

# Focus: Parliaments and Poverty Reduction

“Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”

Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, 1947

“(N)o substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent country with a democratic form of government and relatively free press. (...) Famines kill millions of people in different countries in the world, but they don’t kill the rulers. The kings and presidents, the bureaucrats and the bosses, the military leaders and the commanders never are famine victims. And if there are no elections, no opposition parties, no scope for uncensored public criticism, then those in authority don’t have to suffer political consequences of their failure to prevent famines. Democracy, on the other hand, would spread the penalty of famines to the ruling groups and political leaders as well.”

Armatya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 1999, p. 152, 180

## Introduction

While underlining the general role of democratic institutions for just societies, these quotations also clearly point to their relevance for poverty reduction. As the very first democratic institutions, parliaments are seen as the guarantors of successful representative democracies. They are the expression of the central democratic principle: the identity of government and governed or government by the people. Composed and organised in different ways and elected for the most part, as legitimate representatives of the people they are probably the most important institutionalised form of civic participation in public affairs. Besides the task of representing the people (representative function), they also bear far-reaching duties and responsibilities in legislation (legislative function) and are the supreme body overseeing government (control function).

Parliaments also exercise a key function in poverty reduction and national development. Due to lack of know-how, limited technical and financial resources and capacities, an adverse political climate, unevenly distributed competencies and dependence on donors, however, parliaments are often unable to perform these tasks properly, especially in developing countries.

### Role of parliaments in development cooperation

As an aspect of democracy promotion, the promotion of parliaments has therefore also gained increasing attention in development cooperation as essential for successful and sustainable development and has been included in major international development cooperation documents. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) ascribed to parliaments a major role in setting

out national development strategies, for example, although a very heavy focus was still placed in the donor and partner countries on support for the executive. Finally, the promotion of parliaments as a major component of successful development cooperation was stressed above all in the Accra Action Agenda (AAA 2008). This contained pledges:

- by governments in developing countries to bear even more responsibility for take stronger leadership of their own development policies and to engage more closely with parliaments, citizens and local authorities in shaping, preparing, implementing and monitoring national development policies and plans (Paragraphs 8 and 13 of AAA).
- by **donors to be accountable** to each other and to their respective **parliaments** and governing bodies of the impacts achieved by the funds allocated and to increase the capacities of all development actors, **including parliaments**, so that these can take an active role in dialogue on development policy and on the role of development cooperation in contributing to countries' development goals (Paragraphs 10 and 13 of AAA).

Besides their basic functions (legislation, overseeing government, representation of citizens) parliaments are accorded the following specific tasks in development cooperation:

- In donor countries: maintaining policy commitment to development cooperation, co-drafting and approving national budgets, which are also important for development cooperation, and monitoring the administration of the development funds expended.
- In developing countries: co-drafting national development strategies, co-preparation and approval of the national budget and overseeing the lawful application of donor funds, with the role of parliaments in planning and controlling national budgets being of particular importance here (see Figure 1).

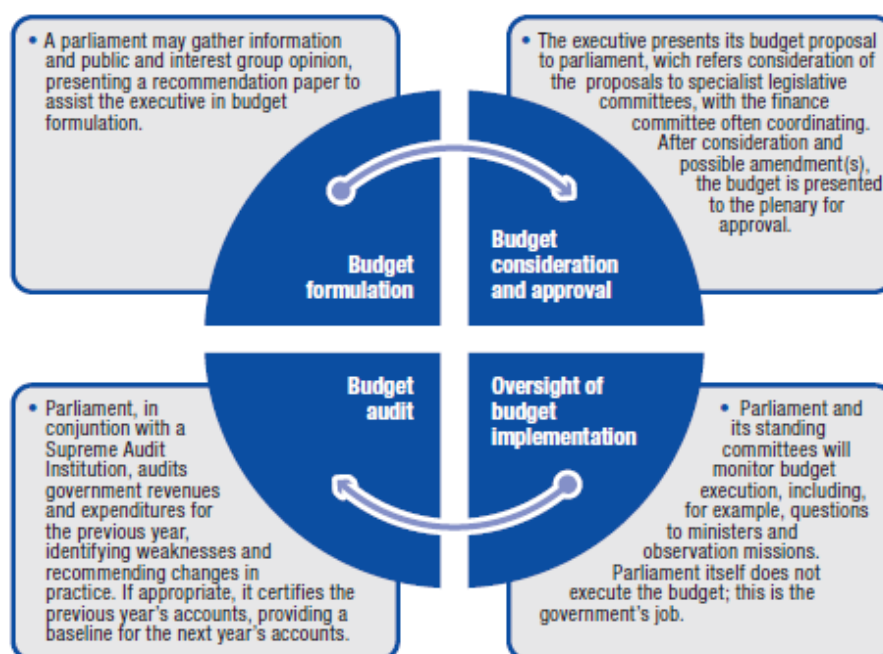


Figure 1: European Commission, Engaging and Supporting Parliaments Worldwide, October 2010, page 134.

## Promotion of parliaments – from theory to practice

In recognition of their essential functions, bilateral and multilateral donors today provide increasing capacity building support for effective parliaments in developing countries. To ensure sustainability in promoting parliaments, there must be a corresponding demand in the country, the programmes must be aligned with the priorities and needs of the parliaments themselves and these must be articulated by the stakeholders. At the same time, each programme must be designed to account for the political climate, including the prevailing power relations and national priorities and/or current plans for reform. It will often be necessary to work with groupings that are not directly located in parliament but perform a function for it or in it. These can, for example, be political parties, civil-society organisations, media, research institutions or parts of the administration (executive).

As in every ADC intervention, measures for promoting parliaments must also adhere to the principles of participation, transparency, accountability, conflict prevention, empowerment and anti-corruption as set out in the policy documents on good governance and human rights as well as the Human Rights Manual. Due consideration must also be given to the principle of non-discrimination and attention must be paid to equitable gender distribution of parliamentary seats and the political participation of women (see explanations in the right column). They also need to observe the principles of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Action Agenda. The following specific areas might be particularly relevant for support:

- Constitutional, legal or institutional reforms;

Capacity building in parliaments (for staff and members), for example, to prepare national development strategies or draft and control budgets (see Figure 2);

- Setting up and strengthening parliamentary institutions and supporting exchange and networking with other parliaments as well as with civil society;
- Poverty and gender mainstreaming initiatives;
- Work with civil society, research institutions and media;
- Strengthening political parties, policy development.

### Increasing political participation of women since 1995

Though small, there has been steady global growth in the ratio of women in parliaments. Altogether, 19 per cent of all parliamentary seats are held by women worldwide (in 2010). This amounts to an increase of altogether 67 per cent compared with 1995, when they only held 11 per cent. This is, however, far from the gender equality target envisaged in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To meet this, women in parliaments should be represented with at least 30 per cent. In 26 countries, the women's ratio in lower chambers (such as the National Council in Austria) amounts to 30 per cent and more, in seven countries, to 40% and more. Nevertheless, 35 women occupied the chair in altogether 269 parliaments as at mid-January 2010, making for 13 per cent.

Positive developments have been recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example. In South Africa, the women's ratio in parliament has now risen to 44 per cent, placing the country at position three in the international ranking behind Rwanda and Sweden. There has also been progress in many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. On the other hand, there are still 58 countries where the women's ratio comes to 10 per cent or less. In nine parliaments, it even amounts to zero.

The reasons for the slight increases overall differ: Electoral systems (considerably more women were elected in voting systems with proportional representation), quota systems or other measures of affirmative action have had the greatest influence so far. Political will or well-trained and sufficiently financed candidates, however, have also played a significant role in elections.

Source: MDG Report 2010, p. 25

## Guiding principles

- Experience shows that although a number of countries have prepared poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), hardly any funds have been actually allocated for this purpose. Nor have parliaments been involved in drafting PRSPs. This undermines democratic institutions and can generally weaken statehood. Due to their central function in allocating resources (monitoring, pro-poor budgeting), parliaments should in any event be involved in PRSP processes. This is why creating a framework for effective parliamentary work and capacity development are so important.



Figure 2: European Commission, Engaging and Supporting Parliaments Worldwide, October 2010, page77

- Gender issues are frequently neglected both in poverty reduction strategies and in other government measures. Female representatives can act as strong advocates for the needs of women and should therefore also be promoted in particular along with gender concerns in general.
- Due to (informal) power relations or socio-cultural factors, there is often a limit to how far reforms can be introduced and implemented from outside. Along with traditions, therefore, these also need to be taken into account.
- Viable parliaments are particularly important in budget support, i.e. the direct transfer of funds to partner countries without any specific project ties. This strengthens their control function in particular, for which they need capacity-building assistance.

## Approaches of Austrian Development Cooperation

Promoting parliaments also plays a major role in Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), partly with a view to achieving two of its major goals: poverty reduction and peacebuilding. ADC proceeds here at two specific levels:

### 1. Capacity development in developing countries

To perform their duties, parliamentarians need specialised knowledge, a professional administrative apparatus, sufficient financial and personnel resources and sound information on development policy in their country. This is why ADC supports parliaments in developing countries in building institutions and capacities so that members can effectively perform their democratic oversight functions. Promotion of parliaments forms part of a wide-ranging approach to advancing democracy and accountability.

### 2. Raising awareness in the Austrian National Council

Besides its major role in preparing the budget, also for development cooperation, as well as overseeing financial auditing by the Austrian Court of Audit, the Parliament of Austria is responsible both for maintaining policy commitment to development cooperation and public information on the issue. ADC therefore seeks to raise awareness in the Parliament and promote its exchange with other parliaments in developing countries.

## Selected projects

### **Networking African parliaments against poverty**

Information exchange, mutual learning and strengthening the capabilities of parliamentarians to perform their democratic functions – these are the goals of the African Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network (APRN). Founded in 2003 on the initiative of African parliamentarians, the network now comprises 15 African states, including the ADC priority countries Uganda and Burkina Faso. In training courses in the individual countries, at the Learning Centre in Ghana established in 2008 or through online courses, parliamentarians gain the requisite know-how for co-shaping policies, overseeing the implementation of poverty reduction strategies, co-deciding on and controlling budgetary procedures as well as for public expenditure allocation and ensuring gender equality. Suitable learning materials and manuals are prepared and made available. With what they have learnt, parliamentarians can better represent the interests of poor sections of the population and contribute to more transparent and effective governance.

Promoting the participation of members of parliament in regional conferences strengthens cross-border dialogue and cooperation and contributes to networking parliaments and their committees. Support is also provided for exchange with civil society and research institutions. The project is conducted by the Canadian Parliamentary Centre and overseen by an executive committee that meets every year. ADC supports the network as of 2006 (2387-00/2006 and 2387-00/2010, African Poverty Reduction Network Initiative (APRN), Canadian Parliamentary Centre, Jan. 2006-Dec. 2009 and Jan. 2010-Dec. 2011, EUR 2,195,600).

### **Promotion of parliaments in the SADC region**

As the bodies responsible for appraising the national budget, parliaments also play a major role in developing countries in the administration of donor funds. Especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, however, the necessary capacities are frequently lacking. Austrian Development Cooperation therefore supports capacity development in the parliaments of the member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In regional seminars and specific workshops, the parliamentarians learn to assess and control how far donor funds are allocated for social equity and poverty reduction. Informational material on good practices helps here. Drawing on this know-how, the parliamentarians draft a plan of action for effective budget control and monitor and audit its execution. Also promoted is regular exchange between parliamentarians and civic organisations, which also carry out an important democratic control function. Avenues for cooperation have been sounded out in a case study on Sofala Province in Mozambique. The parliamentarians are also provided with informational material and a guideline is being prepared as an aid for implementation. The measures are implemented by the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) in close cooperation with the SADC Secretariat, the Parliamentary Forum of SADC, the Pan-African Parliament and a NGO platform from the SADC region - SADC Council of NGOs, SADC-CNGO (2422-00/2006 and 2422-00/2009, Promotion of Parliaments for Development Cooperation Modalities in the SADC Region, Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa - AWEPA, Jan. 2006-Dec. 2008 and July 2009-August 2011, EUR 1,900,000).

### **Parliamentarians in North-South Dialogue**

The work of parliaments in developing countries is frequently hampered by deficits in legislative procedure, lack of means to control government or poor technical resources. The Parliament of Mozambique also faces these problems. This is why ADC supports building the capabilities of Mozambican parliamentarians to enable them to perform their democratic tasks more effectively. Technical equipment is provided for this, above all in the IT sector, and the necessary know-how imparted for applying the new technologies. In special training courses, the parliamentarians also learn to prepare legislation using new information and communication technologies (e-law) and

acquire skills in professional public relations. Dialogue with the Parliament of Austria provides insights into the way various Austrian parliamentary committees operate while enhancing the development policy competencies and commitment of Austrian colleagues. Regular information via newsletter or the project website as well as events by the Austrian Parliament section of the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) also contribute to this along with personal discussions (2411-00/2006, 2411-01/2008 and 2411-02/2010 Parliaments as Actors for Effective Development Cooperation, Gemeinnützige Entwicklungszusammenarbeit GmbH - GEZA, May 2006-June 2008, July 2008-June 2010 and August 2010-July 2013, EUR 1,052,500).

### **Advice and institution building for the Montenegrin Parliament**

As a relatively young state, strengthening parliamentarianism in Montenegro with a view to good governance and democracy is essential for the future development of rule of law and convergence with European institutions. On its request and at the suggestion of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Montenegro, substantive, technical and institutional advice is therefore provided to the Parliament of Montenegro by local and international experts to set up and improve the effectiveness of its committees.

Besides training, seminars, guest lectures and study visits, close cooperation is maintained with parliaments of other European states, such as Austria or Slovakia. Guidance is provided through best practice models, particularly from European states of similar size and with historical experience. Particular support is given to the expert parliamentary committees for security and defence, international relations and European convergence, economics, finance and budgets, human rights, tourism, agriculture, environmental protection and urban planning, education, science, culture and sports. The contents of training are geared to the needs of the individual committees. The general aim is to build up an effective, professional, transparent and publicly accessible parliament and/or parliamentary committees and strengthen its control function. The committee members are also provided with the requisite know-how for dealing with complex legal matters and the demands of the European convergence process (8145-00/2007, Technical Advice and Institution Building for Committees of the Montenegrin Parliament, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Secretariat), April 2007-June 2011 EUR 620,000).



## Further reading

### ADC

**Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs (FMEIA)** 2010, Three-Year Programme on Austrian Development Policy 2010-2012, Vienna: FMEIA, [http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/3JP\\_2010-2012.pdf](http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/3JP_2010-2012.pdf) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**FMEIA/ADA** 2006 (new edition 2010), Good Governance – Policy document of Austrian Development Cooperation, Vienna: FMEIA, [http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/Good\\_Governance\\_19032010\\_Web.pdf](http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/Good_Governance_19032010_Web.pdf) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**FMEIA/ADA** 2006 (new edition 2009), Human Rights – Policy document of Austrian Development Cooperation, Vienna: FMEIA, [http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/LL\\_Menschenrechte\\_Juli\\_2009\\_Web.pdf](http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/LL_Menschenrechte_Juli_2009_Web.pdf) (1 April 2011)

**ADA/Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights (BIM)** 2010, Human Rights Manual – Guidelines for Implementing a Human Rights Based Approach in ADC, [http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/HB\\_Menschenrechte\\_Juli2010.pdf](http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/HB_Menschenrechte_Juli2010.pdf) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

### Bilateral donors

**DFID** 2007, Governance, Development and Democratic Politics: DFID's work in building more effective states, London: DFID, [http://www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu/resources/Governance\\_Development\\_and\\_democratic\\_politics\\_DFID.pdf](http://www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu/resources/Governance_Development_and_democratic_politics_DFID.pdf) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

Hudson, Wren 2007, Parliamentary Strengthening in Developing Countries: Final report for **DFID**, London: ODI, <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/103.pdf> (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**DFID** 2004, Helping Parliaments and Legislative Assemblies to Work for the Poor – Guidelines, London: DFID, <http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/DFID%20-%20Helping%20Parliaments%20and%20Legislative%20Assemblies%20to%20work%20for%20the%20Poor.pdf> (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**Norad** 2010, Support to legislatures, Oslo: Norad, [http://www.norad.no/en/\\_attachment/160865/binary/94221?download=true](http://www.norad.no/en/_attachment/160865/binary/94221?download=true) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

Power, Greg 2008, Donor support to parliamentarians and political parties: An analysis for **DANIDA**, London: Global Partners and Associates, <http://www.um.dk/NR/rdonlyres/000AF191-7B72-4789-AF0F-A1A6933D7A8C/0/DanidaReportSupporttoParliamentsandParties.pdf> (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**SIDA** 2006, Parliamentary Strengthening: Position Paper – Revision 060529, Division for Democratic Governance, Stockholm: SIDA, [http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/Parliamentary%20Strengthening-%20Position%20Paper%20\(Rav%202006\).pdf](http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/Parliamentary%20Strengthening-%20Position%20Paper%20(Rav%202006).pdf) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**GTZ, Parliamentary Centre** 2005, PRSPs in Africa: Parliaments and Economic Policy Performance, Eschborn: GTZ, [http://www.parlcent.ca/africa/papers/GTZ%20Final%20Publication\\_EN.pdf](http://www.parlcent.ca/africa/papers/GTZ%20Final%20Publication_EN.pdf) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

### Multilateral organisations

**European Commission** 2010, Engaging and Supporting Parliaments Worldwide: Strategies and methodologies for EC action in support to parliaments, Brussels: European Commission,



[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/governance/documents/engaging\\_and\\_supporting\\_parliaments\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/governance/documents/engaging_and_supporting_parliaments_en.pdf) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**UNDP** 2010, Benchmarks and Self-Assessment Frameworks for Democratic Legislatures, New York: UNDP, <http://content.undp.org/go/cms-service/download/publication/?version=live&id=2688513> (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**UNDP** 2010, Parliamentary Engagement with the Millennium Development Goals: A Manual for Use in Parliaments, New York: UNDP, [http://www.endpoverty2015.org/files/MC\\_web\\_version\\_HighRes.pdf](http://www.endpoverty2015.org/files/MC_web_version_HighRes.pdf) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**UNDP** 2009, Parliamentary Development – UNDP Strategy Note, New York: UNDP, [http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/UNDP%20PD%20Strategy%20Note%20\(May%202009\).pdf](http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/UNDP%20PD%20Strategy%20Note%20(May%202009).pdf) (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**UNDP** 2004, Strengthening Parliamentary Involvement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process and the Millennium Development Goals, New York: UNDP, <http://www.agora-parl.org/fr/node/2550> (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**World Bank**, Parliaments Website: <http://go.worldbank.org/BUTNWF7EY0>

**World Bank Institute** 2006, Orientation Handbook for Members of Parliaments, Washington D.C.: World Bank Institute, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PSGLP/Resources/HandbookforMembersofParliaments.pdf> (accessed: 1 April 2011)

**World Bank Institute** 2005, Parliaments as Peacebuilders: The Role of Parliamentarians in Conflict-Affected Countries, Washington D.C.: World Bank Institute, <http://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/WB%20-%20Parliaments%20as%20Peacebuilders:%20Parliaments%20in%20Conflict-Affected%20Countries%20-%20Jul%202005%20-EN%20-%20PDP.pdf> (accessed: 1 April 2011)

## Organisations/Associations and NGOs

**Portal for Parliamentary Strengthening:** <http://www.agora-parl.org/>

**International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA):** [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

**National Democratic Institute (NDI):** <http://www.ndi.org/>

**International Republican Institute (IRI):** <http://www.iri.org/>

**International Knowledge Network for Women in Politics:** <http://www.iknowpolitics.org/>

**Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons:** [www.parliamentaryforum.org](http://www.parliamentaryforum.org)

**Parliamentary Centre of Canada:** [www.parlcent.ca](http://www.parlcent.ca)

**Austrian North-South Institute for Development Cooperation: Parliamentarians in North-South Dialogue:** [www.nordsued-dialog.org](http://www.nordsued-dialog.org)

## Parliamentary networks

**Parliamentarians for Global Action:** [www.pgaction.org](http://www.pgaction.org)

**Global Organisation of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC):** [http://www.gopacnetwork.org/main\\_en.htm](http://www.gopacnetwork.org/main_en.htm)

**Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA):** <http://www.awepa.org/>

**Commonwealth Parliamentary Assembly (CPA):** <http://www.cpahq.org/cpahq/mem/default.aspx>

**Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD):** [http://www.wfd.org/pages/home.aspx?i\\_PageID=1811](http://www.wfd.org/pages/home.aspx?i_PageID=1811)

**Parliamentary Network of the World Bank (PNWB):** <http://www.pnowb.org/>

**Parliaments Network for Conflict Prevention:** <http://www.parliamentariansforconflictprevention.net/>





**Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU):** [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

**African Parliamentary Union (APU):** [http://www.african-pu.org/index\\_english.html](http://www.african-pu.org/index_english.html)

**Pan-African Parliament (PAP):** <http://www.pan-africanparliament.org/>

**Southern African Development Community (SADC) Parliamentary Forum:** <http://www.sadcpf.org/>

**Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA):** <http://www.copa.qc.ca/eng/index.html>

**Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA):** [http://www.e-fipa.org/news\\_en.htm](http://www.e-fipa.org/news_en.htm)