

Parliaments Can Be Key to Accountability

March 22, 2007 — The seventh annual conference of the [Parliamentary Network on the World Bank](#) (PNoWB), held in Cape Town last weekend, registered a number of 'firsts'.

It was the first time the conference had been held in Africa, the first time the heads of the IMF, African Development Bank (AfDB) and the World Bank had sat together in a public forum to open themselves up to collective scrutiny, and the event also spawned the inaugural meeting of the Southern Africa chapter of the PNoWB.

Held in the prestigious setting of the old South African parliament building, the conference brought together more than 200 [parliamentarians](#) from 100 countries, with both developing and developed countries well represented. Participants included the chair of foreign affairs committees in Canada and Denmark, the speaker of the Parliament in Rwanda, the chair of the oil revenues management committee in Nigeria, and the chair of the public accounts committee in Uganda.



Fawzia Koofi and Sabrina Saqib, MPs from Afghanistan

The agenda for the conference reflected the key development issues on the international agenda. Parliamentarians discussed:

- The call for action on Africa as a development priority
- Accountability and transparency in International Financial Institutions
- Illegitimate debt, the need for a sense of shared responsibility, and responsible lending
- The effectiveness of parliamentary strengthening initiatives
- Good governance and anti-corruption
- Aid effectiveness
- Tackling the challenge of climate change
- Transparent management of extractive industry revenues
- Creating a business climate conducive to growth
- New actors in the provision of resources and the impact on health and development in general
- Importance of agriculture in achieving growth

The Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB) was founded in May 2000 as an informal network of individual parliamentarians, to strengthen accountability and transparency in international financial institutions in general and in the Bank in particular. PNoWB is an independent non-governmental organization with more than 800 members from 110 countries.

The network works closely with the Bank and many activities are undertaken in partnership, including the Annual Conference and the Field Visit Program. PNoWB's biggest funders are the governments of the Netherlands and Finland. It has also received funding from the U.K., Swiss, Greek, and French governments, the United Nations Foundation, the World Bank, and the IMF.

Growing Role for Parliamentarians

For the [roundtable discussion](#), the heads of the three International Financial Institutions were joined by one of Africa's most prominent politicians, South African Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, signaling the growing recognition of the role parliaments can play in the development process and the importance placed on engaging parliamentarians in the development debate.

How Members of Parliament (MPs) could strengthen their role was a recurring theme in this session, which focused on issues of growth, aid flows, the growth in financing from private foundations, and how both African countries and the IFIs should position themselves in relation to emerging countries such as India and China.

Billow Kerrow, a Kenyan MP and chair of the East Africa chapter of PNoWB, made a plea for greater consultation with parliamentarians on governance issues: "My concern is that efforts by Members of Parliament to hold their governments to account are being undermined by the multilateral institutions themselves; a good example is when you get a couple of guys from IMF walking into town, spending a couple of weeks and giving the government a clean bill of health as regards the economy and so forth, when indeed the Parliament and the people of that country are raising concerns about governance."



Members of the Hout Bay Strings Project, which provided the music during an official dinner hosted by H.E. Manuel, South Africa's Minister of Finance, at the conference in Cape Town

The heads of the IFIs then held individual question-and-answer sessions. [President Wolfowitz's session](#) with the parliamentarians was chaired by U.K. MP Hugh Bayley, who pressed him with a surprising request for greater conditionality on future Bank loans: "It's unusual for people to demand more conditionality from the Bank; but I think that's really what is being asked for.

"Would you make it a condition, or would you at least issue good practice guidelines to your partner governments that when you're engaging with a loan or grant deal with them that you should expect them, as the government of the recipient country, to consult with their Parliament about the terms of the deal?"

Highlights of the program were webcast live on the Bank website, with IMF and AfDB also taking part in the main roundtable discussion. The event was organized by EXTEU, which is responsible for Bank relations with parliamentarians, and the PNoWB, in cooperation with the Bank office in Pretoria and AFR. Sixty field offices around the world were involved in the preparations.



Jean-Christophe Bas, World Bank development policy dialogue manager (center) introduces Saumura Tioulong of Cambodia (left) to President Wolfowitz. Billow Kerrow of Kenya looks on.

Voice and Empowerment

The last 20 years have witnessed a tremendous increase in the voice and empowerment of populations. The number of countries with electoral political systems has almost doubled during that time, with now more than 120 countries having elected governments.

Parliamentarians approve budgets; they hold the power of ratification and are the final arbiters of economic policies in their countries. As democratically elected representatives, they have tremendous potential in the oversight of progress on official development assistance commitments

Perhaps their key role is in holding their governments to account, both for their pledges as donors and for their anti-poverty strategies as developing countries: the executive branch has the power to make promises, but parliamentarians have the power to ensure those promises are kept.

Country-Level Engagement

The Bank engages with parliamentarians internationally through this valuable forum, but the most important engagement is probably at the country level. About one-third of offices report monthly contacts with parliamentarians. EXTEU has facilitated the creation of active PNoWB regional chapters in East and West Africa, India, the Middle East and North Africa, and Southern Eastern Europe, which are interacting with field offices on a regular basis, and is currently working on a guide book on Bank field offices' work with parliamentarians.

Capacity-building programs have been carried out in 22 countries to strengthen budget oversight and financial management, and more than 6,000 MPs have attended WBI training and seminars in just over ten years. In addition, country assistance strategies systematically include consultations with Parliamentarians.



Left to right: IMF Managing Director Rodrigo de Rato, African Development Bank President Donald Kaberuka; Mamphela Ramphele of South Africa; Norbert Mao chairing the session; President Paul Wolfowitz, and South Africa's Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel in a roundtable session on Africa

For more information about Bank work with parliamentarians or PNoWB, please contact Jean-Christophe Bas or Naye Bathily (EXTEU) or visit these websites: www.worldbank.org/parliamentarians and www.pnowb.org