

How to Note



Political Parties

1. PREFACE

The promotion of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights are key priorities in Danish development cooperation. Denmark's strategic priorities for support to democratisation and human rights identify the deepening of democracy and the realisation of human rights, as the two thematic focus areas for Danish engagement.

The purpose of this How to Note is to provide hands-on guidance and inspiration on how to put these strategic priorities into practice in Danish development cooperation.

This How to Note focuses on one particular aspect of the support to deepening democracy – the promotion of democratic political processes through the development of pluralist political systems based on accountable and legitimate political parties.

Support for accountable and legitimate political parties alone will rarely be sufficient to achieve and sustain democratic governance.

It should complement other related governance efforts – such as electoral reform, constitutional reform, parliamentary strengthening, judicial and legislative reform, and the strengthening of the media, and of civil society. Further guidance on support to some of these areas is provided in separate How to Notes.

This Note introduces the purpose of Danish support for accountable and legitimate political parties (section 2); identifies key questions to consider prior to initiating such support (section 3); suggests a number of possible entry points for supporting accountable and legitimate political parties (section 4); identifies possible elements in support for accountable and legitimate political parties (section 5); provides guidance on how to monitor and evaluate such support (section 6); and concludes with suggestions for further reading (section 7).

Danida's How to Notes provide brief technical guidance and inspiration for programming choices in Danish development cooperation. This and other How to Notes are available at www.danidadevforum.um.dk.

Contributions aimed at enhancing the content of this Note can be sent by email to the Technical Advisory Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark at devforum@um.dk.

Key Messages

Danish support for accountable and legitimate political parties should be:

- Based on an inclusive multi-party and non-partisan approach, as well as on clear criteria including the respect for human rights.
- Designed to benefit the party system as a whole and promote multi-party dialogue.
- Provided as one element among others in support for democratic governance.
- Provided jointly with other relevant multilateral or bilateral development partners. It should, furthermore, be channelled through intermediaries, such as multi-donor support mechanisms or institutions specialised in providing technical and other assistance to the development of pluralist political systems.

2. THE PURPOSE OF SUPPORT

The purpose of support for political parties is to promote democratic political processes through the development of pluralist political systems based on accountable and legitimate political parties.

Domestic accountability is key to realising developmental objectives. The institutions of state and civil society form a chain of accountability between the people and government, ensuring that the policies enacted are in the best interests of the people whose needs they are designed to meet. In emerging democracies, political parties play a pivotal role in the development of a democratic culture and in linking the public with the political system. An effective party system is vital to securing a stable political settlement and a quality of governance that is responsive to citizens' concerns.

Ideally, political parties play a vital role in:

- **Articulating:** They provide the main channel for articulating issues of public concern within the institutions of representative democracy and the public arena.
- **Aggregating:** They develop coherent policy platforms reflecting differences in public opinion – providing the basis for the elec-

torate to choose between governing policies and styles during elections.

- **Governing:** They form the basis for the executive and legislative branches of government, providing the organisational structure for ruling and opposition groups.

Political parties also potentially play a central role in the development of a democratic political culture – not least through the engagement of the youth.

3. KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Until recently, development partners have been reluctant to engage directly with political parties. However, there is a growing recognition that political parties can be important allies in securing democracy – just as they can be the root cause of many of its deeper problems. The experience with support programmes to accountable and legitimate political parties is, however, still rather limited.

The political sensitivities around working with political parties provide a set of specific questions that development partners need to consider to avoid accusations of political interference or partisanship. Across the different systems and contexts, the type of questions that support programmes should consider include:

What is the context? The starting point for developing a party assistance programme must lie in a detailed understanding of the institutional and political context of political parties. This includes understanding:

- The institutional framework – the political system, the electoral system, party laws (such as registration and financing) and other relevant legislation – and how this influences the constellation of parties, their behaviour and performance. In some countries, legislation may determine whether, and to what extent, political parties can receive foreign financial contributions.
- The political factors that determine how the parties were formed (such as liberation movements), their relationship with the electorate (including possible geographical, ethnic, religious or tribal lines of division), and how they relate to each other.
- The challenges, opportunities and needs arising from the current economic and socio-political context – such as whether the country is emerging from conflict; whether it is transitioning

from a one-party system to multiparty democracy; or whether it is moving from central planning to a more open, market based economy.

What are the needs for capacity development? The design of support programmes for accountable and legitimate political parties must also be based on a thorough mapping and capacity needs assessment of the parties. Some of the issues that need to be considered include:

- The number of political parties.
- Whether parties are based on personal or policy differences.
- Whether parties exploit lines of division in society (such as geographical, ethnic, religious or tribal divisions).
- Whether political parties feature internal democratic structures.
- Whether the skills of the politicians and party staff are adequate.
- Whether political parties ‘hibernate’ between elections.
- The extent to which minorities and vulnerable groups, including women, are represented in and by political parties.
- The distribution of power between parties. In some countries, one party may historically have dominated the legislative and the executive, while power may alternate more frequently in other countries.

The context analysis and needs assessment should provide the basis for deciding whether it will make sense to engage in support for accountable and legitimate political parties.

What is the rationale for the programme? If it is decided to provide support to political parties, it needs to be clear to all stakeholders why the support programme is being developed, what resources will be provided, how they can be used, and the results that can be expected from the support. For example:

- Assistance for political parties should not be used as an endorsement or mentioned as part of a campaign.

- Support should bind political parties to certain responsibilities for disseminating good practice or meeting certain internal standards of democracy.
- It is always helpful to start a programme by spelling out an exit strategy, defining the terms on which and when assistance will cease.

Identify the criteria for eligibility. In principle, support should be available for all registered parties – whether represented in parliament or not. In some cases though, it may not be possible, or desirable, to work with every political party. It may be necessary just to work with parties that are represented in parliament, or some political parties may fall short of the standards expected within democratic systems (such as respect for human rights). The criteria for eligibility need to be clear and transparent – such as only working with parties that respect human rights, behave responsibly, meet certain prescribed legal standards and are committed to internal reform.

Be aware of the electoral cycle. The electoral cycle is the single most important factor determining the activity and outlook of a political party. Working with particular parties shortly before or during election periods will be particularly sensitive. By the same token, the lull between elections provides a suitable period to work with parties on their internal organisation and administration.

Which are the most suitable methods of support? The biggest criticism of the traditional approach to party assistance is that it relied too much on training – and on trainers that were neither suitable nor relevant to the intended beneficiaries. Trainers were accused of not understanding the political context and using materials that were developed for an idealised political party model from Western Europe or North America. The structure and content of training in particular needs to be built around the needs and aspirations of the party members, staff and politicians to whom it is directed.

How can the support best be designed to benefit the party system as a whole? A party assistance programme should be built around activities that strengthen both political parties and the party system as a whole. This is likely to involve a long-term commitment involving activities that deepen the political culture and reinforce the institutional framework. It also means that the objectives of party assistance need to be co-ordinated with other elements of a democratisation strategy – including for instance the strengthening of parliaments, of

electoral laws and commissions, of constitutional commissions and processes, of civic education, and of a free press.

Which other development partners and institutions provide support to political parties? A range of development partners (and other actors) work with political parties, providing opportunities for co-ordination and collaboration. The main actors in party assistance can be broken down into four categories:

- Multilateral agencies and institutions such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the European Union (EU).
- Bilateral agencies that provide support as part of their wider development and democracy assistance.
- Foundations that engage specifically in party-to-party support who generally work with sister parties, such as the German Stiftungen.
- Institutes that pursue multi-party projects, such as the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy (NIMD).

The Danish Institute for Multiparty Cooperation, an autonomous and independent institution established by law in 2010 on the initiative of the government, combines a party-to-party approach with a multi-party approach.

In Uganda, six development partners, including Denmark, have developed a Deepening Democracy Programme that involves support to enhancing the integrity of elections, institutionalizing an effective multi-party system, strengthening parliamentary autonomy and oversight, encouraging civic engagement and strengthening a free media.

Key activities of the support to an effective multiparty system include grant making and inter-party dialogue. The support is provided through an intermediary (a programme management unit) and NIMD has been contracted to promote inter-party dialogue.

4. POSSIBLE ENTRY POINTS FOR SUPPORT

Before development partners became more active in working with political parties, support mainly came from political party foundations in Western Europe and North America. Such support typically involved a foundation working with their sister party in an emerging democracy, supporting them to develop their internal structure, their policy, and their election campaigns.

While the party-to-party model of assistance undoubtedly benefits some, its focus on individual parties has obvious limitations. The ultimate purpose of support should be to develop pluralist political systems that improve the quality of representation to the entire electorate. As a result, development partners engaging in this field are seeking to combine support to several parties with measures to strengthen the party system as a whole. There are at least five dimensions that provide potential entry points:

Reinforcing the legal and regulatory framework. The quality of political party and election law will have a significant effect on the way in which parties operate internally, and the way in which they engage with each other and the public. Laws which apply to party finance may offer a specific way of tackling corruption. Support to the legal and regulatory framework can thus have a major impact. Such support could be provided, for example, by:

- Helping to assess the current state of party law and understand how it affects the actions of political parties.
- Providing assistance to revise the legislation where party law is deficient.
- Assisting political parties to apply and abide by new regulations.

In Ghana, the Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy (NIMD) worked with the Accra Institute for Economic Affairs to facilitate dialogue between political parties about the need for political reform. In 2006, the parties worked together to commission a representative group of consultants to undertake a wide-spread public consultation on how democracy had fared since independence. The findings were collated to produce the Democratic Consolidation Strategy Paper, which included a review of the state of democracy and recommendations for political reform. Political parties have pledged their support for many of the reform measures. These have been incorporated into three bills on the funding of political parties, the review of the political parties law, and presidential transition. These bills are supported not only by the political parties, but also by the government – which recognises that they were the fruits of multiparty collaboration. The process has not only prompted political reform but has also helped to build democratic culture and understanding between political parties in Ghana.

Strengthening internal party structures. The basis on which most agencies engage with political parties is that they must develop coherent structures and processes of internal democracy. This involves, for instance:

- Strengthening of internal management and administrative processes.
- Improving the transparency and accountability of the organisation so that decision-making is based on consultation, that members can influence the leadership, and to ensure the party's financial arrangements are legitimate.

Improving links between political parties and the public. Effective political parties need both 'listening' and 'speaking' skills. Understanding the concerns of the public means engaging in a variety of consultation techniques ranging from the most basic of public meetings to more sophisticated opinion polling and focus group workshops. But parties also need to be able to turn these insights into policy and then communicate these to voters.

Working with parties in parliament. Although part of the wider grouping of 'political parties', parties in parliament have distinct duties within the legislative body. They therefore need an internal structure that allows them to both pursue their own party policy, and to carry out parliamentary oversight and accountability. They also need staff

that are capable of organising and communicating with politicians. These needs can often be addressed within the framework of parliamentary strengthening programmes.

Fostering multi-party dialogue. As development partners have become more concerned with stabilising the politics of fragile and post-conflict states, interest has increased in promoting multi-party dialogue amongst political parties. Facilitating multi-party dialogue can prevent a relapse into conflict, and it can also serve as the basis for agreeing system-wide reforms amongst the key political actors. Such dialogue can be seen as an end in itself, but it should also form a part of all activities with political parties. It can be used to build inter-party cooperation around economic and social reforms essential to pro-poor development. If the political parties have youth branches, these should also be incorporated in activities.

5. KEY SUPPORT ELEMENTS

The initial context and stakeholder analysis and capacity needs assessments, must guide the decision on whether to support political parties, which specific objectives to pursue, which elements to include in the support, as well as their sequencing and the exact combination of technical and financial support.

Guiding principles for Danish support for accountable and legitimate parties include that it should be:

- **Based on an inclusive multi-party and non-partisan approach as well as on clear criteria**, including the respect for human rights.
- **Designed to benefit the party system as a whole and promote multi-party dialogue.**
- **Aligned with wider governance and development objectives** such as poverty reduction. For example, parties could be supported to articulate the concerns of the public within debates surrounding national policies and strategies. Party assistance should also be aligned with support for other governance and democracy institutions, such as parliaments. Party support programmes should always consider the role that parties play both in and outside of parliament, ensuring that both the objectives of support and support activities themselves are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

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- **Locally owned.** Party members and other key stakeholders should be involved in the design, delivery and management of support programmes. Identifying and supporting agents for change is important for ensuring that assistance is relevant and sustainable.
- **Providing long-term support with lasting effect.** Promoting a democratic political culture requires long-term support over multi-year periods. Long-term presence will also help to build trust and understanding. It is, therefore, important to be realistic about what can be achieved in certain periods of time. Programmes should also be designed to be relevant to the work of politicians in their day-to-day lives – one-off events that provide little support for politicians to apply and integrate lessons into their work have limited impact.
- Where relevant, **democracy support should be integrated with peace and state building processes.** Deferring support for political parties in the name of security or development can risk entrenching political interests that lie at the heart of instability and underdevelopment. Democracy, rule of law, economic development and security should be brought together and balanced as part of an overarching development and peace building strategy.
- **Harmonised with the support of other development partners.** Support for political parties should be provided jointly with other relevant multilateral or bilateral development partners. It should, furthermore, be channelled through intermediaries, such as multi-donor support mechanisms or institutions specialized in providing technical and other assistance to the development of pluralist political systems.
- **Provided in a transparent manner.** External support to political parties may be seen as politically sensitive in many countries. It is therefore of paramount importance that information on the amount and type of assistance is made publicly available.

There is limited experience with support programmes to accountable and legitimate political parties and there is no single template for providing such support. However, **possible elements include:**

Legal advice to improve party regulation, including on party finance. The decision to revise a party law is a political one, which will usually need to emerge from agreement between the political parties them-

selves. However, developing or revising political party legislation requires legal expertise and support programmes can provide such expertise and advice to political parties in the process of developing new regulations.

Technical advice on implementing party laws. Adopting a new party law is only the first part of the process. It is important that support programmes also incorporate measures to promote the legislation so that party officials and members apply it. Such measures might include the development of simple guides to the new law or working with party officials to develop new internal processes so that the political party meets the requirements for registration and reporting its activities. This is particularly important with regards to anti-corruption measures, such as full disclosure of party financing.

Capacity development within political parties. To have a lasting effect, support for capacity development must address the individual, institutional and organisational levels. Programmes that seek to improve internal structure and administration should also seek to build internal expertise through long-term support to party staff – including skills and leadership training for women. Often the best sources of advice are those with direct experience of running or organising a political party in another country. Existing or former party officials can be drawn from a number of different countries to help devise and implement new processes. They can provide direct advice through a programme of visits, and track progress over that period. Exchange visits can also be useful, provided they are built around specific objectives and outputs – for example, the promotion of a more gender balanced representation in political parties.

Preparing candidates or elected politicians for the work in parliament may also improve parliamentary performance – for instance, by focusing on the cross-party work carried out in committees such as legislative or public accounts committees.

Linking parties with the public and civil society. Political parties should form a bridge between civil society and the various branches of government. In many countries, parties and civil society organisations are driven by very different views of politics and tend to regard each other as part of the problem rather than part of a solution. Working with parties to develop inclusive policy-making and consultation processes might range from providing advice on consultation techniques, to holding open policy development forums with invited participants from different sections of society (including women and the youth).

Training as part of a wider party assistance programme. Workshops, seminars and other forms of training are most effective when they are used in conjunction with other elements of a support programme or based on a training-of-trainers approach. For example, in helping party members to understand the implications of changes to party law or working with prospective candidates, including women, on selection processes. The participation of candidates in specific knowledge networks (such as the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics) can be particularly useful. Training might also be used as part of a long-term process of political education for party members about the role and function of parties in a democracy. However, training must be perceived as relevant – appealing to the needs and interests of the intended beneficiaries – and not be solely driven by donor preoccupations.

Fostering cross-party collaboration around specific policies, including the promotion of gender equality. Programmes may seek to bring together members from different parties around common policy interests. One example, adopted by International IDEA in Peru, is to bring together representatives of the women’s wings of the various political parties. This has had a dual effect in improving collaboration between the key female figures in the political parties and providing new ways of pursuing common gender equality issues within all parties.

In Colombia, a coalition of 10 development partners used a series of indicators to rank the inclusion of women in political parties and assess efforts to address inequality. The coalition ranked the parties according to levels of gender inclusion and presented the findings at an inter-party workshop. This helped to instil a degree of competition on gender inclusion between political parties. And it provided development partners with the opportunity to help parties formulate strategies for addressing inequality.

Providing ‘neutral’ forums for multi-party dialogue. Cross-party collaboration should form part of any wider party assistance project. However, in particularly sensitive contexts such as post-conflict environments, there may be a case for simply providing a forum within which opposing parties (and their youth branches if these exist) can discuss political issues. In this sort of project, development partners act as a ‘host’, creating the basis for negotiation so that multi-party dialogue becomes both a means to party strengthening and an end in itself.

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Measuring the results of support to political parties is critically important for accountability and learning purposes. There is, however, still relatively little knowledge about what works under what conditions. This in part reflects the number of challenges associated with monitoring and evaluation of support to political parties. The first challenge is in defining reliable and valid indicators to monitor change at the output, outcome and impact level. This presupposes that clear and realistic objectives have been agreed. Moreover, indicators should be defined in consultation with programme partners at the design stage to enable a solid baseline. Output level indicators may include measures such as the number of multi-party roundtable discussions held or number of people trained.

However, the real challenge is in defining indicators at the outcome and impact level. Outcome level indicators may include the passage of a political parties law or campaign finance law. Indicators at the impact level may relate to changes in political behaviour and culture – such as a more open process of candidate selection or evidence of improved feedback from constituents. It is paramount that the selection of indicators is done in close consultation with the political parties and draws as much as possible on data already collected by them.

Another challenge exists in identifying realistic methodologies to assess change and prove that a particular project or programme contributed to it. Programmes should focus not only on monitoring the achievement of results, but also on the process and context. In-depth case study evaluations may prove useful in understanding the degree of success achieved and identifying lessons learned. For example, programme theory evaluations can be used as a way to appreciate upfront the importance of contextual factors and to test the logic of intervention. The initial context analysis should inform this work by identifying the most significant external factors impacting on the programme. Such factors may include the importance of social movements and private sector organizations, as well as the role of parliaments.

How to Note on Political Parties
June 2010

Publisher
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
Asiatisk Plads 2
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Denmark

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Internet: www.um.dk

Design: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
Print: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
Photo: Mikkel Østergaard

The publication can be downloaded or ordered from:
www.danida-publikationer.dk

The text of this publication can be freely quoted

ISBN -978-87-7087-389-5 (print version)
ISBN -978-87-7087-390-1 (internet version)

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7. FURTHER READING

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