunities on the Calendar of Events on iKP: <http://www.iknowpolitics.org/es/event>
- In Colombia, look into training opportunities through Mas Mujeres Mas Politica: <http://www.fescol.org.co/mujeres-campana.html>
- NDI's Political Party Network (PPN) has a library of resources and announces training courses in Latin America: <http://www.ndipartidos.org/es>

NDI recommends that all training materials and courses should be tailored to the country context, accurately reflect local customs and needs.