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Models of Empowerment and Governance for Sustainable Development of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Prospects and Potential

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Abstract

Empowered national parliaments are the foundation of good governance, an essential aspect for sustainable development. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has everything a country needs to develop. Its vast and rich mineral deposits could have made it one of the most prosperous countries in the world. The DRC has the second lowest nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the world, yet a majority of its citizens struggle to survive. Natural mineral deposits are grossly mismanaged with no clear accountability on how they are exploited. Mismanagement of public offices, corruption, theft from public coffers, nepotism, dictatorship, selective justice, and a lack of rule of law all point to the deep-rooted culture of incompetent and unethical leadership. This is a case study of the National Parliament in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Data was collected from members of parliament and civil society organizations using one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The findings show a structurally disempowered parliament that is deprived of all necessary tools to enable essential operations. To effect positive change, the parliament needs to be provided with structural, financial, and operational autonomy. A clear demarcation needs to be drawn, separating the National Parliament from the Executive to enable the Parliament to operate independently from the grip of the Executive.

Key Words: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), empowerment, good governance, sustainable development

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Introduction

Empowered national parliaments are accepted as the most crucial public institutions that ensure representation and oversight, and perform national legislative duties. Additionally, national parliaments represent symbols of integration and national unity in a nation. Various development partners and stakeholders, such as the European Union and World Bank, argue that building a democratic system provides a sustainable pathway that countries can use to empower their national parliaments, create good governance, and promote socio-economic development. The European Union and World Bank have thus persuaded nations around the world to strengthen their public institutions by empowering their national parliaments (Brack, 2018). Empowered national parliaments are autonomous, adequately staffed, and have access to and control budgets. This enables them to conduct their parliamentary duties effectively, duties such as legislating good laws and providing oversight over other arms of government. Additionally, empowered national parliaments control the calendar of their activities and regulate the activities of political parties in a transparent and accountable way (Bicketon & Puetter, 2015; King & Ivor, 2013).

In countries that are economically and politically developed, there is trust between the society and the government. In addition, they have mature democratic systems of governance where the governments are allowed to govern to a certain level, while strong parliamentary institutions built into the system provide necessary checks and balances on such governments (Vries, 2013). Daft (2016) has noted that in order to build strong and legitimate institutions, a set of intangible values and norms must shape their behavior. This includes the expectations of people and organizations in the external environment of an institution which put pressure for the institution to conduct its activities in a proper and correct way. Zarrouk (2014) argued that good governance and solid national parliaments as public institutions are an essential catalyst for sustainable development and have been recognized by the international community as a major pillar of the development agenda.

Statement of the Problem

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has for a long time experienced authoritative style of leadership, corruption, nepotism, injustice, lack of accountability, lack of inclusiveness among many other things that has led the country to unending strife and wars. The country faces massive structural constraints on governance and this has resulted in severe levels of poverty, low socio-economic development, poor infrastructure, a deeply rooted culture of clientelism,

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decades of burdensome and violent conflicts and an absence of trust by the Congolese masses on their institutions and state agents (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018). State institutions such as the National parliament, which are tasked with providing checks and balances on government, suffer from a lack of professionalism, corruption and a dismal performance (Gnassou, 2017). These structural and systemic problems have significantly contributed to the contemporary socio-economic and political state in the DRC which is riddled with a major governance crisis. In spite of the country's vast natural resources, the country is yet to fully harness and use them for the sake of the public good. For instance, the DRC has, in part, the second largest rainforest in the world which also cuts across Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Gabon. This rainforest cover accounts for more than 18% of all the remaining rainforests in the world. About 57% of DRC land is covered by forest and very fertile soil, such that crops can grow without the application of fertilizers (Damania et al., 2016). The world's second largest river, the Congo River, waters the country, and thus irrigation and land cultivation are possible year-round. The DRC has the world's fourth largest dam with a capacity of producing 1,775 Mega Watts (MW) of electricity. Despite its abundance of water and fertile land, the DRC imports flour, rice, and maize from Pakistan, Zambia, Tanzania, and other countries (Eric et al., 2017; Sondi et al., 2018). Because the country has been poorly governed, it has not developed its agricultural sector.

The DRC is endowed with abundant mineral deposits such as cooper, titanium, gold, rare diamonds, tin, casserrite, cobalt, uranium, coltan, and oil (Geenen & Marysse, 2016). Its vast and rich wealth deposits could have made it one of the most developed and prosperous countries in the world. Ironically, the DRC has the second lowest nominal GDP in the world, and a majority of its citizens continue struggling to survive (African Development Bank, 2018; Vogel & Musamba, 2017). The natural mineral deposits are grossly mismanaged with no clear accountability on how they are exploited. They are neither sustainably exploited, nor have a majority of citizens benefited from this resource. The mismanagement of public offices, theft from public coffers, wanton destruction of environmental resources, corruption, nepotism, dictatorship, selective justice, and a lack of rule of law all point to the deep-rooted culture of very low levels of competent and unethical leadership. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how to empower the DRC National Parliament to promote good governance for the sake of sustainable development.

Review of Related Literature

Theories of Empowerment

Empowerment Theory

The Theory of Empowerment is associated with Swift and Levine (1987) who asserted that empowerment encompasses both processes and outcomes. According to the theory, activities, actions, or structures can be empowering, and any outcomes from such processes result in a certain level of empowerment. However, Zimmerman (1995) clarified the Empowerment Theory further by analyzing it on a psychological, institutional, and community level. According to

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Zimmerman (1995), empowering processes are the ones which seek to gain control, acquire needed resources, and critically understand the social environment of people or institutions. Conversely, empowered outcomes encompass the operationalization of empowerment, and in an institutional construct, outcomes include institutional networks, acquisition of resources, policy making, and the realization of goals (Zimmerman, 1995).

According to the Theory of Empowerment, changes in attitudes and beliefs significantly determine the participation of people in the processes of social change. The theory assumes that individuals are more likely to work for the common good when they develop a sense of critical consciousness (Gutierrez, 1995). Zimmerman (1995) posited that empowered people or institutions have the power to take decisive steps to address problems that affect their immediate environments. Therefore, empowered institutions, specifically the national parliament, must be autonomous, independent, and free to make decisions that promote good governance for sustainable development to be realized.

Structural Empowerment Theory

This theory was put forward by Kanter (1993) in their renowned work, ‘Men and Women of the Corporation’. According to the Structural Empowerment Theory, individuals or groups within an institution are affected by certain contextual factors, which determine how effective they are in discharging their work. The theory posits that people are influenced by four essential social structures that they should be able to access within an institutional context. These are information relating to work and the institution, opportunities to advance and grow within the organization, support from colleagues, subordinates and leaders, and the availability of resources in terms of materials, personnel, sufficient time and adequate financing. Kanter (1993) argued that when members of an institution access these empowerment structures, the chances of them accessing formal and informal power are increased. Kanter further noted that power is more likely to bring with it more power as a result of accessing the structural empowerment elements, thus empowering the members of an institution.

Further, the theory asserts that when the structures of opportunity and power are adequately availed, members of an institution get a sense of empowerment which makes them committed to their work, and have a sense of autonomy and control (Kanter, 1993). On the contrary, members of an institution who feel that they are powerless will often experience a sense of failure pertaining to their work; this then leads to a culture of negative behaviour and to attitudes such as disengagement and lackadaisical work practices which negatively impact on the overall performance of an institution (Kanter, 1993). This theory explains the lack of structural empowerment factors that have negatively affected the Congolese National Parliament and have made it an ineffective institution.

Members of the National Parliament in the DRC are not adequately structurally empowered, which has often resulted in them being powerless in terms of executing their full constitutional mandate. As Kanter (1993) asserted, a sense of being empowered only arises when elements of structural empowerment are adequately provided to the members of an institution. As such, the theory sufficiently describes what empowerment means in the context of institutions

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which is the main focus area for the current study. Additionally, Wagner, Cummings, Smith, Olson, Anderson, and Warren (2010) noted that structural empowerment is a precursor of psychological empowerment. Evidence in literature has confirmed this relationship, which links high levels of structural empowerment to psychological empowerment (Hagerman et al., 2017). This theory helps explain the type of structural empowerment needed in the National Parliament in the DRC in order to enable it perform its constitutional duties and mandate.

The Benefits of an Empowered Parliament

Evidence in literature reveals that empowered parliaments have a strong association with good governance and sustainable development around the world (Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption, 2018). Strong national parliaments ensure that proper oversight practices are secured in the fundamental state structures, laws, constitution, and parliaments own procedural rules (Juncker et al., 2015). Empowered parliaments are bequeathed with adequate human, financial, and capacitation resources that enable them to oversee executive functions and independently control these resources (Adiputri, 2018). Bonenberg and Kaplinski (2018) argue that an empowered parliament improves the quality of governance in a society and as a result ensures that development occurs in a sustainable manner. Additionally, the need for ensuring that national parliaments are stable and work effectively has led to concerted efforts to promote strong and empowered parliaments as key public institutions (GOPAC, 2018).

In Europe, Denmark is built on a parliamentary system of governance. Their parliament is empowered with the mandate to oversee the activities of those in government and keep them accountable to the electorate. Denmark's system has promoted a culture of civility, rule of law, liberty, accountability, and good governance (Laursen et al., 2017). The Danish constitution has given its parliament power to protect citizen liberties and freedoms. These are enforced and respected, and for a long time Denmark has been ranked among the top governance bodies in civil liberties and political rights (Laursen et al., 2017). The Danish parliament is independent from state manipulation which has given the institution autonomy in the conduct of parliamentary business. The independence of the Danish National Parliament has given the institution power to oversee the Executive, protect the rights of its citizens, and ensure that freedoms and political rights are protected in the country (Laursen, et al., 2017). Additionally, according to Transparency International (2018), Denmark is ranked as one of the least corrupt countries on earth. This integrity has contributed to Denmark having a culture of good governance and thereby having the foundation for sustainable development of the country.

In Germany, the constitution ensures that a parliament's members are elected in free, equal, fair, and secret elections – all criteria being essential prerequisites for an empowered parliament (Friedbert et al., 2017). Germany also has a parliamentary council for sustainable development which is in charge of supervising the government's sustainability strategies (Friedbert et al., 2017). This council, which is reconstituted after every parliamentary election, has moderate political influence on the activities of the parliament. This has made the council a strong advocate for long-term development practices (Friedbert et al., 2017). Therefore,

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Germany has one of the strongest parliaments in the developed world, one which has promoted a culture of good governance and effective national development.

In Africa, Ghana recognizes the National Parliament as a key public institution that is responsible for providing oversight over the Executive, and for restraining the Executive from carrying out acts that are beyond its mandate (Draman et al., 2017). The electoral process is regarded as open and fair, and governance of the country by those in power is based on transparency, participation by citizens, accountability, and the use of modern technologies for good governance (Draman et al., 2017). The Ghanaian National Parliament provides strong oversight over the Executive and other public institutions, and this has provided a culture of good governance in the country. Botchway (2018) observed that Ghana is on a good path, marching toward consolidating its democracy, and improving the quality of governance, thus ensuring sustainable development. Additionally, Ghana continues to enjoy a good reputation of having one of the most stable democracies on the African continent (Botchway, 2018). This has resulted in Ghana being regarded as a beacon of democracy and good governance on the African continent.

In Botswana, there is a parliamentary democracy which has resulted in government functions being conducted in a democratic manner. Elections in Botswana are free, fair, and transparent, and the government is responsive to the needs of the electorate (Lewin, 2018). Botswana has empowered watchdog institutions such as the Ombudsman, an anti-corruption parliament, and an independent electoral commission. The Constitution in Botswana empowers the parliament to inspect and report on how public accounts have been used in all government departments and parastatals (Sebudubudu, 2010). The country has a strong and empowered National Parliament that is effective in discharging its activities (Lewin, 2018). The Executive is thus kept in proper check by the National Parliament. This has promoted a culture of good governance which has positively impacted on development and reduced poverty in Botswana.

However, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, public institutions, notably the National Parliament is undermined and largely controlled by the Executive (Shephard, 2014). The National Parliament has failed to shape political discourses largely because of a lack of institutional frameworks and incapacitation (Afoaku, 2010). Parliamentarians lack adequate staff, facilities and have insufficient budgets to effectively do their work (Trefon, 2013). Trefon further argued that there is a persistence of parliamentary powerlessness, and as a result, Parliament has failed in its mandated constitutional obligations by not adequately providing oversight over the Executive. In analyzing the Congolese Parliament, Afoaku (2010) concluded that the opposition in the Parliament is not only weak in capacity, but is also highly fragmented, thus making it ineffective in challenging the ruling coalition. The oversight role that Parliament was tasked to do is almost non-existent in the Congolese Parliament, as noted by Trefon (2013). Therefore, it can be concluded that the DRC National Parliament is severely disempowered.

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Elements of Empowered Parliaments

Autonomy

Autonomy of parliament is at the core of the role of the parliament, and is tasked to do legislation, give the government authorization to spend public money, and provide oversight to government institutions. Muheeb and Aiyede (2018) asserted that institutional autonomy of parliament is at the heart of relationships between the executive and legislature. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2017), parliaments need formal powers to enable them to oversee the activities of the executive as established in law and in the rules of parliament.

The autonomy of parliament can be classified into three categories:

(a). Financial Autonomy

Parliament needs financial independence in order to enable it properly perform its duties. Money is a powerful tool as it commands authority, gives freedom, and enables the parliament to meet the needs of the House independently without begging from the executive. Financial autonomy includes having a budget to hire and pay staff, pay the salaries of MPs, as well as meet other needs arising in the parliament. In cases where the parliament lacks control over its staff and budget, discharging its duties becomes impossible (Adiputri, 2018). When there is no money, the parliament becomes a prey of the executive.

(b). Operational Autonomy

This includes giving parliament independence to make laws, pass motions, and provide oversight. The executive needs to also respect the institution and not interfere with its functions. A separation of powers gives the institution independence to carry out its functions without interference from other arms of government, notably the executive (Juncker et al., 2015). The executive will often resist giving up power to parliament. However, to effectively empower the parliament, the executive must cede some power, for only then can parliament attain autonomy, an essential and internationally accepted good practice (IPU & UNDP, 2017).

(c)Administrative Autonomy

This function includes controlling activities and resources pertaining to offices, equipment, computers, vehicles, and the freedom to setup up its calendar of activities. Providing these administrative resources will equip parliament to discharge its functions (GOPAC, 2018). An empowered national parliament controls its own budget, staff, and calendar, thereby strengthening the institution to effectively play its oversight and legislative role.

The Contribution of Opposition in Parliament

The opposition in parliament encompasses all movements and political parties that are not part of the parliamentary majority or the government coalition, and those who primarily voice their critical views or disagreements concerning actions by the government. Sanyal (2015) observed that empowering the opposition includes providing avenues for the opposition to set the agenda

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for parliament, or force the government in power to convene a parliamentary session. This involves creating time within the parliamentary calendar to allow the opposition to question parliament, seek amendments, or challenge government programs and activities (IPU & UNDP, 2017).

An effective way through which the opposition can be empowered to keep the government in check and force it to talk about issues is through parliamentary questioning. Opposition parties often have interests of exposing failures in governmental policies which draw the attention of the government. Often, in empowered parliaments, parliamentary questions are asked by members of the opposition party (Vliegthart et al., 2013). A strong opposition monitors the government or ruling coalition through raising issues that are of public concern. A strong opposition plays a special role in providing oversight and checking the excesses of the government or ruling coalition, and therefore there is a need to protect the rights of the opposition as set out in parliamentary rules (IPU & UNDP, 2017).

Parliament can only fulfill its role when members of the House enjoy certain rights such as the freedom of expression. They must also be free to receive, seek or impart information and ideas without any form of fear of reprisal (IPU & UNDP, 2017). According to the literature reviewed for this study, the opposition in the DRC is weak, fragmented, and often unable to provide oversight over what the government is doing. Often, the opposition is manipulated or bought out by the ruling government which consequently weakens and compromises the role it ought to play in checking the same government. There is thus an urgent need of empowering the opposition in parliament as a way of empowering the institution to enable it to fulfil its role in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Research Method

This is a case study of the National Parliament in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Data was collected from a sample comprised of members of parliament and civil society organizations using one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The focus group dialogue was open and free-flowing. They were willing to contribute to what they believed could be used in the future to better their lives through improved leadership of the parliament. Data was analyzed thematically.

Findings of the Study

Structural Empowerment

The study reveals that most respondents want an empowered parliament, equipped with offices, computers, staff, and other bureaucratic materials to make their operation stress-free and effective. A respondent stated that:

It is really inconveniencing that when I need to see my MP to discuss things pertaining to my constituency. I have to go searching for his private office. Some of these MPs don't even have a private office and operate from their homes. To go to somebody's house to discuss official matters can sometimes be

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questionable, because in case he is a male MP, his wife may not understand what is happening. And the setting of a private home, instead of a public office, turns an official matter into a kind of private one.

The respondents felt that the DRC's National Parliament was not empowered according to its current state. They want a parliament that is well equipped with offices for every parliamentarian, ensuring privacy and better accountability. One respondent believed that it would be impossible to hold MPs accountable without giving parliamentarians their own public offices, as being in the parliament building is the only place where a working MP is seen as working for the people. There was an obvious lack of trust in MPs working from their private offices as that venue provided little accountability for "being on the job".

Budget and Financial Empowerment of the National Parliament

Budgeting is an essential tool that sets or limits the operations of government. One respondent stated that "Parliament cannot achieve much without a good strong budget. The budget of our Parliament is just like the budget of a very small private institution [in scope], which is why the Parliament is weak and incapable of standing on its own." Respondents were unanimous in their opinion that the budget of the National Parliament was very poor and did not reflect the big country it was representing. Budgetary failure is further reflected in these two comments:

The budget of the National Parliament is always challenged by the government arguing that it does not have enough money to meet the Parliament's proposed budget, thus, parliament has to come up with a smaller budget in agreement with the government. The government's job is to collect taxes and to make sure that the budgetary needs of the Parliament can be met. We cannot have a strong, effective Parliament without a strong, good budget that meets the needs of the House.

The respondents believed that the Parliament's budget shortage was one of the major aspects that made it vulnerable to the demands of the executive, making it vulnerable to rampant corruption.

The budget has always been a projection, made in terms of the needs of the House. It is unfortunate for the government to say that there is no money. The government must create more ways or channels of revenue collection, and not resort to requiring the Parliament to cut their budget and come up with something that is impossible. How can the Parliament function properly without a proper budget to meet its needs? We cannot have a strong Parliament with a poor budget. The budget represents what kind of institution our Parliament is.

A budgetary deficiency which the majority of respondents addressed was the arrears of salaries, which they understood to be due to the Executive not adequately budgeting for salaries. It was

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felt that the Executive used money as a weapon to subject the Parliament to its demands. Therefore, making money available to the Parliament is paramount to allowing the institution to operate independently from the grips of the Executive.

Empowerment through Adequate Staff

The findings established that the National Parliament lacked adequate staff to effectively carry out its mandate. The National Parliament does not have the resources to hire its own staff and must request the Minister of Public Works for staff to be hired on behalf of the Parliament. MPs also lack sufficient support staff to do their work. One of the respondents expressed their concern in saying:

There are not enough staff to enable the National Parliament to carry out its work properly, and the few staff that are there are hired by the Ministry of Public Works, who decide whom to hire and whom to reject. The staff of the Parliament are answerable to the government rather than to the Parliament, because the government is the hiring agent. They have their allegiance to the government rather than to the Parliament.

There is no way the Parliament can do its work secretly because everything they plan will be automatically transmitted to the Executive because nobody knows the intention of the Executive or the purpose for hiring certain staff. Maybe they are placed there to spy for the government.

Given that the MPs do not have offices and have to lease their own private offices, they also must hire their own personal secretaries whom they compensate out of their own pockets. One Member of Parliament explained this, saying:

The staff that we have in the National Parliament are strangers to us, because they are always hired by the government. We have to hire our own secretaries to do our work, and we need to pay our own secretaries from our salaries. This is why, when there are certain bills in which the Executive has much interest, we ask for money, which turns to be corruption.

This approach to funding essential governance functions affects how parliamentarians do their work in that it leaves MPs with insufficient time to do their parliamentary work and can result in conflicts of interest and corruption. An empowered Parliament therefore needs to be given the autonomy to hire its own staff and the funding to have personal secretaries paid out of the budget of the Parliament.

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Empowerment through Security for Members of Parliament

In countries prone to dictatorship, security is one of the pillars of the parliament's empowerment. One-on-one interviews with parliamentarians revealed that security was one of their major concerns. Most MPs shared the opinion expressed:

The first time it came to my mind to join the Parliament, I believed that I was going to the National Parliament to change things, fight corruption, dictatorship, and most anti values [unscrupulous] behaviours experienced in the government. I thought I would use the institution of the parliament to change things. But, when I went to the parliament, I found a totally different environment with strange realities which changed my resolve. I said to myself: I rather keep my mouth shut, and live, than open it wide and die, leaving my children as orphans (MP 4).

The issue of security was mentioned by most MPs as being one of the pillars that has made the parliament vulnerable. MPs do not have police posted at their homes for protection. Police are only found in the premises of the parliament.

Most MPs stated that they were condoning behaviors and activities out of fear for their lives. During the interviews, one parliamentarian belonging to the party of the president expressed his fear, saying:

After the sessions of the Parliament, every person will go to his home to eat and sleep peacefully, including the people I have come to represent. Why should I be the one to die for others and be buried before my time? I am not Jesus Christ who came to die for humanity (MP 9).

The findings reveal that most MPs are against many of the activities that they do, but, do them anyway, out of fear for their lives. They do not want to be seen as opposing the government, which can bring dangerous repercussions on their lives, as well as impact their career as MPs.

Security is only given to MPs upon personal request; and in such a case, the Member of Parliament pays out of his own pocket for the soldier assigned to him. It is normally an arrangement between the Minister for Internal Security and the parliamentarian. An interviewed MP said:

Getting a security officer or two is only done upon personal request. And one can only be given [security] due to the personal discretion of the Minister of Internal Security, who can also decide to reject the request by the MP concluding that his life is not under threat (MP 7).

Remuneration for MPs

According to the respondents, MPs can go for several months without receiving their salary. Most MPs shared similar experiences, stating that their salaries do not always come on time, and

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that sometimes they do go through several months without their remuneration. According to some MPs, the government's delay to release pay for MPs is strategic and meant to make MPs vulnerable to the temptation of corruption. An interviewee MP 3 stated that "When you have not received your salary for several months and the Executive presents you an offer, it is very difficult to refuse."

It can be inferred that the Executive views the salaries of parliamentarians as them receiving a favor, rather than as receiving remuneration for work done.

Further, many respondents expressed their views that, once the budget is passed, the money belonging to the National Parliament should be deposited in the Parliament's account to avoid dependence of the Parliament on the Executive. This study's findings suggest that good governance appropriately finances parliament to fulfill its role and functions.

Autonomy of Operation in the Parliament

The findings disclose that the National Parliament of the DRC does not have autonomy in passing important bills or motions in the House. These include motions of defiance, motions of censure, motions aimed at the prime minister or a member of his government, motions of questions and answers, and parliamentary investigation. Respondents noted:

In the DRC National Parliament motions of censure are always fruitless because they are always done as a pretext to feed the eyes and ears of the public that the parliament is doing something, but in reality, the motion will end up bringing nothing positive. This is because in the National Parliament every motion that comes to the floor is dealt with according to the directives given by the head of state.

A respondent MP stated:

Having a total majority in the National Assembly, the Speaker of the parliament receives orders and directives from above in order to support the government by all means. The Speaker mobilizes all parliamentarians belonging to the party of the head of state and strategizes with them on how to vote, according to the directives given by the president. This means they do not achieve anything meaningful. Often MPs are bribed to vote in a particular way, to carry out the agenda of the executive (MP 5).

Therefore, the DRC National Parliament is just there as a puppet to legalize what has been decided by the head of state instead of independently conducting the agenda of the National Assembly.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

To enable the parliament to operate independently, it must be provided with structural, financial, and operational autonomy. A clear demarcation needs to be drawn, separating the National Parliament from the Executive to enable the Parliament to operate independently from the dictatorship of the Executive. Providing operational standards is also important because it helps MPs to understand their role as representatives of the people. This will enable the parliament to set its own agenda, hire staff of its own choosing, pass bills without interference from outside, and finance its activities from its own budget. Such measures will strengthen the DRC's National Parliament, enabling it to perform its role effectively and ensure that the public office is well managed to meet the expectations of Congolese citizens. Only an empowered National Parliament will be able to take the government to task and ensure that good governance practices are applied, thereby achieving the aims of a sustainably developed DRC.

Recommendations

- (i) To ensure the functional autonomy of the National Parliament, it is paramount that parliament set its own agenda, legislate laws, carry out debate, and pass bills and motions without interference.
- (ii) Members of parliament should be equipped with staff, office space, and equipment including motor vehicles, computers, and other managerial materials.
- (iii) The National Parliament, financed by public resources, should control its own budget and do so without any interference by the Executive.
- (iv) The Congolese National Parliament should increase its knowledge on how to effectively discharge its duties by studying countries ranking high in the Transparency Index and the Human Development Index.

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