



Quarterly Report
NEPAL: INCREASING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. 367-A-00-01-00129-00
October 1 – December 31, 2001

I. SUMMARY

Women in Nepal are overwhelmingly underprivileged, receiving poor nutrition, limited access to education and poor health care. Their empowerment and their political participation are central to the development and strengthening of Nepal's fledgling democracy. NDI views political empowerment as an essential way for women to improve their access to employment, education, medical services and to strengthen their ability to address issues such as the trafficking of women.

On September 25, 2001 with funding from USAID, NDI began a multifaceted, non-partisan 24-month training program in Nepal to increase the political participation and effectiveness of local women leaders and activists in up to ten districts: Banke, Bardia, Chitwan, Dang, Dhanusa, Nawalparasi, Saptari, Sarlahi, and Siraha. In particular, this program focuses on increasing the number and effectiveness of Nepali women running in the 2002 local elections. In addition to training candidates, this program will work to support incumbent women representatives in Nepal by building their leadership and governance capabilities.

During this quarter, the Institute conducted a variety of activities including: 1) consulting with political parties; 2) consulting with Association of District Development Committees (ADDC/N) and National Association of Village Development Committees in Nepal (NAVIN); 3) working closely with women's wings of political parties to identify program participants; 4) hiring field staff to run the program from Chitwan district; 5) meeting with a working group of organizations and individuals working for women's empowerment in Nepal; 6) forming a working group to revise the campaign manual; 7) meeting with district level officials; and 8) drafting a workplan and timeline. In the next quarter, NDI will conduct a needs assessment of incumbent and first-time candidates in an effort to enhance the effectiveness of the trainings and written materials

II. BACKGROUND

Political Situation

In March 1997, two months prior to local elections, an ordinance issued by the King of Nepal set aside 20 percent of the local government posts for women. Women make up 52 percent of the population and historically have been widely underrepresented in government institutions, businesses, schools, and universities, with only 0.5 percent representation in local government before 1997. Although the King's ordinance resulted in the election of over 37,000 Nepali women to local office, as newcomers to politics, the women found themselves lacking the necessary knowledge, skills and information to carry out their job responsibilities. No government-sponsored orientation or training was provided to these new women officials. The new women representatives were discouraged, and their lack of knowledge on rules of local governance fueled arguments against the increased involvement of women in politics.

The Institute's current program builds upon NDI's successful 1997 women's candidate training program as well as a recent training program for women representatives which trained representatives to better understand their roles and improve their effectiveness in carrying out their responsibilities. With the help of very qualified local staff, NDI's Resident Representative in Kathmandu will manage the implementation of the programs. In addition, throughout the program, the Institute will closely monitor and assess the progress of each activity.

By conducting trainings in ten districts throughout Nepal, NDI helps newly elected representatives and women candidates become more effective political leaders. NDI's specific program objectives are to build the capacity of newly elected women representatives and second-termers to govern more effectively and to institutionalize training methodologies, materials, and activities within Nepali political parties and government agencies. To achieve this goal and to increase the number of women candidates in the 2002 local elections, NDI trains women candidates running for re-election or seeking office for the first time. To increase the prospects of sustaining women's involvement in the process, NDI also helps establish women's caucuses consisting of all the women representatives in a Village Development Committee (VDC).

NDI's program is conducted in partnership with political parties and government agencies and offers technical assistance and training for approximately 7,000 candidates, representatives, and political activists who have demonstrated a high level of community engagement and political commitment. The focus of NDI's training of women elected representatives ranges from budgeting to leadership skills to local government procedures. As a result, elected women officials are empowered to effect change while in office, helping to strengthen local government bodies.

Security Update

During this reporting period, NDI received a threat, via email, which warned the Institute not to open an office in Chitwan. NDI alerted USAID and the US Embassy and is currently investigating the source of this letter. Although there is the possibility of this threat being linked

to Maoist sources (as the message claims), NDI believes that its root is more personal than political. Regardless, this threat has served as a reminder of the importance to keep a low profile throughout the implementation of activities. This disruption has delayed the opening of the Chitwan office although the Nepal office continues with its planned activities.

Drafting a Workplan and Timeline

NDI developed the program's work plan and timeline, which outlines the activities that the Institute expects to conduct over the period of one year. The final version of the work plan and timeline has been submitted to USAID.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Holding Consultations with Political Parties

NDI has initiated activities by meeting with the central leadership of major political parties to establish a partnership for this program. During NDI's previous WCT program, central and district party leadership were highly cooperative, providing input and assisting in the implementation of trainings. Through a variety of other programs, NDI/Nepal maintains good working relationships with the party leadership and has not encountered any problem in gaining access to party leaders.

NDI has identified as its partners five major nationally recognized parties, i.e. parties that achieved a minimum of three percent of the vote in the last national election: Nepali Congress (NC), Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist Leninist (CPN-ML), and Nepal Sadbhawana Party (NSP). All these parties have strength nationwide and will field slates of candidates in the forthcoming local elections in selected districts. During this reporting period, the Institute met the following people:

MP Astha Laxmi Shakya	-	Central Committee Member, CPN-UML
MP Urmila Aryal	-	CPN-UML
MP Bidya Bhandari	-	Chairperson, All Nepal Women's Association,UML
Mr. Ram Chandra Pokhrel	-	Local Governance Chief, NC
Ms. Puspa Bhusal	-	Secretary, Nepal Women Association, NC
Ms. Prativa Rana	-	Central Committee Member, RPP
Ms. Sahana Pradhan	-	President, CPN-ML
Ms. Sarita Giri	-	Central Committee Member, NSP

During these meetings, the Candidate Training program was discussed in detail and it received positive responses from all. Specifically, the immediate needs of the program were outlined, including the need to identify party trainers in ten targeted districts and representatives to sit on a working group committee to revise the existing campaign manual. Each of the

individuals with whom the Institute met committed to identifying two to three potential trainers from their women's wings in each of the ten targeted districts. In addition, they agreed to serve on the manual revision committee, or send a representative.

Holding Consultations with Association of District Development Committees (ADDC/N) and National Association of Village Development Committees in Nepal (NAVIN)

NDI held consultations with the President and the Executive General Secretary of the ADDC/N and the Chair of NAVIN to seek support for the program. These meetings will provide a base for functional coordination at the district and Village District Committee levels. Both ADDC/N and NAVIN complied with the request to involve a representative in the manual revision committee. The leaders of both organizations also expressed interest in having their members at the training of trainers' workshop to allow these participants to provide training internally to their organization's members.

Working Closely with Women's Wings

NDI has been holding meetings with the women's wings of major nationally recognized parties. Almost all political party central and district level committees typically have women's wings and NDI is in the process of identifying qualified women trainers from these district wings. Working with these women's wings serves a multi purpose function: a) increase capacity at the district level for sustained women candidates training in the future; b) allow NDI to access women trainers with knowledge of district and local level politics, geography and demographics, and c) impact the party ticketing process. NDI hopes to impact this ticketing process in targeted areas, with the goal of increasing the number of women recommended beyond the minimum of one woman per ward. In conversations with party activists and women leaders, NDI is stressing the ability of women candidates to attract votes, particularly from women voters, and the perception of many voters that women are less inclined towards corruption.

Core Staff to Run the Office from Chitwan District

NDI began preparations to reopen an office in Chitwan district. The Institute hired a number of its previous staff. These individuals, already based in the Terai, include one Field Coordinator and two District Supervisors who were instrumental in developing and designing the first program, and who will serve once again as the trainers of trainers for the WCT and later for the representative training program. The Institute began searching for an office, renting a vehicle and establishing a post office box and bank account. Given the recent state of national emergency as well as the recent e-mail threat, the field-based staff is working from their homes. They have been advised to keep a low profile.

Meeting with National and District Level INGOs and NGOs

In addition to the work outlined in the program proposal, NDI has been meeting regularly with a working group of organizations and individuals working for women's empowerment in Nepal to seek their cooperation and to better ensure that NDI's activities do not overlap with INGOs and NGOs working in the targeted districts.

The formation of this group was one of the outcomes of a CARE/Nepal workshop held on July 12, 2000, which brought together individuals and organizations working in the area of women's empowerment. NDI has been a part of this working group from the onset. Its main objectives are: 1) to strengthen programming and impact through sharing best practices in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of good governance and gender equity projects; 2) to share materials; 3) to gain from the experiences of projects working in different regions of Nepal; 4) to reduce program duplication in different geographical regions and program themes; and 5) to consolidate efforts being made to address local governance and gender equity from a range of different project angles. The Institute will continue to actively participate in the working group in order to seek cooperation and to share the developments of the WCT/WRT programs.

Forming the Campaign Manual Revision Working Group

NDI has formed a working committee to revise the existing campaign manual "Women Can Win!", which NDI used in its previous program. The members of the working group committee consist of women wing representatives from the five major political parties, officials from the Women's Ministry and the Local Development Ministry and representatives from ADDC/N and NAVIN. The Institute is currently setting the venue and date for the first meeting and will issue an invitation letter for the first working committee meeting to be held in January.

Meeting with District Level Officials

On November 29, NDI held a breakfast meeting at Hotel Himalaya in Patan, inviting the Chairs and the women members of the ten District Development Committees in the districts in which NDI will work. Representatives from eight of the ten targeted districts attended the meeting. The main objective was to give a brief introduction of the upcoming women's candidate training program and to seek district level support. All the DDC chairs and women members were very supportive and promised their full cooperation in their respective districts. Krishna Prasad Sapkota, President of ADDC/N, Mr. Murari Upadhyay, Executive General Secretary of ADDC/N and Mrs. Mahin Limbu, Chair of NAVIN, also attended the meeting.

Drafting a Workplan and Timeline

NDI developed the program's work plan and timeline, which outlines the activities that the Institute expects to conduct over the period of one year.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The Institute is establishing partnerships with major political parties and their women's wings.
- NDI is building strong relationships with representatives from the Association of District Development Committees (ADDC/N) and National Association of Village Development Committees in Nepal (NAVIN), which are the umbrella organizations of 75 District Development Committees and about 4,000 Village Development Committees respectively.
- The Institute is building strong relationships with INGOs, NGOs, and government agencies working in the women's empowerment area.
- NDI hired staff in Chitwan and is making progress towards establishing a district office, taking security precautions as warranted.
- The Institute developed a working committee group that will revise and update the written campaign manual to be used in the trainings and as an ongoing resource by participants.

V. EVALUATION

NDI is successfully laying the groundwork to conduct this program. The depth of contacts made by NDI in Chitwan between 1996 and 1999 has expedited the process of hiring staff. Moreover, the ongoing presence of NDI in Nepali political circles has simplified the process of receiving buy-in from the political party leadership. The lessons learned by NDI in previous programs are helping the Institute develop and early evaluation strategy.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

In the upcoming months, NDI will conduct a needs assessment of incumbent and first-time candidates in an effort to enhance the effectiveness of the trainings and written materials. The Institute will revise and update campaign manual used during the previous program, hire party trainers and coordinators, and initiate a training-of-trainers for the women's candidate training program. NDI is optimistic that a new Chief Election Commissioner will be appointed in the near future. The appointment will then allow the government to proceed with the setting of a local election date.