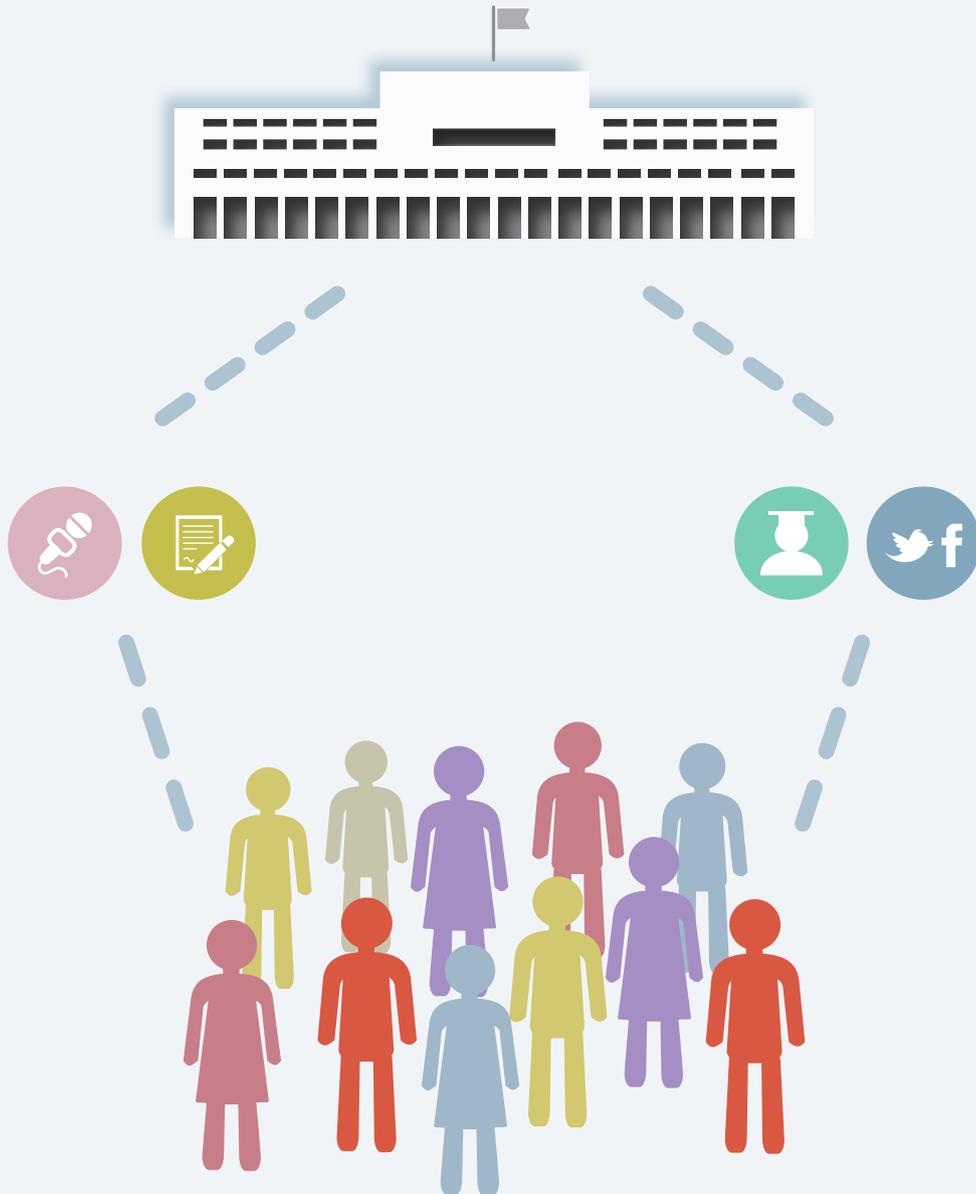


TOOLS FOR ENGAGEMENT

A Guide to Strengthening Relations Between Parliamentarians and Citizens



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Democracy Reporting International (DRI) is a non-partisan, independent, not-for-profit organisation registered in Berlin, Germany. DRI promotes 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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1 PURPOSE

This guide is designed to provide an overview of the various techniques parliamentarians can use to engage with citizens as well as channels through which citizens can communicate with their elected representatives and thereby influence policymaking. The guide is meant to offer parliamentarians, citizens and NGOs with practical approaches and concepts for organising and conducting their work, particularly in relation to outreach techniques. The approaches and strategies described are likely to be relevant for national as well as provincial parliamentarians, political parties, civil society organisations, the media and citizens. Members of the newly elected local governments can adopt these strategies to increase their outreach to citizens

2 INTRODUCTION

When elected through democratic processes, parliaments represent an expression of citizens' human rights. This spirit is captured in article 25¹ of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)², which states that "Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity [...] to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives". Through elections, citizens mandate their elected representatives to govern the state and translate the aspirations of the people into legislative and policy actions. A State party of the ICCPR since 2010, Pakistan is obliged to fulfil the requirements of the convention.

Once elected, parliamentarians become custodians of the will of the people; however, the role of citizens in governance should not end with the casting of a ballot. Parliamentarians and citizens should continue to work together throughout the parliamentary term. Highlighting the need for interaction between citizens and parliamentarians, the UN Human Rights Committee states in General Comment 25³ on the ICCPR that "in order to ensure the full enjoyment of rights protected by article 25, the free communication of information and ideas about public and political issues between citizens, candidates and elected representatives is essential"⁴. A resolution adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union emphasises "the need to foster direct contacts between parliamentarians and citizens through meetings and discussions at all levels, nationally and internationally"⁵. The resolution also notes that it is the duty of parliamentarians to be "fully informed of the citizen's circumstances and problems through constant communication with their constituents".

An explicit and shared understanding between politicians and citizens about their interaction can foster confidence in – and the success of – the participation process⁶. Therefore, it is helpful to establish a clearly defined legal framework for citizens' engagement and participation in decision-making. Formal provisions within the rules and procedures of parliaments are one way of strengthening the use of the many mechanisms outlined in this document.

1 The full text of the article 25 of the ICCPR is as follows: "Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

(a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;

(b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;

(c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.

2 ICCPR is a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It commits States parties to respect the civil and political rights of individuals, including the right to life, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, electoral rights and rights to due process and a fair trial. Pakistan ratified the ICCPR on 23 June 2010. Currently 167 countries are States parties to the treaty.

3 General Comment 25, ICCPR.

4 Other treaties to which Pakistan is State party, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD), Convention Against Corruption (CAC), and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), include commitments relating to citizen participation in decision-making.

5 The resolution was adopted by the 98th Inter-Parliamentary Conference held in Cairo, on 15 September 1997. <<http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/98-1.htm>>

6 European Institute for Public Participation, "Public Participation in Europe: an international perspective, 2009." <http://www.partizipation.at/fileadmin/media_data/Downloads/Zukunftsdiskurse-Studien/pp_in_e_report_03_06.pdf>

3 PARLIAMENTARY FUNCTIONS

Before elaborating upon the tools for citizen engagement, it is important to review key parliamentary functions. For parliamentarians to be effective, they must carry out the functions expected of them in a representative democracy. The principal functions are 1) overseeing the executive, 2) representing constituencies and 3) making laws. In considering whether parliamentarians are acting effectively, one should examine how well they are performing these three functions.

Each of the three functions of the parliamentarian is intrinsically linked with the others. Parliamentarians should be able to conduct each of the three functions effectively while ensuring communication with their constituents.

3.1 OVERSIGHT OF THE EXECUTIVE

An effective assembly or parliament must be relatively independent of the government. It must insist on participating in the initiation of policy and refuse to act as a rubber-stamp for executive proposals. Through its core oversight function, parliaments hold the government to account on behalf of the people, ensuring that the government's policy and actions are efficient and correspond with the needs of the public. Parliamentary oversight is also crucial for addressing any excesses on the part of the government.

Parliamentary oversight increasingly extends to every field of work. Governance, both in national and international decision-making, can only stand to gain from the growing prominence and scope of parliamentary oversight. This role is not limited to the parliamentarians of the opposition parties; backbench⁷ government parliamentarians enjoy numerous opportunities to help achieve effective, accountable government. In regards to the oversight role, well-informed parliamentarians can support or criticise draft legislation. If they support the legislation, they can convince fellow parliamentarians and the people at large of the necessity of the measure. In theory, they can also criticise a weak or badly formulated bill to the extent that the sponsoring Minister may rethink or reword it.

Much of this work is performed outside of the chamber in parliamentary committees. There are plenty of opportunities for parliamentarians to serve in committees and, if the parliament and the government take the work of committees seriously, members of parliament (MPs) can offer a significant contribution.

Apart from discussing draft legislation, committees can supervise much of the internal workings of the parliament and, even more importantly, oversee the executive. This oversight includes performance and accountability checks of the implementation of governmental laws from the angle of human rights as well as investigations of particular issues or controversies.

The regular work of the government is examined through a legislature or departmental committees and, more generally, by the committee on public accounts, which is commonly referred to as the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). This committee closely examines the financial operations of governmental and semi-governmental undertakings, usually by reviewing the reports of the Auditor General of the previous year's accounts. Very often, the whole management philosophy of a government department or enterprise can be called into question by MPs who are willing to apply themselves to engaging in a full cycle of work by examining whether the government has correctly used the funds released for its operations. Theoretically, parliamentarians help to render the processes of governance more transparent and increase its accountability to the people.

In most countries, the majority of development projects are carried out by government agencies. Parliamentarians can help to promote economic and social development in their constituencies by monitoring the progress of ongoing government-funded development projects and maintaining contact with constituents and constituent groups to learn about the success of the projects and whether the projects are appropriately addressing relevant needs. If a project is being implemented poorly, parliamentarians may choose to intervene on the community's behalf by contacting relevant ministries or local government agencies. In some cases, it may take only one phone call to have the problem resolved. Parliamentarians may also want to raise the issue in Assembly sessions. Before doing so, it may be useful to collect testimonies from public to reinforce the case.

⁷ Backbencher⁷ is a term used to refer to a member of the parliament who does not hold any government office or ministerial position. The term may be used for both the members of the treasury benches as well as the opposition benches.

3.2 REPRESENTING CONSTITUENCIES

One of the major roles of a parliamentarian is representing his or her constituency as well as organised groups and individuals elsewhere in the country. The parliamentarian also represents groups and individuals outside of his or her own constituency in overarching concerns such as human rights or environmental issues. This representation can be conducted in various forms, including the parliamentarian's role as overseer (as mentioned above) and as lawmaker (see section below) by ensuring that the concerns of constituents are addressed in the parliament in the drafting of legislation, questions, calling attention to notices and adjournment motions.

Parliamentarians must provide services to their constituents. These services include responding to constituent requests for information, help and casework as well as taking care of the electoral district's interests with respect to state aid formulas, local projects and public expenditures. Parliamentarians have to ensure that citizens and interest groups have access to MPs, committees, and the general parliamentary process. An assembly or parliament must be open and provide information on agendas and proceedings.

Citizens also need a sense of what representative democracy entails if they are to participate and advocate responsibly. It is up to parliamentarians to provide citizens with that knowledge. Parliaments should inform the public that it is the job of the parliamentarians to represent diverse constituencies, various interests and differing values as well as to engage in conflict, build consensus and achieve settlements.

Parliamentarians have to be responsive to the demands of the citizens as well as to what the assembly or parliament determines the needs of the citizens to be. Therefore, it is essential that parliamentarians proactively monitor issues of public interest that can be addressed in the legislature through bills, questions, calling attention to notices and committees.

3.3 MAKING LAWS

Law-making includes several inter-related legislative activities. The parliamentarian's legislative role typically includes reviewing, amending and passing laws, whereas the parliament's role in bill drafting varies from country to country. It is essential that parliamentarians seek input from citizens and interest groups to ensure that the legislation represents the people that it will affect. Laws and policies formulated through public consultation and engagement enjoy greater trust and credibility in the eyes of the public.

The legislative role in formulating, reviewing and adopting a state budget has special significance. In fact, the budget is likely the most important bill that a parliament passes. The budget bill also includes allocations for the rights of the public, such as education, health, and political participation. When reviewing the budget, therefore, parliamentarians should aim to objectively assess that sufficient allocations are made for the provision or strengthening of these rights. Consultations with civil society, technical experts and relevant independent institutions (such as election commissions or national human rights institutions) should also be made during the budget making process. A parliament's performance during the budget process acts as an indicator of the parliament's overall effectiveness.

The parliament's oversight role, as mentioned above, is also worth considering here, as it determines how and to what extent the parliament monitors the application and effect of the laws it has enacted. Finally, one should also pay attention to legislative foresight, reflecting on how and to what extent the legislature should look ahead in order to develop laws and policies that meet the future needs of the state.

4 CONSTITUENT RELATIONS AND CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT

The practice of constituent relations involves communicating with constituents, learning about their concerns and – as possible and where appropriate – helping to solve those problems. It encompasses a broad range of activities that can be adapted to fit a parliamentarian’s resources, time and level of experience.

An effective constituent relations strategy requires that all key actors, including political parties, civil society, the media and citizens, be engaged in the process and that all can benefit from it. Everything from conducting public hearings and public forums, arranging site visits and issuing newsletters, to visiting with a constituent during a trip to the local market or café or intervening on behalf of a constituent before a local government office or parliament all represent effective constituent relations strategy. The specific methods a parliamentarian uses to strengthen interaction and communication with constituents will depend upon a variety of factors, but all parliamentarians can engage with constituents in some way.⁸

4.1 WHY ENGAGE CITIZENS?

Citizen engagement often represents one of the most challenging aspects of a parliamentarian’s job, but it is important and can provide benefits to the constituents, parliamentarians, political parties and society as a whole. Engaging with citizens in policy making also reflects international standards on civil and political rights outlined in international human rights treaties (such as the ICCPR) to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to participate in the conduct of public affairs.

Parliamentarians who actively engage with their constituents can help to create a link between citizens and their government or assembly. By becoming involved in local issues, parliamentarians can demonstrate the parliament’s ability to address real issues in people’s lives and provide tangible benefits to the communities they represent. By listening to public concerns and then conveying those concerns to the parliament or assembly and their respective political parties, parliamentarians become better equipped to design or amend laws and policies that respond to real human needs. Members of the opposition benches in the parliament can more effectively gauge gaps in the government’s policies by proactively seeking citizen’s feedback on the impact of these policies. This information, as well as the relationships that are developed with constituents, can be used by opposition members to effectively scrutinise the government’s work and mobilise popular support for reforms of laws and policies. Political parties can use the information that is collected through active engagement with constituents to ensure that their platforms resonate with constituents and that their policies reflect relevant concerns.

Active engagement in a constituency also gives a more human face to the parliamentarian. Although an elected representative cannot solve all of his or her constituents’ problems, helping with some, and at least engaging with others, can build public trust in the parliamentarian and the parliament. Citizens may better understand who their parliamentarians are, their roles and how they can help (as well as how they are unable to help). Parliamentarians who establish two-way communication channels with constituents may also be able to provide citizens with a better sense of why they are making certain decisions and difficulties that they face (such as insufficient financial and other resources). Citizens who have direct contact with an elected representative are also more likely to identify his or her party as an institution they support.

Effective constituent relations can also help to mobilise citizen participation in public affairs. When a parliamentarian works with local officials, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and ordinary citizens to solve local problems, he or she empowers them to improve their own lives and communities. By widening the circle of citizens who engage in public policies and decisions, the representative helps to fight apathy and enhance democracy through practical problem solving. Parties and legislators who establish strong ties with constituents also develop a base of loyal political supporters, which helps to mobilise volunteers.

The constituent relations activities of parliamentarians can provide a much-needed opportunity for the public. Representatives are uniquely situated to help citizens connect with their government and untangle the bureaucratic maze that they often face. Parliamentarians have the authority and resources to get answers and they enjoy access to information often unavailable to citizens, local elected officials or other community leaders.

⁸ The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) has issued a manual for parliamentarians that addresses some of these issues: <http://www.pips.gov.pk/downloadable_files/modules/028_parliamentarians_hand_book_2013.pdf>

5 TOOLS FOR PARLIAMENTARY OUTREACH AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

5.1 PUBLIC HEARINGS

Public hearings are information gathering mechanisms that can be used by parliamentary committees as tools for analysing and designing policies and laws as well as for oversight and scrutiny purposes. Public hearings are most commonly held to review drafts and proposed laws.

Public hearings enable parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, invited experts, interested bodies and the public to review, scrutinise and investigate a range of issues connected to good governance. They help parliamentarians to determine the measures that are needed to improve a piece of legislation or the functioning of government. Public hearings can also inform parliamentarians and parliaments about the level of public support for a particular law and allow citizens to play a part in the development of public policy. International good practices indicate that laws and policies supported by such procedures enjoy greater credibility.

A public hearing may be tabled as an agenda item at a regular or special committee meeting, or it may represent the sole purpose of a special meeting or series of meetings during which no other matter is addressed.

Each of the Parliamentary Houses in Pakistan has the mandate within their rules of procedure to hold public hearings. Moreover, the country's parliamentary houses, such as the National Assembly,⁹ Senate and Punjab Assembly identify the need to hold more public hearings in order to gather information and knowledge to assist the committees in their work.¹⁰

Examples of public hearings in Pakistan

The Senate Special Committee on Electoral Issues conducted a public hearing on electoral reforms in 2012¹¹.

The Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs conducted a public hearing on "Policy Options for Pakistan Concerning Peace in Afghanistan and the Region in Light of Withdrawal of NATO Forces Afghanistan, Post 2014" in 2014.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Deputy Speaker, Imtiaz Shahid, conducted a public hearing on 'Election issues' in 2014¹².

Public Hearing Formats:

Invitation-Only Hearings: In invitation-only hearings, a committee receives testimony or evidence from either invited experts who are called to provide information on the issue under consideration or from ministry or cabinet officials who appear to explain and defend agency activities and record. The committee receives testimony only from those persons who are specially invited.

Open Public Hearings: In public hearings, committees do not restrict the receipt of evidence to invited experts. Instead, interested parties and citizens are allowed to address the committee members without personal invitation. In a few parliamentary and legislative bodies, any interested citizen is allowed to address the committee, while in others, testimony is limited to representatives and spokespersons of groups and organisations that have a special interest and concern in the subject matter of the hearing.

9 National Assembly of Pakistan, "Strategic Plan 2014-2018." <http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1439219279_679.pdf>

10 Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, "Strategic Plan, 2010-2012." <http://www.pips.gov.pk/downloadable_files/publications/015.Punjab%20Assembly%20Strategic%20Plan%202010-12.pdf> DRI assisted the Special Committee of the Senate on Electoral Issues in holding a Public Hearing in 2012. The civil society's submissions that were presented at the hearing can be accessed here: <http://democracy-reporting.org/files/public_hearing_presentations_on_electoral_reforms__1__2012-10-16.pdf>

11 <http://democracy-reporting.org/publications/country-reports/pakistan/public-hearing-on-electoral-reforms-pakistan-17-october-2012.html>

12 <http://tribune.com.pk/story/667544/room-for-improvement-public-hearing-on-local-government-act/>

There are several types of public hearings, which are listed below:

Legislative Hearings: Parliamentary committees¹³ conduct legislative public hearings on issues and problems related to particular draft laws or to determine the necessity of a new law.

Parliamentary committees sometimes hold such hearings to help initiate additional activities for the committee or parliament. More often, the purpose of a legislative hearing is to devise or amend draft legislation in a manner that takes advantage of the available expertise and reflects public interest.

Hearings often take the form of a forum at which facts and opinions on an act are presented by witnesses for consideration by the committee. The witnesses may be drawn from all walks of life and may include MPs, government officials, representatives of interest groups, NGOs and citizens who have an opinion to voice or have been (or would be) affected by the legislation in question. It is a good practice to hear people who have different views on a legislative action, including 1) those in favour of the bill, 2) those against, and 3) generally interested groups who can improve the contents of the legislation.

The common goal of all participants in legislative hearings should be to determine how best the matter under consideration can be legislated by an act of parliament.

Oversight Hearings: Oversight public hearings – also known as supervisory hearings – examine the work of government, namely government implementation of promulgated laws, and the performance of government officials in executing legislative mandates and projects. Parliamentarians examine the extent to which the government's implementation of the law follows the letter and spirit of the legislation on which it is based and, more broadly, whether public interests are being served. They may also examine draft legislation and proposed acts of parliament. These hearings can also be fruitful when legislative houses are reviewing budgets.

Oversight hearings are used to promote effective and efficient governance. In the United States, for instance, it is common for congressional committees to conduct this type of public hearing when they are authorising funding for government programs, considering the passage of new programs or establishing government agencies.

Investigative Hearings: Investigative public hearings are similar to legislative and oversight hearings, but they focus on the investigation of particular activities or issues.

Investigative hearings take place when there is an indication, evidence or public concern that an offence has been committed by a public official or government department or when a private or public company has acted inappropriately in dealing with government bodies or officials.

Some parliaments establish special committees that are tasked with investigating a particular issue or series of events. In countries with democratic traditions, parliamentary working bodies may conduct such investigations as part of their regular activities. Sometimes these procedures can also be linked with public petitions, as the Senate of Pakistan has recently done.

Hearings Outside of Parliament: Most public hearings are held in parliament, but a parliamentary committee or special committee may decide that there is a need for a public hearing to be held elsewhere.

A public hearing brings parliament closer to the people. Through hearings outside of parliament, committees may hear testimony from witnesses who are unable or unwilling to come to the seat of government to testify. Such hearings also bring the attention of the public to the matter being discussed, especially if the hearing is held in a relevant location, such as a hospital or school.

By conducting a public hearing outside of parliament, the hearing may discuss a problem or issue with the people most directly affected by it.

¹³ For the purpose of this document, parliamentary committees refer to all of the committees of the Parliament, Senate and Provincial Assemblies in Pakistan, including joint committees

5.2 PUBLIC PETITIONS

Public petitions are a tool used by citizens to provide input on public policy. Citizens may submit petitions to bring issues of public importance to the attention of the parliament or use them to make a formal request to the parliament to address a grievance. Petitions may also be used by citizens as a means of contributing public opinions and ideas regarding matters on the parliamentary agenda. Sometimes they are used to ask the parliament or a house to take a specific action.. Petitions can be presented directly by citizens, or else citizens can ask a parliamentarian to present a petition on his or her behalf.

Petitions serve as checks on the implementation of legislation and help measure the responsiveness of government institutions to citizen's concerns and can thereby be used by parliamentarians to strengthen public policy.

Public petitions in Pakistan¹⁴

The Senate of Pakistan has established a mechanism for the receipt and processing of public petitions¹⁵. The procedure for the submission and disposal of public petitions is provided for in the Senate's Rules of Procedures and Conduct of Business¹⁶.

5.3 FIELD VISITS/SITE INVESTIGATIONS

A parliamentary field visit represents a useful tool to complement the functions at the disposal of a parliamentarian or a parliamentary committee. The visit is used to bring attention to an issue, gather information, review the situation on the ground, gather evidence, and possibly expose corruption or ineffective policy. Parliamentary field visits are 1) part of a process, 2) should not be implemented at random and 3) should lead to follow-up parliamentary activities. If parliamentarians are to have an impact on policies and projects, it is essential that they enjoy the opportunity to make political assessments and check results on the ground. Monitoring, evaluating and reporting is crucial to parliamentary oversight of the implementation of legislation.

Field visits involving an entire committee can take place to assist the committee's deliberations. Individual committee members are also free to make any visits that they deem necessary for their personal information gathering. Caucuses can also conduct these site investigations and deliver their findings to relevant committees.

5.4 ADVISORY COMMITTEE

If parliamentarians are interested in acquiring specialised or expert information from a specific constituency, they may consider forming an advisory committee. Representing a common practice in many European countries, an advisory committee comprises a cross section of people who are interested in a particular subject or collection of subjects and are assigned specific tasks, such as preparing recommendations, conducting research, speaking with constituents or organising events. These advisory committees can be linked to individual parliamentarians, party caucuses, governing parties, oppositions, specific issue based groups or standing committees.

If a parliamentarian would like to improve the quality of a piece of legislation that is up for debate either in the assembly or a committee on which the parliamentarian is sitting, the parliamentarian can first assemble an advisory committee of local merchants, lawyers, as well as interested NGOs and citizens. The advisory committee might then dedicate itself to reviewing the piece of legislation, writing letters, lobbying local and regional politicians for assistance, preparing reports that document the unique qualities of

14 Several countries, such the UK, Scotland, Canada and Sri Lanka, allow for such petitions
Canada: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/MarleauMontpetit/DocumentViewer.aspx?Sec=Ch22&Seq=1&Language=E>
UK: <http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/sign-a-petition/paper-petitions/>
<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-information-office/P07.pdf>
Sri Lanka <http://www.parliament.lk/en/component/committees/committee/showCommittee?id=11>

15 Senate of Pakistan, "Public Petition." <<http://www.senate.gov.pk/en/petition.php?id=-1&catid=110&subcatid=282&cattitle=Public%20Petition>>

16 Rule 277, Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Senate, 2012. <<http://www.senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/updatedrpcb.pdf#page=104>>

the legislation, or writing amendments to the specific piece of legislation.

When parliamentarians are in a position to lobby government ministries for assistance with the legislation, advisory committees can equip them with valuable information, clear statistics, vocal support and professional input. By getting involved in the legislation, the advisory committee will also become invested in its success, and the individuals that form the committee might later be enlisted as useful allies in other key political projects in the constituency, including re-election campaigns.

5.5 DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

As we move into a more technologically advanced world with a range of communications platforms, parliamentarians must examine the various possibilities of exploiting these new forms of communications to better engage with their constituents¹⁷.

The prevalent use of social media creates an opportunity for parliamentarians, civil society and advocacy groups to connect with citizens, lead conversations on issues of interest and drive civic discussions. Social networking forums such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, make it possible to extend conversations virtually and reach large numbers of individuals. Messaging applications, such as Viber, WhatsApp and Skype, also provide parliamentarians with the opportunity to communicate en masse with a wide range of constituents regarding their work in the assemblies or within their constituencies. Many of these communication tools also provide features that can be used to conduct online polling.

Political, electoral and social campaigns are becoming more decentralised in terms of political control over campaign topics and more focused on social networks. Advancements in social media networking allow individuals and their networks to act like broadcasters and publishers and, therefore, transform the nature of political communication. Another way that social media affects politicians is the increasing organisation of citizens through online forums. As a result, politicians are being made to answer questions they may not have otherwise faced. Thus, those seeking to engage constituents and involve them in political processes must also engage with and win the trust of social network groups.

There has been significant citizen disengagement from politics around the world in recent years along with a growing feeling of alienation. Digital and social media offers a means of re-connecting constituents and parliamentarians, thereby strengthening a sense of public responsiveness and accountability. These tools can help bridge gaps that emerge when parliamentarians prove unable to physically visit their constituencies (for example, during parliamentary sessions). Parliamentarians can develop feedback mechanisms to enable constituents to respond to or talk to political elites. Surveys or questionnaires seeking opinions from constituents can also be conducted using social media platforms.

Both print and electronic media are using photographs and citizen input on news stories. Mindful of this fact, parliamentarians should look at the opportunities that this new engagement offers. It has previously proved difficult for backbench opposition and government parliamentarians to receive significant media coverage for the work that they are performing. By using social media, parliamentarians can ensure that their message and their work can be transmitted to a wider audience without a reliance on traditional media outlets.

With the help of social media, citizens now have greater access to advocate parliamentarians regarding personal issues or ideological stances about which they feel strongly. Parliamentarians and political parties can also use citizens who are active on social media in order to better ascertain areas of public concern and to link up with like-minded groups on specific issues, such as human rights.

Parliamentary houses (such as assemblies or senates) can also use digital and social media to inform citizens about their activities.

¹⁷ To learn more about the use of social media in politics see: European Parliamentary Research Service, "Briefing on Social Media in Election Campaigning 2014" <[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2014/140709/LDM_BRI\(2014\)140709_REV1_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2014/140709/LDM_BRI(2014)140709_REV1_EN.pdf)>; Green European Foundation, Campaign Handbook, pp 67-72, 2014 <http://gef.eu/uploads/media/Campaign_Handbook.pdf>; and Centre for European Studies, "Social Media: The New Power of Political Influence, 2012," 2012. <<http://www.martenscentre.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/social-media-and-politics-power-political-influence.pdf>>

5.6 PUBLIC MEETINGS/TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Public or Town Hall meetings represent an important means of developing and maintaining a local identity in the constituency and disseminating messages to constituents. Bringing a diverse audience together has its challenges. On the positive side, a public meeting affords parliamentarians the occasion to speak with a very large group of citizens all at once. This provides him or her with an opportunity to directly gain a sense of the community's attitudes, problems and values. On the other hand, representatives will have to respond to challenging questions and can be bombarded with the type of requests that may prove impossible to accomplish as a public representative. Yet, it is nonetheless the role of parliamentarians to manage such expectations and inform their constituents about limitations and challenges.

When structuring a public or town hall meeting, event planning becomes critical, and there are numerous ways to address this issue. Some parliamentarians regularly travel to their constituencies during the legislative recess; others hold weekly meetings at select locations. When planning any meeting schedule, here are some basic factors to consider:

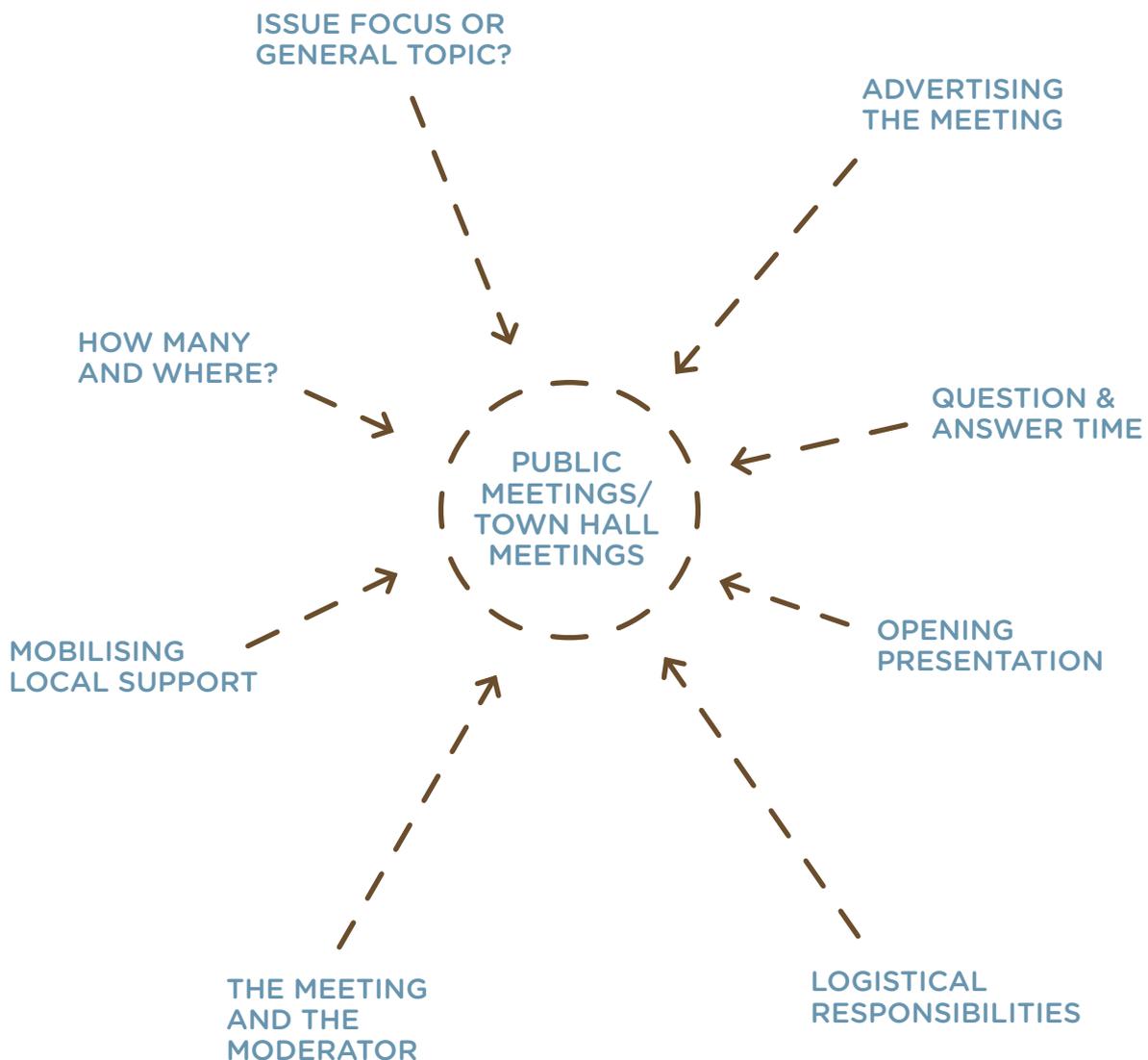


Figure 1: Planning public/townhall meetings

How Many and Where? An active parliamentarian should develop some type of regular schedule for public meetings in his or her constituency. The size, number of constituents with whom they need to meet, and geographic features of the constituency will influence this schedule, as well as the availability of resources. In many rural areas, the weather and seasons will also affect when and how one can travel. When planning these trips, parliamentarians should sit down with staff and review areas that might represent priorities. Is there a place that the parliamentarian has never been, a place that is experiencing a great deal of sudden change, or a location that has a lingering condition that might be eliminated through this sort of effort? These locations should become primary targets on the parliamentarian's tour.

Issue Focus or General Topic? Parliamentarians will need to decide whether their public meetings should focus on a single issue (like pension questions or improving roads and sanitation) or whether the meetings will be entirely open to general discussion (such as reviewing the recent parliamentary session or listening to constituents talk about a range of local issues). Generally, discussions about specific issues will attract fewer people, but potentially draw a more engaged audience. It will likewise draw the attention of the media in a larger locality and limit the number of vexing comments on unrelated issues to the parliamentarian's work as an elected official. However, in smaller towns and rural villages, an open forum may be more suitable if the parliamentarian rarely visits the area or if it is the type of community that is unaccustomed to receiving politicians. In many towns and villages, citizens may welcome the chance to attend a meeting and speak about a variety of issues that impact their lives, and the local media may grant exceptional coverage of the event simply because the parliamentarian took the time to visit.

Advertising the Meeting: Parliamentarians should advertise the time and place of the meeting well in advance of arrival, but not by more than two or three weeks. If it is feasible, staff or local volunteers should begin hanging posters in public spaces, on billboards, or place small advertisements in local newspapers approximately eight to 10 days before the event. Another possibility is to go door-to-door with flyers or have loudhailers drive around the area announcing the upcoming meeting. Social media can also be used to spread the word. Just by informing the local newspaper about the purpose of a visit, free media coverage can often be generated. Parliamentarian should inform the media about the importance of the visit. Regardless of how a parliamentarian ultimately chooses to advertise the visit, it is crucial to promote the event and circulate details. If the visit is a listening tour designed to get a better feel for the community's problems, the media should be informed of that purpose. After the distribution of a press release, staff should telephone local newspapers and reporters to remind them of the upcoming meeting. Even if the attendance at the meeting is small, a widely publicised notice highlights the fact that the meeting occurred and that the parliamentarian took the time to visit the community. A parliamentarian can also publish the schedule of their visits through his or her website or social media accounts, such as Twitter and Facebook.

Mobilising Local Support: Organising meetings and event planning can be very time consuming. Help can be enlisted to assist with the task. Party members, NGOs, and interested local constituents or supporters can usually bring citizens together with their representatives in a more organised and coherent manner than someone trying to organise a meeting over a series of long distance phone calls. This approach also offers a better idea of the type of people who might attend based on the affiliations of the local organiser. If the parliamentarian is visiting a group or community that potentially disagrees strongly with his or her point of view, the parliamentarian should take measures to get to know the audience. Staff or local volunteers should acquire as much information as possible about the group. If this is a new city for the parliamentarian, research should be conducted by telephoning select officials from the parliamentarian's party or local media in order to get a better understanding of the political scene. Lastly, someone should arrive shortly before the meeting (usually half an hour before the parliamentarian speaks) and ask the gathered participants questions to get a feel for the way the conversation is headed. If the parliamentarian is walking into an engaged crowd, it is best to have information beforehand to prepare and consider revising tactics.

The Meeting and the Moderator: A successful public meeting requires a moving and focused discussion facilitated by both the parliamentarian and a moderator. Choosing the right moderator to guide the discussion is critically important to any visit. The moderator can be a local ally, a media figure, the leader of a local advocacy group or even a staff member. The moderator should introduce the topic of discussion, announce the rules for any questions and answers, and state what time the meeting is scheduled to end. Make sure the moderator can firmly control the proceedings and if necessary play the role of the "bad guy" should the discussion become unruly. A parliamentarian should not be the individual who cuts a rude person off or stops someone from asking too many questions. That role should be left to someone who is not an elected official and will not make the next day's newspapers if the proceedings turn for the worse. A parliamentarian should appear to be diplomatic, tactful and graceful under fire.

Finally, five to 10 minutes before closing the forum, the moderator should remind the audience that the meeting will end. An open announcement of this nature by the moderator protects the parliamentarian from appearing to be cutting someone off or refusing to take additional questions.

Opening Presentation: When giving an opening statement, the parliamentarian should briefly address the topic of the meeting. For example, if a parliamentarian is there to provide an overview of the past session of the parliament or assembly, he or she may want to limit the discussion to three key issues. This speech should also reflect a well-researched understanding of the topics being presented to the audience. Of course, the type of audience present is the key to the style of presentation. A parliamentarian would not be well served if he or she gave remarks addressing a lawyers association in the same manner as to a group of elderly pensioners. The parliamentarian should be prepared to discuss issues and not simply recycle old campaign rhetoric. A parliamentarian will be more appreciated as a speaker if he or she is prepared to discuss the audience's concerns and speak in a style that the audience can relate to and understand.

Question & Answer Time: Whether the visit is part of a tour across a district or a single issue stop, a public meeting should be considered a form of dialogue with constituents. Sharing information about important issues and the parliamentarian's activities can be useful, but a public meeting is not a debate and is not the appropriate place to lecture or teach an audience. Parliamentarians should try and be good listeners, seeking to understand before being understood. Staff or volunteers should take notes at key intervals, and follow-up questions should be asked when important subjects are addressed.

Logistical Responsibilities: Before the opening address is given, someone should send a sign-up sheet throughout the audience or place a sign-in sheet on the table where people enter the room. The registration should be kept optional, but it should be remembered that by having this information a parliamentarian or his or her staff can write thank you letters to the attendees. In general, voters are still unaccustomed to receiving any communication from a parliamentarian; a quick note of appreciation for attending reinforces the message that parliamentarians are concerned with constituent problems and have not forgotten them after moving on to the next community.

5.7 TOURING THE CONSTITUENCY

Some parliamentarians find it useful to organise trips throughout key regions of their constituency and hold several different meetings in a short period of time. When planning these tours, parliamentarians should meet with a wide spectrum of interest groups and publicise the tour schedule through the local media or social media, if useful. The parliamentarian should also consider asking local party officials or a local NGO to organise the tour. This is particularly helpful when there is an NGO working on the specific issue or the specific geographical area within the constituency. This helps with the basic organisation and logistics but, more importantly, local officials and NGOs have a much better sense of the kinds of issues that voters care about and popular attitudes toward a given party or ideology.

During their time in the constituency, parliamentarians may also want to set up meetings with constituents at specific locations (also referred to as "clinics" or "surgeries" in some countries). The parliamentarian should advertise the location, date and time as well as choose locations where people are used to congregating, such as cafes, restaurants or public squares. Several of these meetings can be scheduled throughout the day. In the absence of a district office, setting up clinics on a regular basis can help convey a parliamentarian's long-term commitment to constituents. If these clinics are to be held on a regular basis, parliamentarians should consider using a friend's or a party official's home to save money.

5.8 TOURS OF THE ASSEMBLY

In a democratic society, parliamentarians should encourage activities that strengthen the notion that parliaments serve the people. Popular in many parts of the world, tours of the parliament and government offices help people to better engage in the political process. Allowing constituents to see the offices of the parliament, meet staff, observe proceedings of the parliament or committees and ask questions, gives a human face to the parliament. Many constituents will remember their visits to a parliament for years to come, and this familiarity often brings with it the added bonus of loyalty to the individual parliamentarian, if not the party, who sponsored the trip.

Tours of the legislative houses are also a good way of imparting civic and political education. Many democracies encourage tours for students from schools, colleges and universities. Through these visits, students can learn not only how parliaments function but also the importance of why parliaments are necessary a democratic society.

Facilitating such tours becomes easy if a particular office is tasked within the parliament. Most modern parliaments in Europe, America and Asia have departments that formally arrange tours. Tour guides are also available to provide tours. In many cases, parliamentarians themselves give assembly tours, particularly to citizens from their own constituencies.

5.9 SURVEYS/QUESTIONNAIRES

Public opinion surveys offer parliamentarians and political parties valuable information about a constituency's needs, priorities, and the perceptions of its citizens. Parliamentarians are the representatives of the people in their constituency and it is therefore crucial for these representatives to know what their constituents think and what their concerns are.

Matters that parliamentarians and their parties consider a pressing issue might not be as high a priority or a concern of actual constituents.

A benefit of public opinion research is that it lets citizens know that their opinions matter and that they have a stake in the parliamentary process. Conducting surveys can be very simple, constituting, for instance, a one-page questionnaire to constituents about their top concerns. It can also be very complex, depending upon the type of information the parliamentarian is seeking. If parliamentarians are attempting to gather truly scientific data, research done by an outside polling firm may prove the best option. This may provide more honest answers to questions that can be difficult to ask, including questions relating to a parliamentarian's performance or a specific stance on an issue.

Public opinion surveys can either be quantitative or qualitative. Both types are described below:

Quantitative Surveys: A quantitative survey involves interviewing a large number of individuals using a set questionnaire. The individuals interviewed answer "yes or no" to the questions or choose from a list of responses. By compiling the answers collected from these questionnaires, one can ascertain how a given percentage of constituents feels about the issue. The advantage of a quantitative survey is that it can be easy to design. The disadvantage, however, is that providing statistically valid (accurate) results requires interviewing a large number of people, and those people must be chosen randomly. This can be expensive and time-consuming.

Qualitative Surveys: Qualitative research includes less structured survey methods such as free-form interviews or focus group discussions. The questions asked are usually open-ended and the person being interviewed generally answers in his or her own words. Formal qualitative research can be more complex to design, and does not provide easy numerical results, but it does allow for a more in depth examination of people's opinions. It essentially asks why people feel the way they do about an issue. Informal qualitative research can be conducted on an ongoing basis, simply by talking to constituents and meeting with groups of people to discuss important issues.

Focus Groups: Representing a relatively common form of qualitative research, focus groups involve assembling a small group of individuals (usually no more than 10) from the target demographic group. Each individual should be chosen through random selection. The group is then asked questions from a discussion guide of questions relating to a given topic. Detailed notes are taken, and once several discussions have taken place, the parliamentarian and his or her staff can review the results and draw some conclusions about how constituents feel about the issues in question.

A good public opinion survey is one in which a wide enough sample of people is questioned to provide an opportunity for the average member of the constituency to have his or her voice heard. Generally, the simpler the survey the better, so lengthy questionnaires should be avoided. With each additional question after the first eight to 10, interviewees will begin to lose interest and begin to rush answers, thus corrupting the final data. The most common method of polling is face-to-face interviews, although this may be substituted with telephone interviews that are less time consuming and involve a more controlled envi-

ronment. Face-to-face opinion surveys can be conducted in one of two manners:

- By an interviewer who usually is an employee or volunteer for the legislator or his or her party. The interviewer asks specific questions and leads the discussion on the subject in question.
- For a self-administered survey, constituents are given forms to fill out and return once they have answered the questions. Whether parliamentarians choose to employ the in-person interview technique or the self-administered survey will depend upon the circumstances and reasoning for conducting the survey.

The more issues, details and nuances desired, the more necessary it may be to consider using the in-person interview technique. If the survey is strictly being used to gauge support for a single issue that is well-known throughout the district, a self-administered survey might be considered.

5.10 CONSTITUENCY OFFICES

In many countries, parliamentarians conduct constituent relations without the use of formal offices or other sites designed to facilitate interaction between parliamentarians and constituents. In these countries, meetings that take place between parliamentarians and citizens occur in homes, offices, restaurants, cafes or other locations.

In some countries, the parties or state give parliamentarians budgets to set up constituency offices¹⁸ to ensure that they remain closer to their constituents. Such offices have a separate staff from those in the parliament and often separate financial resources to purchase equipment and pay for staff and outreach activities. Funds are often allocated by the parliament for constituent relations activities and provided to each individual parliamentarian or to each party (which has representation in the parliament), who then determines how best to spend the money. Some offices are located in a municipal building, others stand alone. It is important that the parliamentarian, wherever possible, avoid the perception of specific party affiliation. Regardless of where the office is located, all constituents, including those who voted for the parliamentarian and his or her party as well as those who did not, need to feel that it is somewhere they are comfortable visiting and discussing their concerns.

Well-run offices can increase a parliamentarian's visibility in his or her constituency and convey a sense of permanence about a parliamentarian's participation in a community. They can help to make constituent outreach activities more efficient by providing a consistent place to conduct meetings with constituents and a centralised location for dealing with casework or individual requests for help from citizens. Most of the techniques listed below and materials can be readily adapted to suit the needs of any parliamentarian, whether or not he or she benefits from an office.

Newsletters: Newsletters from an elected representative or parliament are a great way to communicate directly with constituents, disseminate a message, and reinforce the projects and priorities the parliamentarian has for his or her constituency. A newsletter neither has to be expensive, nor does it require specific expertise to produce – but it should look professional. Where computers are readily available, most standard word processing programs can be used. It is much better to produce a simple publication once a year than to publish a report indicating no activity.

A newsletter should describe the parliamentarian's, party's or assembly's activities and promote issues about which they care. It is also a forum to present views and opinions that have been expressed by constituents. To make the newsletter informative, a parliamentarian should think about what he or she has been doing in the assembly or parliament, around the country, in the constituency, and conversations he or she has had with constituents. A good newsletter can demonstrate to constituents that a parliamentarian is accessible and responsive, and can help to heighten the parliamentarian's profile in the community.

¹⁸ In British Columbia, Canada, for example, members of the legislative assembly receive constituency office allowances to run day-to-day office operations. In South Africa, parties represented in the parliament receive allowances to run party offices in constituencies where members of the public can approach elected representatives and ask for help.

Generally there are two types of newsletters:

Targeted Newsletters: Targeted newsletters are a valuable way to save money and resources while getting specific messages across to key constituents. A short brochure updating the business community on efforts to improve industrial infrastructure, or a newsletter to a neighbourhood beset by utility problems is a way of demonstrating commitment to the constituency. Targeted newsletters should include quotes or pictures of individuals within the community who support the project or have been instrumental in advocating for the work that the parliamentarian is trying to accomplish.

Joint Newsletters: If costs are a problem and the issue is broad enough, joint newsletters with the local party branch or local elected officials should not be ruled out. If several members of a party are working on a similar project (i.e. bringing job growth to the region or conducting a major opinion poll of the constituency), a joint newsletter can help promote these activities. The ruling party or opposition could also issue a party newsletter to share the collective performance of their party. Legislative houses can issue newsletters to explain the performance of the house as a whole.

Office Handouts: A brief handout or brochure can help convey a positive first impression of the parliamentarian. These handouts are generally brochures or leaflets allowing parliamentarians the opportunity to introduce themselves, their activities, and explain what an elected representative does. A good office handout does not necessarily need to be an expensive one. Whether creating a simple one-page flier or a detailed glossy publication, there are certain elements that can help create the right document for any office.

A good handout should contain some (if not all) of the following:

- A basic biography and/or introductory statement by the parliamentarian;
- Essential contact information;
- Pictures of the parliamentarian, preferably in the Assembly;
- A brief statement thanking voters for their trust and affording the parliamentarian the privilege of representing the constituency. The office handout is also the place to tell constituents what motivates the representative to want to serve. Tell them why public service was appealing, what issues are crucial to his or her legislative agenda, and what has been done to help constituents and the constituency more generally.
- A basic listing of the types of services that the parliamentarian and his or her staff provide, or areas in which the staff can provide assistance. This brochure should try to tell constituents how the parliamentarian is helping them to solve their problems and expound specific areas of expertise. Of all of the challenges involved in fashioning a brochure, listing the types of services the office provides usually proves the most difficult. However, constituents often possess very little knowledge about what an elected representative actually does and what types of activities constitute constituent services. Creating a short list of services the office provides and incorporating them into the brochure by way of examples helps take the feeling of arbitrariness out of situations wherein the representative or staff cannot assist someone with an issue.

Office Assistant/Staff: In politics, first impressions matter. A lasting first impression of any elected representative is frequently made when constituents interact directly with the parliamentarian or his or her staff. All staff that work in the office should be professional and courteous.

An effective office assistant can ensure that the office operates smoothly and maintains a positive image in the community. Anyone who is hired should have appropriate skills for the job, or be willing and able to learn. The specific duties of an office assistant will vary for each office, but should include at least some of the following: managing the office; helping constituents to connect with appropriate government offices; arranging meetings; keeping records of meetings and constituent requests; assisting with telephone calls and other constituent correspondence; planning public meetings and other activities for the parliamentarian to attend; organising news conferences and writing news releases; and, where appropriate, helping the parliamentarian report to the party about his or her constituency work.

If possible, hiring professional experts to address the concerns of citizens can make a big difference. Providing a basic list of who can do what, in addition to a list of basic services the parliamentarian's staff offers constituents is helpful in this regard. Firstly, it demonstrates foresight and planning on the part of the parliamentarian. Secondly, it enables easy contact and reference points for follow-up correspondence and future meetings. Finally, it informs constituents about the staff's areas of expertise. Assigning specific roles to staff compartmentalises and solidifies who ultimately has responsibility for what, making the office more accountable to the public.

When it is not possible to hire staff for constituency office work, consider some alternatives:

Ask supporters to volunteer their time. In Ireland, some parliamentarians recruit the assistance of supporters they know well through elections or other community work to help liaise with constituents. These supporters, who volunteer their time, share updates about the community, help plan constituency visits and meet with constituents.

Recruit volunteers who want to make a difference in their community. Constituency Volunteers (CVs), whom parliamentarians identify and train with the assistance of local NGOs, help organise public meetings, record constituent requests and stay in touch with constituents about the status of their requests.

Create a student "internship" program in the constituency. Ask a secondary or university student to help with constituency tasks. He or she can help advertise constituency visits, share information on the parliamentarian's behalf, and write down constituent comments and concerns. In exchange, the student learns new skills.

Pensioners can also assist in this task. Citizens often retire but remain extremely active and want to keep engaged in meeting and assisting people.

Keeping Records:

- Parliamentarians and their staff need to keep a good record of efforts made to help constituents. When someone enters the office or meets with the parliamentarian, access to documentation of who they were and why they came is vital so that parliamentarians and staff are not forced to rely on their memories to resolve the situation later.
- In many countries, parliamentarians rely on a standard logbook that is kept in chronological order to document constituent visits. These logbooks are often little more than a simple ledger with names, dates and contact information, as well as basic information regarding the nature of the constituent's visit. Some parliamentarians use a simple pen and notebook system. This is not necessarily a poor solution to documenting requests from constituents for help in resolving specific issues; however, if an office has computers, digital approaches may prove more efficient.
- Constituent tracking software provides a simple and accurate way for members and their staff to keep track of specific requests from constituents, dates of conversations, specific actions taken and resolutions. While this software is more efficient and offers more potential than the logbook, the main objective is to make the requisite information easily retrievable and accessible; as long as the elected representative can stay well informed and his or her staff can effectively answer the questions and requests of constituents, the system matters very little.
- Parliamentarians might also consider creating a method of collecting and recording comments received by them, their staff or their offices. When people call the office of a parliamentarian with a comment about a local issue, a national problem or a personal concern, staff members should have the ability to quickly document it and enter it into a permanent record. Knowing how constituents feel about an issue is important in representing the constituency effectively and to understanding changes in public opinion.

5.11 COLLABORATING WITH NGOS

Parliamentarians can also work with local and international NGOs and charitable organisations to encourage them to undertake development projects in the constituency. Parliamentarians should find out what NGOs are active in the constituency and meet with their representatives. Often NGOs are a good resource for research that can help parliamentarians in all of their functions: legislation, oversight and representation. Some NGOs may also be able to provide support in drafting bills where parliamentarians lack the resources to do so. Constituting citizen bodies, NGOs are also a great way to keep in contact with a wide spectrum of the society. Parliamentarians will not always be able to help, but with their deep knowledge of their constituents' needs, they can help the NGO determine project priorities. In turn, representatives can associate themselves with the projects, demonstrate a commitment to citizen needs and thereby increase their popularity, which can prove helpful for subsequent election campaigns.

5.12 PARLIAMENTARY PROGRAMMES/FELLOWSHIPS FOR CITIZENS

Many parliaments host fellowship programmes for students and young professionals in the fields of political science, law, international relations and other related areas. The programmes are often designed to equip fellows with practical skills in parliamentary work and increase their capacity for research. Fellows get the opportunity to work directly with parliamentarians and secretarial staff.

Such initiatives are beneficial for strengthening civic education and also useful for cultivating human capital for future parliamentary roles and work. These programmes may be initiated in collaboration with relevant civil society organisations, academic institutions and think tanks.¹⁹

¹⁹ For example, the Young Parliamentary Associates is an initiative by the Improving Parliamentary Performance in Pakistan project and the Parliamentary Institute for Parliamentary Services that deploys young citizens to the Parliament. See <<http://ip3.org.pk/what-is-the-ypa-programme/>>

6 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RESOURCE	OVERVIEW	LINK
Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services (PIPS)	PIPS was created to provide quality research and capacity building services to parliamentarians and parliamentary functionaries.	http://www.pips.gov.pk
National Assembly of Pakistan (NA)	The National Assembly website provides information regarding scheduled NA sessions, parliamentary history, details of committees and committee members, and media updates.	http://www.na.gov.pk
Senate of Pakistan	The Senate website provides an opportunity for citizens to contribute to public petitions and provides updates on Senate activities, committee reports and access to its newspaper	http://www.senate.gov.pk
Improving Parliamentary Performance in Pakistan (IP3)	The main objective of IP3 is to strengthen the parliament as an institution and to support committees and individual parliamentarians in the four main areas of their work: legislation, oversight, representation and budgeting.	http://ip3.org.pk
United Nations Development Programme	UNDP works to build lasting institutional capacity, provide technical expertise to improve development outcomes, and build strong and accountable governance mechanisms.	http://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/
Centre for Legislative Research and Advocacy (CLRA)	CLRA is an independent, not-for-profit, non-partisan initiative, working to support and strengthen Parliament and legislatures.	http://www.clraindia.org
AGORA -Portal for Parliamentary Development	Agora is a global knowledge platform on parliamentary development. It has been designed as a meeting space used by parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and the community of practitioners in order to facilitate information exchange.	http://www.agora-parl.org
National Endowment for Democracy (NED)	NED is a private, nonprofit foundation dedicated to the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the world.W	http://www.ned.org/ideas/democracy-resource-center/
International Republican Institute (IRI)	IRI encourages democracy in places where it is absent, helps democracy become more effective where it is in danger and shares best practices where democracy is flourishing	http://www.iri.org
National Democratic Institute (NDI)	NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.	https://www.ndi.org

RESOURCE	OVERVIEW	LINK
Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI)	DAI is an international development company working to tackle fundamental social and economic development problems caused by inefficient markets, ineffective governance and instability.	http://dai.com
Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)	WFD was established in 1992 to support democratic practices and institutions in developing democracies. WFD specialises in parliamentary strengthening and political party development.	http://www.wfd.org
Democracy Reporting International (DRI)	DRI promotes political participation of citizens, accountability of state bodies and the development of democratic institutions worldwide.	http://democracy-reporting.org
World Bank (WB)	The WB is a source of financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world, working in partnership to reduce poverty and support development.	http://www.worldbank.org/en/about/parliamentarians
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)	The CPA works towards strengthening the right of parliaments and parliamentarians to play a more active role in the development of their countries. The Association has 185 Parliaments and Legislatures and 17,000 members.	http://www.cpahq.org/cpahq/
UK Parliament	The UK parliament website provides access to parliamentary business and information (including virtual tours) and represents a means of engagement for citizens and parliament.	http://www.parliament.uk/business/commons/
Parliament of Canada	The Canadian parliamentary website provides mobile access to citizens to engage with democracy in action.	http://www.parl.gc.ca/default.aspx?Language=E
Parliament of Australia	The Australian parliamentary website provides educational resources to learn more about the Australian parliament as well as an opportunity to get involved in Parliamentary Committees.	http://www.aph.gov.au
House of Oireachtas (Parliament of Ireland)	The Irish Parliamentary website provides a comprehensive overview of activity relating to its work and includes links to webcasts covering the business of the national parliament as well as an online educational programme.	http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/