



Women Candidates Training Workshop 2010

8-12 March | 2010 | Honiara, Solomon Islands

Having identified a need for the training and development of future women leaders in the Solomon Islands, the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) conducted a *Women Candidates Training Workshop* in Honiara from 8th-12th March 2010. Fittingly, the workshop commenced on International Women's Day. This workshop follows on from the success of a similar workshop that CDI conducted in Buka, Bougainville in November 2009. CDI's partners in delivering the workshop were the Solomon Islands National Council of Women (NCW), through their Women in Shared Decision-Making (WISDM) program, the Solomon Islands Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs, and the Solomon Islands Parliament.

The Solomon Islands has a poor history of electing women to its national parliament since self-government was achieved in 1978. Hilda Kari (in East Central Guadalcanal) is the only woman to have been elected, achieving success at the 1989, 1993 and 1997 elections. She was defeated at both the 2001 and 2006 elections. A handful of women have been elected to provincial assemblies, but national representation remains elusive.

Representation in the national Parliament is drawn from 50 single-member constituencies, elected by the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) voting system. At the time of writing, a proposal is before the parliament to increase the number of constituencies to 67. This proposal will be accepted or rejected by April 2010, ahead of the general election which is due to be held by mid-August 2010. The CDI workshop builds on training conducted prior to the 2006 election by the NCW and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and complements other training initiatives of the NCW. The need for such capacity-building was emphasised by the diagnostic study of women candidates following the 2006 election. This study reported that capacity-building should aim to:

...build greater confidence in women as leaders, to ensure better informed voting, to enhance the links between elected women and their constituencies, and to promote their accountability to their electorate and to the women's agenda.¹

¹ S. Whittington, S. Ospina and A. Pollard (2006). *Women in Government in Solomon Islands: A Diagnostic Study*, p. 24.

The Workshop

The five-day workshop was led by CDI Associate, Dr Norm Kelly, who was assisted by Linda Reynolds, a former National Campaign Manager for the Liberal Party of Australia; and Dr Meredith Burgmann, from the Australian Labor Party, a former President of the New South Wales Legislative Council, and current Sydney City councilor. Luke Hambly, Executive Officer for CDI, provided logistical support.

The workshop attracted 28 participants (13 candidates and 15 campaign managers), who came from a broad geographic spread of eight Solomon Island provinces.² The group included five candidates who contested the 2006 election. Each candidate and her campaign manager had identified separate constituencies to contest in 2010, hopefully minimising the potential for vote-splitting under the FPTP system. By targeting campaign managers as well as candidates,³ the CDI team could deliver specific training on the separate skills required for these two roles.

Structure

The workshop was structured around the three M's of campaigning – Machinery, Money and Message. These sessions covered important campaign functions, including building a campaign team, fundraising and structuring a budget, getting out the vote, developing a clear message and techniques for delivering a message. Other sessions covered the strategies necessary for contesting a FPTP election, and included two sessions from the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC). At the start of the week, the Chief Electoral Officer, Polycarp Haununu, explained aspects of the electoral system, particularly voter registration, which was in progress during the time of the workshop. Mr Haununu returned later in the week to address further issues and questions raised by the participants. Further presentations from the SIEC, by Jeremy Miller, Miligan Pina and Clera Waokea, covered issues including education and outreach, electoral law, and the principles for fair conduct by electoral management bodies.

The workshop included interactive sessions, with participants developing campaign messages for fictitious candidates, and then developing their own messages which were then used in 'meet the voter' sessions. A mock election was conducted for the fictitious candidates, as a way of explaining the FPTP process, and emphasising the importance of getting voters to mark the correct box.⁴ Campaign managers were stepped through organisational methods, while candidates were trained in effective public speaking and message delivery. Participants were also trained in dealing with the media.

² Central, Guadalcanal, Honiara, Isabel, Makira-Ulawa, Malaita, Renbel and Western provinces.

³ The Bougainville workshop was primarily targeting potential candidates.

⁴ There can be a tendency for voters to mark the symbol or name of a candidate, rather than the blank box – required for the vote to be formal. A Bill currently before Parliament will allow more freedom for a Returning Officer to accept a vote if the voter's intention is clear, but this amendment is yet to be passed.

Candidates, introduced by their campaign managers, were required to make presentations of their campaign messages and priority issues for the campaign. Participants received a workshop manual which covered the session themes, and included a strategic campaign plan and timetable template. The workshop also included discussion on how to deal with contentious issues such as the use of Regional Constituency Development Fund (RCDF), possible intimidation, and the twin roles of representing constituents and the national interest. The parliamentary education office presented a session on the rights and responsibilities of Members of Parliament, which included committee and budget processes.

Other presenters included Emele Duituturaga, who detailed the background, work and goals of the WISDM program; and Josephine Teakeni (Vois Blong Mere), on the qualities that are sought in good leaders. The group also attended the launch of *Being the First: Storis Blong Oloketa Mere Lo Solomon Aelans* – a book on the achievements of 14 Solomon Islands women.

Conclusion

The workshop adds to an identified training need for potential women leaders in the Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands electoral system is not conducive to women being elected. However, results from 2006, where two women achieved over 20 per cent of the vote (and two others, 15 per cent), and the ongoing training and support provided by women's organisations (such as the NCW and Vois Blong Mere), indicate that women's representation is definitely achievable in 2010.

CDI sincerely appreciates the contributions of Linda Reynolds and Meredith Burgmann, who both enthusiastically provide their time and expertise. Their training and campaigning skills and experience were valuable components of the workshop. CDI could not have conducted this workshop without in-country logistical planning and support, and we value the work of the NCW, and in particular, Sarah Dyer, in this regard. NCW's identification and targeting of serious candidates for the upcoming election meant that this workshop was delivered to focused women who are set to meet the challenges of the 2010 election and beyond.