

Parliamentarians – Advocates for Development

CPA & The World Bank Regional Development Seminar for Parliamentarians

27-28 February, 2006, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The CPA is the association of the 53 Commonwealth Countries and with the states, provinces, dependent territories there is a total of 170 Branches representing 15,000 Members of Parliament.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Don McKinnon, said last year “promoting democracy is not about waving a stick. It is also about strengthening democratic institutions and rooting them in a culture of good governance and transparency.” This has always been the *raison d’être* of CPA, but throughout my term of Secretary-General I have placed attention on identifying other parliamentary support programmes being undertaken, and we have gone out of our way to network with those agencies so the best quality support possible is available through a co-operative approach.

In June last year, I attended a meeting in Vienna co-hosted by the World Bank, the Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the Austrian Development Agency. There were 26 Parliamentary Organizations and Assemblies; 9 Think Tanks, Institutes and Foundations; and 16 Multilateral and Bilateral organisations represented in Vienna. It was an ideal opportunity for organisations to share experiences in promoting development and fighting poverty and corruption.

The meeting also was an opportunity to strengthen existing networks and build new ones so that there is greater co-operation and co-ordination between the many organisations and groups who work with the parliaments of the Commonwealth and around the world or support them through parliamentary development programmes

During the past few years the World Bank has engaged in close interaction and dialogue with parliamentarians, parliaments, and parliamentary organisations on poverty and development challenges, and Bank policies, at both domestic and global level. An example is our work with the World Bank and other agencies with a view to developing a consensus on indicators of parliamentary performance.

This programme in Kuala Lumpur, organised in partnership with the Development Policy Dialogue Team at the World Bank, has been the first time we have devised a workshop for parliamentarians on the role and structures of the Bretton Woods institutions whilst allowing Members the opportunity to interact with senior officials from the World Bank.

This is, in part, a natural extension of our support for the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank. Many CPA Branches have Members who are part of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB), which is a key vehicle for promoting transparency, accountability, and advocacy. It is important for our Association keeps in contact with this and other parliamentary networks.

CPA Programmes

CPA activities are increasingly focussed on good governance and poverty reduction in member countries in need of support. The Association runs parliamentary programmes under the following headings:

1. Professional Development (e.g. Post Election Seminars, recently in Tanzania; Parliamentary Staff Training Programmes & workshops with the Commonwealth Secretariat for Government and Opposition in Mozambique, Trinidad & Tobago, Fiji);
2. Technical Assistance Programmes (Solomon Islands (with UNDP), Malawi, Bougainville (PNG) & Guyana);
3. Human Rights (encompassing Gender Equity, Access to Information & HIV/AIDS);
4. Poverty Reduction (encompassing Financial Scrutiny of the Executive; the International Trading System (with WTO) & West African Parliaments Programme (with DfID)); and
5. Commonwealth Promotion (e.g. Youth Parliaments – the Third Pan-Commonwealth Youth Parliament was delivered in partnership with the World Bank Institute)

In the context of our most recent partnership activities, I want to mention one particular programme: a joint CPA/WBI Study Group on the Administration and Financing of Parliament which met in Zanzibar last

year. The report is included in your briefcases. Among the key recommendations the first three focus on the independence and integrity of Parliament:

- All Commonwealth Parliaments should implement [The Commonwealth Principles on the Accountability of and Relationship Between the Three Branches of Government](#), especially those relating to the independence of the Legislature. These principles are also contained in the CPA Packs in your briefcase.
- Parliamentarians must be able to carry out their legislative and constitutional functions in accordance with their Constitution, free from unlawful interference.
- Parliamentarians should maintain high standards of accountability, transparency and responsibility in the conduct of all public matters. By making it known to all exactly where public funds flow to and from, and by what process legislation is formed, helps to ensure that people get what they deserve from their nation's finances, and laws – the very best. Public coffers are not Members' or the government's personal funds to finance irresponsible spending. Allowing the public a clear view of how the money is being spent will be a first and vital step to ensuring transparency in public financing.

The rest of the recommendations reflect the same key areas of concern that repeat themselves all too frequently:

- The Governance of Parliament
- Financial Independence and Accountability
- Parliamentary Service
- Public Accountability

The Independence and the Independent Financing of Parliament

In spite of the proliferation of multi-party democracy throughout the Commonwealth there is still a great deal of work to be done. There is one area of support for good governance and strengthening the institution of parliament that has emerged as a constant theme in recent years and that is the need to assist countries to gain greater independence for their

parliaments from direct government control, particularly in the area of administration and financing for those parliaments.

This has emerged as a major issue in the parliaments I have visited in developing democracies. Governments in many countries are reluctant to relinquish their Ministerial control of both the finances of the parliament and its administration. In too many countries the parliament is simply used as a rubber stamp for the government programme, and is only called to sit at the whim of Ministerial authority.

The results of a recent case study in Guyana highlight the following weaknesses that are typical in many parliaments:

- Lack of Independence of the parliament and its management from the control of the Executive;
- Members who are not sufficiently *au fait* with their role within the parliamentary framework;
- An Opposition which is angry and frustrated and therefore does not grasp the opportunities afforded it by the rules of procedure;
- Standing Orders in need of revision;
- A committee system which is not properly functioning;
- Insufficient qualified staff, with ill-defined roles and lack of procedural knowledge;
- No awareness of the parliament's responsibility to relate with civil society, the private sector and the wider public.

More specifically some of the key points included *inter alia*;

- There should be a settled parliamentary timetable with recognized opportunities for the Opposition and also for debates on Committee reports. Sittings of the parliament should not be at the whim of the government.
- The parliament should be given much greater control of its own budget and expenditure.

- The Clerk of the Parliament should become the employer of the staff of the parliament and have complete control over all aspects of their employment.

These weaknesses are typical of the current situation in the deficit of democracy in many developing and conflicted countries. In these countries Parliaments must be strengthened to enable them to carry out their role as the principle institutions of democracy, and carry out their role in lifting many millions of people out of poverty.

As I said at the Opening Ceremony, the CPA greatly values the strong relationships it has developed with international organizations such as the World Bank and WTO in recent years. We hope that this cooperation will continue in the future to maximize the impact of the parliamentary voice and ensure that CPA Members remain informed actors in respect of important developments relating development.