

The role of parliamentarians in facilitating grassroots projects

Commonwealth Parliamentary
Association

Nairobi, September 2010

Steve Lee **Senior Governance Advisor One UN**



The role of parliamentarians in facilitating grassroots projects

CPA Nairobi September 2010

To start our discussion: Should we have some working definitions/understandings?

- Grassroots projects? What might they be?
- Facilitate? What does this mean for MPs?
- Constituency development funds CDF? The answer? Or the question?

Grassroots projects – some examples: North and South

Kenya (from CDF data)

- Youth centres
- Local admin offices improvements
- Road works (small scale)
- Bridges and culverts (small scale)
- School improvements (latrines, dorms)
- School science labs/classrooms
- Vocational training (exam costs, bursaries)
- Water bore holes
- Health dispensaries
- Electricity connections
- Football activities (*grass for the grass roots*)

...grassroots projects examples...

Canada (from MP web sites)

- Youth internships
- Business planning help for NGOs
- Support to new entrepreneurs
- Local library support
- Local literacy support
- Bicycle paths
- Park improvements
- Hiking trails
- Fire station improvements
- Hockey rink improvements
- Soccer field improvements (*grass for the grass roots*)

Facilitate? What does this mean for MPs?

At the local level...?????

- Propose
- Encourage
- Help organize/design
- Monitor progress
- Seek funding (local public or private)
- Lobby local government
- Sponsor/endorse

At the higher level (National/State/Province)...???

- Lobby Ministries/Departments
- Seek budget support (the modus op in the USA)
- Seek Minister support (or higher – the modus op in Afghanistan)
- Seek parliamentary endorsement
- Use CDF – if available
- Other

Constituency Development Funds-the answer? And the questions?

- *According to the survey work presented at the December 2009 workshop by the Centre for International Development, SUNY, New York:*
- CDFs are used by Commonwealth country MPs on several continents.
- India (Federal and States), Bhutan, PN Guinea, Solomon Islands, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania (new), Uganda, Jamaica. Some version appears to exist in Malaysia, Pakistan, Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda. Along with Mexico. Some argue the USA Congress uses the budget “ear mark” as CDFs.

Constituency Development Funds-? the answers?

- CFDs are increasingly used by parliaments (MPs) to address grassroots projects, and are becoming increasingly important.
- They seem to fill a gap in existing political-admin systems (that are seen by some as too “central” and bureaucratic/out-of-touch).
- Use of CDF can build relationships local-centre - parlmt. and govt.
- In Africa they seem to fit the traditions and nature of constituency politics- citizen demands for constituency services and MP delivery.

Constituency Development Funds-the questions?

However....

- CDFs are seen as highly open to misuse and corruption
- They can undermine local admin and priorities
- They shift the role of MP from representative and legislator to financially based goods/service provider

....and....

- They are criticized by some citizens and NGOs as non transparent and non inclusive (decisions) and thus undermine the credibility of parliaments
- They can be seen as purely political tools for re-election of MPs- not for development or good governance
- They are un-popular with bi-lateral aid donors (who prefer central government institutions and processes: transparency, accountability, rational, predictable – and open to donor influence/conditions of aid).

Constituency Development Funds-the answer? And the questions?

- Are CDFs the answer for MPs to facilitate grassroots projects?
- **What do MPs do where there are no CDFs?** (are they at the mercy/by the grace of Ministers and Departments “including” them in community development projects and credit and is this reserved/favoured for govt. MPs only?).
- Can the idea of CFD and the design of implementation be improved to address the concerns and opportunities for abuse?

Conclusion:

- What do we mean by grassroots projects?
- What do we understand as the role of MPs?
- What kind of tools do we have/are needed to enable MPs to play a role?
- Are CDFs the answer?
- Should they be improved? How?
- **Asante sana. Thank you.**