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Politics lessons for 1,000 women

New Delhi, Jan. 11: In a landmark initiative by a civil society organisation, as many as 1,000 marginalised women will be trained as women leaders for electoral politics.

This is an initiative of the Centre for Social Research, an organisation working for the empowerment of women through its United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) project, titled "Enhancing the Role of Women in Strengthening Democracy". It will train this massive pool of women leaders by implementing the core strategy of "Train, Contest and Win" at three levels.

At level one, women's leadership capacity will be built by imparting training to 1,000 prospective women leaders and by preparing and motivating them to contest elections for the state legislatures and national Parliament. At level two, advocacy and lobbying with political parties will be undertaken to increase seats for women within parties and lobbying for passage of 33 per cent Reservation Bill with

its network partner, WomenPowerConnect (WPC). At level three, the learning from the projects shall be shared with South Asian partners to build stronger foundation for democracy in South Asia.

"Women have proved time and again that whenever the need arises they are able to stand tall and be as good leaders as men. However, women in this country are subjected to widespread discrimination, and therefore they need to develop their skills and understand the dynamics of political process. It is essential to train more women as well as encourage the ones who are successful at the local governance level to enter the state Assemblies and national Parliament," says Dr Ranjana Kumari, director, Centre for Social Research.

Participant women shall be selected from entire India, with proportional regional representation. Special emphasis shall be given to women in panchayati raj and training for leadership building amongst the women belonging

to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and backward classes will be undertaken.

At the end of the project, capacities of women across India will be enhanced to contest elections. Political parties will be made aware about this pool of trained women. Key political parties shall be encouraged to ensure voluntary quotas within parties to ensure gender balance. They will also be sensitised and lobbied with to ensure a smooth passage of the Women's Reservation Bill.

UNDEF is an additional strategic funding instrument of the UN to promote and strengthen democracy in the world. It funds action-oriented projects that bring tangible improvements in democracy and human rights on the ground and mainly focuses on gender equality, the grassroots and vulnerable groups' inclusion. As many as 95 countries throughout the world have instituted quotas and other positive measures to include women in politics. These affirmative actions have broken barriers and have encouraged decisive outcomes, as there has been greater participation of women in the democratic functioning of the nations.