

CONSOLIDATED RESPONSE ON INDEPENDENT WOMEN CANDIDATES IN LOCAL ELECTIONS IN MALI

This consolidated response is based on research conducted by iKNOW Politics staff and contributions submitted by the following iKNOW Politics experts: Julie Ballington, Program Officer for Partnership between Men and Women, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU); Doris Ravenhill, Founder of Women's Lobby; Edith Miguda, Fellow at the Centre for Women's Intercultural Leadership at St. Mary's College; and Drude Dahlerup, Professor of Political Science at Stockholm University.

Question:

In 2009, Mali will hold municipal elections. Unfortunately, political parties do not promote women in their candidate lists, which forces women to leave the parties and form lists of independent candidates. Is it a good practice to form such lists? What else can be done to promote women's participation in the upcoming elections and to ensure their success in it? – Nyeleni, Mali.

Introduction

Women in politics and public offices are often faced with gender discrimination that prevents them from climbing the political ladder and achieving their policy agendas. Faced with discrimination within their parties and other political institutions, women often decide to promote themselves as independent candidates. In general, it is very hard for independent candidates to compete and win elections. For example, according to UNDP, in the 2007 legislative elections in Morocco, there were 13 independent lists that took only 5 seats of the 325 seats of the new parliament. Interestingly, Morocco has used 'national lists' for women candidates in the 2002 and 2007 parliamentary elections, which led to a significant increase of women in parliament. However, these lists were based on agreement among parties to reserve a certain number of seats for women candidates. Julie Ballington, Program Officer at the Inter-Parliamentary Union, further points out that even the few women-only political parties that exist these days struggle to obtain votes in elections. (Expert Opinion. 2008) At the same time, Doris Ravenhill, founder of the Women's Lobby and iKNOW Politics expert, warns that forming lists of independent candidates may be divisive in nature and should be used strategically. (Expert Opinion. 2008)

This consolidated response highlights recommendations provided by iKNOW Politics staff and experts to empower independent women candidates to succeed in elections. These recommendations include providing training sessions, working with civil society organizations, forming women's caucuses and coalitions, holding public outreach campaigns, and lobbying political parties.

Providing Training and Seminars

Providing training and educational seminars for women candidates, both independent and partisan, proved to be one of the most effective tools in promoting women's political participation. As was mentioned in previous iKNOW Politics consolidated responses, it is important to provide training sessions for women candidates focused on fundraising, message development, working with the media, building voter contact programs, writing campaign plans, and designing targeted methods of voter communication. Julie Ballington also recommends partnering with political parties in providing training sessions for independent women candidates. According to Ms. Ballington such partnership with political parties might motivate parties to promote women as candidates in their party lists in the future.

Working with Civil Society Organizations and Forming Women's Caucuses

Independent women candidates may greatly benefit from the help and support of civil society organizations. Organizations such as 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone, Women of Uganda Network, East Timorese Women's Political Network (*Rede Feto Timor Lorosae*), and Women's Lobby are good examples of civil society organizations that use their resources to train women, campaign for women's equal rights, and support women candidates before and during elections. Such organizations provide not only tools and access to knowledge to women candidates to run in elections, but also a platform for reaching out to their constituents and voicing their policy agendas.

There are also a number of successful cases where women leaders and activists formed their own political caucuses to support and empower women in politics. For instance, in the 2001 Constituent Assembly elections in East Timor, the East Timor Women's Political Caucus helped independent women candidates to register for the elections. (Cristalis, I. and Scott, C. 2005. p. 186) Teresa Sacchet in her report describes how women in Latin America have built coalitions

across political and social sectors as a means to advance their policy agendas. She highlights the examples from Chile where despite divisions in their parties, women organized independently to end the military dictatorship, and from El Salvador, where women formed a coalition called 'Mujeres 94' to raise awareness about gender issues and to put pressure on the parties to listen to their demands during the 1994 elections. (Sachett, T. 2005. p. 11) Describing the contribution of independent women's organizations in Zimbabwe, Aili Tripp mentions that:

"In 1996 the Women's Lobby financially backed 44 independent women candidates running in the parliamentary elections. Although only one of these women won a seat, its efforts no doubt encouraged the parties to put up more women candidates and as a result, 15 party-backed women won seats, bringing the number of women in parliament from 7percent to 11 percent, i.e., 16 out of 150."

(Tripp, A. p.15)

Holding Public Outreach Campaigns

Women leaders and candidates have been very creative in using various types of media in their political and public outreach campaigns. Some women leaders work with resources available locally, such as reaching out to their constituents through local radio shows, TV channels, and public events, while others utilize tools provided by international and regional organizations. For example, women in Mali, with the help of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) produced a booklet, a video, and audiotapes in French showcasing the experiences of twenty women who are active in political life. These materials were distributed to political parties and non-governmental organizations throughout the country to help raise consciousness about the role of women in politics and energize women to become actively engaged in the political process. (Women's Participation: Civic Education and Advocacy. 2007)

Another tool for public outreach can be using public events and discussions to raise the issue of women's under-representation in politics and the importance of women's participation in political processes. According to Drude Dahlerup, Professor of Political Science at Stockholm University and iKNOW Politics expert, raising public awareness and initiating public discussions may make voters demand more women candidates on the electoral lists, which in its turn will influence nomination processes within political parties. She also points out that facing such a pressure from the public and constituents, political parties will be more interested in nominating women in

their electoral lists. (Dahlerup, D. Expert Opinion. 2008)

In their public outreach campaigns, women candidates should not underestimate the role of women voters and, thus, reach out to them to galvanize their support during elections. Working with women voters may involve clarifying the candidate's policy agenda from a women's perspective and women's interests. It may also require highlighting to women voters their right to vote independently, explaining procedures to register and check registration lists before the election day, and ensuring that they know the location of their registration polls.

Sometimes, women candidates use their participation and involvement in community life to reach out to women voters. Edith Miguda, Fellow at the Centre for Women's Intercultural Leadership at Saint Mary's College and iKNOW Politics Expert, highlights that there is a long-lasting tradition of African women being involved in community work, which allowed women to build a strong support base among women voters for their candidacies. (Expert Opinion. 2008)

Access to Media

One serious challenge facing independent women candidates is the lack of access to traditional sources of communicating policies and messages. Political parties have greater financial resources for television and radio commercials, campaign literature, lawn signs and other promotional items. Cristalis and Scott point out that the three independent women candidates endorsed by the East Timorese Women's Network (Rede Feto) lost the 2001 Constituent Assembly elections in East Timor due to the under-resourced campaigns, which was a consequence of not having the support of party-machine behind them. (Cristalis, I. and Scott, C. 2005. p.81) In addition, in many countries the election machinery favors parties – for example

"I used non-traditional techniques in my campaign that questioned and exposed the old political culture and norms in my country. I reached out to poor people in their communities and homes, going door to door. While other politicians shunned those who lived in the slum areas, I visited women in their kitchens everywhere and listened to them. Opponents demanded that I stop my visits to households.... I stuck to my outreach strategies and continued visiting women in their little kitchens and gardens under the sun while they did their chores – speaking and listening to them about their struggles. This excited women and made them feel that they had power through voting."

Derived from the iKNOW Politics' Interview with Winnie Byanyima, Director of UNDP Gender Team and former Member of

independent candidates are not represented in televised debates and do not have access to public airtime on national broadcast networks. And in regions, where there is public financing of political parties, they do not have access to such funds.

One strategy for independent candidates to overcome this is to focus on *earned media* and *social media* (as opposed to *paid media*). *Earned media* is a term used for positive news coverage or repetition of paid ads in mass media outlets such as newspapers or television. An example of this is when a radio commercial is leaked in advance or sparks controversy and it is aired on political talk shows as an actual news item. *Social media* refers to messages generated by the public – for example blogs, letters to the editor, or YouTube videos.

According to Anita Vandenberg, iKNOW Politics Project Manager, independent candidates can use a combination of both *earned* and *social* media to communicate their message. For example, with access to just a webcam and a computer, an independent candidate could post a particularly creative, controversial or quirky video on YouTube, get like-minded people to blog about it and write Letters to the Editor, and perhaps the local television station will pick it up as a news item. With access to internet expanding rapidly to all parts of the world the mass media's monopoly on public policy dialogue is fracturing. As a result, a well-organized independent voice with an appealing message has unprecedented possibilities for mobilizing public support. An interesting example may be the video clip posted on YouTube by a Saudi Arabian woman activist driving her car and asking the government to allow women in Saudi Arabia to drive freely around the country. According to CNN, this woman galvanized the support of other 125 women in Saudi Arabia and petitioned government to grant women equal rights for driving. (Saudi woman seeks driving acceptance on YouTube. 2008)

Lobbying Political Parties

Although independent women candidates and leaders do not use party affiliations and do not enjoy party support during elections, it is essential for women to continue working with political parties since they are gate-keepers of elections. Independent women candidates may form coalitions among their colleagues and with women's groups to pressure political parties to promote women in their party lists and to adopt gender sensitive policies within the party.

It is also essential to lobby political parties to adopt positive action measures, such as voluntary party quotas. A successful example is the African National Congress (ANC), which in 1994

adopted a 30 per cent quota for women in political party lists. As a result of this, the representation of women in the national parliament of South Africa increased from below 3 per cent to 27 per cent in one election in 1994. (Global Database of Quotas for Women, 2006) As Mavivi Myakayaka-Manzini describes in her paper, the adoption of gender quotas at ANC was achieved through active lobbying and pressure from the party's Women's League that advocated for adopting 30 per cent quotas for women from 1991-1994. (Manzini, M. 2003.) Furthermore, Drude Dahlerup points:

“Nothing prevents any political party from introducing gender quotas for its internal boards and electoral lists – tomorrow! Usually it is easier to make a center or a left political party make this first move. If successful, a process of contagion may lead other political parties to start recruiting more women as candidates.”
(Dahlerup, D. Expert Opinion. 2008)

Keeping in mind the capability of political parties to adopt voluntary quotas for its candidate lists and party nominations, Ms. Dahlerup highlights the necessity of pressure from women's groups within the parties combined with vivid public discussions on the importance of quotas to make the first step toward promoting women in politics. (Dahlerup, D. Expert Opinion. 2008)

Another vehicle to strengthen women's participation in political parties is to advocate for adopting mandatory party quotas in Election Codes, national constitutions, or any other laws regulating elections. Mandatory quotas, also called legal quotas, may involve legal sanctions for non-compliance such as rejecting the registration of a party that does not comply with the quota requirement in its candidates list. The possibility of facing legal sanctions makes political parties use women candidates in their party lists and comply with the quota requirement.

An interesting case of such lobbying efforts is the 50/50 Campaign of the Namibian Women's Manifesto Network (NWMN). Launched in 2000, the 50/50 Campaign called on political parties to include 50 per cent female candidates on party lists and lobbied parliament to amend the electoral laws to bring gender equality in elected positions at all levels. As a part of this campaign, NWMN held meetings with political party leaders and heads of the parliamentary committees to lobby for the equality in politics. Additionally, NWMN held a widespread public outreach campaigns gathering more than 2,5000 signatures in a short time to petition for laws requiring equal representation of women in elected positions in government. The petition was

presented to the Speaker of the Namibian National Assembly following a march on parliament, in which NWMN involved many supporting non-profit organizations and the representatives of media. (Frank, L. 2004. p. 90)

Furthermore, having mandatory quotas make women viable candidates in elections, which creates incentives for political parties to use women in their party lists. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the most progress in women's advancement in politics in 2007 was made by Kyrgyzstan, which went from no women in parliament to 25.6 per cent in the 2007 parliamentary elections. IPU highlights that this achievement was due to the introduction of a proportional representation system in Kyrgyzstan and the requirement for political parties to present at least 30 per cent of women candidates in their candidate lists. (The World of Parliaments: Quarterly Review. 2008)

Conclusion:

Entering the realm of politics is a hard task for women, and it is even harder for independent women candidates. To overcome barriers and hold successful political campaigns, independent women candidates and aspirants need to have access to training opportunities, work with civil society organizations, form alliances with other women's organizations, and hold public outreach campaigns. It is also very important to continue working with political parties to achieve long-term results in promoting gender equality in politics.

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