

Supporting regional parliaments – issues, lessons learned and future opportunities

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Why support parliaments?

Support for parliament a core part of donor support for political governance

- fulcrum of democratic systems
- centre of a web of domestic accountability
- improved parliamentary performance will improve good governance generally
- fixing parliaments helps fix politics/democracy?

Broader donor context

Donor support for parliaments must be seen in a broader development context

- Increasing recognition of the importance of governance to development outcomes
- Increased pressure to demonstrate effectiveness
- Increasing recognition of need to engage with politics in providing effective support
 - From technical support to political governance
 - Thinking and Working Politically

The challenge

What does this mean for parliamentary support?

- Issues re effective institution building
- Issues re politically engaged programming

Core questions

- Can parliamentary support programs support institutions apolitically but in a politically aware ways?
- How might you do this?

Challenges in providing support

Expectations and practicalities don't easily line up

- Difficult developing contexts
- Problems within parliaments
- Local ownership
- Parliament vs the political system
- Contradictory objectives/goals
- What is effective support?
- What is “politically engaged” support

Lessons learned – what works?

There is an increasing body of evidence regarding what works in political governance

- Recognise and respond to local political economy/incentive structures
- Have realistic expectations
- Local ownership is key – work to build it, work with broad stakeholders – beyond MPs/parties
- Base assistance on long-term commitments, programs/not projects
- Function over form – technical support in politically savvy support
- Integrated approach – recognise parliament in a political system
- Issues based approach –strengthen institutions by doing substantive things
- Improve program management – collaborate/coordinate with other donors – spread risk, measure performance

Politically engaged programming?

What then is politically aware programming?

- Better recognition of context
- Attempting to fit specific activities to context
- Thinking creatively about using democratic spaces to build inclusive politics
- A disposition to look outward and to collaborate with a broad range of stakeholders
- Technical support in politically savvy ways

Opportunities?

Institution strengthening/capacity building remains core business

- issues of effectiveness, sustainability, affordability important
- demonstrating success at institutional level relatively easy but higher level impact harder

But there are opportunities around political engagement

- recognise the importance of keeping democratic spaces open, strengthening democratic infrastructure
- Engage in politically aware programming which capitalises on parliamentary convening power
 - link technical support to substantive issues (health, extractive industries, service delivery, budgetary oversight, gender)
 - broad coalition building the key, with other donors and the wider community (developmental leadership, coalition building, citizenship building)
 - develop broad partnerships to identify issues