



Research Article

The Role of Parliaments in African Development Planning

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Abstract

This article explores the evolving role of African parliaments in shaping, legislating, and scrutinizing national development plans. Emphasizing their lawmaking, oversight, and representative functions, it analyzes how African parliaments engage with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), foster accountability, and confront barriers like executive dominance and resource constraints. The article draws on country case studies and includes charts to illustrate parliamentary engagement, highlighting emerging trends and best practices for effective development planning in Africa.

Keywords: African parliaments, national development plans, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), legislative oversight, accountability, executive dominance, resource constraints, parliamentary engagement, development planning.

INTRODUCTION

Parliaments stand at the heart of democratic systems, entrusted with representing the population, making laws, approving budgets, and holding the executive accountable. In Africa, their effectiveness directly impacts whether national development plans genuinely reflect citizens' needs and how efficiently such schemes are implemented and monitored. As countries commit to ambitious frameworks—like the SDGs, Agenda 2063, and various national visions—the quality and independence of legislative institutions are increasingly vital to sustainable, inclusive growth^{[1][2][3]}.

2. Theoretical Foundations: Parliaments and Development Planning

Development planning involves defining medium- and long-term policy frameworks that shape economic and social priorities. Parliaments contribute by:

- Legislating enabling laws and frameworks.
- Reviewing and approving national development plans and appropriations.
- Monitoring executive action and policy implementation through committees and inquiries.
- Ensuring that planning processes are participatory, inclusive, and evidence-driven^{[1][2][4]}.

Parliament's Main Functions in Development Planning

Function	Description
Lawmaking	Passes laws critical to development priorities—e.g., education, health, jobs
Oversight	Scrutinizes government agencies, policies, and public spending
Representation	Articulates citizen needs, especially marginalized groups
Budget Approval	Reviews and approves national budgets underpinning development plans
Policy Review	Monitors and debates national development strategies and results

3. Legislative Engagement in Africa's Development Agendas

3.1 National Development Plans

Parliaments are expected to:

- Debate and adopt flagship development plans (e.g., Vision 2030 in Kenya; National Development Plans in Tanzania and Uganda).
- Provide legal backing and legitimacy to multi-sectoral strategies.
- Promote continuity and reduce policy reversal during political transitions^{[2][3][4]}.

3.2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

African parliaments have formalized mechanisms to:

- Establish parliamentary SDG committees.
- Track implementation and align national plans with SDG targets.
- Hold public hearings on SDG progress.

- Encourage gender-sensitive and inclusive policymaking^[3].

4. Oversight, Accountability, and Good Governance
Effective oversight is essential to ensure that development policies:

- Are implemented transparently and efficiently.
 - Benefit targeted populations.
 - Avoid leakages, inefficiencies, and corruption.
- Parliamentary committees routinely review government budgets, summon officials, and audit development outcomes^{[1][5]}. Inadequate scrutiny can result in undetected mismanagement, with losses estimated over \$140 billion annually due to corruption in Africa—funds that could transform sectors like health and education^[1].

5. Participation and Inclusion
Parliaments act as forums for popular participation, enhancing the legitimacy and responsiveness of development plans by:

- Including marginalized groups—women, youth, local communities—in consultations.
- Encouraging public debates and grassroots engagement.
- Supporting civil society organizations’ input into legislative processes^{[3][6]}.

6. Barriers and Challenges
Despite their mandate, African parliaments often contend with:

- **Executive dominance:** Strong presidential systems may sideline legislative input, especially in planning.
- **Limited capacity:** Shortage of technical staff, data, and research undermines effective scrutiny.
- **Weak democratic culture:** Legacies of one-party rule and patronage erode the independence and assertiveness of legislative bodies.
- **Inadequate resources:** Budgetary and technical support for committees is often insufficient^{[5][6]}.

7. Case Studies: Zambia, Tanzania, and Uganda
Zambia and Tanzania

- Parliaments in these countries have expanded their development planning influence by:
- Creating special committees to review national development plans.
 - Conducting field visits to assess progress of World Bank- and donor-financed projects.
 - Increasing budgetary oversight, targeting sectors like education and health^[6].

- Uganda**
Uganda’s parliament plays a leading role in SDG oversight by:
- Integrating SDG targets into legislative review.
 - Mainstreaming SDGs into budget scrutiny and performance assessment.

- Routinely engaging in public debates on SDG implementation^[7].

8. COMPARATIVE TRENDS AND DATA
8.1 Budget Share Approved by Parliament (2023 Estimate)

Country	Budget Share Subject to Parliamentary Approval (%)
Kenya	100
Uganda	100
Tanzania	97
Nigeria	100
Ethiopia	95

8.2 Parliamentary Committees on SDGs (2024)

Country	Dedicated SDG Committee Exists?
Ghana	Yes
Kenya	Yes
Senegal	Yes
Ethiopia	No
Rwanda	Yes

9. GRAPHS AND DATA ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Functions of African Parliaments in Development Planning (2024)

[image:1]

Figure 2: Parliamentary Oversight Activity (Number of Budget Hearings, 2022–2024)

[image:2]

10. Emerging Best Practices and Policy RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthen Parliamentary Capacity:** Invest in data analysis, research units, and staff training to enhance scrutiny and policy impact^[6].
- **Institutionalize SDG Mechanisms:** Create or reinforce committees that monitor SDGs and major development goals^[3].
- **Promote Transparency:** Use open parliamentary proceedings, online platforms, and regular progress reports to build public trust.
- **Deepen Partnerships:** Collaborate with civil society, private sector, and international organizations for evidence-based, participatory planning^{[2][3]}.
- **Shield Parliaments from Excessive Executive Control:** Legal and constitutional reforms are needed to guarantee genuine oversight powers^{[1][6]}.
- **Support Gender and Youth Inclusion:** Affirmative strategies to promote women and

youth participation in parliaments and their committees.

11. CONCLUSION

African parliaments are pivotal for meaningful, accountable, and inclusive development planning, transforming broad policy aspirations into realities that serve all citizens. Their ability to legislate, oversee, represent, and scrutinize is expanding with new institutional innovations (such as SDG committees) and growing public demand for accountability. However, real progress depends on addressing persistent challenges—strengthening institutional independence, expanding technical capacity, and promoting inclusive, participatory democracy. In the future, empowered parliaments will remain at the forefront of Africa's transformation and sustainable development^{[1][2][3]}.

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