

# PROFESSIONAL PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENT BY INDEPENDENT RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

This article aims to show how Parliamentary Research and Capacity Building Institutions such as the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) can provide essential professional development for Members of Parliament, which fosters their effective, efficient and impactful time as elected representatives of the people.

The Parliament, as the house of elected public representatives, remains a unique state institution that not only manifests aspirations of the people of the country but more importantly performs the demanding tasks of representation, legislation, oversight of the Executive and policy review that leaves no stone unturned in influencing, guiding and holding accountable any government so that the state respects, protects and fulfills the will of the masses.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, immediately after any elections, Members of Parliament are expected to transform themselves from local politician into a seasoned Parliamentarian who becomes well versed, in the shortest possible time, with the key concepts, principles and various tool of parliamentary working. As a result of this rapid change, there is often a need for formal and informal avenues for knowledge sharing, research-based analysis and capacity building that would fall under the definition of 'Parliamentary Professional Development'.

Professional development can be defined as a life-long process of learning and growth by which we adapt to continuous changes happening around us, and enhance our awareness, knowledge and skills. It ranges from informal opportunities of learning in practice as well as exposure to national as well as international conferences and formal training or academic programs ranging from certificate orientations, courses to degrees. While Members of Parliament often represent great diversity *viz a viz* their geographical and academic profiling, their areas of interest as well as their expertise, it nevertheless enhances the need for gradual

professional development. The basic professional development of Members commences and revolves around the core/essential concepts and key areas of the parliamentary discipline, that every elected representative is expected to comprehend and utilise to be an effective Parliamentarian.

These often comprise of the following: *The Constitution, Legislative Process and Assessment, Rules of Business and Procedures of the House, Working of Committees as oversight mechanism, Parliamentary Tools for Non-Legislative Business, Parliamentary and Legislative Research, Principles of Legislative Drafting, E-Parliament, Inter Parliamentary Relations, Constituency Relations, Post-Legislative Scrutiny, and Understanding Public Finance to Analyse the Economy and the Budget.*

### New Members Induction Programme

Professional development is part and parcel of the Legislature as the newly elected Members are introduced to the above-mentioned core parliamentary areas. For example, in Pakistan, as a tradition, this is done through a three day to a week-long New Members Orientation Programme immediately after their election. The faculty for such orientation comprises former Presiding Officers and Speakers, Members of Parliament, parliamentary experts and Clerks (senior parliamentary officials), who provide practical insights to the newly elected MPs on all dimensions of their parliamentary role and working practices.



In addition, the designated departments and services or units within the Legislature provide MPs with regular on-work resources, including thematic brochures, research papers and publications in addition to holding knowledge sharing seminars to orient them *viz a viz* the key parliamentary tools to amicably perform the main functions of representation, including legislation, Executive oversight and policy as well as budget review.

### Challenges for Developing Sub-national or smaller Parliaments

In small Parliaments and sub-national or provincial Legislatures, a lack of resources and the local capacity of the Secretariat for professional development programmes for MPs may prove a huge challenge. In a parliamentary setting, putting together a seasoned, committed and merit-based human resource of professionals in research, legislation and training remains a most demanding challenge, and having a sustainable political will and continued backing for the same is imperative.<sup>2</sup>

Essentially, a parliamentary research unit must recruit a highly motivated team of researchers from all major disciplines such as economics, law, international relations and strategic studies, history, finance, statistics, environmental studies, public policy and finance. Researchers should be full-time employees comprising specialists at the senior and mid-level assisted by new graduates at the basic tier.<sup>3</sup> On the training side, a small team can organise training programmes with guidance provided from experts and practitioners.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, it is essential to network with academia, research think tanks, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations to create opportunities for MPs' professional development. In some cases, the geographical location of small Parliaments may sometimes prove to be a hurdle.

### Independent parliamentary research and training institutions

In more than 60 countries around the world, independent parliamentary research and training institutions work in close liaison with the Parliament. They offer relevant research papers 'on demand' as well as anticipated research for individual MPs and Committees. Professional certificate courses and workshops on parliamentary and thematic areas for MPs from both national and

provincial (state) Legislatures can also be provided. An independent research and training parliamentary institute governed by a cross-party body allows essential independence and freedom in relation to producing quality research and holding capacity building events on a wide range of topics without fear of victimization by the government in power.

One of the biggest hurdles to delivering objective or independent research can often be the pressure faced by Parliamentary Clerks and staff to provide information for the government of the day rather than both sides of the aisles. In this context, there is growing recognition for the need for independent research and capacity building think tanks for MPs. Contemporary examples include the Canadian Parliamentary Centre (CPC), Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS), Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia (PICs), Institute of Parliamentarianism, Kazakhstan (IPK) and the King Prajdapokh Institute Thailand, (KPI). These examples have in-House seasoned parliamentary researchers, in addition to varied degrees of engagement and networking with academia, national experts and civil society organisations within their respective countries. Activities are organised such as thematic roundtables and orientation seminars to workshops/courses on significant parliamentary topics such as rules of procedures, legislative assessment, legislative drafting and the effectiveness of Committees.

### Opportunities for parliamentary development: Case study of the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services

The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) was established in 2008 through an Act of Parliament, envisioned by a cross-party Parliamentary Board of Governors, as an appropriate forum to equip Parliamentarians with cutting-edge strategies and tools to perform their representative, legislative and oversight functions effectively and efficiently.<sup>5</sup> PIPS has provided over 1,500 research-based articles, technical and thematic papers to individual Members of Parliament, Parliamentary Committees and cross-party caucuses. It has also published 67 books that are utilised for the core curriculum for the various capacity building programs held for legislators and parliamentary staff working at the National Parliament of Pakistan as well as four Provincial



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Assemblies. A wide range of contemporary topics such as post-pandemic challenges, sustainable development, conflict resolution, economic empowerment, gender mainstreaming, climate change, foreign policy, public policy, education, health, food security as well as economy and governance matters are covered through its researched publications and training modules.

PIPS publishes its *Parliamentary Research Digest*<sup>6</sup> (every month since January 2014) that provides its readers with insights on matters of parliamentary and current significance. The Digest is one of the most widely read parliamentary publications in Pakistan and is read by Members of Parliament, Clerks, parliamentary staff, academia, civil society organisations and the diplomatic corps.

PIPS has come a long way in its almost 15 years of service, including hosting more than 400 capacity building programmes and thematic roundtables for MPs and more than 150 programs for parliamentary staff. PIPS is the only institution of Pakistan that has collected the entire repository of over 700 federal and more than 2,700 provincial laws presently enforced from 1812 until today, following two years of data collection, testing and publication. The Institute published a comprehensive book on the challenges and achievements on the SDGs in 2017, with the latest 2<sup>nd</sup> edition published in 2022, that is internationally quoted in the Voluntary National Review at the United Nations due to its authoritative data and analysis. The Research Wing at PIPS has gathered 52,101 articles in PIPS Knowledge Management System since 2015, accessible through the PIPS website; spread across areas of the economy, education, health, trade and commerce, regulatory bodies, defence and security, the environment and conservation, to facilitate MPs and parliamentary research staff.<sup>7</sup>

The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) delivers the following key initiatives that are applicable and relevant to any developing Parliament in the contemporary world today:

#### 1. Training of Trainers Programme

A cost-effective initiative that can be undertaken by smaller Parliaments involves conducting a 'Training of Trainers' Programme within their institutions. By bringing together current practitioners and Consultants from Parliaments, former Members of Parliament and senior parliamentary experts, professional knowledge can be 'passed on' to MPs and parliamentary staff so that they can develop training programmes in their own Parliaments.

**“Professional development for Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff with regards to the key functions of representation, legislation, oversight and policy and economic review, is undoubtedly essential for every parliamentary institution, traditional or new, small or big.”**

In 2009-10, PIPS held a similar exercise for parliamentary officials from the National Assembly of Pakistan, the Pakistan Senate and the four provincial assemblies of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh with the result that many of the participants became in-House trainers which continues today.

#### 2. Practitioners and Experts from Developed Democracies

PIPS also invites international experts on parliamentary research and legislative drafting, including a former Director at the Congressional Research Service (CRS), a Senior Policy Fellow at the University of California and a former Clerk at the UK House of Commons, to conduct training sessions for MPs and parliamentary staff. Therefore, this provides a 'trickle-down' effect where international experts are passing on their expertise to local MPs and parliamentary staff.

#### 3. Exchanges and Thematic Roundtables

Members of the Provincial Legislatures get the opportunity to regularly interact with Members of the National Parliament through parliamentary exchanges and thematic roundtables. These exchange visits include observing proceedings of House and Committee Meetings as well as thematic interaction among Members to develop insights on current issues. PIPS parliamentary exchanges and thematic roundtables feature themes such as the economy, human security and rights, sustainable development, foreign policy, inheritance laws, post-legislative scrutiny, public policy, peace and democracy, education and health.

#### 4. Parliamentary Caucuses

In Pakistan, cross party caucuses such as the Women Parliamentary Caucus (WPC), Parliamentary Taskforce on Sustainable Development Goals and the Young Parliamentarian Forum (YPF) at the National Parliament and their chapters in Provincial Legislatures are another source of informal professional development for Members of Parliament.

PIPS consistently works with the three caucuses to host international conferences and national workshops for MPs across Pakistan. PIPS has also assisted the National Parliament in holding seven international conferences on themes such as Democracy and Peace Making; Sustainable Development; Tourism, Connectivity and Development for Poverty Alleviation; Parliament and the Youth; Gender Mainstreaming and Women as Peace Makers; and so forth.

In addition, PIPS has worked with caucuses to hold thematic roundtables, public hearings and seminars on universal education, inheritance laws, cyber security, civic education, water scarcity, SDGs, women's empowerment, trafficking laws, population, conflict resolution, peace building and youth policies.

#### 5. International Partners

PIPS works regularly with development partners such as UN Agencies, the European Union, USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and many other organisations to hold knowledge sharing activities for Members from the National Parliament and Provincial Legislatures.

International parliamentary associations such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the Inter-

Right: The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) welcomes a wide range of international organisations and partners. Here a group of Turkish MPs visit the Institute.



Parliamentary Union (IPU) and many regional associations such as the Parliamentary Association for ECO countries (PAECO) are an invaluable source of professional development for Members. Their annual and biannual activities provide very relevant work exposure to MPs, including Members from small jurisdictions, who may otherwise may not have access to research and training.

#### 6. Towards a sustainable and strengthened democratic tradition – Youth Outreach

Parliamentary studies has also emerged as an academic discipline in developed democracies like the UK, Australia, Canada and the USA. Numerous universities offer cross discipline degrees in political science and parliamentary studies in addition to publishing research journals. This gives Members of Parliament the opportunity to study formal degrees in parliamentary studies.

Through the initiative by the National Assembly of Pakistan, in 2014-15, the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) engaged with the country's Higher Education Commission (HEC) and several universities to encourage the offer of parliamentary studies as a discipline. As a result, 17 universities countrywide offer elective courses on parliamentary studies and legislative drafting through existing law and social sciences degrees. PIPS trained the faculties and continue to provide support in the form of books and curriculum development materials to all universities. In addition, PIPS has oriented over 10,000 young people over a decade (2012-22) on this inspiring journey through its outreach program and PIPS run several internship programmes inviting university and college students to have experiential learning of the Parliament alongside experienced MPs and parliamentary staff. The parliamentary studies initiative not only sensitizes young people to the importance of the Constitution and Parliament's role; but also helps to prepare educated and aware young people to enter into politics to serve the people.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, professional development for Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff with regards to the key functions of representation, legislation, oversight and policy and economic review, is undoubtedly essential for every parliamentary institution, traditional or new, small or big.

Sub-national Legislatures must plan and develop a strategic plan of how to assist their MPs through various in-House and outsourced support to implement a thought-out professional development program for newly elected MPs, especially after the first three years. This commences with a new Members orientation programme immediately after election and continues through capacity building exchanges on parliamentary business, thematic seminars and roundtables.

An efficient research team producing technical research papers and parliamentary materials for MPs along with a 'Training of Trainers' Programme for experts, gradually helps to develop a cohort of seasoned MPs and in-House experts and researchers who can prove to be the local champions for planning and implementing a coherent professional development initiative for the benefit of the National and Sub-national Parliaments for many years to come.

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- <sup>6</sup> Parliamentary Research Digest - [https://www.pips.gov.pk/resource\\_type/research\\_digest/](https://www.pips.gov.pk/resource_type/research_digest/)
- <sup>7</sup> PIPS portal <http://portal.pips.gov.pk/OpenKM/frontend/index.jsp>