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TANZANIA

CASE STUDY

Civil Society Meets Parliament

Members of Parliament and civil society groups exchange ideas



Photo: Habari Communication/Abdul Njaidi

A civil society representative discusses her organization's work to eradicate female genital mutilation in rural areas with Deputy Speaker Anne Makinda, right, in Dodoma, Tanzania.

“A mutually beneficial relationship between civil society and parliament can enhance the efforts of both groups ... This opportunity for interaction is an important step towards cementing such a relationship,” Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Honorable Anne Makinda.

Telling Our Story
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Challenge

Following Tanzania's general elections in 2005, the number of Members of Parliament (MPs) from mainland Tanzania increased from 295 to 323. Of those, 170 are new to parliament. During their five-year term, the MPs must tackle challenges such as reducing poverty, natural resource conservation, and reducing barriers to development, including gender inequality, corruption, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Also, they must fulfill their mandate of applying checks and balances to the executive branch and represent the needs of their constituents.

Initiative

Civil society organizations can play an important role in helping MPs fulfill their duties. They provide legislators with the technical expertise and knowledge necessary to take action. Relations between the parliament and these organizations, while growing, are still in their infancy. With support from USAID, these organizations hosted an exhibition for MPs to become acquainted with their work and expertise. Representatives from organizations from across the country met Tanzania's elected representatives at the legislative capital of Dodoma, in central Tanzania. Organizations working on a variety of reforms and public policies placed their lobbying and advocacy agendas directly before those empowered to enact the nation's laws. Now, when MPs want to learn more about the implications of a specific policy, they will know where to turn for more information.

Results

Over 250 MPs and senior government officials attended the two-day event, where Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Anne Makinda delivered a message about the crucial relationship between MPs and civil society. The exhibition promoted dialogue between MPs and civil society representatives, who also participated in radio interviews taped during the exhibit. The radio messages on human rights, domestic violence, and the rights of the disabled reached citizens in rural areas who have few opportunities to hear their leaders and civil society representatives address these important issues. The relationship between MPs and civil society is still young, but now it has a foundation on which to grow and fully mature.