

# GUIDELINES FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP TRAINING



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



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**T**hese guidelines draw on the research report “Women’s Leadership in Viet Nam: Leveraging a Resource Untapped”, commissioned by the Women’s Leadership project of UNDP Viet Nam and the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The guidelines are primarily intended for trainers and those designing the curriculum for leadership training programmes, and who want to ensure these programmes are gender-responsive. The recommendations are based on an analysis of 37 political and public sector leadership programmes, within Viet Nam and globally.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

A gender-responsive leadership training programme recognizes that there are important differences between men and women participants, and takes these differences into account when designing the programme. By doing so, the unique training needs of both men and women are reflected in the programme design, course content and training methods. This helps to ensure an effective and inclusive programme that makes best use of its resources to train participants on exactly what they need.

Gender-responsive leadership training helps to build a cadre of capable female and male leaders, who understand the value and need for shared leadership. It also supports more women to take on leadership roles. This, in turn, will create a more gender-responsive government and public sector which can better serve all of its citizens, both women and men.

### Integrate gender equality into every aspect of the programme

#### Focus on gender equality, not simply gender parity

Gender equality must be included explicitly in the training objectives and strongly woven into every aspect of the programme, beginning with the planning and design phase, throughout implementation and monitoring for impact. This

requires moving beyond a quantitative approach of solely using gender as a criterion for selecting trainers, speakers and participants, to an approach that creates attitudinal and behavioural change among women and men on the issue of women’s leadership.

### Encourage positive perceptions about female leadership

During training it is crucial to promote awareness of the importance of inclusive leadership and the value of women’s contributions to public life. This requires engaging both men and women in discussion and building an understanding of the gap created by the exclusion of women. A comprehensive gender-responsive programme should also include an analysis of the external environment and power relations, identifying the key factors that influence women’s access to (or lack of) participation, leadership and power.



Effective training provides women opportunities to practice their public speaking and presentation skills

### Conduct a needs-based assessment before designing the curriculum

Programmes targeting men and women equally often fail to address the specific needs of women (and could at times better address the particular needs of men). A holistic assessment of these individual requirements prior to the training course will reveal how best to address needs influenced by gender.

### **Anticipate unique funding needs, such as childcare costs**

The need for childcare can be a significant barrier to women's participation in training. Women with small children might need to bring them to training sites or need financial support to hire a childminder during the training session. It is therefore important to ensure that childcare is provided or is eliminated as a barrier to training for women with young children.

### **Make use of participatory and interactive training methods**

#### ***Use interactive training methods and keep sessions to a manageable size***

The research report found that learning has most impact when it is interactive and has a physical component. Effective adult learning techniques take into account that adult participants come to training sessions with some degree of knowledge and experience, and they leverage this for the benefit of the training group through group discussions and other reflections. In both the Vietnamese and global training programmes reviewed, role-playing, simulation and other participatory methods helped to build confidence and improve presentation skills among female participants.



*Interactive participatory training sessions provide more effective learning*

Most of those interviewed for the report found that the optimal number of training participants is 15 to 20, and that classes should not exceed 30 participants. More intimate training allows for more peer-to-peer learning. As such, training of trainer courses, which require extra time for practicing skills and absorbing material, should be no larger than 20 participants.

*"The participatory methodology actually helped the women participants a lot. It provides women opportunities to first speak in front of a smaller group, then in front of a larger group and then in front of the whole class. The continuity of having such opportunities to speak in public through regular training over several years is very important to build the confidence of women."*

- Female participant and now Provincial People's Council representative, Viet Nam Women's Union training supported by the Women's Leadership project

#### ***Ensure that training focuses not only on practical skills but also the opportunity to practice acquired skills***

The evidence suggests that lecturing should be limited to no longer than 20 minutes at a time. This leaves time for participants to role-play and practice skills, particularly women participants who often need more opportunities to develop their confidence. Working in teams and developing projects collaboratively is also a useful strategy to engage less assured women.

*"First I was very shy and quiet and did not think that I could present my action plan well. However, receiving encouragement from the peers in the group, I presented it in front of the class. The Norwegian trainer told me that 'if I were your voter, I would vote for you because your action plan was very logical and to the point'. After receiving her positive comments, I became much more confident and from then on I felt it was much easier speaking in front of others in the class. The trainer actually helped build my confidence a great deal."*

- Female participant in the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs training of trainers programme for candidates for elected office

#### ***Keep training sessions relatively short***

Three-day training sessions seem to be most suitable for participants – particularly female participants who find it easier to take time off from work and home-related responsibilities for this amount of time. Within such limited time, however, comes the trade-off that the training content is limited. Some trainers therefore recommend longer sessions. A gender-based analysis of needs will help to determine at what length participation

becomes a problem for women. Providing preparatory materials to participants before the course begins helps to establish a certain level of background in advance.

### **Combine national and international trainers, and women and men**

International trainers can provide a useful outside perspective, drawing upon a collection of experiences from across the globe. International trainers also play an important role in providing current knowledge and skills and often facilitate dynamic, open class discussions. The benefit of national trainers is their proximity to participants in terms of culture and communication, and the opportunity to learn from the experience of local leaders. Female facilitators for programmes with a majority of female participants can help to create a safe space and provide role models and personal anecdotes of overcoming gender-related obstacles.

### **Focus on more than just skills training to create long-term impact**

#### **Use distance learning and experiment with digital learning options**

Digital learning options expand the reach and audience beyond those of a physical training. Digital learning portals, for example, can serve as digital libraries for resources and training material. Digital portals can also serve as forums for social connection. Much like existing social media sites, digital forums can facilitate an easy exchange of ideas, information and event planning while remaining exclusive for programme alumni. Video clips of class lectures available online allow participants who cannot come to the class training to still access them. This



*Distance learning is an effective option to offer women's leadership training courses*

can be particularly useful for women with family responsibilities.

#### **Continue to follow up with participants**

Those programmes that offer multiple training sessions or a divided training schedule reported a number of positive outcomes. This kind of programme builds in time for participants to reflect and apply the skills they have learned, before they return to subsequent training where they can address any implementation challenges they faced. This training model does require the training location to be accessible (or affordable) for participants to repeatedly visit and requires a longer time commitment. This can be more challenging for women with family responsibilities and it is therefore important to address any barriers to their participation. Mentoring and coaching can also successfully be incorporated as a follow-up activity to training.

#### **Supplement skills training with mentoring**

Skills training has to be supplemented with activities that focus on relationship building, mentoring and confidence promotion. This is a particular need for women who want to be successful in male-dominated leadership environments. Matching experienced leaders as mentors with more junior managers has proven valuable. Mentors not only provide insights and advice from personal experience, but also help potential leaders network and access key decision makers. Mentoring can be particularly useful for women as access to power and informal networks is an important but often missing link for aspiring female leaders. Residential experiences that take place during training, and which house participants, trainers and senior leaders or experts in the same place, allow for even greater mentoring opportunities.

*"I was able to really see how women who are fantastic leaders change the world every day. The most important part of the experience for me was seeing these examples. These women inspired me to realize my potential."*

- Participant, NEW Leadership programme by the Center for American Women in Politics

## **Mentors are a valuable resource**

A variety of professionals can serve as valuable mentors for aspiring managers and leaders. Leadership Beyond Boundaries (LBB) provides individual advice on where to seek mentors, advising that those from universities and academic institutions are best for providing “knowledge mentoring” or subject matter guidance. Professional coaches are often useful as counsellors for career advancement and management techniques. LBB trainers incorporate lessons on how to find mentors who are good matches and how to engage these leaders most effectively. LBB warns that government officials as mentors can lack objectivity, but may have significant experience and be able to provide guidance on overcoming political obstacles. While mentoring is often incorporated as a follow-up activity to training, both the Irish Institute of Public Administration and the German Konrad Adenauer School for Young Politicians incorporate it during or between multi-session training.

### *Build and maintain an alumni network*

An active alumni network provides men and women participants with continued peer support and networking opportunities, and enables programmes to track their participants’ success into the future. Programmes that keep in contact with participants through alumni networks have also proven better able to leverage alumni as a resource base for speakers, donors and as recruiters for informally attracting new applicants.

### *Build in a comprehensive evaluation process to track progress*

Ideally, any leadership training institution should systematically evaluate its programme, including conducting an initial baseline assessment, ongoing evaluations, a final programme evaluation as well as a long-term impact assessment. Tracking participants’ attitudes and behaviour beyond the life of the programme is the clearest indication of progress made. In order to have gender-disaggregated data and feedback on the programmes, gender must be built into the process from the start and

any monitoring and evaluation tool must be coded and analysed by gender. Together, these recommendations can help to ensure the long-term success and impact of a gender-responsive leadership training programme.

## **Alumni networks provide peer support and networking opportunities**

The German Marshall Fund (GMF) runs the annual Marshall Memorial Fellowship, which offers an exemplary alumni network model. This programme for emerging leaders maintains a network of nearly 2,500 leaders, connected through an interactive online database facilitated by GMF, and fosters dialogue, advertises events and provides resources for its alumni fellows. The success of the alumni programme is demonstrated by the high degree of alumni participation in follow-up activities, social events and donations. Alumni networks can also serve as an indicator of programme impact over the long term. Many programmes measure the rate of alumni attrition from networks and alumni attendance at conferences years after training programmes, using this data as an indicator of the programmes’ long-term impact.

## **Analysing barriers to women’s leadership**

The success of EMILY’s List in the US in identifying and addressing a single major obstacle to women’s political participation resulted from a thoughtful and systematic approach by its founders to understand the barriers to women’s political leadership in the US. In the case of EMILY’s List, this assessment found that financial resources were a larger barrier than campaign skills and became the primary obstacle around which the organization was formed. As a result, a finance strategy was developed to help women garner political power, which was later supplemented by training and one-on-one coaching.