

**Resource Mobilization for Effective Capacity
Building
for Sierra Leone Parliament**

By Mrs Finda F. Fraser

Introduction

Located on the west coast of Africa, Sierra Leone lies between longitude 7 and 10 north of the Equator. The country, as you all may know, went through a devastating eleven year conflict which led to a complete breakdown of the socio-economic and institutional fabric of the country. In spite of the horrors of conflict, the nation and the people have moved on.

The Parliament of Sierra Leone, the legislative arm of the State, has the constitutionally mandated role of law making, representation and oversight and lies at the very crux of good governance. While the Parliament has been in existence since 1961, because of various historical reasons including the one party rule, conflict, etc. the Parliament of Sierra Leone was never enabled to play its mandated role in the past.

It is only now, with the passing of the Parliamentary Service Act, 2007 which established the Parliamentary Service Commission and the setting up of the different departments in the parliamentary service by 2012 that a conscious effort is being made to strengthen the democratic governance in the country. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which supported this process also undertook an assessment of the donor support for Parliament.

At the end of the exercise, in order to promote transparency and to avoid duplication of efforts by partners, UNDP assisted Parliament in 2012 to set up the Parliament Assistance Coordination Office, namely PACO which I am heading.

\

Having said that, I wish to point out that Parliament still lacks the resources to carry out essential capacity building measures for both the Members and staff which is critical for Parliament to emerge as a credible and accountable institution of governance. Unless and until the systems in Parliament are strengthened with adequate capacity building of staff, the legislative, oversight and representative role of Parliament will continue as before. And this will continue to negatively impact the quality of overall governance in the country.

For this Parliament requires regular, sustainable resources to focus on vital areas of parliamentary functioning.

Challenges to resource mobilization

- **Notwithstanding the fact that Sierra Leone is considered a success story in terms of having bounced back from a devastating 11 year conflict, it continues to be a fragile state. The breakdown at the institutional level, caused by the recent Ebola crisis, merely substantiates the point. The overall fragile governance setting makes many donors wary of political disturbances and to that extent, support for political institutions like**

Parliament becomes more difficult. Unfortunately, the situation is not viewed as an opportunity to strengthen governance processes to counter the fragility in governance.

- **Donor support to the executive, places financial resources at the disposal of the executive and governance to that extent becomes more centralized and thereby making the other arms of the state, namely, the Parliament and the Judiciary more dependent on the executive. This makes a further dent on the application of the principles of separation of powers, a critical dimension for improving overall governance in a country.**

- **In Sierra Leone, many donors provide budgetary support to the government.**

Parliament as an institution is dependent on the executive to provide funds

for its functioning. Given the tight financial setting, budgetary allocations for

Parliament cater primarily for the salaries and other maintenance issues

leaving very little for the actual role of holding the government accountable.

There are no measures in place to ensure a degree of financial independence

for Parliament for carrying out its constitutionally mandated tasks. To

**perform its oversight and representational role, Parliament has to invariably
depend on the support of other partners.**

- **In this context, the recent EVD crisis in the country, has rightfully resulted in attention of donor partners on building essential health infrastructure.**

However, I notice that the overall approach of the donor community leaves Parliament, an institution which has the role to hold the government accountable, somewhere in the background. It would be appropriate to support Committee on Health, Committee on Social Welfare and other related departments and staff within Parliament with critical information and skills

to enable them to conduct effective oversight to improve the overall health sector in the country.

- **Another noticeable fact, is that often, the policy making role of MPs is neglected by donor partners who perceive that after every general elections there are new Members who then require capacity building all over again. They tend to forget that investing resources on an MP in turn helps in passing essential knowledge to the community.**
- **Now that the parliamentary service has been established, it would be worthwhile to invest in capacity building of the staff who are permanent**

members of staff and the knowledge bearers of Parliament and would be in a better position to support the new Members of Parliament and the committees.

Be that as it may, the reality is that the Parliament of Sierra Leone is cash strapped, with very limited resources from the national budget to carry out its mandated tasks. At the risk of repeating, the challenges include:

- Limited annual budget allocation for Parliament to effectively perform oversight functions;**

- **Inadequate resources to effectively capacitate staff to support Parliamentary Committees and MPs to perform fiduciary oversight of Ministries, Departments, Agencies, Local Councils and sub vented agencies;**
- **Donor dependency to finance key Parliamentary functions which is also not forthcoming;**

- **Unwillingness of other partners to support as the information is available in the public domain that Parliament has a Grant Agreement with ACBF to the tune of USD2 million. Unfortunately, for reasons beyond the control of Parliament, we have received less than USD 400,000 and the Grant agreement also finishes by June this year.**

- **Given the scenario, wherein a new administrative set up is being established for the first time in Parliament of Sierra Leone, and the government itself is unable to budget sufficiently for parliamentary activities, and there is insufficient support from partners, it is extremely difficult for Parliament to play its constitutionally envisaged role. In**

fact, the only consistent partner is UNDP which provides essential technical support in addition to funding a few activities.

By way of conclusion, I may add that for the Parliament of Sierra Leone in order to mobilize resources the following are being considered:

- Approaching new donors with the new Strategic Plan 2016-18 for Parliament;**
- Proposing changes through the on-going constitutional review process for more financial autonomy for Parliament to carry out its functions;**

- **Establish a budget office for Parliament in order to support effective scrutiny of financial and budgetary matters of the government by Parliament and thereby better planning and transparency in terms of allocations for Parliament from the national budget.**

I thank you all for your kind attention.

