



Unlocking Development Potential through Direct Support to Politicians and Parliament

Peer-to-Peer Community of Practice for Institutional Development Workshop: July 2019

The Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Community of Practice seeks to establish a more focused, professional and effective form of international assistance to institutions of governance worldwide. In contrast to the large-scale and generic forms of technical assistance that have dominated traditional governance programmes, the Community of Practice is characterised by more discrete, targeted and expert forms of peer-to-peer engagement. At a time when governments across the world are dealing with increasingly complex and difficult problems, international partnerships between peer institutions can unlock solutions and deliver outcomes for citizens. It is built around an exchange of ideas and techniques, and is designed to support officials, ministers and politicians in managing the immediate and daily challenges within institutions, but in a way that also strengthens the systems of government in the long-term.



Nicola Smith, Head of Government Partnerships International



Greg Power, Founder & Chair, Global Partners Governance

In this workshop, organised jointly by Government Partnerships International (GPI) and Global Partners Governance (GPG), organisations involved in providing direct support to **parliaments and politicians** explored effective ways of working through innovative peer-to-peer techniques. Participants from within government and a range of development organisations examined the opportunities and challenges of P2P partnerships, including case study presentations from GPG, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), and a roundtable with three UK politicians who have been involved in providing international P2P support, who gave their perspective of what the world looks like through an MP's eyes, the priorities that politicians have to deal with, and how assistance needs to align itself with the incentives at work inside political institutions.

Why work with Politicians and Parliaments?

- Politicians, parliaments and political parties offer routes in to every important policy area in developing states, from economic growth, to the provision of public services, to anti-corruption and human rights. Politicians should be allies in those development goals, provided international assistance is delivered the right way.

Key Elements of Effective P2P Support for Politicians and Parliaments

- **Product over process:** the ultimate objective of P2P support is to assist political institutions in improving the quality of policy, and the delivery of services that affect people's lives. Projects are most effective when they are linked to clear and compelling policy objectives.
- **Think local:** In most constituency-based electoral systems, politicians are elected because of what they do outside of parliament, at the local level. The local perspective and incentives need to be integrated into approaches to working with politicians and institutions.



Alistair Burt MP, former DFID & FCO Minister

- **Small is beautiful:** with increased funding and demand, there is a temptation for donors to aim for sweeping change with large projects, however, political processes require time and patience and change is an incremental progress. In the political sphere it is not possible to ‘buy results’ – it is far more effective to start small and create a ripple effect through behavioural change on the basis of small but tangible achievements.
- **Work with not at:** P2P approaches are about going in and working alongside local politicians and policy makers rather than abstract or generic training. Sustained support is needed to enable politicians themselves to implement systemic change by applying newly acquired skills in practice.
- **It’s all about trust:** Trust is a crucial element for P2P approaches and develops over time. At its core, P2P is about finding the right people to work with and building a relationship with them, a process which can also generate significant soft power benefits.

How do Politicians perceive assistance?

- **Politicians and parliaments come in many shapes and sizes** but around the world, governance processes and political representation are the main means by which political change can be delivered and development objectives achieved. Recognising and understanding that democracy and governance processes do not follow a standardised method, being agile and sensitive to different contexts, is key for effective P2P delivery. A politician’s aim is to find a route to delivery within their own particular system, and P2P should supporting their efforts to develop a working a model rather than coming in with a pre-set formula.



*Rt Hon. Jacqui Smith,
former UK Home Secretary*

- **Politicians have a shared language:** Being elected and responsible for representing citizens is a unique experience and knowing that your counterpart has shared this experience brings instant credibility. This means that engaging former and current politicians with a variety of political experience is a fundamental element of effective P2P practice. Equally, where parliamentary staff are engaged, the shared language of standing orders and parliamentary procedures provides the foundation for mutual understanding and trust.



*Lord Archy Kirkwood,
former Liberal Democrat MP*

- **Politicians can’t show fear:** in the cut and thrust of political debate, politicians know that admitting to personal weaknesses or gaps in knowledge may be seized upon by their opponents. An unwillingness to appear vulnerable is one reason for the generally low take-up of formal professional development opportunities in parliaments both old and new. Discreet P2P mentoring offered by experienced politicians who are not involved in local politics is an effective route to address this.
- **There’s no job description:** being an MP is a unique position and is a role that can be carried out effectively in many different ways, from constituency representation, to national legislator, to service as a Committee Chair, Speaker/Deputy Speaker or Minister (for which MPs are often ill-prepared). Learning-by-doing is the usual approach, but politicians can benefit from greater clarity on what is expected from them in these roles, drawing on the experience of others.
- **Don’t let a good crisis go to waste:** around the world, reform is often born of political crisis, including in the UK where our own parliamentary processes have been reshaped in the last decade alone by the expenses scandal, the first coalition government, and the current challenges of Brexit. At times of crisis, rules can be rewritten and behaviours changed as expectations shift. P2P and the associated funding structures need to be alert and agile enough to take advantage of these opportunities.

Peer-to-Peer Community of Practice

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