

# Constituency Development Funds

By Mark A. Baskin

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The past decade has seen the creation of an increasing number of Constituency Development Funds in emerging democracies. A “Constituency Development Fund,” or CDF, is the generic name for a policy tool that dedicates public money to benefit specific political subdivisions through allocations and/or spending decisions influenced by their representatives in the national parliament. In different places, they are known as Electoral Development Funds, Member of Parliament Local Area Development Schemes, Constituency Development Schemes, Earmarks, Pork Barrel, Priority Development Assistance Funds, among others names. The emergence of CDFs has led to no small controversy:

Critics argue that CDFs fragment decision making on development away from the executive, can upset the balance of power between the legislative and executive, and lead to decreased accountability in the employment of funds and to the misuse of funds intended for development and delivery of needed services.

Supporters point out that CDFs can redress the imbalance between executives and legislatures, mitigate the “winner take all” quality of elections, give legislators a way to deliver essential goods and services to constituents, provide an opportunity for popular participation in development projects, strengthen ties of constituents to representatives and legislatures.

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In response to these different perspectives, the international legislative community has undertaken systematic, comparative research on CDFs. A project at the State University of New York Center for International Development (SUNY/CID) has identified at least 18 such funds: 10 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 4 in Asia, 2 in the South

Pacific, and 1 each in the Americas and Caribbean. This evidence-based project opened in workshops in December 2009 and May 2010. We are conducting in-depth research in several countries, and are examining how CDFs are implemented, their transparency and accountability in operation, and how they affect constituency-representative relationships. In this work, SUNY/CID is working with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, as well as with the UNDP, the National Democratic Institute, the World Bank, the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank, the International Budget Project and individual members and staff from parliaments.

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At this stage, the SUNY/CID project can draw a few provisional conclusions. CDFs appear to be increasingly significant tools of decentralized resource allocation in developing countries. The relationships between the emerging CDFs and traditional types of centrally-driven development institutions are complex, and it is no small task to achieve cooperation and coordination among different types of programs aimed at decentralization and local development. Whilst CDFs can supply goods and services that were left undelivered by centralized administrations, they also challenge MPs and other policy makers to devise norms, rules and procedures for their effective operation.



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