

## Unit 6: Regional Parliamentary Peacebuilding and Engagement with International Organizations

### Learning Objectives

#### How can international networks help parliament handle conflict?

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Appreciate that professional regional and international parliamentary associations provide a venue for parliamentarians to focus on issues beyond the domestic;
- Identify ways in which parliamentarians can use parliamentary association to promote conflict prevention;
- Understand how parliamentarians can participate in international initiatives sponsored by multilateral development agencies to reduce poverty and improve development.

### **Introduction**

There is a growing recognition that parliamentarians, as direct representatives of the people, have a regional, and sometimes international, role to play in peacebuilding. Traditionally, parliamentarians' focus has been limited to representing their constituents within parliament on any number of issues, but predominantly domestic topics. More recently, parliamentarians are finding that they are able to represent the interests of their constituents in forums outside parliament, which have not traditionally been within parliaments' purview, such as international initiatives and processes sponsored by multilateral development agencies. Furthermore, by looking beyond their lawmaking and accountability functions, and working with parliamentary colleagues across international borders, parliamentarians can make contributions to peacebuilding and conflict prevention either in their own countries or regionally, through encouraging dialogue, building confidence and facilitating peer to peer learning.

By forging informal networks or participating in regional and international parliamentary associations, parliamentarians can have an impact on regional or

international issues. Such forums or associations promote dialogue among parliamentarians from different countries and serve as an excellent peacebuilding and conflict prevention model, especially when disputes cross international boundaries. Parliamentary associations are uniquely qualified for this purpose, as those involved have specific knowledge about how parliaments work and the strengths and limitations of parliaments. Similarly, formal regional institutions promote dialogue, build confidence and facilitate learning between members of a region, while helping to mediate disputes and provide a neutral space for dialogue.

Parliamentarians across regions face similar hurdles when using their position and the institution itself to manage conflict and build peace. One aspect of peacebuilding is developing relationships between actors who can then work together to avert escalation of conflict, building on the trust that exists between them due to their similar professional standing. Parliamentarians are able to forge regional relationships amongst themselves in three ways:

1. Developing informal networks
2. Joining and participating in professional associations, such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC), Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) and the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB); and
3. Participating in formal regional institutions, such as the East Africa Legislative Assembly, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Parliamentary Forum and the Pacific Islands Forum Parliamentary Assembly.

### **Challenges faced by Parliaments when developing Regional or International Relationships**

Parliamentarians do face some challenges in developing regional relationships, particularly because of the duplication of efforts by some overlapping associations and networks, and the diversion of scarce parliamentary resources needed to participate in these networks away from other priority areas. Those challenges should be taken into account; however, they should not hinder the development of regional relationships, which is at the core of peacebuilding activities. Unlike other

stakeholders and representatives, parliamentarians are well placed to develop beneficial and long-lasting relationships between one another at a regional level.

## **Parliament Representing Community Interests in Initiatives Undertaken with Multilateral Development Agencies**

Parliamentarians' representative role extends beyond their responsibilities in parliament. Traditionally, the executive has dealt with international organizations and multilateral development agencies; however, due to their representative nature, parliaments are now seen as vital democratic institutions that are playing a larger role in international initiatives and processes sponsored by the multilateral development agencies. For the first time, parliamentarians are able to directly represent the interests of their constituents in major forums and processes outside of parliament.

Parliaments can participate in international initiatives and processes with multilateral development agencies working to reduce poverty and increase levels of development. Specifically, parliaments can contribute to such initiatives by assisting with design, oversight, and implementation. Initiatives undertaken in conjunction with multilateral development agencies include coordinated attempts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Global AIDS initiative, multilateral trade negotiations, the Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) and the country-driven Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process work undertaken by the World Bank. As previously discussed, reducing poverty and increasing levels of development pay a peacebuilding dividend. There is a growing realization in the development community that implementing international initiatives becomes more successful with broader stakeholder involvement in the consultation, design and implementation phases of such initiatives. Parliament is uniquely positioned to participate as a key stakeholder in its own right, as well as being the democratic representative of various other specific stakeholders, in all three phases.

It is not unusual for parliaments to routinely — but indirectly — contribute to national initiatives undertaken in conjunction with multilateral development agencies. Whether parliamentarians wish it or not, the legislature is often a default stakeholder in national initiatives since it may be required to approve or facilitate such enterprises. For instance, in some countries, projects initiated between the executive and international organizations, such as the World Bank, are subject to parliamentary approval through ratification or, more commonly, through indirect approval via the budget process. Furthermore, parliaments are sometimes required to pass legislation to aid the implementation of international initiatives, such as in Poland, where parliament was required to amend the public finance law in order to enable municipalities to accept loans from a World Bank Municipal Development Project.

The necessity for parliament to approve or facilitate the implementation of many of these international initiatives provides it with an opportunity to engage with the process in a more robust manner than may already be the case. The most obvious way in which parliaments can engage is through its oversight function. Even when parliament's oversight function has not been specifically tasked with respect to one of these international projects, parliament is nonetheless able to provide oversight via the budget process or through the creation of particular committees devoted to monitoring the specific initiative, whether it be the MDGs, Global AIDS initiative or poverty reduction. Parliament can provide input on the implementation particularly because of its role in assessing government policy and suggesting policy adjustments to decision-makers in line with budget constraints.

However, parliamentary engagement can go beyond just oversight; it is just as important for parliament to engage at the consultation and formulation stages of these international initiatives and to institutionalize its own ongoing participation. Participating in the earlier stages ensures that parliamentarians will be better able to represent the interests of their constituents in the development of these initiatives. Furthermore, participatory processes tend to yield more sustainable results, and as a major stakeholder, parliament should be consulted prior to the formulation of these initiatives. For instance, with respect to the PRSP process, the World Bank and partnering countries generally accept that national strategies should involve a participatory process, and should provide the basis for debate in the countries'

national assemblies or other elected bodies. When participating in such initiatives, parliamentarians are able to minimize conflict by ensuring the direct inclusion of socially vulnerable and marginalized groups, who are often more likely to be affected by conflict. Parliament can seek their inclusion either by representing their interests or by encouraging the direct inclusion of these groups during the consultation stage. To ensure that parliament is able to represent the interests of socially vulnerable groups, parliamentarians need to engage with their constituencies through outreach activities, public hearings and by ensuring that the public has ready access to easily comprehensible information about the issues and processes.

In addition to playing a role in participatory consultation processes and helping to formulate international initiatives, parliamentarians can contribute to the ongoing management of such initiatives and should seek to institutionalize greater participation by parliament and civil society in ongoing processes aimed at reducing poverty and increasing growth, whether through budgetary processes or in the outcome of the process itself. For instance, parliament can urge the executive to create a steering committee, with stakeholder representation, tasked with implementation and ongoing management of the initiative. As mentioned before, parliament has a strong claim to be included: it is a stakeholder in its own right, the executive is often dependent on it to approve or implement the initiative, and it is the democratic representative of the population at large, including the many vulnerable groups that are often precluded from participating in such processes. For these reasons parliament should urge the executive to include bipartisan parliamentary representation on any such steering committee. By ensuring that the formulation and implementation of international initiatives are sensitive to the interests of divergent groups and potential causes of conflict, parliaments can contribute to peacebuilding whilst promoting sustainable development.

It should be noted that a parliament's capacity to live up to these heady engagements is often contingent on its having the capacity and knowledge to tackle these complex processes and issues. In order to acquaint themselves with how other parliaments have engaged with similar projects, parliamentarians in conflict-affected countries should seek to learn from the experience of other countries in their regions that have undertaken similar processes. Further still, parliamentarians can turn to one of the many parliamentary organizations such as the Commonwealth

Parliamentary Association, the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB), the Inter-Parliamentary Union or European Parliamentarians for Africa (AWEPA), to aid in their engagement and improve their knowledge so that they can reach their potential as representatives of the people.

## **Conclusion**

It has been a long held belief that the role of parliament and parliamentarians was merely to pass legislation and provide oversight, mostly over the budget process. However, there has been a growing trend for parliamentarians to look beyond their traditional functions in order to embrace broader responsibility in representing the interests of their constituents in peace and poverty reduction. Parliamentarians' growing understanding of the role they can play and the positive and constructive contribution they can make to these lofty goals has led to increasing interest by parliamentarians in participating in regional and international professional associations and forums. Parliamentarians are able to contribute to peacebuilding and conflict prevention by encouraging dialogue, building confidence and facilitating peer to peer learning. There are challenges to developing regional relationships, such as duplicating efforts or using scarce parliamentary resources to build networks and relationships outside their traditional constituencies, but the benefits that can accrue from developing informal and formal networks cannot be underestimated. The case-studies in this chapter illustrate how parliamentarians are able to represent their constituents' interest in peace and contribute to conflict prevention by participating in different regional and international forums.

Parliamentarians do not necessarily need to look beyond their borders when seeking to more proactively represent their constituents' interests in peace and poverty reduction. Participation in initiatives sponsored by the multilateral development agencies, such as the MDGs, the Global Aids Initiative, and the World Bank PRSP process, provide forums outside of parliament in which parliamentarians can give their constituents a voice and represent their interest in peace and prosperity. Whether parliamentarians are representing the electorate in regional and international forums or engaging domestically driven initiatives supported by international organizations, they are now able to look beyond the traditional confines

of parliament's role to better represent the interests of the people in conflict prevention and poverty reduction.

### Unit 6 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. How can parliamentarians contribute to conflict preventions by participating in professional parliamentary associations and regional institutions?
2. What parliamentary associations and regional parliamentary institutions are available to parliamentarians in your conflict-affected country of interest?
- 4.3. What challenges are faced by parliamentarians who are seeking to foster regional or international relationships?
4. How can parliamentarians engage with initiatives sponsored by multilateral development organizations in order to promote poverty reduction and development?

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