



SUCCESS STORY

Kosovo's 'Week of Women' Empowers Voice of Women in Politics



Photo : USAID National Democratic Institute

Participants of the Week of Women fill-in their evaluation forms online

“Empowering women is not a personal empowerment,” said Kosovo President Atifete Jahjaga at the conference opening. “It is how you empower your country.”

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When Ilirjana Gafurri, a political party activist from Peja, won a seat at her local council six years ago, she became an advocate for issues such as better health care and women's equality in her community. But Gafurri had to struggle to make her voice heard in the predominantly male body, where women are often perceived as being passive or not as qualified.

To improve her political skills and gear up for reelection, Gafurri decided to attend USAID supported Week of Women (WoW), held in March 25-29, 2013. She joined more than 100 Kosovo women from business, political parties, parliament, local government, the media and civil society in the capital, Prishtina, to talk about women's political careers, how parties are organized, making the decision to run for office, and running successful campaigns.

Even though Kosovo is led by a female president, women continue to face economic, political and social disadvantages. In politics, their representation is seen more as a requirement for political parties than a benefit. This often discourages women from running for office.

To address the issue, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) with support from USAID hosted the first WoW in 2012. The goal of the week was to create a network for women leaders and help them gain skills to further their careers. This year's WoW focused on elections, with an emphasis on local polls, which are planned for the fall.

During WoW Gafurri focused on preparing for public speeches, message development, policy development and how to become valuable for your political parties. “I still feel very nervous when talking to a crowd, and I do that [as part of] my work as a counselor, but now I know that I can manage that, and have already started seeing a difference. If there is one thing I learned at the Week of Women it is DO NOT STOP!”, says Gafurri

Women from different ethnicities and ages from across the country participated in the five-day event, co-hosted by participants from last year—including teachers, lawyers, political party members, journalists, academics and NGO representatives—with assistance from the Kosovo Assembly's Women's Caucus. “It is not like you can meet these women every day,” said Gafurri. “Networking with them will definitely help me in the future.”

Gafurri is back in Peja but she proudly emphasizes that the Week of Women gave her the confidence to run for reelection in the fall, and to start working on her campaign for mayor of Peja in four years.