Parliaments and Democratic Development: The role of the European Commission in Parliamentary Support

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Presentation overview

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A common misunderstanding

- It is often assumed that democracy is something that the 'West' must bring to the South, beginning with Athens and Sparta.

- Actually, there are numerous examples of democratic systems in the ancient world that predated Athens and Sparta, including in Africa, India, Persia, and Mesopotamia

- Across pre-colonial Africa, consensus on community issues was reached through open-air forums, described by Portuguese colonists as *palavra*, from which the English word palaver is a corruption

- The former South African president Nelson Mandela, describes attending such community meetings as a child:

*"Everyone who wanted to speak did so.
It was democracy in its purest form."*

B. The EC and Parliamentary Development

Why should the EC invest in parliamentary support?

➤ Democratisation is a central focus of EC development policy

➤ Parliament is a central institution in effective democracies

➤ Budget support modality requires effective state oversight institutions including parliament

➤ Parliament is the central democratic institution and guarantor of fundamental rights

➤ Parliament assures democratic oversight of the security sector

➤ Free and transparent elections must result in functional and effective democratic institutions, otherwise the democratic path can be discredited.

About the Study on EC Support to Parliaments

- EC democratic development priority: *"Strengthen the institutional, organizational and technical capacities of parliaments as well as their ability to interact with civil society and the media"*

- International IDEA contracted to conduct: *"Study on strategies and methodologies for EC action in support to Parliaments"*

- Objective: *to support stronger and more strategic role of EC in parliamentary development*

- Study outputs to include:
  1. *Mapping EC support to parliaments in ACP, and asess strengths and weaknesses*
  2. *Produce practical guide to parliamentary development*
  3. *Develop and test training modules on parliamentary development programming*

Special study focus areas

1. Parliament - civil society relations

2. Building an effective parliamentary media and parliamentary communications

3. Fostering democratic oversight of the security sector

4. Parliament and the national system of public financial management

5. Gender representation in parliament and gender focus in national priority-setting

Data collection on EC projects underway…

Country		Project title	FA doc	Description action	Logfram	Budget	Progress reports	Monitoring reports	Final report	Extra docs
Angola		Appui institutionnel à l'Assemblée Nationale	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	no
Central African Republic		Programme de Renforcement des Capacités de l'Assemblée Nationale (PARCAN)	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	PIF proposition
Comoros		Appui à la mise en œuvre de l'Accord sur les dispositions transitoires aux Comores	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	no
Congo DRC		Programme Appui à la Gouvernance en RDC (PAG)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	no
Ethiopia		Sustained Good Governance in Ethiopia through Capacity-Building of National Parliament	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	Project proposal
		Support to Democratic Institutions Programme	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	no
Equatorial Guinea		Programme d'Appui dans le Domaine des Droits de l'Homme, de la Démocratie et de l'Etat de Droit	1	1	1	1	0	2	0	no
		Subvention UIP pour l'appui aux Institutions Parlementaires	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	no

Some facts on EC support to parliaments

- Between 2000 and 2009, the EC has financed or is planning parliamentary development projects in 23 ACP countries, in addition to several regional and sub-regional projects

- Projects vary greatly in size from a few thousand Euro to multiple millions

- The majority of support programmes to parliaments are part of wider initiatives to support good governance

- Some parliamentary support initiatives derive from institutional strengthening elements of budget support programmes, but many budget support programmes do not include parliamentary support

Project timelines

- February – June: Desk research and missions to parliamentary development organizations

- June: Missions to two parliamentary strengthening projects in Africa

- July – August: Draft assessment report

- September – October: Draft of practical guide and training module

- November – December: workshop to review practical guide and training module

C. EC parliamentary support programming -

Two case studies

South Africa

South Africa

❖ EC has been active in support of the South African parliament since the early years of transition to democracy in the 1990's

❖ It is easily the largest of the EC's parliamentary development programmes

❖ The programme has developed a unique 'sector approach' in which the national and provincial parliaments and legislatures are developed as a distinct legislative sector

❖ This allows the development of norms across national and provincial parliaments, and strengthens perceptions of the legislative sector as a key part of national governance

❖ The financing method for the new phase 2009 - 2012 is also unique; sector budget support

Senegal

Senegal

❖ EC support to parliament in Senegal is built around the Delegation 's budget support modality

❖ It is necessary to ensure effective national oversight institutions in order for general budget support to be an appropriate development financing modality

❖ Support to parliament is provided as part of the National Programme on Good Governance (PNBG)

❖ Emphasis has been placed on strengthening the National Assembly's Finance Committee

❖ Through its PNBG programme the Senegal EC delegation has been able to bring together the Ministry of Finance, the Cour des Comptes, and Parliament's finance committee to develop and implement a plan to clear a lengthy backlog of annual audits of public finances.

D. Best practices in parliamentary development

Six main areas of parliamentary strengthening support

❖ *Legislative capacity enhancement*

❖ *Strengthened oversight of executive action*

❖ *Strengthened representation*

❖ *More effective role in the budget cycle*

❖ *More effective parliamentary administration*

❖ *A representative parliament*

Groundwork is essential …

❖It's necessary to understand the internal dynamics of parliament in addition to the relationships between state institutions in order to be able to identify areas of strengths and weakness as well as potential *drivers of change*.

❖As part of the Study, the consultant team is developing a tool to assist in assessing a parliament's functioning and readiness for parliamentary support

❖An inclusive needs assessment and project development process will involve parliament's interlocutors (inc. executive and non-state actors) as well as parliamentarians and staff.

❖A starting point for parliamentary support is often the elaboration of a strategic development plan for parliament

Possible entry points for parliamentary support programming (1)

- As noted above, the *development of a strategic plan* is often a key starting point for parliamentary support

- The shift towards *budget support* is a crucial entry point; sector and general budget support requires effective oversight institutions

- Strong parliaments make effective use of the *parliamentary administration*: strengthening programmes for the parliamentary administration can build sustained additional parliamentary capabilities

- Increasingly, as discussed by Lisa, parliamentary support initiatives can be build around goals of *meeting international norms of parliamentary functioning*.

Possible entry points for parliamentary support programming (2)

- Parliamentary development can be *part of the electoral cycle approach*; this can either involve low-level support to support electoral legislation or, preferably, a broader interface building *from* free and fair elections to strong democratic institutions

- Parliaments are often sidelined in developing, approving, and evaluating *PRSP's*; EC support can help build national ownership and oversight of PRSP processes

- Often, as in Senegal, parliamentary strengthening work is part of a programme of *comprehensive support to good governance*.

- *South – south collaboration* is a crucial but underutilized vehicle for parliamentary development

E. Risks and challenges in parliamentary development

Possible barriers to parliamentary support programming

- Lack of real institutional commitment to change within parliament

- Resistance to parliamentary development from the executive

- Perceptions within the development agency that parliamentary development is 'political' and thus illegitimate

- Difficulty measuring outcomes rather than merely outputs

Some considerations in parliamentary development (1)

- Be observant of the overall constitutional framework of governance; reform efforts that contradict that framework will be difficult and controversial

- The political fact of parliaments means that the decision making process is usually one of negotiation between different political tendencies rather than a bureaucratic hierarchy as in ministries; this may appear inefficient but similar processes are followed in Western democracies.

- The relationship between the parliamentary administration and parliamentarians varies by institution; it cannot be assumed staff training will translate to improved capacity of parliamentarians

Some considerations in parliamentary development (2)

- There is frequently high turnover of parliamentarians at elections so sustainability can be a major issue
- It is important to ensure that all tendencies represented in parliament benefit from parliamentary support
- It is important to distinguish between political groups as constitutionally prescribed bodies within parliament and political parties outside parliament which are part of civil society
- Relationships between parliament and civil society are often competitive and even conflictual. Projects should aim to build synergy between these two institutions.

Thank you!

Any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me:

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