



TOOLKIT FOR EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS

FOR PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

DEMOCRACY
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INTRODUCTION

Structural and institutional challenges, particularly in emerging democracies like Pakistan, severely hampers the ability of parliamentary structures to address and resolve country's pressing policy issues. Some of these shortcomings were brought to the forefront as we witnessed the parliamentary response (or the lack thereof) in effectively dealing with the outbreak of Coronavirus diseases (COVID-19) in the country.

To support and strengthen Pakistan's federal and provincial parliamentary structures, Democracy Reporting International (DRI) has prepared this toolkit. It provides a roadmap for improved parliamentary structures and is an extension of the recommendations outlined in DRI's earlier publication, 'Effective Functioning of Standing Committees on Human Rights in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Provinces'.

The first section of the toolkit provides general guidelines for parliamentary reforms. The second section proposes strategic interventions comprising of recommendations, strategies, actions and their subsequent timelines specifically for the Human Rights Committees of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies (these guidelines can also be used to introduce similar reforms in provincial assemblies of Sindh and Balochistan). While the assessment of human rights committees of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been used to specify some of the reforms, this toolkit can go beyond the recommendations in the referenced assessment and can be used for general parliamentary reform. The last section lists some suggestions for parliamentary outreach (using digital platforms) in the times of COVID-19.

¹ https://democracy-reporting.org/dri_publications/briefing-paper-104-effective-functioning-of-standing-committees-on-human-rights-in-punjab-and-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-provinces/

SECTION 1: GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

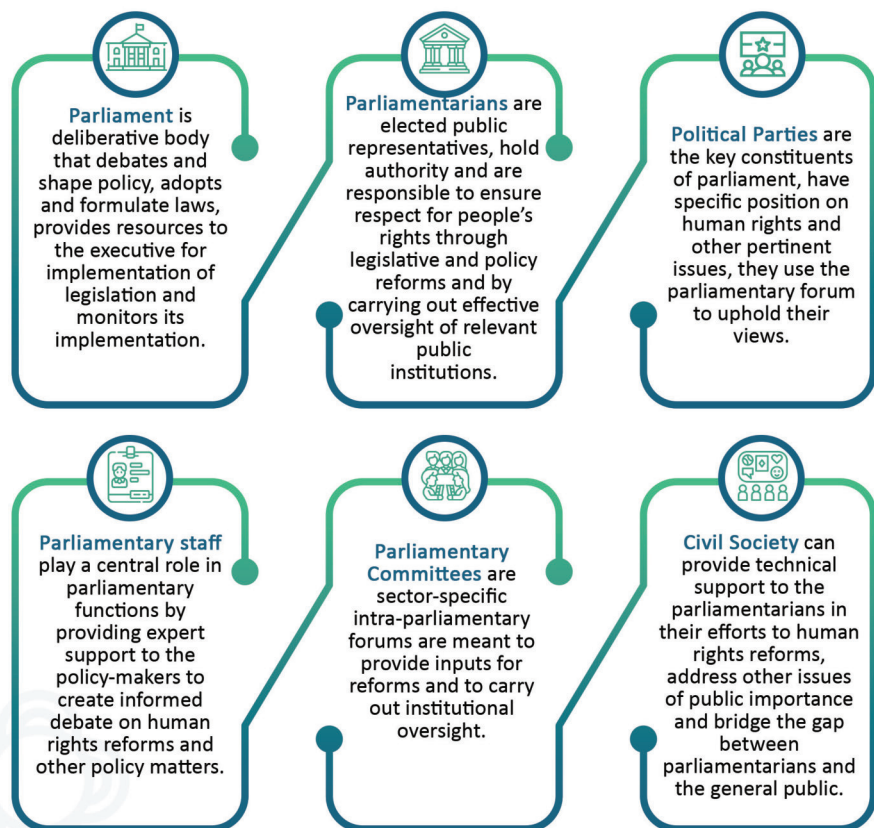
Parliamentary reforms enable democratic institutions to effectively undertake public affairs. This requires ensuring democracy within parliamentary structures, key principles of which are:²



It is important to note that Pakistan's provincial assembly structures have to play their due role in public policy design, delivery and oversight, especially after given increased provincial responsibility under the 18th constitutional amendment.

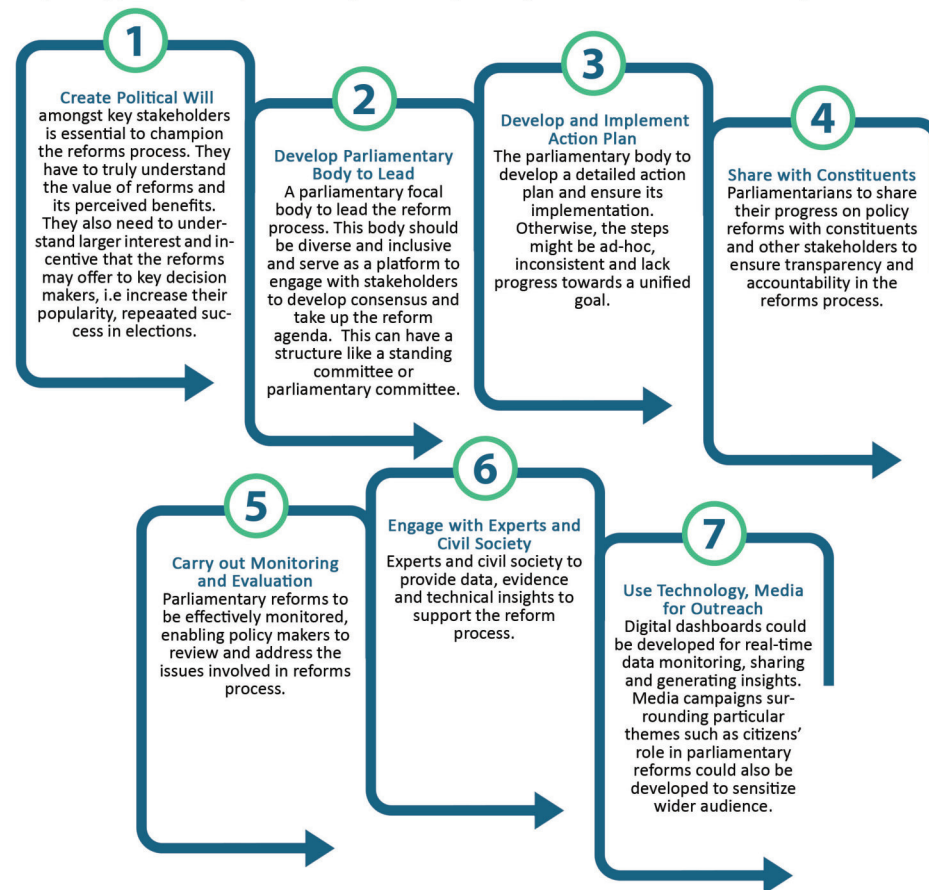
² Parliament and Democracy in 21st Century, A Guide to Good Practice: by Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006 (http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy_en.pdf)

WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS?



WHAT ARE THE PROCESSES?

A 7-step process described below entails recommendations for advancing parliamentary reforms focusing on improving parliamentary functioning and strengthening the committees on human rights.



SECTION 2: SPECIFIC STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

Elements ³	Recommendations	Strategies and Actions	Timeline ⁴
Adequate internal structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration of introduction of amendments by the Provincial Assemblies, particularly of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in the existing rules to scrutinize each piece of legislation against Pakistan's domestic as well as international human rights obligations and commitments. This will ensure that each legislation embodies the spirit of protection and promotion of human rights in the country. 	<p>Creation of political will, which in Pakistan's case may involve a larger informal effort, requires support from party leadership. Using Speakers' office can be an effective way to propose and ensure adherence to the committee reforms agenda. Chairs and members (some key ones/all) can arrange meetings with Speaker and Parliamentary Leaders to build support for the reform agenda. The following key actions may be required to undertake this activity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Outlining proposed reforms prioritizing the order in which reform process can be taken forward. This can be done by some identified champions of reforms until a formal body is created. Example of developing strategic plans for different assemblies can be taken here, where the top office i.e. Speaker expresses willingness to undertake strategic plan and that follows the formation of a committee to oversee the process. 2: Prepare logical rationale explaining why reforms are needed 	Determination of timeline requires assessment of multiple proximities i.e. complexity of the reforms agenda, willingness and availability of political stakeholders, availability of technical/ research support etc.

³ 7 elements of strengthening parliamentary capacity for the protection and realisation of human rights, used by DRI in its assessment of committee of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

⁴ Since this is a working draft, to be shared with respective committees, it is better that they determine timelines for each of the suggested actions.

Elements ³	Recommendations	Strategies and Actions	Timeline ⁴
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3: Organise meetings with Speaker and other stakeholders to seek their consensus on proposed reforms 4: Review the reforms agenda to incorporate stakeholders' inputs 5: Present reforms at the assembly floor 6: Continuing follow-up 	

Elements	Recommendations	Strategies and Actions	Timeline
Strengthened structures of specialised committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expansion of the role and mandate of all committees especially Human Rights Committees in Punjab and KP so they can operate independently. Their mandate should include taking Suo Moto notices of human rights violations in line with standing committees of National Assembly and Senate. They should have freedom to convene meetings and bring debates to the house on issues of human rights. Provision of full briefing by the Secretary of a department (in line with the provisions 135-A of Balochistan Assembly's Rules of Procedure) to the relevant Standing Committee once it formed. This briefing should include details of budget, ongoing projects, legislative gaps and other priority areas of that department. This will provide a very good starting point to the committee for starting its work once it is formed. The committee can decide on recurrence of such briefing as per need and as it continues its oversight function on regular basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It requires amendments in the rules and procedures. However, the existing procedures do not bar committee members from using assembly offices to seek briefings from departments. Whereas, political advocacy may be kept continued to structural changes as mentioned above, some practical changes may be brought in by the committees using the existing mechanisms. Creation of work linkages between Chairs of the Human Rights Committees of Punjab and KP and Secretariats of their respective assemblies to seek briefings from the departments on their functioning and projects etc. 	

Elements	Recommendations	Strategies and Actions	Timeline
Functions of the committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The specialised parliamentary Human Rights Committees to create informed parliamentary debate on human rights (which should be their principle function). As per this practice, legislative scrutiny should be one of the major functions of the committees on human rights, particularly in Punjab and KP. Clearly define the Provincial assemblies' role in compliance of international human rights obligations. <p>(Pakistan's architecture for human rights does not explicitly define provincial assemblies' role in scrutiny of compliance with and implementation of international human rights obligations.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interaction of the committees with other structures, line departments and other parliaments to understand broad role of parliament in conducting legislative scrutiny and oversight function. Legislative scrutiny and effective oversight function of the committees should be their ultimate aim. Incorporation of regular meetings and oversight functions in daily working/work-plans of the committees. 	
Methods of working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The specialised parliamentary human rights committee to adopt appropriate working methods, which are published and kept under regular review in the light of practical experience, it may involve mandating committees to develop their work-plans, set meeting schedules, adopt professional approach to convene the meetings, seek technical and research support from experts and civil society, conduct public hearings, carry out follow up of reforms agenda. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usage of existing mechanisms by committees to develop and pursue their work plans until required reforms are materialised. By developing and acting upon their work plans, the committees can demonstrate their potential and relevance with regards to human rights protection, which will create demand for required reforms. Seek assistance from parliamentary support organisations in development and persuasion of their work plans. 	

Elements	Recommendations	Strategies and Actions	Timeline
Relationship building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliaments and Human Rights Committees to develop and maintain consistent and effective work relationships with a range of key interlocutors. Key interlocutors for members and staff of human rights standing committees include relevant government departments, national/sub-national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and relevant civil society organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt proactive approach by parliamentary committees to reach out the relevant stakeholders. Seek assistance from parliamentary support organisations like DRI/others to build and maintain these crucial relationships. It involves development of a list of key stakeholders, setting up meeting schedules, and carrying out periodic follow ups. Provide regular updates to the constituents through media platforms or direct interactions. 	
Training and capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliaments to provide appropriate training opportunities and research services to all committee members and staff on public policy issues including human rights. Provincial assemblies should taking full advantage of the mandated trainings provided by Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services (PIPS), as this service is not being fully utilized at the moment. Capacity development of provincial assembly members, particularly the newly elected ones, will increase their potential (limited provincial assembly members involved in parliamentary strengthening projects run by national and international organizations have shown keen interest in capacity development initiatives). <p>(Currently, there are no structured training and capacity building programs being offered by the assemblies themselves)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a detailed, need-based, training and capacity building plan for the parliamentarians and committee members. Adoption of a systematic approach either by PIPS or provincial assemblies for the capacity development of elected representatives, particularly the members of standing committees. This capacity development initiative should be specific, strategic and result-oriented. PIPS, provincial assemblies and parliamentary support organisations should adopt a coordinated approach for capacity development of federal and provincial assembly members. 	

Elements	Recommendations	Strategies and Actions	Timeline
Methodology for Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliaments to develop a methodology to assess their effectiveness, particularly with regards to their role in human rights protection. Strengthen the institution of “Committee of Chairs” so all committees can share information and learn from each other. Establish interprovincial parliamentary forum, a platform for parliamentarians and committee members to exchange their views, experiences and best practices. <p>(There is no current mechanism/method to assess the effectiveness Pakistan’s parliamentary structures, including the standing committees on human rights.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All committee chairs to come together formally/informally as “Committee of Chairs” to discuss reforms on regular basis and take systematic approach to committee effectiveness. Promote inter-provincial learning and sharing of experiences may as a tool of peer-learning. Develop and implement an inter-provincial exchange calendar. Assemblies to initiate strategic planning processes, outline key reforms, processes to implement the reforms and establish indicators to measure success against such reforms. 	

SECTION 3: PARLIAMENTARY OUTREACH IN TIMES OF COVID-19

The outbreak of COVID-19 has presented a lot of challenges to the parliamentarians. It has highlighted the need for parliamentarians to have procedures and processes in place to effectively deal with emergencies. The spread mis/disinformation and fake news has exacerbated the need of parliamentarians to have open and direct channels of communication with their constituents. This is where social media and digital platforms can play a crucial role. To ensure transparency and accountability, elected representatives can share their progress and performance with their constituents and with larger audience via social media, digital platforms and traditional media. Despite Pakistan’s poor ranking in digital literacy, social media platforms such as Facebook are gaining more popularity by the day.

Inter-Parliamentary Union echoes the same sentiment in their Social Media Guidelines for Parliamentarians when they state that “You cannot wait for the people to come to parliament; you need to go where the people are. Today, the people are on social media” and we have to reach them there⁵. In Pakistan, social media usage by parliamentarians is slowly becoming an effective tool to communicate with their constituents and promote their performance.

Following are some of the resources which parliamentarians can use to see how they can use social media for keeping their constituents engaged and informed regarding the reform process and their performance:

1. Inter-Parliamentary Union Social Media Guidelines for Parliamentarians
<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/social-media-guidelines-parliaments>
2. Social Media Strategy of Parliament of Georgia (provided as an example)
https://idf.ge/public/upload/IDFI_2019/General/social_network_strategy_parliament_eng.pdf
3. Social Media and Democracy in Pakistan (A study of Democracy Reporting International)
https://democracy-reporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/8P-98_Social-Media-and-Democracy-in-Pakistan_March-2019.pdf
4. Transparency in Parliament (A publication of Senate of Pakistan)
<http://www.senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/6.%20Transp.%20Book.pdf>

⁵<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/social-media-guidelines-parliaments>

DEMOCRACY REPORTING INTERNATIONAL

Democracy Reporting International (DRI) is a nonpartisan, independent, not-for-profit organisation registered in Berlin, Germany. DRI promotes the political participation of citizens, accountability of state bodies and the development of democratic institutions worldwide. DRI helps find local ways of promoting the universal right of citizens to participate in the political life of their country, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.



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