



**NDI-Nepal**  
**Strengthening Political Parties Ability to Engage in the Electoral Process**

**Report On**  
**Polling Agent Training Program**

## **Political Party Poll Watcher Training**

NDI strongly values the importance of domestic efforts to ensure the integrity of election and political process, especially the work of political parties and candidates to organize their supporters to guard and promote their ability to compete openly and freely in the electoral process.

The training of thousands of party poll watchers helps them to better understand their rights and responsibilities; their deployment in polling stations nationwide on election day also helps to preserve the integrity of the electoral process. Overall, election monitoring activities build parties' confidence in the electoral process, which leads to their continued involvement in electoral contests, providing voters with a choice on election day.

With the objective of strengthening political parties' ability to engage in the electoral process, and keeping the above objectives in view, the Institute conducted a training-of-trainers (TOT) methodology to implement the activity. NDI invited political parties to participate in poll watcher training for recruitment, training and deployment of male and female party poll watchers on election day.

### **Program Activities:**

#### **Phase One: Training of Trainers (TOT)**

The Institute conducted the first phase of the Polling Agent Training of Trainers program in Kathmandu, with 92 participants from seven political parties, drawn from the country's five development regions. Women made up more than 25 percent of the total number of participants and there was good representation from the Dalit, Indigenous and Madhesi communities.

<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Date - 2007</b>	<b>Total participants</b>	<b>Total women</b>
Nepali Congress (NC)	August 13-15, 07	16	5
Nepali Congress Democratic (NC-D)	August 13-15, 07	15	6
Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML)	August 13-15, 07	16	6
Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)	August 20-22, 07	14	2
Nepal Sadbhawana Party – Anandidevi (NSP-A)	August 20-22, 07	16	1
Rastriya Janashakti Party (RJP)	August 20-22, 07	8	5
United Left Front (ULF)	August 20-22, 07	7	3

Sessions were undertaken on the electoral system, the rights and responsibilities of polling agents and strategies to ensure the deployment of agents and the collection of completed polling agent forms. NDI and party co-facilitators explained voting and counting procedures and how agents should react to irregularities; the exercise was reinforced by a mock poll. The training focused on ensuring that participants could pass information on to district

trainers who would then train constituency level polling agents. Before, during, and after the program NDI assisted political parties to design election monitoring strategies, including mechanisms to record, collate, and analyze the observations of party agents

### **Evaluation of Phase One: Training of Trainers:**

The Institute received positive feedback from all the participating political parties. Though the party activists acknowledged that the concept of the training was a familiar one, yet they did not have sound technical knowledge and the program helped clear the many misconceptions and confusion over the roles and responsibilities of polling agents; To sum up in the words of a NC activist “The Polling Agent Training of Trainers program was very useful and will serve as a guideline for political parties to avoid and or identify any potential problems that might take place during Election Day”

An evaluation on the program was conducted and below is a synopsis of the findings.

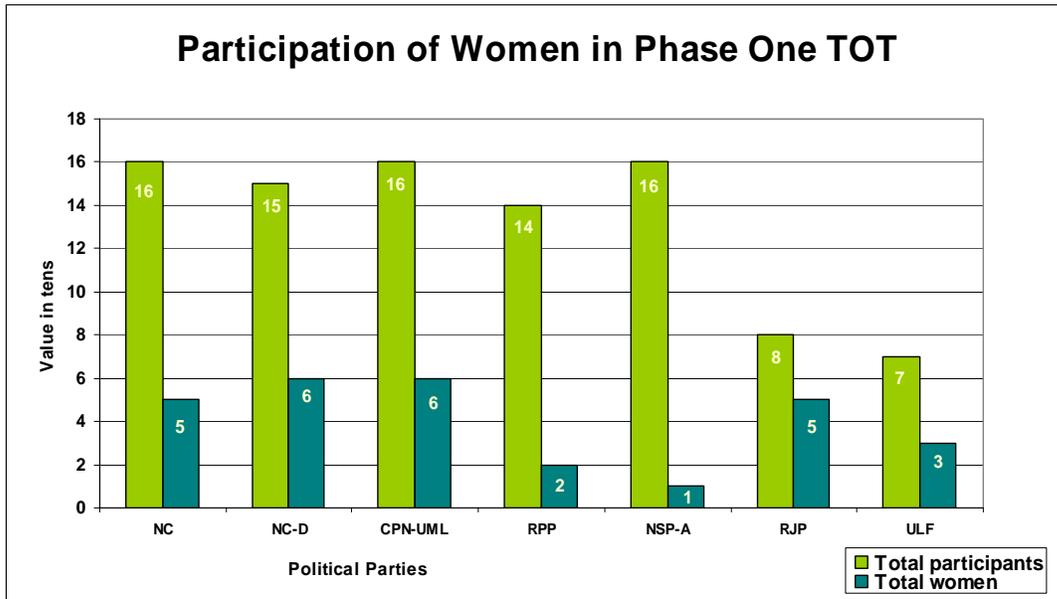
- Most of the participants rated the session on Electoral Laws and Code of Conduct as extremely useful; they opined that such laws and code of conduct help ensure that elections are free and fair, thereby lending credibility to the whole process.
- The session on Developing Monitoring and Poll Watching Strategy was also high on the participants’ evaluation list, especially as it brought out the essence of monitoring elections and the roles and responsibilities of polling agents.
- Another section of the participants responded that Principles and Practice of Election Monitoring was equally useful. They reiterated that the component of election monitoring was something all the political parties should be aware of.
- The participants were also unanimous in their agreement that the session on training polling agents was very informative. To quote an activist from the CPN-UML “Though we have participated as polling agents in the previous elections, it is only through this training we have obtained an in-depth knowledge on the roles and responsibilities of polling agents and the crucial role they play in elections”. Emphasis was given on the quality of the training so that at the end of the day, polling agents would be able to safeguard their parties’ interest; communication and reporting during election day was another component of the training the participants found illuminating.
- Another group of participants rated all the programs as extremely useful; they pointed out that the program had strengthened their ability to engage in the electoral process.

### **Suggestion by participants:**

All the parties were enthusiastic of the Institute’s polling agent program. However, they were very forthcoming in their suggestions, which are summarized below:

- The participants suggested that there should be continuity to these programs. They expressed their hope that the Institute would conduct such programs at the grass roots level.
- The duration of the program according to the participants should have been longer. They said that it would have been much better if the Institute had dedicated a few more days to the training program.
- Some of the participants opined that the Institute could have added more value to the program by bringing in resource persons from around the globe.

To a large extent the polling agent program was quite successful; however the participation of women was low from all these major parties which was disappointing.



### IEC Materials: Polling Agent Manual and Checklists

The Institute prepared an easy to carry pocket manual which includes all the necessary details about the rights and duties of polling agents. The manuals would serve as reference to these polling agents who will be mobilized all across the country by their respective parties on election day.

Checklists, namely Observer’s Checklist and Critical Incident Form were prepared to be used by the polling agents to document their concerns and critical incidents if they happen on election day. These forms have been standardized for all the parties.

### Polling Agent Training Program for new parties:

From March 10 to 11, 2008, the Institute conducted polling agent training for master trainers from five newly registered political parties - Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party, Madheshi Janadhikar Forum, Mongol National Organization, Nepal Sukumbasi Party (Loktantrik) and Shashkati Nepal drawing 40 participants from all five regions. Women accounted for almost 25 percent of the total participants with good representation of Dalits, Indigenous and Madhesi communities.

The new parties were very vocal in their appreciation of the program and expressed gratitude at being given an equal footing with the established major parties. In the words of a party activist “This training was very useful. I learned more than I had ever hoped to learn within two days”.

Participants especially from the Tarai parties stated that the program had helped clear many doubts about the election system. These parties had been agitating against the government and had refused to participate in the Election Commissions’ many training programs. As a

result the leaders of these Tarai parties confessed that NDI's polling agent training program filled this gap by making them aware of essential election related information.

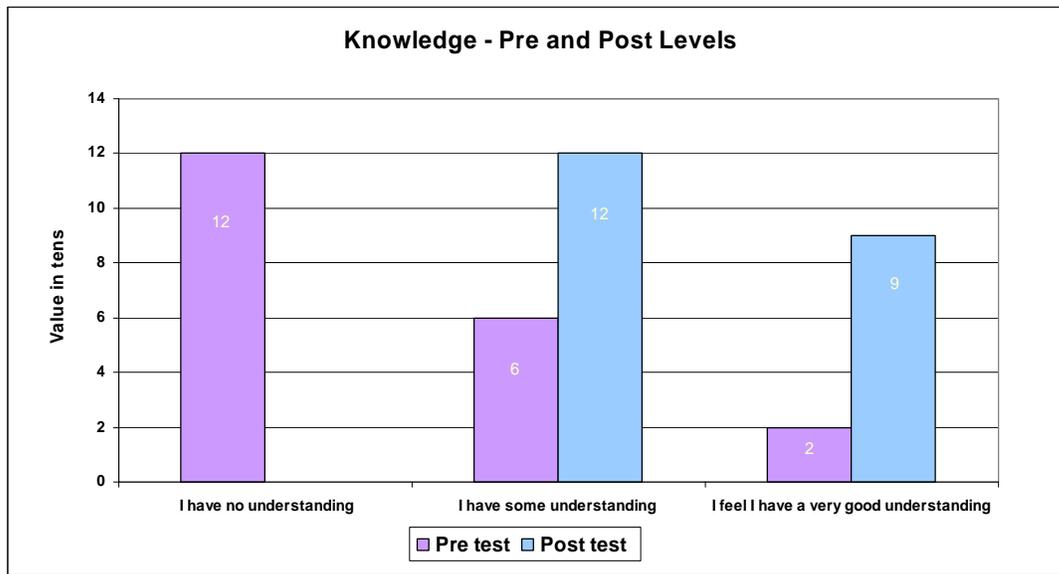
**Training Evaluation:**

The participants from the newly registered parties were given a simple pre and post questionnaire to find out the difference on their levels of knowledge, resources, information, expectations, confidence and commitment before and after the training. A noticeable increase in the levels of awareness in the post test questionnaire was found as compared to the pre test forms.

Participants were asked to identify their levels of knowledge before and after the program. Each party activist had to mark one of the three levels of knowledge to indicate their levels of awareness, namely:

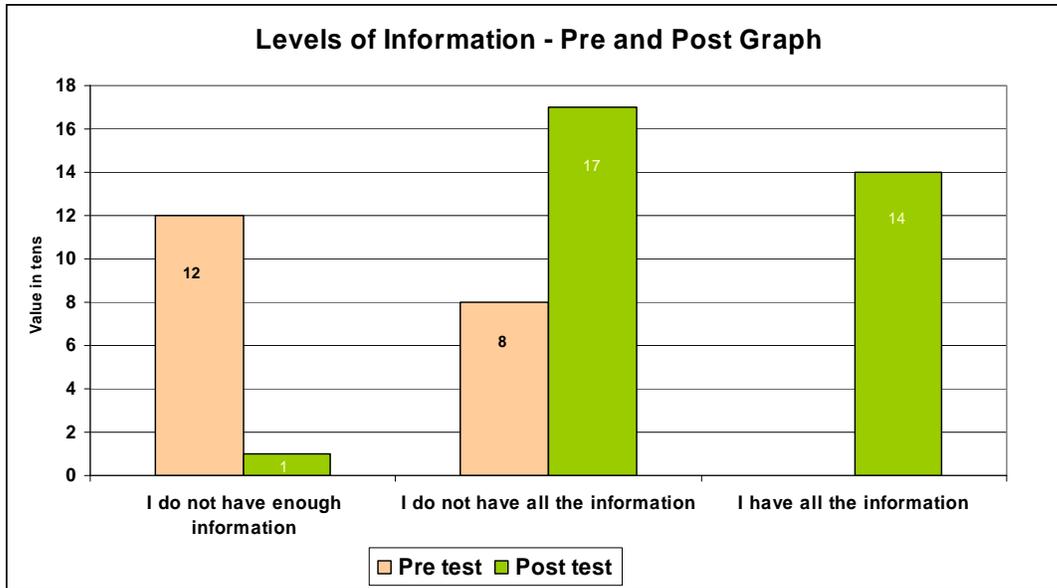
1. I have no understanding of the basic concepts involved in this type of training.
2. I have some understanding of the basic concepts and issues.
3. I feel I have a very good understanding of the concepts and issues.

The chart below illustrates the rise in the degree of levels of knowledge before and after the training.



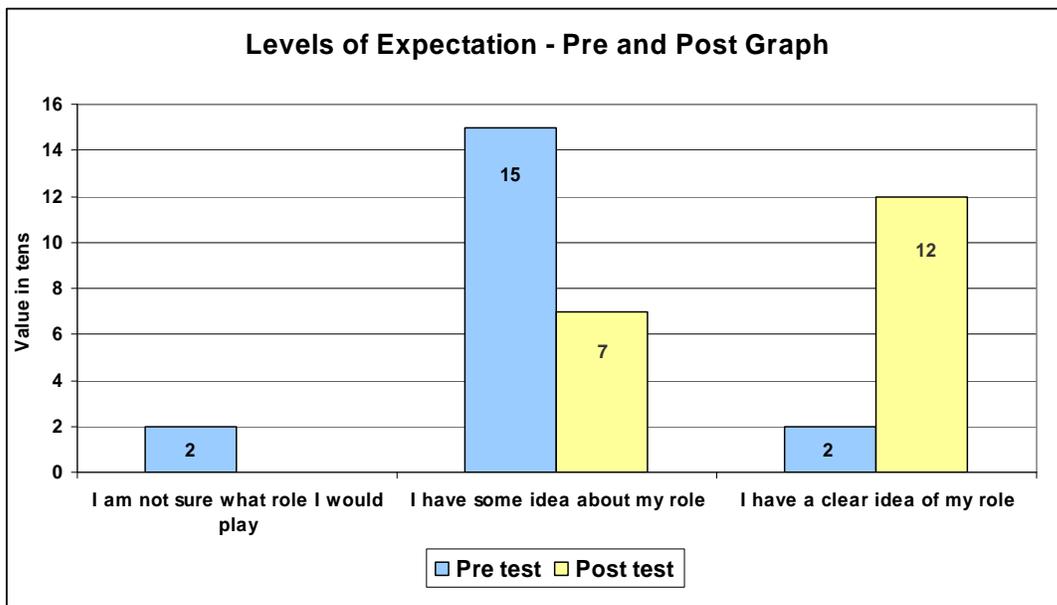
On the levels of Information before and after the training, the questionnaire was designed as:

1. I do not have enough information and do not know where to find it.
2. I do not have all the information I need but know how to find it.
3. I have all the information I need to get started.



On the levels of expectation, before and after the training:

1. I am not sure what role I would play in this type of activity.
2. I have some ideas about my potential role.
3. I have a clear idea of my role in this type of activity.



**Refresher Training:**

Refresher program for the major parties who had received training in August was conducted on March 14 and 15, 2008; the main focus of the refresher training was to develop strategies for the regional level trainings and to update the master trainers with new changes in the election laws and regulations. 35 participants from the major parties including NC, UML, and RPP participated on the first day and 15 participants from RJP and SP attended the

second day of refresher training. NSP-A did not participate in the program as the party had split due to internal coordination problem. During this training, the Master trainers also developed communication and reporting strategies for communicating and reporting critical incidents on the election day to their respective parties.

### **Regional Level Polling Agent Training**

Each of the eight political parties who received Master level polling agent training from NDI in August and March, trained their regional coordinators who would further train and recruit their members at the district and constituency level to work as poll watchers on election day. These trainings provided the party representatives with information, tips, and techniques for recruiting, training, and deploying polling agents on election day. Training was conducted simultaneously in the five regions of the country from March 23 to March 30, 2008; the map below indicates the regions/districts where these trainings were held.



A total of 976 party activists from NC, CPN-UML, RPP, RJP, SP, ULF, TMLP and MJF took part in the program.

These trained representatives were present at polling stations across 240 constituencies in Nepal on election day to observe the voting process on behalf of their party or candidate, question any irregular activities in the polling station and verify the results of the vote count.

The Master trainers also dispatched polling agent manuals to the regional coordinators who were responsible for handing them out to their respective polling agents. This easy to carry pocket manual which include all the necessary details about the rights and duties of a polling agent would serve as a reference to these polling agents who were mobilized all across the country by their respective parties on April 10.

Accordingly, Checklists namely Observer's Checklist and Critical Incident Form which have been standardized for all the parties were given to the regional coordinators of respective parties by the Master trainers. These checklists were used by the polling agents to document their concerns and critical incidents as they happen on election day. These forms were

dispatched to the central level party leaders according to the communication and reporting plan developed by their Master trainers.

As the standardized Checklist is a new experience for the polling agents in Nepal, the regional party coordinators in charge of recruiting and deploying polling agents were excited about it.

**Success Story:**

In a rare case of understanding, parties took partial financial responsibility for the poll watcher program by signing memorandums of understanding with NDI committing to pay for lodging for their respective participants in the regional program.

Training techniques and materials delivered by NDI have been integrated into party training programs carried out by the NC, UML, NC-D, and RPP. More than 20 programs based on the content provided by NDI have been undertaken by the parties, including NC district workshops (the first in more than ten years), RPP regional workshops on party platform and communications, and NC-D district workshops on party platforms and internal party reform.

Each party participating in the poll watcher program prepared an organizational and communication structure to enable them to recruit, train, and deploy party poll watchers on election day; these structures were developed by the parties following the trainings from NDI

**Achievement:**

As a result of the Institute’s polling agent program a total of 92 master and 976 regional trainers from the across the country were trained. The regional trainers in turn conducted trainings at the constituency level in all the five regions.

Following the training program a total of 102,674 and 109,780 Polling Agent Manual and Checklists were distributed respectively to the political parties for election day observation.

<b>Party</b>	<b>No of Manual</b>	<b>No of Checklist</b>	<b>Total</b>
NC	20,150	21,695	41,845
CPN-UML	18,645	19,845	38,490
RPP	16,645	17,320	33,965
RJP	17,384	17,870	35,254
ULF	3,800	3,800	7,600
SP	4,600	6,000	10,600
MJF	7,500	8,600	16,100
TMLP	10,950	11,650	22,600
MNO	800	800	1,600
Central District Office	200	200	400
Election Commission	800	800	1,600
FECOFUN	800	800	1,600
INSEC	400	400	800
<b>Total</b>			<b>212,454</b>

Appendix: CA Court – Updates:<sup>1</sup>

S. No	District	Constituency	Candidate Name	Party	Case	Status
1.	Mahottari	6	Saradh Singh Bhandari	Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF)	Accused of winning the election through rigging	Written explanations from the defendants sought
2.	Bara	1	Rambabu Prasad Yadav	MJF	Accused of winning the election through rigging	Written explanations from the defendants sought
3.	Nuwakot	2	Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat	NC	Accused of winning the election through rigging	Hearing was on May 7 and was in favour of Dr. Mahat
4.	Dadeldhura	1	Sher Bahadur Deuba	NC	Accused of winning the election through rigging	Written explanations from the defendants sought
5.	Parsa	5	Ramesh Rijal	NC	Accused of winning the election through rigging	Written explanations from the defendants sought
6.	Bara	1	Saroj Yadav	Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Mahato)	Accused of winning the election through rigging	Written explanations from the defendants sought
7.	Sankhuwasabha	2	Purna Parsad Rai	CPN - Maoist	Accused of winning the election by terrorizing people and capturing booths in five VDCs	Written explanations from the defendants sought
8.	Sindhuli	1	Bisham Lal Adhikari	CPN - UML	Accused of taking 38 ballot papers lost during the counting process which was conducted in illegal manner	The court has issued an interim order on this case.
9.	Nawalparsi	6	Dev Karan	NC	Accused of winning the	The court has issued

<sup>1</sup> This is a compilation of the cases filed on the irregularities that occurred on Election Day in the CA Court

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S. No	District	Constituency	Candidate Name	Party	Case	Status
			Kalbarla		election through rigging	an interim order on this case.
10.	Baglung	2	Mani Bhadra Sharma	NC	Accused of winning the election through rigging	Hearing on May 22
11.	Sarlahi	5	Khobari Ray	SP	Accused of winning the election through rigging	Hearing on May 27