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The impact of Exposure and Dialogue Programmes (EDPs) on German parliamentary work and decisions

by RUTH MÖLLER

This article is based on extracts from the report of the International Workshop on the Promotion of Participatory Development Processes in the Fight Against Poverty and Exclusion.¹ The author, Ruth Möller, is Senior Development Policy Officer with the Social Democrat Group in the German Federal Parliament. She presents an account of the history of German MPs' participation in EDPs since 1985. She then discusses the impact of an EDP in which a whole parliamentary working group, the Study Commission on Globalisation of the World Economy, took part. Although both the President of Parliament and this parliamentary working group now recommend EDPs, the author acknowledges that there is still a long way to go before EDPs are fully institutionalised in the German Parliament.

During the 14th election period, the German Parliament established a Study Commission (Enquete) on 'Globalisation of the World Economy – Challenges and Answers' with 13 Members of Parliament (MPs) and 13 external experts. The final report was presented to Parliament and published in June 2002.² The report shows how knowledge, experience,

and recommendations for political action can be achieved by direct dialogue at the grassroots level in developing countries.

As part of the study, the Study Commission decided to participate in a short Exposure and Dialogue Programme (EDP) with the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India.³ This was not the first time German MPs had participated in an EDP. However, as far as I know, this was the first time that an entire parliamentary body had taken the opportunity to participate in an EDP.

History of MPs' participation in EDPs

The first EDPs in which MPs took part were in 1985 and 1987. Several more took place between 1987 and 1997, most of which were hosted by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. However, planned lobbying for the participation of MPs really started after the 20th EDP hosted by the Grameen Bank, in 1997.

During the reflection phase of this EDP, Mohammed Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank and 2006 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Karl Osner founder of the EDP Association, Mr Pinger, a German MP, and I as a staff member spoke about ways of ensuring that EDPs could become instruments of parliamentary work. The EDPs would be offered by self-help organisations and

¹ The workshop was held in Lehnin and Berlin, from 29 February to 3 March 2004. It was initiated by the EDP Association.

² German Federal Parliament printed paper 14/9200, 12 June 2002.

³ SEWA is an Indian organisation formed by women who are working in the informal sector.

banks such as SEWA in India, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, and CARD (the Centre for Agriculture and Rural Development) in the Philippines and Laos. Knowing what parliamentary work is like, and taking into consideration the tight schedules of the members, it was clear that a normal EDP of one week or more would be difficult for MPs. So we proposed specially designed short exposures on demand. The idea was that the opportunity to do an EDP could be offered to MPs on their way to, from, or during official visits. I proposed this in my exposure report, which was given to all MPs.

In 2000, a delegation of four members of the parliamentary Committee for Economic Cooperation and Development (AWZ) had an EDP with CARD. After this visit, the delegation sent a letter to the President of the Parliament recommending that these kinds of experiences be supported.

More and more MPs took the opportunity to participate in an EDP. Parliamentary evenings were organised by the EDP Association during which MPs could interact with Mr Yunus from Grameen, Ms Bhatt from SEWA, and other leading people from EDP partner organisations.

The Study Commission EDP

From 7th to 16th February 2002, a delegation from the Study Commission visited the special administrative region of Hong Kong in the People's Republic of China. They then travelled to India, visiting Delhi, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad. In India, the visit primarily focused on the impact of the country's greater integration into world trade, especially in the IT sector, and aspects of development cooperation. For this purpose, a meeting with SEWA was also organised. During this time, delegates took part in a 2-day EDP. As part of this, delegates spent one day and one night in the houses of some SEWA members. During this time, they experienced their hosts' hardships first-hand by sharing some of their daily tasks and listening to their life stories.

Although agreed upon from the very beginning, it was still not easy to have this EDP realised for the Study Commission. Before leaving, not all of its members were convinced of its positive effects. In addition, the Administration and even the President refused experts' participation, even though they had full member status on the Study Commission, with equal rights and votes on the report and any recommendations decided upon. This situation changed when the President of

Parliament, who was also a member of the executive board of the EDP Association, sent a letter recommending EDPs for all working committees of Parliament.

Impact of the EDP

The experience of the EDP had a positive impact on the work of the Study Commission. The situation in developing countries and for their citizens became clearer and led to discussions on political recommendations. The experience of this short EDP with SEWA led to detailed statements and recommendations regarding micro-financing, combined with social security and support for women more broadly. It also referred to the role and economic importance of the informal sector. Another aspect of the recommendations was to maintain internationally sanctioned social and environmental standards.

This EDP also led to recommendations concerning parliamentary work itself. The final report presented to Parliament said officially and publicly that MPs should take the opportunity to combine their international talks and travels with a short EDP administered by Parliament. The Study Commission stated that, especially in times of growing internationalisation, networking, and interdependence, it is of great importance for Parliament to have an instrument like EDP at hand.

The current status of EDPs

Now, both a parliamentary body and its President recommend the EDP process. However, participation by MPs is still a question of having an intense personal interest and being able to convince contacts. As the German Parliament has not yet institutionalised this instrument of EDP, the role of the EDP Association is very important in informing members, preparing them, and helping them to reflect on what can be done upon return.

Working in Parliament, I try to support the EDP unofficially where I can. So we are headed in the right direction with a growing number of participants. But institutionalisation is still a long way off. EDP is an instrument to open eyes, hearts, minds, and thoughts. But it will constantly need people and infrastructure for providing information, and assisting with preparation and reflection on exposure and dialogue. It will need an organisation and time for lobbying in Parliament because political situations and challenges change – as well as Parliament members and majorities.

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