



N E P A L

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE



“NDI’s program is very contextual to the needs of Nepal’s local women representatives... this program will yield long-term positive results.”

Ms. Chitralekha Yadav
Deputy Speaker of the House
of Representatives, Nepal

THE SITUATION

In March 1997, two months prior to local elections, an ordinance issued by the King of Nepal set aside 20 percent of local government posts for women. At that time, women held fewer than half a percent of local government seats.

Historically, women have been widely under-represented in Nepal’s government, businesses, schools, and universities. Remarkably, the King’s 1997 ordinance resulted in the election of over 37,000 Nepali women to local office. But as newcomers to politics, they found themselves lacking the necessary knowledge, skills and information to carry out their job responsibilities effectively. No government-sponsored orientation or training was provided. The new representatives were disheartened, and their lack of knowledge on rules of local governance fueled arguments against the increased involvement of women in politics.

NDI’S RESPONSE

In preparation for the 1997 elections, NDI trained 4,000 women candidates and party activists in campaign and outreach skills. But the successful election of large numbers of women representatives was just a beginning. Responding to requests from the newly elected women representatives, NDI developed a comprehensive program to provide more

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than 1,700 women with the skills and confidence necessary to govern effectively from their new leadership positions. The Women Representatives Training (WRT) included seven modules on the rights and responsibilities of elected officials. Because 60 percent of participants were illiterate, the 40 local trainers and coordinators conducting the sessions made extensive use of role playing, skits, case studies, cartoons, pictures, puzzles and games. This proved both inclusive and effective. NDI also established a “women’s caucus” in each local government ward to provide women with a forum for meetings and support.

OUTCOMES

The WRT has had a powerful impact on the role of women in local government in Nepal. Women representatives, who had little or no knowledge about political processes and governance, developed leadership skills and became involved in community development activities. The program also increased representatives’ confidence—only 18 percent of women representatives surveyed before the 1999 training indicated they would run again for political office; following the training, 90 percent of participants said they would. Since the training, women have united across political party lines and are lobbying for transparency, impartiality and accountability in local government decision-making. Trained women representatives have worked hand-in-hand with their male counterparts and community activists to establish schools, to form women’s micro-credit lending groups and to bring more development programs to their communities. A leading national newspaper, *The Kathmandu Post*, declared that women representatives now have “vowed not to remain backbenchers.”

Nepal faces local elections in 2002, with the first large class of women incumbents seeking re-election. NDI continues to work in partnership with political parties and government agencies to train both new and incumbent candidates. NDI’s current program aims to increase the participation and effectiveness of women leaders in local government by offering 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.



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

2030 M STREET, NW, FIFTH FLOOR WASHINGTON, DC 20036

202-728-5500 FAX: 202-728-5520 EMAIL: CONTACTNDI@NDI.ORG HTTP://WWW.NDI.ORG