U4 Expert Answer

What works in working with parliaments against corruption?

Query

What does the evidence tell us about what works in different contexts when working with parliaments to tackle corruption?

Content

Caveat

Evidence of what works when engaging with parliaments is very scarce, due to very limited efforts to systematically assess the impact of parliamentary development initiatives. More research would be needed to address this knowledge gap. As a result, this Helpdesk answer provides an overview of the role of parliament in curbing corruption and of donors' approaches to support this role, drawing lessons from existing literature.

Summary

As part of their legislative, oversight and representation functions, parliaments have a key role to play in the fight against corruption, as the institution holding government accountable to citizens. As they represent the people, MPs also need to be exemplary in performing their duties, to embody the ethical values of their community, and to adhere to the highest standards of integrity. Many actors are involved in parliamentary strengthening programmes, which typically involve support for institutional reform and development, skill transfer and capacity building, human support services and support to peer networks of parliamentarians.

While there is a growing interest in strengthening parliaments across the world, there have been very few systematic efforts to conduct impact evaluations of parliamentary support, making it difficult to draw lessons on what works when engaging with parliament in which context and why. One of the most important lessons that emerges from the literature is that, due to their inherently political nature, parliament strengthening interventions need to be neutral, country specific, based on a solid understanding of the political economy and informed by local needs assessments.

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Date: 29 June 2017 **Number:** U4 is a web-based resource centre for development practitioners who wish to effectively address corruption challenges in their work. Expert Answers are produced by the U4 Helpdesk – operated by Transparency International – as quick responses to operational and policy questions from U4 Partner Agency staff.

1. The role of parliaments in curbing corruption

Parliaments are an essential pillar of a country's democratic system of checks and balances and have a key role to play against corruption, deriving from their legislative, oversight and representation functions, as the institution holding government accountable to the electorate. A number of organisations, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC), have articulated this role and made recommendations on using a combination of legislative, oversight and representation approaches to fighting corruption at the national level (IPU 2001; GOPAC 2005). In addition, as parliaments are one of the most crucial institutions of democratic representation and accountability, these approaches need to be combined with initiatives aimed at promoting integrity and fighting against corruption at parliamentary level.

In spite of this broad consensus on the role parliaments can play in the fight against corruption, there is very little academic evidence on the impact parliaments have on reducing corruption, and little research has been undertaken on this topic. Reflecting this relative lack of academic interest, most national anti-corruption strategies largely ignore the role of the legislature in anti-corruption (Stapenhurst, Jacobs and Pelizzo 2014). It is therefore very difficult to identify what works to support the effectiveness of parliaments to fight corruption.

Legislative role

As part of their legislative mandate, parliaments are responsible to ensure that there is a strong legal framework in place to curb corruption. This does not only involve passing national anti-corruption legislation that tackles corruption and money laundering but also lobbying national governments to ratify relevant international instruments such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). This also includes passing legislation that creates an environment which makes corruption more difficult by promoting transparency and participation in the management of public affairs. This includes enacting legislation on access to information, whistleblowing protection, freedom of information, party funding and electoral campaigns, integrity of members of parliament and other public officials, and oversight legislation to ensure transparency and accountability in government and public affairs. (IPU 2001; Pelizzo and Stapenhurst 2014). Parliaments can also pass laws on areas vulnerable to corruption, such as public procurement.

Parliaments also have a key role in setting broader governance rules and promoting integrity standards for businesses, citizens and other organisations by providing incentives, surveillance mechanisms and sanctions to encourage appropriate private sector behaviour. Parliaments also have the mandate to establish strong regimes for financial and public service management and transparency and accountability of government, including establishing effective conflict of interest and illicit enrichment regulations, transparent and strict rules for the approval of senior government and public officials and mechanisms to sanction these officials when they are found guilty of unethical conduct to ensure the most competent and morally upright officials are appointed to key positions (IPU 2001; The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank 2006).

Other laws can indirectly have an effect on corruption by addressing the underlying causes that can provide incentives and opportunities for corrupt behaviour. This includes laws establishing social standards for all citizens (wages, employment opportunities, social security, equal participation in decision-making processes) or legislation aimed at reducing red tape and establishing transparent and effective bureaucratic processes (IPU 2001).

Evidence on the impact of legal and institutional reform on corruption is mixed. Based on statistical evidence, a 2011 report finds that, while there is no proven impact of direct anti-corruption interventions, such as the establishment of anti-corruption agencies or ombudsman or the ratification of UNCAC due to a number of contextual factors, there is some evidence of the positive impact of freedom of information (FOI) acts and the second generation of transparency tools (such as transparent budgeting and asset declarations) on reducing corruption (Mungiu-Pippidi 2011).

In line with these findings, a 2015 review of evidence on the effectiveness of anti-corruption approaches finds that transparency and access to information laws can have a positive outcome on institutional responsiveness, corruption, citizen empowerment, and so on, with country level evidence confirming the potential impact of access to information in countries such as India and Uganda (DFID 2015).

However, although evidence is scarce, enacting laws alone is unlikely to have a lasting effect on corruption. The quality of their formulation in terms of language clarity, adaptation to the local circumstances and compliance with human right standards, the credibility of the electoral process, and their level of implementation are key determinants of their legitimacy and effectiveness in fighting against corruption (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank 2006).

Oversight role

Parliaments also have an oversight mandate and are responsible for holding government accountable for its action and ensuring that it operates within an ethical and accountable legal framework. There are a number of key entry points to exercise this oversight function, including questions to the government, participation in the budget process, oversight committees – especially public account committees (PACs) – and cooperation with supreme audit institutions and other watchdog agencies (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2006).

There is some (although little) evidence that strengthening the oversight capacity of parliament can contribute to reducing corruption. Some scholars suggest that legislatures that perform their oversight role more effectively have a higher democratic quality, more political stability and less corruption (Pelizzo and Stapenhurst 2012; GOPAC 2013; Pelizzo 2014). In Ghana, a study finds a positive correlation between an increase in oversight tools and the reputation of the parliaments and parliamentarians, the legitimacy of democracy and control of corruption.

Contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of oversight include a relatively low level of partisanship at committee level, access to alternative sources of information and public demand for good governance (Stapenhurst and Pellizzo 2012). Statistical analysis from a global survey of 82 legislatures finds that the presence of oversight tools is correlated with variation in perceived levels of corruption. However, this varies depending on the political regime: the correlation is found the strongest in presidential forms of government, but less so in semi-presidential governments and even less in parliamentary systems (Stapenhurst, Jacobs and Pelizzo 2014).

Key determinants of effective parliamentary oversight include the institutional design, the number and types of oversight tools, the presence of independent oversight bodies, and the availability of free and reliable information (Pelizzo and Stapenhurst 2013). Beyond the number of tools that parliaments have to oversee governments' activities, effectiveness of oversight is supported by the political will to make an effective use of this oversight capacity, an enabling environment, public support for anti-corruption reform and facilitating factors such as legislation information and research capacity, as MPs need to be given proper information to perform their oversight functions (GOPAC 2013; Pelizzo and Stapenhurst 2013; Pelizzo 2014).

Participation in the budget process

In most countries, parliaments are empowered to approve the budget and oversee government expenditure throughout the four stages of the budget cycle: drafting, legislation, implementation and audit. This is one of the most powerful tools for holding government to account. For parliament to effectively fulfil this mandate, the process for preparing and executing the budget needs to be transparent and participatory, providing safeguards against government misuse of public resources (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2006).

However, in many countries, given the overly technical nature of budget processes, the complex financial instruments used and the time pressure, MPs often lack the resources and the technical capacity to fulfil this role effectively. The budgetary oversight skills and capacity of parliaments can be strengthened by establishing special committees such as PACs – provided they are granted adequate powers, resources and independence – and having these committees conduct public consultations in advance of the budget and monitor implementation post facto

(GOPAC 2005). The work of these committees can be supported by parliamentary research and information services.

A case can be made for establishing parliamentary budget offices (PBOs), such as in Uganda. PBOs are independent, non-partisan entity that provide analytical support to the legislature to inform decisions when examining the budget. The PBO in Uganda, established in 2001, is operating effectively and has been successful in empowering MPs to actively participate in budget processes, has increased the credibility of and donor confidence in the budget process, improved the responsiveness of parliaments due to greater flow of information and scrutiny, and contributed to strengthening executive accountability (Policy Forum Tanzania no date).

Civil society is also a natural partner in monitoring and overseeing public budgets, with, for example, organisations such as the International Budget Project (IBP), promoting budget transparency and building civil society's capacity to analyse, influence and participate in budget processes.

Oversight committees

Committees are instrumental for legislatures to perform their oversight functions. They can be permanent and exist for the whole duration of the legislature or ad/hoc for a specific period of time or to examine a specific issue (GOPAC 2013). The use of oversight committees to scrutinise government action can be strengthened, especially by establishing or strengthening special committees dealing with public accounts and anti-corruption. According to GOPAC, the proliferation of such committees in recent years seems to reflect a growing political will to address corruption and the gradual emergence of consensus across party lines on the political importance of these issues (GOPAC 2005).

There is some evidence of the success and effectiveness of such approaches drawn from a survey of 33 chairs of PACs. The large majority of respondents (78.8%) reported that the recommendations of PACs are frequently accepted, while less (63.6%) stated that the recommendations are frequently implemented. However, it is rare that PACs' recommendations lead to disciplinary actions. Key determinants of PAC success include a balanced composition of the PAC excluding government members, powers given to the PAC (e.g. powers to make recommendations, publish conclusions or choose topics to be investigated), and their practices (e.g. keeping record of the proceedings of meetings, preparing for the meetings, existence of procedures to assess whether governments implement the recommendations, etc.) (Pelizzo, Stapenhurst and Olson 2006).

Another paper explores the elements that make PACs work and confirms that their effectiveness depends on the behaviours of committee members, the availability of independent sources of information and the media's interest in scrutinising government accounts (Pelizzo, Stapenhurst, Sahgal and Woodley 2006). A comparative analysis of PACs from Eastern and Southern Africa concludes that there is no blueprint for strengthening PACs, as their needs tend to be country specific. To be successful and effective, PACs need quality staff, some need to have greater opposition representation, while others need to be granted more powers and a broader mandate (Pelizzo and Kinyondo 2014).

Parliamentary questions & internal oversight tools

Parliamentary questions to government are important mechanisms for bringing governments to account. There are a wide range of tools legislatures can use to question the executive, such as hearings in plenary assembly, hearings in committees, inquiry committees, parliamentary questions, question time, interpellations, etc. (GOPAC 2013; Stapenhurst, Jacobs and Pelizzo 2014).

Other internal oversight tools include motions for debate or mentions of censure, or special committees of enquiry. In some countries, such as Benin, Burundi, Congo and Indonesia, parliaments can conduct fact finding missions to assess the efficiency of government policy implementation. In other countries, such as Cyprus, Djibouti and South Korea, the executive is required to submit regular reports on the implementation of policies and programmes (GOPAC 2013).

Not all tools are equally important and effective in all contexts. The effectiveness of these respective oversight mechanisms varies according to forms of government. In presidential systems, the most important instruments are committee and plenary hearings, and ombudsman offices; in semi-presidential regimes, "question time", interpellation and ombudsman offices are perceived to be more effective, while in parliamentary systems, interpellations seem to be the most important oversight tool (Stapenhurst, Jacobs and Pelizzo 2014).

A free and independent media can support these formal parliamentary mechanisms: parliaments can follow up on corruption cases exposed in the media and prompt investigations. When ministers fail to respond adequately to parliament's questions, as they are obligated to, media attention can reinforce this oversight role and put them under pressure to respond. At the same time, parliaments are well placed to ensure an enabling environment to a free and vibrant media to make sure that the media can play this supportive role. This fruitful collaboration between a representative parliament and an independent media was illustrated in Uganda in the 1990s where the media and parliament mutually reinforced each other. The media provided extensive coverage of several corruption scandals that in turn allowed parliaments to tackle several high-profile cases of fraud (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2006).

Cooperation with and coordination of watchdog institutions

Parliaments can also cooperate with external oversight tools such as supreme audit institutions (SAIs), ombudsman or anti-corruption agencies (ACAs). Parliaments can promote the creation of strong watchdog agencies with adequate resources and strengthening cooperation between parliaments and these institutions to ensure that their reports receive adequate attention and their recommendations followed-up by parliament and government (IUP 2001; GOPAC 2013). In particular, ombudsmen and SAIs are key institutions to partner with for effective oversight of the operations, practices and expenditures of government agencies. SAIs can work closely with finance and account committees and provide them with audit reports they can use in their oversight role, provided PACs are granted adequate resources and powers to initiate and follow-up inquiries into audits presented by the audit institutions.

In fact, a recent study analysing the interactions between parliaments and audit agencies in the budget process finds that the quality of these interactions is a critical factor to ensure the effective functioning of budget accountability mechanisms. Since those linkages are often ineffective, the overall effectiveness of the budget oversight system is undermined. The author concludes that, in many cases, these types of dysfunctions are systemic rather than agency specific, and that the agility and coordination of the various components of the budget oversight system may be more important than the effectiveness of each individual oversight agency to ensure effective oversight of budget processes (Santiso 2015).

Working with SAIs can be especially promising as they have been found to be more effective at reducing corruption compared with other anti-corruption institutions, such as ACAs. This depends, however, on the institutional context and the types of audits they conduct (DFID 2015). To foster effectiveness of such collaborations, institutional capacities of both PACs and SAIs need to be strengthened for both institutions to perform their oversight functions. Such capacity enhancement can be achieved by providing adequate staffing and resources, training and access to information. Both institutions also need to be independent from partisan and political influence. Finally, the availability of information and potential for information exchanges are key determinants of their effectiveness (McGee 2002).

Representation

Parliamentarians represent citizens, are accountable to the electorate and need to ensure that their influence over government processes reflect citizens' concerns. These representation concerns are especially important to create a political will to fight corruption by channelling the interest of the people and mobilising broad-based support for anti-corruption reform (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2006).

Voice and accountability mechanisms that ensure citizens' participation in the political debate are likely to reinforce parliaments' legitimacy in representing the people. There are many avenues that provide opportunities for building dialogue with civil society, such as constituency outreach, public hearings and consultations. Parliament, for example, can organise parliamentary workshops with civil society groups prior to the introduction of major pieces of legislation or develop various tools to strengthen accountability, such as report card methodology and service delivery surveys to generate citizen feedback on level of satisfaction with public services (GOPAC 2005). In principle, and even though they are perceived by Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer data to be among the most corrupt institutions in many countries of the world, political parties have an important role to play in this process when they are not themselves involved in corruption.

Integrity of parliamentarians

As they represent citizens, members of parliament need to reflect the ethical standards of their community, be exemplary in performing their mandate and adhere to the highest standards of integrity. This is a pre-requisite for promoting/restoring trust in the institution which, according to Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer data, is often perceived as one of the most corrupt institutions in many countries of the world and to ensure the credibility and legitimacy of democratic processes.

This involves strengthening the integrity of political parties, particularly during electoral competition for power by regulating political party funding and campaign finance as, in many cases, parliamentarians are implicated in political corruption scandals involving vote buying, contributions from illegal sources, illegal use of state resources, etc (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank 2006). Legislation or codes of conduct for political parties can be instrumental in setting disclosure rules, contributions, donations and expenditure limits, etc.

This also involves establishing effective ethical regimes for parliamentarians, through the development and implementation of integrity laws and codes of ethics, regulations of conflicts of interest, asset declarations rules, etc. and mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of these ethical rules. While there is a broad consensus on their importance, evidence of the impact of such approaches on reducing parliamentary and political corruption is scarce. While such codes of conduct are often poorly implemented, some studies have shown that they are perceived by parliamentarians as helpful in certain situations such as preventing technical infringements, protecting them when dealing with constituents and subjecting them to greater scrutiny both inside and outside parliaments. Factors contributing to the effectiveness of the codes include the existence of broad support among parliamentarians, MPs' involvement in the development of the code, the existence and nature of sanctions established for violating the code, the prevailing political culture and training activities undertaken to raise awareness and build MPs' ethical skills (Martini 2013).

The issue of parliamentary privileges and immunities and the extent to which they should be protected from prosecution also needs to be addressed in a comprehensive parliamentary ethical regime. There is anecdotal evidence that immunity may be misused by parliamentarians by, for example, using a seat in parliament specifically to enjoy impunity for their illegal or corrupt activities (USAID 2006). This points to the need to balance the protections of parliamentary immunity with the need for greater transparency and controls on corruption.

2. What works in engaging with parliaments against corruption

The knowledge gap

Direct support to parliaments aims to strengthen parliaments for democratisation and good governance and typically involves support for institutional reform and development, skill transfer and capacity building (training, expertise, networking), human support services (secretarial and libraries, for example) and physical infrastructure (NORAD 2010; GSDRC 2013). Many actors are involved in parliamentary strengthening programmes, ranging from bilateral and multilateral donors, to parliamentary networks, political party foundations and civil society organisations (NORAD 2010; Hudson and Wren 2007). While those programmes do not always have an explicit anti-corruption focus, they are expected to strengthen the capacity of parliaments to perform their legislative, oversight and representation functions and thereby increase government accountability, with an impact on reducing opportunities for corruption.

Efforts to assess the impact of parliamentary strengthening have been limited, making the identification of lessons and articulation of informed recommendations problematic. As a result, evidence on what works in parliamentary strengthening is scarce (Hudson and Wren 2007).

A 2012 review of the state of knowledge on donor approaches to parliamentary development assistance and their effectiveness also concludes that there is an important knowledge gap on what works in parliament development assistance, due to inconsistent and under-resourced efforts to collect evidence. There is also a lack of information on how the various actors involved have adapted different approaches and programmes to specific contexts. The evaluation literature in this area of intervention consists mostly of either ad hoc single programme evaluations or broad thematic reviews, with no comparative data on funding levels and activities, and little analysis of what has worked under

different conditions and why. The report recommends undertaking more systematic targeted evaluation exercises and further research to address these knowledge gaps (SIDA 2011).

Examples of donor approaches to parliament strengthening

Donors can take different approaches to parliamentary strengthening. For example, most DFID's work is focused on parliament as an institution rather than on training individual MPs, with interventions aimed at strengthening key parliamentary committees, helping parliaments design their own development plans, and/or promoting civic education and parliament/civil society engagement, with mixed results (Hudson and Wren 2007).

On the other hand, the World Bank's experience in parliamentary development tends to suggest that a combination of three approaches to parliamentary capacity building is more likely to succeed and adapt to changing circumstances and needs (O'Brien, Stapenhurst and Prater 2012): i) individual (enhancing the capacity of individual MPs and professional parliamentary staff); ii) institutional (strengthening the whole institution or select institutions within parliament, such as oversight committees); and iii) network (bringing together MPs or parliamentary committees at the regional or global level using parliamentary networks).

UNDP uses a mix of four strategies to support parliamentary development, including i) improving knowledge, skills and abilities of MPs and staff; ii) supporting parliamentary reforms; iii) improving relations with other branches and government and civil society; and iv) increasing female participation in various levels of parliaments. It also supports parliamentary networks (Kinyondo and Pelizzo 2013).

Even though they have been under-resourced as a target of development assistance, parliament strengthening programmes are generally seen as a cost-effective and strategic approach, due to their limited costs, the limited number of beneficiaries and high impact audience. These initiatives are also considered good entry points for addressing multiple development goals and as valuable opportunities to build strategic partnership given the important role that parliaments play in the aid effectiveness agenda. In an analysis of UNDP's performance under the multi-year funding framework from 2004 to 2006, UNDP established that the parliamentary development service line accounted for some 2% of the expenditures on democratic governance, but accounted for over 10% of the reported results (Hubli 2007).

Areas of parliamentary strengthening

Irrespective of the selected approach, parliament strengthening programmes typically encompass supporting the institutional structures, capacities and individual capacity of parliamentarians and professional parliamentary staff. Supporting the development of peer networks of parliamentarians is also a common (NORAD 2010; GSDRC 2013):

Institutional structure and capacities

Support in this area includes interventions aimed at enhancing the legislative, representational, oversight and administrative capacities of parliaments to enable them to fulfil their core constitutional and political functions effectively. This can involve legal competence building, building MPs' communication skills, the strengthening of key parliamentary committees, training in the application of parliamentary procedures, etc.

Programmes can also target the administrative support services parliamentarians need to fulfil their duties, including secretarial support, information technology, libraries and document handling, etc. According to NORAD, such administrative capacity projects have traditionally received the greatest percentage of donor funds (NORAD 2010).

Other programmes support institutional reform processes to enhance institutional efficiency through the restructuration of the committee system; the institution of a new parliamentary calendar and sitting frequency; a revision of parliamentary procedures; or the introduction of new internal regulations such as codes of conduct.

Skills and performance of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff

Some support projects target parliamentarians and specific categories of parliamentarians to build their capacities, skills and performances. Such projects have been favoured by donors and include knowledge and skills transfer through training, seminars, conferences, partnership programmes, parliamentary exchange programmes, networking and study visits, access to peer networks. Some support has also been provided to permanent staff, especially in politically sensitive contexts where donors wish to distance themselves from MPs (NORAD 2010).

Capacity building programmes vary across donors and organisations, but the targeting of training programmes and whether to focus on parliamentarians or professional staff is debated. In the Pacific region, for example, a paper argues that while there have been substantial training investments, parliamentary performance in many countries has not improved accordingly (Kinyondo 2012). The study's findings conclude that training providers should give priority to parliamentary staff rather than members of parliaments, as a longer-term solution to strengthening parliaments in the region. This would enhance their ability to provide technical support to MPs and help address the question of institutional memory in a context of a high turnover of MPs, among other advantages. This approach should be combined with improved recruitment processes for parliamentary staff, as literature shows that higher educational backgrounds enhance the ability of staff to fulfil their duties and to benefit from training.

Peer networks of parliamentarians

A third area of intervention consists of building and supporting parliamentary networks at the regional and global levels and promoting knowledge exchanges among peers. This is especially relevant for anti-corruption work, as corruption is a global challenge that often has a transnational dimension. Such networks allow joined advocacy, develop communities of practitioners, establish peer-support mechanisms and share experiences and best practices. Networks such as the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank or the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association can contribute to the fight against corruption by mainstreaming anti-corruption in their agendas, while the Global Organisation of Parliamentarians against Corruption is an example of a single-purpose network specifically dedicated to fight corruption (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank 2006).

GOPAC and the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank have issued guidelines to strengthen oversight through parliamentarian-donor collaboration. These guidelines were developed to support donors' engagement in recipient countries and improve the transparency, accountability and parliamentary oversight of donor funded projects and loans by engaging with parliamentarians "so that the design of projects are responsive to the country developmental needs and adequate parliamentary oversight can be exerted over donor funded programmes and projects" (GOPAC and The Parliamentary Network 2013).

Lessons learned

Although impact evaluation of parliament strengthening initiatives are limited, reviews of donor supported programmes conducted over the years have identified a set of common recommendations and lessons learned. One of the most important lessons that cuts across all recommendations is that parliament strengthening interventions need to be country specific and informed by local needs assessments (Kinyondo and Pelizzo 2013).

- Parliamentary strengthening requires a comprehensive and long-term approach as it involves influencing the democratic parliamentary political culture of a country. Effectiveness and impact can only be achieved through long-term interventions that can run through two, preferably three electoral cycles (NORAD 2010; Hubli 2007; Hudson and Wren 2007; Hubli and Schmidt 2005).
- Parliamentary strengthening should be anchored in local demand and needs. Interventions should be based on a needs assessment produced with the participation of the targeted parliament to support broad-based local ownership. Externally driven approaches or based on conditionality are not sustainable (NORAD 2010; Hubli 2007; GSDRC 2008; Hudson and Wren 2007).
- Training and capacity building initiatives need to be tailored and customised to country-specific needs. In particular, when delivering training, it is recommended to conduct a comprehensive training needs assessment prior to designing and delivering training programmes to identify all salient features that need to be addressed (language, focus, cultural and constitutional frameworks, etc.) (Kinyondo and Pelizzo 2013).
- Successful interventions need to involve a wide range of recipients and stakeholders, including local organisations and interest groups, opposition MPs and parties as well as members of government (Hudson and Wren 2007).
- Parliamentary strengthening is politically sensitive (NORAD 2010). Such interventions are political in nature, and donors run the risk of being suspected of pursuing their own hidden agenda (Hubli 2007). To overcome this, support to parliament should appear to be neutral. Channelling support through multilateral agencies which are perceived to be more impartial and neutral and less prone

to have ulterior motives can help overcome this challenge (NORAD 2010; Hubli 2007; Hudson and Wren 2007). An alternative can be to use peer-support approaches that involve networks of parliamentarians, as peer advice is often more acceptable than donor "guidance" (NORAD 2010). SIDA also recommends involving parliamentarians in programming since parliamentarians are more likely to accept technical assistance from peers or longer-term consultants and advisors, particularly those who are able tolerate as peers to parliamentary partners (Hubli and Schmidt 2005).

- Parliamentary strengthening needs to be based on a solid understanding of the political economy. Due to the political nature of parliaments, interventions need to be tailored to the political context, and based on an analysis of the political system in which parliaments operate, the incentives of the various stakeholders, the political culture, etc. (Hubli 2007; Hudson and Wren 2007). Similarly, SIDA recommends reducing reliance on short-term interventions that tend to be less politically contextualised, such as support for parliamentary exchanges, conferences and seminars (Hubli and Schmidt 2005).
- Issue-based approaches to parliamentary strengthening are likely to be more successful and offer useful entry points for reform (Hudson and Wren 2007; Hubli 2007; NORAD 2010). Rather than focusing on generic parliamentary processes and institutions building, interventions are likely to be more successful and better received if they are integrated in day-to-day parliamentary work, by combining process strengthening with relevant committees that are working on specific issues (Hubli 2007). This can consist in providing substantive training on specific issues such as anti-corruption rather than focusing on procedural change or institutional reform (NORAD 2010). Similarly, UNDP recommends tackling systemic problems through smaller and narrower interventions that are more likely to succeed in building capacity and consensus (GSDRC 2008; Hubli 2007).
- Timing and sequencing matters (Hubli 2007). It is important to plan parliamentary interventions carefully and ensure that they are well timed and well sequenced in terms of the electoral cycle or in case of a political transition (Hubli 2007).

While these recommendations are valid and relatively consensual in the literature, the local political will is a major factor of success of parliament strengthening initiatives (Kinyondo and Pelizzo 2013). Parliament strengthening programmes are more likely to succeed in countries where there is a demonstrated political will to address parliamentary weaknesses and to create an enabling environment for parliamentary activity. This can be demonstrated by the level of investment in technical support, institutionalisation of political parties and democratisation of political systems (Kinyondo and Pelizzo 2013).

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