

Working with parliamentarians to increase demand for evaluation

Key messages:

- **Parliaments around the world have the power to create real change for people by strengthening the demand for evaluation.**
- **Several CSOs, VOPEs and other stakeholders pro-actively engage with parliamentarians. However this engagement must be a long-term process that is built into evaluation advocacy strategies.**
- **Engaging with parliamentarians requires a thorough understanding of the political and policy-making environment, ways in which the parliament functions and the level to which parliamentarians currently use evaluation and evaluative thinking in decision-making.**
- **Depending on your context, identify strategic entry points for engaging with parliamentarians, such as through parliamentary leadership, parliamentary committees, individual parliamentarians, and parliamentary caucuses. Look out for pending bills related to evaluation that can be used as an entry point to start a discussion.**
- **A promising movement is the Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation in South Asia that is supporting parliamentarians to take the lead to advocate for national evaluation policies in South Asia. Other initiatives include a project on 'Engaging Parliamentarians for an Innovative Evaluation Culture', which won EvalPartners Innovation Challenge in 2013.**

Engaging parliamentarians to build a culture of evaluation¹

Parliaments can allocate resources for evaluation from national budgets, establish strong national evaluation policy directions, and debate, shape and enforce evaluation-focused laws and policies that protect people. They can ask tough questions, demand answers and hold governments, industries and civil society accountable. It is for these reasons that an increasing number of CSOs, VOPEs and other stakeholders strongly engage with parliamentarians.

Ten Reasons for Parliamentarians to Engage in National Evaluation Policy Process²

1. Parliamentarians have vested interest in the country in giving vision and leadership and to gear the country in the right direction. The vision and right direction should be informed by evidence.
2. Parliamentarians are the first pillars to approve/ allocate resources for development initiatives in the country, through parliamentary procedures. Therefore parliamentarians should be well informed with up-to-date information about effective initiatives and development programmes through evaluation so that resources are wisely invested in the country.
3. Parliamentarians have the opportunity and authority to supervise and question progress of any development initiative/ use of public funds in the country. Therefore relevant data and information are useful to properly monitor the progress through the Parliament.
4. Parliamentarians are the key in making legislation and policy in the country. It is important that policy and legislation is evidence-based so that they are useful for and contribute to make a difference in the country.
5. Parliamentarians represent Citizens' interest and therefore should respond to Citizens' demands. Parliamentarians need correct and updated information so that the public is informed about the correct picture.
6. Parliamentarians are members of different parliamentary committees, which review effective use of funds by public institutions. To engage effectively in such committees and raise the right questions in them, parliamentarians need information about the efficiency and effectiveness of public funds.
7. Parliamentarians do safeguard equity and human rights. Equity and human rights measures can be well maintained with the right information and evidence, which comes through evaluation.
8. Parliamentarians support the executive who in turn rely on the Parliament to pass laws and allocate resources. Therefore parliamentarians are key to influencing the executive regarding the National Evaluation Policy.
9. Each country has Millennium Development Goals' targets, which need to be evaluated, and needs to set new targets for Sustainable Development Goals, which need a new set of indicators. Therefore it is important to have a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for the country, which should be in line with the National Evaluation Policy.
10. Parliamentarians have a limited term and they need to seek re-election to continue their service to the people. It comes handy for the parliamentarians to go back to people for re-election with some concrete results/ achievements from their current term. Therefore parliamentarians need evidence to show results of their achievements.

¹ The contents of this chapter are adapted from UNICEF. (2009). *Guide to working with Parliamentarians*

² Developed by Asela Kalugampitiya, EvalPartners Secretariat for EvalYear; Coordinator, Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation. Resource material published by the Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation in partnership with EvalPartners to commemorate International Year of Evaluation 2015.

Effective parliamentary engagement is a long-term process that needs to be integrated into CSO, VOPE and stakeholders strategies to strengthen the enabling environment for evaluation. To work effectively with parliaments, advocates must understand the political context of their respective countries, the working methods of parliament, the level of parliamentary familiarity with evaluation and how it can be put to use in policy-making.

Parliamentary and political structures: CSOs and VOPEs should understand their specific parliamentary process and the larger political context within which the parliamentary processes and structures function. Become familiar with parliamentary calendars and turnover among parliamentarians. Work plans must take into account the timing and impact of elections, post-election learning curves, legislative floor periods, legislative recesses and changes of political leadership. *(You can get this information as part of your policy analysis. See [Question 2: Who can give it to us?](#) for more details)*

KEEP IN MIND

To maintain continuity despite regular turnover of elected officials, it is essential to also support key parliamentary staff (such as clerks, administrators and committee secretaries), who tend to have greater permanence and institutional memory.

Remember to look into parliament's relationship with the executive branch. In many countries, the separation between parliament and the executive is not well defined; in others, it is so great that parliament is barely involved in policy debates and has little power to monitor government actions.

In Practice

Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation³

The Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation is a collective of parliamentarians who are committed to development evaluations. This is the first time in the history that:

- Parliamentarians are organized as a formal group to work on development evaluation.
- Parliamentarians are raising awareness on the need for national performance evaluation mechanisms.
- Parliamentarians are taking the lead to advocate for national evaluation policies.

In February 2013, the first ever parliamentarians' panel presented three country experiences (Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh) on building an enabling environment for development evaluation in respective countries at an evaluation conference held in Kathmandu, Nepal. This was historical in that parliamentarians gave voice for national evaluation policies and showed promising commitment to realize these at country level. Based on the response of the panel, the three country parliamentarians decided to establish a forum with a view to addressing the issue collectively at country level. The Forum is now represented by parliamentarians from seven out of eight South Asian countries; Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Maldives is in the process of joining the Forum.

The goal of the Forum is to advance an enabling environment for nationally owned, transparent, systematic and standard development evaluation process in line with National Evaluation Policy at country level which ensures aid effectiveness, achievement of results and sustainability of development. The objectives of the Forum are:

1. National evaluation policies endorsed by the respective South Asian governments are in place and effective.
2. Create the space for dialogue between legislators and evaluation community.
3. Improve capacity of parliamentarians who are committed to development evaluation in the country.
4. Establish country level performance measuring mechanisms, in line with national evaluation policies ensuring result oriented and sustainable development.

The core team of the Forum is working on development of country status reports identifying gaps in evaluation mechanisms, establishment of country parliamentarian teams, development of model national evaluation policy and raising awareness towards national evaluation policies.

The Forum participated in a panel on "Why National Evaluation Policies matter in South Asia" at the Sri Lanka Evaluation Association (SLEVA) International Evaluation Conference held in July 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Nine parliamentarians representing six South Asian countries attended the conference proving the interest and commitment in development evaluation⁴. Following the conference, the Forum conducted a strategic planning meeting at the parliament of Sri Lanka. In 2013, the Forum also took an active part in the Third International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities held in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

³ Additional details are available at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Parliamentarians-Forumon-Development-Evaluation-in-South-Asia/310884062378855>; http://www.mymande.org/evalyear/working_with_parliaments; http://www.mymande.org/evalyear/parliamentarians_forum

⁴ Afghanistan -2; Bangladesh – 1; Bhutan – 1; Nepal -2; Pakistan -1; and, Sri Lanka -2.

Identifying Strategic Entry Points

Potential entry points for increasing engagement with parliament and its members include the following:

- **Parliamentary leadership:** The leadership of parliament, such as the Speaker of the House, is generally responsible for managing the affairs of parliament, determining its agenda and assigning the matters before parliament to the relevant committees. It is therefore useful to establish a channel of communication with the leadership to obtain institutional backing for evaluation related issues.
- **Parliamentary committees:** Most parliamentary work is done in committees, which may be standing or ad hoc committees. Stakeholders should identify the relevant parliamentary committees and their leadership and establish cooperation with them.
- **Individual parliamentarians:** Identify and support individual champions within parliament and urge them to advocate for use of evaluation and evidence in policy-making. You could also encourage the creation of a network of parliamentarians that support the use of evaluation and provide them with relevant information. It is important to ensure a non-partisan approach when targeting individual parliamentarians and, where possible, engage a representative number of parliamentarians from all political parties. This will avoid the identification of CSOs, VOPEs and stakeholders with a particular political faction.
- **Parliamentary caucuses:** In many parliaments, caucuses devoted to the promotion of human rights are generally playing an increasing role. As informal groupings, caucus memberships tend to be open to all parliamentarians and constitute an important entry point for interaction with parliaments on promoting a culture of evaluation.
- **New Members of Parliament:** New parliamentarians may be particularly open and receptive to becoming involved in development issues as they are often looking for an area of work where they can make a personal contribution.
- **Parliamentary library, research and documentation services:** Parliaments generally have services to provide information that parliamentarians require in their work as legislators. These services prepare notes and background papers and obtain other resource materials pertinent to legislation or issues on the parliamentary agenda, allowing parliamentarians to make informed decisions. It is useful to be in contact with the staff who service these facilities and to make available to them relevant evidence from evaluation on issues and legislation.
- **Pending bills that resonate with stakeholders' concerns:** In many countries, bills fester for years without passage. CSOs, VOPEs and stakeholders can survey the legislative landscape, identify bills already proposed, and use evidence from evaluation as an entry point to push for their adoption by parliament.

In Practice

Parliamentarian Group for the Promotion of a National Evaluation Policy in Pakistan⁵

To bring change in the evaluation culture in Pakistan, the Pakistan Evaluation Network (PEN) is engaging with parliamentarians, primarily Members of the National Assembly from different political parties, to promote better evaluation practices and a national evaluation policy in Pakistan. With support from IOCE, PEN partnered with SLEvA to move in that direction and became a part of the South Asian Parliamentarians Forum for Development Evaluation.

The Hon. Eng. Hamid ul Haq was the first Member of Parliament from Pakistan to participate in these efforts. He is a member of various Parliamentary Committees, such as the Communication and Works Committee, Higher Education Commission Committee, Public Health Committee and the Monitoring Health Committee. He actively took part at the SLEvA conference held in July 2013 in Sri Lanka where he highlighted a possible direction for more accountable governance in Pakistan. Post conference, he shared its report with the Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly and with the Chairman of PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, *a political party in Pakistan*).

Hon. Eng. Hamid ul Haq has committed to bringing together parliamentarians from various political parties in Pakistan towards drafting and promulgating a national evaluation policy for public institutions. To this end, in consultation with PEN, the Parliamentarians Group in Pakistan, including the Hon. Qaiser Jamal., Hon. Junaid Akber, Hon. Hamid ul Haq and Hon. Sajid Nawaz are discussing a detailed action plan for popularizing a national evaluation policy. The Parliamentarian Group has also established linkages with other parliamentarians of SAARC countries for the preparation of a national evaluation policy at a regional level in South Asia. In addition, the parliamentarians are advocating for incorporation of evaluation as an integral part of the manifesto of political parties.

PEN was able to effectively mobilize the parliamentarians due to two main reasons. The timing was favorable for introducing the concept of evaluation as the change in government came in with promises of transparency and accountability to the people. Moreover, PEN's strong association with different members of the political parties has reduced the time usually required to build trust and rapport. PEN used a conscious and deliberate approach of communicating the evaluation concept initially from a political perspective. This involved studying the political parties' manifestos and placing emphasis on the role of evaluation in strengthening accountability to the people. In addition, the natural competitiveness amongst political parties' was leveraged to encourage more active participation from the parliamentarians. Putting together these efforts then entailed frequent follow-ups with the parliamentarians and being readily accessible to them to provide technical inputs or information on other development related matters. With these efforts, PEN positioned itself as a knowledge resource for the wide and disparate information requirements of the parliamentarians.

PEN's initiative, together with Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation, Community of Evaluators (CoE) and European Evaluation Society (EES) work with parliamentarians is now part of EvalPartners global project 'Engaging Parliamentarians for an Innovative Evaluation Culture'. *For more details on this global project see case study 'Public hearing on Evaluation in Democracy at the European Parliament' ahead.*

⁵ Case study contributed by Shah Alam on behalf of Pakistan Evaluation Network

Tips to meaningfully engage with parliamentarians:

- Provide parliamentarians with relevant documentation and data in user-friendly formats. It is essential to translate CSOs and VOPEs expertise and evidence-based knowledge into messages that resonate with parliamentarians and constituents.
- Obtain constituency-level disaggregated data from evaluations. Provide support to national institutes that collect data.
- Work with all political parties and parliamentary candidates to integrate the use of evaluation into their political and electoral platforms.
- Provide parliamentarians access to individual evaluation experts. CSOs, VOPEs and other stakeholders can make highly qualified national or international technical experts available to parliament.
- Make parliaments aware of the many benefits of partnering with CSOs and VOPEs.

In Practice

Public hearing on Evaluation in Democracy at the European Parliament⁶

The European Evaluation Society organized a public hearing on Evaluation in Democracy at the European Parliament in April 2013. The purpose was to stimulate debate and innovative thinking about the potential role of evaluation in the European Parliament and the European Commission. The event was sponsored by Tarja Cronberg, Member of the European Parliament. She spoke of evaluation as a tool for the empowerment of citizens; a way of promoting social learning, identifying priority policy interventions, and reducing the democratic deficit in the European Union. An evaluation survey was circulated immediately after the event among the event participants. A special edition of Connections, the EES Newsletter, related to the Public Hearing on Evaluation in Democracy was published in June 2013. Hardcopies of this special edition of Connections were distributed to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

Other advocacy efforts included the development of a proposal for the EvalPartners Innovation Challenge competition.⁷ The first proposal, Towards an Innovative & Sustainable Evaluation Culture (TISEC), was shortlisted together with two other proposals, including from PEN on behalf of Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation and CoE in South Asia. These three initiatives then made a collective proposal 'Engaging Parliamentarians for an Innovative Evaluation Culture' which finally won the competition and received USD 30,000 for the implementation of the project. Following this grant, the initiative will work to engage parliamentarians in Asia, Europe and the Americas to enhance a supportive evaluation environment.

⁶ http://www.mymande.org/evalyear/filling_the_democratic. For additional information, please visit <http://europeanevaluation.org/1366206322-ees-public-hearing-at-the-eu-parliament.htm>

⁷ For more information visit

http://www.mymande.org/evalpartners/evalpartners_announces_the_winners_of_the_innovation_challenge

Additional resources

UNICEF. (2009). *Guide to working with Parliamentarians*. Available at:
http://www.unicef.org/thailand/UNICEF_Guide_to_working_with_Parliaments.pdf

EvalPartners. Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation. (2013) *How to Engage Parliamentarians in Development Evaluation: Training Module for VOPEs, Government Policy-makers and Evaluation Professionals*. Available at: www.mymande.org

Visit Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) website (www.ipu.org) for additional resources on working with parliaments.

Learn more about Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation at
http://www.mymande.org/evalyear/parliamentarians_forum