

# Strengthening Parliamentary Involvement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process and the Millennium Development Goals



## Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty Issues



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# **LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC OUTREACH ON POVERTY ISSUES**

***Strengthening Parliamentary Involvement in the Millennium Development  
Goals and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process***

National Democratic  
Institute for International Affairs  
[www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org)

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. They are on the ground in 166 countries, working with people on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and its wide range of partners. UNDP's Bureau for Development Policy provides technical leadership and policy guidance in priority areas of development, including democratic governance.

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The handbook emerged from pilot activities designed to strengthen the capacity of legislatures and civil society to participate in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process (PRSP), a process that is intended to be country-owned and participatory, including civic and legislative involvement in planning and monitoring phases. In practice however, legislative involvement in PRSP mechanisms varies widely from country to country. To strengthen legislative involvement, UNDP partnered with NDI in 2001 and 2002 to conduct capacity-building activities with members of parliament and PRSP commissions in Malawi, Niger and Nigeria. Based on the experience with these three PRSP pilot programs, and drawing on their experience in democratic development programming with legislatures around the world, NDI developed, in partnership with UNDP, a series of handbooks that are intended to provide resources for MPs, parliamentary staff, civic leaders, social networks and the international community on legislative involvement in poverty reduction. The series includes:

- *Legislative-Executive Communication on Poverty Reduction Strategies;*
- *Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty Issues; and*
- *Parliamentary-Civic Collaboration for Monitoring Poverty Reduction Initiatives.*

Alicia Phillips Mandaville, NDI Senior Program Officer for Governance and Poverty Reduction, prepared the main text of this document with assistance from Rebecca Logan, NDI Senior Program Assistant for Governance. Valuable comments and review were provided by K. Scott Hubli, NDI Senior Advisor for Governance, and Randi Davis, UNDP Technical Advisor for the Democratic Governance Group, and Magdy Martinez-Soliman, UNDP Governance Practice Manager, Democratic Governance Group/Bureau for Development Policy. Additional feedback was offered by Fredrick Staphenurst, Senior Public Sector Management Specialist for the World Bank Institute.

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## QUICK REFERENCE FOR ACRONYMS IN TEXT

<b>CAS</b>	<b>Country Assistance Strategy.</b> The CAS describes the World Bank's assistance strategy for a country, indicating the level and composition of assistance to be provided based on assessments and the country's portfolio performance. While key elements are discussed with the government, it is not a negotiated document.
<b>HIPC</b>	<b>Heavily Indebted Poor Country.</b> The HIPC Initiative is an agreement among official creditors designed to help the poorest, most heavily indebted countries escape from unsustainable debt.
<b>IDA</b>	<b>International Development Association.</b> IDA, part of the World Bank Group, helps countries reduce poverty by providing "credits," which are loans at zero interest with a 10-year grace period and maturities of 35 to 40 years.
<b>IFIs</b>	<b>International Financial Institutions.</b> This term includes the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Inter-American Development Bank.
<b>IMF</b>	<b>International Monetary Fund.</b>
<b>I-PRSP</b>	<b>Interim PRSP.</b> The interim report is submitted by countries to satisfy eligibility requirements while a full PRSP is still under development. Interim PRSPs must include an assessment of existing poverty reduction strategies and specify a road map for the production of a full PRSP in a timely fashion.
<b>MDGs</b>	<b>Millennium Development Goals.</b> The United Nations' agenda for reducing poverty and improving lives, as agreed on by UN member states at the Millennium Summit in September 2000. For each goal one or more targets have been set, most for 2015, using 1990 as a benchmark. The agenda includes guidance for incorporating the MDGs into national priorities, achieving targets and emphasizing good governance.
<b>MP</b>	<b>Member of Parliament.</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-Governmental Organization.</b>
<b>PRGF</b>	<b>Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility.</b> The IMF's low-interest lending mechanism. Loans through the PRGF are based on the content of the PRSP.
<b>PRSP</b>	<b>Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.</b> Originally introduced by the IFIs in September 1999, poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) are strategic economic documents intended to establish a multi-year framework for national poverty reduction. PRSPs provide the basis for assistance from the Bank and the IMF, as well as debt relief under the HIPC Initiative. PRSPs are intended to be country-drafted, comprehensive in scope, partnership-oriented, and participatory. In general a country only needs to write a PRSP every three years, but changes can be made to the content in the Annual Progress Report on the PRSP.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>POVERTY, NATIONAL REFORMS AND CONSTITUENTS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
	The Millennium Development Goals	
	How Does This Relate to Constituents?	
	What is “Legislative Public Outreach”?	
<b>SECTION 2</b>	<b>WHY CONDUCT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC OUTREACH ON POVERTY?.....</b>	<b>4</b>
	Citizen Needs are More Likely to be Met	
	Political Parties and MPs are Seen as More Responsive	
	Democratic Institutions Grow Stronger	
<b>SECTION 3</b>	<b>PRO-POOR PUBLIC OUTREACH STRATEGIES.....</b>	<b>7</b>
	Factors to Consider	
	Access to Resources	
	Creating a Communication Strategy	
<b>SECTION 4</b>	<b>INSTITUTIONAL PUBLIC OUTREACH: THE NATION AS THE AUDIENCE.....</b>	<b>13</b>
	Informing the Public about Priorities and Achievements	
	Informing the Public About Innovative Programs and Approaches	
	Institution-level Outreach as a Basis for Civic Education	
<b>SECTION 5</b>	<b>OUTREACH BY COMMITTEES.....</b>	<b>20</b>
	Official Committee Business: Gathering Information and the Public Record	
	Issue-specific Public Education: Information or Awareness Campaigns	
	Applying Issue Expertise to Grassroots Challenges	
<b>SECTION 6</b>	<b>OUTREACH BY PARLIAMENTARY PARTY GROUPS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
	Platform Development and Parliamentary Group Coordination with the Party	
	Using the Media	
	Party Group Coordination: A Strategic Tool	
<b>SECTION 7</b>	<b>INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS TO COMMUNICATE WITH CONSTITUENTS.....</b>	<b>28</b>
	Knowledge is Power: Gathering Information About Your Constituency	
	Thinking Strategically About Individual Outreach to Inform the Public	
	Options for Communication: Tailoring Activities for the Individual MP	
	Local Problems, National Actions	
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>ESTABLISHING PRECEDENTS FOR MORE RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>APPENDIX I</b>	<b>THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE: MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND TARGETS.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>APPENDIX II</b>	<b>POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPERS (PRSP).....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>APPENDIX III</b>	<b>SAMPLE FORMS FOR RECORDING PUBLIC FEEDBACK.....</b>	<b>38</b>
	Constituent Feedback Form and Casework Form	
<b>APPENDIX IV</b>	<b>SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>APPENDIX V</b>	<b>ADDITIONAL RESOURCES .....</b>	<b>41</b>

## INTRODUCTION

# Poverty, National Reforms and Constituents

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Poverty reduction and economic reform are two of the most important issues facing parliamentarians and elected officials. Consequently, several global initiatives have been created to complement different aspects of national economic growth strategies: among them, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). Members of Parliament hoping to communicate with the public regarding poverty—or poverty related reforms—may find it useful to review how these initiatives interrelate. Such programs are often alien to constituents, who care deeply about poverty and their own quality of life but do not see a connection between their experiences and the issues MPs must address in parliament in order to affect change.

### THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were developed by the UN member states at the turn of the millennium and serve as broad, internationally recognized development objectives. The MDGs seek to:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- Achieve universal primary education;
- Promote gender equality and empower women;
- Reduce child mortality;
- Improve maternal health;

- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- Ensure environmental sustainability; and
- Develop a global partnership for development.

The MDGs shape the content and process of national and international development programs and projects by focusing global efforts on eight specific objectives and establishing a universal time line for their fulfillment. (For more information on MDGs, see Appendix I.)

### Roadmaps and Blueprints

If MDGs are the final destination in a global pursuit of economic and human development, the international community and developing countries have together created a series of blueprints in the hopes of achieving these goals by the target date. Originally introduced by the international financial institutions (IFIs) in September 1999, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are country-owned, strategic economic documents intended to establish a multi-year framework for national poverty reduction. PRSPs serve as the basis for IFI debt relief and concessional lending in roughly 70 countries. Through the development of its own unique PRSP, each country eligible for debt relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative (HIPC) or for no-interest loans from the International Development Association (IDA)

identifies specific objectives and targets within its own economic, social, political and geographic context. The PRSP then puts forward a plan for pursuing those objectives. For example, in many countries expansion of urban health care is a priority because large portions of the urban population are unable to access appropriate treatment due to unemployment and a consequent lack of family income. In response, the PRSP may emphasize both an expansion of available medical facilities and macroeconomic policies to boost job-creation in urban centers. (See Appendix II for more detail on the PRSP cycle.)

Alongside the PRSPs, a number of other strategic plans are generated by the World Bank, IMF and various other international donors. Based on their analysis of each country's PRSP poverty diagnosis, growth targets and implementation capacity, both the Bank and the Fund develop their own country-specific assistance strategies or programs. In the IMF's case, this is called the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility.

### HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO CONSTITUENTS?

For many citizens, poverty is a real, daily experience that seems to demand simple solutions (a job, a local health clinic, more agricultural tools, electricity). For legislators working to alleviate or reduce poverty however, resolving these issues can be a complicated process: prioritizing needs, navigating national policy or development processes (like the PRSP) or negotiating within various timelines for national budgets or international aid disbursements. While citizens are unlikely to be interested in the technical details of legislative business, an MP's willingness to discuss citizens' needs as well as the MP's own efforts to address those needs can improve public opinion of elected officials and may reduce public cynicism regarding the political process.

In many countries, national poverty reduction policies have an obvious impact on large portions

#### FOUR CATEGORIES OF LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC OUTREACH

- Institution-wide efforts to educate or inform the population.
- Outreach by committees or by single issue-based groups of legislators.
- Communication efforts organized by political party caucuses within the parliament.
- Individual member efforts to communicate directly with specific groups of citizens.

of the population. As countries develop and implement PRSPs or other strategic economic plans, communication with citizens from a variety of locations becomes critical for diagnosing the needs of impoverished population groups, alerting citizens to changes in policies or regulations that will affect them directly (such as VAT, licensing and price deregulation) and determining whether or not government programs are fulfilling their objectives. The constituent concerns most frequently encountered by most MPs are issues of economic opportunity, such as employment and affordable education. Consequently, it is important for MPs to build a strategic plan for communicating with constituents about poverty-related needs and policies if politicians are to build public trust and ownership in government processes.

### WHAT IS "LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC OUTREACH"?

Legislative public outreach encompasses almost any systematic effort on the part of the members of the national legislative body to communicate with the electorate. Such outreach can be divided into four categories:

- **Institution-wide efforts to educate or inform the population.** This includes non-partisan communication efforts by the parliament such as informative publications, parliamentary news letters or broadcasts, youth visits or tours of the chamber. It also includes

any work done by a parliamentary information office that is intended to increase the amount of factual information available to the public regarding parliamentary business, the members or pending/existing legislation.

- **Committee or issue-based outreach by groups of legislators.** This category includes committee efforts to gather or disseminate information: requests for briefings, testimony or analysis by issue experts; public hearings to solicit feedback on proposed or existing legislation; public briefing sessions to inform citizens about the impact of pending policies or changes in policy; publication of a committee report; or broadcast of a committee investigation or hearing. For organizational purposes, this book includes in this category outreach efforts by less formalized, single

issue-based groups of members (such as issue caucuses) as well.

- **Communication efforts by political party caucuses within the parliament.** As one of the more visible manifestations of any political party, a mobilized parliamentary party caucus is able to communicate the party platform, express support for proposed poverty-related policies or reforms, or voice potential alternatives to existing policy. While excessive politicization of poverty policy can be detrimental, economic policies are inherently political and party-based caucuses will naturally voice opposing views periodically. Articulating this diversity of perspectives helps voters to distinguish parties along policy lines, rather than relying on factors like the personalities or ethnicity of individual party leaders.
- **Individual member efforts.** Elected to represent specific population groups, individual members may have the most incentives and opportunities to communicate with their constituents. Members may gather information on the broader needs of their constituents to inform their work in the legislature, publicize information about reforms or changes that will affect constituents' lives, or communicate with individual constituents regarding the outcome of a local or personal issue. Individual member activities to exchange relevant information with constituents may be considered legislative outreach. These efforts may include issuance of public statements, newsletters or site visits by the MP.

#### LEGISLATIVE OUTREACH HAS MANY AUDIENCES

Although communication with citizens is the most common form of legislative public outreach, parliaments make efforts to communicate with a wide range of political actors. When formulating an outreach strategy, it may be useful to keep in mind the following potential audiences:

- Academics or professional experts;
- NGOs and think tanks;
- The executive branch;
- Local governments or councils;
- The international community;
- Media;
- Political parties;
- Labor unions; and
- Religious organizations or bodies.



## SECTION TWO

# Why Conduct Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty?

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Legislative public outreach on poverty issues may be undertaken for a variety of reasons or to achieve a range of objectives. Regardless of the initiator and motivating factors, legislative public outreach confers benefits across a broad spectrum:

- Citizens;
- Political parties;
- Individual members; and
- Democratic institutions.

### CITIZEN NEEDS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE MET

Impoverished citizens are the most obvious group who stand to benefit from enhanced national dialogue on poverty issues. The more accurately a government is able to diagnose, design, implement and evaluate pro-poor programs, the more likely citizens are to benefit from such initiatives. Citizens gain the most when legislative outreach provides a mechanism for their voices to be heard at each stage of the poverty reduction strategy cycle.

#### Stage 1: Poverty Diagnosis

In addition to statistical surveys, effective diagnosis of poverty includes citizen feedback on the conditions and challenges of daily living. To address this, participatory poverty assessments, sponsored by the World Bank, have been conducted in many countries to complement ongoing

research with direct feedback from poorer citizens. Legislators, particularly those elected directly by a geographic constituency, are well placed to solicit and gather this kind of locally specific information. Aside from making poverty diagnosis more accurate, members who are familiar with the immediate needs of their constituents are typically better able to pursue policies or programs tailored to meet the needs and interests of their district.

#### VOTERS CARE ABOUT POVERTY

The economy, and poverty reduction in particular, is a tangible political issue. While citizens may not know or care about the “PRSP” *per se*, they tend to express considerable interest in nationwide efforts to improve standards of living. Global public opinion research confirms that citizens (and voters) regard the impact of economic factors on their lives as a main concern:

**Afghanistan, 2002:** Focus groups of Afghani women report a lack of housing as the country’s gravest problem.

**Bosnia, 2002:** 70 percent of voters surveyed named unemployment as a determining factor in their voting intention.

**Kenya, 2000:** 41 percent of those polled listed poverty, food security, or unemployment as their single largest concern.

**Latin America, 2003:** 52 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that “I wouldn’t mind if a non-democratic government came to power if it could solve economic problems.”

## Stage 2: Pro-poor policy formulation

While policy formulation is often initiated by the executive branch, in circumstances in which legislation is needed to give rise to certain programs or initiatives, legislative outreach to issue experts, academics, think tanks or NGOs can strengthen the quality of the forthcoming policy. Committee hearings to examine analysis by such experts on proposed poverty-related legislation can bring to light previously unconsidered facets of the law or suggest amendments or revisions to

increase its impact. Particularly where legislative research capacity is limited, outreach to issue experts can increase a legislature's ability to contribute to national policy.

## Stage 3: Implementation

Members are logical public education vehicles during the implementation of national economic and poverty reduction policies. In some cases, citizens require specific information before they are able to participate in economic opportunity

**TABLE 1: RECOGNIZING THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF VARIOUS TYPES OF OUTREACH**

ACTOR		PUBLIC OUTREACH EXAMPLES	POTENTIAL IMPACT
INFORM THE PUBLIC	Legislature as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parliamentary newsletters</li> <li>• Parliamentary broadcasts</li> <li>• Youth visits/tours</li> </ul>	Strengthen image of parliament as open and democratic; inform citizens of accomplishments and goals.
	Committees and other parliamentary groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public hearings</li> <li>• Press conferences/media outreach</li> <li>• Committee/caucus reports</li> </ul>	Demonstrate that the group is working to advance citizen interests; articulate policy stances.
	Individual MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press releases/brochures</li> <li>• Publicize pending reforms and policy changes</li> </ul>	Establish relationships with media; inform constituents of goals and minimize severe reactions to policy changes.
GATHER INFORMATION	Legislature as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize parliament's library or research services to reach out to experts and interest groups</li> <li>• Interactions with civil society</li> </ul>	Promote informed policymaking; ensure that parliament is truly representative.
	Committees and other parliamentary groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek testimony/request briefings from issue experts and civil society</li> <li>• Utilize public opinion polls</li> </ul>	Group can better decide what policies are priorities; group will be better informed on substance of policy.
	Individual MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tour key regions of district</li> <li>• "Open forum" (town hall-style) public meetings</li> </ul>	Identify what issues matter most to constituents/district; improve public image.
TAKE INFORMED ACTION	Legislature as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pass legislation</li> <li>• Use influence over budget to emphasize problem areas</li> </ul>	Demonstrate the effectiveness of parliament and its important role in solving the country's problems.
	Committees and other parliamentary groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the media to publicize problems</li> <li>• Markup/propose legislation</li> </ul>	Enhance reputation of group; can be seen as responsive to public needs.
	Individual MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow through on constituent casework</li> <li>• Hold periodic "visiting hours" in district office</li> </ul>	Improve ability to identify trends and recurrent problems; build loyalty among constituents.

initiatives (for example, micro-credit schemes are often difficult to implement when citizens mistrust or have no knowledge of standard lending practices). In other situations, the increased citizen awareness generated by legislative public outreach on more challenging economic reforms (price deregulation, tax increases) can help to build public understanding of the need for these difficult measures.

### **Stage 4: Monitoring and Evaluation**

Once programs have begun, constituent outreach remains one of the most direct ways of determining whether or not poverty reduction measures are having the intended impact. Whether information is gathered through direct visits to project locations, through constituency office hours or through hearings at which local citizen groups testify, outreach strengthens the public's perception that legislators care about poverty. It also enables the legislature to execute its oversight functions more effectively by providing information on the actual impact of executive policies.

### **POLITICAL PARTIES AND INDIVIDUAL MPs ARE SEEN AS MORE RESPONSIVE**

Whether part of the ruling coalition or serving in opposition, political parties benefit when their elected members conduct effective public outreach on issues that are important to voters. Not only is a party's reputation as being "in touch with its constituents" likely to increase as its elected members conduct more outreach, but such outreach also allows parties to differentiate themselves from one another, thus building recognition and support for their party even in non-election years.

- For parties in government, outreach may be seen as a way for individual members to promote the party's platform or policy agenda. Legislators are also able to emphasize aspects of the platform that are particularly relevant in the districts from which they are elected, as

well as publicize local programs that have been particularly successful.

- For parties in opposition, outreach may be one of the best ways to publicize alternative policy proposals, particularly when investigation of certain poverty reduction programs demonstrates that outcomes were less positive than originally anticipated.

Elected legislators themselves also benefit from initiating or participating in public outreach efforts because constituents and parties both benefit. Regardless of the electoral system, a member who not only has the support of local voters but also has demonstrated his/her value to the party is much more likely to advance politically than a member who has remained silent on issues important to constituents.

### **DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS GROW STRONGER**

In addition to the more tangible political benefits of legislative public outreach, increased communication between elected officials and voting citizens strengthens democratic institutions by building public faith in representative processes. Regular interaction between elected political elites and citizens at the local, regional and national levels reinforces the understanding that elected officials care about their constituents' quality of life; citizens see the provision of information about legislative progress or reforms as evidence that members are making efforts to address their concerns. Over time, this dynamic mitigates voter cynicism by maintaining a mechanism through which citizens can request information and offer feedback on quality of life issues. This can help to build support for further reform efforts. Finally, maintaining these channels of communication may also, to some extent, diffuse the impact of populist political campaigns by demonstrating that consistent progress requires time and feedback from various citizen groups.

## SECTION THREE

# Pro-Poor Public Outreach Strategies

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While public outreach nearly always improves national poverty reduction efforts, legislative outreach programs must be carefully tailored to be successful. For this, legislators will require a communication strategy for their outreach activities.

**FACTORS TO CONSIDER****Political and Logistical Challenges**

Whether a member represents a distant, rural district with low literacy rates or an urban center whose residents have become jaded to political promises of elected officials, members of parliament each face specific challenges in attempting to establish and maintain meaningful communication with their constituents. While there are no universal answers to these challenges, recognizing the specific obstacles to open, two-way communication is the first step in determining the best way to work around them.

Legislators in a variety of countries have identified ways to communicate with their electorate by overcoming a collection of complicating factors:

- Low literacy rates or multiple languages spoken in a single district;
- Citizen confusion regarding the responsibility or authority of legislators;
- Limited or biased media coverage;
- Severely constrained resources;

- Deep-rooted public cynicism regarding the motivation of elected politicians;
- Lack of public interest in national policy or initiatives; or
- Control of public space by a single or dominant political party or figure.

**Specific Needs of Constituents**

Whether members are elected as part of a party list or by single-member districts, they represent a specific grouping of constituents. In most systems, this is a geographic grouping. In some cases, however, the distribution may be demographic- or issue-specific. An efficient legislator will identify the issues most relevant to his or her constituency and incorporate them extensively into a public outreach strategy. For example, an MP from a rural district may focus his or her efforts on water distribution and infrastructure, while an MP from an urban constituency might focus instead on water treatment and sanitization. Both MPs could conduct outreach regarding national investments in water facilities, but each would tailor his or her efforts to address the immediate concerns of the district.

**Political Party Platforms**

In addition to the needs of individual constituencies, members will also likely wish to consider the issues that are most vocally emphasized by their parties. Particularly where a recent (or up-

coming) election has focused public attention on specific policies—or where political party discipline is quite strong—legislators will want to ensure that their outreach efforts are consistent and complementary to the efforts the party is making to publicize its own policy positions. For exam-

ple, legislators elected by party-list on a party platform espousing greater public access to primary education may want to consider how better to communicate with local constituents regarding educational facilities, to demonstrate how they intend to pursue their platform.

**TABLE 2: MATCHING OUTREACH EFFORTS TO POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXTS**

**Institution-wide efforts to educate or inform the population: Sharing non-partisan, factual information**

Most appropriate when:

- Poverty-related policies or programs are being implemented that will have a large impact on the population;
- The media does not cover poverty reduction efforts sufficiently on its own;
- Demonstrations of national unity or consensus are important due to recent conflict; or
- National crises make specific issues universally relevant (famine, epidemics, natural disasters).

**Outreach by committees or issue-based groups of legislators : Applying issue-specific expertise**

Most appropriate when:

- Pro-poor policies in the committee's or issue based groups' area of interest are being formulated, implemented or evaluated for impact;
- Pro-poor legislation is pending and the group requires more information before it can finalize its recommendation with respect to the legislation;
- Staff research capacity is low or does not provide sufficient information/analysis and members must gather more information on their own; or
- Public participation in certain projects (small business loans, training programs) requires specific (technical) information.

**Efforts by political party caucuses within the parliament: Pursuing national policy agendas**

Most appropriate when:

- Poverty policies that are a priority to the party are being formulated or evaluated;
- Political parties have significantly different policy platforms or preferences regarding poverty reduction;
- A highly partisan (or polarized) society would not trust information from groups with which they do not associate;
- Political parties have greater communication infrastructure or resources available than the legislature or
- Members of the legislature are elected by party list.

**Individual efforts to communicate directly with specific groups of citizens: Focusing on local issues**

Most appropriate when:

- Programs with high public interest are being considered or evaluated;
- Members of the legislature are elected by a majoritarian system;
- Geographic or constituency needs vary tremendously; program impact varies by region;
- Local government structures offer inadequate representation or information for local residents; or
- Members want to cultivate grassroots voter support or gather locally specific information.

## When Local Issues are National Priorities

Sometimes constituency issues or party platforms overlap with national priorities as identified in the PRSP or with one of the MDGs. When this is the case, members may find that a surprising number of programs have already been initiated to address the specific issue. A bit of investigation with the relevant ministry, agency or relevant donor body (IFIs or UN) may reveal natural points for outreach to evaluate the impact of national poverty reduction initiatives.

For example, one of the MDGs is to combat HIV/AIDS. In Botswana, a country in which approximately 30 percent of the adult population is infected with HIV/AIDS, UNDP helped launch a National AIDS Coordinating Agency as well as several District Multi-Sectoral AIDS Committees. MPs who are aware of what these committees are doing in their districts can coordinate their own efforts to combat the health crisis to maximize the effectiveness of these programs. Public outreach activities could include speaking with constituents affected by the epidemic, evaluating the impact of existing efforts and identifying issues that still need to be addressed.

## ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Limited access to infrastructure or other resources can be one of the most formidable obstacles to effective legislative public outreach. In many countries, legislative budgets barely cover basic legislative costs in the capital city, leaving few resources for travel, communication technology or staff in constituencies. Despite these constraints, legislators can still conduct significant public outreach as long as they develop a communication strategy, prioritize and access the resources that already exist.

While each type of public outreach requires different resources, the following resource priorities are fairly common:

## Critical Resources:

- *Positive relationships with media.* Earned media coverage is a no-cost way for members to communicate with large national audiences. Cultivating positive relationships with key journalists is one way of increasing the likelihood that the media will cover issues on which members wish to conduct outreach.
- *Permanent contact information for members.* This may be as simple as a single switchboard and courier service through the parliament building, or as complex as differentiated individual member contact information in both the capital city and constituency offices/residences (phone, fax and e-mail). Without at least one publicized means of contacting legislators, even citizen groups or issue-experts that have positive, useful feedback will be unable to offer their information in a timely manner.

### RECOGNIZING ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES

In many cases, an MP's greatest challenge is not to identify sources for additional resources, but to effectively mobilize existing resources. Once priorities have been identified and a targeted, strategic communication plan developed, MPs may want to assess the accessibility of the following resources:

- Committees;
- Party caucuses;
- Municipal branches (possible local office space);
- Government (information-gathering capacity through briefings);
- Universities (expertise);
- Local and international NGOs/ foundations; or
- The international development community (information on implementation of PRSP-related initiatives).

By utilizing and taking advantage of such options, MPs can continue to engage in public outreach activities and promote poverty reduction in their

- *An information filing and access system, no matter how basic.* Outreach strategies must be based on accurate information regarding policies or reforms. Whether maintained by staff or by the members themselves, there should be a central location (perhaps a regularly updated collection of personal files) from which members can regularly and reliably access current, accurate information.
- *A mechanism for keeping records of constituent feedback.* Whether gathered by individuals or groups of MPs, a means of recording citizen, NGO or issue-expert feedback and contact information is needed. When used consistently, a basic form can track this information (see Appendix III for examples) and be integrated into personal, committee or caucus filing systems on a regular basis. As the legislature modernizes its technology over time, these forms provide a basis on which to build electronic files.

### Quite Useful (and Low Cost):

- *Regular office hours for public access in the capital city while the legislature is in session.* While some parliamentary budgets are unable to finance regular legislative sessions or regular member travel between districts and the capital city, in most cases it is possible to predict when members will be in the capital. Standardizing the times at which members will be available for communication with constituents while the legislature is in session helps to normalize public outreach from both member and constituent perspectives by making its occurrence more predictable.
- *Office space and regular hours in constituencies.* Although establishing stand-alone constituency servicing centers may be expensive, it is quite economical to borrow space from an already functional, relevant office. In some cases, MPs have found that municipal government or local party branches are willing to lend them a meeting room or office for their use on a periodic basis (e.g., once a month). MPs who establish a specific time and place for constituency outreach in the district are able to establish a regular mechanism for sustained citizen contact.

- *Individual contact information for each member.* Telephone, e-mail, fax and mailing addresses for individual members—both in the parliament building and in the constituency—may help citizens locate their representative more easily.
- *Staff within the Assembly assigned specifically to institution-wide public outreach.* Such staff could write press releases, publish newsletters or make updates on parliamentary business to individuals who request them.

### If Resources Permit:

- *An information center within the legislative building.* Such a center would be able to coordinate proactive outreach to interested citizens, citizen groups, or the media. This could include regular publication of a hansard or summary of parliamentary proceedings, circulation of legislative schedules or planned meetings, or provision of draft legislation to a general list (media or civic groups). Staff at an information center could also be considered the first line of response for general public inquiries regarding parliamentary business, proceedings or outcomes.
- *Publication of newsletters or radio/TV programs* that cover legislative business (or individual constituency issues/efforts).
- *Travel budgets that enable members to travel to districts more frequently.* This allows MPs to communicate directly with citizens where mass-media outreach does not permeate, and to gather feedback from constituents directly.
- *Stand-alone constituency outreach facilities within districts.* An office dedicated specifically to MP outreach and response to citizen

requests can be an invaluable tool for demonstrating member commitment to resolving local issues. This type of facility is typically most useful for members who are regularly able to travel to their district and have sufficient funds to staff the office with at least one administrative assistant to handle case work in the member's absence.

## CREATING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Members who hope to maximize the impact of individual or group outreach initiatives will likely want to develop a communication strategy before initiating any activities. Establishing a strategy allows members to prioritize the use of resources and to remain consistent. It also offers parameters within which to make sometimes difficult decisions. It is particularly useful for coordinating actions when groups of members plan to

collaborate or individual members will need to rely on staff to prepare or execute specific actions. There are four essential components to creating a communication strategy.

### Determine your Message/Question

Members will need to decide what they are trying to communicate to the public or what piece of information they are ultimately trying to obtain. Is this an effort to promote the positive impact of pending policies or projects (a new road is being built to this part of the country that will increase farmers' ability to sell surplus crops)? An effort to educate the public regarding participation in new programs (HIV treatments or drugs will be available through public health clinics at no cost for registered patients)? An effort to explain/justify coming changes (de-regulation will cause fuel prices to rise next year, but supply will be more regular)? Alternatively, are members trying to gather a specific piece of information? (Do rural residents need new farm equipment or parts for repair? Has the electrification program provided a consistent power supply? Are families sending daughters to school at the same rate as sons?)

### Identify the Target Audience

With whom will legislators need to communicate? A group of members announcing the creation of a new regional highway will have a much smaller (and more specific) audience than a group of members attempting to generate greater public awareness of the rationale behind an increase in the price of petrol. Regional public meetings or fliers are appropriate for the first situation, national radio broadcasts or coverage in national newspapers better fits the latter. Knowing the size, location, literacy level and preferences of the target audience will help members to select appropriate outreach techniques. It will also help members anticipate how their message will be received.

MESSAGE BOX FOR AN MP ANNOUNCING A NEW ROAD	
A message box is an excellent tool for organizing one's own thoughts and preparing to respond to the arguments of others.	
<b>Member's message</b> <i>"A road to this area is good. More farmers can sell crops in distant locations and make money for their families."</i> This is the point Member will always try to convey.	<b>Opposing arguments</b> <i>"A road to this area is bad. It will disrupt grazing and harm traditional herding livelihoods."</i> This is the what those who disagree with the Member will say.
<b>Opponents' response to Member</b> <i>"The additional money made by farmers will not make up for the money lost by local herders."</i> This is how opponents will rebut Member.	<b>Member's response to opponents</b> <i>"Local herders will also be able to sell their milk in city markets and purchase other needed goods."</i> This is how Member will rebut opponents.



### **Anticipate Questions and Rebuttals**

Rarely will members find that everyone is in agreement regarding pro-poor policies or priorities; in many cases reforms will have opponents. Even announcements about new infrastructure can trouble some constituents, civic groups or opposing political parties. Constructing a message box (like the one pictured on the left) is one way to anticipate opposition questions and prepare realistic, informed responses in advance. Whether organized into a box or not, members who have analyzed their points—as well as the points and rebuttals of their opponents—are generally much more comfortable speaking to the public or the media.

### **Select an Appropriate Messenger and Format**

While many members will want to play the lead role in outreach initiatives, a communication strategy will also consider what other speakers or

messengers might be best suited to speak on behalf of parliament. In some cases it may be wise to invite a technical expert (perhaps a civic expert or a civil servant) to discuss details or respond to questions while members' make opening or keynote remarks. In others, it may make sense to have staff draft press statements that can be issued in the member's name to the media so that national press is mobilized to carry the message.

A productive outreach strategy may identify appropriate communication vehicles, for example: national press coverage, information made available through print mediums (such as fliers and posters), local appearances by members, public hearings broadcast on radio or TV stations, or local radio or television appearances. Nations with multiple national languages, far-flung constituencies or low literacy rates may require specific communication formats in order to be effective.

## SECTION FOUR

# Institutional Public Outreach: The Nation as the Audience

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**I**nstitutional public outreach is typically most appropriate when attempting to educate or inform a large portion of the public by communicating non-partisan information. Outreach that targets very specific groups is more likely to have partisan overtones and be more appropriate for party groups, committees or individuals to pursue.

In most cases, the legislature as a whole undertakes outreach activities in response to the public's need for information regarding parliamentary business or pending/existing legislation. While it is not the role of the legislature to educate the public on all issues, MPs may benefit from informing the public about recent or upcoming public policy changes, especially as they relate to poverty reduction initiatives. This section examines two different situations in which legislative public outreach enhances public support for elected MPs and highlights an array of outreach activities that may be appropriate in each circumstance.

## INFORMING THE PUBLIC ABOUT PRIORITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Occasionally there will be a broad, multi-party consensus on the need for the legislature and the country to address an issue. For example, a national legislature may feel it is important to send a unified message to the country about the need to address HIV/AIDS, as was the case in Nigeria. If—reflecting broad political party agreement

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### INSTITUTIONAL PUBLIC OUTREACH AT A GLANCE

**Target Audience:** The voting public or broad segments of the population, as well as the media

**Most Appropriate for:** Making non-partisan information available to the entire population (the role of MPs, the status of various policies, the impact of pending legislation)

**Benefits:** The parliament as an institution may have substantially greater resources than any configuration of individual members; parliamentary administration may be viewed as non-partisan and therefore more credible

**Communicator(s):** A representative of the legislature; (e.g., the secretary general, chief clerk, other chamber leadership, press office, information center, etc).

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that HIV must be combated—this year's national budget has allocated increased funds to health programs, MPs may have multiple reasons for wanting to communicate this fact to the public at large. Particularly where the legislature plays a substantive role in the budget process (and all legislatures must at least approve a budget before it may be enacted), publicizing specific allocations is one way of highlighting and building public understanding of the legislature's role in national poverty reduction efforts.

Publication of this type of information may increase the public's support of parliament and of democratic processes. In many cases, constituents who live near clinics only benefit if they are

made aware of the new programs and facilities financed by the increased allocation. By making part of the announcement that money has been allocated for new clinics, MPs demonstrate that they are actively working to improve the lives of their constituents.

### Target Audiences

While a large portion of the general public is likely to be interested in receiving better health care, certain groups will be more interested in the issue than others. The media, civic organizations, national pressure groups, the international community and urban elites are the most likely to seek out information on national budget allocations or federal health policies. If the legislature is able to provide the information sought by these groups, it can be the basis for building long-term, mutually constructive relationships. The general public may be more interested in specific clinics or projects being financed. Consequently, many legislatures find it most useful to tailor outreach mechanisms to each interested group.

### Likely Communication Coordinators

Legislatures often have a press office, public relations department or information center that is traditionally responsible for the institutional com-

munication with the public. These offices or centers conduct most public outreach on behalf of the entire institution. If no such center exists, institutional outreach duties most likely fall to the staffs of the Speaker, Secretary-General, Chief Clerk or other such official.

### Outreach Options

Institutional outreach options often rely heavily on producing written records and making them accessible to interested audiences.

*Newsletters or other regular updates.* Parliamentary newsletters (paper or electronic) are one means of making information on legislative business and achievements available to the public. Typically produced on a monthly or sessional basis, this type of publication covers basic updates or announcements of fact (see sample on following page). The publication is often handled by non-partisan public relations or communications staff assigned to the parliament as a whole, to the secretary general or to parliamentary leadership. In the case of the increased health budget, it may be appropriate for the monthly newsletter to:

- Include statements by parliamentary leadership noting the budget increase and the role played by the parliament in pursuing greater resources for health care;
- Report on meetings or deliberations of the committees which discussed the health allocations; and
- Describe how readers obtain copies of parliamentary reports examining health expenditures.

*Parliamentary records library or information center.* While a newsletter may serve as a logical means by which to announce the achievement of a sought-after adjustment to the national budget, a document library or information center may be necessary to preserve records of the work done by parliament in a way which is both accessible and useful to actors seeking additional informa-



The billboard above was part of an effort by Nigerian legislators and a domestic HIV/AIDS prevention organization to increase citizen awareness in 2003.

## SAMPLE PARLIAMENTARY NEWSLETTER: SOUTH AFRICA (EXCERPT)

Special Edition

# INsession

April 2003
YOUR SEAT IN PARLIAMENT

## Committee Meetings



**TUESDAY, 17 JUNE 2003**

Portfolio Committee on Sport and Recreation (National Assembly) [Meeting between subcommittee clusters and identified federations], Committee Room G26, Ground Floor, National Assembly Wing, 09:00

Standing Committee on Public Accounts (National Assembly) [Auditor-General's briefing on Justice and Constitutional Development], Committee Room E249, Second Floor, National Assembly Wing, 11:00

**WEDNESDAY, 18 JUNE 2003**

Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration (National Assembly) [Briefing by SAMDI on cost recovery in respect of training interventions], Committee Room G26, Ground Floor, National Assembly Wing, 11:00

## Bills before Parliament



The following is a list of the bills currently before the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP).

**LEGISLATION NOT DISPOSED OF BY 17 APRIL 2003**

*NA (as second House) (75/76)*  
*NCOP (as second House) (74/75/77)*

1. Geoscience A/B [B 7 - 2003] (NA - 75) (Minerals & Energy)

**BILLS passed by 1st HOUSE & before of 2nd House:**

1. Anti-personnel Mines Prohibition Bill [B 44B - 2002] (NA - 75) (Defence)
2. Insurance A/B [B 52B - 2002] (NA - 75) (Finance)
3. Natural Scientific Professions Bill [B 56B - 2002] (NA - 75) (Arts & Culture)
4. Judicial Matters A/B [B 2B - 2003] (NA - 75) (Justice)

12-05-2003 to 27-06-2003	
Deadline for submission of legislation	20 March
Committees	12 – 23 May
Plenaries	from 26 May
Joint Rules Committee meeting	27 May
Leave period	30 June – 11 July
Constituency period	14 – 25 July

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email: [insession@parliament.gov.za](mailto:insession@parliament.gov.za)

**POTENTIAL PARLIAMENTARY NEWSLETTER TOPICS**

- Past and future events on the legislative calendar: the date, time and purpose of major committee activity; or debates or votes on pending legislation that are scheduled or anticipated.
- Changes in the institution: leadership reassignments, amendments in standing orders or other procedural frameworks; large-scale schedule changes or new regulations that increase or constrain the authority of the legislature.
- Information regarding legislative leadership: significant speeches and meetings by legislative leaders or staffing changes.
- Adoption of legislation or resolutions stating the legislature's position (e.g., regarding poverty reduction, education initiatives, or a recent natural disaster).

tion. For example, a journalist assigned to cover children's welfare may be interested in the details of a committee debate regarding the costs and benefits of expanding inoculation programs. A document library or resource center containing relevant committee reports, bills under debate and transcripts of debates and hearings creates a single, reliable access point for issue activists, as well as fellow members. While document libraries can have sophisticated filing and archival systems, they can also be as simple as organizing official publications in printed or electronic files, consolidating holdings in a single office and publicizing the procedure for requesting documents.

*Cultivated relationships with journalists.* Legislatures with limited resources may find that they are able to effectively reach out to the public through earned (or free) media coverage. Consequently, the cultivation of institutional relationships with independent journalists is a low-cost, high-impact way to improve public outreach on issues relevant to constituents. While the details of health budgets can make for unexciting radio news, the planned location for new clinics or the availability of new drugs is certainly media-worthy. By ensuring that relevant media receive the information they need to cover poverty reduction programs or initiatives when it matters—and

by ensuring the information is in a format that is of interest to readers—parliament can help constituents make better use of available resources. Parliamentary staff can facilitate regular coverage of parliamentary priorities and accomplishments in the media by:

- Compiling a list of the names and contact information of journalists who are to receive all parliamentary press releases or statements;
- Establishing a parliamentary press corps, members of which would have regular, consistent access to the chamber and permission to attend committee hearings unless otherwise specified. The press corps could also hold periodic press conferences with parliamentary leadership; and
- Creating a parliamentary press office or liaison officer to serve as the first point of contact for all media queries.

**INFORMING THE PUBLIC ABOUT INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS AND APPROACHES**

Institution-level public outreach may also be appropriate as a way for legislators to demonstrate their concern or involvement in fighting poverty at the grassroots level. For example, if the legislature feels that the pursuit of an environmentally sustainable water supply (MDG #7) is one of the country's most pressing objectives, it may seek out innovative programs that have made progress in that area in order to highlight them. Perhaps a local village or charity has taken the initiative to construct a village-wide rain-water collection and holding facility. If the legislature feels the approach could and should be replicated elsewhere, it may wish to use its public profile and ability to generate earned media to build awareness of the problem and of the innovative solution used by that village.

**Interested Audiences**

Unlike macro policy-level reforms or national budget allocations, information regarding tangible, life-affecting initiatives are of particular in-



## SAMPLE PARLIAMENTARY WEBPAGE



terest to citizens. The legislature may initially target an audience that can benefit from lessons learned by the innovative project—in this case, small villages with similar water needs.

### Likely Communication Coordinators

This type of communication may be initiated by any actor that would be seen to represent the legislature as a whole, for example:

- Legislative information centers or public relations staff;
- Chamber leadership—speakers, presidents, or other senior figures (perhaps individual MPs associated with specific issues);

- Multi-party groups of individual members tasked with pursuing a specific issue or policy reform; or
- Senior administrative figures.

It is important to distinguish between senior administrative figures and senior political figures because institutional outreach approaches make sense only when there is multi-party consensus on the issues covered by the outreach. If the communication is coordinated by senior figures of the ruling or opposition parties, it may be viewed as using institutional resources for their own party's advantage.

## Outreach Options

In order to increase the information that citizens receive directly from the legislature, institutional outreach often benefits from direct communication with citizens outside of the capital city. However, this can be particularly challenging in countries where travel is difficult or expensive, rural literacy is low (or where there are multiple languages) or media outlets are either not centralized or have little geographic reach. Particularly where resources for legislative outreach are scarce, legislatures must maximize the impact of each communication effort by pursuing mechanisms with the potential to reach geographically broad audiences.

*Site visits to development projects.* Although travel by legislative committee delegations to national development projects can be logistically and financially demanding for legislatures with limited resources, direct visits—when carefully organized—can be an effective means of showing legislative involvement in or commitment to resolving citizens' concerns. With respect to the earlier rain-water collection facility example, a site visit can use the legislature's ability to generate earned media to educate community leaders on innovative ways of resolving community problems. Site-visits may include such activities as:

- Touring the partially completed facility or attending a public presentation of blueprints;
- Holding a public meeting to discuss the construction of the collection center, timeline for completion and anticipated effects;
- Participating in (or moderating) a public question and answer forum for local residents;
- Meeting with local government representatives to hear perspectives on the local impact of the facility (e.g., on health or crop irrigation);
- Meeting with local media outlets to give interviews or join discussions regarding completion of the facility; or

- Meeting with officials who were involved in managing the construction of the project to gather information, if parliamentary investigations have been commissioned to examine the use of funds for the site.

In countries where previous incidents of government or contractor misuse of resources have disrupted infrastructure projects in the past, visits by parliamentarians to tour ongoing construction of large initiatives (e.g., electricity production facilities or transportation centers) may also demonstrate a commitment to exercise oversight of the funds allocated to the project. However, oversight-driven site visits are more easily influenced by partisan politics and may best be conducted by the appropriate oversight committee rather than by using an institutional approach.

*Broad communication through mass media.* Even where cost or difficulty prevents regular MP travel outside of the capital city, efficient use of the media is one way of maintaining communica-

### USING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR OUTREACH

Even where large segments of the population do not have access to Internet facilities, web-based parliamentary outreach can ensure public access to information by providing an access point for interested civic organizations, private sector actors and the media. Once established, such websites can be maintained at fairly low cost and can publicize a variety of information, for example:

- An explanation of the administrative structure of parliament, the role of each office or department, and office-specific contact information;
- Pending or archived legislation or parliamentary statements on the annual budget;
- Scheduled hearings, votes or other activities;
- Proceedings: debate transcripts, parliamentary questions, voting records or public statements;
- Descriptions of, contact information for, and links to other governing structures or bodies

For further information on creating or using parliamentary websites, the Inter-parliamentary Union's *Guidelines for the Content and Structure of Parliamentary Web Sites* (available at <http://www.ipu.org/ctr-e/web.pdf>) may be very useful.

tion with citizens across a broad geographical range. Where low literacy levels prevent print media from being a viable way to reach citizens, radio can be very effective (in many cases audio media can be more effective, even where literacy rates are not prohibitive). In the rain-water collection facility example, legislators may wish to schedule and participate in a range of public information media events. These could include:

- Recording or commissioning a public service announcement (PSA) for repeated radio broadcasts regarding the parliament's support for construction of the rain-collection facility and highlighting development successes that could be replicated elsewhere. In countries with networks of community radio stations, one or more MPs (or appropriate leadership figures) could record the announcement in the capital city and distribute the tapes to regional radio stations throughout the network.
- Offering to send legislators to participate in radio or television broadcasts to discuss parliament's response to water shortages. If MPs have never been invited to join radio or television broadcasts, such an offer (extended by the legislature's public relations staff) may help cultivate positive media-legislative relationships. As with PSAs, tapes can be distributed and re-broadcast by local stations.
- Appearing on radio call-in programs that allow citizens to directly ask questions. This may be particularly useful for legislators attempting to reach more urban areas. Demonstrating a willingness to discuss citizens' questions and concerns also encourages a more positive popular opinion of the legislature and greater citizen involvement.
- If a sizeable portion of the population reads national print media regularly, legislatures may find that coverage in national newspapers is an effective way of communicating with the population at large. It can also be a useful mechanism for ensuring that issue-activists are aware of the legislature's position or activities. Issuing a press release or having appropriate leadership make a statement about the construction of the facility would be one way to encourage print coverage of the legislature's position in the print media. (See Appendix III for a sample press release.)

#### **INSTITUTION-LEVEL OUTREACH AS A BASIS FOR CIVIC EDUCATION**

In addition to serving as a non-partisan source of information regarding specific policies and initiatives, outreach by the legislature as a whole may help to publicly clarify the role of the legislature in national government. Particularly in places where legislative roles and authorities are newer or less familiar to the population at large, coordinated efforts to communicate the poverty-related results of legislative business or to make legislative processes more transparent can be among the most effective ways in which to demonstrate the role of parliament with regard to issues that are part of daily life for most citizens. Formal or institutionalized outreach by the legislative body as a whole can provide citizens with information about the lawmaking process. It can also help illustrate that parliament is representing citizens' needs and pursuing solutions to complicated quality of life issues.

#### **THEATRE TROUPES AND RURAL OUTREACH**

In many cases legislatures may be able to reach out to portions of the population through more traditional, culture-specific communication mechanisms. For example, in Niger, the National Assembly commissioned a local theatre troupe to perform a play (in multiple local languages) that elaborated the role of the parliament in national poverty reduction strategies. This performance was recorded and then broadcast by regional radio stations in an effort to reach as many rural citizens as possible. In some cases, radio clubs (groups of villagers who share a radio and occasionally discuss the content of broadcasts) followed these radio performances with a discussion of the information presented.



## SECTION FIVE

# Outreach by Committees

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Parliamentarians who wish to communicate with the public in detail regarding a very specific issue area often find that such outreach is most effectively undertaken through committees or other issue-based groups such as issue-specific caucuses, commissions or taskforces. These issue-based groups are not only generally well positioned to apply the information gathered from the public to future legislation or oversight activities, but they also typically have the most expertise from which to draw when discussing new policies or pending reforms in their issue area. This section explores outreach mechanisms for committees and other issue-based groups hoping to gather information from relevant actors regarding the impact of previous and future policies, or aiming to provide the public with detailed information in a specific policy area.

### OFFICIAL COMMITTEE BUSINESS: GATHERING INFORMATION AND THE PUBLIC RECORD

As the issue-specific bodies within parliament, committees play a key role in executing basic legislative functions. Assume, for example, that in an effort to increase the number of rural primary school teachers, the education committee is reviewing a bill that would establish a teacher training center. Full review of the bill would require committee members to gather enough information to answer at least the following questions:

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#### SINGLE-ISSUE OUTREACH AT A GLANCE

**Target Audiences:** Issue experts; segments of the population that are interested in particular issues or policies (*i.e.*, families with HIV, rural farmers, the business community); the media.

**Most Appropriate for:** Outreach where issue expertise is required, such as gathering issue-specific pieces of information, publicizing information about policies or describing their intended impact.

**Benefits:** Committees and other issue-based groups typically have the most up-to date issue information, and are often placed to apply public feedback or new information most immediately.

**Communicator(s):** Chairs, members and staff of committees; other issue-specific groups such as ad-hoc commissions, sub-committees, parliamentary taskforces or issue-caucuses.

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- What about current rural education requires attention (what is the bill's intended purpose)?
- Do education experts believe the proposed legislation will effectively address current challenges in a sustainable manner (is the legislation, as presently drafted, likely to accomplish its objective)? If not, is there another alternative?
- What are the cost implications of the proposal?

Particularly in parliaments with limited staff and resources, parliamentary hearings may be one of

the most efficient ways of collecting needed information. Committee hearings are conducted as formal meetings at which relevant experts are asked to provide information on a particular issue or present analysis of a proposed policy initiative. Committee hearings can also be used to get input from ordinary citizens who will be affected by the bill—in this case, students and teachers who might benefit as a result of the training facility. Moreover, the proceedings or findings of a parliamentary hearing are part of the public record and can be publicized through media coverage, parliamentary publications or press statements by committee members or chairs. In this way, an exercise to gather information regarding public policy can also double as a mechanism by which the committee can demonstrate its active engagement in policy issues.

### Committee Hearings to Examine the Problem

In preparing to review proposed legislation to create a teacher training center, the education committee may wish to gather additional information regarding the current status of rural education. One option would be to hold a hearing and to invite:

- A representative from the Ministry of Education to present information on the current number and distribution of primary school teachers as compared with the number of school-age children;
- A representative of the national teacher's union to present facts about current training requirements and programs for primary school teachers; or
- A domestic or international expert on the impact of additional instructors on rural literacy (in addition to national education experts, the UNDP and other international organizations may be able to provide comparative country experience).

Whether organized by parliamentary staff or other support services, an effective parliamentary

### INEXPENSIVE INFORMATION GATHERING

One way to work around limited staff capacity and scarce resources is to organize hearings and request briefings as a means of gathering information. By inviting external issue experts and representatives from relevant ministries and agencies to speak on a particular subject, MPs effectively bring information in from outside sources to a central place that is accessible to legislators at little or no cost.

hearing allows legislators to reach out to the policy community who have specific information regarding the issue at hand. For situations in which legislative-civic or legislative-executive relations have traditionally been complicated, advance planning and organization can facilitate a more positive, productive exchange. In these cases, the committee members and staff who are coordinating the hearing will want to take special care to:

- Determine the format for the hearing, the ground rules for discussion and the time allocated to various portions of the hearing. Where the chair of the hearing is not predetermined by legislative rules—as in the case of an informal, issue-based caucus—a chair should be selected;
- Consider developing briefing materials for MPs in advance; make sure these materials are easily accessible and designed with busy MPs in mind;
- Identify and invite appropriate speakers. Typically these would include representatives from relevant ministries, agencies, think tanks, academia, civil society or professional experts; and
- Define the role of each presenter and establish mutual expectations, objectives and time limits. Experts should tailor their presentation to suit the purpose of the briefing. This may require that witnesses be briefed by committee staff before the hearing.

- Build in significant time for questions and discussion; determine who will facilitate this portion of the hearing;
- Develop a plan for media coverage. Will media coverage of the briefing demonstrate MP interest in poverty reduction or expose members' lack of familiarity with existing programs and strategies?;
- Re-confirm participation of presenters and the committee schedule; and
- Consider asking the witness to provide a written copy of their prepared testimony for distribution to committee members and (where appropriate) the parliamentary information

### THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY AS A LEGISLATIVE RESOURCE

Members of the international development community can be valuable sources of information for issues confronting MPs in committee. International development organizations such as UN agencies have not only professional expertise, but also years of experience in the field. Such organizations often have compiled valuable cross-national comparative information and may be able to offer tools and mechanisms that have been successful in similar situations. In many cases, specific organizations or staff portfolios correspond directly to poverty issues—to access information available through the international development community, MPs may wish to invite these organizations to testify during hearings or briefings. The UNDP is responsible for overall coordination and monitoring of the MDGs. For some goals, however, additional information may be obtained from relevant UN agencies:

- *Hunger*: Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO)
- *Gender/Women*: UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
- *Youth*: UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- *Environment*: UN Environment Programme (UNEP)
- *Health, HIV/AIDS*: Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

center. This is a low cost way to guarantee public access to information on the proceedings.

### Committee Hearings to Investigate Impact

If the education committee feels it has gathered sufficient information regarding the challenges of rural primary education, it must still evaluate the likely impact of the proposed legislation to determine the appropriate course of action: to send the proposed bill ahead to be debated and voted on by the entire legislature, to propose amendments to the legislation, or to recommend that the bill be adopted. At this point, the education committee may wish to have a public hearing in which:

- A representative of the Ministry of Education offers analyses of the intended impact and sustainability of the proposed training program;
- Civic or NGO members of the education policy community comment on the effectiveness of previous teacher training programs with regard to recruitment and performance; or
- A representative of the primary school teachers' association discusses options for a teacher-training curriculum based on organizational experience.

Inviting analysis by a range of experts and affected citizens makes it more likely that the committee will receive a wide range of information and opinions. For example, the teachers' union may believe that additional training will not increase the number of teachers in rural areas unless low salaries are also addressed. In addition to enabling more effective decision-making, hearings also constitute an opportunity for the committee to reach out to a variety of political and policy actors.

### ISSUE-SPECIFIC PUBLIC EDUCATION: INFORMATION OR AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

National economic reform policies—particularly changes in price controls, taxation or public

access to social services—affect citizens directly. Consequently, reform decisions are not only politically challenging, but are also capable of creating popular dissatisfaction or unrest when there is insufficient public information to justify the policy in the eyes of the electorate.

To mitigate this reaction, members of parliament (particularly members of the governing party or coalition) can play a role in disseminating public information regarding the impact of pending reforms in advance of their implementation. For example, while constituents will never be pleased with the elimination of price controls on oil or gas, widespread public discussion about the reasons for elimination of price controls and the potential medium term benefits (*e.g.*, greater availability of petrol or shorter queues) may diminish the strength of popular reaction. Polls in many countries have shown that citizens are more likely to support or accept economic reforms that require sacrifice if they understand the purpose of the reform.

Committees or other issue-based groups may find themselves positioned to undertake public education or awareness campaigns regarding a number of issues. However, it may be most useful to consider three categories:

- Technical legislation or economic reform that directly affects citizen purchasing power or quality of life (for better or worse): Value Added Taxes (VAT), price or industry deregulation, currency revaluations;
- Regional issues or initiatives that require citizen awareness to be of use to them: employment or training programs, natural disaster relief, infrastructure investments; and
- Nationwide issues affecting a majority of the population that may be resolved by greater public education: HIV, famine relief, children's health.

While these types of public information campaigns attempt to reach as many citizens as possible, the use of creative, personal outreach techniques by committee members can drive home the point that MPs care about citizen needs. These techniques can include:

- Town hall (or traditional village) meetings to discuss and answer questions concerning the anticipated effects of the reform;
- Broadcasts or rebroadcasts of committee debate summaries on local or regional radio stations; and
- Public information campaigns.

Campaigns to inform the population about access to new social services will obviously project a different tone than those to warn citizens about impending price increases. In either case however, the campaign would include a few fundamental components:

- A clear, concise message: “The price of electricity will go up next month, but we believe the power grid will function more regularly” or “HIV testing is now available in a private setting at the Northern Health Clinic”;
- Spokespeople equipped with full information regarding the issue, and who have been briefed/prepared to make points or statements that do not contradict statements being made simultaneously by other MPs;
- Factual information to support the stated claim (anecdotes regarding the availability of other goods whose prices have been deregulated, maps showing the locations of new clinics);
- Information on where one can get more information (pamphlets, office contact info);
- Publicity events (MP visits to development sites, interviews with MPs and new program beneficiaries); and
- Media coverage.

### **APPLYING ISSUE EXPERTISE TO GRASSROOTS CHALLENGES**

For many citizens, poverty appears to have very clear solutions: (*e.g.*, running water, local schools, vaccinations and electricity). From a legislative perspective, however, these “simple” solutions involve complicated, technical decisions: ensuring sanitary water supplies; selecting instructional language in a multi-language area; allowing for needle sterilization techniques; or coordinating the placement of electrical infrastructure. Moreover, policymakers must prioritize competing demands for extremely limited resources. Moving poverty-related reforms through legislative processes can make these

technical decisions even more complicated. While citizens may be frustrated with the slow speed of reforms, a dialogue with citizens can help educate them on the complexities of public policy. In addition, the ability of a committee or issue-based group to speak with expertise to concerned citizens and civic actors about specific development issues helps demonstrate parliamentary commitment to improving national standards of living. Illustrating parliamentary consideration of the impact of various technical decisions on the lives of citizens may also help reinforce the understanding that while time consuming, committee work and legislative review contribute to the quality of national reform programs.

## SECTION SIX

# Outreach by Parliamentary Party Groups

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Whether members of the governing coalition or of an opposition party, political party groups (or caucuses, factions or fractions) in parliament are likely to find themselves engaging in some form of public outreach regarding poverty issues. MPs in the governing parties may be called upon to endorse or promote the government's poverty alleviation programs; conversely, opposition party leadership may rely on their parliamentary party groups to generate voter interest in their proposed policy alternatives. Parliamentary public outreach regarding quality-of-life issues is undeniably one of the most effective ways for a party to demonstrate that its elected officials are concerned about the issues that most directly affect voters.

## PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT AND PARLIAMENTARY GROUP COORDINATION WITH THE PARTY

The establishment of a political party platform that includes party objectives for poverty reduction or other development issues forms the basis for most outreach by parliamentary party groups. Before party group leaders can plan activities to carry the party's message to the public, they themselves must be clear as to what that message is. Political party platforms—essentially, the party's comprehensive, public statement of ideology and policy goals—can serve as a mechanism to ensure that party group outreach activities stay on-message. For example, if an opposition party

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### PARLIAMENTARY PARTY GROUP OUTREACH AT A GLANCE

**Target Audiences:** Sectors of the population likely to support the party conducting the outreach, as well as citizens still deciding which party they support (swing voters); the media.

**Most Appropriate for:** Informing likely voters about party commitment to key poverty issues or to demonstrate the party's problem-solving skills.

**Benefits:** Voters are more likely to respond to party communication regarding poverty and quality of life issues; parties with platforms that address development issues are already prepared to communicate these goals to citizens.

**Communicator(s):** Political party parliamentary group leadership (whips or chairs), groups of members, party group staff or staff of party group leadership, de-facto party spokesmen for relevant issues within parliament.

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has made increasing access to health care a major component of the party platform, members of the party's parliamentary group can be sure that outreach promoting their own proposals for improved health care access will benefit the party by reinforcing the idea that the party is committed to citizen health.

Once the message is clear, party group activities can be tailored to carry the party message to citizens and voters. In some cases, parliamentary party groups may reach out most effectively through application of their own party resources.

**STRATEGIES FOR COORDINATING WITH  
THE PARTY AT LARGE**

Obviously, no political party platform will address every single reform or development issue. In cases in which the party platform offers no guidance on a pending issue or proposed reform, parliamentary party groups may find that they can coordinate with the party as a whole to identify a consistent stance using the following strategies:

- Regular party group meetings;
- Party parliamentary group- and party-leadership coordination;
- Party group coordination through the cabinet or shadow cabinet structures;
- Establishment/cultivation of parliamentary “spokespeople” for individual development issues; and
- Provision of party staff or other support for party MPs whose activities benefit the party.

- **Party newsletters:** If the party already produces a newsletter (or other regular publication for its membership), it may make sense to allocate a portion of print space to the parliamentary group. This is one way of demonstrating that the nationally elected representatives of the party are actively pursuing party goals or issues. For example, a party group article might detail members’ efforts to press for health care reform through the health or development committees.
- **Regional and branch party offices:** Many parties have established regional and branch offices in locations away from the capital city. While often used as campaign headquarters during national or local elections, they can also serve as hosting locations for party MPs who wish to conduct regional outreach efforts. Additionally, MP visits help the party office show that the national officials of the party care about the well-being of local citizens.
- **Elected local officials:** Coordinating public appearances (such as site visits or town hall meetings) with elected local officials from the same party is another useful mechanism

for demonstrating party commitment to specific issues at the local and national levels. Furthermore, pre-event discussion with relevant local officials helps bring specific aspects of the issue into perspective for MPs who may spend very little time in the region in question.

- **Individual MPs:** Particularly when elected through a party-list system, MPs are likely to be receptive to party communication strategies. Willingness to organize or participate in party group outreach activities may even be seen as another mechanism for demonstrating commitment to party priorities as articulated in the platform.

**USING THE MEDIA**

Even with clear party positions or messages on specific development issues, parties and parliamentary party groups must work with media outlets to communicate much of their position to the general public.

Governing party MPs may find that they are called upon to explain or generate public support for recent (or pending) reform initiatives. Conversely, opposition party MPs may be relied upon by the party to articulate alternative policies and demonstrate the viability of their own party’s leadership through engagement with the key issues. Both types of parliamentary party groups may wish to coordinate this outreach by:

- *Geography:* particularly if MPs are elected from geographic constituencies;
- *Issue focus:* where specific MPs are known for commitment to a particular issue; or
- *Skill set:* if certain MPs are particularly gifted speakers or writers, they may be asked to focus on interviews or editorials.

**Communicating New Policy Changes**

Legislatures can help moderate public response to policy changes by informing the population ahead of time about the nature and expected im-

pact of macro-economic reforms. Although politically less attractive, particularly for parties in opposition, MP efforts to publicize pending policies such as VAT increases or price control eliminations can contribute to a more informed population. While information does not prevent popular dissatisfaction with economic reform policies, it can help alleviate the potential severity of popular reaction. Particularly in countries with a record of civic unrest during periods of inflation or economic transition, MPs of the governing party can help facilitate smoother implementation of economic reforms by ensuring that their constituents are informed about the date and nature of the reforms. MPs can also articulate possible consequences and expected benefits of the reforms, thereby preparing the public for change and promoting a greater sense of predictability.

### **Shadow Cabinets**

Opposition parties may establish a shadow cabinet by mirroring each of the ministerial positions held by the governing party with one of their own parliamentary party group members. This not only allows the opposition to publicly identify the individuals with whom they would chose to create a cabinet, but also to pinpoint individual members as a face for the party with regard to specific types of policy. Parliamentary colleagues as well as journalists and civic actors then know, for example, that the shadow minister of health will articulate the party's position regarding rural health clinics or the provision of drugs. This further allows opposition parties to demonstrate policy positions and present their party as a viable alternative to the current government. With respect to poverty reduction and PRSP issues, it may make sense to assign "shadow ministries" to each of the PRSP thematic groups established by the national PRSP commission.

Once formed, a shadow cabinet can be effective in communicating that the party is committed to

the issues that most directly affect citizens' quality of life. Meeting regularly as a shadow cabinet to strategize about outreach priorities and to coordinate activities may also prove to be a useful exercise. Options for outreach include:

- Conducting site visits as a group: the shadow ministers of agriculture and foreign affairs may visit a UNDP-funded infrastructure program to review impacts and express support;
- Establishing a regular issue update: the shadow minister of education may issue a monthly press release or newsletter detailing the party's proposed education reforms, or documenting successful initiatives in their own districts; or
- Mobilizing media coverage: by virtue of their consistency, shadow cabinets enable media outlets to cover opposition policy positions more effectively by establishing regular points of contact.

### **PARTY GROUP COORDINATION: A STRATEGIC TOOL**

Party groups provide an excellent organizational unit through which to coordinate legislative outreach on key poverty issues; this is because party groups are fundamentally efficient means of organizing the actions of some of the party's most visible members. Regular party group meetings or briefings by group leadership help members make political decisions and take public actions that reinforce both the party's message and image. Perhaps more importantly, they help even the newest members avoid making statements contradictory to the party platform, which could confuse the party's public image. While public outreach on poverty related issues is one of the most useful applications of parliamentary party group coordination, parties may find that many mechanisms developed to address poverty are equally useful for clarifying party positions on other issues of importance to constituents.



## SECTION SEVEN

# Individual Efforts to Communicate with Constituents

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While poverty affects the nation as a whole, its impact is felt differently in each region or district. Consequently, individual members of parliament may find their outreach efforts have the most impact when they are specifically tailored to fit local situations and needs.

Individually tailored constituency outreach on poverty includes a range of activities based on increasing two-way communication regarding community needs, constituency-based (or constituency-located) development initiatives, the local impact of national poverty reduction initiatives or the availability of international and local resources for development. In places in which MPs provide the only political representation for large numbers of citizens from specific geographic or demographic constituencies, this communication with the constituency can be even more critical.

### **KNOWLEDGE IS POWER: GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CONSTITUENCY**

Knowledge about one's constituency is not only useful for identifying and pursuing the issues most relevant to one's district, but also helps to identify which local outreach activities are most likely to generate desired results. Fortunately, gathering this information or conducting community assessments may also be a form of constituent outreach when done in a way that enables communication to flow in both directions—from MP to citizen, and from citizen to MP.

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### **INDIVIDUAL OUTREACH AT A GLANCE**

**Target Audiences:** Mostly specific geographic, demographic or issue based constituencies, as well as civic actors active in the district.

**Most Appropriate for:** Informing voters about individual MP efforts to alleviate poverty locally; introducing recent reforms with local impact; or gathering information about local needs and concerns.

**Benefits:** Regular contact with constituents not only increases an MP's chances of advancing politically, but also enables them to more effectively represent their constituency (as they have a clearer sense of local needs) and to further demonstrate their value to their party.

**Communicators:** Most obviously, the members themselves, but also individual office staff or local party activists/staff.

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### **Two-way Communication to Identify Local Issues and Characteristics**

Participatory assessment activities such as town hall meetings, public forums or organized group discussions can be conducted to investigate any issue of importance to local citizens, the individual MP or his/her political party. Making an event participatory can be as simple as designating a space in which an MP and citizens are able to speak out regarding critical issues; this is neither a presentation by the MP, nor a detailed display of citizen complaints. Creating a permanent space in which such exchanges become the norm

can help reduce poverty by keeping the national government attuned to local needs, and by keeping constituents abreast of local poverty reduction initiatives and accessible resources.

To acquire a full picture of local poverty conditions and priorities, MPs may wish to explore the following types of topics with a variety of citizen groups:

- What recent events or changes have had the most impact on local citizens? Has that impact been negative or positive?
- What about the quality of life most bothers people in this area? What is considered to be working well? What issues most excite or anger people?
- What goals do local leaders and citizens have for the coming year? What are local priorities?

An MP who is familiar with the demographics and other characteristics of his/her constituency becomes more able to identify the national issues or initiatives that are likely to have the greatest impact on citizens at home. For example, if there is a proportionally large number of residents under 15 in a particular region, the region is more likely to benefit from children's health programs than from hospice or elder care efforts. Some key constituency characteristics to explore include:

- Ratios of young or elderly people;
- Predominant ethnic, linguistic or religious groups;
- Key institutions in all sectors (private, public, socio-cultural);

**MPs MAY FIND IT USEFUL TO MEET WITH THE FOLLOWING TO DISCUSS LOCAL CONCERNS**

- |                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| • Local officials     | • Labor groups      |
| • Traditional leaders | • Religious leaders |
| • Business leaders    | • Farmers           |
| • Citizens            | • Local CSOs        |

- Major transportation or communications infrastructure;
- Natural resources; and
- Community hazards (such as waste dumps, sewage, factory emissions).

The more types of information an MP has about his or her constituency, the more likely it is that he or she will be able to use that information to his or her advantage, or to the advantage of his or her constituents.

Open communication and interaction with constituents will likely elicit a great deal of information that demonstrates the way in which citizens are affected by a problem. Whether through informal meetings at market places and community gatherings, or through official office hours and formal meetings convened to discuss local issues, increased MP-citizen dialogue helps MPs to see the ways in which poverty issues affect the lives of their constituents. MPs may want to think about looking for two types of information: details that show the way in which people are affected by a problem (qualitative), and details that show how many people are affected by a problem (quantitative).

As a complement to qualitative communication, quantitative information regarding the number or proportion of constituents facing a particular challenge can simultaneously be the most persuasive argument for greater development in a certain area, and also the most difficult information to gather. For example, if 75 percent of resident families must send someone to a well five miles away for reliably clean water on a daily basis, this is an excellent argument for increased infrastructure for regional water distribution.

While the resources needed to conduct formal quantitative research are substantial, MPs may be able to access this type of information through the statistical office of various ministries or through national statistical surveys compiled and conducted by the international development com-

munity. For example, as part of the PRSP, the World Bank often supports substantial nationwide data collection that may be available to interested members of parliament. Similarly, UNDP's National Human Development Reports and UNFPA's (Fund for Population Activities) support for national censuses provide disaggregated data that may be useful to MPs. For example, education levels and literacy rates may be found on the United Nations Statistics Division website (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/default.htm>). Additionally, a map of resources or development initiatives in a district may have been compiled by a local civic organization. (For websites and additional information, please refer to Appendix V at the end of this document.)

### **Information to Identify Appropriate Outreach or Communication Mechanisms**

Information about a constituency not only informs an MP's ability to pursue constituency needs through legislative mechanisms, but can also help an MP determine how to best communicate information to their constituents in a way that people are easily able to understand. For example, if a majority of individuals living in the region are not literate, public outreach must rely on audio media or local appearances to communicate with their constituents. Information and questions MPs may wish to explore before drawing up a communications strategy include:

- Current sources for information about national or local poverty reduction programs (radio, local government, traditional community leaders, staff of international development organizations);
- Local preferences for receiving information (through traditional leaders, official messenger, audio or print media, district visits);
- Roles of various gender and age groups in community decision-making or information-

gathering (for example, male and female literacy rates);

- Local gathering places;
- Identification of community-based organizations or NGOs in the district;
- Sites for self-help or other projects, especially those sponsored by MPs; and
- Potential sites for outreach or the location of a district office.

#### **CREATIVE PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH**

Discerning citizens' priorities within a limited time-frame can be a challenge in districts with low literacy rates. Focus groups, or formally facilitated discussions, are one option; however, other types of activity may elicit the needed information more effectively in a given cultural and social context. Consider the following scenario:

To better represent her constituency, an MP representing a very poor rural district with little experience in political participation wanted to know where it made sense to concentrate her efforts: lobbying for an access road or for more accessible water wells. To resolve this question, the member organized a series of information gathering sessions that drew on more traditional, local methods of communication. For each group, she brought 15 individuals outside, placed a woven basket (representing a road for trade access) and a bowl of water (representing the well) on the ground, drew a large circle around each object, and handed each individual two stones. Every participant was then asked to place one stone in each circle, but to bear in mind that the closer a rock was to the center of a circle, the more it indicated that individual valued the object. At the end of this activity, the placement of the stones clearly demonstrated which issue was of greater importance to the group as a whole.

Such information gathering methods are by no means appropriate in all countries or all constituencies. However, in cases where literacy, multiple languages, or citizen inexperience with democratic participation make communication problematic, creative approaches like this one enable citizens to share useful information in a way that is comfortable to the

## Managing Information About your Constituency

MPs who have taken the time to gather information about their constituency will want to keep that information organized so that it can be used as often as possible. This can be done in many ways and at all different resource levels. Options include:

- Establishing a paper filing system for the constituency: this may be located in the Member's office in the capital, or on-site in the district. In either case, information should be regularly and easily accessible and filed systematically by region, issue, date, name or other pertinent categories.
- Creating a portable filing system: although

less thorough than a stationary office information system, portable files (kept in a large briefcase or trunk) may be useful when MPs travel between the capital and the constituency regularly, or where there is no staff assistance available in the district.

- Where computers are available, maintaining electronic files not only makes it easier to update constituency information, but the use of e-mail further enables information to be shared between district and capital offices.
- Using standardized forms to record information gathered through various activities. By using consistent forms (for samples, see Appendix III), MPs and staff can become familiar with the information in the files more quickly.

### PREPARING TO ANSWER CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS

When traveling to districts and constituencies, MPs can expect citizens to ask a broad range of questions. While no one can predict all potential queries, advance preparation can equip MPs with an appropriate response to most questions. Before traveling, it is useful to think through the following:

- What are the central poverty issues in the country and the region? Has the MP in any way been active in addressing these issues to date?
- Will pending legislation affect the region?
- Who are the local officials, public-sector agencies or non-profit organizations that may be conducting useful programs in the area?
- What are the MP's plans for the coming year? When will he or she return to the district? How can citizens reach him/her in the meantime?
- What is being done to address poverty at the national level? Even where this does not immediately affect local needs, MPs may be asked to talk about or explain national initiatives. In this sense, MPs may wish to review factsheets on the PRSP or MDGs at a national level.

These topics offer a good basis from which to initiate outreach to gather additional information. As an MP communicates with an increasing number of constituents, answering questions in public forums will become easier and easier.

In addition to maintaining files, MPs in some regions may find drawing community maps a useful means by which to keep track of their constituency and its economic and social needs. Creating such a map enables MPs to pictorially summarize key characteristics about a geographic group of constituents and creates an easy reference guide. Community maps may be comprehensive or as simple as including the locations of, for example, all water access points in a region, major gathering places, transportation points, commerce centers and flood zones.

### THINKING STRATEGICALLY ABOUT INDIVIDUAL OUTREACH TO INFORM THE PUBLIC

In addition to gathering information, MPs will also want to undertake efforts to communicate specific pieces of information to their constituents. This can include, for example, what national programs are addressing local problems, how the MP (or his or her party) is pursuing resources for development needs and what will be the impact of pending reforms. Particularly where outreach resources are scarce or travel to the district is limited, designing an outreach strategy is a critical first step in effectively communicating relevant information to constituents.

Bearing in mind the information gathered through open dialogue with constituents, the MP's next step is to define outreach goals. While groups of legislators may have broad objectives for communication with the public, individual MPs focused on outreach in a specific geographic constituency tend to have more precise goals in mind:

- Demonstrate MP responsiveness to local needs by explaining a legislative initiative the MP is pursuing on behalf of the constituency (such as the decentralization of education funds). This enhances citizen perception of MPs.
- Demonstrate political party responsiveness by explaining a particular legislative initiative with relevance to the district that the party is pursuing, or by explaining party opposition to a reform measures. This enhances citizen perception of the MP's party.
- Show understanding of local realities by helping to untangle local bureaucracies or inviting constituents and groups for problem identification and problem solving sessions.
- Increase the MP's or party's base of electoral support by mobilizing citizen participation in government through town hall meetings or other forums.
- Ensure accountable, equitable, accessible and appropriate services for local constituents by creating a link between citizens and government institutions.
- Improve (mutually beneficial) coordination with locally elected officials in the constituency by engaging in joint activities or projects.
- Increase access to local (or locally relevant) information by developing relationships with local or issue-based NGOs.
- Demonstrate value to the party by becoming a regional spokesperson for a specific issue vital to the constituency such as desertification, industrial cleanup or electrification.

At this point, an MP will not only want to define the goals of his or her communication strategy, but will need to prioritize them. Because time and money may be in short supply, MPs will want to consider their own skills, experiences and interests and their party's priorities and interests as compared to community needs. Members will also want to consider which issues in the community are already being addressed and by whom, and the potential impact of including or excluding certain groups or specific issues.

Once the goals of a communication strategy have been established, MPs or staff will wish to weigh the type of information an MP needs/wants to convey, identify various outreach activities and determine when they are appropriate.

### **OPTIONS FOR COMMUNICATION: TAILORING ACTIVITIES FOR THE INDIVIDUAL MP**

#### **General Forms of Outreach**

An MP has a broad range of outreach activities from which to choose. While some activities conducted by an individual MP are similar to outreach activities carried out by a parliament, political party or committee, the way in which an MP might approach these activities can vary extensively:

- Public or town hall meetings;
- Public service announcements (both radio and television);
- Participation in a radio or television call-in show;
- Use of print media by issuing press releases, publishing statements or announcing events;
- Distribution of a newsletter or other relevant publication;
- Attendance at local events;
- Presentation of information on reform progress or processes; and
- Organization of special events.

Although many of these activities are common to all levels of parliamentary public outreach, MPs usually have fewer resources to devote to these activities. It may be useful for an MP to look for outreach opportunities that coincide with existing community resources or activities—opportunities where it makes sense for an individual MP to get involved rather than the party caucus or parliament as a whole. For example:

- Rather than drafting and distributing a monthly newsletter, an MP could ask a local newspaper if he or she could contribute a column to the weekly newspaper; this allows the MP to communicate with constituents on an ongoing weekly basis without expending additional resources.
- Holding special events can be resource (as well as time) intensive when being carried out by an individual MP. Therefore, an MP might choose to attend a community festival or travel to a busy local market where he or she could establish a space in which to speak with constituents.

#### **GENERATING POSITIVE MEDIA COVERAGE THROUGH SITE VISITS**

Where MP travel to districts is rare, development site visits provide an excellent opportunity to generate free media coverage of parliamentary activity. Public relations staff can encourage positive coverage of the travel by:

- Briefing relevant journalists on the timing and purpose of the trip;
- Briefing the attending members on the district to which they will be traveling so that they are able to contextualize their speeches and answers;
- Constructing and keeping to an accurate itinerary;
- If large crowds are anticipated, designating a specific media location so that journalists are able to hear all proceedings and speeches clearly; and
- If appropriate, distribute a statement of findings or summary of the visit to relevant media outlets.

- When relying on individual MP resources, even travel to the constituency can be prohibitively expensive. While not possible in all cases, MPs who have demonstrated commitment to a specific local issue may be able to participate in internationally-funded travel to the region. If, for example, an MP is willing to lend additional credibility to a public education seminar on HIV-AIDS prevention by giving an opening address, some international development organizations may be willing cover the cost of that MP's travel.

#### **Individual-specific Forms of Outreach**

There are also outreach activities an individual might conduct that the parliament, a committee or political party group cannot.

##### *Casework*

Casework is one example. When conducting casework, an MP works with an individual constituent (or group) to resolve a particular problem or to address a specific issue. Often the constituent has brought a problem to the member's attention during office hours (also called constituency "clinics" or "surgeries") or through some type of direct communication (mail, personal visit, messenger, e-mail or phone call) in order to ask for assistance. When the MP can help the constituent (*i.e.*, the citizen in question needs more information about a local small-grants initiative, or help navigating through local bureaucratic mechanisms to apply for specific social services), he or she would generally follow-up with the constituent over some period of time to ensure the problem is adequately resolved. (For a sample casework tracking form, see part two of Appendix III.)

##### *Participation in Local Development and Training Events*

An individual MP from an agricultural district might participate in a high-profile local training

workshop being conducted by a domestic or international organization on new agricultural techniques. As a representative of both their district and the government, MPs not only gain valuable skills which they can then impart to their constituents, they also lend a sense of credibility to the project and illustrate to citizens that the government and the given political party are concerned about poverty relief.

### **Non-traditional Constituency Outreach**

One of the most common and formidable barriers that MPs must overcome is the widespread perception that MPs should distribute monetary resources to individuals. Faced with limited local resources, many MPs end up spending a great deal of their own personal assets to satisfy their constituents. Changing this perception can be hard, but is not impossible. While it is not the job of the MP to dispense handouts, ensuring that their district benefits from scarce state resources is part of the MPs role. In addition to financial resources, state resources also include service provisions such as healthcare, jobs training and water supply. An MP can also highlight and help to mobilize other resources that may not be self-evident to the public, such as NGOs, Chambers of Commerce or international development bodies.

Examples of non-traditional constituency outreach that can be accomplished with limited resources include:

- Creating a directory of community organizations and making the directory available;
- Bringing together community members, Chambers of Commerce and local government for the purpose of information-sharing and facilitating dialogue;
- Working with citizens to initiate small-scale development projects or to obtain small, official loans to open businesses;
- Mobilizing donor resources for projects in the MP's district;

#### **CONSTITUENCY OFFICES**

An MP may choose to engage in casework at a variety of locations in his or her home district. Depending on available resources, an MP may also choose to open a constituent office so that constituents will know how and where to find the MP on a regular basis. In addition to providing a physical location from where the MP can carry out his or her duties, an office is rich in democratic symbolism. A constituent office can convey the message that the MP is working to meet the needs of his or her constituents.

When resources are not available to establish an independent constituency office, another option is to use existing local office space, such as space in municipal or party offices. As long as an MP's hours in the office are predictable, this may serve

- Helping constituents access entrepreneurial training conducted by government or NGOs;
- Meeting with capital city-based development project managers to gather information about progress or ongoing work in the district (this is also a good way to prepare for constituency visits); and
- Serving as a clearinghouse for information regarding previous initiatives in the region that have either worked or not worked.

### **LOCAL PROBLEMS, NATIONAL ACTIONS**

While poverty is an easily identifiable experience for citizens, the mechanisms available to a legislator with which to make progress on poverty reduction may be difficult to understand. An MP who is able to communicate frankly and succinctly about the steps he or she is taking to address local poverty issues in a way that makes sense to constituents is more likely to be supported at a grassroots level. While the activities discussed in this section are by no means exhaustive, making use of a variety of individual outreach techniques to bring the actions of the parliament closer to the voters is an excellent way to build public trust, and to cultivate local voter support for the individual member.

## CONCLUSION

# Establishing Precedents for More Responsive Government

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While the legislature's involvement in pursuit of MDGs and other pro-poor reforms can sometimes involve very technical issues, such reform can have direct impact on the lives of citizens. Legislators in countries undertaking pro-poor reform may find that outreach efforts provide an excellent opportunity to discuss pending reforms, reveal anticipated or observed results, explain the role of the legislator (or legislature) in developing these programs or to review the quality of implementation. While citizens are interested in hearing from their elected officials about national efforts to improve the quality of life at a tangible local level, two-way communication efforts can also help an MP to execute the oversight, legislative and representative functions of his or her job by providing the member with accurate information about constituents' needs and concerns.

Whether conducted by parliament as a whole, by committees, by party groups or by individual MPs, public outreach on poverty-related

issues can help to build public trust in democratic institutions. This can be particularly important in nations that have undergone a recent transition to democracy or where there is a legacy of legislative weakness. In these cases, citizens often lack information regarding an MP's role, the types of assistance an MP can provide or how to ask for that assistance when appropriate. Typically, there is also little public information about the efforts parliamentarians may have already undertaken to pursue pro-poor reform.

Poverty-related outreach gives legislative actors an opportunity to establish precedents for more effective interaction with the public on a range of national issues. In the long run, questions concerning poverty underpin nearly all national policy decisions in many developing countries. By establishing precedent for legislative-public communication on these issues, the parliament is able to represent the needs and preferences of the people more and more effectively over time.



## APPENDIX I

### THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE: MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND TARGETS

Excerpted from: <http://www.undp.org/mdg/>

The Millennium Development Goals are an ambitious agenda for reducing poverty and improving lives that world leaders agreed on at the Millennium Summit in September 2000. For each goal, one or more targets have been set, most for 2015, using 1990 as a benchmark:

#### 1. ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

More than a billion people live on less than US\$1 a day: sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and parts of Europe and Central Asia are falling short of the poverty target.

*Target: Halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and suffering from hunger.*

#### 2. ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

As many as 113 million children do not attend school, but the target is within reach. India, for example, should have 95 percent of its children in school by 2005.

*Target: Ensure all boys and girls complete primary school.*

#### 3. PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN

Two-thirds of illiterates are women, and the rate of employment among women is two-thirds that of men. The proportion of seats in parliaments held by women is increasing, reaching about one-third in Argentina, Mozambique and South Africa.

*Targets: Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.*

#### 4. REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

Every year nearly 11 million children die before their fifth birthday, mainly from preventable illnesses. That number is down from 15 million in 1980.

*Target: Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five.*

#### 5. IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH

In the developing world, the risk of dying in childbirth is one in 48, but virtually all countries now have safe motherhood programs.

*Target: Reduce by three-quarters the ratio of women dying in childbirth.*

#### 6. COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES

More than 40 million people are living with HIV. Countries like Brazil, Senegal, Thailand and Uganda have shown that the spread of HIV can be stemmed.

*Target: Halt and begin reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS and incidence of malaria and other major diseases.*

#### 7. ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

More than one billion people lack access to safe drinking water and more than two billion lack sanitation. During the 1990s, however, nearly one billion people gained access to safe water and the same number to sanitation.

*Targets: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources; by 2015, reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water; and by 2020 achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.*

#### 8. DEVELOP GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT

Many developing countries spend more on debt service than on social services.

*Targets: Develop further open trading and financial systems that include a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction, both nationally and internationally; address the least developed countries' needs, and the special needs of landlocked and small island developing states; deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems; develop decent and productive work for youth; in cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries; and in cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies—especially information and communications technologies.*

## APPENDIX II

### POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPERS (PRSP)

The PRSP process involves four main phases, which often overlap:

1. **Poverty diagnosis:** This includes a comprehensive evaluation of the roots and symptoms of poverty—Who are the poor? Where do they live? What factors are perpetuating current poverty levels?
2. **Poverty policy formulation:** Based on poverty diagnosis and a country's vision for its development, what are the national priorities for poverty reduction? What policies should be put in place?
3. **Poverty policy implementation:** This phase involves implementing the policies in the PRSP; for parliaments, this often means the passage of necessary legislation and appropriate budgets.
4. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Has the PRSP worked? If parts have not worked, how can the PRSP be improved?

PRSPs set forth national policy by establishing concrete three-year strategies for addressing a limited number of poverty-related priorities. Once these priorities have been identified, the PRSP is intended to serve as a national roadmap for allocating resources to effect concrete, measurable reductions of poverty. In addition to being pro-poor, the PRSP was originally conceived around six core principles. PRSPs are intended to be:

- **Country-driven**, developed with broad participation by civil society and the private sector;
- **Results-oriented**, focused on outcomes that benefit the poor;
- **Comprehensive**, recognizing the multi-dimensional nature of poverty;
- **Prioritized** so that implementation is feasible, financially and institutionally;
- **Partnership-oriented**, coordinated with bilateral, multilateral and non-governmental development partners; and
- Based on a **long-term perspective**.

Alongside the PRSPs, a number of other strategic plans are generated by the World Bank, IMF, and various bilateral donor organizations regarding their own assistance. Based on their analysis of each country's PRSP poverty diagnosis, growth targets, and implementation capacity, both the Bank and the Fund develop their own country-specific assistance strategies or programs.

## APPENDIX III

### SAMPLE FORMS FOR RECORDING PUBLIC FEEDBACK

#### CONSTITUENT FEEDBACK FORM

---

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_ (Home)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Work)

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

General Category:

- ☐ Issue stance
- ☐ Specific legislation
- ☐ Complaint
- ☐ Comment
- ☐ Thank you

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

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**CASEWORK TRACKING FORM****I. Constituent Contact Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_ (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Work)

Best time to contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Case Profile**

Date case opened: \_\_\_\_\_

Staff member receiving original request: \_\_\_\_\_

Call In ☐ Walk In ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Basic nature of request:

☐ Complaint about government☐ Issue-specific☐ Information Request☐ Feedback

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes on first exchange:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_**III. Actions Taken**

Staff member referred to: \_\_\_\_\_

Actions taken:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_**IV. Closure**

Date Case Closed: \_\_\_\_\_

Any further actions to be taken/recommendations for future management:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX IV

### SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

June 11, 2002

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Ms. K. Tlebwe, MP

#### **MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT SUPPORTS WOMEN'S BUSINESSES**

It has only been six months since Member of Parliament for Bryanja West, Ms. K. Tlebwe, helped a group of women secure a loan from the National Association of Business Women (NABW), but in that short time, small business ventures in the constituency have flourished. A group of women, who have different backgrounds and support different political parties, approached Ms. Tlebwe late last year after all efforts to find affordable credit had failed. Ms. Tlebwe helped the women fill out forms and contact NABW, and soon they had the capital to start the businesses they had always dreamed of running.

“The women of Bryanja West have always been hard working. They just needed a little capital to get their businesses going. Now the women are earning money, providing services and creating employment in our constituency. Ultimately it is the whole community that benefits, not just the women running the businesses,” said Ms. Tlebwe.

The women who received loans have started businesses ranging from tobacco farming to retail trade to handicraft making. There is even an all-women fishing crew that used a loan to buy a boat and nets to catch and sell fish. Many women have already begun to pay back their loans and are earning good profits.

Ms. N. S. Dranika, the captain of the first all-woman fishing boat in the area, praised the loan programme. “When the women of my village first came up with the idea of going in to the fishing business, everyone laughed. Boats and nets are very expensive, and fishing is usually done by men, but Ms. Tlebwe listened to us and helped us secure money from NABW. Now the members of my crew are able to pay school fees for their children and buy food for their families. Even our husbands are proud of our accomplishments. Without NABW and Ms. Tlebwe, we would not have been able to accomplish our dreams,” said Ms. Dranika.

Ms. Tlebwe praised the NABW and pledged to help ensure that the recipients of loans pay back their money on time. “Others in Bryanja West have seen the success of the women and want to borrow money to start their own businesses,” she said. “By paying back loans on time, we want to prove that the people of our constituency are trustworthy and encourage lending institutions to continue providing loans to members of our community.”

## APPENDIX V

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### ORGANIZATIONS WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- African Development Bank <http://www.afdb.org/knowledge/publications.htm>
- Asian Development Bank <http://www.adb.org/Publications/default.asp>
- Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/poverty>
- Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP) <http://www.crop.org/>
- Department for International Development (DFID) <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) <http://www.fao.org/>
- HakiKazi Catalyst <http://www.hakikazi.org/>
- Institute of Development Studies Civil Society and Governance Programme: Policy Briefs  
<http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civsoc/PolicyBriefs/policysums.html#poll>
- Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) <http://www.iadb.org/>
- International Budget Project <http://www.internationalbudget.org/>
- International Monetary Fund <http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/prgf.htm>
- Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) <http://www.unaids.org/en/default.asp>
- Medium Term Expenditure Framework <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/pe/mtef.htm>
- National Democratic Institute for International Affairs <http://www.ndi.org> and  
<http://www.accessdemocracy.org>
- Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) <http://www.oecd.org>
- Overseas Development Institute Poverty and Public Policy Group <http://www.odi.org.uk/pppg/index.html>
- Parliamentary Centre <http://www.parlcent.ca/povertyreduction/index.html>
- Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty <http://www.ifad.org/popularcoalition/>
- United Nations Children's Fund <http://www.unicef.org/>
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development  
<http://www.unctad.org/Templates/Startpage.asp?intItemID=2068>
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) <http://www.unifem.org/>
- United Nations Development Group Devlink <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm>

United Nations Development Programme Human Development Reports (global, regional, and national) <http://hdr.undp.org/default.cfm>

United Nations Development Programme Millennium Development Goals <http://www.undp.org/mdg/>.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) <http://www.unep.org/>

World Bank Development Forum: Poverty Profiles and Policymaking “PAC Talk” Discussion Board [http://www.worldbank.org/devforum/forum\\_pac.html](http://www.worldbank.org/devforum/forum_pac.html)

World Bank Group <http://www.worldbank.org/>

World Bank Group Millennium Development Goals <http://www.developmentgoals.org/>

World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/>

World Trade Organization <http://www.wto.org/>

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**United Nations Development Programme  
Bureau for Development Policy  
304 E 45th Street  
New York, NY 10017**

**[www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)**