# SAMPLE STAFF MEMO

## BEFORE SENDING THIS MEMO

Organizations considering the use of *Men, Power and Politics Toolkit* need to consider:

► Do we understand the approach and time needed to engage political organizations in the program?

► How will we integrate this program with other work based on the electoral calendar?

► Do we, internally, model a culture of inclusion and equity and hold ourselves accountable? Should we think about holding the workshop for our own staff in advance of the program?

► Do we have staff members that convey respect for women, and are open to the program and learning how to better support gender equality in democracy programming?

► What 1-2 male staff members will support the program and be present for all of the workshops as appropriate?

► Who will research local basic care and support services, including psychosocial assistance for program participants?

► Do we understand the political context in which this program will take place?

► Do we understand the history of women's rights and the current gender context in which the program will take place?

► What political organization(s) would we target?

► How can we secure the participation of male political leaders?

► Do we have the experience to help male political leaders and other stakeholders develop concrete action items to be completed following the workshop?

► How can we hold male political leaders accountable to action steps committed to during the workshop in a measurable and formal way when possible? This may require giving a sub-grant to a women's rights organization, political party women's wing or expert.

Once these issues have been considered, the following; explanatory memo should be sent to colleagues involved in program implementation.

**TO:**        [Implementing Organization Colleagues]
**FROM:**     Program Organizers
**DATE:**      xx/xx/xxxx
**RE:**        ENGAGING MEN AS AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

## BACKGROUND

The full and equitable participation of women in public life is essential to building and sustaining strong, vibrant democracies. Women's ability to participate equally in politics as activists, voters, members of civil society, party members or leaders, government officials and elected leaders results in tangible gains for democracy. When women participate, political parties are more responsive to citizens' needs, there is increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable peace. Women's participation in politics helps advance gender equality and affects both the range of policy issues considered and the types of solutions proposed. There is strong evidence that as more women are elected to office there is a corollary increase in policy making that emphasizes quality of life and reflects the priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities.

Women in politics face both formal and informal barriers to their participation, but one of the greatest obstacles facing women in politics are ideas about gender, and the social expectations and personal attitudes and behaviors to which these give rise. In many societies, it is still the case that power, and especially, political power, is associated with men and masculinity. Based on this, it seems "natural" and "normal" that men hold a majority of political posts, including a preponderance of political party leadership positions, while women are relegated to supporting roles. If women are going to increase their voice, visibility and power in political life, then current ideas about masculinity and femininity must be challenged and changed.

To date, many of the programs to increase women's political participation have focused directly on women. This is intentional as it is essential that work to increase women's empowerment be called for by women and focused on building the individual capacity of women, responding to their rights and stated needs and demands. Other programs have focused on political institutions and identified targeted interventions to advance gender equality issues in policies and processes, and increase the presence and influence of women in civil society organizations, elections management bodies, political parties and elected bodies. These programs have not worked to fully address the inequality of women's political participation.

For more than three decades, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has worked to strengthen democratic resilience through stronger, more contemporary, inclusive, relatable, responsive and open political institutions. Institutions such as civil society organizations, elections commissions, political parties, government ministries and elected bodies that must be responsive to citizens' needs and create opportunities for inclusive multi-partisan and multi-ethnic consensus. A key aspect of this work is increasing women's political participation and leadership.

## THE MEN, POWER AND POLITICS TOOLKIT

NDI has created *Men, Power and Politics Toolkit*, a tool to engage male political leaders as transformative agents of change for gender equality. The *Men, Power and Politics Toolkit* is intended for use by democracy and governance (D&G) practitioners, but is unlike most previous political training programs. This work is rooted in empirically-tested initiatives that have been used in other sectors and contexts to influence male attitudes and practices and to increase their support for women's rights in the home, the community, and in public life.

The goal of this program is to change the patriarchal gender norms held by elite, male, political leaders and underpin political institutions. The theory of change for the program is that changing the norms of these political leaders will lead to a change in the attitudes of their peers and the political organizations they lead. Changing the political organizations will allow for greater women's political participation, leadership and gender equality.

The final desired result is a shift in the organizational structures, policies, and actions of institutions such as political parties, civil society organizations, government ministries, and elected bodies like local councils and parliaments.

Political organizations that could be targeted for this program include civil society organizations, political parties and various government entities such as ministries, electoral management and elected bodies, including councils, legislatures and parliaments.

## OUR ORGANIZATION

As we use the *Toolkit*, it is important for us to understand how this program is different from most political programs and how it is an essential component of a larger and longer process to increase gender equality and women's political participation. Moreover, in order for the program to be successful, we must engage a local masculinities organization with experience in working with men and boys to promote the rights of women and girls and increase gender equality.

This program includes at least two distinct components:

► A workshop or workshops with male, political leaders; and

► Partnership with local women's rights organizations and female members of the targeted political organization(s) to understand the political context of the program, to hear women's experiences in political life and to hold male, political leaders accountable.

   **NOTE:** If the female members of the targeted political organization are also members of local women's rights organizations or movements then this last component is one group. If the female members of the targeted political organization are NOT also members of local women's rights organizations or movements then this last component is two distinct groups: 1) Members of local women's rights organizations provide the political context of the program and help to hold male, political leaders accountable; and 2) female members of the targeted political organization(s) share their experiences in political life and in the targeted, political organizations.

In designing this program it is crucial that we collect and understand key information:
1.  How this program fits within the local context, focusing on
    a.  information about the political system (civil society, politics and government), the political calendar and recent events; and
    b.  the history regarding efforts to increase gender equality and women's political participation in the country.

2.  How this program fits within our larger body of democracy and governance work focusing on
    a.  specific information about the targeted political organization(s);
    b.  experience of women members of the targeted political organization(s); and
    c.  workshop participants (male).