# UNDP and Parliamentary Development

Parliaments and parliamentarians have a critical role to play in spurring and sustaining national action toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and can be powerful agents of change, particularly during and after times of crisis. Parliamentary development is thus a particularly strategic entry point for UNDP programming and policy advisory services. The organization now supports over 50 parliaments around the world. Parliamentary development is one of the fastest growing areas of UNDP's democratic governance practice, with the number of projects up tenfold from a decade ago.

Inter-parliamentary networking drives UNDP's work in parliamentary development. UNDP aims to ensure that its parliamentary advice is comparative and tailored to the development and cultural context of the partner country. Through formal and informal arrangements with parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and parliamentary associations, UNDP leverages high quality expertise to provide North-South and South-South development solutions. UNDP's key partners include the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum, the Association of Western Parliamentarians for Africa, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the World Bank Institute, the French National Assembly, the French Senate, the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, the Parliamentary Centre of Canada, and many other parliamentary development practitioners and experts. Through these and other partnerships, UNDP has developed some of the leading source books on parliamentary matters, including handbooks for parliamentarians such as *Parliament, the Budget and Gender; Strengthening Parliamentary Involvement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process (PRSP); and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).*

## UNDP services

UNDP provides a package of integrated technical assistance aimed at strengthening the three chief functions of parliaments — lawmaking, oversight, and representation. The organization works to build the capacity of legislators and technical staff, promote institutional reform, and strengthen parliaments' relationships with the executive and judiciary branches of government as well as with civil society. UNDP's Practice Note on Parliamentary Development, which can be found at www.undp.org/governance/parldev/docs/parldeveng.pdf, provides an overview of UNDP support in the following areas:

1. **Constitutional reform and support for institutional frameworks** to ensure that parliaments have sufficient power and independence to contribute to democratic development.

2. **Administrative and institutional reform,** which includes such areas as reform of the parliamentary professional service and the internal rules of parliamentary procedure, staff training, and activities to strengthen parliamentary library and research services.

3. **Policy support with a focus on MDG** *advocacy,* which is an important component of UNDP programming in nearly every country where the organization is working with parliament. MDG monitoring reports are tabled in parliaments, and members of parliament are encouraged to hold government accountable for national progress toward the Goals.

4. **Parliamentary outreach,** a vital aspect of UNDP's parliamentary development work that aims to ensure public participation in parliamentary processes.

5. **Political party reform** aimed at ensuring that parties make constructive contributions to the deliberations of parliament.

6. **Capacity building for members and staff** on substantive and procedural issues as well as skills such as public speaking, dealing with the media, debating, and codes of conduct.
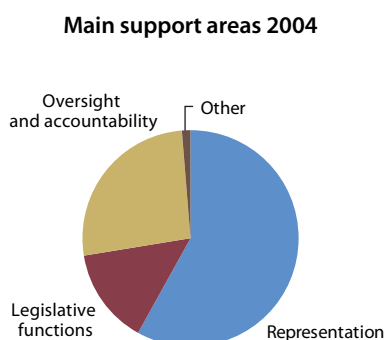
## Cross-cutting areas

**Gender** is an integral component of UNDP's parliamentary development work. Many UNDP country offices provide targeted support to enhance the effectiveness of women members of parliament and improve their ability to caucus and learn from one another. Gender is also mainstreamed in UNDP's legislative, oversight, and outreach activities, as it is vital that deliberations of parliament address the distinct needs of both women and men as well as the differing impacts of policies and the budget on various segments of society.

**E-governance and ICT strategies** are used to network parliamentarians and to enhance parliamentary-constituency interaction and outreach. In many countries, the technologies targeted include traditional forms of communication, such as radio outreach. Increasingly, however, ICT strategies aim to enhance parliamentary access to independent sources of information; such access is vital for legislators to fulfill their parliamentary mandate and contribution to democratic processes. In 2005, UNDP, in partnership with the European Commission, undertook a Global Study on e-parliaments, which will shortly be available on UNDP's parliamentary development webpage. It includes case studies and good practices.

## UNDP support to Parliamentary Development in 2004

Parliamentary development is a solid and established pillar of UNDP's Democratic Governance Practice, with 51 UNDP country offices currently engaged in parliamentary development activities. The past few years have witnessed a steady evolution in the content of UNDP's parliamentary development portfolio. Initially focused primarily on legislative processes and drafting, the portfolio is now far more diverse, including many programmes aimed at enhancing parliamentary oversight and representation.

**Main support areas 2004**



| Region | Number of Projects '02 | Number of Projects '04 |
|---|---|---|
| Africa | 20 | 26 |
| Arab States | 6 | 7 |
| Asia & the Pacific | 14 | 11 |
| Europe & the CIS | 4 | 4 |
| Latin America & the Caribbean | 2 | 4 |
| **Total** | **46** | **51** |

## UNDP support to Parliamentary Development by region

### Africa

UNDP currently supports parliaments in 26 African countries. The majority of projects focus on strengthening the representative function of parliaments. A quarter focus on strengthening parliamentary oversight and accountability, and fifteen percent focus on enhancing the legislative function. Many of the projects in Africa are in countries recovering from conflict or crisis, adding to the urgency of building parliaments' ability to play a proactive role in reconstruction and reconciliation.

**UNDP Benin** supported the creation of a specialized financial analysis unit within parliament; its responsibilities are to support members in their review of the budget and to hold government accountable for the direction of government expenditure.

## Arab States

The largest recent expansion of parliamentary activities has taken place in the Arab States region, with seven parliamentary development projects now active there. This is also a region where UNDP's Global and Regional Governance Programmes have joined efforts to support regional parliamentary collaboration, to make knowledge on parliamentary development more accessible in Arabic, and to promote the empowerment of female legislators. UNDP has recently launched a website, http://www.arabparliaments.org, a "one-stop-shop" for parliaments in the Arab region to access information and resources in Arabic and English.

**UNDP Lebanon** is supporting the efforts of the National Assembly to function as a forum for national dialogue and guarantor of the rule of law. Activities include enhancing parliamentary-civil society interaction, drafting laws set out in the TAIF Accord, and aligning Lebanese laws with international conventions on Human Rights.

## Asia & the Pacific

UNDP assists 11 parliaments in Asia. Most of the programmes are focused on strengthening the legislatures' representative functions, with a smaller number devoted to the legislative and oversight function. These activities are reinforced by the UNDP Regional Programme for Asia and the Pacific, which strengthens networking amongst parliamentarians, promotes learning across the region, and conducts research on matters related to parliamentary development in Asia.

**UNDP Cambodia** is working to strengthen the capacity of women members to engage in substantive issues like the MDGs, and holding parliamentary information sessions on a range of topics, such as the role and responsibilities of parliamentarians, party groups and opposition members, relations between parliament and civil society, and ethics and accountability.

## Europe & the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Although UNDP is directly supporting only four parliaments in Europe and CIS, at the regional level UNDP is strengthening parliamentary networking and promoting reform throughout the region on matters of budgetary independence, government oversight, and broader democratic development issues.

**UNDP Kazakhstan** has been strengthening linkages between local government and the national parliament. This has resulted in the creation of a new analytical and information unit within the national parliament and the empowerment of regional legislatures to impact the budgetary process at the local level.

## Latin America & the Caribbean

UNDP supports four parliaments in Latin America and the Caribbean. Three of these projects focus on strengthening parliaments' representative functions, while in the case of Peru, activities also aim to bolster parliament's communication functions.

**UNDP Brazil** has helped to enhance cooperation amongst state assemblies, enhanced parliamentary outreach, and improved the transparency of parliamentary process through the use of new technologies such as online videos and information management systems.

## UNDP's Knowledge Development Agenda

At the global level, UNDP is working with partners such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Geneva Center for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) to conduct leading-edge applied research on parliamentary matters and to ensure that products such as the IPU/DCAF handbook on *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector* reach the widest possible audience. Current research includes the production of a handbook on parliamentary immunities, and an examination of *political party legislation* and how it affects parliamentary operations. Finally, in recognition that building lasting democratic institutions requires support — beyond the event of an election — UNDP is developing guidelines on parliaments' roles in crisis prevention and recovery.

## Additional resources

UNDP's Practice Note on Parliamentary Development: www.undp.org/governance/parldev/docs/parldeveng.pdf
UNDP's website on Parliamentary Development: http://www.undp.org/governance/parldev.htm
UNDP's website on parliamentary development in the Arab region: http://www.arabparliaments.org/

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