



## **Strategic Vision 2023-2024**

### **African-European Parliamentarians Initiative (AEPI)**

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# **AEPI Strategic Vision 2023-2024**

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## 1. Introduction, Context and Mission

It is AEPIs firm belief that strong parliaments – in their role as arbiters of peace, stability and prosperity – lie at the heart of long-term development and the realisation of human rights. Accordingly, we strive to strengthen African parliaments and promote human dignity by supporting democracy on the continent.

Our strategy is to put our efforts towards achieving SDG Goal 16: ‘Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.’

It is our vision that parliamentarians will be able to fulfil their role as the democratically elected voice of the people. They have a constitutional mandate and a sworn obligation to represent the people’s interests. Unfortunately, many African parliaments do not have the resources, or even the capacity and skills required to carry out their role effectively. In some cases, governments tend not to prioritise funding for parliamentarians, and often donors tend to fund civil society organisations. But it is the parliamentarians who are directly accountable to the people. Bypassing parliamentarians weakens democracy, undermines development efforts, and often leaves citizens without a policy-level representation of their rights and needs.

Years of experience have demonstrated that networks of parliamentarians have proven to be important vehicles for enhancing their individual and collective capacity and effectiveness, especially in the developing world. The World Bank said in a recent report that *‘the importance of networks in developing capacity and improving the effectiveness of parliaments and parliamentarians in developing countries was ‘a critical lesson’ they learnt from their work with parliamentarians.*

The uniqueness of AEPI is in its peer to peer learning that helps build the capacity and effectiveness of parliamentarians in Africa, whilst also providing invaluable insights and knowledge building for their counterparts in Europe. Exchanging with and learning from those who have faced similar issues, and who understand the ways of democracy, and the workings of a well-functioning parliament are invaluable.

The challenge today is to make aid even more effective in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The capacity of parliaments in Africa needs to be strengthened as the principal institution of representation, legislation and oversight. They need to participate in drafting national development policies and targets and receive progress reports from their governments. They should be able to promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.

In the past, AEPI has played an important role in leading the initiative to have parliamentarians represented in national and global aid discussions. Emphasizing the central role that parliamentarians should play in policy discussions. We aim to broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.

## **History of AEPI**

AEPI stands upon solid parliamentary experience in Africa stretching over 40 years. It has its roots in fighting apartheid in the early 1980s. Originally known as AWEPA and then AWEPA, it was formed primarily to mobilise Western European parliamentarians against Apartheid, supporting the anti-apartheid struggle in Africa, and the organisation of post-conflict and post-Apartheid democratic elections.

After the abolition of Apartheid in 1994, at the request of African partners, AWEPA continued its work to support democratisation processes and respect for human rights in Africa, through capacity building of parliaments. This enabled AWEPA to broaden its scope to other parts of Africa, where the end of civil war and undemocratic regimes gave rise to a growing demand for support to parliaments, political parties and democratic institutions in general.

The parliaments that AWEPA supported just after the first democratic elections developed into more democratic, and more sophisticated institutions. Whereas right after the elections, the needs of parliaments are usually quite basic and general, as the countries develop further, needs become more specific and complex.

After the cessation of AWEPA, many African parliamentarians and parliamentary institutions asked where they could find the type of invaluable support they had been receiving and still needed. At the same time, many of the European parliamentarians involved in AWEPA felt that the vital work needed to be continued. Thus, AEPI was formed to continue the important work.

## **2. Current Activities**

The requests from our African partners are broad. Within this AEPI decided to focus on two areas for the period of 2023-2024:

1. The East Africa region: The East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) and its partner states;
2. Strengthening its European network.

### **2.1 East Africa**

#### **2.1.1 East African Legislative Assembly (EALA)**

AEPI has been involved with the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) in Arusha, Tanzania since EALA's inception in 2001 as the independent, legislative arm of the East African Community. Today, the East African Community has grown from three original partner states to seven with the admission of the Democratic Republic of Congo in July 2022.

On 7th November 2018, AEPI and EALA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) agreeing to implement a parliamentary capacity building programme in East Africa. It was agreed that the programme would aim to build and enhance the capacity of EALA to meet the objectives set out in the Treaty for the East African Community. As the period of the MoU ends

in December 2022 we are currently in conversation with the Speaker about a renewed and updated MoU.

### **Facts about EALA**

EALA's core functions include law-making, approval of the Community budget and support of its programmes, liaison with National Assemblies of Partner States on EAC matters, and providing advice to the Council of Ministers on the implementation of the EAC Treaty. EALA carries its functions through bills, motions for resolutions, questions and reports of Committees. It consists of the legislature and the administrative division.

The overall objective for EALA has six Strategic Interventions:

- Legislation of Regional Laws.
- Establishment of a harmonised framework for EALA Members at National level.
- Establishment of an efficient and effective communication and reporting mechanisms between the EALA and National Assemblies.
- Establishing and strengthening the legislative, oversight and representation functions of EALA that have clear linkages to those at national levels.
- Establishing Standing Committees in Partner States' Parliaments responsible solely for EAC affairs.
- Promote and branding EAC corporate image.

The political structure includes the office of the Speaker of the Assembly, also the Head of the organ. The Assembly has a Membership comprising of nine Members elected by each Partner State's National Assembly plus ex-officio Members consisting of the Ministers and Deputy/Assistant Ministers responsible for the EAC Affairs from each Partner State, the Secretary General of the EAC and the Counsel to the Community. The Clerk heads the administrative division.

### **The East African Parliamentary Institute (EAPI)**

EALA passed the East African Parliamentary Institute (EAPI) Act, providing the legal framework for establishing a parliamentary training Institute. Once operationalised, EAPI will be the first regional Parliamentary Institute in Africa to provide a unique opportunity for Parliamentarians and other stakeholders within the East African Community to sharpen their skills in parliamentary matters. It will also be the think tank of the East African Parliaments on how to deepen democracy and fast-track regional integration. The role of the Institute will also be to contribute to the effective and efficient execution by Legislatures of their roles and functions in democratic governance; to participate in the preservation and transmission of parliamentary knowledge; and to provide directly, or in collaboration with other institutions of higher learning, facilities for parliamentary research, studies and training.

It is aimed to be a specialised resource centre for the training and capacity development of both Members and staff of EALA, member states' Legislatures and beyond the region. The project would aim to create an institutional mechanism for the delivery of capacity building interventions for Members, Parliamentary staff and stakeholders.

In 2021 EALA requested AEPI assist in establishing this regional parliamentary Institute. The rationale behind AEPIs decision to do is:

- **To continue the long-term partnership with EALA:** This support offers an opening to continue the long-term partnership and an opportunity to positively and sustainably influence policy at the regional level.
- **Follow-up on law enforcement:** It has been proven that supporting the enactment of laws without proper follow-up on law enforcement is a half-job endeavour. This point of entry provides an opportunity to follow up laws and policies from draft to enforcement.
- **Regional coverage:** The Institute would automatically provide access to policy-makers of one of Africa's biggest regional blocks. Such opening through interactions with staff and parliamentarians from the region would facilitate AEPI's work with the six-member states of the region.

The AEPI/EALA programme is highly demand-driven, and EALA Members and staff express a strong feeling of ownership for the programme. The work plans, both in terms of design and content, originate within EALA. In addition, EALA staff members are integrally involved in all aspects of the programme's administration; this is to ensure the sustainability of the programme.

### **Training modules produced**

AEPI developed six training modules and proposed an organisational structure for the Institute. The modules developed for delivery fall into six different but related categories.

#### **Part 1** *Staff training on Enhancing the Capacity of Staff to Support the Assembly and Members of the Assembly.*

This module targeted Parliamentary Staff in the six East African Community Partner States. The capacity needs of staff per department seem to be diverse. It was thought that a generic course that covers common areas would be most appropriate to start. The key need to be addressed was thought to be 'Enhancing the Capacity of Staff to Support the Assembly and Members of the Assembly'. This course content includes:

- Functions of parliamentary staff in general and how to support Members and the Assembly for increased accountability and transparency
- Specialised staff functions in selected departments (committees, research, accounts, research, Hansard, records, procurement, general services and logistics etc.) and how they can increase support for accountability by the Assembly and by the Members. (This is the core of the training and can take two days)
- Requirements and tools for effective support to the Assembly and Members.
- Measuring the effectiveness of staff support through M&E and self-assessment tools

**Part 2: MPs training on EALA Rules of Procedures and Strengthening Leadership Capacity for Members of the Assembly**

For the Members, it was agreed to organise a course combining Commissioners and Chairs of the Assembly Committees while a general course including individuals from almost all departments. The course content includes:

- Objectives and functions of rule of procedure in parliamentary settings.
- Distinctive characteristics of regional parliaments compared to national parliaments.
- The EALA rules in the context of strengthening accountability and oversight- tools, mechanisms (questions, answers, debates, motions, bills, committees, executive reports) on the one hand and the accountability of parliaments and parliamentarians on the other. Case studies will be used.
- Rules and the regulation of the balance of power between the executive and legislature. This takes them through rules which government debates, questions, plenaries etc. in the context of ensuring fair play between legislative and executive participants in the Assembly.
- The leadership role of Parliament and parliamentarians in terms of types and typologies of leadership; positive and negative leadership styles; creating a legacy through transformative and servant leadership and tools of self-assessment on leadership.

intellectual property and its large network. Starting afresh gave the opportunity to modernise and streamline the structure and procedures, learning from and leaving behind unnecessary procedures. This has enabled AEPI to be more in tune with the development cooperation environment of today and is something we will continue to fine-tune over the coming years.

**Training delivery methodology**

Initial plans were to do the traditional face-to-face interactions with participants in March 2021. However, due to Covid19 prevention regulations, it was decided to try innovative techniques to deliver both trainings online. The training period was then used to record all course content on video and uploaded it online. A website that will eventually be owned by the Institute was created, and all content was uploaded in the form of videos and reading materials. It is an interactive platform where authenticated participants will be able to access all training materials, conduct a self-assessment based on the acquired knowledge and be able to auto-generate a certificate of completion once a participant has satisfactorily attended all assessments. Whereas the moderator might not be online all the time to answer questions, a chat forum has been created on the website where participants can post questions, and the moderator would respond intermittently. This website will be linked to EALA website as well as the websites of all seven national parliaments in East African Community.

**2.1.2 Parliament of South Sudan**

AEPI's parliamentary support capacity in South Sudan was able to resume when the country eventually managed to set up the Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA) in August 2021. The first activity began with a parliamentary capacity assessment, followed by a high-level workshop to assist TNLA in designing its strategic framework for the transitional period. The strategic plan defined the mission and vision from which a set of activities were derived.

A process of consultation within the TNLA was held in the form of a series of workshops spread over the year. During these consultations, the TNLA leadership was acquainted with the needs

ahead, identified available sources of experience, and defined priority areas and the required capacity development to carry out its functions effectively. From this series of workshops and several fact-finding missions, the strategic plan was drafted. Consideration was also given to the needs at the staff level, so there would be personnel trained to give the necessary facilitation.

## **2.2 Europe**

AEPI is registered in the Netherlands as an Association since 2018. It has a Management Board consisting of (former) parliamentarians from across Europe and across the political spectrum. Its membership consists of parliamentarians from donor countries, who also carry the role of overseeing the implementation of their countries' funding. There is also an Advisory Board consisting of both African and European parliamentarians.

European membership is a unique characteristic of AEPI. Its European members play a fundamental role as experts in its activities and as a lobby network for African development issues. European AEPI members volunteer their time to assist with this process.

We believe it is important for there to be a group of current and former parliamentarians from across Europe acting together to strengthen the voice for Africa in Europe, and to work together to assist the practical tasks of African Parliamentarians.

## **3. Strategic Objectives 2023-2024**

### **3.1 East Africa**

#### **3.1.1 EALA**

EALA and AEPI are currently in discussion on the next steps to take in the establishment of the institute EAPI. The modules produced over the last two years have been uploaded onto internet and now meetings and trainings can take place face-to-face, we are exploring possibilities.

Part of our strategy is to continue supporting EALA to enrich the database of both online courses and physical by producing more training modules. Plans are forming to create a programme that would aim to:

- Build and enhance the capacity of EALA to meet the objectives set out in the Treaty for the East African Community;
- Support capacity building to enhance EALA's legislative, oversight and representation performance in its 4th Assembly which runs from 2017 to 2022;
- Empower Members and staff of EALA to carry out their specific mandates through capacity building activities, training, study visits and exchange programmes and participation in international parliamentary activities.

#### **3.1.2 South Sudan**

In South Sudan, we plan to contribute to the implementation of their strategic plan. Following the signing of the peace agreement, the newly established legislative Assembly and its members have a critical role to play in South Sudan's quest for peace and stability. The Assembly needs to be supported to effectively perform its role in the new political infrastructure of South Sudan. It should be a place where potential sources of conflict can be aired and addressed publicly and



where issues of national importance including laws, government policies and other issues of public interest can be debated.

The principal task of the transitional Assembly is to establish the rule of law required to implement and give effect to the amended Constitution and to review it as necessary. There is a significant role for the legislature to play in defining the parameters of government, especially with regard to the implementation of the peace agreement.

The key priorities identified in the strategic plan include the constitutional amendments to conform with the peace agreement. However, with a new parliament whose majority members are also new to parliament, a series of induction courses are urgently needed to equip all parliamentarians with skills in parliamentary processes. South Sudan's Parliament now has a crucial role to play in the reconciliation process, and the establishment of a power-sharing government, not least due to the necessary constitutional amendments that require reviews and passage into law. Ordinarily, Parliaments are conceived as forums for peaceful conflict management – this purpose is especially relevant in South Sudan today. The evolution of Government towards a more parliamentary and less presidential system presupposes a growing role and responsibility for the South Sudan Parliament.

The strategic plan designed for TNLA caters for all these considerations highlighted above and provides for windows to adjust when and where need be to ensure that the pathways lead to the attainment of the peace agreement and democratic elections. There is a desperate need for training to help parliamentarians fulfil this intention and to create a strong, competent and inclusive institution with accountable and transparent governance that works in the people's interest. It is our aim to assist them in this process over the coming two years.

### **3.1.3 Further developments**

AEPI has a good track record in working with parliamentary institutes in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia who have requested assistance. Over the coming two years we will monitor developments in the countries.

Specifically, we would like to assess the feasibility to relaunch our work in Somalia. As AWEPA we had an extensive and effective programme, a good reputation and strong relations with the parliament. The country has found stability now and has recently elected a new parliament which needs all support in terms of capacity building.

AEPI maintains good rapport with the leadership of the current parliament. The renewal of the memorandum of understanding would be quickly drafted. Former AWEPA consultants are ready to reengage at a moment's notice.

## **3.2 Thematic Programmes**

Our strategy is first and foremost to help build strong, democratic institutions throughout Africa. We also have a history of assisting with specific, and important thematic areas in parliament which will assist in this, and assist in achieving various targets indicators of SDG 16.

### **3.2.1 Aid Effectiveness**

Since parliamentarians have the power to adopt policies, oversee budget implementation and monitor government performance, they should play a leading role in development policies and

aid programmes. A well-functioning parliament remains the cornerstone of democracy, with free and fair elections an essential pillar. Elections need to be coupled with and followed by effective parliaments, which exert the constitutional powers they possess.

One of the constitutional duties of Parliamentarians is to scrutinise activities and prevent abuse by the Executive arm. It is their role to put in place a continuous review mechanism to ensure timely course-correcting when/if necessary. The strength and effectiveness of a parliament depends on the extent to which parliament's operations remain determined by itself, but few African parliaments can determine and approve their own budgets, severely compromising parliamentary autonomy. Those parliaments with independent budget offices, such as Kenya and Uganda, prove more effective with budget oversight.

Most European parliaments have systems in place to hold the executive accountable for aid funds and programmes. They are kept transparent and accountable, and all official development programmes are available for examination by parliament. In many European countries, parliamentarians work closely with NGOs who alert them to concerns and can give detailed briefings for issues that need to be addressed and debates to be had.

If all countries had similar structures and oversight systems, then parliamentary partnerships would run much smoother, especially in the field of development aid. Transparency in both donor and recipient countries keeps the development budgets relevant and on track, and increases ownership. To be effective parliamentarians need to understand what this entails. In many countries in Africa, this is still too weak.

At the Second-High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (2005) it was recognised that aid could - and should - be producing better impacts. The Paris Declaration was endorsed in order to base development efforts on first-hand experience of what works and does not work with aid. In 2008 at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Accra, all OECD donors, more than 80 developing countries and some 3000 civil society organisations from around the world joined representatives of emerging economies, the United Nations and multilateral institutions and global funds in the negotiations leading up to and taking place during the Accra meeting.

AEPI's Vice President led a parliamentarian delegation to Accra, ensuring that from that point on parliamentarians would be part of the aid effectiveness debate. AEPI believes that parliaments are at the centre of the domestic accountability cycle. It is vital that they are able to hold their governments accountable. Without that oversight, aid is in danger of subverting accountability.

Whilst progress is being made, many African countries still rely heavily on foreign aid. Yet several studies have shown that foreign aid has failed to deliver sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. Critics point to the fact that official aid creates dependency. Others argue that foreign aid might not be a problem by itself, but misallocation of resources, corruption, and bad governance limit Africa's ability to use aid.

But substantive research has found that, in the absence of good governance and institutions, aid had minimal impact on delivering long-term growth. It's not the aid that is ineffective, it is the lack of good governance. This is why one of our strategies is to do work towards ensuring parliamentarians have the capacity, and understand their oversight role, in ensuring aid is effective.

### **3.2.2 Equal Opportunities**

It is AEPIs firm belief that all people should have a voice. This includes women, youth, people with handicaps and minorities. It is part of our strategy to work to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

From its inception, AEPI worked with women's caucuses and women MPs to empower them in their work and their lives. We have been involved in legislation concerning women's rights, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. We have trained youth and young parliamentarians and helped give them a stage.

We have been instrumental in bills being passed concerning the rights of women such as the ground-breaking 2016 SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children already in Marriage.

At the time of AWEPA's demise, we had established a Regional Parliamentary Network on FGM with MPs from eight West-African countries (Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau). We had also created an Anti-FGM/C Parliamentary Caucus in Kenya.

In Europe, we were also active in bringing gender related issues onto the agenda. For example, an active AEPI member worked to expand the Belgian law on FGM, making individuals who actively promote and facilitate FGM in Belgium also prosecutable and not only the implementers of FGM. The same parliamentarian also drafted a bill concerning medical support for victims of FGM/C.

These are just a few of the types of activities we hope to continue in the coming years. SDG 5 aims to 'Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls.' But as UN WOMEN's website states 'While women are a source of economic vitality across Africa, discrimination hinders their opportunities.' There is still a great deal to be done.

### **3.2.3 The Environment; Climate change and food security**

In the preamble to the 2030 SDG Agenda, world leaders affirmed that they are: "Determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations."

Increasing temperatures, rising sea levels, warming oceans, changing precipitation patterns and more extreme weather are threatening the ecology and human health and safety. If it continues food and water security and socio-economic development in Africa will be severely impaired.

Over the years AEPI has worked to assist with climatic issues in Africa. From conferences raising awareness on climate and food security to field trips with parliamentarians of the Lake Chad region, which has shrunk by 90 per cent over the last 60 years causing numerous problems in the region.

The FCO begins its 2022 report on 'Food Security and Nutrition in the World' by saying that their report 'should dispel any lingering doubts that the world is moving backwards in its efforts to

end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms.' Conflict, climate change and economic instability are combining to create a serious food shortage and raise the costs of nutritious food. The distance between achieving SDG 2 is growing rather than shrinking.

Governments play an important role in transforming their country's agrifood systems. Parliamentarians need to ensure that policies are in place to ensure better access to affordable nutritious food for all citizens. Guidance, training and awareness raising is needed in many parliaments in Africa. Focus needs to be given to their role and responsibility in ensuring investment is made in sustainable food production.

Achieving a more sustainable environment, and mitigating the effects of climate change is a goal that cross cutting through nearly all the 17 SDG goals. Specifically, it is mentioned in goals 2, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15. This crisis is something that affects every single person in Africa and is something we envision incorporating into our activities in the coming years.

### **3.3 Strengthening the AEPI lobby in Europe**

The bedrock of AEPI is its membership of parliamentarians who volunteer their time to work with their peers on both continents. It, therefore, remains a strategic priority to continue to expand our network of parliamentarians from across Europe. For the period 2023-2024 we will concentrate on the following activities in Europe:

- To rejuvenate and renew our network of AEPI members;
- To also assist in keeping African issues high on the agenda in Europe and to assist in strengthening the role and unity of the European and national development cooperation agendas in relation to Africa.
- To keep members involved through regular and professional communication and dialogue;
- To facilitate the pro-active and timely approach of members who demonstrate an interest in participating in AEPI activities.

### **3.4 Leadership**

As with the membership, due to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 expansion of the AEPI leadership was put on pause. Process is underway to expand the Management Board which is aimed to become concrete in the early part of 2023. This will bring on-board well-established parliamentarians from a number of European countries with a solid track record who can contribute to the next phase of AEPI's growth.

Alongside this, the AEPI Advisory Board has become latent. African ownership of our activities is intrinsic to our work. The advice of African (former) parliamentarians is an important part of the partnership of parliamentarians from both continents. The aim is to rejuvenate this important body with new, influential and committed members.

### **3.5 Internal Functioning**

There is a trend in the donor funding to put money into large projects and large basket funds or to local Civil Society Organisations. This leaves little space for an organisation such as AEPI which has a unique and important role to play.

Part of our strategy is to build on our strengths such as our short line of command, enabling us to respond to a need within 24 hours. Overhead costs are kept down low, ensuring that the majority of the resources our partners donate to us are used for the objectives and mission of the organisation. AEPI works with consultants, which enables basic costs to be based on actual work done, and limits ballast during less active periods of a specific activity.

Over the last two years, AEPI has developed a series of policies and procedures to ensure transparency, safety and effectivity. This includes various forms and HR and reporting systems. In the specific it includes:

- Governance Structure
- Code of Conduct
- Financial Policy
- Protocol Budget Approval Procedure
- Anti-Bribery & Anti-Corruption Policy
- Procurement Policy
- Monitoring & Evaluation Framework

All of these can be found at [www.aepi-international.org](http://www.aepi-international.org).

Work will continue in the coming two years to improve and solidify our transparency and accountability and the sustainability of our work.