



Factsheet

Civil Society Engagement with Parliament

Systematic Inclusion of Civil Society

Parliamentary Reform

In 1991, Zambia changed its system of governance from a single party state to multi-party democracy. Consequently, and as a way of enhancing democratic governance, the National Assembly of Zambia found it prudent to realign the functions of parliament with the demands of plural politics. This called for the introduction of parliamentary reforms with a view to addressing some of the limitations which existed in the institution. The reform programme was, therefore, conceived in order to enhance parliamentary oversight of the activities of the executive and also to allow for increased participation of the citizens in the affairs of the country.

The goal of the second phase of the parliamentary reform programme and the subsequent third phase has been to increase the responsiveness to stakeholders so that parliament could fulfil its roles of representation and oversight. In achieving this goal, the reform programme worked towards increased interface, interaction, communication and consultation:

- Between members of parliament (MP) and their constituents
- Between the National Assembly and the general public including interest groups in civil society
- Between the National Assembly and the executive
- Between the office of the Speaker and the MPs regarding the management and administration of the National Assembly

A number of civil society organisations (CSOs) have identified this provided space for engagement and have come up with meaningful programmes and activities that bring parliament closer to the people.

Role of the Good Governance Programme

The Democratization, State and Civil Society Programme (Good Governance) supports the efforts of Zambia's civil society to advance governance reform and the poverty reduction processes. The overall goal of



Phase 2 of the Good Governance Programme which started in October 2009 is "Civil society organisations and networks contribute to national governance reforms and poverty reduction in an accountable manner." Its three component goals are directly related to the Fifth National Development Plan; they are

- Promoting civil society in the networking capacity to contribute and influence the implementation of national development priorities
- Supporting civil society in their efforts to contribute to transparent and accountable governance reform processes
- Enhancing the capacity of legal state institutions and paralegal networks for better legal aid provisions to the Zambian people.

Due to its emphasis on non-state actors the contribution of the Good Governance Programme to promoting the involvement of civil society in the parliamentary reform

¹ Source: The National Assembly of Zambia, www.parliament.gov.zm

process plays a pivotal role in helping attain the overall development goals related to governance reforms. The programme has been actively promoting dialogue between state institutions and civil society organisations.

Civil society organisations such as The National Youth Constitutional Assembly (NYCA), The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflections (JCTR), Caritas Zambia and Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) that are partners of the programme have made tremendous effort to engage actively and constructively with the National Assembly of Zambia. Other CSOs also made significant contributions to parliament in the debate running up to the enactment of the NGO Law. Below are three examples of CSO engagement with parliament in Zambia.

National Youth Constitutional Assembly (NYCA)

The National Youth Constitutional Assembly was established in the year 2002 to stimulate participation of young people in the conduct of economic and civic affairs of the country. The relationship between GTZ and NYCA has since 2003, been at first, through a project for the promotion of youth participation and later, through the Good Governance Programme.

NYCA's mission

Based on democratic and transparent principles NYCA seeks to create a platform for young people's participation in civic affairs of the country through holding youth parliaments and other such fora as a means of empowering the youth with skills and knowledge to engage in decisions on constitutional matters that affect them.²

NYCA currently operates in Eastern, Southern, North-Western and Lusaka provinces. As a means to reach out to as many young people as possible, NYCA has established school parliament clubs in ten high schools in Lusaka and three high schools in each of the other provinces. The National Assembly of Zambia provides technical support to NYCA in the holding of annual National Youth Parliaments. The National Assembly also features the cooperation of NYCA with the Parliamentary Business Division at Cabinet Office to ensure mainstreaming of the youth parliament views on the Government agenda.



Young parliamentarians shaking hands with the Speaker of the National Assembly, Amuusa Mwanamwambwa, after the official opening of the 2009 National Youth Parliament

The National Youth Parliament is held to commemorate the International Day of Democracy which falls on 15th September every year. Sensitising youths on democracy and bringing parliament closer to young people in order to inspire them to become future leaders has been identified as an overall objective of the youth parliament. Submissions that are obtained from the youth parliaments are channelled for further discussion and possible adoption through the parliamentary select committees. In 2009 all submissions were handed over to the Committee on Education, Science and Technology and the select committee on Sport, Youth and Child Affairs².

Complementing the above activities NYCA undertakes workshops to popularize the presence of the Constituency Parliamentary Offices. In 2008 NYCA carried out a study on the effectiveness of these offices by assessing their accessibility by the different social interest groups with keen interest on youths. The findings which indicated that there was low awareness on the use and functions of these parliamentary offices and very few people took advantage of their existence to connect with their MPs confirmed NYCA in its strength and effort to promote youth participation.

Research on Parliamentary Constituency Offices by Caritas Zambia

The cooperation between Caritas Zambia and the Good Governance Programme started in 2007. Caritas Zambia aims at promoting integral human development through economic justice, social justice, human dignity and empowerment of the less privileged in society. In order to reach these goals, it applies advocacy, research and training and institutional strengthening.

The Parliamentary Liaison Programme (PLP) is one of the programmes under the Governance unit of Caritas Zambia. The purpose of the programme is to enhance the democratic rights of citizens in contributing to the parliamentary policy and legislative making process in Zambia. The work is structured on the premise that policy formulation and enactment of legislation must be influenced from community level through community advocacy. The PLP is designed to bridge the gap between parliament, MP's and the constituency. Achieving this goal is pursued through activities such as "meet your candidate" forums during presidential and general elections, civic education advocacy work and training in public policy analysis.

In its interest to monitor the on-going parliamentary reform, the PLP carries out profound research. A relevant example is the one on surveying the effectiveness of parliamentary constituency offices. The study was commissioned to assess i) the level of interaction between the MPs and the electorate before and after the introduction of the parliamentary constituency offices, ii) determine the awareness of the constituents on the existence and the purpose of the constituency offices, iii) assess the level of utilisation and effectiveness of the offices in respon-

² NYCA Activity and Programme Report, September 2009

ding to the needs of the constituents and, iv) determine the extent to which the offices remain politically neutral.

Caritas's mission

Caritas Zambia is a faith based organisation inspired by the gospel and catholic social teachings and dedicated to the promotion and protection of human dignity and sustainable development for the people of God especially the less privileged through witnessing, animation and institutional strengthening.

The study revealed that there is widespread support for the idea of constituency offices in Zambia and the steps taken by government and supported by donors to decentralise parliament are well received. The constituency offices receive a good number of visitors. In many instances they have been able to address the concerns of the people. Nevertheless, the findings from this research also confirmed the gaps that exist between the National Assembly and the constituencies and the various perceptions surrounding the parliamentary constituency offices. To this effect, Caritas Zambia has produced a brochure titled, "A brief on the parliamentary constituency offices", which outlines the purpose of these offices, some misconceptions and the benefits of the parliamentary offices. The brochure also outlines the roles of a member of parliament and the roles of a citizen in the operation of a constituency office. At present, the National Assembly has successfully established parliamentary offices in all the 150 constituencies around Zambia.

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection on Zambia's Debt Situation

What JCTR does³

The centre engages in research on key social and economic issues like cost of living, social implications of debt servicing, accessibility of healthcare and education, and integrity of local democracy. The findings are disseminated in workshops, publications, and media presentations. JCTR also joins in advocacy campaigns by mobilising the public through local-based teams around Zambia and also by cooperating with other civil society organisations. JCTR has had marked engagement with parliament on the matter of the management of Zambia's public debt. The Good Governance Programme has been a keen supporter of the work of the JCTR since 2003.

JCTR's mission

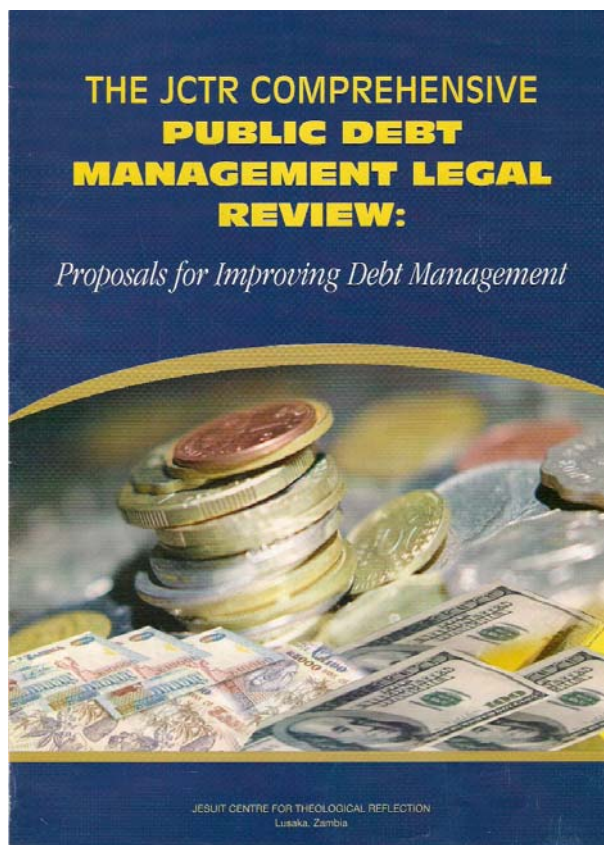
We foster from a faith inspired perspective a critical understanding of current development issues. Guided by the social teaching of the church that emphasises human dignity in community, our mission is to generate activities for the promotion of the fullness of human life through research, education, advocacy and consultation. Cooperating widely with other groups, our Jesuit sponsorship directs us to a special concern for the poor and assures an international linkage to our efforts. We aim to promote an acculturated faith, gender equality and empowerment of local communities in the work of justice and peace and the integrity of creation.

Background to Debt Monitoring

JCTR hosted Jubilee-Zambia, which aimed at securing total debt cancellation and a just international trade system in order to facilitate poverty reduction. A huge amount of debt was written off by Zambia's creditors in the years 2005 and 2006 under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI). The present focus is to advocate for sustainable debt management, which aims at ensuring that freed resources are used for equitable poverty eradication, but also for legal reform of the debt management process.

Realising the adverse impact of huge debt servicing and lobbying that Zambia does not fall back into a debt trap again JCTR undertook a research on the causes of the previous debt stock in 2007.

One of the strong recommendations from the research on strength and weaknesses of the debt management system in Zambia was the proposal of a Debt Management Bill⁴, a legal framework to guide the processes of loan contraction in the future. JCTR has been concerned by the fact that despite efforts and verbal commitments by government, Zambia has not yet come up with a policy for prudent management of its resources. The JCTR conducted a workshop for MPs that provided a platform to map out ways that parliamentarians would best influence the discussions both in parliament and in the National Constitutional Conference (NCC) committees. The workshop was conducted in May 2009 and contributed to equip the MP's with adequate information on debt trends. Furthermore, the event charted the way forward in establishing an effective strategy for the prudent management and accountability of Zambia's debt.



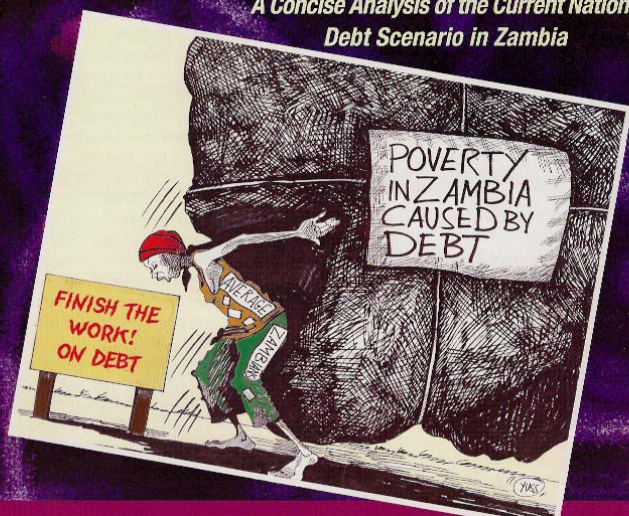
JCTR brochure, March 2008

³ www.jctr.org.zm

⁴ The JCTR comprehensive public debt management legal review: proposals for improving debt management, 2008

Is another debt crisis looming for Zambia?

A Concise Analysis of the Current National Debt Scenario in Zambia



Purpose of Prudent Debt Management

An institutionalised debt management regime is to ensure responsible borrowing, prevent the country from falling back into the debt trap and create understanding of the loan contraction process. Parliament is to be given the oversight mandate. Borrowing is to be confined to long-term projects for developing infrastructure, constructions of hospitals, schools and other public utilities.

Conclusion

It has been argued that in Zambia, the extent to which civil society organisations are recognised and engaged with as independent development actors is limited and that these have become isolated “events” rather than a process of engagement in the assessment of policy results. In other words, civil society organisations appear to be legitimising policies determined by

governments and donors, rather than by an open dialogue. Civil society is also alternatively viewed as a source of legitimacy and stability for government and as a source of resistance against arbitrary, oppressive and overweening government.⁵ The parliamentary reform of 1991 took cognisance of the former view and made a goal to work towards increased interface, interaction and communication between the National Assembly and civil society groups.

All this is done with a view to generating a social basis for democracy and the production of social trust, reciprocity and networks. From the documented examples, it is agreed that civil society organisations provide checks on government power and by this contributing to better governance through enhanced accountability and transparency. Civil society organisations also contribute to policy formulations, safeguard rights, articulate interests and deliver social services. In so doing, they enhance efficiency and participation in public affairs and the strength of the rule of law. Participation is one of the characteristics of good governance. Participation needs to be informed and organised. It is important for civil society in Zambia to be equipped with information, strategize adequately and participate effectively in the spaces provided through the various reform processes.

⁵ Rosenblum N L & Post R C (eds), 2002, *Civil Society and Government*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey

The Highlights of the Bill

- Establishing of a debt advisory committee appointed by cabinet, comprising of seven representatives from the Ministry of Finance and National Planning (MoFNP), three from the Bank of Zambia and representatives from civil society, charged with overseeing the country's debt and revenue for the future
- Regular state debt management strategy to be determined by MoFNP. This strategy should include citizen's participation and be approved by a council of ministers
- Parliamentary oversight including deciding upon annual borrowing ceilings, setting of broad terms and conditions for loan procurements and planning what loans to contract as well as the purpose of that specific loan
- Information on the outstanding debt
- Medium-term plans to project both domestic and external borrowing
- Terms and conditions of borrowing including capital investment, projections and expenditure
- Responsibility of approving expenditure, revenue and the borrowing terms after the budget presentation by the Minister of Finance through Parliament
- Authority of setting borrowing conditions which must be approved by cabinet through the Attorney General.

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- German Technical Cooperation -

Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
65760 Eschborn, Germany
T +49 61 96 79-0
F +49 61 96 79-11 15
E info@gtz.de
I www.gtz.de

Contact:
German Technical Cooperation

GTZ Lusaka Office
Plot No. 6469 Kariba Road, Kalundu
Private Bag RW 37X
Lusaka, Zambia
T +260 21 1 291 918-20
E dedo.geinitz@gtz.de

Factsheet 3

Author:
Lorraine Tembo Mupeta

Responsibility:
Dr Dedo Geinitz

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