

The Role of Parliaments in the PRSP Process

Seminar Sponsored by PRMPR and WBIGF

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2:30–4:00 pm

Summary of Presentation

- Overview of NDI & its PRSP programming
- Need for, and Constraints on, Greater Parliamentary Involvement
- Niger and Malawi Assessment
- Discussion

Overview of NDI

- A nonprofit US-based, international organization to promote democracy worldwide. Funding is principally from USAID and the NED, but also from UNDP, DIFD, DANIDA and other bilateral donors.
- Main areas of activity include electoral processes, political party development, parliamentary strengthening, citizen participation and civil-military relations.

Overview of NDI (cont.)

- Over 40 field offices in all regions of the world; roughly 20 involve parliamentary programming.
- NDI is a political party institute that works abroad on a nonpartisan basis. It is affiliated with the US Democratic Party, as well as the Socialist International, the Liberal International and Christian Democrat International.
- Comparative approach; tends to emphasize ongoing technical assistance and consultations rather than workshops. Strong emphasis on local presence and local partners.

PRSP Programming

- Component 1 (UNDP-funded) – Pilot programs in three countries (Niger, Malawi, and Nigeria) to strengthen legislative engagement in the PRSP process.
- Component 2 (Bank-funded) – Annex to the PRSP Sourcebook on “Parliaments and the PRSP.”
- Component 3 (Bank-funded) – Regional (video)conference for parliamentarians from the pilot countries to share experiences legislative engagement in the PRSP process.

The Need for Parliamentary Engagement in the PRSP Process

- Implementation – Parliamentary approval is generally required to enact the budgets and legislation needed to implement the PRSP.
- Political Accountability – Parliament can help to ensure that PRSP civil society consultations are broad-based and that expenditures are effective. Absent mechanisms for greater political accountability, investments to increase technical capacity for greater financial accountability may be of limited use.

The Need for Parliamentary Engagement in the PRSP Process

- Legitimacy – Although the representative capacity of parliaments and civil society varies widely among countries, the electoral mandate gives parliaments a degree of legitimacy that civil society lacks.
- Multi-Party Consensus – Parliament provides a forum for building a multi-party consensus on poverty reduction priorities. Lack of involvement by non-governing parliamentary parties may politicize development by linking policy just to the majority party.

The Need for Parliamentary Engagement in the PRSP Process

- Sustainability – Greater civil society consultation is required for all types of legislation. Rather than creating parallel participatory processes, it would be preferable to use the PRSP process to strengthen the representational capacity (hearings, constituent relations, etc.) of parliaments.
- Links to Constituents – Links between MPs and constituents can be a useful tool in building public awareness of poverty reduction efforts and in program monitoring and oversight.

The Need for Parliamentary Engagement in the PRSP Process

- Democratic Development – Although democratic development is not part of the Bank's mandate, its processes should not undercut fragile developing democratic institutions. The current process can have the effect of encouraging “rubber stamp” parliaments, by “requiring” legislative enactments to implement a framework that the parliament was not involved in developing.

Principal Constraints on Greater Parliamentary Involvement

- Limited Awareness – Many legislators lack basic information about the PRSP process.
- Lack of Capacity – Parliaments often face significant human resource and financial constraints.
- Government Recalcitrance – In some cases, the government or the executive branch has been reluctant to allow greater legislative involvement in the PRSP process.

Potential Role for Parliaments

- Potential role will vary widely depending on constitution /governance and electoral systems, political will, capacity, significance of PRSP resources, etc.
- Goal is to develop a wider range of options for parliaments and to build capacity to allow more opportunities for parliamentary engagement
- Role will vary at different points in the PRSP process.

Potential Role for Parliaments – PRSP Formulation

- Use of Hearings – It may be appropriate for a portion of the civil society consultation to take place within the context of public hearings on PRSP issues.
- Sectoral Committees/Thematic Working Groups – Formal linkages between the thematic working groups and the appropriate sectoral standing committees should be strengthened.

Role for Parliaments – PRSP Formulation

- Approval or Endorsement – There are a wide range of mechanisms through which the legislature could formally consider the PRSP, if it so chooses. Alternatively, the legislature could review the quality of the process by which the PRSP was developed, something exempted from review in the JSA.

Potential Role for Parliaments – Implementation

- Public Awareness – Through constituent outreach activities, parliamentarians can play a key role in disseminating information about the PRSP and in developing public demand for successful implementation of programs.
- Ensuring Consistency with PRSP – In reviewing legislation or budgets, legislatures can draw attention to inconsistencies between these bills and the PRSP.

Potential Role for Parliaments – Monitoring and Evaluation

- Constituent Complaints. Information from constituents can provide a useful source of information about problems in PRSP program implementation.
- Oversight Hearings. Although NGOs can play a role in monitoring priority poverty expenditures, NGOs require channels to feed the results of these monitoring exercises into the political/policy making process. Oversight hearings provide one such mechanism.

Potential Role for Parliaments – Monitoring and Evaluation

- Review of Annual Progress Reports. Given their links to constituencies, legislators are in a position to see the impact of programs in their districts. The annual progress report may provide a useful occasion to review government progress to ensure domestic accountability for PRSP implementation, as well as accountability to the IFIs.

Niger

- There is significant interest (and criticism) of the PRSP process among a few, interested deputies.
- Involvement by deputies has been in their individual capacity; institutional involvement was limited to a 2-hour briefing for deputies, with no real opportunity for input.
- The National Assembly has very limited capacity (many deputies illiterate, limited staff resources, limited resources for committee meetings, etc.)

Niger

- There appears to be little government resistance to greater involvement by the National Assembly in the PRSP process.
- There is a great deal of confusion about the role that the National Assembly is to play in the PRSP formulation/approval.
- There is a gap between the thematic working groups and the sectoral legislative commissions.
- There is strong legislative interest in public outreach.

Niger – Planned Programming

- A series of briefings for each of the legislative commissions on the sectoral components of the PRSP within that commission's jurisdiction.
- A series of radio PSAs dealing with the role of the National Assembly (particularly in oversight), using the PRSP process as an example.
- A series of radio broadcasts (post-PRSP approval) hosted by the relevant legislative commissions to discuss their legislative agenda and the portions of the PRSP within their jurisdiction.

Malawi

- Similar timing issues as Niger (too late for strong National Assembly involvement in PRSP formulation; too soon for active involvement in monitoring).
- There is greater capacity for meaningful oversight, particularly within the Budget and Finance Committee and particularly if oversight is done in partnership with civil society organizations.

Malawi

- Several service provider civil society organizations are planning to monitor some of the priority poverty expenditures.
- The PRSP process is more politicized, and there appears to be more resistance to greater National Assembly involvement. The use of development resources for political patronage is perceived as a greater issue.

Malawi

- Political will to engage in PRSP issues exists within the Budget and Finance Committee, and to a lesser extent, within the sectoral committees, but there are limits on the political capital that members are willing to expend on PRSP issues.
- There is a lack of clarity regarding the relationship between the Budget Committee and the sectoral committees on PRSP issues.

Malawi

- Financial resources within the National Assembly are extremely limited. Committees cannot meet without donor support to fund transportation costs for members. It is unclear whether the governance section of the PRSP may be used to push for greater funding for oversight committees to help improve financial accountability.

Malawi -- Planned Programming

Support for a local consultant to help the Budget and Finance Committee produce a committee report on the PRSP process. Although some of this report would evaluate the process to date, it is focus would be on recommendations going forward, addressing questions such as:

Malawi -- Planned Programming

- What should be the allocation of responsibility of the budget and finance committee, the public accounts committee and the sectoral committees? Should a new committee/subcommittee on PRSP issues be established?
- What civil society monitoring programs are planned and what role should the Assembly play in reviewing the results of these monitoring efforts?

Malawi -- Planned Programming

- Are there things that the government should do in its reporting to the National Assembly that would facilitate oversight of priority poverty expenditures?
- What role should the National Assembly play with respect to the PRSP Annual Progress Reports?