

Capacity Enhancement

BRIEFS

SHARING BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTHENING

The Case of Ghana

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This paper examines the World Bank Institute's (WBI's) first multiyear capacity enhancement program in the field of parliamentary strengthening. Seven lessons have emerged: (a) strong domestic political support is necessary, (b) parliamentary strengthening activities should complement broader governance reform efforts, (c) training activities should be integrated into broader parliamentary capacity-building initiatives, (d) training activities need to reflect the evolving parliamentary agenda, (e) a nonpartisan approach is essential, (f) activities must connect with the administrative structure of parliament, and (g) parliamentary committees benefit enormously from direct interface with international organizations, among others, the World Bank and Parliamentary Centre.¹

In late 1996 the Parliament of Ghana requested support for members of its Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and Finance Committee. It was thought that the forthcoming elections in December 1996 would result in an effective opposition² and that the new Members of Parliament (MPs) would benefit from understanding the what, why, and how of financial management reforms, especially as the new Parliament was expected to play an important role in exercising parliamentary oversight of public expenditures.

WBI's global parliamentary training program had begun four years earlier, but had focused primarily on raising the awareness of MPs on specific policy issues. This was the first time it was to focus on strengthening the *institution* of Parliament and work in Ghana itself. Several challenges had emerged following the 1996 elections: few MPs had experience in Parliament or in dealing with the policy issues they would soon have to address; the election had been bitterly fought, and partisan tensions were high; and fundamental weaknesses existed in Ghana's public financial system, including chronic arrears in the public accounts, malfeasance throughout the civil service, and incompetence of many low-level officials. Moreover, the PAC and the Finance Committee themselves had no support staff or even a place to meet.

Collaborating initially with Ghana's Institute of Economic Affairs,³ WBI and the Parliamentary Centre of Canada planned a series of workshops, whose objective was to provide practical advice to MPs on the budget process and relate it to the wider economic reform program to modernize and streamline Ghana's public sector. The first workshop examined the attributes of successful parliamentary committees and reviewed the difficult economic and financial situation facing the country; subsequent activities focused on the budgetary process and committee work planning.

In 1998 the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) awarded the Parliamentary Centre a grant to implement a multiyear parliamentary strengthening project; this anchored the ongoing training program in a broader effort to strengthen parliamentary governance in Ghana.

Change of Government

The December 2000 elections resulted in a change of government,⁴ but as the new government settled in, familiar patterns emerged: it fired hundreds of local government members (appointed by the previous president) and furloughed many senior public servants and army/security officials. The new government spoke out strongly against the previous "culture



of silence,” while the former government, now in opposition, developed an aggressive parliamentary style. A drive for political reform thus emerged, which gave energy and impetus to improvements for parliamentary involvement in policymaking process and oversight.

Capacity Enhancement

Although WBI’s program objectives focused primarily on enhancing capacity at the organizational level, namely on building the capacity of the PAC and the Finance Committee, this necessarily involved working at the level of the individual MPs (by increasing their ability to understand governance and budget issues) and at the institutional level (by enhancing the interaction of Parliament with both the Executive and civil society).

Individual MPs

In 2003 the Bank’s Social Development Department and WBI studied the impact and sustainability of learning from WBI’s activities for parliamentarians around the world⁵; more than half of the respondents were from Ghana.

In terms of the *application and adaptation of learning*, the Ghanaian MPs reported that WBI capacity enhancement enabled them to **participate in Parliamentary deliberations more effectively** (e.g., “It has improved [the quality] of my debate on the floor of Parliament” and “I have become more critical at looking at the policy issues addressed in the budget”) and to **play leadership roles in key development issues** (e.g., “I have used the learning to expose corruption in Government, for example, the purchase of cars for the police without Parliamentary approval” and “I was able to analyze and check the extent to which [budget] allocations reflect the requirements of the Poverty Reduction Strategy”).

Regarding development of *communities of practitioners*, the MPs also reported that the **continuing contact they had with fellow alumni from the workshops and seminars was useful**; on average, they shared their learning with twenty to thirty other MPs. Former participants said “I assist all...MPs with the facts and figures that I gather...on financial matters,” “I am consulted or asked to participate in programs which involve the application of knowledge [gained in these seminars],” and “I have been selected to participate in radio and television discussions in these subject areas.” One MP said “[As a result of my training] I have been sponsored by UNDP to participate in the training of newly elected

MPs in Zimbabwe as a resource person on “The Role of Parliament in the Budget.”

Organizational Level

The program targeted three principal areas of organizational development: building cross-partisan trust within the committees, developing a strategic approach to committee work planning, and providing deeper research and analytical support to the committees.

The program has evidently had considerable impact at the organizational level. As early as 1997, the then chairman of the Finance Committee wrote “...the workshop in no small way cleared the perspective of members and will certainly be of enormous assistance to them in the discharge of their duties as members of the Finance Committee.” Within the committees, partisan considerations began to play a lesser role and informal links with the Ministry of Finance were developed. The manager of the Parliamentary Centre’s Africa Program said “The committees had come to have dynamics of their own, with a sense of internal purpose and an ability to confront questions of their ongoing role with thoughtful realism...The basic insights on the budget process, the audit role of Parliament, and the ways that committees can have impact in a parliamentary system, all have come to be understood by the Ghana economic committees.”

Two other patterns of evolving relationships began to emerge. The first was the interplay among MPs within the two committees. Each committee began to see itself as a unit, with members acting as part of the committee rather than as party representatives. By November 1997 the PAC had adopted the role of principal watchdog over expenditures and operated as an activist body able to take initiatives. The Chair of the Finance Committee at the time reported that the workshops had helped in determining the broad parameters of the committee’s future work and developing concrete steps to take.

The second pattern was cross-partisan cooperation on various issues, which the program proved successful in promoting. Examples included how to improve financial reporting transparency and increase detailed monitoring of expenditures to prevent abuse and to encourage cooperation between the PAC and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and between the PAC and the Serious Fraud Office (SFO). The PAC began to use field-based reviews of projects by subcommittees to provide assessments of government spending, thereby initiating a process partially compensating for late release of the Auditor General’s reports.⁶ The Finance



Committee also successfully developed a detailed checklist of points for consideration in approving for-foreign loans.

The Parliamentary Centre reported that the program had “helped foster cross-partisan interaction in committee activities,” while interactions with civil society organizations helped “ensure that individual MPs look at national development issues from a broader perspective.”⁷

Two ongoing themes at the policy retreats have been poverty reduction and curbing corruption. Notably, heightened awareness among senior MPs on these issues resulted in establishment of two parliamentary committees: Poverty Reduction (to oversee implementation of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy) and Government Assurances (to keep a compendium of assurances made by Ministers and oversee their fulfillment). A new anticorruption caucus of MPs interested in curbing corruption is also working under the aegis of the African Parliamentarians Network Against Corruption (APNAC) and with several civil society organizations in the field.

Institutional Level

MPs quickly began to appreciate the need to involve civil society in committee processes (e.g., through public hearings and meetings in various parts of the country⁸) and also the usefulness of developing closer links with the Executive. The PAC, Finance, Gender and Children, Local Government and Rural Development, and Assurances Committees have carried out joint investigations and public consultations on new and emerging priorities, including PRSP implementation,⁹ whereas both the PAC and the Finance Committee began to adopt participatory mechanisms when performing committee activities. The latter are judged to have “helped foster cross-partisan interaction in committee activities,” whereas interactions with civil society organizations helped “ensure that individual MPs look at national development issues from a broader perspective.”¹⁰ At the same time, linkages with the Auditor General’s office were strengthened and the Auditor General established a parliamentary liaison office to foster greater interaction between his staff and the PAC committee members.

Lessons Learned

This program demonstrated seven factors crucial for sustainable parliamentary strengthening¹¹:

Strong domestic political support, which the program had, even with a change of government.

This was demonstrated by the support of the Speakers and parliamentary leadership, including the majority and minority leaders and committee chairs.

Complementary with broader governance reform, in this instance, with the Bank’s Public Financial Management Reform and Financial Management Technical Assistance projects, which sought to promote, among others, greater government accountability. Such synergies are essential if the program is to be scaled up and replicated in other countries.

Integration of training activities into broader parliamentary capacity-building initiatives, in this case, the CIDA-funded project executed by the Parliamentary Centre.

Flexible design of training activities to reflect an evolving parliamentary agenda; training parliamentarians on such issues as budget processes, anticorruption, and poverty reduction issues; improving research and information capabilities; and emphasis on “just-in-time” training, successfully used in the fall of 2003 to enable experts from inside and outside the Bank to brief MPs on issues critical to their deliberations on the budget.

Reduction in partisanship and thus potentially more effectiveness in the PAC and the Finance Committee, supporting the assertion that “partisanship and committee effectiveness are inversely related: the less partisan the committee, the more effective it is likely to be.”¹²

Recent efforts to develop a training program for Parliamentary staff, helping to deepen the program’s impact within the institution of Parliament.

Direct interface of parliamentary committees with international organizations, such as the World Bank and Parliamentary Centre, clearly with enormous benefits. In turn, international organizations have the advantage of working with national policy institutes that each bring a particular perspective to the program.¹³

Yet challenges remain. Little effort has been given to change or even fully understand the incentive system for MPs. Despite low salaries—an important determinant in parliamentary effectiveness¹⁴—Ghanaian MPs remain committed and are making a difference. Why is this? Additional research on incentives for MPs would be useful. Furthermore, staff and research sup-

port for the PAC and the Finance Committee remains inadequate, and capacity-building efforts should be extended to departmental parliamentary committees overseeing such government programs as decentralization, local government, and health.¹⁵ The recently announced second phase of CIDA's project, coupled with the Bank's Credit for Accountability and Transparency (which explicitly provides support for Parliament) may be able to address these challenges. Another ongoing need is to raise awareness of Bank staff on the organization and operations of parliaments and how best to engage parliaments in their work.

Peer Reviewers : Yongmei Zhou, Economist, AFTPR, and Hon Steve Akorli, MP and former Chair, Finance Committee, Parliament of Ghana

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1 This brief summarizes outcomes of activities by the World Bank Institute and the Parliamentary Centre, financed by CIDA and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development.

2 The opposition party boycotted the 1992 parliamentary elections.

3 The Centre for Economic Policy Analysis, Centre for Democratic Development, Integrated Social Development Centre, and Institute for Policy Alternatives also subsequently became involved.

4 This was the first democratic change of government in Africa.

5 Saddiqi and Dreger, forthcoming.

6 Based on commentary from the senior leadership of Parliament.

7 Ghana Parliamentary Committee Support Project, "End of Project Report," November 2003.

8 Aided, in particular, by activities designed to facilitate such interaction in northern Ghana under the CIDA-funded program and carried out by the Parliamentary Centre with the Institute of Policy Alternatives.

9 Such investigations, at least in part, help overcome timing problems caused by late release of the Auditor General's reports.

10 Ghana Parliamentary Committee Support Project 2003.

11 Manning and Stapenhurst 2002.

12 Messick 2002.

13 Steven Langdon, personal communication.

14 Barkan, Joel and others, forthcoming.

15 Such support is now being provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

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