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Mind the Gap
Lessons Learnt and Remaining Challenges in
Parliamentary Development Assistance

A Sida Evaluation Pre-Study

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Presentations to Sida and Swedish Parliamentarians
Stockholm, 4-5 December 2012



Outline of presentation

1. Overview of the study
2. Overview of support to parliaments
3. Lessons & innovative practice
4. Stalled progress & explanations
5. Recommendations & next steps



Why parliaments and parliamentary development (PD) assistance?

- Parliaments sit at the centre of democratic political systems.
- But they remain weak and widely mistrusted.
- How to help them become more effective is a crucial question for actors involved in democracy support.
- This issue is even more salient within current international focus on results and cost efficiency.



Objectives of study

- Follow up on 2005 Sida evaluation.
- Review state of knowledge on parliamentary development assistance and its effectiveness.
- Identify key lessons and knowledge gaps.
- Assess need for a multi-stakeholder evaluation and, if relevant,
- Identify stakeholders interested in participating in a future evaluation and areas to be covered.



Overview of the study

Methodology

- Extensive review of the literature.
- Semi-structured consultations with 50+ stakeholders in PD field.
- Semi-structured consultations with 20+ parliamentarians.
- Attendance at 4th Annual Donor Coordination Meeting on PD.

Outputs

- Report, briefing, and presentation.
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Overview of support to parliaments

Who provides support to parliaments?

1. Bilateral development agencies (e.g. Sida, USAID, DIFD, CIDA)
2. Multilateral/inter-governmental institutions (e.g. UNDP, IDEA, WB, EC)
3. Parliamentary associations (e.g. IPU, AWEPA, PGA, CPA)
4. Political (party) foundations (e.g. NDI, Stiftungen, NIMD)
5. Non-governmental organisations (e.g. IDASA, PC, PMOs)
6. Private research/consulting firms (e.g. SUNY, DAI, GPA)



Overview of support to parliaments

The universe of PDA

No need to read the small print...

... but you can see there's lots of possibilities!

AIM OF SUPPORT		HOW IT IS TO BE ACHIEVED		
Policy focus	Desired outcome	Beneficiary	Modality	Activity
1. Democracy strengthening: objective is to strengthen several related institutions	1. Secure/untied funding for core activities	1. Parliament, as whole – Regional – National – Sub-national	1. Funding arrangement – Bilateral – Basket	1. Provide funds – Core funding – Grant making – Sector/budget support
	2. Improved physical infrastructure	2. Parliament, specific part – Speakers/ political leaders – MPs – Caucuses – Committees – Secretariat	2. Project type – Core funding – Project – Programme (set of linked projects)	2. Provide physical goods – Buildings/ furniture – Equipment/ software
2. Parliament focused: increasing parliament capacity is primary objective – Administration – Legislation – Oversight – Representation	3. Improved central/ support services e.g. library, research, admin.		3. Related institution (in recipient country) – Media – Churches – NGOs – Interest groups – Parties	3. Duration – Short term – Long term
	4. Improved institutional capacity e.g. legal and regulatory reform	4. International NGOs – Associations/ networks – Foundations – Research institutes/ think-tanks	4. Design – Demand led/ supply driven – Flexible/rigid activities – Context specific/ generic – Strategic/ad hoc, reactive	3. Develop/transfer knowledge – Training/ seminars – Peer support/ South-South cooperation – Exchanges/ study visits – Twinning – Secondment – Mentoring – Technical assistance
3. Issue based (i.e. indirect): support to parliament to further other policy objectives – Financial/budget monitoring – Corruption – Human rights/ gender equality – Poverty reduction – Health – Social accountability/ civil society advocacy – Peace and reconciliation – Elections – Political parties – Party system	5. Improved organisational capacity e.g. reform of structures, management systems and procedures		5. Implementation* – Direct implementation – parliament-parliament – funder-beneficiary – Via a third-party intermediary – UNDP, association, foundation, NGO, consultancy, etc.	5. Implementation* – Direct implementation – parliament-parliament – funder-beneficiary – Via a third-party intermediary – UNDP, association, foundation, NGO, consultancy, etc.
	6. Improved individual competency e.g. develop knowledge, skills and values	4. Generate and share information – Conferences – Networks		



Overview of support to parliaments

In practice, five main models of support to parliaments

- Discrete PD projects
- Direct funding for parliamentary organisations
- Longer-term PD programmes
- Issue-based programmes and projects
- Integrated democracy programmes

And a cross-cutting approach

- Politically aware programming
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Overview of support to parliaments

Main trends in support to parliaments

- Growth in PDA since late 1980s.
- But still small area of assistance in relative terms.
- Broader trends in international aid also influence PDA.



Overview of support to parliaments

Main take-away points on support

PD universe is diverse and complex.

- Diverse tools for supporting parliaments – and both objectives and methods influence effectiveness.
- Differences between PD organisations both within and different categories of actors.



Lessons for improved PD support

- PD assistance is an under-evaluated area.
- Yet there is remarkably consistent body of lessons and recommendations on improved support.
- We highlight **ten key lessons** in the study.



Lessons for improved PD support

Lesson 1: Most important lesson is that it is essential to understand how parliaments work in practice.

→ PD should not be only about fixing the car, but also about engaging with the driver, while having a sound understanding of road conditions.



Lessons for improved PD support

Factors that shape parliamentary incentives include:

- History of state formation
 - Nature of the political system
 - Nature of political parties and inter-party relations
 - Nature of patronage politics
 - Relations between civil society and political parties/MPs
 - Accountability mechanisms
 - Electoral politics and ensuing expectations of MPs
 - 'Winner-takes-all' nature of politics
 - High degree of turnover among MPs
 - Widespread apathy and cynicism
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Lessons for improved PD support

Lesson 2: Use in-depth political economy analysis to ensure that programmes are appropriate to context.

Lesson 3: Be realistic about what can be achieved given the PE of parliaments and the scale and timeframes of PD support.

Lesson 4: Base assistance on long-term commitments to partners.



Lessons for improved PD support

Lesson 5: Ensure PD efforts are driven from within and interventions are tailored accordingly.

Lesson 6: Develop an approach that provides needed technical support but is also politically savvy.

Lesson 7: Treat parliaments as part of the broader political system and integrate support with other areas of assistance.



Lessons for improved PD support

Lesson 8: Build assistance around specific policy issues rather than generic activities.

Lesson 9: Encourage South-South learning.

Lesson 10: Improve programme management (incl. better coordination, programme design and M&E, more tolerance of risk and more appropriate staff skills and incentives).



Innovations in PD support

The most striking changes within PD have occurred at the **international and strategic level:**

- There is now a strategic consensus about the key features of more effective parliamentary programmes.
- There are also more consistent efforts to improve coordination of PD efforts and share knowledge and experience.
- Examples include: Agora; development of benchmarks and principles; development of better suited indicators for PD field.



Innovations in PD support

Progress at the **operational level** remains more uneven/limited. Efforts include:

- Greater use of PE analysis to inform country strategies.
- More comprehensive and longer-term programmes of democracy assistance.
- More intensive and hands-on efforts to develop sustainable capacity.
- Some systematic demand-led work.



Areas of limited progress

But in many areas there has been no or only limited change.

Key areas of stalled progress include:

- Being politically informed and/or working politically
- Long-term and joined-up engagement
- Context-responsive and demand-led programmes
- Indirect / issue-based support



Constraint on uptake of lessons

Long-standing, clear lessons and general buy-in ...
but limited progress.

Why?

Three main types of reasons for the slow uptake.



Constraints on uptake of lessons

Constraint 1: Genuine gaps in knowledge or capacity

We know the principles of what we should do
but we don't know how to put them into practice

What's needed?

- a better evidence base,
- guidance on how to adapt to context,
- insight into MPs motivations and preferences.



Constraints on uptake of lessons

Constraint 2a: Tensions between individual lessons, objectives and/or positions

We know what we should do ... but there can be trade offs between objectives, e.g.

- RBA vs working politically or facilitating local agendas
- Large, integrated programmes vs. ownership & choice



Constraints on uptake of lessons

Constraint 2b: Tensions between individual lessons, objectives and/or positions

We know what we should do ... but we don't agree on the right way forward e.g.

- How to work politically in practice?
- Impact of harmonised programmes?
- Raises issues of ethics, effectiveness and prudence.



Constraints on uptake of lessons

Constraint 3: Political economy of aid system

We know what we should do ... but we are unable to do it.

Constraints on better practice arise from:

- staff incentives and ways of working,
- results-based agenda & bureaucratic compliance,
- lack of autonomy and adverse funding environment.



Constraints on uptake of lessons

The main take-away points on constraints are:

1. Disaggregate! Recognise and learn from variation in the PD field.
2. Trends within aid may make it less not more likely that PD organisations are able to act on lessons.



Recommendation 1: Do not proceed with a single, large-scale evaluation of assistance

- PD field is too broad and diverse to capture everything in a single evaluation.
- A large-scale, retrospective evaluation would likely reinforce lessons, recommendations and principles that are already widely accepted.



Recommendation 2: Address knowledge gaps by undertaking targeted evaluation exercises

This could include:

- A systematic review of existing evaluations and body of evidence in PD field.
- Focused evaluations (e.g. parliamentary networks, integrated democracy programmes, issue-based approaches, etc.).
- Tracking new/innovative approaches in real time.
- Comparative case studies.



Recommendation 3: Address knowledge gaps by undertaking further research

Not all knowledge gaps can be solved by evaluation. Further research could include:

- Research on what parliamentarians need/want.
- Analysis on the impact of social media and mobile technologies on accountability relationships.
- A synthesis of existing knowledge about how ongoing donor practices in other areas have undermined parliaments.



Recommendation 4: Promote greater coordination and dialogue among diverse PD actors

- Such coordination should build on ongoing initiatives.
- Greater efforts should be made to encourage linkages with non-OECD DAC donors.
- More could also be done to encourage the sharing of lessons among CSOs involved in parliamentary work in North and South.



Recommendation 5: Redefine the results-based agenda

- RBA needs to become better suited to the types of support needed to transform parliaments.
- PD actors need to move beyond their traditional role of fund providers and act as facilitators/ brokers of change.
- This calls for new approaches to manage and communicate results.
- An honest debate on RBA is needed to move the field forward.



Recommendation 6: Invest in better understanding of the political economy of donors

- There is an urgent need to better understand internal constraints to the uptake of lessons and recommendations in the PD field.
- This includes exploring challenges different PD actors face to adapt to new ways of working, and
- Analysing how the development assistance can be better aligned with the need for PD assistance.



Possible next steps?

- These recommended activities and exercises are not fully fleshed out options.
- They provide a menu of the kinds of alternatives available to move the PD field forward.
- The intention is for Sida and others interested to further develop proposals that seem most promising.



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