

Support to Parliament

Introduction

On 7th of December 2017, the Fourth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone was formally dissolved paving the way for the next general elections. A new Parliament is expected to be in place by April 2018 which will be the Fifth Parliament of Sierra Leone.

Interestingly, a number of senior MPs who have been Members of the House, since 2002, are not contesting thereby leading to more space for a new leadership in the Parliamentary Service Commission.

Also, there is a potential based on the current political dynamics, that unlike the last Parliament, more than two political parties may get represented in the Chamber which can present interesting opportunities to maneuver on policy issues and oversight.

As per the Population Census 2015, an additional 20 constituencies have been created taking the total of elected Parliamentary seats to 132 in the Fifth Parliament. With the re-districting and creation of two additional districts there will be 14 PCMPs taking the total strength of the new Parliament to 146.

In the course of the last Parliament, with UNDP support, a Parliamentary Service with 9 departments, the permanent institutional memory of the Parliament has been put in place.

In 2018, therefore, with a new Parliament in place, which is more diverse and representative, a newly constituted PSC and with key support staff in place, UNDP and other development partners have a clear opportunity in Sierra Leone to promote principles of separation of powers in governance by supporting Parliament in law making, representation and holding the government of the day accountable.

UNDP Support to Parliament

The presence of a strong legislature is a pre-requisite for a stable democracy. As elected representatives of the people, Parliaments constitute uniquely legitimate democratic institutions; with a central role to play in all governance and development processes. UNDP support to Parliament in Sierra Leone focuses on institutional capacity building of Parliament through the Parliamentary Service Commission and more particularly the Parliamentary Service, the professional wing established through UNDP support. The Parliament of Sierra Leone (Recruitment & Conditions of Service) Rules, 2016 was drafted and approved by the Parliamentary Service Commission (PSC). UNDP has been instrumental in setting up the Legislative Department of the Parliamentary Service to manage the legislative business transacted within the Chamber. Other significant support includes setting up the Hansard Department, recruitment of key staff, Directors and Committee Clerks, setting up the Parliament Library, designing of the Parliament website and setting up of the ICT infrastructure for Parliament. More noticeably, the Parliament of Sierra Leone has a Strategic Plan, 2016-19, developed with technical support from UNDP. It was laid on the Table of the House signifying complete ownership of the strategy by Parliament. In order to improve the budgetary oversight and develop the technical base for policy analysis and basic research resources for the parliamentary committees and the MPs, UNDP initiating the setting up of a small Budget Office in the Parliamentary Service.

UNDP, further supported the setting up of Parliament Assistance Coordination Office (PACO) as a nodal office for assistance to Parliament. PACO has managed to improve donor coordination to avoid duplication, to ensure transparency and better utilization of funds. With the setting up of PACO, the Project Implementation Units (PIU) of different agencies previously established within Parliament were closed with only UNDP retaining an embedded presence. UNDP has been consistently present and supported the establishment of the Parliamentary service and kept the

engagement on-going both with the political and administrative sides of Parliament during the last parliamentary term which has been vital for the information flow on national issues and on diverse development issues. Given its relevance and utility in the Parliament administration, it has now been incorporated as a Department in the parliamentary service, namely, the Department of Parliament Assistance Coordination (DePAC).

Parliament Administration

In terms of overall administrative management, the Clerk of the House heads the Parliament. At the same time, he is Secretary to the Parliament Service Commission which is chaired by the Speaker and consists of the members of the parliamentary leadership representing different political parties in Parliament. While the Parliamentary Service Act, 2007 instituted this management arrangement, it was set up only in 2010 and started functioning with the inauguration of the new Parliament in December 2012. Decision making in a political environment is often riddled with difficulties and more so when a new arrangement has been put in place. The concept of decision making through the PSC for parliamentary matters is very new and requires to be more structured and clearly delineated. Similarly, the Office of the Clerk, with its multiple roles, of handling administrative matters relating to the Parliamentary Service, the chamber related functions, being the secretary of the PSC and the Advisor to the Speaker is a very challenging one. Information flow to the office is of an extremely diverse nature and the quantum is also phenomenal; however management capacity to classify, document and to assist in decision making is rather limited and is dependent on the skills of the individual holding the office. There is clear need to expose the members of the PSC and the Office of the Clerk to best practices in other dispensations through peer learning for an improved management of Parliament.

Strategic Plan 2016-19

The 2016-2019 Strategic Plan is prepared with a focus on four (4) key Strategic Goals that will help build on the achievements of the last few years and help Parliament's long-term development. The Goals are interconnected and aimed at helping Parliament achieve its vision of being a beacon of peace, hope, democracy and good governance for the people of Sierra Leone. These include: Building the Institutional Capacity of Parliament; Strengthening Lawmaking; Strengthening Oversight; and Making Parliament Representative and Accessible to citizens. These Objectives are informed first and foremost, by the need to create an efficient and effective institution that is positioned to help Parliament and its Members achieve their triple functions of lawmaking, oversight and representation.

In line with the strategic Plan 2016-2019 and keeping in mind the potential requirements of a new Parliament, the project workplan 2018 has the following 3 outputs;

1. Role and functions of the new Parliamentary Service Commission(PSC) streamlined

Under this output, the new Parliamentarians benefit from an Orientation programme covering essential areas of parliamentary work in order to assist them to perform their mandated work of law making, representation and oversight. This may also include topics such as ICT in Parliament, PBO work, SDGs, legislative work, etc. This may be conducted prior to the oath taking at Parliament. Further, few Members of the PSC and staff would benefit from a peer learning experience to a South Parliament in line with the UNDP focus to promote south-south collaboration, knowledge sharing on work of a PSC in managing Parliament and related issues. Department of Parliament Assistance Coordination will be supported in its work.

2. Increased capacity of Parliament to monitor government budget and expenditure

Under this output, the newly created PBO will be supported to generate a data base of development information at the constituency/district level for use of MPs. The PBO staff will also benefit from attending trainings to carry out their task of budget analysis for use of Committees and individual MPs if possible.

3. Streamlined legislative process in Parliament which is transparent, open and gender sensitive

Under this output, Legislative department created with UNDP support in the last Parliament will be supported to streamline and structure the legislative business and the Department and to capacitate the Women caucus on legislative work such that MPs become aware of gender sensitive issues in law making.

UNDP will continue to provide both upstream and downstream policy advice and technical assistance to bring about shifts at both policy and operational levels at Parliament during the said period as per demand.