European Commission
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International IDEA

Joint Training on
Effective Electoral Assistance

DAY 2
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Assistance to Political Parties & Parliaments

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Questions

• What are the particular challenges of working with political parties?

• How can these be addressed through assistance?
What comes to mind when you hear the term ‘political parties’?

– Role in processes – elections, policy formation, opposition
– Role in institutions – parliamentary and executive representatives
– Image:
  • Self-interested
  • Discredited
  • Not representative
  • Captured by elites
  • Not issue based
What is the role of political parties in a democracy?

- Aggregate interests
- Structure the vote
- Integrate and mobilize the public
- Foster future political leaders
- Organize government
- Influence or form public policy
Why are Parties Important?

- Critical governance and electoral actors
- Have been left out of DG assistance
- Traditional assistance of limited utility – why much is ‘bouncing off’ parties
- Division of roles/attributes (political party institutes, party internationals, multilaterals)
Engaging Political Parties

- Should we work with political parties?
- If yes, how can we without jeopardizing our position?
Value added?

- What do we bring?
- Electoral Cycle entry points:
  - Role in **Institutions**: EMBs, Parliaments, Government, Political Party Commissions
  - Role in **Processes**: Legal framework, voter+party/candidate registration, voter sensitization, campaign, pollwatching, electoral disputes, accepting results, conflict management
  - **Functioning** and **Image**: Codes of conduct, relations with media, internal rules and regulations, nomination procedures
Lessons Learned thus far: Do’s and Don’ts

**DO**
- Be aware
- Be non-partisan
- Be transparent and clear
- Be inclusive
- Be equitable
- Know your capacity
- Use HD/MDG agendas
- Focus on dialogue
- Think about the cycle
- When in doubt seek help

**DON’T**
- Give funding directly
- Favor parties over each other

**WHAT ABOUT?**
- Parties and violence
- Parties that prohibit women
Parliamentary Development - a key pillar of Democratic Governance

• Relatively new area of DG & few engaged in PD
  ➢ Since nineties gradually gaining in importance
  ➢ But few actors, international donor community relatively shy in providing funding to parliaments, still preference for executive and CSO
  ➢ Important electoral assistance too often not followed by assistance to parliaments, but changing
• Quickly expanding area of UNDP’s DG practice
  ➢ a tenfold increase in 10 years : currently over 60 parliaments supported – became main provider of assistance
  ➢ but in terms of resources relatively small (about less than 3 % of total DG support or 40 million out 1,4 billion USD/year)
• Became integral part of UNDP’s comprehensive DG agenda in 2000
What is the role of parliaments in a democracy?

- Three chief functions:
  - Law-making
  - Oversight of government/executive, including state budget
  - Represent the will of the people

- Important role in mediating different constituency interests and in relieving different ethnic, economic and religious tensions

- Effective, representative and accountable parliaments are an important conflict prevention tool
Electoral versus Parliamentary Assistance

• Need to engage parliaments in electoral assistance work:
  ➢ Key role in adopting electoral law & framework as law-maker
• “Strong parliaments are necessary to sustain the democratic gains of free and fair elections” UN Secretary General Kofi Annan
  ➢ But many newly democratically elected parliaments lack capacity, experience and resources to play the vital functions most constitutions provide them – with consequences to their image, participation in elections and confidence in democratic system
  ➢ High turnovers after every elections (50 % + of change)
    ➢ To consolidate important investments of international community in EA, limited assistance to parliaments would seem well spent to maximize the democratic divident
    ➢ PA not expensive business - 5% of EA would go a long way
• Work on mimimum standards/benchmarks for democratic parliaments (using the norm-setting experience of electoral field)
Parliamentary assistance trends

- Evolution in the types of support and approaches:
  - From limited parliamentary administration reform and equipment support to strengthening the core functions; a lot of attention to oversight and representative function and comprehensive capacity building programs growing
  - Institution building through issues-based approaches (e.g. Niger decentralization law)
  - Moving from a pure technical approach to one recognizing and introducing political variables into our support (political party groups, reform champions, ensure opposition rights etc).
  - Trend towards single parliamentary programmes where all donors pool their resources and coordinated by one partner (e.g. Afghanistan, Benin) – response to Paris Declaration
Some lessons learned

• Importance of **long-term sustained engagement** which is correlated with project effectiveness

• Ensuring **broad-based involvement/support** in the preparation and implementation of the strengthening efforts (steering committees with majority and opposition representatives as well as parliamentary administration teams)

• **L.T. Parliamentary development plans**, if elaborated with involvement of all relevant stakeholders, ensure ownership of the reforms, and are also an effective vehicle to channel donor support

• **Committees** are a good entry point for support in particular in parliaments that are more closed
Some lessons learned

• Importance of **regional exchanges and south-south collaboration** (exchanges of good practices); working groups on sensitive issues (e.g. SSR and political party legislation); promising modality to broach difficult subjects before addressing these at national level.

• When providing support to the legislative and oversight function do it with a **comprehensive approach** looking at procedures, committee structures, executive-legislative relations, incentives for MPs etc. Training alone on the techniques do not suffice.

• **Link parliamentary assistance to other thematic areas** of support for **DG** (electoral processes, audit institutions or ombudsman, anti-corruption and Human rights work, political parties, security sector reform, etc.) to consolidate DG.

• Importance of having a **permanent project support structure based within the parliaments**.
Learning agenda - Tools and resources

- Need to consolidate learning in this new area - UNDP is trying to build knowledge through research, documenting good practices and building practical tools for parliamentarians:
  - Handbooks for MPs (e.g. on budget oversight and gender)
  - Guidelines on the role of Parliaments in conflict prevention and peacebuilding; see www.parlcpr.undp.org
  - Arab region knowledge building: www.arabparliaments.org

- General: www.undp.org/governance/sl-parliaments
- Global Programme on Parliamentary Strengthening