



Recommendations of the Political Party Peer Network Conference

Strengthening Political Parties – Ensuring People’s Voice Towards the 2030 Agenda

17 to 19 June 2019

Helsinki, Finland

Introduction

A network of international democracy assistance providers and development actors met in Helsinki, Finland to discuss international assistance to political parties. The Political Party Peer Network (PPPpeer) meeting was an opportunity for the participants to learn about assistance approaches and best practices and identify joint projects.

The meeting furthered efforts already underway to bring political party assistance providers closer, especially with regard to the sister party approach and multiparty approach; share important lessons between political party assistance providers and beneficiaries of political party assistance; identify common challenges and nuanced solutions to those challenges; and continue the dialogue with development agencies and national counterparts on how to do more with less while maintaining expectations vis-à-vis outcomes during periods of financial austerity.

Over 80 participants representing a wide range of international actors attended the conference. The six workshops focused on ways to take political party and democracy assistance forward. The following recommendations are aimed at donors, political parties, and governments and represent a way forward on strengthening political parties related to Agenda 2030.

Donors & practitioners

1. *Understand the nature of political parties*

Political parties are driven by an existential need to win votes. However, the parties are essential to resolving the big problems facing the world. Do not try to sidestep this contradiction – it should be the starting point for our engagement with political parties.

2. *Do not let training go to waste*

In order to make the changes really materialise in parties, political party programs must set more conditions for party leadership to incorporate the recipients of trainings into leadership positions and candidate lists, introduce the initiatives developed in workshops to party activists and local chapters and institutionalise the internal procedures developed during programs.

3. *Emphasise the need for strategic thinking*

Recognize that trainings and workshops alone are not enough to change a party's behaviour and organisational structure. Technical support and capacity building must be synchronized with adequate follow up and strategic planning and this needs to be inherent within the design and budget of the party program.

Take care during the planning stage to think through the context and what strategic planning has been done before and what has not. Be aware of the existing landscape, for automatically assuming a lack of internal democracy could undermine structures that are already in place. Analysing the formal and informal structures in advance will help avoid this and ensure the process is meaningful to the party in question. You also need to identify the right change agents. Reflect carefully on who has the leadership/ownership to take the process forward – this might not be the party

leadership. Ensure there is sufficient political will to implement the reform measures. Pilot programs with youth wings, women's wings or local branches can be useful for securing broader buy-in from party leadership and improving the process.

When creating the plan, make sure it is doable. Strategic plans need to be simple and feasible. This might be difficult as you need to create the path of reform while keeping in mind the time and effort it takes to overcome institutional barriers, resistant leadership and social or cultural norms. Try to build the programming around party specific incentives and identify where and how local stakeholders outside the party can apply pressure.

Finally, stress the importance of maintaining plans in times of calamity, such as after election defeat. Strategic planning helps keep parties together at such times and keep vital processes going.

4. *Embrace change*

Not only do the parties need help to develop, so does the democracy support community. The world has moved on since the late 90s, but in many respects the democracy assistance community has not. We are bringing normative language to a post-truth argument, the proverbial knife to a gun fight. One of the calls emerging from the international populism conference in Brussels in 2018 was to defend democracy but to do so in ways which resonate with the realities we face. Let us have less of the coulds and shoulds and more of the cans and wills.

5. *Understand the importance of relationships*

The importance of relationships based on trust with the political parties should not be underestimated. Drawing up a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with parties can be useful to address key issues of confidentiality and anonymity. It is also important to recognize that initiating the process of getting parties involved in looking at risks and opportunities of trying new things is a useful way to build understanding of our partners' needs and wishes.

6. *Reward cooperation*

Support multi-party coalitions, women's and youth wings, alliances of women's organisations and women leaders, and efforts of civil society – particularly on local level – to encourage dialogue, cross-sectoral exchange and issue-based advocacy in politics. Although it is very difficult sometimes to bring women from different political parties together, it is absolutely a must to advance and strengthen women's representation and contribution in politics. Women need to come together to create their own support networks to effectively compete in politics.

Make sure you also engage with male party leaders and male allies on inclusion issues to facilitate buy-in and commitment to institutional and sustainable change. A useful way of supporting cross-cutting cooperation between genders and parties is to promote existing as well as new platforms and making them more accessible. These platforms should not be only for experts

but also for the civil society, media, enterprises, political parties and political institutions. Moving beyond the local level, it is important to utilise technological possibilities to strengthen international cooperation.

7. *Prioritize work on inclusion in political parties*

Prioritize strengthening inclusion in political parties, as such discussions have a positive impact not only on gender equality and inclusion of under-represented groups (i.e. youth or persons with disabilities), but contribute to overall party building, long-term planning and internal party democracy. Consider holistic, systemic, long-term approaches to inclusion within politics, yet identify your own specific strengths and expertise, find right entry points and collaborate with others to complement each other's efforts on inclusion.

Do not only help everyone, remember to also include everyone. Strategic planning needs to be owned by all, or at least open to all, not just to those in leadership positions or in charge of the process. To achieve this, the need for extended participation needs to be well communicated in the party who should provide opportunities for members to engage in the process.

8. *Pay special attention to gendered needs*

Go beyond standard trainings for women and think critically who your audience is, what skills they have and need to learn (technical or political), what works (hand-in-hand support) and what message your training gives in terms of capacity for

politics and responsibility for change. Make sure you also build capacity and awareness of men in politics to understand the importance of inclusion.

9. *Keep in line with Agenda 2030*

Frame the Agenda 2030 as a common goal in order to underpin worldwide activities and harmonise donor requirements especially when promoting the common goal.

Political parties

1. *Assess your party's development needs*

Conduct annual assessments of the party's activities and internal structures to identify the aspects the organisation needs to improve on. Pay special attention to gender or inclusion perspectives when looking at the party's internal structures, recruitment processes, fund allocation, party platforms and culture. This can be done through gender audits followed by a consultative process of developing gender or inclusion action plans.

2. *Ask what members want to change*

Create formal forums for party activists at the local, regional and national levels, to present reform ideas to party leadership. If you want to take it further, develop an internal reform committee (with a budget) that includes representatives from local chapters, members, internal auxiliary groups, the executive committee and civil society or nonmembers with a mandate to explore needed areas of reform and a formal process to present its findings and recommendations to party leadership.

3. *Listen to your voters*

Provide a platform for external discussions. Let your voters voice their opinions and listen to their frustrations about how they are experiencing the political system from the outside. Shape the way you communicate your policies to respond to these concerns. This does not mean reacting to every whim; it means that you craft your policy solutions in ways that resonate with people. Populism generally rises fastest in systems where voters feel they are being ignored, so get out there and listen.

4. *Consider the longer term*

Short-term promises are effective in winning elections, but if those promises are undeliverable, they undermine support for your party in the long-term. Thus, it is important to build a structure for developing and delivering policy solutions that can be fulfilled quickly when you win the election. However, do not lose sight of the long-term either. Clear and consistent policies help the party develop an identity beyond its leader or its base of support. Having a strategy that balances short-term and long-term goals can make the party more resilient over time and enhances political parties' image as long-term policy makers.

5. *Take gender into account*

Guarantee equal internal distribution of resources between women and men during electoral and non-electoral periods. Support women's full participation through an internal party fund or allocation of public funding and support training programs that focus on women.

6. *Lead by example and take responsibility for inclusion*

Lead by example and have the party leadership engaged in inclusion discussions, as to demonstrate political commitment and democratic maturity. Take responsibility at the highest party levels for introducing institutional change towards sustainable internal party democracy and inclusion. Comply with reporting requirements and make clear and transparent party policies and procedures for candidacy and list placement.

7. *Understand media and use it for everyone's benefit*

Strengthen the discussion about the role of the media in the political system. You can also implement a 'marketplace of ideas' and hold media workshops and seminars to promote certain topics, such as Agenda 2030, and coordinate programme planning and activities of international actors.

Governments & decisionmakers

1. *Invest in the change you want to see*

Ministers must invest in contextually-informed political party work. As politicians, you know the fundamental role that parties play in shaping democratic outcomes.

Allocate adequate financial, technical and human resources to political party registrars and other political monitoring bodies. Electoral Management Bodies should adopt measures to include childcare expenses in campaign costs as a

part of gender-targeted public funding for elections.

2. *Reward learning*

Encourage more research and knowledge generation around how political parties function and how they change as institutions over time. Ask development implementers across the spectrum how they are bringing political parties into the conversation on key Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) issues and what they are learning from the responses.

3. *Give people tools and information to improve democracy with*

Generate institutional benchmarks around inclusion, financial transparency, campaign finance and citizen engagement that parties must meet and maintain in order to keep their registration. Include these ideas in new laws and regulations. Finally, report on the state of democracy by gathering, disaggregating and publishing data (gender disaggregation) on these important issues. Utilise media both to investigate and report on these issues.

4. *Incentivise change and inclusivity*

You should, however, be smart about regulatory regimes and how they do and do not incentivise positive change. When developed and applied poorly, regulations can distort political systems and behaviour, creating negative spillover effects. In our efforts to deal with technology, social media, money etc. and their influence on politics, let us make sure we are taking a dynamic view as to how

these new rules will drive behaviour, either positively or negatively. Based on well-researched knowledge, governments must ensure effective implementation of laws, through operational guidelines, adequate monitoring and enforcement by independent bodies, and efficient sanctions for non-compliance.

Create incentives (access to public funding) or requirements for parties, parliaments and other institutions to adopt internal reforms around key areas such as internal democracy, gender, organisational transparency and campaign finance. Democratic institutions, often funded through taxpayers, have a responsibility to promote inclusion of citizens and the government should hold these institutions accountable.

5. *Facilitate dialogue*

Provide platforms for meaningful dialogue and cooperation on inclusion in politics by involving diverse groups of males and females in regular consultation, supporting multi-party platforms, encouraging civil society engagement, women and youth activism, collaboration with disabled persons' organisations in parties and beyond. All these contribute to inclusion efforts in parties and politics more broadly. Ensure this dialogue and cooperation is both regional and international with many stakeholders.

6. *Media*

Make sure media reports equally on male and female candidates to ensure a gender sensitive reporting and encouraging equal access to media.

Workshops of the PPPeer Network Conference

Journeys of Change: Case Studies of Internal Party Reforms, organized and moderated by National Democratic Institute's (NDI) Iain Gill and Christian Brunner

Winner Takes It All?: Helping parties rethink the balance between long-term policy thinking and short-term competition, organized and moderated by Westminster Foundation for Democracy's (WFD) Shannon O'Connell and Victoria Hasson

Meaningful Inclusivity – Underrepresented Groups in Political Parties, organized by The Oslo Center (OC), Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD), Political Parties of Finland for Democracy – Demo Finland and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), moderated by Anu Juvonen and Ajla van Heel

Strategic Planning for Political Parties: Contributing to Responsive and Policy Based Parties, organized and moderated by Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy's (NIMD) Karijn de Jong and Wouter Dol

Political Party cooperation in the Arab World, organized and moderated by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's (KAS), Michael Bauer and Franziska Fislage

Intersections of Gender and Political Finance, organized and moderated by International IDEA's Maria Lohela and Meriem Trabels

The Political Party Peer Network Conference 2019 was organized in collaboration with the PPPeer Core Group



The conference was organized in collaboration with Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

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