

Parliamentary strengthening and the Paris Principles: Four country case studies

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Dr. Alan Hudson (ODI) and Dr. Anthony Tsekpo (Parliamentary Centre)

For more details: www.odi.org.uk/parliaments or contact A.Hudson@odi.org.uk



Introduction to the research project

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, ineffective and marginalised. Parliamentary strengthening 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. 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.

The overall aim of this research project is to generate better evidence about parliamentary strengthening, in order to inform decisions about whether and how to provide support to 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. The vantage point taken for our analysis is that of the Paris Principles on Aid Effectiveness.

The Paris Principles and parliamentary strengthening

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. 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.

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 donors, 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 donors' 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 donors coordinated their support to parliaments, using common arrangements and procedures, with each donor focussing on its areas of expertise rather than duplicating their efforts. At the very least, harmonisation in parliamentary strengthening implies that donors 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 donors 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 donors and parliaments conducted joint assessments of progress on parliamentary strengthening, with parliaments sharing information with their other stakeholders and donors making available information about their parliamentary strengthening activities.

Politics, parliament and parliamentary strengthening

Cambodia: 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 most recent elections took place earlier this year. The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has established itself as the dominant force, in Parliament and across the political landscape. Parliamentary Commissions (committees) have begun to play more of a role in legislative scrutiny, but, dominated by the Executive and the CPP, with a highly politicised Parliamentary Service and lacking basic institutional capacity, Parliament is largely ineffective. UNDP and CIDA have been the key players in a landscape of parliamentary strengthening that has been predominantly supply-led.

Ghana: Having endured years of military and quasi-military rule since 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. The National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party are neck-and-neck as the December 2008 elections draw near. Competition for political power is lively, with political parties increasingly effective in putting forward their agendas. The Parliament of Ghana has shown some signs of becoming more effective, increasingly involving itself in budget processes for instance. There are however continuing concerns about Executive dominance. A large number of Development Partners have been involved in parliamentary strengthening including the African Development Bank, CIDA, DANIDA, DFID, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, UNDP, USAID and the World Bank Institute.

Tanzania: 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. Recent years have however seen the emergence of a new dynamic with MPs – encouraged by more informed voters – 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. DFID, USAID and UNDP have been amongst the key players as regards parliamentary strengthening.

Uganda: Ugandan politics has been dominated by President Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) since 1986. Until the first multi-party elections of 2006, politics was organised according to the Movement system of one or no-party politics. President Museveni, under pressure

from Development Partners, came out in support of multi-party politics once Parliament had been persuaded to abolish Presidential term limits. With Parliament and parliamentarians still getting used to multi-party politics, with the system of party politics in its infancy, and with the NRM still dominant (although perhaps decreasingly so), Parliament is considered by some to be less effective now than it was at times under the Movement system. 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, these key parliamentary institutions were put in place under the Movement system of no-party politics. Development Partners' support is increasingly focussed on the demand-side of governance and deepening democracy.

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

Ownership: 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 – it remains to be seen whether it will be implemented effectively. 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. 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: 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 that which they should be aligning with. When Governments are at best lukewarm about seeing a stronger Parliament, aligning support with the Government's plans 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: 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 DP 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: 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: 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

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. However, this conclusion needs to be taken in the context of the fact that data on the effectiveness of parliaments and parliamentary strengthening is in short-supply.

But, as with aid effectiveness more generally, while the Paris Principles are a useful framework for moving towards a more effective partnership, progress depends very much on politics. 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, encompassing formal and informal politics, the role of political parties, and the sometimes-competing incentives and accountabilities faced by MPs.

	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.