



WORKSHOP AND LAUNCH
African Parliamentary Network on Poverty-Reduction
Tamale, Ghana; 7-8 November 2003

A. Background and objectives

The African Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network was created under the auspices of the Canadian Parliamentary Centre's 4-year, \$9 million Africa-Canada Parliamentary Strengthening Program (ACPSP), funded by the Canada Fund for Africa through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The Network brings together parliamentary committees (members and staff) involved in the PRSP process (design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) or more generally in the oversight of poverty reduction. Member countries so far include Benin, Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, with the expectation of expanding to include other countries.

The Network was to be launched at a founding meeting and workshop to be held in Tamale, Northern Ghana on November 7-8, 2003. The workshop would serve a double objective of:

- deliberating on the broad conceptual issues that underpin the mandate of the Network: exploring the organizational issues and developing a tentative workplan for the activities of the Network;
- providing a forum for discussion on substantive issues of importance to the Network, the community monitoring of poverty reduction: sharing experiences on the engagement with civil society and a field visit to examine the ways in which Parliament could link up with civil society in conducting oversight for poverty reduction.

The Ghana venue was chosen in order to allow for a greater participation by Ghanaian parliamentary committees with whom the Parliamentary Centre has been working through the Ghana Parliamentary Committee Support Project. The workshop would thus allow for the rich experience of Ghana to be shared, but would also serve as a bridging activity for the Ghanaian committees in the ongoing lapse period between the end of the Ghana Project Phase 1 and the start of the second phase.

B. Summary

The workshop counted 30 participants from 13 countries, including 25 MPs, 4 parliamentary staff and 1 representative from a research institution. Invited guests included the First Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana; the Minister for the Northern Region; Hon. J.H. Mensah, Senior Minister; as well as a representative of the Canadian High Commission. There was also strong representation from the organizers, both the Parliamentary Centre and the Institute for Policy Alternatives. *A complete list of participants can be found in Annex 1.*

Opening Session

The Network Launch was led off by introductory remarks from Rasheed Draman (Poverty Reduction Network Coordinator, Parliamentary Centre) presenting the brief history of the network and its proposed objectives. Addresses by invited guests included:

- **Hon. Ernest Debrah, Minister for the Northern Region, Ghana**, acknowledged the innovative approach of the Network. The voice of the poor can be heard through parliament; the latter and government must find ways of working in partnership to take action on poverty.
- **Ms. Louise Corbin, Representative of the Canadian High Commissioner to Ghana**, spoke of the history of Canadian government's ongoing efforts to support Africa, particularly in the governance field in Ghana, through for example the long-standing relationship with the Parliamentary Centre and the Parliament of Ghana.
- **Hon. Freddie Blay, 1st Deputy Speaker of Ghana**, challenged the Network to move beyond words and take action on poverty reduction. Parliaments must move away from their reputation of rubber-stampers and strengthen their oversight role, hold the executive accountable and engage with civil society organizations and community-based groups.
- **Hon. J.H. Mensah, Senior Minister and veteran politician** confronted the orthodox paradigm which defines poverty reduction strategies in Africa and urged the Network to look deeper for Africa's own analysis of poverty – particularly the structural inability to attain high levels of productivity - as the starting point for “home-grown” strategies. *(A complete synthesis of Hon. Mensah's address can be found in Annex 2).*

Session I: Sharing Poverty-Reduction Experiences

The session was led off by a presentation by Rasheed Draman entitled “Poverty-Reduction Efforts in Africa”, providing a brief overview of the PRSP process and how parliamentarians can and should be involved.

Participants were then invited to react by sharing their countries experiences, challenges and best practices on the following points:

- Parliamentary engagement in the PRSP or poverty-reduction policy;
- Parliamentary oversight of the PRSP or poverty-reduction policy;
- Facilitation of public participation in poverty-reduction;
- Engagement with organized civil society (as partners for policy-making or oversight).

The discussion was informal, with most countries reacting on one or more of the above points.

The following points can be drawn out from the discussion:

- **Niger:** The PRSP was an initiative of the Government; Parliament, put in front of a fait accompli, decided to concentrate on its monitoring and evaluation. Parliament, via a special Committee on Poverty Reduction, has been particularly involved in creating awareness of the PRSP in the general population through the use of the media and field visits to local communities.
- **Sénégal:** Both Parliament and civil society were very involved in the creation of the PRSP, which was debated in Parliament before being presented to the World Bank. The strategy led to a National Program on Good Governance, which includes capacity-building for Parliament and MPs. Through the Parliamentary Network on Population and Development, MPs have a

voice and serve as the link between PR projects and civil society, and between civil society and government.

- **Burundi:** The PRSP is still in an intermediate stage, but Parliament has been involved in participatory approaches down to the grassroots level. The population's concerns have guided its elaboration and a consultative process at every stage ensures that these concerns are brought forward. Conflict has had serious incidence on poverty and has delayed the PRSP process. An ad hoc Parliamentary Network on Poverty Reduction has been formed to determine what action can be taken while waiting for the full-fledged PRSP.
- **Ghana:** Parliament approved the GPRS and its implementation is part of the National Budget, which is also controlled by Parliament. However, Parliament has no day-to-day direct control over implementation and needs to be informed about areas where they lack control, a situation that should be improved through the work of the recently formed Special Committee on the GPRS.
- **Tanzania:** The involvement of Parliament in the elaboration of the PRSP was not as direct as hoped; however Parliament had the opportunity to review and approve the document. Certain parliamentary committees are responsible for its oversight through a national system; however, the challenge remains on how to involve the population.
- **Malawi:** The first priority of the Budget and Finance Committee is poverty-reduction; a task force has been set-up to coordinate with all other committees in Parliament. The executive is putting in place a monitoring system and Parliament is pushing for involvement.
- **Zimbabwe:** Though not a PRSP country, poverty-reduction policies are in place and the challenge is for Parliament to be involved in the assessment of poverty at a local level. There is a need to link with other organizations, such as the Forum on Poverty Reduction.
- **Ethiopia:** Challenges to the involvement of the population in poverty-reduction include the difficulty of accessing the public in rural areas because of the physical constraints of roads and time, and the absence of a strong civil society, crucial for Parliament to achieve its role.
- **Kenya:** The development of the PRSP was very consultative, with both Parliament and civil society, but at a superficial level; the executive consulted government employees at the district level, but not the poor themselves. Furthermore, the new government has disregarded the PRSP. Parliament needs to define its own role, including being engaged in budget-making from the onset, by making constituencies the basis of development, establishing a balance between the Office of the President (responsible for the PRSP) and Parliament, and involving target groups.

In summary, Parliaments clearly demonstrate a will to be involved in PRSPs and other poverty-reduction policies, but the degree of actual involvement varies between countries. Parliaments can play a key role in the information and awareness phase and ensure monitoring, particularly at the budgetary level. Many countries are putting into place a national monitoring system, and it is crucial for Parliaments to be involved.

Session II: What can a Poverty Reduction Network Accomplish?

Debra Violette (Program Officer, Parliamentary Centre) presented a brief history of the elaboration of the Network and its objectives to lead into a discussion about activities and initiatives the Network could undertake to further these objectives. Activities in the workplan or in the planning stage include:

- **Training on Community Monitoring of Poverty Reduction:** Dr. Sulley Gariba (IPA), presented an overview of this activity which will build the capacity of MPs and staff of parliamentary committees to engage with community-based organizations for the monitoring of poverty-reduction efforts. A first round of training for three committees was to start the following week.
- **Link with the MIMAP network:** Dr. Lassina Konaté (MIMAP team, Burkina Faso) presented an overview of the MIMAP network's efforts to shed a scientific light on poverty-reduction efforts by analyzing poverty – through macroeconomic models - in order to better guide policy-making efforts. Dr. Konaté also presented some findings of the Burkina Faso team's research. A workshop between MIMAP researchers and the PR Network is slated for early 2004.
- **Africa-Asia Symposium:** Debra Violette briefly presented this initiative proposed by IDEAS to bring together parliamentarians from Africa and East Asia to share experiences on parliamentary oversight of poverty reduction. The initiative is still in the planning stage but could be envisaged in the first half of 2004.

These presentations were meant to spark discussion on other potential initiatives for the Network to undertake. Brainstorming took the form of an “ideas marketplace” where participants with an idea lobbied others to join their discussion group to develop this particular idea. The activity led to the following proposals for the Network, some in the form of concrete activities, others as ideas for direction and orientation of the Network:

- **Capacity Building:**
 - Focus on the grassroots, by assisting the poor themselves to monitor poverty reduction efforts;
 - Assist MPs to connect the work in parliament with conditions of the poor and to exercise oversight in representing the voice of the poor;
 - Include staff of Parliament in capacity building to ensure that there is long-term retention and sustainability of the systems for Parliamentary oversight of poverty reduction.
- **Promoting Dialogue and Analysis for a Paradigm Shift:**
 - Establish a process for policy review, reflection and promote a paradigm shift, whereby African Parliaments can contribute to debate about different forms of analysis of poverty and strategies for development, not just the PRSP.
- **Mainstreaming Gender in Poverty Reduction Oversight:**
 - Develop systems and procedures to ensure that budgets are gender sensitive, and target resources to the most vulnerable among our poor – women, children and the disabled;
 - Ensure that reporting on poverty reduction efforts by government capture the necessary data on how these programs are affecting women, children, the disabled and the vulnerable;
 - Link efforts of the PR Network with those of the Gender Network.
- **Collaborating with NEPAD and other Regional Bodies Working on Poverty:**
 - Set up mechanisms of collaboration, such as joint meetings and workshops;
 - Make efforts for the Network members to make presentations at formal meetings of NEPAD and other regional bodies dealing with poverty issues in Africa;
 - Undertake exchange visits to strengthen linkages.
- **Parliamentary Youth Initiatives in Poverty Reduction:**

- Build capacity of young people wishing to work with and understand Parliamentary work;
- Support youth to participate in Parliamentary debates on poverty reduction;
- Assist youth groups to acquire resources for their work on poverty reduction.

Session III: The Poverty Reduction Network – Organizational Issues

Rasheed Draman presented the participants with a proposed organizational structure for the Network, elaborated by the Parliamentary Centre following the in-depth consultative meetings with African MPs that led to the creation of the Network. At the latest consultative meeting in Addis-Ababa in May 2003, a leadership for the network had been proposed, and this was also put forward to the participants for approval.

The group approved the following organizational structure for the Network (*see Chart in Annex 3*):

- The Network will be coordinated by a designated representative of the Parliamentary Centre,
- A Steering Committee, formed of one representative for each of the Western, Eastern and Southern African regions (and ensuring linguistic representation as well) will provide direction to the Network and make decisions regarding the workplan, in collaboration with the Network Coordinator;
- The Network is formed of parliamentary committees specialized in poverty-reduction, each of which designates a main contact to liaise with the Network Coordinator and the regional representatives;
- Each member committee is responsible for maintaining the relationship with other relevant committees within its Parliament;
- Relationships are not meant to be only vertical, but also to cut across horizontally between member committees who are encouraged to liaise and share experiences.

The group approved the following Steering Committee for the Network, as proposed in Addis-Ababa:

- Hon. Anne Makinda, Tanzania, representative of the Eastern Region
- Hon. Louis Chimango, representative of the Southern Region
- Hon. Abdourahim Balarabe, Niger, representative of the Western Region

A short discussion was held and focused mostly on the sustainability of the Network. The following points were raised for consideration:

- the Network must be institutionalized within each member Parliament;
- the Network must develop a structure that ensures African ownership, including funding;
- in the long-term, the Parliamentary Centre should move from coordinating the Network, to being a partner;
- the work of the Network should be linked to Parliament's action plans for oversight of poverty reduction.

Session IV: The civil society linkage

The session on exploring linkages with civil society for the oversight of poverty-reduction initiatives took the form of a field visit to a local community, to engage with the population on issues linked to poverty-reduction.

The session began by an introduction of the three partner community organizations that had agreed to collaborate for the visits, followed by a brief question-and-answer period before departure. The three projects to be visited were as follows:

1. Community-based Action and Advocacy on Mutual Health Insurance – CPHD;
2. Voices of Poor Farmers – Ghana Agricultural Workers Union of the Trade Union Congress;
3. Alternative Community-based Health Delivery – Amasachina.

These three organizations were representative of the some of the key poverty issues confronting the people of Northern Ghana – Health and Agriculture. The predominant occupation in the region is agriculture, but mostly on a subsistence level. As a result, most households are not able to generate enough resources to pay for health care which is now on the basis of “cash and carry.” IPA’s choice of these organizations was very appropriate.

Participants divided up according to their particular interest. When more than one participant was present from a particular country, they normally made an effort to join different groups. The visits took the form of interaction between the MPs and their staff on the one hand and the selected local communities on the other. The CS organizations facilitated the interaction, in most cases providing translation services from the local language to English. In keeping with tradition, MPs and their staff on arrival in the community went straight to pay a courtesy call on the village chief and his elders. All interactions followed this protocol.

The field visits lasted all afternoon and provided an opportunity for participants to engage with the local population. Each group reconvened upon return. The general impression of the visits to the three communities was that MPs were afforded the opportunity to:

- Get a sense of the depth of poverty in Northern Ghana;
- Understand the immense poverty reduction challenges that confront them in their various countries (given that most MPs have not had this kind of interaction with the poor in their respective countries); and
- Whip up their commitment to making the PRSP process a success.

C. Results

Both proposed objectives of the workshop were achieved in that:

- The Network was solidly launched:
 - the workshop brought together key members as well as introduced new members;
 - representation from the various countries was excellent, with only Nigeria absent;
 - an organizational structure and leadership were approved;

- discussion was had about sustainability and other issues, which will be kept in mind as the Network evolves;
- activities in the workplan were presented and discussed;
- new ideas for activities and direction will be further refined and integrated into the workplan.
- Issues of substance were tackled:
 - the workshop provided a first forum for the general sharing of experiences on poverty reduction oversight within the various member countries;
 - the topic of community-level monitoring of poverty-reduction was addressed head-on by a field visit to local communities.

The workshop created and/or reinforced the relationships with and between key African poverty reduction committees. For some countries already involved in the ACPSP, the workshop drew in new contacts, thus widening the ACPSP reach within these Parliaments (e.g. Sénégal, Bénin, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Malawi had representatives not previously involved in the ACPSP and who showed great enthusiasm for the program). A complete list of contacts was drawn up and circulated, with the hope that not only will the Network draw members together, but that members will communicate amongst themselves as necessary.

Unfortunately, the participation of the Ghanaian committees was not as good as had been hoped. Only 6 MPs were present out of an invited 14, representing 3 out of 6 invited committees, with no representation from the Poverty Committee. The participation of the guests of honour, including the First Deputy Speaker who remained for the entire workshop, certainly provided a strong Ghanaian contribution. The presence of the Northern Regional Minister as well as that of Hon. J.H. Mensah (secured through the relentless efforts of Gifty Adika, facilitated by Hon. Cecilia Amoah) showed a commitment to the activity on the part of Ghana, and the MPs present shared Ghana's experiences. In terms of the Network itself, then, the Ghanaian participation was excellent. However, in terms of the Ghana Parliamentary Committee Support Project, the desire to use this workshop as a bridging activity between both phases of the project was not successful. Weak participation can be attributed to several factors including: urgent parliamentary business that had come up and the apparent communication problems within parliament about the activity; the Committee on Local Government and Rural Development had another workshop scheduled for the same period; and the lack of a connecting flight to Tamale for PC Appiah Offori, Chair of the Special Committee on the GPRS who had just returned from a program in Nairobi

Participants' evaluations were generally very positive; the openness of participants and the opportunity for exchange were often cited as positive outcomes of the experience. Also much appreciated was the field visit as an opportunity to see first hand the needs of the local communities - a first for some MPs - and for most everyone, an opportunity that does not arise often enough.

D. Lessons Learned

The choice of Tamale as the venue proved excellent, not only because of the existence of IPA and its links to local communities, but also because being one of the poorest regions in Ghana, it

provided participants a much-appreciated up-close look at the reality of local populations that poverty-reduction initiatives are meant to target. Though the length and discomfort of the travel was decried upon arrival, participants unanimously applauded the choice of venue upon departure.

IPA, namely Dr. Sulley Gariba and his team, provided excellent support and facilitation to the workshop, including the well-organized field visits. The facilities, both at the institute itself and at Gariba Lodge were optimal. The importance of having a trustworthy contact on the ground when organizing such events cannot be overstated. Likewise, the contracting of Gifty Adika was key, especially in her dealings with the local travel agent and the excellent coordination of logistics in Accra.

The value-added of using a local agent such as Starline Travel and Tours is to be questioned. It did not, as hoped, avoid the usual obstacles we face when dealing with flights in Africa. Once again, last minute ticket issues (in this case a problem with DHL) compromised the participation of 2 members and this number would have been higher had some participants not bought their own tickets or come from another program activity in Nairobi. Working with a third-party agent meant delays in communication and tickets being issued at the last minute, though preparations had started much in advance. However it is hard to ascertain whether these are normal obstacles to face when travelling in Africa, a reality that our growing experience in such matters seems to confirm. Complaints have come in writing from one delegation about the poor service received from Starline including check-in problems at the hotel in Accra – some participants waited 6 hours for their room to be ready - (though whether this was a problem with the La Palm Royal or with Starline is hard to ascertain) and the failure to confirm return flights though in possession of the tickets. Gifty Adika dealt directly with Starline and given all these factors and uncertainties, her general assessment is that the service they provided was average. One has to wonder why Starline came so highly recommended by the by both Parliament and by PSU staff (they had just brought in participants for the CPA conference and for an Africa-wide parliamentary program just before ours). This might be worth investigating further. There are other agencies that are more professional but it remains to be seen whether their expertise at moving people across the continent is better.

Timing was somewhat of an issue, with a very-intensive two-day program. A lot of ground was covered but the days were very long and due to overflow on some points, certain questions were not debated as fully as hoped. Our original idea of a three-day workshop with two full days of discussion and one day for a field trip might have been more appropriate, especially given the time invested in transporting participants all the way to Tamale. However, the compressed schedule and need to tackle things rapidly probably contributed positively to the sense of urgency for the Network's future actions and the consequent momentum.

Communication issues with the Parliament of Ghana seem to have been a factor in the poor participation of Ghana MPs in the workshop, despite Gifty Adika's relentless efforts. Communication among the leadership of Parliament seems to be an ongoing challenge, which the IRCs will have to continue to face in the Ghana Parliamentary Committee Support Program, and around which to find innovative solutions. One important lesson learned is that For the Parliament of Ghana, there is no clear distinction between the ACPSP or the GPCSP and

activities coming from one or the other of the programs. Therefore, regular procedures and protocol of the GPCSP should be followed when implementing ACPSP activities in Ghana.

E. Conclusion

There was great enthusiasm from all participants at the launch of the Network and it will be crucial to follow-up rapidly in order to keep the momentum going. Immediate actions include the compilation and dissemination of the workshop report, and a closer examination of the action plans proposed during the workshop, their development and integration into the Network workplan. The former will be undertaken by the Network Coordinator as he maintains his ongoing communication with all Network members. The latter will be the main responsibility of the Steering Committee in the coming months leading up to the Network workplanning meeting slated for February 2004.

Other key Network activities in the next few months include the first round of training for MPs and staff on Community Monitoring of Poverty Reduction (November 2003) and a policy workshop between the Network and MIMAP researchers (February 2004).

**Launch of the African Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network
Tamale, Ghana; November 7-8, 2003**

List of participants

Honorable MPs

Bénin	Abou B. Soulé Adam , Chair, Finance and Trade Committee
Burundi	Raphael Bazeruke , Member, Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network
Ethiopia	Teshome Eshetu , Chairman, Budget and Finance Affairs Committee
Ghana	A S K Bagbin , Chair, PAC Cecilia Gyan Amoah , Member, Committee on Gender and Children Wiafe Dankwa , Member, Committee on Gender and Children Dominic Nitiwul , Member, Committee on Gender and Children D Y Mensah , Member, Government Assurances Committee Kwabena Sarfo , Member, Government Assurances Committee
Kenya	Soita Shitanda , Chair, Finance, Planning and Trade Committee Adhu Awiti , Member, Finance, Planning and Trade Committee
Malawi	L. J. Chimango , Chair, Budget and Finance Committee A. Sikelo , Vice Chair, Budget and Finance Committee F. L. Chome , Chair, Commerce, Industry and Tourism Committee and Member of the Budget and Finance Committee
Mali	Samou Sangaré , Chair, Rural Development and Environment Committee
Niger	Abdoulrahim Balarabé , Chair, International Relations Committee and Member of the Poverty Reduction Committee
Sénégal	Dib Niom , Chair, Finance Committee
Tanzania	Anne Makinda , Chair, Standing Committee on National Resources, Environment and Poverty Reduction Job Yustino Ndugai , Member, (as above) Bernadine R. Ndaboine , Member, (as above)
Uganda	Jack Sabiti , Vice-Chair, PAC
Zimbabwe	Priscilla Mishairabwi-Mushonga , Chair, PAC Paurina Mpariwa , Member, PAC

Parliamentary Staff

Malawi	J. L. Mwenyeheli
Tanzania	Mudith Cheyo Buzenja , Senior Economist, Poverty Reduction Department (Vice-President's Office)
Ghana	Jewels MC Annan ,
Kenya	Florence Abonyo , Second Clerk Assistant

Invited Guests

	Hon. Freddie Blay , First Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Ghana Hon. J H Mensah , Senior Minister Hon. Ernest Debrah , Minister for the Northern Region (represented by Charles Bintim , Deputy Minister) Louise Corbin , 2 nd Secretary of Political and Public Affairs, Canadian High Commission to Ghana
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Resource persons

Burkina Faso	Dr. Lassina Konaté , MIMAP
Bénin	Guy Ajanooun , Former MP

Institute for Policy Alternatives

	Dr. Sulley Gariba , Director
	Support staff

Parliamentary Centre

	Rasheed Draman , Poverty Reduction Network Coordinator
	Debra Violette , Program Officer
	Gifty Adika , Information Resource Coordinator

**Launch of the African Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network
Tamale, Ghana; November 7-8, 2003**

Keynote address by the Hon. J.H. Mensah, Senior Minister, Ghana

Unofficial Summary of Key Points

If parliamentary committees are to be effective in the oversight of poverty reduction, they must have a clear view of the situation. There is a need to move away from the “traditional” view of poverty and its policy solutions and adopt an African perspective.

It is proposed that poverty be defined as the structural inability to attain high levels of productivity. Poverty reduction must therefore pay attention to the empowerment of the individual through innovative means. For example, education increases mobility and therefore opportunity; however, there is a need to move away from formal education and focus on skills useful to increasing productivity. Parliamentarians therefore, as policy makers, should not be influenced by the higher education lobby.

Most often, the opportunities for increasing productivity come not from the individual but from external forces. However, given that the majority of the poor in Africa are self-employed, parliament must move away from the obsession of public policy on attracting foreign investment but rather focus on favouring self-empowerment. The productivity of the self-employed is affected by capital: both public (water, infrastructure, etc.) and private (own equipment, clients). Parliament must therefore push for policies to better equip the individual. Even community-based organizations are useless if the individual is not empowered: the private sector paradigm – improving the range of possibilities - must be carried forward to the individual level.

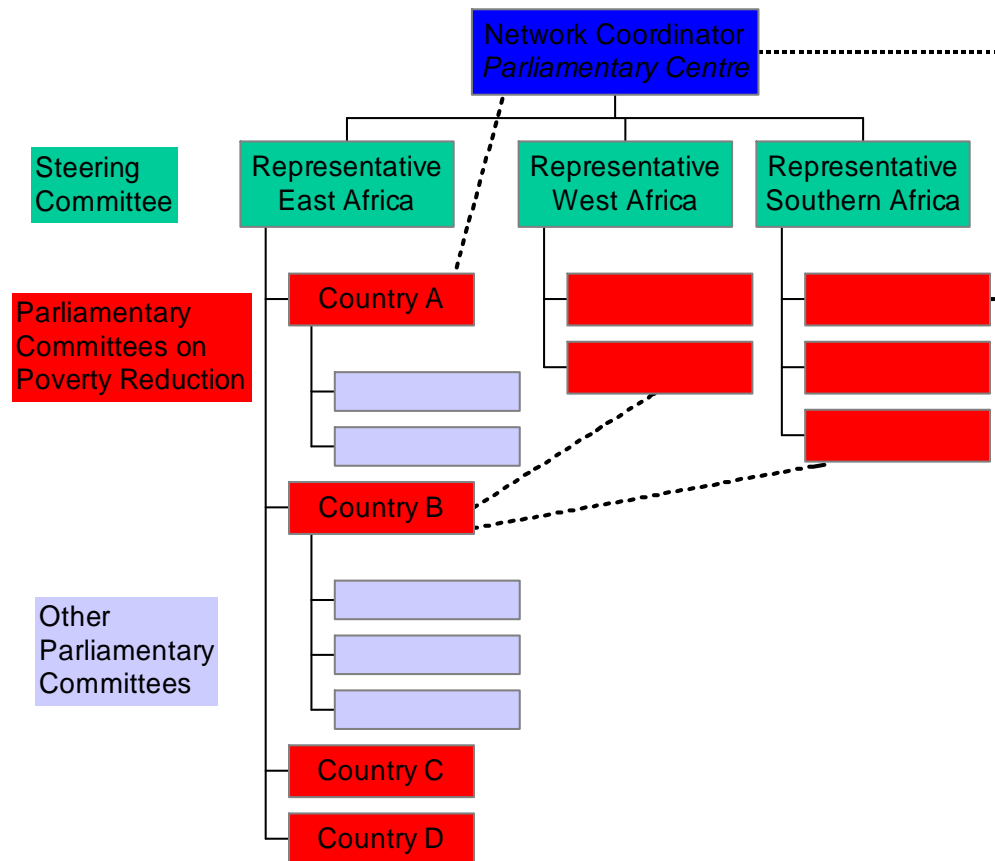
Parliaments must also look at how the budget affects productivity, but by looking at the budget in its entirety, not department-by-department. Often parliaments are misled by piecemeal information. The Poverty Committees should not only examine special poverty initiatives, but study the impact of the total budget on reducing poverty.

There is a need to move away from soothing symptoms through social welfare and attack the causes of poverty. The colonial heritage of us vs. them is still very present in the relationship between government and the people and perpetrates the handout mentality and the image of government which should, yet does not, provide services and infrastructure. If individual productivity is improved, then the community has more money, can contribute in taxes and services (e.g. schools) are improved. On the other hand, if a school is built in a community where productivity is unimproved, can the community afford to maintain and support the school? Mentalities must be changed in order to break the cycle of poverty. We have to build our communities ourselves, because no government or foreign donor can do it for us. There is therefore great value to decentralization in poverty-reduction.

The source of the economy is individual. There is no substitute to empowerment, and the only sustainable empowerment is self-empowerment.

African Parliamentary Network on Poverty Reduction

Organizational Structure



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