

Political Party Funding Campaign, South Africa

I Fact Sheet

Name of Tool: Political Party Funding Campaign

Brief Description: This campaign advocates regulation of private funding of political parties in South Africa.

Responsible Organisation: The Political Information and Monitoring Service-South Africa [PIMS-SA] at the Institute for Democracy in South Africa

Creation of the Tool: The Political Information and Monitoring Service-South Africa, Institute for Democracy in South Africa

Problems Addressed by the Tool: Lacuna in party funding law created by the failure to regulate private funding of political parties. This situation has naturally led to conflicts of interest and opaque political party financing.

Areas of Work: Conflict of Interest, Political Corruption (Party Funding and Campaign Finance) and Access to Information in South Africa

When and Where the Tool was Implemented: The campaign was started in South Africa in August 2002 and as of July 2003 is still ongoing.

Alliances: Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Open Democracy Advice Centre, South African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC), South Africa Council of Churches (SACC) and The Black Sash.

Financing: Funded by the Department for International Development-Southern Africa [DFID-SA]

For Additional Information Contact:

The Political Information and Monitoring Service-South Africa
(PIMS-SA) at the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)
P.O. Box 1739
Capetown 8000
South Africa
www.idasa.org.za

II Objectives

The main aim of this campaign is to secure regulation of private funding of political parties in South Africa.

The following are some of the specific objectives of the project:

- To ensure the protection of a level playing field for the exercise of political rights where certain interests are not able to predominate over others.
- To encourage citizens to exercise their public rights and responsibilities and become informed, active voters with influence.
- To protect the right to freedom of expression, understood as a democratic right that contributes to the individual's involvement in robust political debate. Giving citizens access to information through the appropriate regulation of private funding of political parties would also be likely to minimise the undue influence of money on politics.
- To promote fair participation in the formation of government.
- To facilitate an open arena for public dissemination of information and opinion on political issues and thus to encourage transparency, where political actors are identifiable, and their affiliations, interests, objectives and resources made public.

It is important to clarify that in achieving the above-stated goals we consequently hoped to:

- Constrain undue influence on political parties, public representatives and the party in Government.
- Lessen the likelihood of, or at least reduce the incidence of, patronage.
- Make public patronage appointments in the public service and, more importantly, bring to light the relationship between certain Government decisions and large donations to a party in Government.

III Context

National

Allegations of irregular private funding of parties, such as the recent allegations surrounding German fugitive Jurgen Harksen's donations to the Democratic Alliance, have highlighted the importance of regulating private funding. Such allegations serve to deepen people's cynicism of politicians and politics. The regulation of party financing needs to be reviewed and properly strengthened.

Organisational

The Political Information and Monitoring Service-South Africa (PIMS-SA) at IDASA has already carried out extensive work on issues relating to party funding. It is this work and previous experience that facilitated the conceptualisa-

tion of this project. PIMS-SA has traditionally campaigned around issues of transparency, openness and accountability.

The campaign to regulate private funding of political parties started formally when the Prevention of Corruption Bill was tabled in Parliament. Civil society organisations were requested to comment on the Bill. While the Bill was an attempt to deal comprehensively with corruption and to criminalise it, there was a lacuna in the law, namely that there was no reference to regulating private funding of political parties. This has long been a weakness in what is an impressive array of South African anti-corruption laws. PIMS-SA/IDASA, together with five other civil society organisations, then formed a campaign group to focus on the importance of the issue of private funding of political parties and why regulation is important. The campaign group made submissions to Parliament regarding this in the context of the Prevention of Corruption Bill.

IV Implementation

- The initial focus of this project was to review the existing political party funding laws and, most importantly, the Prevention of Corruption Bill. During the course of the project, a submission was made to Parliament.
- Subsequently, PIMS-SA, along with its partners, co-hosted a conference on the issue. This conference drew together several leading Members of Parliament, civil society representatives and representatives of the Independent Electoral Commission [IEC] as well as overseas experts. This served not only to highlight the importance of the issue but also to hear from political parties what their position was on the existing regulation.
- In addition, PIMS-SA wrote articles in key South African newspapers on the issue, thereby drawing attention to it.
- PIMS-SA is currently involved in a civil society awareness campaign which involves focus group meetings with politicians, civil society organisations, business and the IEC. These meetings were due to be held around the country during August and September 2003.
- PIMS-SA is also engaged in lobbying Parliament on this issue as the Prevention of Corruption Bill has yet to be finalised. The campaign group has also made a submission to the Private Members' Bill Committee of Parliament.
- There is no envisaged limit to how long the campaign will go on as this depends solely on the successful passing of revised political party funding legislation. The PIMS-SA team is composed of a Manager and a few researchers collaborating with other partners on this project.

- Political parties in general and most politicians in particular have been reticent to review and regulate the process, level and origins of their funding. It has been difficult convincing them of the necessity of this project. This challenge is being addressed by intense lobbying and discussions linked to increasing public pressure on the subject.

V Results

Collective efforts have managed to bring this issue to the fore in the media and to mobilise key civil society organisations around this important issue. Furthermore, politicians are more welcoming to the idea of regulating party finance. It is hoped that this will eventually lead to the passing of a reviewed and strengthened political party finance bill.

VI Recommendations

Since this project is based mainly on campaigning, advocacy and lobbying, it would be useful to collaborate extensively with not only other CSOs and think-tanks, but also with political parties. Bringing people from all the different spectrums of society on board would help tremendously.

Description by: Judith February