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World Bank Institute’s Approach to Parliamentary Capacity Strengthening

By Mitchell O’Brien, Rick Stapenhurst, and Brooke Prater

The World Bank Institute (WBI) seeks to enhance the capacity of parliaments to effectively perform their functions (oversight, representation and lawmaking) in order to better contribute to open and collaborative development. Good governance is essential to achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Governance is the manner in which state power is exercised and is based on four pillars – accountability, transparency, participation and the rule of law. Open and collaborative governance reinforces the need to include supply side and demand side actors in the governance process in order to achieve these four pillars. Central to a multistakeholder approach to good governance are parliaments; as constitutionally mandated institutions they have a vital role to play not only in priority setting, but also holding the executive to account for meeting a country’s development objectives. Furthermore, as representative institutions they are better placed to engage more directly with other demand-side governance actors, such as the media, civil society and individual citizens, in order to achieve truly open, collaborative and accountable governance in client countries.

Capacity Development:

Capacity development is a complex, multi-faceted process aimed at creating an environment conducive to improved performance. Capacity building is often reduced simply to training. Although training is a tool that can be used as part of a capacity development process, it should not be the only approach used if parliaments and the development community want to achieve sustained capacity yields from ongoing efforts. More generally, the components of parliamentary capacity development include:

- **Institutional capacity** – Processes/ conventions/ frameworks within a parliament that influences behavior
- **Organizational capacity** – Clarity of mandate and internal structures to effectively manage change management processes
- **Information capacity** – The ability of parliaments to elicit, absorb and manage the flow of information and analysis necessary to perform parliament’s functions and relay information about parliamentary action to the community
- **Resource capacity** – Including material, financial and human resources

Development Challenge:

The WBI has been working directly with parliaments for over a decade and a half. The Institute has adopted an iterative approach to parliamentary strengthening, learning from successful implementation of projects as well as implementation challenges in order to refine its approach to parliamentary development. This programmatic learning has been supplemented by periodic internal reviews and
ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the impact of its initiatives. The approach outlined in this paper is not presented as a universal model; rather, it was designed to meet the implementation and development challenges particular to achieving WBI’s development objectives.

WBI identified a number of challenges to providing support to parliaments globally. They include:

(i) **Technical Expertise**: Mobilization of appropriate technical skill to inform parliamentary reform processes – the bulk of international expertise rests with parliaments themselves.

(ii) **Sustainability**: The natural election cycle process erodes capacity achievements when Members of Parliament (MPs) are not returned (NB: This is also a strength as the periodic election of MPs under a constitution provides parliamentarians with a legitimacy other demand-side institutions lack)

(iii) **Scalability**: Although country-driven programming has proven to be successful in some instances, resource limitations mean that it is not possible to have devoted institutional strengthening projects in every client country. A model that is scalable is essential to respond to the burgeoning global demand for capacity support

(iv) **Complexity**: The complexity of development issues parliaments must now grapple with requires new thinking as to how to build the capacity of parliaments to constructively engage on cross-sectoral issues and complex public financial management systems; and

(v) **Homogeneity**: No two parliaments are the same and parliaments consist of multiple institutions operating within parliament. This requires and adaptive and targeted approach to support.

**Parliamentary Strengthening Approaches:**

As a broad generalization, there are 3 approaches to parliamentary capacity building:

(a) **Individual approach** (Enhancing the capacity of individual Members of Parliament and Professional Parliamentary Staff);

(b) **Institutional approach** (Whole-of-Institution/ Parliamentary Administration/ Committee Strengthening); and

(c) **Network approach** (Bringing together like-minded Members of Parliament/ Parliamentary Committees at the regional and global level using parliamentary networks).

Experience has shown that a strategy that combines all three approaches, is adaptive to changing circumstances and needs, and adopts participatory and adult-learning techniques achieves better capacity yields.

The objectives of WBI parliamentary strengthening efforts have been guided by this assessment of parliamentary capacity building.
The objective of WBI’s Parliamentary Strengthening Program is to:

1. Identify innovative approaches to reform (supplemented by applied research);
2. Foster and strengthen parliamentary networks/communities of practice to act as platforms for south-south learning; and
3. Deliver targeted training to MPs and staff, including facilitating demand-driven action planning processes, in order to bolster the effectiveness of specific oversight committees.

The WBI achieves these objectives by:

- Connecting Global Knowledge
- Convening & Coalescing Stakeholders
- Managing Knowledge for Capacity Development

Figure 1: WBI Model for Parliamentary Engagement

Figure 1 above outlines the parliamentary capacity development approach developed by WBI to facilitate knowledge exchange, maximize knowledge dissemination through networks and portals, and ultimately capitalize on global, regional, and geographic knowledge-sharing to strengthen parliaments’ functions at the national level.
Meeting growing demand for support to parliaments has meant that WBI has had to shift its approach from direct or retail delivery of courses in overseas locations to working more with regional networks (and their Secretariats), regional and national training institutes, think tanks, and universities to support in-country capacity-development programs, and to help build their capacity to build capacity. The new approach aims to have a greater and more lasting impact by customizing global knowledge to local realities. Where it is strategic important retail learning programs will continue to be delivered while WBI also builds the capacity of regional and selected country institutions to scale up program implementation.

Underpinning this model is the aim of capturing and feeding knowledge, experience and data back into the networks, activities and country-level action throughout all five steps of the process. It should also be noted that WBI works closely with several partners in the delivery of this approach, including working closely with parliaments that have undertaken reforms or implemented good practice in order to share knowledge as to how to successfully navigate reform processes.

Focus Areas and Cross-Cutting Initiatives:

Consistent with the challenges identified during stakeholder consultations, the WBI identified three focus areas where WBI could support parliamentary capacity development efforts in order to enhance open and collaborative development processes. These focuses areas were selected based on the following criteria:

- Parliamentary demand
- Comparative experience/ technical knowledge; and
- Consistency with the World Bank’s global mandate and strategic priorities

The three focus areas are:

1. **OPEN BUDGETING** (including Public Financial Management and Procurement Oversight)
   **Objective:** Strengthen the capacity of parliaments to engage the budget process
   **How:** By establishing and working with parliamentary budget offices and regional networks of parliamentary audit committees to enhance the capacity of parliaments to play a constructive role during the formulation of the national budget and overseeing implementation of projects funded under the national budget.

2. **EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES**
   **Objective:** Improve parliamentary oversight and committee coordination in relation to the Extractive Industry sector.
   **How:** WBI has developed a participatory process whereby parliaments themselves map how parliamentary oversight committees engage along the EI value chain. The aim of this participatory process is to: (a) identify where there are gaps or overlap in the responsibility of
different parliamentary committees to oversee the EI sector; and (b) design organic mechanisms for internal coordination with an eye to improving oversight and transparency of the EI Sector.

3. **Climate Change**

   **Objective:** Enhance the capacity of parliaments to address challenges posed by climate change, including oversight of international climate change financing.

   **How:** Working closely with World Bank’s climate change practice, WBI (working with partners) has developed a global community of practice of like-minded MPs who seek to enhance their understanding of: (a) issues related to the changing climate; and (b) how parliaments' can use their functions (representation, law-making, and oversight) in order to enhance country responses to the climate challenge.

There are **two cross-cutting initiatives** aimed at supplementing programmatic efforts in the WBI’s focus areas:

A. **Parliaments in Fragile and Conflict Affected Countries**

   **Objective:** To strengthen the capacity of parliaments in fragile and conflict affected states to play a constructive role in the national budget process and ensure that national development plans and annual budgets contribute to conflict prevention.

   **How:** WBI facilitates the participation of parliaments from conflict-affected countries in regional networks in order to: (a) foster linkages between fragile states and neighboring parliaments; (b) encourage parliaments to learn from best practice previously implemented by neighboring parliaments; and (c) strengthen the capacity of the parliament to use the budget process as a conflict prevention mechanism.

B. **Parliamentary Staff Training**

   **Objective:** Strengthen the capacity of professional parliamentary staff to support parliamentary operations.

   **How:** WBI's parliamentary e*learning portal ([www.parliamentarystrengthening.org](http://www.parliamentarystrengthening.org)) and e*Institute provides an open access training catalogue for the parliamentary community from around the globe. This is supplemented with concerted training of select mid-level parliamentary staff on topics like the budget process, committee operations, anti-corruption, etc.

**Case-Study - Parliamentary Staff Training:**

Two challenges to providing support to parliaments globally that were identified during stakeholder consultations were sustainability and scalability. An internal evaluation of WBI’s parliamentary strengthening efforts in the mid-2000s specifically recommended scaling up engagement with parliamentary staff in order to achieve sustainable capacity yields. In a majority of jurisdictions (although not all), professional parliamentary staff act as the corporate memory of parliament.
However, reliance on traditional face-to-face training of parliamentary staff was alone not addressing the growing demand for staff training. Furthermore, only using face-to-face trainings raised issues of equity of access as junior staff are most often not selected to participate in training programs and parliaments from smaller jurisdictions were often excluded due to availability of resources.

In order to overcome these challenges the WBI is scaling-up its capacity support to parliamentary staff through an enhanced wholesale approach. This approach consists of two pillars -

a) **Broadening access** to training for junior parliamentary staff through the WBI’s e*Learning catalogue; and

b) **Deepening access** for mid-career parliamentary professionals through the development of a University Certified WBI Executive Training Course for Parliamentary Staff (to be piloted Summer 2012).

**Broadening Access**

After several years of costly and limiting face-to-face and videoconference training available to only a handful of the world’s parliamentary community, WBI, together with its partner, The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, began transforming its academic papers prepared by international subject area experts into easily accessible and quickly absorbable learning modules to strengthen the capacity of junior to mid-career level parliamentary staff by offering them through two e*Learning portals – [www.parliamentarystrengthening.org](http://www.parliamentarystrengthening.org) and now the e*Institute ([http://einstitute.worldbank.org/ei/](http://einstitute.worldbank.org/ei/))

Since August 2007 the WBI Professional Development Program for Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Staff has used these sites as open enrollment platforms to offer online training for free or at a marginal costs for all interested members of the parliamentary community and provides a feasible, affordable, sustainable and targeted learning program. To date, the e*Learning project has trained just under 2000 participants from across the globe using a variety of interactive, moderated modules on different development and institutional topics. Participants interface with the moderator/ subject matter expert through email and the messaging board on the portal. The course culminates with a final project that allows participants to take what they have learned from the module, the expert moderator, and the experiences of their course peers and contextualize it in terms of their own country so they are not just learning new theoretical information, but applying it practically to help improve their own parliaments. Each course paper is graded with comments by the course’s moderator.

The high rate of participants who go on to undertake further courses after completing their initial course suggests that the content has been appropriately tailored to the needs of the audience and that this model is meeting an unmet demand for parliamentary strengthening. This is borne out by the responses from regular participant evaluations.

**Figure 2** below breaks down the technical positions of the professional who have participated in the course to date. You will note that the overwhelming majority of participants are parliamentary staff,
therefore, reinforcing the argument that the content has been appropriately developed for the target audience. Interestingly, there is a selection of participants from alternate professions and a small number of parliamentarians who have participated in the moderated courses. We have found that their inclusion has been beneficial to the learning process as they offer an alternate perspective, especially during the online discussion forums.

**Figure 2: Technical Position of Participants**

![Pie chart showing technical positions of participants]

**Figure 3** below provides a gender breakdown of participants. These statistics are important as they show that a substantial majority of participants have been female. It is notoriously difficult to obtain accurate comparative information of parliamentary secretariats and even more difficult to obtain gender disaggregated information. Dichotomies that inhibit accurate comparative analysis of parliamentary secretariats include:

- The distinction between devoted parliamentary services compared to the administration of parliament being supported by the public service.
- The distinction between professional parliamentary staff and parliamentary advisors (often appointed directly by the Members and similarly vulnerable to the election cycle process)
- The distorting effect the increasing role consultants play in providing support to parliamentary administrations; and
- Even when disaggregated gender information is available, it is often unclear the extent to which female parliamentary staff perform leadership/management roles within a parliamentary administration

Irrespective these hurdles to information gathering on gender and parliamentary secretariats, there is anecdotal evidence that a growing cadre of female parliamentary staff are providing support to parliaments across the globe. The practice of parliamentary associations and development partners asking parliaments to be gender sensitive when nominating delegates to participate in regional and global training opportunities has helped increase women’s access to capacity development efforts. However, there is no data to suggest that the numbers of women participating in capacity building programs commensurate with the increasing role women are playing in parliamentary administrations. This could be due to female parliamentary staff holding more junior posts, therefore, unable to access traditional training opportunities, or ongoing structural and organizational impediments to greater gender parity in capacity building efforts.

An objective to developing an open enrollment e*Learning platform was to promote greater equity of access to knowledge exchange and training opportunities. The gender-disaggregated data below suggests that e*Learning approaches have been successful in facilitating greater female participation in parliamentary capacity building efforts.

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1 It is assumed that enhanced women’s participation in parliaments has benefited from devoted gender programs, especially those conducted through professional parliamentary associations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The recent IPU report entitled “Gender-Sensitive Parliaments” Reports and Documents No.65 – 2011 notes that there have been modest improvements in women’s participation in the democratic process.
The success of the first phase of the WBI e*Learning project provided impetus to scale-up the scope of the project. In partnership with the Association of Francophone Parliamentarians, WBI has adapted and translated the first module in the e*Learning catalogue into French, which will be piloted in November 2011.

Feedback to date suggests there is high-unmet demand for junior to mid-career parliamentary staff training in French speaking jurisdictions. Also, expanding the scope of the project to include Francophone deliveries is consistent with the objective of broadening access to parliamentary development opportunities to a broad range of parliamentary staff, who would not normally be able to benefit from training opportunities. We anticipate that the take up for expanded Francophone offerings will be consistent with participation in the English language trainings and will follow a similar development timeline.

**Deepening Access**

The WBI’s e*Learning project has been in operation for four years. The capacity demands of those parliamentary staff who initially participated in trainings offered through the e*Learning portals has naturally evolved as they successfully matriculated from each of the entry level modules and acquired greater experience in their respective parliaments. Accordingly, a global consultation was conducted in 2010 to identify interest in and capacity needs that should be addressed as part of a mid-career staff training program.
An outcome of the consultation was a recommendation to establish a fee-based executive training program aimed at deepening the knowledge of target mid-career parliamentary staff. Such a program is designed to complement efforts to broaden access to training for junior parliamentary staff by providing a university certified executive training program for a select number of mid-career/ senior parliamentary staff who have already participated in and matriculated from the entry level e*Learning courses.

The WBI and McGill University, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Parliamentary Centre, are offering a unique, university-certified development program for senior parliamentary staff. The program focuses on advancing parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance. It follows a three- pronged approach with courses concentrating on:

- Parliament in Government Systems and its Core Functions;
- Modern Management Practices; and
- Theories and on current issues of local concerns

Key is the recognition that no single model is right for all jurisdictions. For this reason, the theories and practices that will be studied will focus on their application to parliamentary settings within different political systems and cultures.

The executive training course is adaptable, accessible and unique:

- **Adaptable:** To attempt to fill all of the needs of all parliamentary staff would not be constructive or feasible. For this reason, the Program is structured in such a way as allow participants from diverse parliamentary backgrounds to benefit and learn. Further, the program is structured to allow other groups besides parliamentary staff, such as staff of the executive and judicial branches of the Government and journalists from the parliamentary press corps to participate. However, parliamentary staff will be given preference in admission.

- **Accessible:** The program builds on the WBI e*Learning modules, which have proved to be effective and its success would serve as a model for the Program. e*Learning allows for increased access, cost efficiency, convenience and flexibility to clients and it enables participants to develop essential skills related to mixed media and ICT.

The Program is intended to be offered to senior staff – and others, as noted above – possessing a university bachelor’s degree or equivalent work experience. Priority will be given to House/Committee procedural staff. However accommodation will also be made to administrative staff involved in the corporate governance of parliament and to research staff mostly from Parliamentary libraries and political caucuses.

- **Unique:** The Program is a unique training and capacity building plan for senior parliamentary staff. Combined with both a theoretical and practical approach, it uses a blended learning
methodology of face-to-face training/residency program, web-based learning and videoconferencing training for its delivery.

The Program also offers mentoring by current and former senior parliamentary staff, and the option for a short attachment at another Parliament, in lieu of one of the courses.

The one year curriculum will comprise a blend of two one-week residential sessions (one at McGill University (Montreal, Canada) and the other at a location to be determined plus seven e*Learning courses. Those who has successfully completed WBI’s e*Learning offerings will receive advance standing for admission.

The pedagogic approach includes a practical facet; theoretical courses in a formal setting are not sufficient to meet the training needs of parliamentary staff. The executive training course encourages participants to address specific regional/local concerns of their legislative institution or to develop skills and abilities that are needed in their actual or future jobs.

Including not only a set of compulsory and elective “theoretical” courses, but also a “practical” component, the executive training program has incorporated integrative mechanisms to complement the theoretical courses. Case studies of personal or local interest, a study trip to another parliament or an in-house supervised assignment are unique features of this course.

This cost for the fee-based executive training course would be borne by the parliaments themselves or third parties. Importantly, applications will need to be endorsed by the leadership of the parliamentary secretariat. This requirement aims to ensure the parliament identifies the most important candidate for the executive training program and makes provision for the staff member to not only participate in the residency components, but undertake ongoing learning through e*Learning modules and videoconference series.

The WBI is presently assembling a Steering Committee, including representatives from Parliamentary Staff Associations, in order to ensure the content of the course continues to be tailored to parliamentary needs. In addition to esteemed parliamentary development experts, the Steering Committee will have representation from the leading parliamentary association and associations of secretaries-generals/clerks.

**Conclusion:**

The WBI seeks to enhance the capacity of parliaments to effectively perform their functions (oversight, representation and lawmaking) in order to better contribute to open and collaborative development. Capacity development is a complex, multi-faceted process aimed at creating an environment conducive to improved performance. WBI identified a number of challenges to providing support to parliaments globally and sought to develop a model that addressed these challenges so as to be able to enhance the
capacity of parliaments in client countries to be active and constructive players in open and collaborative governance systems.

The Parliamentary Strengthening Program’s approach to capacity strengthening combines all three approaches to parliamentary capacity building (individual, institutional, and networking) in a five stage change process aimed at translating global and regional parliamentary knowledge into country-level action. The change model used is adaptive and adopts participatory and adult learning techniques in order to achieve better capacity yields. The WBI’s programming focuses on three focus areas (Open Budgeting, Extractive Industries, and Climate Change) and has two cross-cutting initiatives (Engagement in fragile and conflict-affected countries and parliamentary staff training). The WBI approach to parliamentary capacity development outlined in this paper is not designed as a universal model; rather, it was designed to meet the implementation and development challenges particular to achieving WBI’s development objectives. A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework is presently in development in order to track the effectiveness of this model over the medium-term.

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