

Helpdesk Research Report: Impact of parliamentary and party assistance

Date: 01.03.13

Query: Please briefly summarise the number, type and headline findings from any impact evaluations completed in the last ten years on parliamentary and party assistance (programme specific or broader). Restrict evaluations to those that have used rigorous evaluation processes, summarise impact evidence and not lessons learned, and try to identify planned evaluations as well as existing evaluations.

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1. Overview

The impacts of parliamentary and party support have been broadly under-analysed (Power 2008; Wild et al. 2011; Rocha Menocal and O'Neil 2012). There are few rigorous¹ evaluations (expert comments²), but significant evidence gaps remain (Wild et al. 2011). The evaluations that do exist are non-experimental short-term studies, using case studies, interviews and

¹ 'Rigour' is taken here to mean any approach that uses systematic, transparent and empirical research to investigate the impacts of an intervention. This includes a range of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods designs'.

² An expert commented: 'I would think the list is fairly small, given the questions about what methodology is most appropriate to the particular field, value-for-money in evaluation, and the types of questions that you are seeking to answer'.

literature review as their analysis methods. In general, they emphasise processes, outcomes and activities, rather than the specific impacts of parliamentary and party programmes (Menocal and O'Neil 2012).

These limitations have been attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, evaluations of socio-political processes are notoriously difficult to conduct. Democratic change is essentially 'domestically driven' (Disch et al. 2011) and occurs over a long period of time. It is, therefore, difficult to develop evaluative indicators that accurately capture political change. Secondly, there is a lack of consensus surrounding what is considered to be an impact (rather than what is an outcome or an achievement). For example, some evaluations list participation in a conference as an impact indicator, while others look for more meaningful, longer-term, indications of democratic change. Thirdly, the design of party and parliamentary programmes can undermine impact evaluations (Menocal and O'Neil 2012). Programmes are often orientated around capacity building activities, which have a narrow range of indicators (Power and Coleman 2011) and often lack adequate monitoring and evaluation frameworks (De Vrieze et al. 2012).

Considering these factors, the literature presented in this report is limited. The first section of the report identifies the available impact evaluations and discusses the methodological approach that has been adopted in each. Where possible, summaries or lists of impact evidence have been provided. In the second section, the report highlights additional literature that might be beneficial. While some of these have an evaluative element, they are not full impact evaluations. The fourth section of the report identifies any ongoing evaluations, and the fifth and sixth sections provide additional references and information.

From the impact evidence that is available, the commonly articulated impacts of parliamentary and party assistance programmes include:

- demonstrable improvements in the use of information technology and communications in targeted parliaments, for example through the creation of parliamentary websites or active use of intranet websites (e.g. Benin, Morocco, Azerbaijan)
- an enhanced scrutinising role of parliamentary committees, evidenced in an increase in the number of questions submitted on bills (e.g. Niger, Benin)
- the improved functioning of parliamentary committees (e.g. Pakistan, Senegal)
- a quantitative increase in the use of oversight procedures such as formal questions (or interpellations) and commissions of inquiry (e.g. Niger).

2. Impact evaluations

Development International (2011), *USAID Azerbaijan Parliamentary Program of Azerbaijan Evaluation: Final Report*. Bethesda, Maryland: Development International.
<http://www.democracyinternational.com/sites/default/files/Azerbaijan%20Parliamentary%20Programs%20Evaluation%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Development International's independent evaluation of USAID's parliamentary support programme to Azerbaijan identifies the overall impact of the programme, as well analysing lessons learnt, major constraints and the relationship between the programme and the broader political environment. The methodological approach adopted involved desk-based research, in-depth interviews with stakeholders, participants and observers, and quantitative data analysis. The evaluators found that the project had achieved several notable accomplishments but that the impacts of these were difficult to deduce. For the most part, the programme did not change the functioning of the parliamentary branch – which was found to 'demonstrate little independence from the executive branch' (p. 5) – and there was no evidence of impact in how Azerbaijani people relate to or understand the parliament (p. 7). The evaluation found that the programme activities were too modest to achieve what was a highly ambitious project goal³ (Ibid.), and the activities that were carried out were often constrained by the political climate (p. 8) and close involvement of the parliamentary administration (p. 9).

Some of the listed accomplishments include: an orientation programme for new members of the parliament; an improved website for parliamentary members featuring completed and draft legislation; two public parliamentary hearings on issues relating to disability and social services; the creation of 125 Members of Parliament Assistants offices (MPA); and a database for MPAs to track constituency requests. For achievements to translate into greater impacts, the evaluation team aver that programmes should give careful consideration to the political environment and emphasise representation, legislation and contestation in parliament (p. 19).

De Vrieze, F., Beeckmans, R., Ahmad, R. (2012), *Evaluation Report of the Pakistan SDPD-II Project and Recommendations – Final Report*.
<http://erc.undp.org/evaluationadmin/manageevaluation/viewevaluationdetail.html?evalid=6359>

The Strengthening Parliament through Parliamentary Development (SDPD) programme was initiated through cooperation between the Parliament of Pakistan, the Inter Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The evaluation team, which included two international parliamentary experts and one national consultant with expertise in governance, evaluated the results and initial impact of the project formulating recommendations for the way forward. The rigorous methodological approach involved a wide range of interviews with stakeholders, an analysis of project documentation, field visits to

³ The MoU signed between the Government of Azerbaijan and USAID lists the goal of the programme as 'to strengthen the capacity of Parliament to effectively fulfil its legislative and oversight function and develop a more independent, representative, and responsive legislative institution to reflects the views of Azerbaijani society'.

provincial assemblies and engagement with the parliament's international partners. At the outset the evaluation cautions that it is difficult to make an assessment of the impact of project interventions due to weak baselines in the monitoring and evaluation framework (p. 19). Nevertheless, they were able to identify a limited number of impacts. The evaluation found that the project had a positive impact on the effective functioning of some but not all parliamentary committees. In particular, the project supported Women's Caucus of the Pakistani parliament has become a key platform for ensuring gender issues are addressed through legislation, policies and programmes (p. 5). Staff training had the effect of upgrading the knowledge and skills of committee staff, particularly relating to legislative drafting, budgetary processes, research methodologies and parliamentary oversight (p. 6). In addition, parliament's outreach towards young people was improved through the launch of the Children's Parliament and the Youth Parliamentary School (Ibid.).

IDEA (2010) *European Commission Support to Parliamentary Development in the ACP (2000-2009), an Assessment.*

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/governance/documents/assessment_ec_support_to_parliaments_en.pdf

This is an independent assessment of European Commission's (EC) support to parliamentary strengthening programmes in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific group of states (ACP), citing two case studies: South Africa and Senegal. The assessment studied documentation from 46 EC development programmes covering the years 2000 to 2009, and conducted field based research and interviews with parliamentary officials, delegation staff and development partners (p. 3). In general, the evaluation found little evidence that programmes have had a positive impact on institutional strengthening (p. 11) and a very limited number of impacts are discussed. In the case of Senegal, the evaluators found some improvement in the working conditions of the country's Finance Committee, but overall little evidence of improvement in terms of parliamentary output or oversight (p. 24). They denote the most important impact of EC support to the Senegalese parliament as being that it has provided 'an entry point for skilled EC officials to help broker a major improvement in the handling of national accounts auditing' (p. 26).

Disch et al. (2011), *Democracy Support through the UN. Oslo: Norad.*

<http://www.norad.no/en/tools-and-publications/publications/publication?key=284256>

In this comprehensive evaluation, Disch et al. evaluate and assess Norwegian support to democracy through the UN between 1999 and 2009. The methodological strategy adopted is multi-method and incorporates a literature review, mapping study and seven country case studies. The results evaluation was carried out in a two stage process. First, a risk chain assessment was undertaken to identify the results and the programme theory which the results were linked to; and second, the evaluators identified what the results achieved and what could account for them (p. 7). The literature review found that donors have mainly had a limited impact on democratic development and caution that they need to be realistic about what they can achieve in what are essentially domestically driven political processes (p. 14). The case studies are rigorously evaluated and they identify some of the specific impacts of Norwegian supported programmes. These include: improved deliberations on parliamentary bills in Malawi and increased civil society involvement in issues of governance, human rights

and social service delivery (p. 29); an increased awareness of multiculturalism in Guatemalan courts and agencies; and the establishment of media monitoring stations in Sudan (p. 45).

Murphy, J., and Alhada, A. (2007), *Global Programme for Parliamentary Strengthening II Mid-term Evaluation Report*. New York: UNDP.

<http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/UNDP%20-%20Global%20Programme%20for%20Parliamentary%20Strengthening%20-%20EN%20-%202007%20-%20PS.pdf>

In this extensive, independent mid-term evaluation, Murphy and Alhada explore the impacts of the UNDP Global Programme for Parliamentary Strengthening II (GPPS). Their methodology involved visiting national pilot projects, interviewing programme staff and reviewing documents. Overall, the evaluators found that the GPPS was a 'considerable success' and that it had 'implemented innovative parliamentary projects at national, regional, and global levels' (p. 1). Though they were able to identify some specific impacts in the case studies, they caution that there is a need to develop more effective monitoring and evaluative indicators (p. 151).

Some of the country-specific impacts are identified below.

- **Algeria:** The project was found to have had a pronounced impact on the parliament. This includes parliamentarians formulating requests for more information about proposed legislation and suggesting ways to improve parliamentary work in training seminars (p. 18-19).
- **Benin:** Positive impacts were identified in legislative effectiveness, government oversight and institutional modernisation. Legislative effectiveness has been demonstrated in the improved way parliament dealt with the 2006 national budget, in a reconsideration of legislative bills that were submitted to parliament but never considered, and in an increase in legislative production (p. 32). There was a quantitative increase in the use of oversight procedures such as interpellations and commissions of inquiry (p. 32-33), and a notable impact on the National Assembly's use of information technology, specifically through the development of an internal computer network and installation of an internet site (p. 33).
- **Lebanon:** In the context of an unstable political environment, the evaluators found it difficult to measure the impact of the programme (p. 39).
- **Morocco:** Actual and ongoing changes to the parliamentary administration and a commitment to implement a comprehensive communications strategy are two of the impacts identified by the evaluators in Morocco.
- **Niger:** Real and perceptible results were identified in the project activities in Niger relating to an improvement in the quality of legislative work and oversight activities (p. 79). Specifically, there was an increased involvement of parliamentary commissions in the examination of bills, an increase in the number of legislation and amendments proposed by parliament, a significant increase in the number of interpellations and questions submitted, and an increase in the profile of female deputies (p. 83).

NIBR (2010), *Evaluation of the Norwegian Centre for Democracy Support 2002-2009*. Oslo: Norad.

<http://www.norad.no/en/tools-and-publications/publications/publication?key=158291>

The Norwegian Centre for Democracy Support (NDS) was a cross party forum that sought to strengthen democracy in developing countries through party assistance. It was closed in 2009 following critical reports and an evaluation was commissioned to explore impacts and lessons. The methodology utilised by the evaluators involved both a literature review and interviews. The evidence of impacts was broadly negative, with evaluators finding few indications that NDS had any lasting impact on partner organisations in promoting democracy (p. 25). The evaluators note the complexity of developing indicators to measure political change and caution that it is often difficult to draw inferences between an observed change and a programme (p. 98).

Nakamura, R., Johnston, N. and Rodrigues, C. (2007), *Independent Evaluation of the UNDP Papua New Guinea Support to Parliament Project*.

<http://erc.undp.org/evaluationadmin/manageevaluation/viewevaluationdetail.html?evalid=2859>

The UNDP Papua New Guinea Support to Parliament Project (PNG-SPP) was initiated in 2006 and sought to provide comprehensive parliamentary assistance over five particular areas: the parliamentary service's systems and process; the committee system; linkages with provincial legislatures; supporting MP's; and linkages to external support (p. 3). In this independent evaluation, Nakamura et al. were tasked with identifying project outcomes and impacts, and making recommendations on lessons learnt. The evaluation methodology involved desk-based research and interviews with project staff, parliamentary representatives and donors. Though the evaluators were able to identify project activities and some outcomes, they do not comment on their broader impacts. Of critical importance here is the project's lack of a monitoring and evaluation framework and its focus on only basic outcome indicators (p. 11).

IPU/UNDP (2003) *Ten Years of Strengthening Parliaments in Africa, 1991-2000: Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward Inter Parliamentary Union and UNDP*. Geneva: UNDP

http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/africa2000_en.pdf

Technical assistance to African parliaments significantly increased in the early 1990s. This IPU/UNDP retrospective provides an in-depth survey and assessment of programme assistance to Africa in the 1990s. The methodology utilised involved a questionnaire sent to 48 African parliaments and to bilateral and multilateral donors. On the basis of the data collected, six parliaments were selected for more detailed investigation – Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The evaluators found that half of the targeted parliaments benefited from technical assistance in the period covered and that greater project success was found among those parliaments that were 'reform-minded' (p. 31). The retrospective focuses on activities and recommendations and mentions a few impacts. Some of those identified in the case study analysis are detailed below.

- **Benin:** the establishment of a parliamentary documentation centre and an increase in staff motivation that was demonstrated through the creation of a web page (p. 13).

- **Burkina Faso:** an improvement in staff skills and training (p. 16).
- **Ethiopia:** an increased availability of parliamentary documents; greater publicity for parliamentary proceedings on national television; increased representation of opposition and independent members on committees; more gender inputs and a review of legislation to ensure gender equality (p. 18).
- **Kenya:** restructuring of committee rules and an amendment on the procedure for examining bills; more active committees (p. 22).
- **Zimbabwe:** an improvement of parliamentary library; better management of human resources (p. 26).

Power, G. et al. (2009), *Evaluation of International IDEA's Political Parties Programme*. London: Global Partners and Associates.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) supports a range of programmes and initiatives that seek to strengthen the capacity of political parties to act as 'agents of democratisation' (p. 8). In this comprehensive independent evaluation, Power et al. assess the quality and impact of the Parliamentary Parties Programme (PPP), contextualising it within both the wider political contexts and the activities of other donors and agencies working in this field (p. 5). The evaluation methodology utilised was rigorous and involved the development of a comprehensive framework for assessing the quality and impact of the work (p. 12-14). Desk-based research was complemented with field visits and key informant interviews; triangulation was used consistently to heighten the accuracy of the collected data (p. 14). At the outset the authors caution that evaluating the impact of democracy support is 'notoriously difficult' (p. 13) and claim that the many of the goals of the PPP are extremely broad, making it problematic to identify their specific impacts (p. 10). They recommend that objectives should be refined to make them more accessible and achievable (Ibid.). Despite the challenges of evaluation, the authors found that the PPP had a significant impact in a number of areas, namely 'providing support for regulatory reform, fostering multi-state dialogue and strengthening party systems in conflict prone societies' (p. 10).

3. Other useful resources

Rocha Menocal, A. and O'Neil, T. (2012), *Mind the Gap: Lessons Learnt and Remaining Challenges in Parliamentary Development Assistance - A SIDA Pre-Study* (UTV Working Paper, 1) Stockholm, Sweden: SIDA.

<http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7925.pdf>

In this frequently cited working paper, Menocal and O'Neil review the knowledge and effectiveness of donor approaches to parliamentary development. The study identifies gaps in knowledge and assesses the need for a thematic evaluation. The authors establish that 'there is a lack of a robust evidence base for assessing the impact of parliamentary support' (p. 63) and the available material tends to focus on processes, outcomes and activities rather than on impacts (Ibid.). The paper states that poor programme design can undermine evaluation processes, specifically where there are poorly specified hypotheses, weak baselines and unsuitable indicators (p. 32).

Power and Coleman (2011), *The Challenges of Political Programming: International Assistance to Parties and Parliaments*. Draft. Stockholm: International IDEA.

<http://global-partners.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Challenges-of-political-programming1.pdf>

In this discussion paper, Power and Coleman assess the challenges of parliamentary and party assistance, drawing from four case studies in Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana and Macedonia. They emphasise the difficulty of identifying the impacts of parliamentary assistance programmes and the challenges of developing quantitative indicators (p. 14). The authors caution that donors and agencies should have a clear understanding of how political change happens – ‘incrementally, over a long period and [it] is shaped by a number of different factors’ (p. 14) – and that they should set meaningful and realistic objectives with this in mind (p. 23).

World Bank Institute (2007), *Strengthening Parliaments – Strengthening Accountability: The World Bank Institute’s Parliamentary Strengthening Program Retrospective*.

Washington, DC: WBI.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PSGLP/Resources/RetrospectiveSTRENGTHENINGPARLIAMENTS.pdf>

For over 15 years, the World Bank’s Parliamentary Strengthening Programme (PSP) has provided support to parliaments and legislatures across the world. In this comprehensive retrospective analysis, the authors explore the approaches, outcomes and lessons learned by the PSP. The methodology utilised combines desk-based research, primary interviews, an electronic survey and case studies (p. 9). The limited number of impacts identified include: in Ghana, an improvement in the quality of committee activity, with partisan considerations beginning to play a lesser role (p. 23); and, in Indonesia, the development and adoption of a strategic plan for parliament and an evident increase in the scrutinising role of the Parliament’s Budget Committee (p. 21).

Hubli, K. S., and Schmidt, M. (2005), *Approaches to Parliamentary Strengthening – a Review of SIDA’s Support to Parliaments*. (SIDA Evaluation 05/27) Stockholm, Sweden: SIDA

<http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/SIDA%20Approaches%20to%20Parliamentary%20Development.pdf>

This independent evaluation reviews SIDA’s support to parliaments and parliamentarians. The scope of the evaluation is comprehensive and includes four broad areas of inquiry: reviewing policies and strategic thinking; reviewing evaluation and lessons learned from other donors; surveying and analysing the parliamentary assistance portfolio; and reviewing selected case studies (p. 3). The evaluators found that a lack of political contextualisation has hampered parliamentary strengthening programmes (p. 5). They caution that there had been a focus on short-term interventions, rather than sustained technical assistance and that this has occasionally given the perception ‘that a substantial portion of assistance is event-driven rather than objective-driven’ (p. 4). In particular, they criticise the tendency to evaluate parliamentary exchanges, conferences and seminars based on participant reactions rather than their impact on parliamentary development (p. 8).

4. Ongoing or planned evaluations

There will be an independent evaluation of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) in 2013, which will assess the results of WFD's programmes, lessons learned, recommendations for future implementation and provide evidence for future funding decisions⁴.

5. Additional references

Power, G (2008), *Donor support to parliaments and political parties: An analysis prepared for DANIDA*. London: Global Partners and Associates.

[http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/Greg%20Power%20-%20donor support to parliaments and political parties an analysis prepared for danida.pdf](http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/Greg%20Power%20-%20donor%20support%20to%20parliaments%20and%20political%20parties%20an%20analysis%20prepared%20for%20danida.pdf)

Tostensen, A. and Amundsen, I. (2010), *Support to Legislatures, Report 2/2010, Synthesis Study*. Stockholm: Norad.

<http://www.norad.no/en/tools-and-publications/publications/publication?key=160869>

Wild et al. (2011), *International Assistance to Political Party and Party System Development, Synthesis report*. London: ODI.

<http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/5535-international-assistance-political-party-party-system-development>

6. Additional information

Selected websites visited

DAC Evaluation Resource Center: <http://www.oecd.org/derec/>

Inter Parliamentary Union: <http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>

World Bank Independent Evaluation Group:

<http://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/content/ieg/en/home.html>

UNDP: Evaluation Office: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/>

UNDP Evaluation Resource Centre: <http://erc.undp.org/index.html>

USAID: <http://www.usaid.gov/>

MandE: <http://mande.co.uk/>

3ie: <http://www.3ieimpact.org/>

⁴ See: <https://www.devex.com/en/projects/impact-evaluation-of-westminster-foundation-for-democracy-in-the-united-kingdom/secure?mem=ua&src=tender>

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Suggested citation:

Hinds, R. (2013), Impact of parliamentary and party assistance (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report), Birmingham, UK: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham.

About Helpdesk research reports: Helpdesk reports are based on 3 days of desk-based research. They are designed to provide a brief overview of the key issues; and a summary of some of the best literature available. Experts are contacted during the course of the research, and those able to provide input within the short time-frame are acknowledged.