RECOMMENDATIONS OF STUDY GROUP ON THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN AFRICA

ABUJA, NIGERIA, 11-14 MAY 2010.

Introduction

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the World Bank Institute (WBI), in partnership with the Parliamentary Centre and AWEPA, and with support from the Commonwealth Secretariat convened a Study Group hosted by the National Assembly Nigeria from May 11 to 14, 2010 in Abuja, Nigeria. The Study Group forms a step in a broader process, led by CPA and WBI, aimed at ascertaining how parliaments can play a more constructive role in addressing the challenge of climate change.

A cross-section of African parliaments, including from Francophone West Africa, participated in the Study Group. The objectives of the Study Group were to:

1. Assess the knowledge and needs of parliaments in Africa regarding climate change – its risks; responses to better manage these risks (adaptation); and on efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation)

2. Develop a body of knowledge focused on how parliaments can better contribute to the formulation, implementation and oversight of environmental policy in sub-Saharan Africa, especially as it relates to climate change; and

3. Provide guidance on the role MPs can play in facilitating implementation of climate change policies and strategies.

The outcome of this broader process will be a body of work, developed from an African perspective, to be shared with parliaments and parliamentary strengthening organizations with a view to enhancing their knowledge on the topic. Members present agree to form a regional grouping on the CPA Task Force on Climate Change.

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1 Benin, Botswana, The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia
The Study Group recognizes that climate change is one of the biggest challenges to humanity this century. The challenge of climate change is directly related to development and the complexity of the issue requires MPs to try and understand the interrelated effects of climate change and development. As part of parliaments’ efforts to ensure the climate change debate was more accessible to their constituents, the Study Group sought to develop a working definition of climate change that was more relevant to sub-Saharan communities.

The Study Group agreed that the term ‘climate change’ can be expressed to mean more unpredictable rainy seasons, shorter rains, prolonged droughts, floods, and sea level rise. Further that climate change is caused directly and indirectly from human activities including fossil fuel use, deforestation and forest degradation and agriculture which result in increased carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide in the atmosphere. For their constituents, climate change means the loss of crops, declining productivity, reduced food security, increased water scarcity, increased challenges to energy access, risk to poverty alleviation, inability to produce some valued crops, loss of houses in flood prone areas, increased occurrence and expansion of diseases like malaria, and less water for irrigation. Climate change also adds to ongoing challenges such as land degradation, coastal erosion, sand mining, trans-boundary issues especially water management, and transmigration. It impacts many of the MDGs, adding to the cost and challenge of meeting these goals.

Climate change is occurring now and if the world as a whole does not reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, the threat to development will worsen. This places a greater imperative on African parliaments to act now. However, climate change also provides opportunities for sustainable development and to strengthen governance.

This issue provides practical opportunities for moving towards sustainable development in a prompt and urgent way by mobilizing responses anchored in both the public and private sectors with active involvement of the civil society. This entails ensuring that biodiversity is valued, natural resources and water are managed, and that there is development that meets the needs of individuals and communities. Climate change is a political risk and therefore it is imperative to act now, act differently, and act together.

The Study Group made the following recommendations:

**Representative Function**

- MPs need to adopt and use an accessible definition of climate change when undertaking outreach activities in order to raise community awareness around this issue.
- MPs should embrace innovative techniques and strategies to engage the community, including using both formal and informal sub-national/local/village structures to seek input from community groups focusing on climate change.
- MPs should seek input from multiple external sources and then disseminate the information to their constituents with the assistance of and through civil society networks, including climate change organizations, the media, think tanks, private sector etc.
- Parliaments should exercise their representative responsibilities in order to ensure government-led efforts to draft comprehensive national adaptation and mitigation plans that reflect the interests of the community.
- MPs can invite civil society groups and government officials to provide policy briefings on relevant topics associated with climate change.
- To raise awareness amongst MPs on climate change issues and to provide an informal and inclusive parliamentary mechanism through which likeminded parliamentarians can engage with the community, parliamentary caucuses/forums on climate change can be formed.
- Parliamentary leadership need to ensure adequate human and financial resources are allocated to enable MPs to undertake constituency outreach and/or MPs should work with partners to cover financial costs associated with effective outreach without impinging on the independence of parliament.

**Legislative Function**

- MPs should use parliamentary question time/parliamentary motions as mechanisms to highlight important issues regarding climate change and sustainable development.
- Where possible, MPs should use their legislative function as an opportunity to draft climate change legislation and provide the regulatory regime.
- MPs should support the policy, legal and institutional framework to enhance mitigation and adaptation actions.
- Plenary debates, especially those related to climate change, should be broadcast.
- Parliaments should revise standing orders to allow/facilitate the formation of climate change committees, tabling of Private Member’s Bills, for example on renewable energy or limitations on charcoal production, improved energy efficiency in buildings, and climate resilient infrastructure.

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2 These may include dance and drama troupes, media, and communication techniques such as pictorial representations of climate change effects.

3 Regulatory regimes include by-laws, delegated legislation and devolved powers to sub-national and local authorities.
- Parliament should work with the executive to pass legislation in order to domesticate international climate change obligations and commitments
- Parliament should encourage Public Private Partnerships as a mechanism for addressing the climate change challenge

**Oversight Function**

- Parliamentary committees should be strengthened and emboldened to provide constructive input into climate change related bills and to provide effective oversight over the implementation of climate change policy and legislation as well as ongoing policy review
- Lead climate change committees should, as far as possible, be representatives of all groups (parties, regions/interests) as climate change covers diverse sectors
- Lead climate change committees should have broad terms of reference to be able to examine the diverse issues that the climate change challenge presents
- Lead climate change committees should have strong secretariats to assist Members of the committee to perform their oversight function and to act as the institutional memory of the committee
- In recognition of the complexities of the issues related to climate change, the parliamentary leadership should seek to retain the Chair of the lead climate change committee for more than one term
- In order to ensure Members of the lead climate change committee are able to fully engage on the issues capacity building should be provided to new Members
- Parliamentary oversight committees should hold public hearings and invite/solicit inputs from civil society groups, academics, research institutes, the private sector etc
- The lead climate change committee should use, when available, National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) as the start to assessing whether the government is adequately addressing climate change challenge
- Parliament should be strategic in its public outreach and the public should be notified about upcoming hearings through the use of adverts in the media/ engaging parliamentary information services etc
- Public hearings should be open not only to the broader public, but the media specifically and they should be encouraged to report on deliberations. To this end lead committees must endeavor to collaborate with technical experts to capacitate a cadre of media practitioners who can champion the cause of climate change
- Committee reports should be made public on tabling in parliament
The lead climate change committee should follow-up on recommendations stemming from its hearings using accountability tools available to it, such as holding follow-up hearings to determine whether public officials had implemented the original recommendations of the committee.

MPs can seek to hold the government to account by using such oversight tools as posing questions to the relevant minister in the plenary or moving a motion or motion of adjournment.

FINANCING CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

- MPs should engage with the executive to ensure government seeks to access funding through international climate change financing mechanisms.
- MPs and lead committees should get regular updates on the progress of climate change projects and programs from the executive.
- Lead climate change committees should engage with the budget process so as to facilitate funding for mitigation and adaptation policies; specifically local agencies must be adequately funded to carry out their functions.
- Lead climate change committees should seek to appropriate funds for the Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) to build its expertise to conduct climate change audits, which can be used by parliamentary audit committees and the lead climate change committee to ensure effective implementation of policies/programs by government officials.

EXECUTIVE-LEGISLATIVE RELATIONS

- Parliament should be pro-active in developing its capacity and understanding of climate change and sustainable development issues so that it can engage the executive as a co-equal branch of governance.
- Parliament should encourage the executive to develop National Climate Change plans/strategies to be used as a framework for legislative business and as a baseline to hold the executive to account.
- MPs should liaise with ministries or sectors to understand specific mitigation and adaptation actions at the local level and facilitate the involvement of civil society and other stakeholders in these actions.

Climate Change Formal Definition: Climate change refers to a statistically significant variation in either the mean state of the climate or in its variability, persisting for an extended period (typically decades or longer). Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or external forcings, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in its Article 1, defines “climate change” as: “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.”