

# Professional Performance and Development Seminar

## A Sample Orientation Handbook

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For more information, visit these organizations at the following websites:

UNDP <http://www.undp.org/>

SADC PF <http://www.sadcpf.org/general/contact.asp>

SUNY/CID <http://www.cid.suny.edu>

**Professional Performance and Development Seminar**  
**Member Orientation Handbook**  
*Improving the Lives of the People of our Nations*

**Introduction and Purpose**

Honourable Member of Parliament:

Parliamentary careers are among the most complex and challenging on earth. Competing demands – from one’s party, from the House, from the constituency and family – make the MP’s life a challenging balancing act. MPs are always “on the job,” whether walking the halls of parliament, interviewing an expert witness regarding a proposed legislative amendment, traveling abroad on a study mission, or greeting a constituent at the front door. There is no required or even prescribed course of study for becoming an MP. Doctors attend medical school; lawyers, law school; and even teachers attend teacher-training academies; but where do MPs go to learn to succeed in their profession?

MPs begin, and continue in their careers by winning elections, not through mastering training programmes or by passing qualifying exams. Most come to parliament not knowing just how or what they can or should do there, and they learn on the job. And in most nations, the job of an MP is becoming more difficult. Constituent needs and demands are growing; representation, lawmaking, and oversight responsibilities are expanding.

This Professional Performance and Development Seminar is designed to provide you with knowledge and opportunities for discussion that should help you optimise your performance as an MP. The foundation of this handbook and seminar is an assumption that more effective parliaments and MPs will help nations establish conditions under which a growing number of people will have real opportunity to improve their lives.

This handbook provides valuable information for MPs, both the seminar and handbook are divided into the following ten modules:

1. The Role of Parliaments in Strengthening Democracy; Comments on the Democratic Transition in [region X](#)
2. Roles of MPs: Representation and Constituent Relations
3. Roles of MPs: Lawmaking
4. Roles of MPs: Oversight
5. Roles of MPs: Parliament and the Budget
6. Parliamentary Committees
7. Political Parties in Parliament

8. Keys to Being a Successful MP
9. Parliament's Regional and International Roles
10. Building a Stronger Parliament

With few exceptions, each seminar module provides general and regional information on the theme, allowing you to compare your parliament and your experience with those of others; includes detailed information on your parliament's role in that theme area; and allows a generous amount of time for discussion with other MPs on that theme. Finally, each module addresses issues of gender in relation to the theme being covered. Used alone, the handbook provides general, regional, and gender information.

1

**The Role of Parliaments  
In Strengthening Democracy:  
Comments on the Democratic  
Transition in **Region X****

# 1. The Role of Parliaments in Strengthening Democracy: Comments on the Democratic Transition in **Region x**

[Put a comment on the situation in your region]

We need strong engendered democratic institutions, including effective, representative parliaments, if we are to be nations where women and men have real voice in public affairs and have the potential to improve their lives. Effective parliaments can help our people realize their potential.

Legislatures are *the people's branch* of government, the institution where citizen interests and preferences are expressed and transformed into policy, and the point which, at least potentially, people most closely engage their national government. As such, legislatures are key to achieving the democratic potential embodied in free and fair elections. While legislatures are central to democracy, they tend to inherit a position of weakness relative to the executive. Moreover, legislatures must function effectively to reinforce democracy and make public policies effective. If the voices of those most affected by government policies are not heard in the policymaking process, those policies will not be as successful as they can be.

Legislatures fulfill a number of important functions in a democracy: they *represent people and groups*, reflecting and bringing their needs, aspirations, problems, concerns, and priorities to the policymaking and policy-amending process; they *make laws*, the rules that govern a nation; and they *practice oversight*, assuring that laws and programs are carried out legally, effectively, and according to legislative intent.

This handbook and seminar will address many of these issues. The combination of general, and country-specific material presented in the seminars is designed help you reflect on the workings of your own political system, and to place them in a broader context. It is our hope that this handbook will spark debate and inquiry to help you to maximize your performance as an MP, and to assist you in establishing the conditions under which your people will be able to improve their lives.

2

## **Roles of MPs: Representation and Constituent Relations**

## 2. Roles of MPs: Representation and Constituent Relations

### What This Unit Will Cover

- General information on the roles of MPs and parliaments in representation and constituent relations;
- Representation and gender;
- Discussion questions; and
- *Hon. Member, You Promised*, a humorous look at promises MPs make to get elected.

### General Information: Representation and Constituent Relations

Throughout [the region X](#), constituents are well acquainted with their MPs, and successful MPs are rarely far beyond the reach of the people of their districts. But what, exactly, do MPs do for constituents? This module examines MPs relations with constituents, and includes an entertaining look at promises candidate make, and expectations citizens may have of their MPs.

MPs and parliaments link individuals and groups to their government. They do this by informing citizens about MP and parliament activities, by providing citizens and groups a voice in public policy – including in national budgets, and by assisting constituents with their individual concerns. How MPs do this depends on a variety of factors, including the nation’s electoral system, its political environment, and the parliaments capacity.

**Informing citizens about the activities of individual MPs and the parliament:** Parliaments, unlike executive bureaucracies, conduct their business in public. Plenary sessions are open to the press and public, and may be covered on TV and radio. Committee meetings in some countries ([you can put an example from your region](#)) are also open to the press, and MPs make themselves more available to the public – especially to their own constituents – than do other government officials. In addition to the personal contacts between MPs and constituents, some parliaments reach out and provide information to the public, through:

- Newsletters and publications, even children’s books;
- Press offices and visitor information centers;
- Web sites;
- Publishing Hansards (parliamentary record) through parliamentary web sites ; and
- Publishing member directories, providing photographs and biographical information on MPs on web sites, and as publications.

**Enabling citizens and groups to impact government policy:** Parliaments do not just send out information, they also act as “eyes and ears”, listening to citizen concerns, and providing mechanisms through which citizens and groups can influence government policies. Legislatures in presidential or hybrid systems are more likely to develop significant policy-making capacities than are those in pure parliamentary systems (see Module 3 *Roles of MPs: Lawmaking*), yet all legislatures should allow citizens some voice in influencing policy.

**Responding to constituents:** Finally, parliaments link citizens to their government through MP constituent services. MPs in some nations cut through the “red tape” that keeps constituents from receiving normal government benefits, and may speak to government ministries on behalf of constituents. Constituent services have been a problem for MPs in several countries, where constituents have come to expect MPs to provide services, even from their own resources.<sup>1</sup> MPs at one pilot seminar in 2003 stated that some constituents view them as “walking bags of money” or “walking ATM machines.”

A growing number of Parliaments – even in sub-Saharan Africa – assist MPs in their relations with constituents. Assistance may include providing offices and meeting spaces for MPs in the capital, funding district offices, and adjusting parliamentary calendars to enable MPs to spend time each month at home with constituents. Following are specific examples:

- The Ugandan parliament re-acquired and upgraded old parliamentary office space occupied by government ministries during the years parliament was closed. MP offices are now located in this space.
- Soon after democracy was re-established in Chile in the early 1990s, Parliament adjusted its calendar so that MPs could spend one week each month in their districts.
- [Or other examples](#)

Because providing MPs additional space to meet with constituents, especially district offices, is expensive, parliaments have experimented with such alternatives as the following:

- Poland’s Parliament provided legislators office space in local party offices.
- The Palestinian Legislative Council established regional legislative offices used by all political parties. (This has not proven to be ideal, however, as citizens are often confused about which member to

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<sup>1</sup> [You can place example](#)

approach, and there have been concerns about the lack of privacy in these offices.)

- [Or other examples](#)

### **Factors Influencing Representation and Constituent Services**

Electoral and political systems, the political environment and parliamentary resources may all affect relations between MPs and constituents. .

**Electoral systems:** MPs in every democracy depend on citizen votes to get – and stay – in office, but some electoral systems provide greater incentives for MPs to attend to constituent needs.

MPs elected through *constituency-based* (or plurality-majority) electoral systems<sup>2</sup> are likely to be quite conscious of constituents needs, and to desire to provide good constituent services. [Place examples of MPs elected through constituency-based systems in your region.](#) (Critics of constituency-based electoral systems claim that they lead to gender distortions in representation, due to the strong patriarchal prejudices against women contesting elections directly with men).

In *proportional representation* (PR) electoral systems, also used widely in the SADC region, parties devise a list of electoral candidates ranked in order. People vote directly for a party, rather than a particular candidate, and the number of legislative seats per party is determined according to the proportion of votes won by each party. A party winning 35 percent of the vote, for example, earns approximately 35 percent of the seats in the House. Since one's position on the list (which is determined by one's party) is key to being elected, MPs will be especially responsive to their party, and feel less pressured to serve constituents than their single-member district counterparts. [Place examples of MPs elected through proportional representation in your region.](#)

A third type of electoral system, *semi-proportional*, combines aspects of both PR and constituency-based systems. In a bicameral legislature, for example, members of one house may be chosen by plurality-majority, while members of the other are selected based on proportional representation. Alternatively, a certain number of legislative members in a given chamber may be chosen one way, with a percentage chosen by the other. [Place examples of MPs elected through proportional representation in your region.](#) *Germany, Mexico, Bolivia, and Russia all use variants of semi-proportional electoral systems.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In constituency-based electoral systems, candidates run in single-member constituencies/districts and the candidate receiving the most votes (not necessarily a majority) wins. Constituents are more likely to re-elect an MP who has been responsive to their needs, so MPs will generally strive for good constituent relations.

<sup>3</sup> The Legislature and Constituency Relations, United National Development Programme, 1999. (<http://magnet.undp.org/Docs/parliaments/notes/Constituency%20Relations%205%20.htm>):

**Political environment and parliamentary resources:** Effective representation and constituent relations are hindered in some nations by a legacy of less-than-open political systems, and, more recently, a distrust of civil society organizations. Another hindrance is the lack of parliamentary resources to support MPs in responding to constituent requests. While some legislatures in the developed world have staff to answer constituent requests, legislators in low resource countries are often left without recourse to funds.

### **Gender and Representation**

Gender representation in parliaments can refer to the presence of women and men as MPs in decision-making positions, but it can also refer to the interests and needs of women and men being factored into the decision-making process and political agendas.

The recognition and acknowledgement of gender inequalities by MPs allows them to analyse a parliament's effectiveness in representing the people by considering how well gender proportions in society are reflected in the parliament. This is a challenge to parliaments of most regions of the world in which the women are substantially under-represented in parliaments. In addition, not all parliaments have provisions designed to achieve any measure of gender balance.

But gender representation is more than a matter of numbers in parliament. While gender parity is a laudable objective, MPs must also be able to articulate the views and concerns of those they represent and to enact policies and programs that will benefit their lives. In exercising their representational duties, MPs must consider the needs of all people in the constituency - women and men, girls and boys. Regular contact at the constituency level enables the MP to keep in touch with the needs in the constituency, receive feedback from the electorate on any public issue and ensure voter access to their representative.

The real challenge is for MPs is to use a gender perspective that will enable them to consider both women and men's interests in the decision-making process, recognising the fact that women and men do not participate equally in decision making, though women play an important role at community and grass-roots levels. Effective representation and constituent relations focuses on politicising issues of everyday life in order to make it more democratic. Both women and men must see their experiences reflected in the political agenda.

MPs can bridge the gender gaps by the way they define their tasks, for example:

- Do MPs acknowledge the unequal gender relations by singling out women as an important social category/group to represent?
- Do parliamentarians cultivate plenty of contact with various women's organizations?
- Do MPs view gender equality in the extent to which they are actively promoting gender equality issues in their work?

### Discussion Questions

1. What methods does your parliament use to inform citizens about the activities of parliament, to enable citizens and groups to impact government policy, and to respond to individual citizen concerns?
2. What electoral system does your parliament use? How does your electoral system impact on constituent services?
3. In what ways might your parliament more effectively incorporate gender concerns into issues of representation and constituent services?

The following humorous excerpt captures much of the challenge MPs face in dealing with constituents.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Hon. Member, You Promised**

To be there for your constituents, i.e., to be seen, reached, smelt and be accessible to them round the clock. No strict office hours; no vacation/leave; or personal time. You could in a way be referred to as a *roaming prisoner*.

To be the people's representative/emissary to and from the capital in a consistent manner. Indeed, you have assumed the role of a glorified postman/messenger and bearer of good news, bad news and *in fact all news*. However, for political and survival reasons you are expected to bring good news and gifts of all manner of description and value to key people and institutions on a regular basis if you still want to remain popular.

To be the Principal Agent/Proponent and Activist for ensuring that there is improvement in the infrastructure and service provision of the Constituency, including:

- a) Upgrading of roads, bridges and related infrastructure;

<sup>4</sup> From *Parliament and Constituent Relations*, by former MP Michael Matuare of Zimbabwe during a speech presented at the SADC PF- Parliament of Lesotho Professional Performance and Development Seminar held in Maseru, Lesotho 29 September – 1 October 2003.

- b) Improvement of health services and facilities, e.g., clinics, staff;
- c) Improvement of schools and related facilities;
- d) Identifying donors and NGOs to bring material and financial resources for projects in the area;
- e) Organizing scholarships and employment for a host of demanding political stakeholders including campaign supporters and party activists.

Nurturing and maintaining the support of spouses, family (immediate and *suddenly* extended) and a plethora of friends, acquaintances and *hangers-on*.

To be the chief celebrant/benefactor at feasts, weddings, field days and graduations of various sorts. Your contribution must be seen to be the largest or among the large ones.

To be the chief sympathizer/principal mourner in cases of bereavement and death. You are expected to play the role of undertaker when and if we as your constituents cannot afford a coffin or access a vehicle to ferry our beloved relative for burial.

To be the individual but unofficial/substitute social welfare unit for all those in need in your constituency including the various fundraising functions to which you are invited, may decline to attend but to do so at great personal risk to your political career.

To be your party's most ardent defender, promoter/public relations agent. You are expected to be a party loyalist, worker, volunteer and resource mobiliser. In this case your personal resources, vehicle, house, telephone, time, etc, are part of the party's pool of resources to be accessed as and when required.

To be the willing and unwilling subject/object of close public scrutiny and examination. The media are this *unique type of vulture that love fresh meat in the form of errant public officials* behind whom or who are associated with scandal or who occupy houses with cupboards full of skeletons.

For those who serve in cabinet your constituents expect that you can marshal and commandeer resources easily and can get development finances without much difficulty.

# 3

## **Roles of MPs: Lawmaking**

### 3. Roles of MPs: Lawmaking

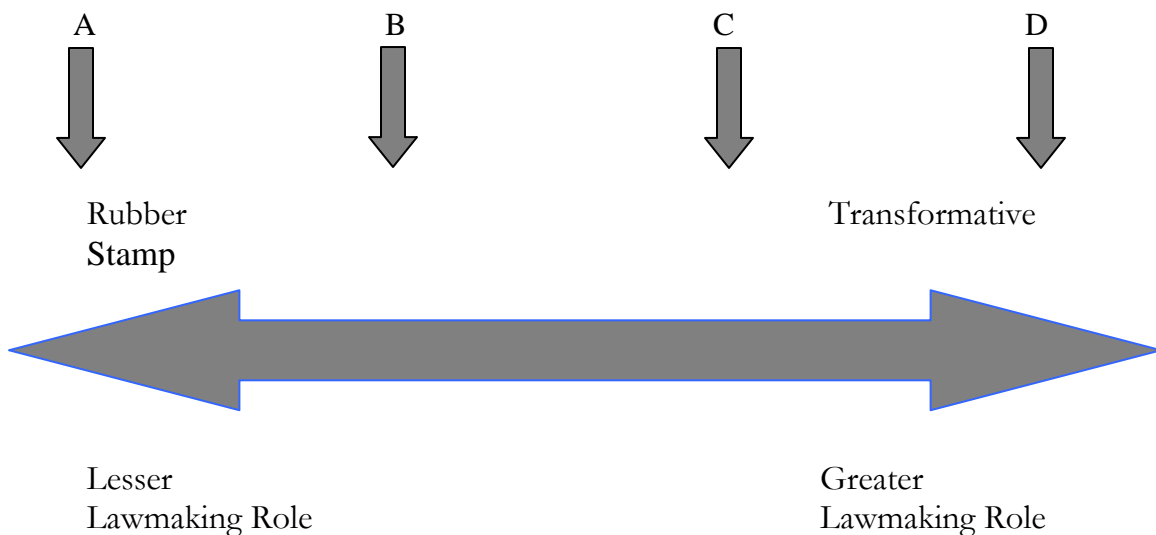
#### What This Unit Will Cover

- General information on the roles of MPs and parliaments in lawmaking
- Gender in lawmaking
- Discussion questions

#### General information: Roles of MPs and Parliaments in Lawmaking

If you ask citizens what parliaments do, many would reply, “They make laws” – the rules that govern society. But the role parliament plays in the lawmaking process varies from nation to nation, and even in the same parliament over time. We may think of a parliament’s lawmaking role as moving along a continuum.

- At one extreme are “rubber stamp” legislatures, which simply endorse decisions made elsewhere.
- Next are those that actively debate proposals, and have some ability to influence government to make changes to their proposals.
- Continuing to move right on the continuum, we come to legislatures that make significant amendments to executive proposals, and many of their amendments become law. Some may even introduce legislation.
- Finally come what are known as “transformative” legislatures. Transformative legislatures may amend nearly all government proposals, and make and pass their own proposals into law.



A number of factors help determine the lawmaking role your parliament currently plays; among them regime type, formal legislative powers, the political environment, and legislative capacity.

**Regime Type:** Legislatures in *parliamentary systems*, where the chief executive and cabinet are members of parliament selected from the majority party or coalition within the legislature, have less incentive to develop significant lawmaking capacities than do legislatures in other systems. Because legislative and executive powers are fused, committees tend to play a lesser role in lawmaking. Policy decisions are generally made within the ruling party or coalition and government ministries.

In *presidential systems*, by contrast, legislatures are elected separately from the executive. The two branches of government are independent of each other, especially if the president appoints the cabinet from outside the legislature, as is done in Angola and the US [or Examples from your region if any](#). The centre for conflict over policy making is usually between the executive and the legislature. There are clear incentives for the legislature to develop a strong committee system and professional staffs. Individual legislatures can influence policies and laws.

Finally, *hybrid political systems* share characteristics of both parliamentary and presidential regimes. There are different hybrids, but a common version in Africa has the president directly elected through a nationwide vote (as in presidential systems), but appointing cabinet ministers from the Parliament (as in parliamentary systems). [Examples from your region if any](#) are hybrid systems with growing parliamentary lawmaking roles.

**Formal lawmaking powers:** Formal lawmaking powers, described in the constitution and standing orders, also help determine the lawmaking role parliament will play. Most systems allow members to introduce legislation (private member bills), and some, [Examples from your region if any](#), permit committees to introduce legislation. Most parliaments have formal authority to override a presidential veto, but the percentage of votes required to do so varies. Called departmental committees, sectoral committees, or standing committees, they are empowered to receive public comment on and amend executive proposals.

**Political environment:** Third, a nation's political environment helps determine the parliament's lawmaking role. By political environment we mean such factors as:

- The type of lawmaking role parliament's leaders and members desire, and the intensity of their desire;

- The willingness of the executive and other power brokers (such as political parties) to share their lawmaking role with parliament; and
- Demands from groups in society that parliament play a greater lawmaking role.

One indication of a changing political environment likely to impact the legislature's lawmaking role is the pressure exerted by the demands from citizens, organized groups in society, and members of parliaments, which helped bring about the change. Now that many political systems have become more open, many of these groups will expect their parliaments to be responsive to their concerns in the lawmaking process.

**Legislative capacity:** Finally, the legislature's technical capacity and resources influence its ability to play a major lawmaking role. It happens that parliaments do less than their formal lawmaking powers allow, and a major reason for this is limited legislative capacity. Conducting hearings, factoring public and expert comment into amending legislation, and drafting amendments and legislation all require professional staff and facilities that are often in short supply in legislatures. A number of parliaments in the region are involved in programmes to upgrade their technical capacity, and we examine some in Module 10, *Building a Stronger Parliament*.

## Gender in Lawmaking

Place a comment with examples on the situation in your region

- endorsement at political level
- situation of equity/parity
- laws and gender impact
- etc

Some of the principal issues concerning gender-sensitive lawmaking in parliament are the degree to which the institution exercises its own initiative in legislating gender-sensitive laws and policies and the degree to which it influences the passage of gender-sensitive legislative proposals received from the executive. The underlying reality making gender-sensitive lawmaking necessary is that we live in a society where women and men follow different paths in life and have different living conditions and needs. Because of this, societal rules and laws will affect men and women differently. MPs must therefore ensure that a gender perspective is integrated into all proposed legislation, policy formulation and review, and that all bills tabled before parliament include a full Gender Impact Analysis/Assessment.

Gender-responsive lawmaking requires that MPs understand the impact of proposed laws and how they might be better designed to achieve outcomes

which meet the needs of women and men, girls and boys as well as different groups of women, men and children. This approach is based on an appreciation that equality should not be confused with uniformity and in fact uniformity can be often the enemy of equality. It involves the development of an analysis, which reflects an understanding of the law/policy's gendered implications by

- Questioning the assumption that laws and policies are “gender-neutral” in their effects;
- Identifying implicit and explicit gender issues;
- Assessing whether the law/policy will continue or change existing inequalities between men and women (and groups of men and women) and patterns of gender relations; and
- Determining whether and to what degree proposed laws/policies enhance women and men's democratic rights.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What role does your parliament play in the lawmaking process?
2. How do the four factors listed (i.e., regime type, formal lawmaking powers, political environment, and legislative capacity) impact the roles your parliament plays in lawmaking?
3. How would it benefit your nation to mainstream the gender perspective in lawmaking?

4

**Roles of MPs:  
Parliament and the Budget**

## 4. Roles of MPs: Parliament and the Budget

### What This Unit Will Cover

- General information on the roles of MPs and parliaments in the budget process
- Gender budgeting
- Discussion questions

### General information: Roles of MPs and Parliaments in the Budget Process

Parliamentary approval for taxing and spending can be traced back 800 years to the British House of Commons, the “Mother of all Parliaments.” As the King needed funds to conduct wars and run the monarchy, local communities, represented in the Commons, were called upon to provide them. With time, the Crown made regular requests for funds, and only representatives of local communities were empowered to grant the King the money he requested. The requirement that the King request local representatives to collect taxes for his expenses represented a significant limitation on royal prerogatives. By 1422 there could be no statute and no tax without parliamentary authority, and, within Parliament, without the Commons’ agreement.<sup>5</sup>

The requirement that parliaments approve executive taxing and spending continues today in virtually all democratic political systems, but, as was the case with lawmaking, the extent of parliamentary involvement varies – and for many of the same reasons. Using the same four criteria applied to lawmaking – regime type, formal powers, political environment, and parliamentary capacity – we now consider the parliament’s role in the budget process.

**Regime Type and Formal Budget Powers:** Parliaments in presidential and hybrid systems, with distinct separations between legislative and executive powers, have greater incentives to play an independent budget-making role than do parliaments in pure parliamentary systems. Formal budget-making powers in several nations empower parliaments to debate and accept or reject – but not change – the executive’s proposed budget. Consequences for rejecting the budget can be severe. When parliamentary budget powers are so constrained parliament exercises its influence more indirectly during the budget debate, where MPs point out problems with the budget, and their criticisms can be presented to the electorate through the press. [Place examples from your region if any.](#)

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<sup>5</sup> The House of Lords Record Office, *The History of Parliament and the Evolution of Parliamentary Procedure*. Transcript of lecture given by Maurice Bond, 21 June 1966, p. 3. (<http://parliament.uk/documents/upload/bond.pdf>)

**Political environment and legislative capacity:** As is true with lawmaking, a nation’s political environment affects the parliament’s role in budgeting. The political environment includes the budget-making role parliament’s leaders and members want to play – and the intensity of their desire; the willingness (or unwillingness) of the executive and other power holders (such as political parties) to allow parliament a greater role; and, demands from groups in society that parliament play a greater lawmaking role.

A common shortcoming for parliaments wishing to be more effective in budget making (and in oversight, as we shall see later) is lack of access to budget expertise. Executive budgets are large, complex, and difficult to understand (sometimes by design), and legislators all over the world need help understanding them. Some legislatures address this need through hiring short-term experts to assist them in analyzing the executive budget, and another approach is to build greater budget capacity in-house.

## **Gender Budgeting**

Budgets are not neutral instruments, though a budget on the face of it appears to be a gender-neutral policy instrument set out in terms of financial aggregates, totals, subtotals of expenditure and revenue and the resulting budget surplus or deficit. There is no particular mention of women or of men. However, budgets affect different people – women, men, boys and girls – differently. Thus, the way government collects its revenue and spends its money will mean very different things to women and men in rural areas, or to middle class women and men.

The rationale for gender budgeting is straightforward, but highly political. Simply put, every cent spent by government has a different impact on women and men, boys and girls. Therefore, budget allocations by government should be carefully determined and monitored. This requires parliamentary action geared towards gender budgeting work.

**What is gender budgeting?** “Gender-sensitive budgets,” “gender – budgets”, or “gender responsive budgets” entail a breakdown of the government’s budget according to its impact on women and men, boys and girls and different groups of women and men, taking cognisance of the society’s underpinning gender relations. Therefore, it is important to appreciate the fact that gender-sensitive budgets are not *separate* budgets for women or for men, but rather are analyses of actual budgets through a gender lens.

All budgets share common characteristics. There are, however, many differences – such as in the form in which they are presented and in the level of detail provided. There can be a single budget for the whole country or separate budgets for different levels (national, provincial/regional, local). It is important for MPs wanting to do gender budget work to understand the budget development process. The timetable for the process provides clues as to the most effective point for intervention.

A gender-sensitive analysis of the budget is based on the premise that budgets must follow policy. A gender-sensitive analysis of budgets can be conducted by using different approaches depending on the availability of information, expertise of personnel and other resources. For example the gender-sensitive budget exercise in South Africa contains two components – one outside government and one inside government.

One gender-sensitive budget strategy is to work through committees to identify gender issues and gender-target allocations specific to given sectoral budgets such as education, land, water, agriculture, industry, health and welfare. By employing the gender-budgeting approach, parliamentarians require government departments/sectors to produce expenditure analysis for their gender impacts within each budget cycle.

The following are some of the methods that MPs can use to do a gender analysis of the budget:

- Analyse the situation of women and men in relation to the sector concerned – agriculture, land, industry, labour, social welfare, health, education, information, defence and security.
- Examine the sector's policy to see if it addresses gender issues identified in the situational analysis.
- If the policy is gender sensitive, analyse the budget to establish whether sufficient financial and other resources have been allocated to translate the policy into reality.
- Assess how the resources have been used – for example, how many women and men receive a service and at what cost?

In addition to the committee-based gender budget analysis, parliamentary finance committees as well as individual portfolio committees can hold public hearings on what the budget should contain in advance to its presentation.

In examining spending, MPs need to consider expenditure in terms of three categories:

- Expenditures targeted at gender issues and groups of men or women, boys or girls such as special employment programmes for unemployed young men and women, domestic violence counseling for men, women's health programmes;
- Spending related to equal employment opportunities by government agencies; and
- General budget expenditures available to both women and men but analysed for their gender impact, for example who benefits mostly from government spending on primary health care, government supported literacy programmes and farming subsidies.

Most government spending tends to fall in the general budget category and unless this category is gender sensitive we cannot say that the budget is engendered. Gender budgeting is a process that can only be developed over a period of time. Incorporating the gender perspective in national budgetary processes is dependent on the magnitude of gender inequality, the priority given to gender issues in the national development agenda, and competing demands on government capacity and resources. Materials on gender-budgeting experiences of countries such as South Africa and Australia provide important insights on gender-budgeting strategies. Similarly, gender analyses of the parliament's own budget can be an easy starting point.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What budget-making powers does your own parliament possess, and in what ways could they be utilized more effectively? Are efforts under way to increase parliamentary budget powers?
- Does the parliament do a gender analysis of the budget? How could gender budgeting be made a part of your budget process?
- Do civil society organizations and expert associations work with parliament in the budget-analysis process? Why or why not?

# 5

## **Roles of MPs: Oversight**

## 5. Roles of MPs: Oversight

### What This Unit Will Cover

- General information on parliamentary oversight
- Oversight on gender
- Discussion questions

### General Information: Parliamentary Oversight

Oversight is the monitoring of executive activities for efficiency, probity, transparency and fidelity, to ensure that funds appropriated by the parliament are used legally, effectively, and for the purposes for which they were intended. The previous unit on budgeting dealt with the “before” role parliaments play in the budget process – their involvement in helping to set spending priorities, and in approving methods of collecting revenue to cover these expenses. Oversight, by contrast, is the “after” stage – looking back on government spending and activities to determine whether there was waste or corruption, and to ask “value for money” questions.

**How is oversight practiced in region X?** Oversight tools available to MPs vary from nation to nation, but parliaments have access to at least some of the following.

**Questions to ministers:** MPs typically address questions to the Speaker, who determines whether and when they will be presented to the appropriate minister for response. Supplemental questions may also be raised during the question period. This tool can be weakened by the lack of sanctions available for ministers who fail to answer questions adequately, or to follow up on questions.

**Public accounts committees:** Since the creation of the Public Accounts Committee in the Gladstonian Reforms of 1861, PACs have become ubiquitous throughout the Commonwealth. The tremendous expansion and scope of government and of state-owned enterprises during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made PACs, which are charged with overseeing government expenditures, even more important.

In Commonwealth nations, independent assessment agencies, often called auditors-general (AG), review government accounts and present audit findings to PACs. PACs study the results, invite ministers, permanent secretaries or other ministry officials to the committee for questioning, and issue a report of their findings. Typically, the government is required to report back to parliament on PAC recommendations within a specified period, usually two to

six months. More often than not, opposition members chair PACs in the commonwealth.

**Departmental (sessional) committees:** These committees oversee specific ministries and handle legislation related to those ministries. MPs are able to use meetings with ministers to ask questions about implementation of laws and to offer advice to ministers. They are able to go beyond the accounting oversight function most PACs perform, and discuss with ministries changes in policy and implementation.

**Select (investigative) committees:** These are temporary committees with jurisdiction limited to investigating the matter for which they were established. “These committees can be very effective as far as oversight is concerned because they address a specific issue already identified and seek to suggest corrective measures.”<sup>6</sup>

**Working in partnership with anti-corruption organisations:** International organisations and associations also work with MPs to combat corruption. One such organisation, Transparency International (TI), funds national chapters to research and report on corruption in their nations. TI then rank orders countries in terms of corruption, and conducts annual international meetings attended by parliamentarians, government officials and CSO representatives.

### **Increasing parliamentary oversight powers**

[Place examples that can reveal how one parliament is using its greater oversight powers.](#)

### **Gender Oversight**

Helping bring about gender equality is another important piece in the complex puzzle of parliamentary oversight. MPs exercise gender oversight by monitoring the implementation of gender-sensitive laws and policies such as national gender policies as well as regional and international instruments or agreements that promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination.

The oversight instruments available to parliament empower MPs to hold organs of the state accountable in their implementation of national, regional and international commitments to achieve gender equality and eliminate discrimination. MPs must be aware of the national, regional and international frameworks on gender in order to perform their oversight role effectively.

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<sup>6</sup> Oversight and the role of Members of Parliament, Hon. Dan. Wandera Ogalo presented at Sade parliamentary seminar, Maseru Lesotho, October 2003.

One of parliament's most effective oversight powers is its ability obtain information from the executive. Both the question periods for ministers and committees, described above, are means through which MPs are able to investigate government performance with regard to promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination.

The existence of “watchdog” institutional mechanisms that promote gender equality and that are accountable to parliament, such as human rights and gender commissions, also enhance parliamentary oversight on gender equality. In the context of the gender agenda, MPs can exercise their oversight functions by

- Examining the position of women and men, boys and girls in each sector, e.g., health, labour, education;
- Examining reports to regional and international bodies to check whether government is meeting its commitments on gender equality;
- Analyzing the budget to see what government is spending to address the needs of women and men, boys and girls; and
- Checking how laws and administrative structures are working to address gender gaps.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Describe the oversight powers of your own parliament. In what ways could they be utilized more effectively?
- Do civil society, expert associations and the media assist your parliament in carrying out oversight responsibilities? Are there ways they could be brought into the process?
- Is parliamentary oversight on gender equality institutionalized? How effective is it?
- How might oversight methods used in other nations in the region be applied in your nation?

# 6

## Parliamentary Committees

## 6. Parliamentary Committees

### What This Unit Will Cover

- General information on parliamentary committees
- Gender and committees
- Discussion questions

### General Information: Parliamentary Committees<sup>7</sup>

Parliamentary committees allow groups of legislators to review policy matters and proposed bills, or conduct oversight more closely than would be possible by the entire chamber. Committees may be temporary (ad hoc) or permanent. Ad hoc committees are formed to review particular bills and are disbanded when their work is completed. Permanent standing (or departmental) committees' jurisdictions tend to mirror the structure of cabinet ministries, and may be involved in both legislation and in oversight. Other permanent committees may focus on oversight (PACs), or may be responsible for rules, management, or housekeeping matters of the House.

**Parliamentary staffing and information needs:** Staff size, level of professionalism and access to resources reflect the relative importance of parliament and of committees in a given system. Parliamentary staff members may be institutional (serving the needs of the parliament) or personal (assigned to a specific MP), and carry out housekeeping and management responsibilities, arrange and staff committee meetings, conduct research, assist in drafting legislation, and provide expert advice.

Increased responsibilities and information needs strain committee resources, and some parliaments in the region are building greater internal expertise to cope with this increased demand. Donors and outside experts provide some of this assistance. In addition, parliaments are making their own investments in developing professional, in-house expertise

In-house resources are rarely sufficient for growing committees. As the need for expert information grows, many committees are establishing relations with and taking advantage of the increasing expertise in regional civil society organizations (CSOs) and think tanks. Some of the brightest minds in the region work for CSOs and committees increasingly tap their expertise to help them amend legislation, and to be more effective in the budget process. Some parliamentary projects have published easy-to-use directories, enabling

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<sup>7</sup> Some of the information for this module is taken from a UNDP Internet document entitled, *Legislative Committee Systems*. 1999.  
(<http://magnet.undp.org/Docs/parliaments/governing%20system.htm>)

parliamentary committees to quickly and easily contact outside experts and organizations able and willing to assist them in legislation.<sup>8</sup>

Before finalizing this section of our discussion on committees, we should point out that strong committees shift the balance of power toward the legislature – and away from the executive and political parties. For this reason, advocates of pure parliamentary political systems (in which the legislature and executive are fused) do not favor strong committees. They argue that *political parties* are the bodies directly responsible to citizens, and that the focus should be on them – rather than on committees. They fear that strong committees tend to reduce party discipline and diminish distinctions between parties, and that they could undermine the executive.

### **Gender in Committees**

Much of parliament’s important work is carried out in committees. The simple fact that there are more men than women in parliaments means that male MPs need to be more gender conscious in dealing with subjects covered by their committees. Both male and female MPs need to know the technical and gender issues in the ministries covered by the committees they sit on.

As greater numbers of women have become MPs, it has become obvious power relations tend to ensure that men’s committee work and women’s committee work is “appropriately” allocated along gender lines. The distribution of women MPs in committees is symptomatic of the gender stereotypes that still pervade parliaments. The majority of women MPs are presumed to be more interested in participating in committees that focus on “soft” issues such as health, welfare, development, agriculture and education. Fewer women are active in “hard” committees such as land affairs, defense, foreign affairs, justice, public accounts, trade and industry, science and technology and finance, even though women have particular needs and interests in these areas as well.

Once women become MPs, their access to the power structures of these institutions remains a challenge. Women MPs predominate in leading committees on gender and women’s affairs, and other social welfare issues. Some parliaments, however, are beginning to allow women to chair some of the more prestigious committees – such as foreign affairs, public accounts, security and mining – which are traditionally reserved for men.

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<sup>8</sup> Kenya: *Committee Resources Directory*; Uganda: *The Civil Society Organisations and Public Policy Experts of Uganda*, both published by the State University of New York with funds from USAID.

Some gender specialists argue that in common with many other institutionalised systems, parliament is characterised by a high level of aggression in which the loudest voice and the most truculent approach wins. It is argued that the parliamentary committee system reduces the adversarial nature of parliaments and encourages more open and larger debate to facilitate the legislative process. Some parliaments have established specialised committees on gender equality, and these include women and men from all political parties. Although the jurisdiction of committees differs from parliament to parliament, it is clear that in addition to specialised committees on gender equality, gender as a crosscutting issue must be addressed in the work of all committees.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Describe the committee system and its effectiveness in your own parliament. Has it undergone changes in recent years?
2. Has your parliament conducted public hearings? If so, how successful have public hearings and committee meetings been?
3. Is there a specialised committee on gender equality, and how effective is it? Do other committees pay attention to gender issues in their work? If not, why not, and what needs to be done?

# 7

## **Political Parties in Parliament**

## 7. Political Parties in Parliament

### What This Unit Will Cover

- Overview on political parties in parliament
- Gender in political parties
- Discussion questions

### General Information: Political Parties in Parliament<sup>9</sup>

Along with committees, political parties are a major means of organizing the work of the legislature and developing public policy. The role of political parties in a given legislature may be influenced by the following: type of governing system (i.e., parliamentary, presidential or hybrid); whether and how many political parties are in parliament; the relationship between the executive and legislature (are the president and the majority party/coalition from the same party?); historic and cultural development; and relative strength of internal party structures and resources.

**What is a political party?** A political party is an organisation that mobilises voters on behalf of a common set of interests or ideologies. Political parties in the West grew out of craft guilds, professional associations, and interest groups. In some African nations parties have emerged around certain leaders, or through a civic movement to change the government. Such parties face challenges of building a party identity and constituency and developing party discipline within parliament. They are often inexperienced at being accountable to voters and may have few resources for developing internal party structures to make them effective players in parliament.

**Political party systems:** Modern political systems are often characterized as multiparty, two-party systems and one-party systems. In two or multi-party democracies, the political party winning the most votes gains control of the legislature. In a parliamentary system, a majority win by a political party also gives the party control of the executive. The head of the winning party becomes the prime minister (chief executive), with party members being appointed to the cabinet. In presidential and hybrid systems – where the president and legislature are elected separately – political control of the legislature does not guarantee a party control of the executive branch.

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the information for this module is taken from a UNDP Internet document, *Political Parties in the Legislature*, 1999. <http://magnet.undp.org/Docs/parliaments/partysystem1.htm>

It is common in multiparty systems for a party to win more seats than any other party, but not more than all or some of the other parties combined. Parties may then form coalitions to achieve a majority and, theoretically, pass legislation that meets its policy agenda and block opposition legislation. Party leaders in such situations know that the theory may not work out in practice, as coalition partners often find it difficult to compromise on their own agendas in order to arrive at a consensus with coalition partners.

In a one-party system candidates are promoted or nominated by the single party and MPs do not organize within parliament on a partisan basis. In practice, one-party systems tend to reduce parliamentary autonomy. Yet even multi-party systems may act like one-party systems if one party dominates and is able to suppress competition from other parties.

**The party in government:** Party discipline – the idea that legislators must vote with their respective parties – is especially important in parliamentary systems. Government MPs failing to vote with their party could bring down the government and result in the legislature being dissolved. Party leaders in parliamentary systems, therefore, will likely view such MPs as a threat and not nominate them to run in the next election. To help ensure party discipline, important decisions are made in party caucuses (meetings of the parliamentary parties), rather than within the parliament itself.

In presidential and most hybrid systems there is a looser connection between the chief executive and legislative leadership than in parliamentary systems. Members may be freer to identify with the needs of their constituencies (especially in single member districts), and committees – more than party caucuses – may be the place substantive policy work takes place. This is not always the case, however. In presidential systems in Latin America, for example, party leaders make most decisions in party meetings and committees tend to be weak.

Parties in parliaments encourage member discipline by meting out punishment and rewards and through naming and empowering party whips to enforce member adherence to party interests. Parliamentary leaders in presidential and hybrid political systems may also insist on party discipline – and punish members who do not vote with their parties – but the consequences of weak party discipline are most severe in parliamentary systems. In some parliaments the whips also perform a role in selecting the representatives of their party in parliamentary bodies and missions [place examples from your region if any](#).

## **Gender in Political Parties**

A central issues for political parties is deciding who will to stand as a candidate for the political party in the next election. Political parties hold the key to accessing parliament, so it is at the party level that the almost unanimously endorsed principle of equality must be put into practice.<sup>10</sup> While the processes of nominating candidates differ in political parties, if the parties are democratic, they should strive towards equal representation of women and men in positions of power and decision-making. Available evidence suggests that party leaders, a broader set of party officials, or significant portions of the people play the gatekeeper role in terms of women's and men's access to parliament and other positions of power and decision-making.

To parties, the most valued characteristic of a potential candidate is that candidate's track record in the party organization. But despite the fact that women can be in great number as supporters and as voters in political parties, men dominate power structures of parties and candidate nominations. The lack of a gender-balanced representation prevalent at party leadership levels has been carried through to candidate lists for election to positions of power and decision-making. Political parties have not yet made a clear link between the women's vote and the need for unequivocal policies and practices aimed at achieving gender equality.

While political parties are increasingly voicing support for gender equality, women continue to be marginalised within political parties. A study done by the IPU reveals that there are difficulties within parties, especially when it comes to nominating candidates and in particular female candidates. According to the available information, women candidates are seen as a "liability" and some political parties openly express this sentiment, based on the belief that the electorate is reluctant to vote for women candidates.

It is often argued that women and men participate equally in politics and the existence of women's wings (or councils, leagues, or sections) is used widely used as an illustrative example. However, an analysis of these structures tends to show that they have reinforced the stereotypes that assign women an inferior status by serving as the hospitality wing of the party. The real test for political parties is to move beyond the rhetoric on gender equality to reform their systems, structures, selection procedures and attitudes to make inroads for equal representation of women and men in positions of power and decision making.

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<sup>10</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Reports and Documents" Series, No. 35, 1999.

In the context of the notion of the politics of presence, gender concerns are better represented in a parliament with a critical mass of women compared to one with few or no women MPs. This notion highlights the fact that the few women actually serving in parliaments instinctively fear being marginalised by raising issues that will be perceived as feminist. They become afraid to move against the mainstream, which may be described as the “malestream,” and in that way find themselves acting as “honorary men” by adopting male behaviours, promoting the patriarchal agenda, and beginning to regard gender as politically irrelevant.

Changing the male “face” of politics remains one of the greatest challenges to political parties in the region. Quotas are one way of correcting the gender distortion in politics and positions of power. The question of quotas for women candidates is germane and has been the subject of debate among women and men. For some, the introduction of a quota system is a form of affirmative action – necessary now until things are more equal. For others, quotas are nothing more than reverse discrimination, and women who get into positions through a quota are seen as appointed because of their gender, rather than elected because of their skills. This is more likely to be true when the women are elected in a separate ballot. Still, though, many political parties dismiss affirmative action between genders, but not between races, as undemocratic.

Indeed, practical action from political parties is needed to match their rhetorical commitment to gender equality with policies and programmes that redress the structural causes of gender inequality. This is not something that can be left to chance. It must be a part of a deliberate strategy and must have strong political backing starting at the political party level. It seems that there are not many political parties with Gender Policy Frameworks in place. However, political parties whose manifestos feature gender equality have instituted the voluntary party quota.

Besides voluntary party quotas, legislated and constitutional quotas ([place examples from your region](#)) have boosted the level of representation of women. Different electoral systems lead to different outcomes and the impact of electoral systems on women’s representation cannot be overlooked. There is overwhelming evidence to show that women are more likely to get elected under the proportional representation system than under the constituency-based system. The Nordic countries Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland and Denmark use the proportional representation electoral systems as do Angola and South Africa and do have consistently high rates of women’s representation in parliament. A favourable electoral system on its own will not

guarantee the equal representation of women. The electoral system is helpful to women only if parties are committed to gender equality.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Is your political system presidential, parliamentary, or hybrid? How does the type of political system affect the role of your political party in parliament?
2. How significant a role do women play in your party? Does your party have a gender policy and mechanisms for ensuring equal representation within party structures and in party political positions?
3. How would you characterise party discipline in your parliament?

# 8

## **Keys to Being a Successful MP**

## 8. Keys to Being a Successful MP

### What This Unit Will Cover

- Keys to being a successful MP
- Gender sensitive MPs
- Discussion questions

### Keys To Being a Successful MP

As important as the technical detail included in these modules is for MPs, the information means little if MPs are not effective in their dealings with constituents, staffs, other MPs, the media, and their families. In 2003, one deputy clerk, drafted a guide designed to help MPs in these very practical areas<sup>11</sup> and much of what follows is excerpted from his booklet.

**Honour the legislature as an institution:** Great institutions grow out of men and women of great character. To work well, government requires a bond of trust between citizens and their representatives. It behooves every Member of the House to grow and develop this trust. Developing trust calls for understanding, patience and a realisation of a common purpose and destiny. Every member should try to appeal to the best instincts in colleagues, talk about what they stand for and what they intend to do during their term, and work as hard as possible to achieve their goals.

**Master the standing orders:** Being an effective legislator depends on mastering the Standing Orders. Just like in a game of football, a brilliant player who does not know and respect the rules of the game will lose. The same applies to legislating. You need to know the rules of the game.

The first-time legislator is well advised to carry the Standing Orders book with him or her at all times. They can refer to it as they observe the process of parliamentary democracy unfold. The Standing Orders might seem strange to the first-timer, but with a little exposure they will start to make sense. Mastery of the rules of the House will make a difference in your legislative career, whether it is just beginning, or is several years old. Get acquainted with experienced parliamentarians and seek their advice routinely.

**Adhere to the code of ethics:** When you become a Member of the House you receive the title, “Honourable.” and become responsible for conducting yourself in a manner that befits the title. Every Member shares responsibility for the way parliament and its members are viewed. The

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick Gichohi, *Lawmakers: Stop and Reflect*, State University of New York, Nairobi, 2003.

public demands a higher standard of conduct of those individuals upon whom they confer such an honour.

Understanding legislative etiquette and ethical responsibilities is vital, not only to the institution and the constituents, but also to every Member's career. "If it won't appear good tomorrow, don't do it today." That's the advice a veteran American legislator gave in judging those instances that are perfectly legal, but could raise questions about a Member's behavior and character. Make sure you understand and adhere to the code of ethics. Politicians are rarely prepared for close scrutiny of their behavior. Ask yourself, "Would I be embarrassed to see my actions reported in the newspaper?" When in doubt, seek expert advice on the code of ethics and then make your judgment.

It is sometimes hard to be sure how to act, but there are two important pointers: Avoid anything that could be interpreted as a conflict of interest. Even the appearance of impropriety would be disastrous for your career as a parliamentarian. Secondly, adhering to rules and agreed practices and norms is cardinal to every parliamentarian for effective leadership/debate. Always keep in mind that your "enemies" are watching and waiting to strike.

**Get legislative help:** You cannot be an expert in everything. You should not try to be all things to all people. Pursue committee assignments in your areas of interest, and be read to help negotiate issues even if you are not the major sponsor. As you become the focal point on specific issues, you will be the Member colleagues turn to for help and information. This will assist you to develop your negotiating skills and build your reputation as a serious lawmaker among your colleagues and the larger citizenry.

Parliament has facilities to assist you in building a legislative career. Seek advice, knowledge and experience freely. Members are also important resource people. Seek information where it can be found, keeping in mind that information is power. Lobbyists and pressure groups are paid representatives whose job is to sell a particular point of view and are ever willing to give information promote their view. Always remember though, that every coin has two sides, and so does every issue.

The legislature has staff whom Members can trust. Every member should consider the benefits of hiring specialised staff. If you do hire staff, be sure to take advantage of their assistance for research and briefings before every committee meeting. You should also take time to review the bills or motions on the agenda with legislative staff. You will be more effective and your point of view will influence the decision of the committee and Parliament at large.

**Master the mass media:** The media are the link between the public and their representatives in government, and are thus an integral part of any democracy. Reporters have a responsibility to keep the public informed and should take that charge seriously. Members of the legislature have a duty to contact reporters regularly to inform them of their position on issues and what they are doing.

Maintaining a good working relationship with the media is as important as is maintaining any other complementary partnership. There are instances when the media do a good job and deserve acknowledgement and praise; there are times they might cross the line; conversely, they deserve constructive censure. The legislature needs to develop a rapport with the media just as one must develop an open channel of communication in a partnership with spouses, siblings, business or professional colleagues. The media serve as the barometer of public opinion so you need to keep a keen eye on what the media brings up.

Watch out for overexposure by the media. Media hype has been known to build one up and also to bring one's career crashing down. A reasoned response to media reports is essential in building and sustaining a legislative career; consider when and how to react to media reports. This discretion will earn you respect and confidence.

**Manage your time:** There are few careers as time demanding as that of an honorable Member. A legislator is on call 24 hours a day. Time is a scarce resource and unless it is managed well, nothing can be managed. Organise, prioritise and commit yourself to those things you consider important and you will always be one step ahead in legislative work. An effective legislator is always punctual, gets to the floor on time, keeps appointments, and gets to committee meetings on time. The manner in which you manage your time reflects on you as an individual. The Parliamentary calendar is very strict; if one misses a date to introduce a bill, or motion it could be a whole year before one gets another chance to do so.

Every legislator also has a personal private life that demands time. Just as it is crucial to attend to your duties as a legislator, it is equally important to attend to your non-legislative responsibilities. You cannot afford to ignore these duties and break links with family and other colleagues because at the end of your term, when you revert to ordinary life, you will need these links.

**Know when to take the microphone:** A great part of a legislator's job involves making speeches. Prepare before you speak. Some great speakers have stated that it takes ten times more time to prepare a speech than to deliver it. A person's character is revealed by their speech. A powerful speech is not measured by its length; be brief and to the point and don't try

to speak on everything. Always do your assessment before speaking on the floor. Speaking on every bill or going to the microphone too often will diminish your effectiveness.

Civility in speech is not only decorous and befitting an Honourable Member; it indicates that the speaker has is prepared. A well-balanced speech is more likely to be listened to by all sides than an inflammatory one full of innuendos or plain insults.

**Be part of the solution:** There is a common saying, “If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.” Controversial, even inflammatory issues will often be brought up in parliament, and some will occur in your constituency. As an elected leader, many people will be watching how you react to such situations and many will take their cue to speak or act from you. You must always consider the consequences of whatever course of action you choose. Your choice could make all the difference.

Jumping on an issue to enhance your visibility is politics at its worst. Use your skills and your office as a parliamentarian to help find solutions. Whether it is a new bill in parliament or a community project, work with local agencies and government to find the best solutions. Ask questions, do research and show that you can be a positive influence both on your fellow parliamentarians and the community at large.

Being a solution seeker sometimes means working with people with whom you might not agree politically. Seeking solutions entails building consensus and being willing to compromise. It helps to approach issues with an open mind rather than with a set position; adopting a new position as a result of new insights is a mark of strength and not weakness. Leadership demands a levelheaded, non-emotional approach to issues, and accepting that you may be wrong. The politician driven by a desire to use his or her position and influence to solve the problems faced by her country and mankind in general becomes a statesman or stateswoman.

**Don't burn bridges:** There are neither permanent enemies nor permanent friends in politics. At times you will be upset with or even loathe certain colleagues, but remember that today's adversary may be tomorrow's ally. Every legislator must develop a thick skin. As long as Members separate the individual from the issue, it will be possible to debate and discuss rationally and decently. You should develop a reputation for being forthright and honest, and expect to be treated as you treat those with whom you disagree. No matter where you are in your parliamentary career, you will need good relations with your colleagues.

**Vote your conscience:** Be careful about measures you choose to support. History is replete with examples of Members who sign on to bills and motions only to renounce them when they come up for debate on the floor of the House. Scrutinise bills and motions beforehand to avoid the embarrassment of having to vote against a bill or motion you have signed on to.

There are instances when, after you have promised to vote a certain way, you get fresh insight or information that leads you to change your mind. When this occurs, make your new position known to all. Credibility is the golden coin of any parliamentarian.

**Stay in touch with constituents:** It is easy as a Member of the House to be consumed by the grandeur of the position and forget that all Members are invariably responsible to citizens. Constituents will not always agree with their leader, but they will respect such a leader for thinking through the issues and consulting them before arriving at a decision. Remember to return phone calls, answer letters, have meetings and do whatever it takes to ensure that the constituents know what you are doing. It is difficult to build a strong bond with your constituents simply through press releases. However, if you are a skilled writer, consider writing a weekly column for your constituents and the general public.

### **Gender- Sensitive MPs**

Politically prudent MPs are gender sensitive, because women wield huge potential power. MPs who seek to be effective in parliamentary work need to be gender sensitive. Even at the level of language and communication, MPs and parliaments need transformation and strengthening. For example, using “he” to also mean “she,” “manpower” instead of “staff,” “one man one vote” instead of “one person one vote,” “Chairman” instead of “Chairperson” or “Chair,” and other informal and formal parliamentary language, signals to women that parliament is a male preserve. If a female MP takes a stand she is

accused of being too sensitive, overbearing or plain ridiculous, and even women join in the mockery. As a bottom line, gender-inclusive language should become the norm for all MPs, and in all parliaments.

Guidelines for gender sensitive MPs include the following:

- Do not assume that all people will be affected by or benefit from laws, policies and programmes in a uniform manner;
- Ensure that opportunities to promote gender equality are identified;
- Ensure that adequate resources are allocated to address gender issues;
- Monitor the implementation of commitments on achieving gender equality;
- Consult and engage both women and men in the constituencies, and promote women as decision makers;
- Use gender sensitive language;
- Do not use the excuse of “culture” to justify failures to achieve gender equality and sensitivity.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is it important that parliamentarians be gender sensitive? What might you or your party do to better respond to the needs of women and men, boys and girls?
2. What specific ideas from this module might help you succeed as an MP?
3. In which of these areas do you consider yourself in need of improvement? In which do you consider yourself especially strong?

# 9

## Parliament's Regional and International Roles

## 9. Parliament's regional and international roles

### What this unit will cover

- Information on regional and international roles for MPs in [region x](#)
- Discussion questions

### General Information: Regional and International Roles for MPs in [region x](#)

Throughout the democratic world, parliaments are the only legally constituted bodies of popularly elected representatives that can effectively hold the executive branch of government accountable for the implementation of national, regional and international commitments and programmes. In addition to exercising oversight on the executive, parliaments discharge the crucial constitutional mandate of making laws for the good governance of their countries as well as appropriating resources for the management of affairs of the nation.

The influence and responsibilities of MPs are, however, confined not only to their national boundaries but may extend to the region as a whole, given that some of the decisions that are made at the local level have far-reaching implications at the regional and international levels. For instance, MPs are expected to ratify and monitor the implementation of regional and international treaties and protocols, all of which affect the lives of their constituents.

This is in line with the vision and mission of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, which is “to bring about convergence of economic, political, and social values in SADC and help create an appropriate environment for deeper regional cooperation through popular participation.”<sup>12</sup> The long-term goal of the SADC Parliamentary Forum is to be transformed into a regional parliament with legislative powers.<sup>13</sup> This should further strengthen the hand of MPs in decision making at regional and international level.

**Parliaments and International Commitments:** Depending on the constitutional and legal framework of a particular country, it is usually the constitutional responsibility of parliaments to ratify their respective government's accession commitment to international legal instruments and declarations. These could be the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the

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<sup>12</sup> Strategic Plan 2000 – 2005, SADC Parliamentary Forum, 2000:9

<sup>13</sup> SADC Parliamentary Forum Constitution

International Criminal Court (ICC), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), among others. In order for Parliament to expeditiously ratify such international instruments, and more importantly, monitor the implementation thereof by their governments, MPs should become familiar with the principles underlying such conventions - otherwise, MPs are unable to discharge their constitutional mandate.

# 10

## **Building a Stronger Parliament**

## 10. Building a stronger Parliament

### What This Unit Will Cover

- General information on parliamentary strengthening initiatives
- Examples of parliamentary enhancement project activities
- Discussion questions

### General Information: Parliamentary Strengthening Initiatives

The growing effort to strengthen parliaments is, to some degree, related to the remarkable increase in the numbers of democratic regimes worldwide, and to the numbers of people living in democracies. Consider the dramatic changes over the past three decades: civilian governments replaced dictatorships in Southern Europe – in Greece and Spain in the 1970s; during the 1970s and 1980s, civilian governments replaced nearly every dictatorship in Latin America; the Asian nations of the Philippines, Korea, and Taiwan became democracies; following the breakup of the Soviet Union, elections have been held and parliaments established in its former republics, in both Eastern Europe and Central Asia; and in Africa, apartheid is now history, and multiparty politics is becoming the norm in much of sub-Saharan Africa. According to one measure, in 1950, only 31 percent of the world’s population lived in countries that could be defined as democracies. By 2000, the figure had doubled.<sup>14</sup>

Donors (such as the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], the US Agency for International Development [USAID], the UK Department for International Development [DFID], the Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA], the Inter American Development Bank [IADB], and now even the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank) have supported legislative strengthening projects, but real and lasting change depends on local efforts and on local support. This comes, primarily, from within parliaments. Political will – the desire of MPs and parliamentary leaders to build stronger parliaments – is fundamental. In addition, others who hold power, such as executives and political parties, must be willing or persuaded to grant parliaments a greater role. We have examined how factors such as regime type (i.e., whether the political system is presidential, parliamentary, or hybrid) can impact on just how strong a parliament becomes. This module describes some things parliaments are doing to strengthen themselves.

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<sup>14</sup> Adrian Karatnycky, “Freedom: A Century of Progress”. *The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, Freedom House, New York, 2000, p. 8.

## **Examples of Parliamentary Enhancement Project Activities**

**Parliamentary commissions/reform committees:** Over the past decade, a number of parliaments in Latin America and Africa established parliamentary commissions (known as modernization committees in Latin America) to oversee and manage the institutional development of the legislature. Parliamentary commissions are generally made up of institutional and political leaders in the parliament, but their charge is limited to institutional development, rather than political issues.

**Parliamentary development plans:** Several parliaments have drafted institutional development plans, and are in the process of implementing them. These plans present a vision for the institution with specific steps and timetables for its development. Planned activities may include programmes, facility and equipment upgrades, new institutional and staffing structures and planned hires, and capacity building and orientation training for members and staff. Parliamentary commissions typically oversee the implementation of these development plans. Given the potential for frequent changes in parliamentary leaders, development plans – with staged implementation of their various components – can help the institution to continue to develop, even as leaders change.

**Committee and institutional strengthening:** Parliaments are implementing a number of activities to cope with increasing demands, sometimes in association with donors. Following are a number of examples.

- **Orientation programs for MPs:** These facilitate the sharing of information and experiences among MPs in the region. They provide initial guidance, advice and background information to newly elected legislative representatives in the forms of seminars, visits, and handbooks such as this one.
- **In-country training for professional staff:** Programmes include training in conducting legislative research, budget analysis, making presentations to MPs, and computer use.
- **International training experiences:** Exchanges for clerks between Parliamentary Associations are common, and some parliamentary development programmes include internships in foreign legislatures. .
- **Research assistance to committees through internship programmes:** Several donor-supported programmes have instituted parliamentary internship programs. Parliaments and MPs also use internship programmes in recruiting talented young people.

- **Expert studies on legislation provided to committees:** Outside experts, from local universities or CSOs, research issues or legislation for committees, prepare white papers or testify at committee meetings.
- **Seminars and study tours on specific issues for committees:** At times donor groups conduct informational seminars or study tours for committees. These may involve foreign travel to examine how other nations deal with particular issues under the committee's jurisdiction, and seminars in which outside experts share their experiences with committee members.
- **Expert directories:** Committee members and staff often need to consult local experts on specific issues, but don't know where to find them. These publications help committees locate such experts.
- **Training for bill-drafters and budget-experts:** Committees in some African parliaments are amending a growing number of bills, and even introducing legislation. Others have become more involved in the budget process. Training programmes in bill drafting and budget analysis help parliamentary staff develop the skills they need to enable parliaments to be effective in these new roles.
- **Assistance in establishing parliamentary research centers, bill-drafting services, and budget offices:** More assertive parliaments need more skilled staff, and they also need new kinds of facilities within the institution (such as research centers and budget offices) to carry out their expanded roles. Local and international assistance is sometimes provided to help them do so.
- **Member offices and staff:** Some parliaments in the region have built or refurbished offices for members, and are providing some funding for personal staff for members.
- **Engendering parliaments assistance:** Most modules of this handbook have stressed the roles parliaments can play in promoting equality between women and men and in enhancing the roles of women in parliaments. Specific assistance can be provided to parliaments. This includes training in gender analysis skills, gender capacity training for MPs and parliamentary staff and access to information on gender.
- **Computers and network development:** Professional assistance can help parliaments to develop coherent information systems, in which all

program components are able to communicate and which can be expanded as needs grow.

- **Parliamentary library strengthening:** Parliaments are upgrading their holdings, training staff, developing expanded library facilities, working on weeding collections, developing acquisition policies and connecting to the Internet.
- **Strengthening linkages with citizens:** Module 2 on representation and constituent relations, described ways parliaments and MPs attempt to better link constituents with government, many of which have been introduced or strengthened through parliamentary development programmes. These include establishing or strengthening press or public affairs offices and visitor information centres; assisting parliaments in publishing newsletters; keeping citizens up-to-date by providing the Hansard and legislative information (including bill status) on-line; logistical assistance and provision of guidelines or manuals in conducting public hearings.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Is your parliament involved in an effort to strengthen itself institutionally? If so, what is the programme designed to accomplish, and when?
2. Has a gender perspective been incorporated into your parliamentary strengthening programmes? If so, what impact has it had on parliamentary practice and procedures?
3. If your parliament were to begin an institutional strengthening program, what might be its priority areas?
4. Does the parliament have a strategic development plan?