



DANISH INSTITUTE FOR
PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY

MMDP KNOWLEDGE BRIEF

MYANMAR MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME
QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON PARTY DEVELOPMENT

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ESTABLISHING A PARLIAMENTARY MONITORING ORGANISATION (PMO)

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Citizens are increasingly recognizing the importance of parliaments due to their roles in representing citizen interests, law-making, and overseeing the executive. To strengthen citizen engagement in and understanding of parliamentary work, a growing number of citizen-based groups are becoming active in monitoring parliaments, assessing their performance and functioning, and developing new ways to enable citizen participation in parliamentary processes.

According to a 2011 publication by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the World Bank Institute (WBI), *Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability, Citizen Engagement and Access to Information: A Global Survey of Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations*, nearly 200 parliamentary monitoring organisations, or “PMOs”, are presently monitoring more than 80 national parliaments worldwide. Drawing on a survey of these PMOs, as well as interviews with PMO leaders and the international development community, the publication finds that PMOs have “shown promise in strengthening a number of components of democratic governance, including the accountability of parliaments to the electorate, citizen engagement in the legislative process and access to information about parliaments and their work.” PMOs are developing a variety of innovative and effective tools for monitoring parliamentary functioning and performance, and supporting reform initiatives aimed at strengthening the democratic development of the parliamentary institution. Some examples of PMO initiatives are described below. Information on specific PMOs and the work they conduct can be found in AGORA’s PMO Atlas. (www.agora-parl.org)

HOW PMO'S TYPICALLY OPERATE

Developing Information and Communications Technologies

All political parties and political members can forward queries or questions relating to the challenges of political parties to the Myanmar Multiparty Democracy Programme, and we will share information, manuals, training tools, guidelines, resource institutions and literature on the topics of interest.

Send requests to Country Coordinator Khin Thazin Myint at email: ktzm@dipd.dk

This knowledge facility is a living information resource for political parties in Myanmar. For more information visit the Myanmar page on www.dipd.dk and www.mynamarmultiparty.org

Among the PMOs surveyed for the NDI and WBI report, around 40 percent have adopted the use of advanced information and communications technologies, known as “parliamentary informatics”. These tools allow PMOs to automatically aggregate and organise information from parliamentary websites and other information sources, and generate visualizations, such as political finance maps or timelines of MP activities. PMOs also use these tools to facilitate citizen-MP communications and to engage website visitors in the monitoring of MPs or analysis of policy.

Supporting Initiatives to Promote Democratic Parliamentary Reform

Although the use of parliamentary informatics is on the rise, many PMOs aim to support parliamentary reform by engaging parliaments directly. The [Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency \(PILDAT\)](#), has gathered parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, prominent journalists and academics, and others, to evaluate the performance of the [National Assembly of Pakistan](#) using the [Inter-Parliamentary Union’s Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments](#). The participants were asked to rate the National Assembly’s performance on a range of questions related to six sections of the IPU’s toolkit using a 10-point scale. The final report, [State of Democracy in Pakistan: Evaluation of Parliament 2008-2009](#), states the results and recommendations developed by participants to improve the parliament’s effectiveness. Other common PMO activities aimed at supporting democratic parliamentary reform include testifying on parliamentary reform issues, fulfilling information requests from parliament or individual MPs on specific issues or legislation, and even proposing MP codes of conduct.

Improving Parliamentary Transparency and Integrity

One of the most common challenges faced by PMOs is limited access to parliamentary information, a problem that limits their capacity to help engage citizens in the legislative process. The lack of information on parliamentary websites – such as voting records and floor speeches – reduces the ability of some PMOs to use technologies that have proven effective in helping citizens understand parliamentary information and engage productively with parliamentarians. Even when this information is available, it must be posted in machine-readable formats for such tools to be useful. For PMOs that do not use informatics, limited access to parliamentary information may cause the use of less effective means for assessing parliamentary performance.

PMOs have employed a range of creative solutions to try to overcome these obstacles. One effective approach to increasing transparency involves enlisting the support of parliamentary candidates to sign a good governance pledge that serves as a public commitment on the part of the candidate, if elected, to improve parliamentary transparency and integrity. The [Al-Quds Center for Political Studies](#), which operates the [Jordanian Parliamentary Monitor](#), used Jordan’s 2010 elections to secure candidate signatures on an agreement that included a pledge to develop a parliamentary code of conduct once elected. The [Regional Index of Parliamentary Transparency](#), which was a joint effort by [Corporación Participa](#) (Chile), [Fundación Poder Ciudadano](#) (Argentina), and [Acción Ciudadana](#) (Guatemala) to test parliamentary transparency by assessing

the concepts of access to information and accountability along four dimensions (comprising 62 variables) of work in which the legislature is involved. Building on this work, the [Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency](#), which includes 15 organisations from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, has developed tools to gauge the availability of [parliamentary budget and expense information](#), [lobbying regulations](#), and [financial statements and declarations of interest](#). (www.agora-parl.org)

IDEAS ON DEVELOPING A PMO

Parliamentary monitoring organisations (PMO) can really help processes of political inclusivity, better legislation making and joint decision making in parliament. The impact PMO's can make, depend on a number of factors:

- The intensity of the connection of MP's with their respective constituencies
- The political and intellectual capacity of persons within the several parliamentary commissions
- The freedom of press and speech, in order to connect to public opinion and advocacy
- The political constellation within the parliamentary commissions (balanced or more one-party dominated)

In general, the factors above also determine where decision making power in parliament is concentrated. Ideally, parliament has a bottom-up working process. In younger democracies it is often more top down, where parliamentary commissions/committees are more 'receiving orders' then negotiate within the commissions amongst themselves. Parliamentary monitoring organisations could play a role to help parliament function better, and can be very supportive in supporting increased public opinion. The challenge however is how to position a parliamentary monitoring organisation in a tailor made way, how to build up trust, confidence and collaboration, instead of agony and mistrust. It is also important to know who the persons are politically in the PMO. Are they politically neutral, disappointed former opposition, or maybe sympathisers of only one party? The suggestion put forward here is that a parliamentary monitoring organisation should 'connect' to the situation as it is today and strive for collaboration and define its ambitions accordingly. Below some ideas in two extreme situations that hopefully contain some suggestions on how to proceed with developing a parliamentary monitoring organisation:

1. If power is concentrated only in the top of parliament and has a large one-party dominance: In this case it is very difficult to establish a PMO because the own control mechanisms in Parliament often do not work sufficiently. If the PMO publishes work, it will shy away the commissions in parliament to speak and the relation between political parties and PMO easily get tensed. Here the best road to follow might be to connect to the top of parliament and offer technical assistance to the parliamentary commissions. That technical assistance could focus on making MP's better understand their role in the committees. Publications to the wider society on the activities of parliament should be discussed and agreed upon with the main political leaders of parliament.

2. If power is more concentrated in the parliamentary commissions and politically more diverse: In this case it is possible to work more directly with the parliamentary commissions themselves. The point of departure could be both on monitoring and communication and on capacity development. The parliamentary commission members could be trained by the PMO on subjects as budget reading, parliamentary control, different types of legislation, commission dialogue processes and things like how to connect the commission work to the other MP's in the respective parties. Through this, collaborative relations are build and after training is done, the PMO could go 'external' and play more a civil society role where it follows decisions in Parliament and comments to a wider audience in society.

The ideal starting point is to get agreement from the relevant actors in Parliament for training and collaboration. Then the PMO should start working with the most relevant commissions and

commission which handle issues of national interest. Through an iterative learning process, final training modules and approach could be designed and also rolled out for the other commissions.

In both cases, it is important who the people of the PMO are, and they should have a sound understanding of the guiding principles that run the parliament, the political balances and the inner power relations in the parliamentary parties. Further they should be able to design and organise capacity building activities and being capable of publishing without offending. Lastly, what MP's in parliamentary really could trigger and accept training, is to take them physically to the actors and beneficiaries of their mandate. So, organise a visit to the security forces for the security committee, schools for education committee, etc. It stimulates teambuilding within the commission, it makes the MP work in a more realistic and better manner.

Finally how to proceed with establishing a PMO? A suggestion is to develop a plan that does not only focus on activities and results of a PMO in Myanmar, but also describes the foreseen process as how to become an appreciated PMO to parliament as well as the society audience where ideas on the comments above could be incorporated.

BEST PRACTICE ORGANISATIONS & CASE STUDIES

- The [Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency \(PILDAT\)](#)
- See also NDI and World Bank Publication on good practices mentioned below

TOOLS, MANUALS AND GUIDELINES:

There are many guidelines and tools on accountability, anti-corruption, dialogue facilitation etc.

WEBPAGES & LINKS:

www.agora-parl.org – shares information on PMO and you can sign up to a particular PMO discussion forum.

<http://www.ndi.org/files/governance-parliamentary-monitoring-organizations-survey-september-2011.pdf> - the study of PMO around the world

<http://www.pmg.org.za/about> - Parliamentary Monitoring Group – South Africa

PMO Leaders Conference on Parliamentary Transparency and Networking, April 30 to May 2, 2012, Washington, D.C. For more information, please contact: Andrew Mandelbaum of NDI at amandelbaum@ndi.org