

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DEVELOPMENT RESULTS: THE ROLE OF AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS

From the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results at the African Capacity Building Foundation



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SYNOPSIS

This discussion was aimed at highlighting the key issues bordering the role of the parliament and participation in delivering development results in Africa. The fact that Africa has continued to lag behind other regions suggests that African parliaments have to be strengthened if the continent should develop sustainably. A lot of capacity constraints facing parliamentarians have been highlighted in this discussion, and remedies proffered, especially for the response of results advocacy institutions like ACBF and partners, including civil society organizations. The online discussion took place from 20th October to 3rd November 2015, and a total of 8 AfCoP members from various countries shared their views, experiences and insights.

Introduction

There has been enormous investment by African countries and their development partners in the design and implementation of policies and programs aimed at promoting growth and sustainable development. Yet, minimum results have been realized despite all these attempts. This situation has been attributed to the lack of capacity and commitment of African governments to properly account for the use of national resources, weak institutions, and accountability mechanisms, and exclusion of the citizenry in decision making among other reasons.

Accountability for results is essential for effective prioritization and utilization of national resources for sustainable growth and development. The global economic slowdown and the increased demand for improved public service delivery among others has led to increased demand for efficient and effective

utilization of national resources. Development partners and taxpayers have intensified the call for governments to demonstrate value and impact of their policies, programs, and projects. During the High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness in Paris (2005), Accra (2008), and Bussan (2011), donors and partner countries emphasized the need for governments to be accountable to their citizens; and acknowledged the essential role of parliaments in promoting accountability through their oversight roles thereby ensuring effective and efficient utilization of national resources in line with the needs and expectations of the citizenry. Accountable leadership and responsive institutions are the most fundamental requirements for the achievement of the goals of the African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Against this background, AfCoP decided to launch an online discussion on the aforementioned topic as

a means of sharing knowledge and documenting perspectives as to how the continent could sustainably increase accountability for development results in Africa, focusing on the critical role of African parliaments. Specifically, the discussion was aimed at: a) identifying and evaluating the capacity gaps and dimensions across parliaments on the continent; b) identifying and documenting success stories in this area across Africa; and 3) identifying and defining strategies and approaches that can be used by different partners to enhance the capacities of parliament to increase their oversight roles.

The following were guiding questions for the discussion:

1. What is the state of achievement of development results in African countries?
2. What are the main constraints for achieving development results in African countries and what role do the parliaments play in this regard?
3. What is the state of accountability (answerability, requirement to inform, explain, and justify) in African governments and how does it affect development results?
4. Watchdog institutions (the ombudsman, anti-corruption and human rights commissions and the auditor general offices) could have some bearing on parliament's accountability function. Are these institutions well established in various African countries? And how are they supporting the parliaments in fulfilling their oversight function?
5. Are the African parliaments able to hold the executive accountable for development results? If not why?
6. What are the capacity imperatives for addressing the challenges that parliaments face in providing their oversight role

effectively? How specifically can these be addressed?

The State of Achievement of Development Results in Africa

The discussion acknowledged that a lot of positive development has taken place in the African Region. Jeewan Ramlugun, a participant in the discussion, clearly pointed out some of these achievements as follows:

Overall, the continent has made impressive progress on many key developmental indicators. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth has recently been over 5%, made possible as a result of prudent fiscal and monetary policies, macro-economic stability, trade liberation, improved exchange systems and a surge in domestic demand with a bulge in the middle class and younger sections of the population. There have been noticeable improvements in economic opportunities, education (except for the higher education and vocational training), health, and political participation and democratic strengthening.

The Main Constraints Limiting Development Results in Africa and Role of Parliament

Catherine Piloto was a participant in the discussion and contended that Africa's problems mostly stemmed from weak political systems, especially as it relates to parliament. She specifically noted the following:

We have seen parliaments becoming battle grounds for political ideologies and platforms to square up political and other differences. All this energy can be diverted to discussing real developmental issues, and not engage in debate just to make political statements. When one observes what goes on in some of our parliaments, a lot of questions come to mind:

- Do political representatives understand what it means to be a parliamentarian or it is just another job?
- Do they fully understand what leadership and accountability is?
- Why do some find it easy to ignore parliamentary sessions, and in some cases consecutively?
- Is the electorate competent enough to choose their representatives?
- Do we have adequate civic education for people to understand the role of parliament?
- How free is the electorate to choose their representatives?
- Why do we get complaints of parliamentarians resurfacing only when there is another election?
- With such a cadre of educated people on the continent, why do our parliaments fail to deliver?

Catherine further argued that “those in a position to do the job well would rather not get involved because the evidence of what goes on [in politics and parliament] gives them no incentive to be actively involved.” The other question relates to whether the good ones in politics are given chance and space to do their job well.

Ebbah Gadaga, another online participant, has asked related questions in defining the problems of results and the role of parliaments: “Our parliamentarians, most probably the majority of them, do not understand what managing for results is about....I am of the view that to promote accountability for results first and foremost is to ask ourselves whether parliamentarians really understand that, what they stand for is RESULTS.”

Jeewan Ramlugun indicated that while Africa has recorded impressive GDP growth over the years, this growth has not been effectively translated into inclusive development. That is, it benefits the rich

more than the poor—or the rich becomes richer and poor poorer, which is not consistent with sustainable development. He noted that “an estimated 6 out of the 10 most unequal counties in the world are in Africa.” The following are specific problem areas and issues he pointed out as needing urgent policy response: (i) human development; (ii) transparency, accountability, good governance, and institutional strengthening; (iii) domestic resource mobilisation & management, including combating fraud, corruption and illicit financial outflows; (iv) capable and responsive governments, demonstration of ethical and visionary leadership at the apex of society; (v) ease of Doing business in Africa and attracting high value foreign direct investment; (vi) building interdependence between business, social and environmental sustainability; and (vii) improving security.

The Role of Parliament in Delivering Development Results

Jasson Kalugendo, another participant, emphasized the need for members of parliament to be involved in monitoring and evaluation of development programs. In particular, the need for the legislature to act on recommendations from monitoring and evaluation reports to improve results delivery and ensure omission of programs that demonstrate poor performance. He further argued that, strengthening parliamentary role requires the readiness of governments (the executive in particular) to develop a culture of accepting their mistakes, which, in his opinion, is lacking at the moment. This also applies to development partners.

Jeewan argued: Parliamentarians are uniquely placed to drive forward the inclusive development agenda, in terms of their representative role and remit. They can communicate important government agendas of the day; canvass the views of the citizens directly, or through community leaders, NGO’s, Ombudsmen and those agencies having an advocacy and social progress monitoring

function. Parliamentarians can ensure that the voices of the underrepresented, the marginalised and minority sections of society are heard and heeded in the political arena.

State of Accountability in African Governments, Watchdog Institutions and Development Results

It was acknowledged that, a lot of accountability institutions have been established in Africa and made laudable progress. Policy development has also been advanced in the continent. As noted in the Report of the High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows in Africa, accountability institutions are now common, besides results reforms embedded in traditional state institutions. Most African countries now have Anti-Corruption Commissions; Ombudsmen; Independent Audit Services; Human Rights Commissions; Financial Intelligence Units; Multi-Party Governments; and a mosaic of Civil Society Organizations, including Transparency International geared at enforcing social accountability for results, with established networks nationally, regionally and globally.¹ Jeewan Ramlugun commented as follows:

There have been undeniable and salutary instances of greater government probity, openness, and accountability, enhancing the public's ability to hold governments to account. Some 20 countries in Africa are today classed as electoral democracies, as compared to 4 in 1994. This suggests representative governments are on the rise, democratic elections becoming more common and peaceful transitions to power more pervasive. A significant number of African states have increased their delivery of economic opportunities, and demonstrated strides in fostering wider

political participation, promoting gender equality and protecting human rights.

Nonetheless, huge accountability and governance challenges still remain in the continent to reaching full-scale and far-reaching development. Furthering effective state accountability for results is predicated upon efficient governments, the fullest extent of citizen involvement and meaningful engagement in the political process (much enhanced in some countries in the world through e-Government), free independent, effectual and responsible media, an effective and credible opposition, strong civil society organisations, fully functional oversight institutions, and the rule of law; all of which require enormous strengthening in the region and parliamentary involvement.

Hans Gutbrod, an online participant, lauded all watchdog institutions operating in Africa. But Hans, however, expressed the need for watchdog institutions themselves to be accountable and transparent. They still need a lot of catching up, and “will become really credible in demanding accountability if they themselves are models of accountability.”

African Parliaments' Ability to hold the Executive Accountable for Development Results

Ssemombwe Joseph, an online participant, highlighted the limitations parliament (especially the opposition wing) faces in holding the executive accountable. Thus, because a number of African nations' development plans are aligned to the ruling party manifestos, dictating policies, deployment, and institutions' performance, it is difficult to have the opposition buy into them with seriousness. Such plans are perceived by the opposition as ruling party programs; thus there are little incentives for checks and balances from the opposition. The manner some of the programs are prepared, many

¹ See African Union/Economic Commission for Africa (2015, pp.38-39) on the details of these initiatives.

a time without significant parliamentary input, is another problem.

Jasson Kalugendo's take on this is that, once governments do not have a culture of accepting their mistakes, there is little anyone else could do about it. "In most government reports (at least those I have worked on), contents have been edited to suit the interests of those who are in the office. Thus, there is a need to develop a culture of accepting mistakes and making a u-turn in government, as well as among development partners.

Jeewan Ramlugun acknowledged the rift that is always found between parliament and the executive, even in developed countries, and the difficult for parliament to hold sway. However, the encouragement of intense debate does pay dividend, citing a current case in the UK regarding the "overturning of the majority government's tax credit cut proposals by the House of Lords." In Africa, he pointed out the lack of requisite capacity in many parliaments to engage in debates as a structural problem affecting delivery of results. For instance, lack of deep budgetary skills and financial literacy has severely hampered the budget scrutiny and oversight role of parliament. There are also constraints in terms of lack of timely, reliable and complete facts, figures and information to conduct intelligent, persuasive and impactful debates. The research divisions of parliaments are not well resourced and supported. And as many parliamentarians belong to the ruling party, their independence and critiquing role can be at best tepid and unforthright. Those parliamentarians who are personally well-endowed materially, and not reliant on parliamentary income, can speak their minds more eloquently and forcefully. While moderating this discussion, a parliamentarian in Sierra Leone confided in the author that "in parliament, sometimes one hesitates to oppose his political party's position, otherwise you won't have the party symbol in the next election." This,

unfortunately, makes going to parliament largely a bread and butter issue, sometimes.

Capacity Imperatives for Addressing the Challenges that Parliaments Face in providing their Oversight Role

The following capacity building recommendations were gathered from all participants in the discussion:

- Scale up development skills and knowledge for parliamentarians
- Increase administrative, human, communication, and research capacity of African parliaments
- Ensure active involvement of parliaments in all development processes, and provide adequate time for parliamentary debate on all development issues
- Parliamentary media need to be given the necessary access and support to carry out parliamentary reporting from the perspectives of both the government and the opposition, ensuring that work of parliament is comprehensively documented and communicated
- Opportunities for regional, national, and transnational learning and development in parliamentary practice need to be facilitated
- Advocacy for behavioural and attitudinal change in parliament, and training for parliamentarians in leadership and citizenship are critical for achievement of results
- The African Union, the Pan-African Parliament and other regional parliamentary strengthening bodies must be fully committed to enhancing the functioning of African parliaments, so they can make a practical and telling difference in terms of how well societies should be governed

- Encourage the development of long term plans transcending political terms for sustained follow-up and review of development progress with the participation of parliaments
- Develop performance targets for all parliamentarians and share these with their constituencies for periodic measurement of their performance and reporting, ensuring that results are published
- There is need to pay special emphasis on peer-learning among African Parliaments and ensure follow-up on implementation of good practices in each country's parliament
- There is need for detailed studies on the constraints African Parliaments encounter; a sample of African countries could be chosen for this on the basis of levels of socio economic development, giving more attention to less developed nations
- Alongside this, joint advocacy should be ongoing by AfCoP, ACBF and other partners, including civil society groups, on various issues pertaining to strengthening parliamentary contribution to development results

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is great potential for increased development results in Africa, if the issues discussed in this paper are properly translated into action. To this end, the following recommendations have been proffered, especially for AfCoP, ACBF, and partners:

- Develop a comprehensive capacity building program for African Parliamentarians on the capacity issues highlighted above and source funding for its implementation



Acknowledgement

This knowledge brief is intended to summarize good practices and key policy findings on managing for development results. AfCoP Knowledge products are widely disseminated and are available on the website of the Africa for Results initiative (AfriK4R), at: www.afrik4r.org/page/resources.

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