



LOOKING BACK, LEADING FORWARD

An Oral History of Gender, Women, and
Democracy at NDI



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Introduction to the National Democratic Institute

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments, safeguarding elections and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

NDI is a leading organization working to advance women's political participation and leadership around the world. The Institute empowers women to participate, compete and lead as equal and active partners in democratic change. Mobilizing its global networks and drawing on three decades of experience in 132 countries, NDI supports women's aspirations for gender equality, and for inclusive and responsive government. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

Foreword

At NDI, we innovate in the face of challenges to democracy. That creative persistence, if you will, comes from close engagement with our partners, to understand what they're confronting and what they want. It comes from diligent research, consultation, piloting, and socializing new approaches. These efforts require time, space and resources – all of which are under pressure by a growing global backlash against democracy and against the fundamental democratic principle of inclusion: that **everyone gets an equal voice in the decisions that shape our lives.**

Despite the unquestionable challenges facing our work, NDI is deeply committed to the simple truth that **democracy is for EVERYONE** – and thus, there is no democracy without equitable opportunities for women in public life: as activists, candidates, elected officials, and more. We remain rooted in our understanding that politics – including democratic politics – is about the power to decide who gets what – and that unequal power relations raise barriers to women's full participation in public life. We will ensure that gender transformative approaches remain embedded in NDI's work to build democracy and make democracy work.

To understand the road ahead, it often helps to consider where the Institute has come from in our work on gender, women and democracy, what we have learned, and how we should move forward. We must approach the moment deliberately and with clear eyes, seizing the opportunity to reflect on how and why NDI's gender, women and democracy work evolved as it did, and how that can inform our path forward. I invite you to join me in taking a look back at the story of NDI's work on gender, women and democracy as recounted through this oral history. I will bet that you will be as inspired and motivated as I am to write our next chapter.

In solidarity,

Tamara Cofman Wittes
President, National Democratic Institute

Executive Summary

With President Trump's Executive Order 14169 on "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid" issued on January 20, 2025 and subsequent stop work orders, NDI lost 80 percent of its funding and was forced to dramatically reduce its footprint. This forcible contraction effectively collapsed functional, or technical, teams, including the Gender, Women and Democracy (GWD) team, into one cross-disciplinary Democracy Innovation Lab. The GWD team, formerly the Women's Political Participation (WPP) team, had been furthering gender, women and democracy programming for over twenty years at the time of its dissolution. This project aims to document the development and evolution of the team's work to ensure that decades of knowledge and learning is not lost in this uncertain political climate. Additionally, the project may serve as a resource to inform future programming. The oral history comprises 25 in-depth interviews of gender champions within the WPP/GWD team and across country offices and in the Washington, DC headquarters of NDI.

An analysis of the team's history chronicles both internal and external factors that propelled gender. Women and democracy work forward at NDI, illuminating a dynamic interplay between the team pioneering new areas within the sector and NDI being spurred by donors and other stakeholders to expand its purview. Donor priorities and requirements and the emergence of U.S. Government policies and initiatives related to gender helped institutionalize a gender lens across programming more broadly, while the team's groundbreaking initiatives like iKNOWPolitics, #NotTheCost, Win With Women, and Men, Power & Politics pushed both NDI and the broader field forward.

Additionally, this narrative highlights a number of recurring themes, connecting across multiple interviews, concerning how the work was developed. Key among these themes are the importance of utilizing a dual track approach to simultaneously pursuing both gender mainstreaming and standalone or targeted programming. While doing so, over time the team increasingly balanced its support to regional teams and management of GWD-led programming. Furthermore, while the importance of a team specifically dedicated to gender and democracy cannot be overstated, interviewees stressed the importance of establishing an infrastructure for supporting gender equality across the entire organization. Internally, individual gender champions have been and continue to act as key drivers for gender and democracy work at NDI. Externally, gender, women and democracy work within NDI has consistently been both innovative and influential within the sector. Part of the early external visibility of the work may be credited to NDI's former Board Chair and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's dedication to advancing these issues and the consistently innovative approaches the team has developed that have proven to have profound impacts on stakeholders. Much of this innovation is also

due to the access and partnership the team had with frontline women's rights defenders and women's political participation stakeholders across the world, allowing the team to learn about their priorities and their barriers, and to scale and build on partners' knowledge and strategies.

Memorializing and learning from this institutional history and innovating new ways to forge gender transformative democracy assistance programs in a rapidly changing context may serve to enhance ongoing and future efforts towards a more equitable, inclusive, and democratic world.

Introduction

On January 20, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14169 into law, otherwise known as “Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid.” The order, and subsequent stop work orders on United States Government-funded programming, prevented congressionally appropriated funds from being used for foreign aid purposes. As a result, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Department of State (DOS) halted work and funding for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), while not classified as foreign aid, was also delayed. As these entities constituted the National Democratic Institute’s (NDI) most significant funders, the effect on NDI’s global footprint and operations was extreme. Following a staff furlough, NDI was forced to lay off approximately 80% of its employees and downsize from almost 60 country offices to 13, continuing presence in 24 countries. NDI’s newly reduced footprint effectively collapsed functional teams, including the Gender, Women and Democracy (GWD) team, into one cross-disciplinary Democracy Innovation Lab.

The GWD team, formerly the Women’s Political Participation (WPP) team, had been advancing gender, women and democracy programming for over twenty years at the time of its dissolution. Its flagship initiatives, such as #NotTheCost, Win With Women, and Men, Power & Politics, are well recognized both within NDI and within the broader democracy development sector. The team’s evolution has taken a unique path, often pioneering new ideas in the field and creating innovative tools and resources to advance women’s full and meaningful participation in public life and strengthen inclusive democracy. With the impacts of the rapid and unprecedented political changes causing reverberations throughout the women, gender and democracy communities and significant uncertainty about the future of such work, this oral history project is an effort to help ensure that more than two decades of important, cutting edge work at NDI and lessons learned from it are not lost. In addition to documenting the development and evolution of this work, moving forward this project may also serve as a resource to inform future programming. Echoing Maya Angelou, “you can’t really know where you’re going until you know where you have been.” This narrative compiles firsthand accounts of the inception and evolution of gender, women and democracy programming at NDI to document how the WPP/GWD team has worked to increase the full and meaningful participation and leadership of women in public life and strengthen gender transformative democracy programs.

Methodology

The GWD oral history project conducted 25 in-depth interviews to capture the rich history of women's political participation and gender, women and democracy programming at NDI, primarily through the WPP/GWD team, but also including important perspectives of gender champions at the headquarters and country levels.

Participants were selected with the goal of gaining a multitude of perspectives on how and why the work and the WPP/GWD team evolved. The interviewees (Annex I) included the three former Directors of the WPP/GWD team and six other former team members with experience ranging from Program Assistant to Deputy Director. Additionally, participants who worked alongside the WPP/GWD team or advocated for gender transformative work on regional teams and other key leadership and programmatic positions within NDI were interviewed. The category of participants spanned all regional teams (Latin American and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, Eurasia, Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, Central and West Africa, and Southern and East Africa) and myriad country offices. The project also conducted interviews with key leaders at the executive level who oversaw and furthered gender programming, including former and current presidents and vice presidents of the Institute.

A total of 25 in-depth interviews were conducted, ranging from 40-90 minutes, depending on participants' experience and length of time spent at NDI. The questions were all open-ended, spanning general reflections on the work and participants' specific experiences. All interviews were conducted on Zoom and, with participants' consent, video recorded for transcription purposes. The transcripts were generated through Zoom's artificial intelligence transcription service then manually edited for accuracy. In line with oral history best practices, transcripts were sent to participants to provide an opportunity for clarifications or corrections. Participants were provided the option to indicate any quotations that they might not want personally attributed to them, but could be included anonymously. Interviewees were also provided with the opportunity to review drafts of the written narrative to ensure accuracy of their contributions and quotations included therein.

As a qualitative methodology, this oral history does not aim to quantify gender work or measure its impact through numerical data. While future work could study generalizable, quantitative results, this project's scope is limited to narratives on the team's inception, evolution, successes, and challenges. An additional limit of the project is its lack of future-leaning perspectives. This is partially due to the research question design, as the questions were designed with a retrospective focus on identifying and

memorializing the evolution of the team and past work rather than on plans for future projects. Another important factor is the political context in which the interviews were conducted, since both the democracy support sector and the gender equality and women's empowerment field, in particular, have been decimated under the Trump Administration and are increasingly facing both reductions in official development aid among non-USG donors as well as backlash with the context of rising anti-gender and authoritarian movements. Based on interviewees' responses to being asked about the future of the field, including multiple visibly emotional responses, it was clear that the current political situation directly affects how and to what extent participants are able to consider where GWD work can and should move. While these reflections on past work serve to document and preserve the institutional history of gender, women and democracy work at NDI and may be used as a resource in thinking about the future of this work, this project is not intended to provide a roadmap for future gender and democracy programming.

Part I: History and Development of NDI's Women's Political Participation/Gender, Women, and Democracy Team

Pre-Women's Political Participation Team: 1990s-2003

The history of gender, women and democracy programming at NDI began prior to the formal creation of the Women's Political Participation team in 2003. In March 1987, NDI organized the first Eleanor Roosevelt International Caucus of Women Political Leaders in San Francisco. Over 70 women political leaders from over 40 countries attended. Ken Wollack, former President of NDI, identified the gathering as "the first entrance of NDI into women's political programming." After the conference, a partnership formed with the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University to further recommendations that emerged from the event. While the partnership didn't directly lead to any concrete activities, Ken noted that it "set the tone for what type of programming NDI would do in the later years." In the subsequent decade, gender champions at NDI worked to integrate women into democracy programming, consolidate knowledge, and expand women's political participation. This work was decentralized and largely *ad hoc*, depending on the interests and priorities of individual staff members as opposed to a centralized institutional effort aimed at women's political participation programming.

Stephanie Lynn joined the NDI Serbia office in 1998. She describes how gender work "wasn't something NDI technically did," but the need for targeted approaches "became abundantly clear to me and to others like me at NDI, those of us who had done political party building and had intentionally engaged with women inside parties because of the problems in our own parties." At the time, NDI staff were training political party members on constituent engagement and preparing for elections. Along with some staff from different countries in the region, Stephanie began to insist that parties and partners begin including women in such training, which were male dominated. She described how the NDI Serbia office insisted that the programs would not continue unless partners brought both women and men participants. While some participants dropped out after the first few sessions, other women and men from the training went on to occupy meaningful political roles.

**"It's a gift and an honor to do this work."
-Stephanie Lynn**

A particularly compelling moment for Stephanie was when a woman who was "sitting in the back of the room at the first training," after the Serbia office

insisted she be invited, went on to become a Member of Parliament, then the Speaker of the Serbian Assembly, and "in a tragic moment, when the President of Serbia was assassinated, she was in the seat that automatically becomes the acting president. She held that position from 2002 to 2004."

In-country staff such as Stephanie made decisive choices in their programming early on to further women's political participation. Shannon O'Connell, who worked in four different NDI country offices, noted that in this time period, many "of the women who came to the organization knew about the importance of this work and they were embedding it regardless."

Other country offices were also integrating a greater focus on programming with and for women in their work. Aleksandra Cvetkovska, formerly of NDI Morocco and NDI North Macedonia, described how the North Macedonia office supported the Parliamentary Women's Club through dedicated training sessions. In Azerbaijan, while the registration of non-governmental organizations was limited, NDI partnered with a national women's organization in the early 2000s to support their advocacy work. There were also a number of projects focused on women's political participation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the early 2000s. Les Campbell, Regional Director of the MENA Team, noted in particular "the adoption of the first significant quota for women in parliament

in the Middle East (30 seats for women in Morocco in 2001), big efforts to increase women's voter participation in Egypt and Yemen, and significant work with women politicians in Croatia and Bosnia."



North Macedonia Women Parliamentary Candidates Workshop in 2006

Photo credit: NDI

Stephanie Rust, NDI's Chief Programs Officer, spoke about how she perceived NDI's work at the time while working elsewhere in the development sector, saying, "it was well known that NDI was providing [women] with all of this support." In her view, **"NDI had already made a commitment and both a value statement, but also an action-like sort of a commitment to doing the work whereas**

I felt like everybody else was kind of figuring out how to get there and how to talk about it and how to mainstream as opposed to just focusing on women and making it a priority."

Though gender programming was not yet an explicitly articulated part of NDI's work, its efforts were increasingly recognized throughout the democracy development sector.

In addition to the programming taking place in country offices, a number of NDI staff members based in Washington, D.C. were simultaneously discussing the need for a more explicit focus on women's political participation within the organization. A number of external consultants were contributing to this workstream, indicating an identified need for technical expertise. Internally, people like Jean Dunn, Vice President of Administration and Development, Vivian Lowery Derryck, Vice President of

Programs, and Patricia Keefer, Regional Director for Southern and East Africa, began advocating for a more formalized approach to women's political participation programming.

The differing outcomes for men and women participating in NDI programs and the need for programming targeted toward women was also becoming apparent to some functional team members. Aaron Azelton, Director of the Citizen Participation & Inclusion team, discussed a Latin American Political Leadership Academy that ran for a number of years in the late 1990s to early 2000s. He said the Academy confirmed for him that "we can't just train men and women the same in terms of issues around political leadership or candidacy, or anything else to do with that type of work."

In addition to internal factors and individual gender champions, external factors like donor interest and requirements also helped drive GWD programming. Shari Bryan, former Vice President of NDI, was instrumental in the eventual creation of the Women's Political Participation team. While serving as a USAID Women in Development Fellow, Shari spent time in Malawi evaluating USAID programs according to their impacts on women. At the time, NDI was implementing a USAID-funded women's parliamentary program. Shari said that while some women at NDI had experience in politics, "I'm 99% sure that they were not the brainchild of these programs, that it really was people within USAID." Donors, including USAID, pushed NDI to focus more on women's political participation, leading to NDI developing programs such as the Malawi parliamentary program. Additionally, at least one early private donor inquired into the existence of women-focused programming prior to the formation of the team, yet there were no materials to present.

Shari described how, after becoming part of a D.C.-based regional team, "I looked around at NDI, and I realized that they already had 10 or 15 projects around the world that were sort of like the one that I had seen in Malawi, kind of women's parliamentary programs or training projects for women on campaigning," which she attributed to USAID requirements. She then began "lobbying for them to hire one person who could begin to develop expertise and be a point person for what I saw was a growing sector of programs." Her efforts were supported by Jean Dunn, then NDI's Vice President, and NDI Board Member Geraldine Ferraro and Board Chair Madeleine Albright, creating a community of allies at the headquarters level. In September 2002, Kristin Haffert was hired as a Program Officer on the Citizen Participation team. During this time, while there was concerted high level organizing taking place toward formalizing NDI's work on women's political participation, Kristin asked to work on women's programs and the decision was made for her to devote half her time to women's programs and the other half to citizen participation.

When Kristin started, she spoke with Jean Dunn who noted to her that while NDI had existing programming for women, the work was not externally visible. Thus, Kristin's primary project when she started working part time on women's political participation programming was to create a repository of ongoing and past work focused on women's political participation with the goal of learning from the Institute's experiences and making NDI's existing achievements more visible. Shortly thereafter, building on the efforts of a group of female staff members who had been working to move the organization in the direction of a more institutional approach to WPP programming, Kristin wrote a memo proposing the creation of a functional team dedicated to women's political participation. She said, "there was internal pressure and external pressure to build the team." She described pressure from donors, the concern that the organization risked falling behind, and a desire to make existing programs more visible. Furthermore, Ken Wollack emphasized how "we wanted to ensure that a team within NDI would advocate for these issues. If not, they risk being marginalized and don't get the attention that they deserve, because there were other priorities at the time. Having a women's programming team have a seat at the democracy table was felt to be important." After submitting the proposal to the President and Vice President of NDI, approval was given in 2003 to start the Women's Political Participation Team.

Building the Women's Political Participation Team: 2003-2009

When the creation of the Women's Political Participation was greenlighted in 2003, Kristin's first mandate was to develop a strategy for the team. It was formed as a DC-based functional team at NDI with a similar mandate as the other teams such as Political Parties or Governance. While the team did not have a Director at the time, Kristin Haffert was functionally leading the team and hired the team's first new staff position shortly after the team's inception.

Later in 2003 the team designed the "Win With Women Global Initiative," their first flagship initiative, to create a network for women political leaders and activists. At a Global Forum held in Washington, DC, the ["Win With Women: Global Action Plan"](#) was drafted by 40 high-ranking women political leaders from 27 countries. The plan aimed to increase women's



Secretary Albright and Political Party Leaders at the 2003 Win With Women Global Forum in Washington, D.C.

Photo credit: NDI

political participation by outlining practical recommendations to help political parties broaden their appeal by becoming more inclusive and representative.

Funding from the National Endowment for Democracy provided seed funding to establish the Win With Women initiative to help strengthen parties globally. Secretary Albright was in attendance, demonstrating her early support for WPP initiatives and gender work at NDI. Kristin describes how “the event was really more of a profile-raising effort to put us on the map, so to speak, around what would make us competitive, and that was the political parties’ piece. The action plan anchored our political party programs for years after.”

Aleksandra Cvetkovska described how the first time the NDI North Macedonia office worked with the WPP team was through Win With Women, when the office identified women politicians that could join the initiative and become gender equality advocates. Birgitta Ohlsson, Director of the Parties Team at NDI, describes learning about the Win With Women initiative when she was a member of the Swedish Parliament. In 2009, she “arranged this 2-day conference that was inspired by Win With Women and the work of Madeleine Albright,” for the Women’s Wing of the Liberal Party. The profile of the initiative had effects beyond women directly involved in the network, demonstrating its significant influence. Women party leaders like Birgitta, who were not directly involved with the initiative, independently utilized principles from the Win With Women assessment to expand women’s meaningful participation in political parties. Additionally, political parties who were directly involved with the initiative also became more inclusive. Aleksandra noted how, in North Macedonia, “many of the parties have improved their political party policies’ visibility of the women branch and women in general.”

With these early initiatives and internal advocacy within NDI, the WPP team’s role began to take shape. As demonstrated by the success of the Win With Women Global Initiative, a major focus of the team’s work at that point was on political parties, specifically through championing women candidates and working with parties to become more gender inclusive. While the Win With Women Action Plan emerged as a roadmap for how parties could become more gender inclusive, it took time for NDI’s programs to engage parties directly on



First time women candidates' training in Mindanao in 2007.

Photo credit: NDI

many of its important recommendations and integrate it broadly into its ongoing political party work. Aaron Azelton specifically noted that NDI's "women's political participation work was tied to political parties" while Kristin also noted how much of NDI's previous work on women's political participation focused on women's political party wings and caucuses. The reason for the focus was that NDI "believed that the only way to change policies in these countries, to become more inclusive of women and other marginalized groups, was to have a critical mass of women in decision-making institutions - in the parliament and in the government of their countries" (Ken Wollack). To support women in securing meaningful roles in government, NDI had to work to ensure that political parties understood the value and importance of supporting women candidates and were prepared to do so.

Ken further noted, "From my perspective, our women's programming grew naturally out of our work on party reform and renewal as a means to promote and sustain democratic systems writ large." Part of the WPP team's ability to quickly begin affecting change within political parties stems from NDI's own structure. Unlike other development organizations and donor communities, NDI's focus on women in political parties was a natural extension of the organization's genesis as a party institute and

"If we were all about democracy, it was our responsibility to find ways to have the other 50% of the population represented and engaged in politics."
- Shari Bryan

its focus on the critical role of political parties to furthering democracy. NDI's status working with a wide range of political parties helped forge credibility and build relationships with parties

globally and created the foundation for its work to advance women's political leadership.

The WPP team situated itself in an advisory capacity to regional and country teams. A significant component of the WPP team's work was providing support to the regional teams, helping to design proposals and providing insight as to what teams should consider in terms of gender, women and democracy. Kristin reflected that, "our true role back in the day was to be advisors. And so in that vein we were always...really highly regarded for that, because we took time with people." This required building a team that had expertise across functional areas and knowledge of global and regional examples of governance, elections, political parties, citizen participation approaches. This knowledge was also developed over time through the team's increasing participation in expert group meetings, work with a wide range of program partners, and by travel to each region to help in-country staff understand Win With Women and other WPP approaches. Feedback from staff, participation in programs, and identifying patterns across regions seen among women and men on the issue of women's political participation and leadership provided an excellent foundation to build a solid functional team to improve women's political participation.

The team also began to find its place among other functional teams at NDI. Kristin noted how none of the functional teams had integrated a gender focus when the WPP team was formed, but that “the other functional directors were really supportive.” She collaborated with each of the functional team directors in their specialized areas throughout her time at NDI, for example working with the Political Parties team, who identified women political party leaders to bring into the network. With regards to support for women’s political participation initiatives, Shari Bryan noted that there was some skepticism by some men within NDI, and Kristin said some people were less supportive. Shari noted that this support typically grew when “they witnessed firsthand the power of women in the countries that they were working in and saw the impact that they were having, and met some of these remarkable women who were just so obviously leaders in their country.”

Shortly after the Win With Women launch, the NDI Board created a WPP Committee, which Kristin described as a “consultative group.” Early members included Hattie Babbit, Nancy Ruben, Molly Raiser, Connie Milstein, and Geraldine Ferraro. The goal of the committee was to involve the board members in women’s political participation work. However, the committee only met once a year, typically around the time of high-profile events, and much of the work involved bilateral talks between Kristin and various members who engaged on behalf of the Institute to fundraise or speak, for example.

In May 2005, the team held the first annual Madeleine K. Albright Luncheon to recognize Secretary Albright’s work supporting women internationally. Additionally, as part of the Win With Women Global Initiative, the Madeleine K. Albright Award was created to support organizations working to create space for women’s political participation. The Award, which was presented at the Albright Luncheon, raised the profile of local organizations. Nicole Rowsell, a former NDI staff member who worked with the 2014 MKA Award recipient Aswat Nissa, said the Award helped “catapult the organization and its impact well beyond the borders of the country.” Additionally, the award and the luncheon helped to highlight NDI’s ongoing WPP work, which Kristin believes helped elevate the team’s status. Furthermore, in 2006, the **Melvin and Bren Simon Foundation made a gift to NDI to be used to support women’s political participation.** The Simon gift was then used to provide micro-grants to the MKA Award recipient to support their local WPP projects. Shari reflects that at the time the WPP team formed was around when “this sector was evolving among donor communities. So it was all happening at the right time. I mean, we were spot on to be sure. We were sort of leading the curve on this.”

On January 17, 2007, as NDI’s presence in Iraq was significantly expanding, staff member Andrea (Andi) Parhamovich was leaving a training in Baghdad when her convoy was ambushed and she was

killed. To commemorate her life and her commitment to democracy and human rights, the Parhamovich Family created the Andi Foundation. The following year, **NDI and the Andi Foundation established the Andi Parhamovich Fellowship** to honor Andi's memory and enhance the skills of women working to end conflict and expand women's political participation. Under the fellowship, a woman who was deeply involved in building democracy would travel to NDI headquarters in Washington, DC for three months to work with the GWD and relevant regional teams and develop a project focused on expanding meaningful access to public life for women in her home country. The Fellow also received funding to implement this project in her home country.

The first Andi Parhamovich Fellow was Ferdos Ameen, who had worked with Andi in Iraq to strengthen women's political participation and civil society. Gina Chirillo noted how a unique strength of the fellowship was the funding for the Fellow's project since many leadership trainings, "give women all these skills, but then not the resources to actually implement the skills that they learned. So I think providing that follow-up funding was really key for them to actually realize the implementation of their project." A total of thirteen women, first from NDI in-country offices and subsequently from local partner organizations, completed the fellowship.



Launch of iKNOW Politics in Brussels, 2008.

Photo credit: NDI

In 2007, the team significantly extended its global profile through the [Win With Women Political Party Assessment Tool](#) (PPAT) and the launch of the [International Knowledge Network of Women \(iKNOW\) in Politics](#). The Political Party Assessment tool was designed for party leaders as a self-assessment of the party's policies and practices regarding women's participation to identify strengths and weaknesses in attracting, retaining, and supporting women party members and candidates. It was based on the Win With Women

Global Action Plan and represented a natural extension of the team's dedication to creating more gender inclusive political parties. The tool was widely used by country offices to work with parties to reflect on and assess how they could capitalize on their strengths and where there were opportunities for growth in terms of women's participation and leadership and to create concrete action plans for reforming internal policies and practices.

The iKNOW Politics website represents the team's first large partner project. Kristin describes receiving emails from women across the globe asking for advice on matters like political fundraising

and thinking “Wouldn’t it be great if all of these resources could exist online? And we just have this platform where women could access all of these things directly?”

Other organizations at the time were also beginning to focus more on women’s political participation, including International IDEA, the International Parliamentary Union, UN Women, and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) which all joined NDI to collaborate on the project. The five organizations were “compelling organizations” with the “resources and the profile” to build iKNOW Politics (Kristin Haffert). Representatives from each of these organizations constituted a steering committee that created “the first digital multilingual website where women in politics could access information and talk to each other” (Kristin Haffert). The collaboration continued not only in creating the website, but also maintaining it, an innovative project in which Kristin expressed immense pride.

The five-year period after the team’s formation saw the successful consolidation of WPP resources, the development of a knowledge repository of effective WPP programming tools and approaches, and progressively higher profile for the WPP team. Kristin describes how when she arrived at NDI there were, “Scattershot programs, different activities going on in different countries. And then, we got to having a program...at least one program, if not gender mainstreamed, into nearly every country office. All 70 countries...plus regional programs.” Some of these regional programs included a multi-day conference in MENA hosted in Jordan and a Southeast Asia program managed by the NDI Pakistan office.

The team helped formalize and institutionalize women’s political participation work and support NDI in having WPP-focused programs in every region in which it was working. During this period, the team educated regional teams about gender mainstreaming and began to see some proposals and programs designed in this way. Regional teams were also using the Win With Women Action Plan as a guide for themselves in working with political parties to become more gender inclusive. Additionally, the team published resources, like “[Assessing Women’s Political Party Programs: Best Practices and Recommendations](#)”, and toolkits to support the design and implementation of more sophisticated and comprehensive WPP programs.

Toward the end of this period, the team outlined a structure for an Institute-wide, internal approach to mainstream gender into programs. Unlike the years preceding the team’s creation, the WPP team was pushing NDI and donors forward in this era. NDI was now seen as a leader and a key member of discussions on women’s political participation and was increasingly invited to speak on these issues. As the team continued to grow, Kristin notes that they “started to get funding directly for some initiatives

for just our team” The shift represents the growing role the WPP team was taking both internally at NDI and externally in the democracy development sector more broadly, as the team’s work seemed to inspire other actors, such as UNDP, to begin programming around women in political parties.

Increased Program Guidance & Development of the Theory of Change: 2010-2014

In 2010, the Director position transitioned to Susan Markham. Susan came from a primarily American politics background, working with women in politics through the U.S. Democratic Party and EMILYs List. She thought that bringing the “realism of what it’s like to run for office, led to a lot of respect for the team.” Caroline Hubbard, who would become the team’s longest serving member, was also hired at this time. There were four full time team members, and Caroline surmised that “it [the WPP team] was probably the only sort of established actual team focused on gender integration or gender and women’s political participation among U.S.-based [democracy assistance] implementing partners.”

Susan aimed to shift the team’s focus away from individual candidate trainings towards considering women’s roles in every aspect of politics, “from being citizen activists to serving as the head of civil society organizations, to working on the elections team or in elections offices all the way through being judges and other public officials that aren’t elected that sort of thing. We tried to broaden the scope of what women’s political participation meant, and expand the work.” Susan applied her background in party politics with the goal of ensuring that political parties adequately supported women candidates. She said, “We had relationships with these organizations and institutions, and so I was trying to get the rest of NDI to help us with that aspect as well.”

“If we're talking about the word gender, we need to talk about what that means with regard to politics. How does gender impact the work that we do? What are we actually trying to achieve?”
- Susan Markham

Susan and other members of the team traveled to myriad countries, often speaking with local political parties about women’s political participation. Susan would insist on meeting with the leader of the party, not only the leader of the women’s wing, because “in coming to that interview they [the male party leaders] had to be briefed, and they had to learn what was going on with women’s political participation.” The team began to prioritize shifting political party behavior in addition to recruiting women candidates.

Caroline described how the team was operating in “response to the country offices. They want to do this work, we’re going to help them do it,” which was operationalized through individually sending resources to country offices when requested. She said a big shift that “Susan and I pushed and made in those first two or three years, we moved to form an enormous amount of fact sheets. So we moved from resource aggregation and sharing to standardizing best practice into fact sheets, and then we moved into publications.” This initiative was motivated by the now vast repository of resources the team had amassed, the number of requests coming in from regional teams, and the finite capacity of a four-person team to respond. Susan corroborated that “80 percent of our time was spent working with regional teams.”

As WPP team members discussed their work with individual regional teams, they identified certain cross-cutting issues across regions, allowing them to observe global trends and create materials accordingly. Though the team continued to primarily provide technical support to regional teams and programs, in 2012 they began to receive Global Women's Leadership Fund money, a joint grant from USAID and the State Department, to implement programming. For example, the team used funding in Myanmar to map the gender composition of Parliament members. Allison Merchant, a Senior Program Assistant at the time, described how she “sat down with, like the Parliamentary Directory, and was trying to parse men versus women. So we got to really come in and sit down with advocates and allies and partners who’ve been working outside the country for so long and help them create what the next step looked like. It was really exciting.” Though the funding was smaller compared to what the team would later receive, amounting to about a million dollars, it represented a significant step towards the team receiving independent funds.

The team’s role advising regional teams and country offices expanded in the wake of the Arab Spring. Caroline noted that “it pivoted us to understanding what happens in times of political upheaval and transition. And so the work

[During the Arab Spring in] Yemen and Tunisia in particular, we really built out an example of what it looked like to integrate gender and the importance of gender integration into political transitions in that sort of period, and that built a good evidence base, and a lot of our baseline for continuing that work...and continues to inform the work that I do today.”

- Caroline Hubbard

then was given a little bit more emphasis and a little bit more focus.” In particular, the team was very involved in Tunisia. Nicole Rowsell, who led the Tunisia office during the Arab Spring, said “the gender team was a huge partner of the Tunisia office...they really leaned in to help us ensure that we were weaving in a gendered perspective to all of the work that we did.” The work in Tunisia was vast

and varied. It encompassed sex-disaggregated public opinion research, support to local partners on integrating gender issues into the Constitution drafting process, and candidate training for women running in Tunisia's first democratic elections.

In addition to global political events, Susan noted that "this idea of gender equality and women's empowerment in politics and democracy was growing as a field." In 2012, USAID released an updated Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy and the U.S. released its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). NDI's main funders were beginning to more publicly demonstrate their gender awareness and create an infrastructure to support increased programming in this area. Additionally, partner organizations like IPU and the newly established UN Women, which consolidated multiple existing gender-focused UN entities to bolster UN efforts to tackle gender discrimination and equality, mirrored NDI's shift towards focusing on institutionalizing women's political participation. Caroline described finding another one of NDI's niches, specifically through elections and "learning how to do election observation and then creating a [tool](#) to integrate gender into how people do election observation." In multiple areas of the sector, support and visibility for women's political participation work was growing.

It was also during this time that the team first decided to create a WPP team **theory of change**. Caroline described how the theory of change was **influenced by and reflected a shift across the sector from individual level capacity building for women to participate in politics toward formal rule change**. She noted, "a lot of people were putting up academic research on gender quotas" and partner organizations were also focused on changing laws.

The first iteration of the theory of change was focused on institutional and individual factors. It was heavily inspired by the team's own learning from country programs, as well as other partner organizations like IPU and UN Women. Since the consensus in the field at the time centered around the importance of formal law changes, the initial theory of change focused more heavily on advancing women's political participation through changes to the formal rules governing political organizations and processes. Caroline said, **"We didn't articulate this at the time, but the idea behind the rule changes was basically that we needed to skip over the social norm change, which we did not have strategies for and was a much longer and difficult pathway to change, and instead we just put the laws in place."** When the team first presented the theory of change at a USAID conference with stakeholders and academics, the WPP team "did include the sociocultural norm piece of it, but we were not fully developed yet, and we didn't really understand how important it was going to be." By the time Susan left NDI in 2014, the theory of change was established and being socialized throughout the Institute.

Internally at NDI, the team continued working to advance gender mainstreaming within the other functional teams and across the Institute. In 2010, the [“Democracy and the Challenge of Change: A Guide to Increasing Women’s Political Participation”](#) toolkit was published. It was created to guide program implementers in mainstreaming gender considerations in citizen participation, electoral



Women Mayors Program Participants in Cote d'Ivoire in 2014

Photo credit: NDI

processes, political party, and governance programming, with each chapter discussing how to develop, implement, and evaluate programs across each technical area in a gender responsive way. At the time, regional teams widely used the resource, much more so than by other functional teams, according to Allison Merchant.

Resources like this one represented the team’s larger efforts to disseminate the tools needed to

empower other teams across NDI to deepen and broaden gender mainstreaming within their programs. Susan described how the team often asked itself “How much do we talk? How much do we push our issue? How much do we get this in front of the senior staff, the board, our other directors?.” While the team had a number of highly visible external events and a growing public profile, it struggled to access financial resources or enough internal traction from these to expand significantly.

Women’s Political Participation —> Gender, Women and Democracy, 2014-2018

In April 2014, Susan Markham left her position as director of the WPP team to become the Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment at USAID, the highest ranking gender specialist in the agency and the second person to serve in the role. Sandra Pepera had recently done some consulting for NDI and was approached by Shari Bryan to apply for the position of Director of the Women’s Political Participation team. Though she had no professional experience with gender work, she would go on to become the longest serving director of the team. The transition between the two Directors was described as “rocky.” The timeframe was slightly unclear, as Susan had pending USAID security clearance and Sandra had a pending visa to come to Washington, DC from the UK. In addition to the change in directors, there was high turnover on the team at the time. Gina Chirillo, a former Senior Program Assistant on the team, said “I think that Caroline staying there through that transition was an extremely helpful thing for the team [because she] was the person with the institutional knowledge of the team.” Caroline describes the transition as “a little bit difficult, because we were being asked to keep the team together, and there was a lot of demand at that time,” with the team working on high-profile events, supporting country programs, and conducting its own research.

At the same time, within the team there was sometimes a feeling that their work was not supported by the rest of NDI, possibly because of the challenging nature of norm change and organizational change, which the WPP Team was committed to. As a result, “every time we went to advise or try to design or co-design a program with folks outside the team, we were battling norms - even though we were their colleagues - that we were making a lot of noise and we shouldn't be listened to” (Sandra Pepera).

The team was approximately five members when Sandra started, having remained fairly consistent in size over time. When she arrived, Sandra spoke with NDI President Ken Wollack, who said the WPP team was “one of our hidden jewels” and asked her to increase the visibility of the work (Sandra Pepera). Sandra outlined the “two important things” she did in her first months at NDI. First, she confirmed Caroline as WPP Deputy Director and began the process to make her NDI’s Senior Gender Advisor. Sandra specified how Caroline became “*NDI’s* Senior Gender Advisor, not *my* Senior Gender Advisor,” further mainstreaming gender within the organization. Secondly, she decided to add a team member with monitoring and evaluation expertise to better support programming. She saw that “not being able to properly assess and challenge and potentially amplify certain results was going to hamper us.” She described how each of these experts were “fantastic” because “they all had the ability to convey some quite tricky M&E type concepts, techniques and technicalities to non-experts.”

The most visible change in the early days of Sandra’s leadership was the team’s name change from Women’s Political Participation to Gender, Women and Democracy. **The development of the theory of change indicated that the team was not “just talking about changing women. This isn’t about women. We’re talking about changing gendered systems and gendered structures”** (Caroline Hubbard). While the team had not yet fully developed its work with men or LGBTQI+ groups, there was a concerted effort to approach the work as broader than being solely about women.

Discussions within the team about the name change had started in the latter part of Susan’s tenure. Caroline said “As soon as [Sandra] started, it was one of the things we started talking about with her.” Sandra noted that “by the time I got there, the team was definitely working on gender and democracy. The team wasn’t [just] doing women’s political participation anymore...So we had to change the name to be true to who we were.” Gina Chirillo noted that the “the name of the team would encompass everything that the team did. Gender, Women and Democracy, like you could just say it, and you would know that that’s what the team did.” The GWD team did not change its fundamental approaches to programming after the name change; rather, the transition from “Women’s Political Participation” to “Gender, Women and Democracy” nomenclature better reflected the totality of the work the team was doing and its increasing focus on the importance of addressing social norms for

gender transformation. This was largely driven by the new theory of change that “became the most known and widely recited theory of change across the Institute” (Sandra Pepera).

The GWD team’s commitment to social norm change was clear, as NDI President Tamara Cofman Wittes noted, “GWD takes [their] approach so much to heart in the way that it addresses the barriers that women face as being about power... **it’s not just about what are the rules. It’s about people and how they interact and what their expectations are and what their attitudes are,** and I think that is a deeper way of understanding the challenge and addressing it. But I also think it’s a much more impactful way.” Sandra noted, “we were not playing with the fact that we needed to drive change. Change was not negotiable. Change had to happen.”

As the team continued to evolve, it added a **partnership with the Madeleine Korbel Albright Institute for Global Affairs at Wellesley College**. The [Albright Institute](#) is home to a fellowship program which selects juniors and seniors from Wellesley College, Secretary Albright’s alma mater, to receive an intensive training in global affairs followed by a practicum experience. At the suggestion of Secretary Albright, the GWD team signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2018 with the Albright Institute. Since then, NDI has hosted at least one MKA Fellow annually. Molly Middlehurst, who supervised multiple Fellows, described how the work the MKA Fellows did was substantive and “used for real projects.”



Stakeholders at GWD’s first violence against women in politics roundtable in 2015

Photo credit: Ezra Gregg

In 2014, the GWD team began work on violence against women in politics, which formed the basis for one of its most visible and impactful flagship initiatives. Some academics were beginning to highlight violence happening prior to election day to try to raise the profile of an issue that some NDI partners, such as the MKA Award-winning

Association of Councilwomen of Bolivia (ACOBOL), had been working on for over a decade. However, no major democracy assistance organizations had the tools or theoretical framework to support women affected by gendered political violence. Caroline described this moment as one in

which **“the Global North finally realized how to name and fundraise and program for a problem that already existed.”**

NDI was able to develop the framework, funding, and awareness to highlight the issue of violence against women in politics within the democracy space. The initial goal of the GWD team’s work was to aggregate existing knowledge and to create and make visible tools to counter violence against women in politics (VAW-P). Among the democracy development sector, NDI is widely recognized as the first organization to fully embrace the issue. Tamara Cofman Wittes, President of NDI, stated that GWD’s work was ahead of the policy conversation by “spotting the issues, elevating their profile, and providing interventions.” Caroline observed that now “everybody that does women in politics does violence against women in politics. And I think that absolutely is due to the partnership and the collaboration and the efforts among us early stakeholders to elevate this issue.”

The team embraced collaboration with other early stakeholders to further the project. Mona Lena Krook, an academic working on the issue, was an early collaborator with the GWD team and was described as being instrumental in building the campaign alongside the team and helping to ensure that everything was both “theoretically rigorous and politically convincing” (Sandra Pepera). From this early work, the team developed the Votes Without Violence manual, [website](#), and methodology, which were released in 2015.

Subsequently, GWD launched its #NotTheCost campaign in 2016, with a [call to action](#) and program guidance aiming to end all forms of aggression, coercion, and intimidation against women as political actors. The team framed violence against women in politics as a human rights issue, a democracy issue, and a women’s rights issue. Caroline said this framing was an important reason why NDI leadership and others supported the project, because “we were making the case through accepted international standards, which is how the election observation case is made in terms of what makes it an election democratic, for example. Additionally, the actual [#NotTheCost launch] event itself is where we started to get a lot more buy-in.”

A number of factors led to the increased buy-in. Institutional partners, namely the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, International IDEA, the InterParliamentary Union, the



Sophie Grégoire Trudeau speaking at the #NotTheCost launch in 2016.

Photo credit: Ezra Gregg

Organization of American States, UN Women, and the United States' State Department and Agency for International Development supported the launch. Caroline noted, "their organizations, not just their gender units, were formal partners for the launch." She further explained how influential figures like Sophie Grégoire Trudeau and Madeleine Albright spoke at the launch and leading parliamentarians from the UK testified to their experiences. The event successfully raised the visibility of the initiative and, at the time of launch, the GWD team had also developed a comprehensive communications strategy. The recently established GWD Twitter account would become the most followed NDI account after the organization's main account. The team strategically positioned the initiative to garner buy-in both across the organization and externally.

As NDI's violence against women in politics (VAW-P) work progressed, the team expanded its work into distinct programmatic areas. The GWD team created ["No Party to Violence"](#), a compendium of research findings following the team's work with political parties, on the heels of re-launching the Win With Women initiative in 2018 with updated guidance for parties. Additionally, the team developed the ["think10"](#) risk assessment and safety planning tool for women in politics. Keila González, former Resident Director in Mexico who helped to implement VAW-P programs, recalls realizing that personal safety "skills are part of what NDI can do to support women," and said "I love that NDI is starting to include personal security issues. It was so key and so useful and so important because NDI can also provide to these women techniques, tools, and knowledge that can help them on those very sensitive and very complicated parts of political work." The GWD team considered the issue of VAW-P in a multidimensional way, one which reflected the team's theory of change.

The #NotTheCost campaign rapidly raised awareness of violence against women in politics. Caroline reflected on how "the momentum from the launch, the recognition, visibility, funding that went into addressing the issue of violence against women in politics, happened at a speed much more quickly

"Our team identified the [violence against women in politics] need like a decade ago, when it was so nascent. So, having our ears to the ground of what real women out there are dealing with and then seeing that trend and starting to talk about it, starting to help people address it [helped it] be embedded in so many of our programs."

- Stephanie Rust

than anything else we had seen. I mean, it really went, it was really quick like within a year to two years."

When interviewees were asked about standout GWD projects, the work on violence against women in

politics nearly always came up as a particularly innovative and resonant campaign. Missy Reif, a Program Director on the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) team at NDI, said "I think #NotTheCost has been extremely effective...I think that's an initiative where it has really been

successful, and I think the message is still very relevant..." Also within the LAC region, Keila Gonzalez said leading training on VAW-P made her realize that "I didn't fully understand what these women that choose public life have to face in terms of violence... in terms of how insecure they felt." She emphasized the importance of providing techniques to women that can "help them on those very sensitive and complicated parts of the political work." Aleksandra Cvetkovska, formerly of NDI North Macedonia, now works as an independent gender consultant with a particular focus on eliminating violence against women in politics. She described how the campaign ignited her passion for the work, saying it "comes from my previous work at NDI." The introduction of this flagship campaign demonstrates how the GWD team both pushed the sector and NDI forward during this period.

Influx of Funding and GWD Program Growth, 2019-2024

The GWD team underwent a significant expansion in 2019 with the influx of funding coming to NDI from the US State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) through the Political Accountability, Inclusivity, and Resiliency Support (PAIRS) award. This award came during a period when donors were pushing for increased gender and inclusion work, which enabled the GWD team to significantly expand its programming and gender mainstreaming work.

Prior to NDI winning the PAIRS award, most GWD work was funded through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and typically totalled less than \$300,000 per year for the team. The PAIRS-funded projects included three initiatives, including two projects of one million dollars each, within approximately six months of each other. Molly Middlehurst, a former GWD Program Director, said "that was a really huge moment of transition for the team. We had never managed budgets that big. They all had major subgranting components. They were much bigger, much more rigorous. It's a very different thing to write and run a State Department program than it is to write and run a NED program, and so that was seismic for our team." Molly described how the shift "gave us a really different standing" within NDI, as the team was able to have a different impact running programs, as well as continuing to serve an advisory capacity. This funding influx prompted the team to gradually expand its staffing footprint over the next six years.

When Donald Trump issued his Executive Order on Reevaluating and Realigning U.S. Foreign Aid in January 2025, the GWD team was composed of 11 people. This was more than double the amount of people as it had consistently been for the past decade, which was four to six. In 2023, the team also took on its first embedded in-country staff member, Rose Musa, who had previously been a Gender Advisor in the NDI Nigeria office. Reflecting on the position, Rose said "I was able to support the country office, despite the fact that I was not a staff of the country office. So it gave the impression, and I think, rightly so, that it's still one NDI." However, she said since the position was remote, it took a

long time to get to know the team members based in D.C. Molly, who worked on the team at the same time as Rose, said it could be useful to have “much more gender expertise diffused throughout different parts of NDI,” such as embedded in country offices.

As donors began prioritizing GWD work more, they also mandated more extensive requirements for programming. Stephanie Lynn, NDI Serbia Country Director, said “we’re not entirely donor driven, but it’s a big piece. So as the USG [U.S. Government] work has pushed this, these types of [gender] measurements and outcomes for countries, we’ve gotten better at it.” One noticeable change during this time period was the rise of donor-required gender assessments. While the GWD team always acted in an advisory capacity to regional and country teams for proposal design and implementation, the role began to shift due to the quantity of programs and gender assessments and GWD’s increased focus on designing and implementing its own programming. When Susan Markham returned to the GWD team in 2024 as Interim Director, she noted that originally, “80 percent of our time was spent working with regional teams. And when I came back it was like 10/90. 90 percent was on independent projects, and only 10 percent on regional teams.” She observed that, “we were looking at every proposal. But we weren’t part of why the proposal was being written, or why gender was part of it. And so it was kind of after the fact.” At the same time, Molly Middlehurst acknowledged the reality that GWD is “a small team; we can’t be everywhere all at once.”

During this time, the GWD team also moved to more direct collaboration with country teams. Sandra said, “what we knew from a staff engagement survey in about 2018 or 2019 was that the country teams really wanted to have more direct engagement with the functional teams.” The PAIRS funding that was directly awarded to GWD allowed the team to select countries in which to pilot programs that they were developing and work directly with those country offices. The shift facilitated deeper relationships between the Washington-based functional team and the country teams. One challenge, however, that Missy Reif of the Latin America and Caribbean team expressed, was how this shift sometimes resulted in regional teams not being adequately brought into the process or consulted on “regional or country specific context.” This funding influx and subsequent shift in the amount of time that the GWD team spent on direct program implementation led to another transition period as the team sought to establish and manage a new dynamic within the Institute.

Beginning in 2020, GWD programming began to include more concerted outreach to new groups. **The Women’s Inclusive Leadership and Advocacy (WILAP) program, launched with PAIRS funding, marked the first GWD program focused specifically on lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women.** The program “was focused on creating opportunities and spaces for LGBTQIA+ women who might be interested in politics, but also just participation in LGBTQIA+

movements that were often very male dominated” (Molly Middlehurst). The program marked a shift toward a more intersectional approach to understanding and addressing the challenges and barriers that diverse groups of women face.

In 2020, the GWD Team launched the [Men, Power and Politics](#) (MPP) flagship initiative with the aim of engaging male political leaders to further gender equality by transforming their understanding of gender and by providing a methodology and guidance for doing so. The team piloted the program with senior leaders at NDI, including former NDI President Derek Mitchell, and encouraged country office staff to go through the MPP curriculum, as well.

“The work that the team managed to do... moving into the masculinity space and engaging those gatekeepers who are predominantly male...was a very important shift in the work to be looking at the ecosystem of what impacts participation more broadly, and where women and gender fit within that system.”
- Nicole Rowsell

Molly noted how Men, Power and Politics was “incredible in that the teams that decided to go with it when we wrote it in [to proposals], or if they had an interest, oftentimes they saw themselves how beneficial it was.” She said the initiative led to the GWD team working with country teams that “we hadn’t worked with a ton in the past, or maybe we hadn’t had an opening for that sociocultural work”.

Another major shift during this time was during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the team to adapt heavily at a time when multiple large PAIRS programs were being launched. The team learned and adapted as quickly as possible to more remote engagement methodologies, notably filming training curricula for the two major PAIRS programs. Additionally, the team created the “Shocks, Democracy and Gender” framework to “think about how things like conflict, things like natural and manmade disasters, pandemics, how that sort of shrinks the space for women. What are the effects of lockdowns when we’re working with women who, maybe...are locked down with abusers?” (Molly Middlehurst). The team adapted to the changing circumstances of the pandemic and approached programming with a different pedagogy due to its primarily online nature. Some of these changes remained after the pandemic, including decreased team travel. Molly described how “I would be meeting with the partner and talking to them and reviewing what they were doing and doing that remotely,” which the team continued doing virtually after the pandemic subsided. This type of virtual engagement increased the

GWD team's ability to work directly with a greater number of local partners while also decreasing program expenses.

In addition to the team's shift in its engagement and program delivery approach online during the pandemic, its VAW-P work took a greater focus on online violence against women in politics. As the world moved online during the pandemic and new digital platforms and mis/disinformation proliferated, so did the ways in which women in politics were being threatened and harassed. In response, GWD increasingly focused on online VAW-P. The issue had been a peripheral part of the early VAW-P work, as "a couple of people at that first definitional roundtable were already thinking about this in the online space. But our initial framework was not focused as much online" (Caroline Hubbard). Sandra reflected that, "in 2016, [discussion around VAW-P] was 85% the physical and maybe 15% the online space. By the time we did the second call to action that percentage was almost reversed. **It wasn't that women weren't still getting aggressed - physically they were, and it was as dangerous as ever - but the the focus had shifted just exponentially to the online space, not only for that direct abuse, but also what we were learning about disinformation and what we were learning about the political use of the digital space to shift political action on the part of voters. That's what changed in those 5 years.**"

In 2021, a renewed #NotTheCost call to action was published, reflecting the shifting online focus. The team went on to release the ["Tweets That Chill"](#) and ["Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide"](#) resources. Sandra noted that the "Tweets That Chill" publication marked one of the first resources on online violence and that the GWD team was "the first to really understand it. Again, there have always been people who wrote the stories. What we tried to do was show what was happening with that in terms of women's participation, in terms of the changing politics, in terms of the changing ways in which people of all kinds were receiving information."

The rapid expansion in GWD-led programming facilitated productive collaboration with other NDI functional teams. The focus on online VAW-P, for example, led to collaboration with the Democracy and Technology (DemTech) team. When Moira Whelan became the Democracy and Technology (DemTech) Director in 2020 she was eager to help Sandra further gender work with regard to technology beyond what the GWD team was capable of. Similarly, Kristen Sample, who joined NDI in 2020 as Director of the Democratic Governance (DemGov) team, said, "when I came into NDI, GWD was already a very strong, consolidated, external-facing, well-known, hard-driving entity." The GWD and DemGov teams collaborated on local governance, community resilience and parliamentary work. Sandra noted how "I was really lucky to get an influx of brilliant new women functional directors."

When Sandra left in 2024, six of the eight functional team directors were women, as opposed to two women functional directors when she started. This “changed the tone of the discussion and our thematic work. It changed the tone of the discussion around who gets in, who's left out” (Sandra Pepera). Despite successful internal collaborations, however, Sandra felt it was difficult to harness the team’s external visibility and “bring it back into the institution and help the institution really leverage that and take it forward. We never cracked that.” By all accounts, however, the years 2019-2024 were marked by significant expansion for the GWD team and provided the team with the resources to push forward both NDI and the broader field.

Part II: Recurring Themes

As the oral history interviews probed how and why the GWD team developed as it did, some common threads began to emerge. Multiple interviewees analyzed key elements of how the work was conceptualized and developed. These throughlines remained consistent across multiple eras of the WPP/GWD team and underscore key factors in the evolution of GWD work.

Importance of a Dual-Track Approach

The GWD team has balanced a number of roles throughout its more than twenty years at NDI and has continually had to make decisions as to how to focus its work, as both internal and external priorities shift and both the political context and gender and democracy fields continue to evolve.

One key component in the team's work since its inception is the utilization of a dual track approach to simultaneously pursue both gender mainstreaming and standalone or targeted programming for women. Susan Markham described how this has been a debate throughout her career doing gender work and noted that, "you have to do both. There's no simple answer that if we only work with women that will empower them. Sometimes, you do need to only work with women because they are going to talk about things that they might not talk about if there's a man present. On the other hand, if men aren't talking about these issues, then we're preaching to the choir. So we need to talk to men who have the power and control the institutions that we want to change."

The GWD team's early work gained traction largely around standalone or targeted programming, specifically through candidate training and work with political party women's wings and women's parliamentary caucuses. Gina Chirillo noted that having a woman-only space for participants who are then integrated in a larger space can support gender equality programming. However, Shannon O'Connell also noted that **if practitioners don't look "at where the problem is coming from, you make the mistake of trying to fix the women instead of fixing the system."** The GWD Team understood the importance of precisely identifying the barriers that women face and designing appropriately targeted interventions.

Over time, initiatives like Men, Power and Politics aimed to create systemic sociocultural change through cultivating male champions of change and to better ensure that NDI was addressing both

*"It doesn't matter if you're talking about elections, if you're talking about governance...having the [GWD] team to be aware, to learn more about that perspective and how to mainstream gender perspectives. I think it's really, really important."
- Keila Gonzalez*

supply and demand issues around women's participation in public life. Part of the team's success is rooted in successfully institutionalizing the importance of gender mainstreaming across all regions and technical areas, which was supported by resources such as the "Democracy and the Challenge of Change" toolkit.

Tamara Cofman Wittes noted that a success of the team was, "integrating a stronger awareness of engagement with gender inclusion, objectives and tools across NDI's programming, so that I think all the program teams understood it was core to their work, and that wasn't true 20 years ago." Gender mainstreaming was reinforced through increasingly rigorous donor demands in this area. Molly Middlehurst noted the importance of "the requirement from so many different funders to have gender assessments early on in the programs, and to actually have those be living documents that are supposed to guide the strategy and the implementation of programs." As more donors required gender assessments, gender considerations and a gender lens were increasingly integrated into all aspects of programming. The team helped ensure that initiatives were designed in ways that were gender transformative and responsive to donors and other stakeholders. The team evolved the ways in which it pursued gender mainstreaming throughout all aspects of program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, pushing the Institute to take a more comprehensive approach to gender inclusive democracy support while continuing to support women at the individual level.

Balancing Regional Support and GWD-Led Projects

Another dynamic area for the GWD team was balancing its support to regional teams and managing GWD-driven programming. From the earliest days of the team, team members would routinely sit



NDI Colombia supporting the #NotTheCost/#NoEsElCosto campaign during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence in 2017.

Photo credit: NDI

down with regional team members in what multiple former team members described as an "advisory role." Kristin Haffert advocated for the importance of ensuring that the GWD team works with regional teams since "it also engages people more, it brings them in, it gives them ownership, whereas if you're just building it on the sidelines, you're losing your audience. This all has to be interconnected." Chief Programs Officer Stephanie Rust echoed this sentiment, saying that GWD team members working closely and on the ground with country offices was extremely

beneficial. Regional teams that worked in a hands-on manner with GWD "have really appreciated and benefited from that type of tight coordination and really specific technical support from GWD". Keila

Gonzalez noted that the methodological and conceptual frameworks that the GWD Team developed and advised country offices on how to use were “one of the greatest contributions from this team.”

As the team began receiving its own project funding, most notably through PAIRS, they began to spend more time designing and implementing their own programming. Rose Musa, who was in the Nigeria country office during a time when GWD was implementing a lot of its own programming, said “I was surprised when I joined GWD that I didn’t know a lot of things that NDI has done or was doing that would have informed my work. So that was missing. And I think it has to do with the structure because GWD staff, as a functional team, were not dealing directly with the country offices, but before I left, I was glad to see that changing.”

For many years, the NDI proposal review process was *ad-hoc* and relied more on personal relationships between functional and regional team members. However, as the proposal design process became more formalized and more structured over time and as the volume of proposals increased exponentially, the team had less capacity to build the same relationships. As Sandra Pepera said, “we were getting slammed with proposals, I can remember days when I was reviewing 3 or 4 against the deadline at a time.” Over time, the GWD team’s relationship with regional, country, and other functional teams has been dynamic, with leadership striving to find the right balance between advisory, thought leadership, and program management roles.

Importance of an Organizational Culture & Systems that Support Gender Equality Work

While the importance of a team specifically dedicated to gender, women and democracy cannot be overstated, it is also necessary to establish benchmarks and an infrastructure for supporting gender equality across the entire organization. Part of NDI’s role as a leader on gender, women and democracy stems from its individual gender champions committed to furthering this work. Shannon O’Connell, who formerly worked in four different NDI country offices, said the work was extremely effective when “it was individuals within the country offices, and it was most effective when it was led by the local staff. So when you had a country director who was keyed into the importance of this work, but the design and the approach was led by local expertise.” She said she saw the biggest impacts of gender programming occurring when utilizing local staff’s expertise and emphasized the importance of having country directors with gender sensitivity. Regional and country staff have immense power to further GWD work. Ken Wollack, former President of NDI, described how “I could name country directors that really, really pushed these issues hard, and became known in the country as a person that would

push women's empowerment. And they moved the ball. They sometimes single-handedly moved the ball."

**"Democracy is for everyone, and if democracy is for everyone, then gender inclusion is integral to what we do."
- Tamara Cofman Wittes**

Over time, the GWD team worked with members of functional, regional, and country teams to help broaden gender equality within NDI. Missy Reif described a push to use more inclusive language from LAC team members, for example. When Kristen Sample hired the two most senior people on the DemGov team, she "was very keen to make sure that they had sensitivity to the [gender] issue." An organization that is composed of individuals who are aware of and sensitive toward gender issues has allowed NDI to become an increasingly more equitable organization. Susan Markham described another important shift when she returned in 2024 and NDI had its first female president, saying "That's the goal, for us gender people to not have gender in our title anymore. We want to be Directors and Presidents...Tamara [Cofman Wittes], definitely had the knowledge, was interested in the topic, was a champion sitting in her position as president. So that was a huge change." As discussed earlier, the composition of functional team directors, and to some extent regional directors, to include exponentially more women was also an important organizational shift.

Throughout the shifts in the team, the importance of gender, women and democracy has consistently been a "fundamental principle at the heart of the work" according to NDI President Tamara Cofman Wittes, who noted, **"Political inclusion for women is not just a means to development ends. It is a right." Gender equality work does not solely belong to the GWD team, but rather belongs to the entire organization.**

Madeleine Albright's Advocacy & Influence

Madeleine Albright's support of NDI's gender, women and democracy work is a throughline from before the team's formation through her death in 2021. She particularly assisted in raising the team's profile internally at NDI and externally in the development sector. Shari Bryan noted that "I think we still would have expanded our women in politics programming, but no doubt the doors that Madeleine opened were just tremendous." NDI President Tamara Cofman Wittes expressed a similar sentiment, saying "It was a priority for her, for NDI to be committed to this work. But I think it's really important to say that NDI is committed to this work, and it wasn't just that Madeleine was driving it."

Other interviewees expanded on Secretary Albright's influence. Nicole Rowsell said, "I think the



Secretary Madeleine Albright speaking at the 2003 Win With Women Global Forum in Washington, D.C.

Photo credit: NDI

Secretary was always very keen on making sure that women were actively supporting one another, were networked in ways that helped that coalition building and advocacy work, and she was a tireless advocate to lend her name. I can't think of a time when NDI had an ask of her, with regards to gender, that she said no to." That support remained constant throughout the life of the team and was a critical driver in expanding GWD programming. In the early years, Kristin Haffert said "it can't be underestimated that she is part of the reason why people did jockey for creating programs around this in the different countries and the different regions." Sandra expressed how

"people knew that anything to do with violence against women, she would write, she would turn up, she would do a podcast, whatever. We asked her, she did it." Outside of NDI, Shannon O'Connell recalled how Secretary Albright brought legitimacy to the issue, noting, "when you have somebody like [Madeleine] Albright saying, 'democracy doesn't move forward without this,' and she was absolutely right, that made a difference. Other organizations followed, I think, as a result of that leadership."

In addition to her support for GWD initiatives, Secretary Albright personally advocated women's empowerment. Ken described her as "a force of nature" and emphasized how she "didn't hesitate to lecture male politicians on [women's rights and gender equality]. She used her power and influence, as well, to push male-dominated institutions. So I think both her effect on women, themselves, and also the ability to influence the behavior of male politicians were hallmarks of Madeleine's impact."

Combined with influential women like Geraldine Ferraro and Hattie Babbitt, advocating from the Board, and others advocating from the internal leadership positions early on, to politicians like Rashida Tlaib and Stacey Abrams spotlighting recent GWD initiatives, these efforts helped further the team's work by lending legitimacy and visibility to the team's efforts.

NDI is a Thought Leader on Gender, Women, and Democracy

Gender, women and democracy work within NDI has consistently been both innovative and influential within the sector. Susan Markham said, "I think NDI has been a leader in this space for decades, and I think that as long as this space continues to exist, NDI will continue as a leader, both building on the internal work and the global programs." In terms of internal work, Aaron Azelton was asked about the effects of the work and said, "I don't think you can begin to add it all up, it's pretty significant. **It really did, across the board, change the way in which we do think about**

programming." Institutionally, protocols have changed, with Stephanie Lynn noting, for example, "you could not have a program today at NDI, I hope, that does not collect sex-disaggregated data."

The GWD team's significant thought leadership extends widely within the sector. Kristin Haffert noted, "you can say without a doubt that the US Government is doing things, well, *was* doing things, until recently, that would never have been happening if our team did not exist." Interviewees pointed to the fact that the World Bank's Voice and Agency Report and USAID's model on women's political leadership reflected GWD's theory of change; that the WPP team helped the International Republican Institute form their Women's Democracy Network; and that NDI's leadership has positively influenced external actors like donors and partner organizations on gender, women and democracy.

Since its inception, the team has pioneered programming that was far ahead of the curve. iKNOWPolitics was created before the concept of knowledge networks was common, for example. Kristin Haffert described how "it became a repository for these resources, and the people know that they can go there for stuff... We kept it. We created a space for this audience." Furthermore, most interviewees emphasized the impact of the team's work on violence against women in politics, which began by consolidating knowledge on the issue ahead of most other practitioners. Now, the issue is consistently highlighted by academics, partner organizations, and other stakeholders. Ken Wollack, former President of NDI, said VAW-P has become a "major global initiative" and "major focus of NDI's work."

GWD programming has also been innovative in its outreach to different audiences. The Men, Power and Politics initiative engaged and cultivated male allies to unpack and disrupt harmful gender norms and stereotypes. DISRUPTHER built the first global civic education curriculum for adolescent girls

"Women aren't a monolith. There's not one type of woman out there that has one set of barriers. When we're talking about... tackling some of the challenges that women experience, it's going to be different, depending on what types of women."
- Molly Middlehurst

to strengthen the pipeline to their political participation and leadership. WILAP sought to make LGBTQIA+ movements more inclusive, highlighting the diverse experiences of queer women. The team's approach to gender equality and women's empowerment has consistently approached the issue from an intersectional perspective, driven by a multidimensional theory of change.

Tamara Cofman Wittes rightfully noted that gender transformative work must be done "across generations and so it's painstaking...it's really really hard to do all the things that need to be done to get

traction...It takes time, and you have to go back over it and back over it and back over it... We've been able to do some good stuff. And I want us to be able to do more."

GWD Impact on Stakeholders

The most important impact of NDI's gender, women and democracy work is indisputably its effects on partners around the world. Badié Hima, Resident Director in NDI's Mali office, said the organization's job is to "give [communities] a voice, and then transform their words into something that meets their needs." When asked about NDI's impact, Ken Wollack responded, **"I am reluctant to talk about *our* impact. I'd rather talk about the impact of the women on the ground. They are the ones who deserve credit, but I think that the solidarity and the support they received from NDI made a difference. We were supporting actors in their struggle."**

Other interviewees elaborated on how NDI showed solidarity with women in the country in which programming was occurring. Merita Gidarjati, who worked on women's political participation programming in the NDI Indonesia office, observed that as a result of participating in NDI activities, "women have more confidence and more organized strategies to strengthen their position in political parties and in getting elected either for parliament or executive positions." Les Campbell said, beyond



Woman Commune Council Candidate in Cambodia, 2007.

Photo credit: NDI

the statistics, he was most proud of the impact of NDI's work on individual women. He praised "the fact that they [women] have the skills and the confidence and the knowledge that they got from us which has helped them throughout the last 20 or 30 years to continue to be leaders. So that's the huge impact."

Molly Middlehurst describes conducting training on violence against women in politics where the women "would say 'I had no idea that this had a name. I had no idea that I wasn't the only one. I had no idea how common this was.' And so again, I think to have women have that sense of community that they weren't alone, that this was not just something they were facing, that other women in politics were facing this around the world. I think often it was very impactful to hear that."

Susan Markham described a moving moment in Yemen where she had been training women on helping to draft the Constitution and lead in the new government. After the training, these women

arrived early to the Constitutional Convention and seated themselves in the first row. When male leaders arrived late to the convention and expected the women to vacate the front row seats that they were occupying, the women asserted their right to stay in their seats. This small moment represented how the training had “changed the way they thought about themselves and the role that they could play in their country” (Susan Markham). Shannon O’Connell recalled working with a 36-year old woman in Romania working at senior levels of Parliament who told her, “You’re the first person in my life who ever said you believed in me.” Importantly, these impacts on individual women were also impacting the political and sociocultural systems in which they were operating.

The team’s work on violence against women in politics also inspired an increased awareness of and willingness to discuss the issue among partners. Recalling a conversation with a woman MP in North Macedonia, Aleksandra Cvetskova said that “the campaign actually encouraged women to speak up, to come forward, so that sparked the increase of discussing violence.” Les Campbell described how in 1997 “there were 80 women in Parliaments in the Middle East. By 2018, there were 657. The number of women in ministerial positions [in Middle East countries] in 1997 was 11. By 2018, 49. The percentage of women who are ministers has gone up in every country...those are some big things, and the success is attributable to the regional team, but also to what we now call GWD.”

In addition to strengthening the capacity of individual women, GWD’s work helps local partners and stakeholders strengthen their organizational capacity. Missy Reif described working with partner organizations on multiple projects and seeing them grow, such as when “we actually worked with the one of the subgrantees from the [Strengthening Urban Women-Led CSOs] program, who, we felt, had grown and advanced and was able to receive a lot more money than they had previously, and they were going to help us be the co-implementer for a new program we were designing.” Such ongoing relationships help both NDI and partner organizations thrive. Molly described how part of the WILAP program involved partners having in-person sessions where “they just really cherished having this space to connect with each other, to talk about their challenges, to feel safe. And it was a really, really special program.” Though GWD was central to the program, particularly in terms of capacity building support, NDI’s approach helped partners take the lead on program implementation. Nicole Rowsell discussed how NDI has taken on more “equitable approaches to partnership”, including “taking in partner feedback in much more strategic and intentional ways.”

“My engagement with NDI and NDI’s partners on [gender] issues changed my attitude and my understanding.”
- Tamara Cofman Wittes

Cutting-Edge Programmatic Approaches

The GWD team has consistently put out forward-thinking, innovative resources and programming, from Win With Women to think10. In addition to some of the major initiatives already discussed, like Men, Power and Politics, Win With Women, and #NotTheCost, participants highlighted other key projects that, throughout GWD's twenty years of programming, stood out as particularly effective.

The Strengthening Urban Women-Led CSOs program fostered collaboration internally, between NDI teams, and externally, between NDI and partner organizations in Mexico, Burkina Faso, and Zambia. Funded by the Hewlett Foundation, it is the largest privately funded GWD project to date and aimed to increase women and girls' perspectives in urban policy. The team worked with urban-based women-led civil society organizations on gender equality projects. Missy Reif, who works on the LAC team and helped implement the project in Oaxaca, Mexico, highlighted the program as an exemplar of successful partnership between GWD, regional, and country teams.



Stacey Abrams and Mexican delegates from GWD's Strengthening Urban Women-Led CSOs at the 2023 Women Deliver Conference.

Photo credit: Kaimyn Paszko

Other initiatives provided professional development and skills training for women while also highlighting GWD's work. Ahead of the 2023 global Women Deliver conference in Rwanda, the team brought eighteen women from Burkina Faso, Mexico, and Zambia who had participated in the Hewlett-funded Strengthening Urban Women-Led CSOs program to three days of workshops in Rwanda. NDI Board Member Stacey Abrams joined the group for most of the week. Sandra noted how the effort was meaningful since some of the women "had never had a passport, let alone got on a plane before." Additionally, the team hosted three programs at the summit, which "got a lot of airtime and network time" (Sandra Pepera).



Geraldine Ferraro Women in Politics
Lunch Flyer at the 2012 International
Leaders' Forum

Photo credit: NDI

The NDI-organized International Leaders Forum at the Democratic National Conventions is an event that provided an opportunity to both highlight and integrate GWD issues. Geraldine Ferraro would often arrange lunches for mainly female political participants at the event. Birgitta Ohlsson described attending the 2004 lunch when she was a young Swedish politician, reflecting, “it was an excellent event to gather our global audience who attended” and “it gave a feminist boost for the ILF participants and was helpful for me and other politicians attending to being more involved with NDI.” Allison Merchant, who attended the event when she worked for the GWD team in 2012, said it was meaningful because the GWD team was “able to integrate into this big platform. Not a gender platform. Not a women's event. But instead,

have it be part of a kind of main stage conversation.”

Furthermore, multiple interviewees highlighted a women’s birth certificate initiative as being particularly creative and responsive to women’s needs. This program originally set out to increase voter registration among women in Burkina Faso, funded by the DRL Fundamental Freedoms Fund Award. However, program implementers soon discovered that many women did not have birth certificates, a root cause that prevented them from being able to register to vote and to access a range of other key rights, services and processes. As a result, the team pivoted to helping women obtain birth certificates. The process was difficult, involving multiple other residents needing to confirm a woman’s date and place of birth, as per criteria set out under Burkina Faso law. While the project’s overarching objective was to support women’s political participation, in practice it addressed a root structural barrier to women’s participation in public life. It thereby helped ensure that women were better able “to participate in society generally, and it's an example of where we really looked at what the needs are and why aren't women registering to vote and addressed that need” (Gina Chirillo).

Another unique strength of the team’s programmatic approach is its commitment to outreach to specific and diverse groups of women and girls. In 2021, the DISRUPTHER program launched, the first GWD program focused specifically on young women and adolescent girls. The program initially operated in Kenya and Brazil. DISRUPTHER encompassed curriculum development and piloting to deepen the pool of adolescent girls and young women with political skills and aspirations to be politically-active young leaders.

GWD's innovation also extended to how the team navigated partnerships. Among NED partner organizations, Sandra recalls working most closely with the Center for International Private Enterprise during her time as director, saying "We just got on well, and we wanted to work together." One of the programs the teams collaborated on was a modified version of the updated Win With Women Political Party Assessment Tool adapted for Chambers of Commerce, which CIPE used in male-dominated chambers around the world. "They loved it," Sandra recalled. GWD also partnered with CIPE on a women in business project in Nigeria and the Philippines. Such collaborations with other organizations allowed the GWD team to expand its work outside of NDI's historical priority areas.

Conclusion

As a result of President Trump's Executive Order 14169 on "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid" and subsequent Stop Work Orders from USAID and the Department of State, effectively immediately ended all foreign assistance. As a result, NDI was forced to significantly downsize; the GWD team - along with all functional teams - was dissolved. While the current political context may make it difficult to imagine the future of gender, women and democracy programming, NDI remains committed to doing so. NDI Senior Gender Advisor Alyson Kozma noted that, **"it is such a core and fundamental part of who we are, what we do, and how we do it."** Stephanie Rust added that **gender, women, and democracy work "is so central to NDI's DNA. It is going to be a core part of what NDI does, regardless of who our donors are and what we're doing, where we're working"**.

As part of NDI's reorganization, the Democracy Innovation Lab, a cross-disciplinary group of the NDI's thematic technical experts, was created. The Lab will continue to provide technical support as functional teams once did, innovate to counter growing threats to democracy, and curate and create resources to further inclusive democratic development.

Despite the darkness and uncertainty of the current political context, this project is rooted in optimism and the hope that practitioners, partners, and other stakeholders may use this moment to reflect on past work with pride, candor, and an appraising eye to learn from our journey and prepare for the long path ahead. NDI President Tamara Cofman Wittes noted, **"in the democracy field, we're in the hope business. If you don't have hope that you, through your efforts, can make the future better than it is right now, it doesn't work. So we have to be optimistic."** Gender champions, both inside and outside of NDI, will continue working to promote inclusive democratic societies that value the equality, dignity, and meaningful participation of all individuals. Stephanie Rust, Chief Programs Officer, said "my hope and my dream" is that NDI is able "to really support women and their communities and their institutions," in the face of the rising anti-gender movement. Memorializing and learning from our institutional history and innovating new ways to strengthen gender transformative democracy support programming will serve to enhance ongoing and future efforts towards building a more equitable, inclusive, and democratic world.

Annex I: List of Interviewees

Name	Position at NDI	Years at NDI	Current Position
Aaron Azelton	Director, Citizen Participation and Inclusion	1992-Present	Director, Citizen Participation and Inclusion
Aleksandra Cvetkovska	Program Director, NDI North Macedonia Senior Program Officer, NDI Morocco	1999-2024	Consultant
Allison Merchant	Senior Program Assistant, GWD	2011-2014	Consultant
Alyson Kozma	Senior Program Manager, WPP Senior Gender Advisor, GWD	2006-2010 2024-Present	Senior Gender Advisor
Badié Hima	Resident Director, NDI Mali	2009-Present	Consultant
Birgitta Ohlsson	Director, Political Parties	2020-Present	Director, Political Parties
Caroline Hubbard	Deputy Director, GWD Senior Gender Advisor	2010-2022	Consultant; Former Senior Gender Advisor and Gender Team lead, USAID
Gina Chirillo	Program Assistant, GWD	2013-2015	Consultant
Keila Gonzalez	Resident Director, NDI Mexico	2005-2023	Consultant
Ken Wollack	President, NDI Executive Vice President	1986-2018	Vice Chair of NED
Kristen Sample	Director, Democratic Governance	2020-Present	Director, Democratic Governance
Kristin Haffert	Director, WPP Team	2002-2009	CEO, Mine the Gap Consulting
Les Campbell	Regional Director, Middle East & North Africa Special Advisor to the President	1994-Present	Regional Director, MENA Special Advisor to the President
Merita Gidarjati	Women's Political Participation Program Assistant, NDI Indonesia	2002-2009	Former Project Management Specialist, USAID Indonesia
Missy Reif	Program Director, Latin America &	2019-Present	Program Director, Latin America

	Caribbean		& Caribbean
Molly Middlehurst	Program Director, GWD	2019-2025	Consultant
Nicole Rowsell	Civil Society Advisor, Iraq Senior Program Manager, Egypt Resident Country Director, NDI Tunisia Senior Advisor, MENA Special Assistant to the President Acting Vice President	2006-2022	Co-Founder and Co-President, New Visions
Rose Musa	Program Manager, GWD Gender Advisor, NDI Nigeria	2021-2025	Consultant
Sandra Pepera	Director, GWD Team	2014-2024	Chief Strategy and Governance Officer, ODI Global
Shannon O'Connell	Resident Senior Program Manager, NDI Romania Resident Senior Program Manager, Western Balkans Program Director, Northern Ireland Country Director, West Bank/ Gaza	1999-2006	Director of Policy and Programs, Westminster Foundation for Democracy
Shari Bryan	Executive Vice President Country Director, NDI Nigeria Regional Director, Southern and East Africa	1998-2021	Executive Director, Mines Advisory Group
Stephanie Lynn	Resident Country Director, NDI Serbia Senior Resident Director, Myanmar Senior Resident Director, Indonesia & Malaysia	1997-2013 2024-Present	Resident Country Director, Serbia
Stephanie Rust	Chief Programs Officer	2022-Present	Chief Programs Officer
Susan Markham	Director, WPP Team Interim Director, GWD Team	2010-2014 2024-2025	Consultant
Tamara Cofman Wittes	President	2024-Present	President

Annex II: WPP/GWD Team Staff

Alex Bailey
Allida Black
Allison Merchant
Alyson Kozma
Amanda Domingues
Amara Shaker-Brown
Amy Hamelin
Besa Rizvanolli
Bea Carboni
Bridget Rittman-Tune
Caroline Hubbard
Cecilia Lero
Claire DeSoi
Crystal Rosario
Ellen Barbosa
Emily Goodman
Gabriella Borovsky
Gina Chirillo
Isabelle Schwartz
Jessica Roland
Joni Lee
Jossif Ezekilov
Julia Canney
Kaimyn Paszko
Kara Joyce
Kathleen Chestnutt
Kirsten Zeiter
Kristin Haffert
Layla Moughari
Lynsey Kryzwick
Mireya Reith
Molly Middlehurst
Nicole Dean
Olivia Lyman

Pari Farmani
Piper Nelson
Rebecca Turkington
Rose Musa
Sandra Pepera
Shelby Eckhardt
Susan Kemp
Susan Markham
Susan Papp
Tamar Eisen
Tzili Mor

And the many Project Assistants, Wellesley College MKA Institute Fellows, and Andi Parhamovich
Fellows who have partnered with the WPP/GWD Team.

Annex III: Women's Political Participation/Gender, Women and Democracy Timeline and Key Dates

2003

- The Women's Political Participation team is created.
- The Win With Women Global Initiative and Global Action Plan report are launched.

2004

- The NDI Board WPP Committee begins.

2005

- May: 1st Annual Madeleine K. Albright Grant Award Luncheon is held.

2006

- The Bren Simon-funded MKA Award is granted to its first recipient.

2007

- The WWW Political Party Assessment Tool is published.
- The iKNOWPolitics initiative and website is established with UNDP, IPU, UN Women and International IDEA.
- First formal Director of the WPP team named.

2008

- "Assessing Women's Political Party Programs" report is published.
- The Andi Parhamovich Fellowship is awarded to its first recipient.

2010

- "Democracy and the Challenge of Change: A Guide to Increasing WPP" report is published.

2012

- The "Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties" paper is published.
- The WPP theory of change is created.

2013

- The Global Women's Leadership Fund project operates in the DRC, Syria, Yemen, and Libya.

- The “Women as Agents of Change: Having Voice in Society and Influencing Policy” paper is published.

2014

- Initial planning for the VAW-P project begins (survey on women, tech, and democracy looking at women’s use of online space and the international roundtable on VAW-P).
- The Women’s Political Participation team is officially renamed the Gender, Women, and Democracy team.

2015

- The “Engendering Phases of Democracy” initiative begins.
- The #VotesWithoutViolence toolkit and website is launched as a part of raising awareness on the need to address violence against women in elections (VAW-E).

2016

- March: The #NotTheCost campaign is launched and the call to action is published.
- September: NDI’s commissioned paper by Tom Carothers on “Democracy Support Strategies: Leading with Women’s Political Empowerment” is published by CEIP.
- The first Wellesley-NDI MKA Fellows Memorandum of Understanding is signed.

2017

- During the Honduras election, NDI conducted electoral observation focused on VAW-P.

2018

- An updated Win With Women assessment tool is published, based on NDI’s 2017 review of political party strengthening approaches and learning.
- The State-Based Gendered Disinformation program launches in Poland and the Philippines.
- October: GWD launches think10, a risk assessment and safety planning tool safeguarding women in politics.

2019

- DRL Political Accountability, Inclusivity, and Resiliency Support (PAIRS) I program begins and funds the largest non-NED-funded programming led by GWD (TBC).
- The GWD & Elections Team compiles “Guidelines on Gender Considerations In International Election Observation, Including Violence Against Women in Elections” for the International Declaration of Principals.

- “Tweets That Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics” report is published, marking the first Online Violence Against Women (OVAW) publication.
- A standard gender analysis framework is created for all CEPPS and PAIRS programming.
- The Gather Girls project operates in Morocco.
- First GWD delegation to the Women Deliver Conference in Vancouver, Canada.

2020

- The GWD team works on the Early Warning Systems project.
- First PAIRS program on Violence Against Women in Politics and in the Media launched with the International Women’s Media Foundation.
- Women’s Inclusive Leadership and Advocacy (WILAP) program launches, the first GWD program focused on LBT+ women, under PAIRS.
- October: The “Engendering Hate” report is published.
- November: The Men, Power, and Politics online guidance and reports are published.
- NDI’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee is established.

2021

- The #NotTheCost renewed call to action is published.
- GWD begins the Hewlett Foundation-funded Strengthening Urban Women-Led CSOs project, the largest privately-funded project to date.
- “Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide” report is published.
- Master Service Agreement (MSA) signed for Designing and Implementing Safety Training for Women in Politics, the first of its kind.
- DISRUPTHER piloting begins, the first program focused specifically on young women and adolescent girls, operating in Kenya and Brazil.

2022

- Initiation of the VAW-P Cadre Development Program.
- Gender and inclusion analysis (GAIA) framework created for DRL programming.
- Global Partnership to End Online Abuse and Harm launches with NDI (GWD and DemTech) providing secretariat support to eight founding member states.

2023

- SHE PERSISTS program begins, funded by DRL through the PAIRS award.
- The first embedded GWD in-country staffer, Rose Musa in Nigeria, joins the team.

- Hewlett program-supported NDI delegation attends the Women Deliver conference in Rwanda with NDI Board Member Stacy Abrams.

2024

- January: “Empower & Lead: A guide on using the media safely and effectively” is published in collaboration with International Women’s Media Foundation.
- July: Launch of WomenLEAD Network.
- “CEDAW Shadow Reporting Guide on VAW-P” is published.
- Organizational Inclusion Assessment published.

2025

- January 20: President Trump issues Executive Order 14169 on “Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid” into law, effectively ending U.S. foreign assistance.

Annex IV: Spring 1987 NDI Newsletter Highlighting the Eleanor Roosevelt International Caucus of Women Political Leaders

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT CAUCUS

"It was exciting, inspirational, and informative to be with other women political leaders from around the world."

Barbara Mikulski
Senator
United States

"The Caucus was the most important event in which I have taken part. It was a challenge that will make me face in the future the role of woman leader with much more confidence."

Carmen Saenz de Phillips
President, Partido Nacional
Chile

"It was a great opportunity to meet such a dynamic gathering of women who have distinguished themselves in the field of politics, and to share in an understanding and appreciation of the concerns we have in common."

Flora MacDonald
Minister of Communications
Canada



(Left to right) Carmen Saenz de Phillips, President, Partido Nacional, Chile; Mansura Mohiuddin, Member of Parliament, Bangladesh, and Geraldine Ferraro.



Maimouana Kane, Counsellor to the Supreme Court, Senegal (left) and Sophie Ndiaye Cissoko, Deputy, National Assembly, Senegal.



Rose Waihuru, Member of Parliament from Kenya (left) with Dorothy Lightbourne, Senator from Jamaica.



(L to R) Sheikh Hasina, Pres., Awami League, Pakistan; G. Ferraro; Nita Barrow, Amb. to the U.N., Barbados; Mayor Feinstein, and Mayumi Moriyama, House of Coun., Japan.



Karin Ahrlund, Member of Parliament from Sweden greeted by Geraldine Ferraro.



Helen Suzman, Member of Parliament, Republic of South Africa.

... TO INCREASE POL

"We are here together in San Francisco to design a global blueprint defining practical ways women can play a greater role in the political life of their countries." That is how NDI Board member Geraldine Ferraro described the purpose of the First Eleanor Roosevelt International Caucus of Women Political Leaders in her opening address to more than 100 delegates and observers.

Sponsored by NDI, the three-day conference last March signified the first time an international group of women political leaders had convened to form a strategy by which more women can become involved in politics and government and ascend to leadership positions.

The caucus was hosted by San Francisco's mayor, Dianne Feinstein, and included 62 participants from 38 countries, as well as 50 official observers from the U.S. and abroad.

"This is in every sense a unique forum," said Sue Wood, the former president of the New Zealand National Party. *"We are here because of the part we have played or the part we are playing in the role of politics. It is beholden upon us to ensure that this momentary glimpse of the strength and fortitude of women power that we have seen in the last two days is not lost with this caucus."*

At the conclusion of the three days of committee meetings and plenary sessions, the participants called for the establishment of an institute for women political leaders that would provide training for women in or entering politics, collect and disseminate information on women's political status, and monitor political parties' progress in promoting women's par-

CALLS FOR GLOBAL BLUEPRINT...

"Participation in the caucus was, for me, a wonderful experience. I return to the problems of Northern Ireland with renewed enthusiasm. More importantly perhaps, I return with greater confidence in the capacity of women to make their mark in the difficult world of politics."

Brid Rogers
Senator
Northern Ireland

"I really felt it an honour for me to have participated, and I am convinced that the conference has accomplished much in promoting the cause of equality of women."

Silu Singh
Director, Women's Legal
Services Project
Nepal

"If a government is mostly male, that means a lot of mediocre men are included. Equal distribution between men and women means the most able are chosen."

Astrid Heiberg
Member of Parliament
Norway

ICAL ROLE OF WOMEN

participation. They agreed also to organize a follow-up caucus in 1988.

Philippine President Corazon Aquino addressed the assembly by video, saying, "I fervently hope to see the continued active existence of this caucus and witness its determination to take on a more meaningful role for women in society." She expressed her desire that the caucus "provide a healthy, vibrant forum for opening new initiatives and opportunities for the total fulfillment of women all over the world."

Messages were also sent by four other women heads of democratic governments: Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway, Prime Minister Mary Eugenia Charles of Dominica, President Vigdis Finnbogadóttir of Iceland, and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain.

Following the initial plenary sessions, the caucus divided into five working committees to examine women's roles in political parties, the interaction of women politicians with the media, and strategies for advancement through resource development, leadership training, and constituency building.

At the closing session of the caucus, NDI Chairman Walter F. Mondale congratulated the participants, saying that "You have unleashed an energy and a commitment here in San Francisco that will make a true difference in the lives of your citizens."

In addition to publicizing the committees' findings, NDI will convene an organizing group comprised of caucus participants to plan the proposed institute and follow-up conference. ■



NDI President Brian Atwood and Caucus Chair Geraldine Ferraro.



Muriel Donawa McDavidson, Member of Parliament from Trinidad and Tobago (left) meets Lee Tai-Young, Institute for Family Consultation from Republic of Korea.



Maizie Barker-Welch, Parliamentary Secretary from Barbados (left) and Nita Barrow, Ambassador to the United Nation from Barbados.



Elva Roulet, Vice Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina with NDI Chairman Walter Mondale.



Muriel Donawa McDavidson, Member of Parliament, Trinidad and Tobago.



NDI Vice Chair, Madeleine K. Albright.

