

Final Report

KENYA: SUPPORTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

NED Core Grant 96-54 (0608)

I. SUMMARY

Since September 1994, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has received Endowment support to work with a coalition of indigenous women's groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in an effort to train potential female political candidates and staffers. By 1996, a group of Nairobi-based women, towards whom NDI's program had been targeted, developed the capacity to support political organizing activities. In response, NDI sought to broaden its program by providing similar training outside of Nairobi.

Accomplishments of NDI's women's programs include:

- C A number of participants developed the capability to serve as trainers to other women, and played an important role in conducting needs assessments of women candidates.
- C The founding of an organization called FREDA (Friends of Esther and Deborah) which continues to work to foster cooperation among women's organizations to strategically plan for assisting women candidates.
- C NDI's program participants began a women's campaign support fund to provide financial assistance to women. NDI has provided technical advice and assistance to this group.
- C Popular interest in the benefits of NDI's programming, reflected in the number of requests flowing into NDI's field office for similar seminars, has grown over the last several years.

II. BACKGROUND

Political/Social Context

Considerable cultural and social barriers impede Kenyan women's participation in the political process. The political climate has added to these barriers, fostering suspicion and distrust between organizations, including women's organizations, and discouraging open discussion and coordination. As a result, many women leaders have been forced to stand alone on the political front, without the support of their parties or of one another.

Kenyan women comprise 52 percent of the population and 60 percent of the country's registered voters but are represented in very limited numbers as elected officials. From the time of independence in 1963 to 1969, no women were elected to parliament. Between 1969 and 1974, women constituted less than 1 percent of the elected members of parliament. The largest number of women in parliament was in 1979, when there were five elected and one appointed female member.

In 1983, only two women were elected and one was appointed; the same was true from 1988 to 1992, when women represented only 3 percent of all parliamentarians. In the multiparty elections of December 1992, six women were elected to parliament -- three from the Democratic Party, one from FORD-Kenya, one from FORD-Asili and one from the ruling party, KANU (constituting only three percent of parliamentarians). In that year of democratization, no women were nominated to any of the appointed seats in parliament.

While many of the barriers limiting the extent of women's political participation in Kenya are cultural and traditional, others are a function of political party organization, or of the lack of technical or other resources for women seeking increased involvement in politics. Until 1995, no woman had ever served a cabinet minister,¹ largely because members of the cabinet are selected from within parliament. Before 1995, the highest position ever held by a woman was that of assistant minister. The situation is similar in local political bodies, where women are substantially under-represented in elected and appointed positions.

Following seriously flawed multiparty elections in Kenya in 1992, formidable challenges to democratization remain. Political organizers, including opposition party organizers, journalists and civic activists, face an often hostile environment in which to express their views. The political climate is one of fear, suspicion and even intimidation. Open discussion and collaboration are impeded under these conditions.

Previous NDI Activity in Kenya

Based on the notion that Kenyan women represent a largely untapped source for political change, NDI co-sponsored an October 1993 conference in Kenya entitled "Women in Political Leadership" which was co-sponsored by the Education Center for Women in Democracy (ECWD), a local multipartisan NGO. In response to the interest generated by the conference, NDI decided to continue to promote women's political development in Kenya. NDI subsequently received a NED grant in 1994 for a seven-month program which provided the ECWD with the financial and technical assistance necessary to conduct a series of leadership training seminars for women throughout Kenya. The grant was also used to create a network of political activists, facilitating an exchange of information and ideas and providing a source of organizational support. This network was to serve as the basis for a long-term, nationwide civic education program.

NDI officially established a field office in Nairobi in May 1994, formally initiating its work in promoting the participation of women in politics in Kenya with the ECWD. During this collaboration, it became apparent that a significant gap in expectations existed between the two

organizations relative to the scope and direction of this partnership. In December, when it was clear

¹President Moi appointed the only female KANU MP as the Minister of Culture and Social Services in August 1995.

that serious differences remained, NDI terminated the cooperative agreement.

Throughout 1995, NDI conducted a series of seminars in Nairobi. The sessions took place six to eight weeks apart and convened 50 to 100 potential candidates and staff from throughout the country. The seminars, conducted in cooperation with eight other NGOs, focused on challenges to women's political participation and campaign planning, voter contact, democracy education, media relations and advocacy.

1996 Program Objectives

The overall goal of the 1996 program was to encourage Kenyan women to more fully participate in the political life of their country. Specific objectives were to:

- C assist potential female candidates to develop skills that will help their own political empowerment;
- C foster popular understanding of the importance of women's participation in the political process in targeted areas; and
- C provide access to experts in women's empowerment outside of NDI's immediate area of focus through data dissemination, community visits and a Speakers' Bureau.

II. PROGRAM ACTIVITY

NDI conducted its 1996 program in Kenya with the volunteer collaboration of a coalition of eight Kenyan NGOs that conduct women-specific programming: the League of Kenyan Women Voters (LWV), Gender Sensitive Initiatives (GSI), National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), the Democratic Foundation (DF), National Commission on Women and Children (NCWAC), Institute for Education and Democracy (IED), the International Federation of Lawyers (FIDA) and the Gender Center (GC).

The program comprised two main components: 1) a national seminar designed to further develop women's political organizing skills and to disseminate practical information to potential women candidates and staff for use throughout the country; and 2) an on-going set of multipartisan, community-based regional activities. In addition to candidate and staff training, NDI also incorporated an outreach strategy into the 1996 program focusing on educating the electorate at large regarding the importance of women's political empowerment, especially in the Kenyan context of limited political participation. NDI's strategy was designed to encourage and provide assistance to those women who would compete in the political arena, and also to foster popular support for greater women's participation. NDI has sought to expand the political space within which Kenyan citizens, particularly women, operate.

Through this program, NDI conducted nine grassroots one and two-day meetings throughout the country, in seven of Kenya's eight provinces (Busia, Embu, Langata, Voi, Githunguri, Kitui, Msabweni, Karachuonyo and Lari). In each instance, the seminar was hosted by a local female

candidate: two seminars were hosted by KANU women, two by FORD-K women, three by DP women and one seminar by an independent candidate. The content of each event was tailored to that particular constituency, and addressed issues deemed most important by the hostess/political candidate.

Among the topics addressed in NDI's nine grassroots meetings were: the importance of women's political participation and leadership development; understanding the electoral process; the social construction of gender; campaign planning; message development; voter registration; fundraising; candidates needs assessments; personal image building; and how to ensure that women's voices are heard. These topics were approached using a variety of formats, including theater presentations, group discussions and "break-out" sessions, role-playing and simulations, and candidate debates and simulations.

The participants at these NDI meetings were mostly women. They included political activists, government administrators, housewives, social workers, and secretaries. The core group of participants in the 1996 program had continued on from participation in NDI's previous years' programming in Kenya. NDI identified other new participants by conducting a search among NDI friends, coalition partners and other related NGOs.

At the end of 1996, NDI hired an in-country consultant to conduct an independent assessment of the 1996 Kenya program.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

NDI's 1996 women's program contributed to the overall democratic development of the country by increasing the number and quality of female Kenyan political candidates on the local, regional and national level, establishing a civic education NGO network (CAN) and encouraging Kenyan NGOs to be more nonpartisan.

All program participants indicated that the technical knowledge as cited above that they had gained through the seminars was extremely useful, especially advice on the development of campaign plans. This successful series of multipartisan seminars is an almost unprecedented event in Kenya's highly partisan political environment.

More important than the provision of specific information, however, was the sense of solidarity which developed among members of the group, many of whom had never met before, and the development of a common belief that by working together, they could make an impact. This attitude was facilitated by NDI's field representative, but it was essentially a dynamic that developed among the participants themselves. For example, participants, even from different political parties, discussed ways they could help support each other in their campaigns, both in material and other terms.

V. EVALUATION/CONCLUSIONS

NDI monitored and evaluated its program activities according to established NDI evaluation procedures which include ongoing staff meetings to review the program as it progresses, the gathering of comments and critiques from program participants, and the eliciting of feedback from the participating international experts.

In addition, an independent evaluation was conducted (see attached).

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Through its 1997 Kenya program, NDI will focus on the national elections which are scheduled to take place before December 1997, and provide election-related documents to program participants. NDI plans to develop and distribute several manuals: a women's campaign manual, a civic education document on the importance of elections, a voter's guide and a directory of women candidates nation-wide.

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APPENDICES

I. Seminar Reports

June 29, 1996 - Busia
August 17, 1996 - Embu
August 22-23, 1996 - Nairobi (Training of Trainers)
September 21, 1996 - Langata
September 24, 1996 - Voi
September 29, 1996 - Karachuonyo
October 24-27, 1996 - Nairobi (Training of Trainers)
November 2, 1996- Nairobi (Young Women Political Participants)*
November 7, 1996 - Githunguri*
November 11-13, 1996 - Nairobi (Women Candidates)
December 6, 1996 - Kemende/Lari*
December 9, 1996 - Mswabeni
December 13, 1996 - Kitui
Independent Program Evaluation by Connie Kiplagat

2. NDI 1996 Program Participant Evaluation

3. List of 40 women who have declared their candidacy as a result of their NDI training in 1996

* This seminar report is not available