

Helpdesk Research Report

Donor support of African parliaments

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Question

Identify in which areas of parliamentary strengthening donors support parliaments in Africa. Where possible identify how donors balance between supporting MPs and permanent staff; whether donors commonly undertake field visits; whether donors support parliamentary operational or recurrent costs; and the evidence of key factors of success and failure for parliamentary support.

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1. Overview

Parliamentary strengthening programmes, including those focused on parliaments in Africa, are diverse in the areas they cover. This is in part because strengthening parliament activities includes issues directly related to parliamentarians but also can include strengthening the services and facilities that parliamentarians depend upon. A number of programmes that help strengthen parliaments may ostensibly focus on other governance areas.

This helpdesk research report identifies reviews of parliamentary strengthening efforts and examines documents of a number of programmes explicitly termed as parliamentary strengthening programmes.

Due to limited time constraints it was not possible to undertake a full mapping, and the analysis in this report is based on a representative sample of programmes.

Areas of parliamentary strengthening

Parliamentary strengthening can be focused on MPs, parliament or other aspects of the political system. One way of looking at the activities undertaken is to divide them into direct support or indirect support. Indirect support is the support of specific policy issues, such as health and education, which subsequently strengthens the parliamentary process. Direct support is work where the objective is to strengthen parliament for democratisation and good governance in general and includes support for:

- **Physical infrastructure:** Building and maintaining buildings and facilities.
- **Institutional capacities and structures:** Enhancing capacity for legislation, representation, oversight and administration through training, meetings and direct assistance. Reforming institutions through restructuring committees, changing timings and revising procedures.
- **Skills and performance:** Skills transfers and training on specific issues.

The key area of donor support to parliamentarians, including in Africa, is through **supporting MPs**, a form of direct support. This mainly involves assistance in undertaking parliamentary work and training in relevant skills. It can also involve providing expertise and knowledge in specific thematic issues of relevance. Some work is also undertaken to **support permanent staff** though it is unclear as to how much donors balance supporting permanent staff compared to parliamentarians. Donors may prefer to support permanent staff as a main part of their programme when they wish to distance themselves from parliamentarians, such as following the Niger coup d'état in 2010.

Field visits by donors do not seem to be a critical component of parliamentary strengthening though donor officials and independent evaluators may undertake field visits to monitor progress in country programmes, which include parliamentary strengthening components. Donor country parliamentarians may also undertake field visits but this is more often to observe development work than as a part of parliamentary strengthening programmes.

Donors may **support operational and recurrent costs** related to parliament but this is rarely a direct part of parliamentary strengthening programmes. An example where recurrent costs for parliamentary strengthening are covered by donors relates to the Solomon Islands where costs were covered for infrastructure and staffing. It is likely that there are other examples of donors covering critical costs but these are unlikely to be included in parliamentary programmes per se, but rather included in, for example, infrastructure programmes.

Factors for success and failure

This research report was only able to identify one impact evaluation in some way related to parliamentary strengthening though this was on a village council rather than parliamentarians. There are few systematic evaluations of the results of parliamentary strengthening though there are a number of programme evaluations which identify whether programme goals have been met. It may not be possible to identify factors for success and failure for parliamentary strengthening in all contexts. Contexts vary markedly in countries and it is important to **understand and adapt to the political context** within which the parliament is situated. Though there may not be clear factors for success and failure there are a number of further lessons learned from parliamentary strengthening programmes which include:

- A need for **long term interventions**.
- Interventions should be based on **local demand** and encourage **broad-based local ownership**.
- Parliamentary strengthening should appear **neutral**.
- **Issue-based approaches** are particularly successful.
- Legislative assistance **cannot be viewed in isolation** from other areas of support outside of parliament.

Another suggestion is that donor assistance to parliaments should **adhere to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness**, particularly in relation to principles of **harmonisation, alignment and ownership**.

2. Areas of parliamentary strengthening

2.1 Overview of areas of parliamentary strengthening

Parliamentary strengthening work is quite diverse. Hudson and Wren (2007) provide examples of the key types of activities and their focus:

- **Focus on MPs:** MPs' skills, their understanding of parliament's role and parliamentary procedures, and their expertise on specific issues such as poverty reduction, human rights or gender.
- **Focus on parliament:** Parliament as an institution, pursuing institutional reform, or having a more specific focus on enhancing the effectiveness of committees such as public accounts committees.
- **Focus on democratic governance:** Some organisations pursue parliamentary strengthening work as part of their work on democratic governance. Projects are likely to address other aspects of the political system, such as parties and electoral systems, as well as parliaments themselves.

Hudson and Wren (2007) argue that the core of parliamentary strengthening work is provided by the World Bank Institute, the (Canadian) Parliamentary Centre, the UNDP and the (US-based) National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. The authors provide an overview of different organisations' activities noting that many bilateral donors fund activities by these organisations:

Table 1: Parliamentary strengthening approaches of different organisations

	MPs		Parliaments		Political systems
	Professional skills/procedural issues	Subject knowledge	Institutional reform	Subject specific	
World Bank		X		X	
UNDP	X	X	X	X	
Canadian Parliamentary Centre	X	X	X	X	X
National Democratic Institute for International Affairs	X	X	X	X	X
Inter-Parliamentary Union		X	X		
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association	X	X	X	X	X
Friedrich Ebert (Stiftung) Foundation	X	X	X		X
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance	X				X
Institute for Democracy in South Africa		X	X		X
Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa	X	X	X		
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	X	X		X	

Source: Adapted from Hudson and Wren (2007, p.28)

Tostensen and Amundsen (2010) also highlight the divergent strategies and models for parliamentary strengthening. In order to categorise these strategies and models, the authors make a distinction between direct and indirect support, depending on whether the objective is to strengthen parliament for democratisation and good governance in general, or indirectly for specific policy purposes.

Examples of **direct support** are:

- **Physical infrastructure:** The construction of new, and the rehabilitation and refurbishment of existing, buildings, including conference and meeting facilities; installation and provision of information technology; provision of photocopying and printing equipment, library and documentation premises, including book holdings; improved office facilities, including the provision of furniture.
- **Institutional capacities and structures:** This is to enhance the capacity, legitimacy and efficiency of the core functions of parliaments, enabling parliamentarians to fulfil their constitutional and political roles better. This category can be further divided into sub-categories focusing on different capacities:
 - **Legislative capacity:** Legal competence building, including the drafting of bills; transfer of know-how; training in the application of parliamentary procedures; the strengthening of key parliamentary committees on selected policy and legislation issues – for instance implementing peace agreements, gender-sensitive legislation, reproductive health (HIV and AIDS), poverty reduction, resource management, budgeting, and anti-corruption.
 - **Representational capacity:** Education, training workshops, conferences and seminars for ordinary parliamentary members and leaders (speakers, presiding officers, committee chairs and party whips), in particular for opposition MPs.

- **Oversight capacity:** Training in the processes of lawmaking, and in particular highly complex budgetary matters. Improving communication skills to enhance their representational capacities and communicate with civil society.
- **Administrative capacity:** Secretarial support, information technology, libraries and document handling, and short-term assistance to meet emergency administrative expenses.
- **Institutional reform processes:** Restructuring of the committee system; the institution of a new parliamentary calendar and sitting frequency; a revision of parliamentary procedures; or the introduction of new internal regulations, e.g. codes of conduct.
- **Parliamentarians’ skills and performances:** Knowledge and skill transfer through training, seminars, conferences, partnership programmes, parliamentary exchange programmes, networking and study visits. Trainers are either peers (parliamentary networks, international and regional parliaments, national (donor country) parliaments and parliamentarians) or experts (intergovernmental organisation and international NGO professionals and thematic experts). Training modules covering a wide range of issues: the rights and responsibilities of MPs; constitutional and legal knowledge; proficiency in process and procedure; budgeting; committee work; policy issues; international cooperation; networking; time management; computer skills; voter outreach; language and communication training, etc.

Indirect support to parliaments is made up of projects and programmes addressing specific policy issues other than democratisation and good governance in general. Parliamentarians need substantive knowledge of the issues embedded in the laws they pass and indirect support projects are orientated to specific themes and policies for these laws. Such issues include: poverty reduction, education, health, energy, women’s representation, environmental protection, climate change, HIV and AIDS, decentralisation, security/terrorism, anticorruption, etc.

2.2 Specific areas of parliamentary strengthening

This report looked at a number of specific areas and identified to what extent donor support to African parliaments focuses on these areas.

Supporting MPs

A number of organisations and their activities focus on MPs, their skills, their understanding of parliament’s role and parliamentary procedure (Hudson and Wren, 2007). This can include assistance with drafting legislation, parliamentary procedures, orientation, codes of conduct, constituency relations, executive relations and “soft skills” such as public speaking. Key organisations undertaking this work include the UNDP; the Parliamentary Centre; the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI); the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA); the Friedrich Ebert (Stiftung) Foundation (FES); the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA); the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA); and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WfD).

Other organisations focus on improving the expertise and knowledge of MPs in certain areas including public accounts scrutiny, PRSPs as well as specific subjects such as gender and human rights. Key organisations undertaking this work include the World Bank; the UNDP; the Parliamentary Centre; NDI; CPA; FES; the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA); AWEPA; and WfD.

Supporting permanent staff

The support of permanent staff varies between donors but also between different programmes from the same donor. The UNDP provides technical assistance to more than 60 parliaments with work carried out through inter-parliamentary networking, e-governance and ICT strategies to support this networking, including Web-based resources (UNDP, 2013). An evaluation report of the UNDP Global Programme for Parliamentary Strengthening suggests that most work is with parliamentarians to support parliamentary process (UNDP, 2011). However, the report notes that following the Niger coup d'état in 2010, an assessment was undertaken and the UNDP decided to continue work in Niger until political stability could be re-established but decided to engage only with the Parliament Secretariat while 'maintaining a cautionary distance from specific MPs and the government' (UNDP, 2011, p.4).

The World Bank Institute undertakes three approaches to parliamentary capacity building as part of its parliamentary strengthening approach (WBI, n.d.):

- An individual approach (enhancing the capacity of individual MPs and professional parliamentary staff).
- An institutional approach (strengthening the whole-of-Institution/ Parliamentary Administration/ Committee).
- A network approach (bringing together like-minded MPs/ Parliamentary Committees at the regional and global levels using parliamentary networks).

The individual and institutional approaches involve an explicit focus on permanent staff. This programme has provided support to more than 6000 MPs and parliamentary staff with their role in the governance process through seminars, conferences and workshops (World Bank, 2013a). Since 2000 the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and World Bank Institute have cooperated in a number of different areas, jointly designing and delivering learning and knowledge sharing programs for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff (World Bank, 2013a).

The CPA, with a membership of around 15,000 Members of Parliament from 53 nations, seeks to advance parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance. The CPA, among other things, organises conferences, seminars, and study groups aimed primarily at Members of Parliaments and parliamentary officials.

Field visits

Donor field visits for parliamentary strengthening seemed rare in the literature. It was possible to find examples of field visits as part of donor work. For example, DFID's 2011-2015 Operational Plan for Tanzania includes 'strengthening organisations such as parliament' in its approach to strengthening voice and accountability (DFID, 2013, p.14). It is noted that DFID programme staff will make field visits to assess

progress in relation to the results framework, and use field visits to collect feedback from beneficiaries (DFID, 2013). However, these field visits are not specifically noted as in relation to the parliamentary strengthening aspect of the work.

An evaluation of the UNDP Global Programme for Parliamentary Strengthening highlights field visits for the evaluators, and for parliamentarians to visit their own constituencies, but does not mention specific donor field visits (Baker, 2011).

The World Bank run a 'Parliamentarians in the Field' programme which allows parliamentarians and legislators from both developed and developing countries to observe and discuss World Bank projects on the ground; learn how countries design and consult around their Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS); observe the role of parliamentarians in country development; and make recommendations to stakeholders in the field, including to the World Bank and local parliaments and legislatures (World Bank, 2013b). This programme, however, does not seem to be aimed at parliamentary strengthening but rather orienting parliamentarians to World Bank and other development work.

Supporting operational and recurrent costs

Parliamentary strengthening programmes rarely identify specific activities focused on covering costs, either operational or recurrent. Review documents focused on parliamentary strengthening do not highlight supporting costs as a specific activity (e.g. Hudson and Wren, 2007; Tostensen and Amundsen, 2010). Neither do documents relating to the parliamentary strengthening work of multilateral donors (e.g. Baker, 2011; WBI, n.d.).

During the course of this research it was possible to identify one project which makes explicit reference to covering recurrent costs. A project completion report on parliamentary strengthening in the Solomon Islands notes that, '(m)any recurrent costs, including ICT, communications and staffing costs are being covered by the project and will need to be progressively assumed within the budget of the National Parliament Office for the project's achievements to be sustainable' UNDP (2008, p.25). In a separate point: '(t)he project also supported development of a budget submission [...] for substantial additional recurrent and capital expenditure [...] for improvements and repairs to the building as well as for security infrastructure' (UNDP, 2008, p.5). These references suggest that in situations of very low capacity, donors may fund basic infrastructure and capacity needs on a recurrent basis, which would contribute to strengthening parliament.

It is likely that such activities would not be highlighted within parliamentary programme documents but rather in documents for programmes on infrastructure or related issues such as public financial management.

3. Factors for success and failure

3.1 Impact evaluations

There are relatively few systematic evaluations of the results of support to legislatures, including parliamentary strengthening (Tostensen and Amundsen, 2010). A search of 3ie¹ for impact evaluations found none relating to parliament or MPs, though there is an impact evaluation of information disclosure on elected representatives' performance in India (Banerjee, Duflo, Imbert, and Pande, 2013). This was an impact evaluation of an accountability measure, rather than parliamentary strengthening measures, which found that **reservations for women and voter awareness** reduced the likelihood of the (poor quality) incumbent village councillors to remain in power.

There are a number of parliamentary strengthening programme evaluations though these focus on outputs and outcomes rather than wider impacts. For example, a UNDP evaluation of a Zimbabwe parliamentary strengthening programme found that training MPs in legislative and policy analysis strengthened their knowledge and skills and contributed to stronger facts-based parliamentary debates, and review and amendments to legislation (De Vrieze & Murupa, 2012). The evaluation also concluded that training MPs on economic literacy and pre-budget and post-budget workshops contributed to a better informed budget debate in parliament, including amendments to the proposed budget.

From such reports it is not possible to identify wider impacts as such. It is important to note that there may not be universal factors for success and failure for parliamentary strengthening in all contexts as contextualisation is important (see below). There are however a number of lessons learned which can suggest factors that improve the likelihood of success of a parliamentary strengthening programme.

3.2 Lessons learned

A 2008 GSDRC Helpdesk Report outlines the lessons learned from parliamentary support (Mcloughlin, 2008). This report examines the stocktakes of parliamentary strengthening programmes undertaken by several agencies which present cumulative lessons learned from programme-level evaluations. These include case studies (both successful and unsuccessful), and make recommendations to donors. The most common recommendation relates to **the need to understand and adapt to the political context** within which parliament is situated, through sound political analysis of parliament and the wider political system. Without this political contextualisation, programmes have historically failed. Mcloughlin (2008) also identifies several other recommendations that are common across the literature:

- **The need for long-term interventions:** Longer-term intervention is correlated with project effectiveness. Donors often perceive a tension between long-term programming and flexibility to respond to new opportunities, but others argue donor coordination can bring added flexibility.
- **Interventions should be based on local demand and encourage broad-based local ownership:** Parliamentary strengthening will only succeed if it is supported by MPs, political parties and other local actors. Initiatives must build on local efforts to strengthen parliaments. Externally

¹ 3ie funds impact evaluations and systematic reviews to generate evidence on what works in development programmes and why, as well as holding a database of impact evaluations:
<http://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence/>

driven approaches, or approaches based on conditionality, tend not to be sustainable. The issue of where the demand for parliamentary strengthening comes from is important. Broad-based political support is a prerequisite for effective programmes.

- **Parliamentary strengthening should appear neutral:** Parliamentary strengthening necessarily involves dealing with politically sensitive issues and has been seen as a political intrusion, or viewed as politically motivated. Assistance is most valued when it is neutral. If parliamentary strengthening is viewed as a mechanism for advancing the foreign policy interests of the donor, the assistance is unlikely to have the intended impacts. Multilateral donors such as the UNDP can be seen as more honest brokers.
- **Issue-based approaches are particularly successful:** Training programmes that focus on specific issues (e.g. gender budgeting), rather than procedures, have been well received. Narrowing the scope of technical support to tackle systemic problems through smaller interventions may lead to more successful capacity development and consensus-building.
- **Legislative assistance cannot be viewed in isolation from other areas of support:** This is particularly with regard to support to political parties. Attention needs to be given to the competencies of political groups and their ability to perform their responsibilities. Technical cooperation cannot be divorced from inter-party or political relationships.

Other recommendations include the need to **build South-South cooperation**, the importance of the individuals who work on programme implementation to be **politically savvy** (though act politically neutrally), the need for **better donor coordination mechanisms**, and the need for **more evaluations at programme level**. Some authors stress **the importance of not imposing outside models** and of **using local and regional experts**.

A 2010 report was commissioned by Norad to review and synthesise international experiences in supporting legislatures, which includes parliamentary strengthening, and to summarise lessons learned in order to determine what works and what does not (Tostensen and Amundsen, 2010). Similar to Mcloughlin (2008), Tostensen and Amundsen (2010) find that it is important to understand the political economy and that there is no generic, one-size-fits-all approach to parliamentary strengthening – contextualisation is critical.

Tostensen and Amundsen (2010) also emphasise the importance of long-term, comprehensive support. Duration of an intervention can be **two, preferably three electoral cycles**. As an electoral cycle is typically 4-5 years, the authors argue that a decade would by no means be excessive. The authors also emphasise the points made by Mcloughlin (2008) that donor support should be demand-driven, and that there are concerns over political sensitivity. Thematic issues are a good entry point for technical support, and a comprehensive approach (including, for example, political parties) is important.

One specific recommendation is that **donor assistance to parliaments should adhere to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness** (Tostensen and Amundsen, 2010). This is particularly in relation to principles of harmonisation, alignment and ownership:

- **Ownership:** Parliamentary strengthening requires the (recipient) parliament to exercise effective leadership over efforts to improve its capacity and performance, for instance, by adopting a clear strategy for parliamentary development that is respected by the development partners, along with a programme to put it into action.
- **Alignment:** Parliamentary strengthening needs to be based on the parliament's own development strategy; based on using the (recipient) parliament's own systems for managing

resources; and based on the provision of funds in a predictable and timely manner that fits well with parliamentary and political timetables.

- **Harmonisation:** Parliamentary strengthening needs to be coordinated between the development partners/donors, using common arrangements and procedures, with each partner focusing on its areas of expertise rather than duplicating efforts. Harmonisation in parliamentary strengthening implies that donors begin with a clear map of the landscape of parliamentary strengthening before thinking about how they can best add value.

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