

**Qualities of
a Good
Parliamentarian**

A CHECKLIST

Legislative Oversight Tool Kit

Qualities of a Good Parliamentarian-A Checklist

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Foreword

This guide is part of a toolkit comprising a set of inter-related and complimentary tools. These tools have been developed as part of a USAID funded project, Strengthening National and Provincial Legislative Governance (SNPLG). It is being implemented by the Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Consortium (PLSC) comprising eight national and international NGOs.

At the heart of SNPLG project is the belief that building the capacity of the legislative branch to perform its basic functions namely, citizens' representation, oversight of the executive and law-making, are a must for a viable and strong democracy. Equally important is the need for encouraging and facilitating people and civil society to get involved in the legislative processes and to hold the legislature accountable. A legislature that is well-equipped to carry out its functions coupled with a proactive and informed citizenry provides solid foundations for parliamentary democracy and good governance.

Founded on the above rationale, SNPLG is divided into three programmatic objectives: legislative strengthening, capacity building of civil society, and the improved use of media and research in legislative endeavors. The project component being carried out by CRCP focuses on the empowerment of civil society for legislative oversight and advocacy.

It is hoped that this booklet and others in the series would help enhance the capacity of civil society organisations and activists to understand, track and influence legislature, and eventually contribute to the strengthening of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan.

Introduction

Considering the basic roles of parliamentarians/legislators i.e. citizens' representation, law making and executive oversight, following is a checklist of criteria to evaluate parliamentarians, based on best parliamentary practices in established democracies. Although by no means exhaustive, the checklist may serve as a good starting point in evaluating the performance of parliamentarians and electing the right kind of people to represent citizens of Pakistan:

Citizens' Representation

1. Does s/he visit her constituents regularly?
2. Does s/he have a formal communication mechanism such as a web site, a telephone line or a dedicated information assistant in place to allow information sharing with constituents and ordinary citizens?
3. Does s/he provide constituent services including responses to requests for information, casework, local projects and public expenditures?
4. Does s/he actively participate in parliamentary debates? You can get this information by reading newspaper reports on assembly sessions or watching proceedings aired on television. You may contact CRCP should you require additional information about how active a parliamentarian has been.
5. Does s/he provide citizens and interest groups with information on agendas and proceedings of the legislature?
6. Does s/he participate in civil society activities, such as public gatherings, seminars and workshops?
7. Does s/he demonstrate a willingness to learn from academics, civil society representatives and ordinary citizens?

Law Making

8. Does the legislator propose laws that reflect society's needs and the interests of the marginalized?
9. Does s/he have basic knowledge about lawmaking and the constitution in a comparative perspective?
10. Is s/he aware of domestic constitutional provisions and legal framework?

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11. Does s/he demonstrate any knowledge of domestic, foreign and international case law?
 12. Is s/he aware of the country's international obligations under treaties, conventions and protocols?
 13. Does the legislator invite input from citizens and organized groups in lawmaking for example, by inviting comments on bills and incorporating suggestions put forward by civil society groups in bills she proposes?

Executive Oversight

14. Does s/he perform actively as a member of a parliamentary committee? Information on members of different parliamentary committees can be obtained either from CRCP or directly from the Senate and the National Assembly. Minutes of committee reports maintained by the Senate and National Assembly deputy secretary should tell you if a particular member attends committee meetings regularly and participates in the discussion?
15. Does s/he pose questions to and seek explanations from ministers during parliamentary debates/question hour regarding the functioning and performance of their ministries/departments.
16. Does s/he take up issues related to corruption, mismanagement and human rights violations by executive authorities that media and civil society organizations bring to her notice?

Miscellaneous Qualities

17. Does s/he promote institutional values and pass on knowledge and skills, for example, by participating as a resource person in workshops and trainings?
18. Is s/he tolerant of views divergent to her party's policies and agenda?
19. Are the funds allocated to a parliamentarian spent in a transparent manner?
20. Does the parliamentarian show interest in issues related to poverty, health and education in parliamentary debates and legislative business?