



Discovering institutions that work for poor people

Research justification

- The political science literature on legislatures is becoming stronger, but studies of legislators are few and far between.
- Not enough is known about how effectively MPs manage the different demands of their formal and informal roles.

Research approach

A hybrid institution

Our scoping research suggested that MPs are subject to very strong and contradictory pressures to supply collective goods and private rewards and that this may reduce their incentives to perform strongly as legislators and watchdogs on executive power.

Managing the role

Our approach is to identify the MPs who are most effective at supplying public and collective goods, and to investigate, using multiple methods, the different institutional pressures and combinations of influences to which they are subject, and how they manage these.

A way forward

The research aims to map out ways in which MPs' roles might evolve so that parliaments are able to become more robust institutions, contributing more decisively to the development of African countries.

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Members of parliament

Getting the best from a hybrid institution

In most African countries, parliamentarians face informal pressures to provide private goods for clients of various kinds. In practice, responding to these pressures often takes precedence over providing public goods, such as legislative oversight, or collective goods such as constituency services. Pursuing the good governance agenda, donors have supported a number of programs to strengthen the formal underpinnings of the MP's role, in the hope of increasing the effectiveness of MPs in performing their 'proper' roles. However, effective public and collective goods provision by MPs in Africa needs to be built upon successful management of both the formal and the informal dimensions of the MP's role, and may call for novel combinations of the two.

The Parliamentarians research stream is investigating empirically the interesting hybrid institution that is the MP's role in Africa, focusing initially on countries with single-member constituency systems and beginning in Ghana. It is using both survey and ethnographic methods, and aims to generate data permitting new thinking about how elected representatives can become better servants of their communities and thus improve the pace and quality of development in the sub-region.

The MPs research is innovative in its combination of four empirical strategies: qualitative interviews with 20 MPs in each country, more extensive surveys covering all MPs in each country, surveys of approximately 1500 constituents in 10 strategically selected constituencies in each country and ethnographic studies of two MPs in each country selected on the basis of the survey results.

The research so far has indicated the need for further ethnographic work to investigate in depth some of the puzzles revealed by the survey work. It has also suggested bringing political party systems and their cultures into sharper focus. Options for 2010 include:

- replication of the research in countries with electoral systems like that of Ghana; and
- extension of the research to countries with party-list electoral systems.

For further information, visit www.institutions-africa.org or contact the Parliamentarians research stream leader: Prof. E. Gyimah-Boadi (gyimah@cddghana.org)