

Parliamentary Strengthening and the Paris Principles

Synthesis Report

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Parliamentary Strengthening and the Paris Principles: Synthesis Report

Introduction

1. In theory, parliaments are one of the key institutions of democracy, playing an important role in terms of legislation, oversight and representation. Regrettably, in many developing countries – as well as in many developed countries – parliaments are weak and ineffective.
2. Parliamentary strengthening, supported by a range of bilateral and multilateral donors, aims to enhance the effectiveness of parliaments through institutional development, through building the capacity of parliamentary staff, MPs and committees, and through putting in place the nuts and bolts of infrastructure and equipment. It is local politics rather than the actions of Development Partners that play the major role in shaping the effectiveness of a country's Parliament, but Development Partners can make a difference and have a responsibility to ensure that their engagement is as effective as possible and takes account of the local political terrain. However, there is little systematic research or analysis about the effectiveness of parliaments or about the effectiveness of parliamentary strengthening. This makes it difficult for those considering whether and how to spend resources on parliamentary strengthening to make well-informed decisions.
3. This report synthesizes the findings from a research project on "Parliamentary strengthening and the Paris Principles". The aim of the research project has been to generate better evidence about parliamentary strengthening, in order to inform decisions about whether and how Development Partners can best support parliaments in developing countries. The project – a collaboration between ODI and the Parliamentary Centre, with funding provided by DFID and CIDA – has involved four country case studies; Cambodia, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda.¹ The vantage point taken for our analysis is that of the Paris Principles on Aid Effectiveness.

The Paris Principles and parliamentary strengthening

4. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness is an international agreement between donors and recipients of aid to make aid more effective. At its core are five inter-locking principles, adherence to which is expected to make aid more effective. First is the principle of ownership; that aid is used most effectively when developing countries – governments, in consultation with parliament and civil society – take charge of their own development plans and use aid in a coordinated manner to implement those plans. Second is the principle of alignment; that aid should be provided and spent in a manner that supports a country's development plans. Third is the principle of harmonisation; that donors should coordinate their support to particular developing countries to reduce duplication and transaction costs. Fourth is managing for results; that aid management and planning should be driven by a focus on results. And fifth, is mutual accountability; that donors and recipients of aid should be accountable to each other, in a transparent manner, for aid effectiveness.
5. Support provided by donors for parliamentary strengthening is a minor component of aid but nevertheless the Paris Principles provide a potentially useful vantage point from which to map the landscape of parliamentary strengthening and could – if they were applied in this sphere – enhance the effectiveness of parliaments and parliamentary strengthening. The intention has not been to assess whether the Paris Declaration has influenced parliamentary strengthening activities; it would be too soon to make such an assessment. Rather, the intention has been to use the Paris Principles as a vantage point from which to examine the landscape of

¹ Further information about the project, including the four country case study reports, is available at www.odi.org.uk/parliaments

parliamentary strengthening. The relevance of the Paris Principles to parliamentary strengthening is as follows:

- **Ownership:** Parliamentary strengthening would be consistent with this principle were a parliament to exercise effective leadership over efforts to improve its capacity and performance, for instance through having a clear strategy for parliamentary development that is respected by Development Partners, along with a programme to put it into action. Ownership in parliamentary strengthening implies that it is demand-led and responsive to the needs of the parliament.
- **Alignment:** Parliamentary strengthening would be consistent with this principle if Development Partners' support to parliaments were based on the parliament's own development strategy, if such support made use of parliament's own systems for managing resources and if support was provided in a predictable and timely manner that fits well with parliamentary and political timetables.
- **Harmonisation:** Parliamentary strengthening would be consistent with this principle if Development Partners coordinated their support to parliaments, using common arrangements and procedures, with each Development Partner focussing on its areas of expertise rather than duplicating their efforts. At the very least, harmonisation in parliamentary strengthening implies that Development Partners begin with a clear map of the landscape of parliamentary strengthening before thinking about how they can best add value.
- **Managing for Results:** Parliamentary strengthening would be consistent with this principle if the work of Development Partners and parliaments were driven by a focus on increasing parliamentary effectiveness. This would imply putting in place and making use of frameworks for monitoring and evaluating progress on parliamentary strengthening and making decisions about future activities on the basis of such monitoring and evaluation.
- **Mutual Accountability:** Parliamentary strengthening would be consistent with this principle if Development Partners and parliaments conducted joint assessments of progress on parliamentary strengthening, with parliaments sharing information with their other stakeholders and Development Partners making available information about their parliamentary strengthening activities.

Politics, parliament and parliamentary strengthening

6. Parliaments do not operate in a vacuum; their functioning and effectiveness is shaped very much by the country context and in particular the political context of which they are a part. This section outlines briefly – for each of the case study countries in turn – the context within which the parliament or national assembly operates as well as providing information about the parliamentary strengthening activities that have been conducted; further detail is available in the country case study reports. It also provides comments about the effectiveness of the countries' legislatures although the reader should bear in mind that Parliaments and Development Partners have, with few exceptions, made little progress in terms of establishing frameworks or collecting data to assess performance.

Cambodia

7. Cambodia is a post-conflict country. Its political institutions are still recovering from the devastation caused by many years of conflict. The first elections under the multi-party system took place in 1993, with a new Constitution also agreed in that year. The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has established itself as the dominant force, in Parliament and across the political landscape, with the elections of 2008 confirming its dominance.

8. The available evidence indicates that Parliament – dominated by the Executive and the CPP – is largely ineffective. Many if not most of its Members lack the skills, knowledge or incentives needed to play an independent role in relation to the Executive and the Parliamentary staff is poorly organised and overly-politicised. Recent years have seen some improvement, with, for instance, Commissions playing a more active role in scrutiny, an improvement in the quality of plenary debates and some positive changes in terms of Parliament's organisational capacities. Nevertheless, Parliament remains weak and lacks the institutional resources, such as an independent Budget Office, that it needs if it is to be an effective counterpart to the Executive.
9. The landscape of parliamentary strengthening in Cambodia is thinly populated, perhaps as a result of some Development Partners taking the view that the structural and political constraints faced by the Cambodian Parliament are insurmountable. As a result, two Development Partners – CIDA and UNDP – have dominated the landscape with others including Germany's GTZ, the World Bank Institute and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung playing smaller roles. In 2002, both UNDP and CIDA began major programmes of support to parliamentary strengthening. UNDP's ended in 2005 and has now entered a new phase; it is to be hoped that UNDP's new project, the Legislative Assistance Project (LEAP) benefits from the lessons learned in its earlier programme of work. CIDA's project – the Cambodia-Canada Legislative Support Project – was due to be concluded in 2007, but, having achieved impressive results, has been extended to 2009.

Ghana

10. Having endured years of military and quasi-military rule after gaining independence in 1957, Ghana has – since the new Constitution of 1992 – seen a series of relatively free and fair elections, with power transferred peacefully from one regime to another in 2000 and in 2008. In the most recent elections, in December 2008, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) won the most parliamentary seats; 114 as against 107 for the New Patriotic Party (NPP). In a closely fought Presidential election which went to a second round of voting, the NDC's Professor Atta Mills was victorious securing 50.23% of the vote, with a turnout of 72.9%. Competition was lively and at times heated, but largely peaceful.
11. Ghana's Parliament operates in a challenging context. Moves to enhance Parliament's financial autonomy are in progress, but it has been dependent on the Executive for its institutional resources, its independence is compromised by the fact that the majority of Ministers are drawn from Parliament and appointed by the President, and its legislative and budget powers are limited by the Constitution. The available evidence indicates that the Parliament – working within the constraints set by executive dominance – has some impact in terms of legislation, is rather ineffective in terms of representation and is increasingly active in terms of oversight, with, for instance, parliamentary inputs into the budget process and into policy processes on poverty reduction gradually increasing. Despite increased levels of funding, on the whole, the Parliament of Ghana remains weak. However, in comparison with other developing countries and with its own performance prior to the last two Parliaments, there are encouraging signs of progress.
12. A large number of Development Partners have been involved in parliamentary strengthening since the early 1990s, including the African Development Bank, CIDA, DANIDA, DFID, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, GTZ, UNDP, USAID and the World Bank Institute. Support has been provided in a wide variety of ways: through the provision of basic office equipment and infrastructure; by training MPs and parliamentary staff; by strengthening the Parliamentary Service and helping to produce strategic plans for parliamentary development; by supporting the work of particular parliamentary committees; through supporting programmes of parliamentary outreach and civic engagement; and, most recently, and not before time, by supporting efforts to develop frameworks to monitor and assess parliamentary performance.

Tanzania

13. Tanzania had been, in effect, a one-party state from independence in 1961 until the first multi-party elections took place in 1995, following the constitutional amendment of 1992. Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the former sole party, increased its share of the vote in elections in 2000 and 2005, with the opposition fragmented. Dominated by the CCM and an Executive that retains the right to dissolve Parliament, and with limited institutional capacity, Parliament has been ineffective. Politics is key at a micro-level too, with individual MPs having to balance their party's demands for them to support the Government, their responsibility to play an effective role in terms of legislation and oversight, and their desire to be re-elected by constituents who expect them to deliver development.
14. Recent years have however seen the emergence of a new dynamic with MPs increasingly keen to hold the Government to account, particularly in relation to corruption. The Prime Minister and two Ministers resigned in February 2008 following the publication by a parliamentary committee of a hard-hitting report. MPs were emboldened in their efforts by their constituents' demands – informed by increased media coverage of parliamentary issues – that corruption should not be tolerated. The strengthening of parliamentary committees, changes to parliamentary rules and procedures, and improved collaboration between civil society organisations and Parliament, have also been important steps towards more effective oversight.
15. A large number of Development Partners have provided support to Tanzania's Parliament since the transition to multi-party politics in the early 1990s. UNDP has provided support for many years, initially by meeting Parliament's basic needs for physical infrastructure. Since 2007, UNDP has been the lead coordinating donor for the multi-donor Deepening Democracy programme which includes within it a parliamentary component. Taking seriously the importance of ownership, the Deepening Democracy programme and its parliamentary component seek to apply some of the lessons that were learnt from an earlier USAID-led programme of technical assistance that was regarded with some suspicion by the Bunge and particularly its leadership. USAID continues to provide parliamentary support in Tanzania, but outside of what is now the primary mechanism for parliamentary support, the Deepening Democracy initiative.

Uganda

16. Ugandan politics has been dominated by President Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) since 1986. The elections of 2006 were the first to be held under the multi-party system for 25 years but the legacy of one or no-party rule and the continuing dominance of the NRM, the Executive and President Museveni – now able to run for the Presidency again in 2011 – continue to shape the functioning and performance of the Ugandan Parliament. It will take some time for the relationship between the new political system and the Parliament to settle and for the 54% of MPs who are first-time MPs to find their feet.
17. The Parliament of Uganda is relatively well-equipped in terms of institutional capacity, a result in part of sustained support from USAID, DFID, UNDP and others. Somewhat paradoxically, a number of key parliamentary institutions were put in place under the Movement system of no-party politics. Despite having relatively well developed institutions, Parliament is considered by many to be less effective now (in the eighth Parliament) than it was under the Movement system of no-party politics (particularly during the sixth Parliament). Nevertheless – despite some recent backward steps such as the replacement of Committee Chairs with Government loyalists in July 2008 and the marginalisation of Parliament in the National Social Security Fund scandal – oversight does seem to have improved in some regards, with the accountability committees asking searching questions of Ministries and Departments and with Parliament engaging more effectively with the budget process.
18. A number of Development Partners have engaged in parliamentary strengthening in Uganda since 1996, with USAID, UNDP and DFID playing particularly important roles. In the years

immediately following the elections of 1996, the focus was on the provision of equipment and training for MPs and parliamentary staff. From around 1998 considerable efforts were made to put in place some key parliamentary institutions including the Parliamentary Commission, the Parliamentary Service and the Parliamentary Budget Office and then – setting out Parliament's vision and seeking to ensure that Development Partners aligned their support with it – the Parliamentary Strategic Investment and Development Plan and the Parliamentary Development and Coordination Office. Development Partners pushed hard for these institutions to be established, but with their necessity was recognised by the Parliament itself, they encountered little opposition. More recently, Development Partners have shifted their attention from the supply-side of parliamentary strengthening to the demand-side, working more on parliamentary outreach and civic engagement, and – most recently – situating parliamentary strengthening within a wider programme of work on Deepening Democracy.

19. In Uganda as in many developing countries, voters, many of them living in poverty, expect their MPs to deliver development to their constituencies rather than demanding that they play an effective role in terms of legislation and oversight. This issue – a complicated one for MPs and parliaments in emerging democracies – must be addressed if parliamentary strengthening is to be effective. Understanding the functioning of political parties is crucial too, particularly in a country such as Uganda where multi-party politics is new. Development Partners are rightly hesitant about interfering explicitly in domestic politics, but if they are to support the emergence of parliamentary democracy as a competition between ideas and agendas rather than a contest between individuals, then they urgently need to engage more effectively with political parties.

Parliamentary strengthening: A view from the vantage point of the Paris Principles

Ownership

20. A vision and plan for Parliament's development provides the foundation for effective parliamentary strengthening. If such a plan is to be implemented, it needs to be owned by Parliament. In Tanzania, Parliament's Strategic Development Plan has not been finalised because of the political complexities of relationships between Development Partners and Parliament and because the Parliamentary Service is weak. In Cambodia, a Strategic Framework and Action Plan was finalised in 2007, but – with Development Partners having driven its production, in the face of severe local capacity constraints – it remains to be seen whether it will be implemented effectively. This issue and the challenges it raises for establishing ownership of plans for parliamentary development would be more pronounced still in fragile and conflict-affected states. In Ghana, an Enhanced Strategic Plan is in place although there are question marks about whether Parliament is exercising the leadership needed to implement the plan. The setting up of a parliamentary unit with responsibility for liaising with Development Partners, along the lines of Uganda's Parliamentary Development and Coordination Office, should enhance the effectiveness of parliamentary strengthening in Ghana. Finally, in Uganda, the PSIDP – alongside other key institutions – asserts a strong sense of ownership by Parliament of its own development plans. Development Partners have played a crucial role in supporting the production of these various plans, having to find the right balance between pushing for a plan to be established, and ensuring that the plan is Parliament's own.

Alignment

21. To be effective, parliamentary strengthening support needs to be aligned to a parliament's own plans for its development. The absence of a strategic plan in Tanzania and Cambodia has meant that parliamentary strengthening in those countries has been somewhat ad hoc, as Development Partners have had no clear statement of what they should be aligning with. As experience in Tanzania and Cambodia demonstrates, Development Partners should bear in mind that when Governments are at best lukewarm about seeing a stronger Parliament, aligning support with the Government's plans, as the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness calls for,

does not necessarily translate into providing support for Parliament. In Ghana and most especially in Uganda, having a clear Strategic Plan has provided a focus and framework for Development Partners' support for parliamentary strengthening. In Uganda, the establishment of a Parliamentary Development and Coordination Office as a clear interface for Parliament and its Development Partners has proved a valuable and increasingly effective addition to the landscape of parliamentary strengthening and a model that could be adopted elsewhere.

Harmonisation

22. Development Partners, at times pushed by Parliaments, clearly acknowledge the value and importance of harmonising their support for parliamentary strengthening. Without harmonisation, coordination and good communication, the landscape of parliamentary strengthening is all too often characterised by duplication, gaps in provision and high transactions costs that are borne by poorly-resourced parliaments. Much remains to be done on harmonisation. In Cambodia, with a small number of players, harmonisation should be easy, but working out which Development Partner should lead remains a challenge. In Ghana, the decision that CIDA should lead is a welcome step towards increasing harmonisation. In Tanzania and Uganda, ambitious wide-ranging programmes on Deepening Democracy promise much progress on harmonisation, although in each case some key donors including USAID and the EU are not part of the new initiatives.

Managing for Results

23. Little has been achieved in terms of putting in place effective systems for monitoring, evaluation and learning. This reflects the lack of attention and resources that donors and Parliaments have – until very recently – put into devising frameworks for assessing the effectiveness of Parliaments and of parliamentary strengthening. This means that decisions about parliamentary strengthening are, to too great an extent, based on guess-work and hunches. A small number of Development Partners including USAID and Sida and to some extent UNDP, CIDA and DFID have conducted good evaluations of parliamentary strengthening support but there are many instances when evaluations have not been conducted and basic documentation and record-keeping is poor. If the flow of resources to parliamentary strengthening is to be sustained, then the parliamentary strengthening community needs to up its game in terms of monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability. Joint evaluations of parliamentary strengthening, such as that which CIDA is expected to undertake in Ghana, should be supported and encouraged.

Mutual Accountability

24. Reliable data and useful analytical frameworks for assessing the effectiveness of Parliaments and parliamentary strengthening are a pre-requisite for mutual accountability for parliamentary strengthening. It follows therefore that little has been achieved in terms of mutual accountability. There are some grounds for very cautious optimism however. In Cambodia, the Strategic Plan institutes regular discussions under a Joint Framework for Action. In Ghana, the Enhanced Strategic Plan could provide a framework for mutual accountability. In Tanzania, the Deepening Democracy programme establishes an Annual Stakeholder Review Meeting. And in Uganda, the Parliamentary Strategic Investment and Development Plan calls for an annual assessment. Putting mutual accountability into practice will require Parliaments and Development Partners to work together, recognising that accountability is about learning and improving performance rather than being solely about checking up on each other.

Conclusions

25. The Paris Principles provide a useful vantage point from which to map the complex landscapes of parliamentary strengthening. If parliamentary strengthening were conducted in a manner that were more in line with those principles, the evidence suggests that it would be more effective. In

their efforts to support the emergence of more effective Parliaments, Development Partners should pay heed to the Paris Principles, seeking to build stronger partnerships with Parliaments in developing countries. They should also bear in mind that it will require many years of sustained engagement to make a difference to the effectiveness of Parliaments in developing countries.

26. Our mapping has demonstrated the importance of ownership, with the experience of Ghana and Uganda – countries where parliamentary development plans have been put in place – contrasting with that of Cambodia and Tanzania. It has also demonstrated the value of alignment, with Uganda's Parliamentary Development and Coordination Office providing a useful model that might be replicated elsewhere. On harmonisation, our case studies demonstrate that Development Partners have much room for progress, although the establishment of Deepening Democracy programmes in Tanzania and Uganda is a move in the right direction. On managing for results and mutual accountability, very little progress has been made; it is essential that Development Partners and parliaments work together to establish frameworks for assessing the performance of parliaments and the effectiveness of parliamentary strengthening. In the absence of such frameworks and data about effectiveness, parliamentary strengthening will remain guided, at best, by intuition rather than by evidence.
27. The Paris Principles are a useful framework for moving towards more effective partnerships for parliamentary strengthening, but progress – as is the case for aid effectiveness more widely – depends very much on politics. It is local politics rather than Development Partner interventions that play the key role in shaping parliamentary performance. Nevertheless Development Partners have a responsibility to ensure that their engagement is as effective as possible. While donors may be reluctant to engage in parliamentary strengthening in an explicitly political manner, there is no doubt that parliamentary strengthening requires a good understanding of the political terrain. Subsequent research could usefully focus on the politics of parliamentary strengthening, exploring the incentives and accountabilities that shape the behaviour of Parliaments and MPs as part of the wider political system. This should include attention to informal as well as formal politics, and – so that Development Partners' increasing interest in engaging with political parties is based on sound evidence – investigating the ways in which political parties shape the behaviour of MPs, Parliaments and democracy.

	Ownership	Alignment	Harmonisation	Managing for Results	Mutual Accountability
Cambodia	Development Partners (DPs) drove the production of a Strategic Framework and Action Plan in its early stages and provided support until it was approved in 2007.	In the absence of a Strategic Plan, Parliamentary strengthening has been <i>ad hoc</i> . As the Government's plans have not prioritised parliamentary strengthening, alignment with those plans does not suffice.	With only two main players, and with those two main players acknowledging the enormity of the task, harmonisation has been relatively easy. But, deciding which DP should lead can be problematic.	Little has been done to assess the effectiveness of Parliament, but both key DPs' programmes of parliamentary strengthening have been evaluated.	Little progress as yet, but regular discussions under the Joint Framework for Action, established as part of the Strategic Framework and Action Plan, are a useful first step.
Ghana	Strategic Plan (established in 1998) and Enhanced Strategic Plan (ESP, from 2006-09) constitute important steps in establishing Parliament's ownership of its development.	There is some evidence of DPs aligning their support with the ESP, but little alignment in terms of financial systems or scheduling. There are welcome moves to establish a parliament-DP liaison unit.	DPs express a desire to harmonise, but there is still considerable duplication, a lack of information-sharing and a desire to maintain profile. CIDA (and the Parliamentary Centre) is now expected to play the lead role.	Little has been achieved in terms of establishing benchmarks, baselines or indicators. However, CIDA is leading a joint evaluation of parliamentary strengthening support provided by CIDA, DANIDA, DFID and USAID.	No joint evaluations have taken place and information-sharing is weak. The ESP could, alongside an annual reporting mechanism, provide a framework/basis for mutual accountability.
Tanzania	Achieving ownership has been difficult because of a weak Parliamentary Service and a history of distrust and poor communication between Parliament and DPs. Parliament's Strategic Development Plan has not been finalised.	The absence of a Strategic Plan has meant that there is little for DPs to align their support with. Aligning support for governance with the Government's plans will not necessarily translate into the provision of support to Parliament.	There is much room for progress, but there has been increasingly effective communication and collaboration in recent years, with the UNDP-led Deepening Democracy programme the current focus for most, but not all, DPs.	Little has been achieved in terms of putting in place effective systems for monitoring, evaluation and learning. Progress reports produced by Parliament lack detail.	Little has been achieved. There is the prospect of some progress being made with the establishment of an Annual Stakeholder Review Meeting as part of the Deepening Democracy Programme.
Uganda	Parliamentary Strategic Investment and Development Plan (PSIDP, from 2004) and Parliamentary Budget Office – both established with strong support of DPs – assert a strong sense of ownership by Parliament of its own development plans.	Parliamentary Development and Coordination Office – established with support of DPs – provides a valuable and increasingly effective interface for Parliament and DPs which most, but not all, DPs make good use of.	The Deepening Democracy programme promises much in terms of harmonisation. But, some DPs remain outside the programme or its funding arrangements and not all parliamentary support falls within the Deepening Democracy programme.	Little has been achieved in this regard. USAID is the only DP to have conducted a systematic comprehensive evaluation of its support. The PSIDP calls for an annual assessment of parliamentary performance; this could be a useful entry point.	Little has been achieved. The annual assessment called for in the PSIDP could provide a useful framework. DPs need to provide Parliament with annual reports on their activities.