



# AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE— THE HIGH PRICE OF POLITICS

The good news is that women's representation in national parliaments as of 2008 is the highest it has ever been. The bad news is that at only 18.2 percent there's still a long way to go to achieve gender parity in most countries of the world.\*

Even so, the current numbers signify a considerable rise from 12.7 percent in 2000 when WEDO began its global campaign for women's equal political representation. But despite slow progress, it remains difficult for women to gain access to positions of power and decision-making.

Lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles that prevent women from participating in politics in greater numbers.<sup>i</sup> Making it easier for women to access economic resources, therefore, is key to expanding women's presence in the political realm.

When greater numbers of women are represented in politics everyone benefits. For example, a recent survey of men and women parliamentarians concluded that women parliamentarians have redefined legislative priorities to include women's concerns and perspectives, such as gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reforms that enhance women's access to parliaments.<sup>ii</sup>

Yet, women face many constraints, from being excluded from certain circles of power and moneyed networks to their own actual economic status, which is often lower than that of men.<sup>iii</sup> Furthermore, the economic and financial challenges that women face are specific and diverse and arise at various times in their political careers.

This fact sheet explores the issue of women and campaign finance in all stages of the electoral process and highlights successful campaign finance strategies that have been used by women candidates in many parts of the world. Though these strategies—which have evolved in different geographical, cultural and political contexts—may not be universal in their application, they do, however, provide valuable lessons to learn from.



PHOTOS: HAZEL BROWN

Women share strategies at a 2007 meeting on campaign finance in Trinidad and Tobago.



Women's Environment &  
Development Organization

\*This fact sheet was adapted from a WEDO research paper authored by Marcela Tovar, Ph.D. for an Experts Meeting in Trinidad & Tobago on Dec. 2-4, 2007. The recommendations emerged from that meeting.

# MONEY MATTERS



## ABOUT WOMEN & CAMPAIGN FINANCING

- Women have less money than men as well as less access to powerful and moneyed networks.
- Men are more likely to become money donors to campaigns, while women are more likely to become time donors.<sup>vi</sup>
- Providing women with early money for nomination campaigns is key to increasing their potential for raising more money in electoral campaigns and increasing their numbers in elected seats.
- Although public funding favors women's candidacies, public funding alone may not be sufficient to promote women candidates since they often have less power within their parties.
- Data from the U.S. shows that the incumbent candidate has a great advantage over challenger candidates.<sup>vii</sup> Given the worldwide gender gap in elected seats, most incumbents are male.
- Establishing networks and planning political strategies to finance women's nomination and election campaigns increases the number of women elected.

**THERE ARE THREE DISTINCT PHASES OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAREERS—DECIDING TO RUN, WINNING A NOMINATION AND CONDUCTING AN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. FOR EACH STAGE, ACCESS TO RESOURCES IS CRITICAL.**

### DECIDING TO RUN

Women tend to be reluctant to become political candidates for a variety of economic reasons. This includes investing family resources, which they do not feel they individually own, asking for credit and risking their own or the family's capital, paying for domestic/caring work they will not be able to do, leaving their jobs and reentering the labor market in cases where they do not get elected.<sup>iv</sup> That is why it is important, particularly in this early phase, to deal with the economic and financial obstacles to women's political participation. Unless women are relieved of the economic burden or the "economic threat" associated with political participation, they may not feel capable of and confident in their participation.

### WINNING A NOMINATION

The costs of nomination campaigns tend to be high. Building reputation and recognition among constituencies as well as among party members requires continuous work with significant amounts of time and money spent by potential candidates. Hidden costs in communication (telephone, postage, transport), events (travel to meet constituencies, clothes for public events and interviews, overnight and weekend accommodation, attending training sessions and party conferences) and family-related expenses are all possible barriers to women's political participation.<sup>v</sup>

### CONDUCTING A CAMPAIGN

Once a woman has secured a nomination, substantial funds are needed to conduct an electoral campaign. In countries where there is public funding and other measures that favor women, all candidates, including women, generally access funds through their political parties. However, in countries where candidates themselves have to raise the funds, large amounts of money are often essential to running a successful campaign.

Public funding, considered by many states to be a desirable measure, has been adopted by countries in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean in order to equalize expenditures among candidates in electoral campaigns. In some cases, however, women candidates have argued that it is not sufficient to cover their expenses for two reasons: 1) women have unequal access to these funds within their party, and 2) candidates rely on additional means from private sources to which women do not have the same access.

Social factors—income level, race and ethnicity, level of education, dominant language skills, geographical location, sexual orientation, age—can also affect a woman candidate's ability to acquire campaign funds during electoral campaigns.

# GOOD PRACTICES

It is important, particularly in this early phase [deciding to run], to deal with the economic and financial obstacles to women's political participation.



Women rally in India

VARSHA KALE

THE FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF VARIOUS STRATEGIES THAT HAVE BEEN USED IN AFRICA, THE CARIBBEAN, EUROPE, LATIN AMERICA AND NORTH AMERICA TO INCREASE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION.\*

## AFRICA

COWAN was founded in Nigeria in 1982 as a response to the perceived marginalization of women and their condition of abject poverty, especially in the rural communities. COWAN's activities span 32 states in the country with at least 260,000 registered members. The organization promotes traditional saving schemes by developing an African Traditional Responsive Banking (ATRB). This has allowed women in politics to have access to loans, enabling them to compete with their male counterparts.

## CARIBBEAN

In Haiti, the electoral law requires candidates to pay a filing fee, the amount of which\*\* depends on the position being contested, and if the candidate is not from a political party, the filing fee increases tenfold. However, the law permits a party's candidates to have discounted fees if at least 30 percent of their lists are women, and the filing fee is lowered by two-thirds for women candidates representing political parties.<sup>viii</sup>

In Suriname and Guyana, where a system of proportional representation is in place, small parties are able to obtain more funding than is available in states operating without this system. This is important because in the smaller parties, even more than the larger, women have to be ranked at the top of the party's list in order to have a good chance of winning.

## EUROPE

In the Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland, which have reached and sustained high numbers of women in their parliaments, political parties receive a state subsidy or some form of assistance, such as free, equal broadcasting time on TV and radio for campaigns or party-related activities like research.<sup>ix</sup>

In 1999, France amended its Constitution to require 50 percent of the candidates on election lists be women. Political parties that don't comply face financial sanctions.

## LATIN AMERICA

In Nicaragua, the women's commission from the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista created a leadership school for women, and the Partido Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional also created mechanisms to work with women's organizations to train women and organize electoral activities. The party established that 30 percent of state subsidies must be allocated to women's political training.

In Costa Rica and Panama, some parties have mandated that financial resources be designated for women's activities, including political training.

\*Further documentation is needed, but a particular gap exists in research on good practice examples from Asia.

\*\*Between 125 gourdes (US\$ 3.13) and 750 gourdes (US\$ 18.75)



## INDIVIDUAL DONORS

### NORTH AMERICA

In Canada, specific legislative measures have helped alleviate women's financial burden. For example, candidates are allowed to list child care expenses, which are tax deductible, as part of their personal expenses. The New Democratic Party created a financial assistance program that reimburses childcare expenses incurred by women and minority candidates.

Women's organizations in the U.S. have established political action committees (PACs) to directly finance women candidates. PACs, such as Emily's List, are organizations that solicit contributions from individuals and redistribute funds to candidates. One distinct subcategory of political action committees are women's PACs, which contribute money only to female candidates. This method has become one of the most successful for providing women running in the Democrat Party with early money—and the earlier women get money the better.

- Individual contributions are one of the most important sources of financing for all candidates, both women and men.
- The average size of individual donations to most female candidates continues to be smaller than the average donation to male candidates.
- The vast majority of large donors to political campaigns are men.
- Female candidates generally depend upon female donors for financial viability and win monetary support from men only as their odds of election approach certainty.
- The small individual contributions received by females suggest that they must attract far greater numbers of individual contributors than their male counterparts just to equalize the total monetary value of their contributions.
- Women who win raise significantly more money than women who lose, while male winners collect only marginally more money than their losing counterparts.
- Female candidates require more money than men to reach the thresholds of both campaign viability and electoral success; thus, a decline in female candidates' fundraising and/or funding needs to be interpreted as a decline in their ability to participate in the electoral process.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**IN 2007 EXPERTS CAME TOGETHER IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO DISCUSS FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS. THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGED.**

## **WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO**

- Adopt national campaign finance legislation that reflects international norms on women's equal participation in politics.
- Formulate national policies and plans with a gender-sensitive finance component to ensure participation and adequate training for women candidates and decision-makers.
- Secure measures that favor women, including legislation on public funding, limits to contributions and expenditures in nomination/election campaigns, and quotas within parties or cabinets.
- Establish incentives, where public funding is available, that are linked to the percentage of women candidates put forward by each party or elected to Parliament.
- Limit candidates' expenditures, rather than parties' expenditures.

## **WHAT POLITICAL PARTIES CAN DO**

- Distribute resources to women and men candidates equally by making it a part of political parties' policies.
- Ensure that women continue to receive equal support once they assume office.
- Dedicate a specific amount of resources for women's affirmative action.
- Establish a women's caucus to empower women candidates and help ensure equal access to the party's resources.

## **WHAT WOMEN CAN DO**

- Make campaign finance a part of your agenda.
- Strategize with other women across political parties on ways to secure more financial resources.
- Partner with women's organizations to support women running for public office.
- Monitor parties' campaign expenditures to be sure that women are getting their fair share of resources.
- Document strategies and best practices by women for raising resources.

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## ABOUT WEDO

The Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) is an international organization that advocates for women's equality in global policy. It seeks to empower women as decision makers to achieve economic, social and gender justice, a healthy, peaceful planet, and human rights for all.

Building on fifteen years of activism that has earned WEDO a reputation as a trailblazer in international women's rights, WEDO emphasizes women's critical role in social, economic and political spheres through initiatives on women's political representation, corporate accountability, climate change and UN reform. In collaboration with women's groups around the world, WEDO's dynamic campaigns and projects advance women's rights worldwide.



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