

WORLD BANK INSTITUTE

*Promoting knowledge and learning for a better world*

# **Parliamentary Libraries, Institutes and Offices: The Sources of Parliamentary Information**

*Robert Miller, Riccardo Pelizzo and Rick Staphenurst*

WBI Working Papers

*Series on Contemporary Issues in Parliamentary Development*



THE WORLD BANK

**Parliamentary Libraries,  
Institutes and Offices:  
The Sources of Parliamentary Information**

*Robert Miller, Riccardo Pelizzo and Rick Staphenurst*

World Bank Institute

**Copyright © 2004**  
**The International Bank for Reconstruction**  
**and Development/The World Bank**  
1818 H Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20433, U.S.A.

The World Bank enjoys copyright under protocol 2 of the Universal Copyright Convention. This material may nonetheless be copied for research, educational, or scholarly purposes only in the member countries of The World Bank. Material in this series is subject to revision. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this document are entirely those of the author(s) and should not be attributed in any manner to the World Bank, to its affiliated organizations, or the members of its Board of Executive Directors or the countries they represent.

**Parliamentary Libraries, Institutes and Offices:**  
**The Sources of Parliamentary Information**  
Robert Miller, Riccardo Pelizzo and Rick Stapenhurst  
*2004. 16 pages. Stock No. 37238*

# Contents

Foreword	v
Introduction	1
Parliamentary Libraries	5
Parliamentary Institutes	8
"World Wide Parliament"	11
Conclusions	13
Bibliography	15



## Foreword

As part of its Governance program, the Poverty Reduction and Economic Reform Division of the World Bank Institute (WBIPR) has sought to strengthen parliamentary oversight – in part, by improving parliaments’ representative function and its accountability to the electorate. In parallel, efforts have been made within WBIPR and elsewhere in the Bank to promote the greater access to information as a key component of good governance.

Noting that legislatures need information to perform their representative, legislative and oversight functions, this Paper primarily looks at different *sources* of parliamentary information – parliamentary libraries (including research staff and internet access), parliamentary institutes and more specialized legislative budget offices.

Not surprisingly, the distribution of parliamentary libraries and their resources vary greatly, from the United States Library of Congress, which has 110 million books and 75,000 periodical subscriptions, to Burundi, whose parliamentary library has only 50 books and Paraguay, whose library subscribes to only one periodical. Not surprisingly, the distribution of research staff is equally skewed – meaning that deficiencies in parliamentary library collections are typically not offset by other sources of information.

In countries as varied as Canada, India, Bangladesh and Russia, parliamentary institutes represent a solution for the information problem. Such institutes exist either as independent organizations outside of parliament (as in Canada and Russia) or as specialized research and training arms of the parliamentary bureaucracy (as in India and Bangladesh). The Paper concludes that, where parliamentary budgets cannot sustain a comprehensive library service, a parliamentary institute could offer a more viable source of information for parliamentarians.

Robert Miller is the Executive Director of the Parliamentary Centre (Canada), Riccardo Pelizzo is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Singapore Management University and Rick Stapenhurst is a Senior Public Sector Management Specialist in the World Bank Institute. The authors would like to acknowledge the comments of David Olson (Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina) and Raja Gomez (former Director, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) as well as the assistance of C.V. Madhukar in the production of this paper. The views expressed herein are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank.

Roumeen Islam  
Manager  
Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Division  
World Bank Institute



# Introduction

Information is important for the functioning of democratic legislatures. Legislatures, as Frantzich noted more than two decades ago, need information to perform their representative, legislative and oversight functions<sup>1</sup>. Writing about the US Congress, Frantzich argued that:

“Congress needs four basic types of information to better perform its role. Congress as a whole and individual congressmen need information to coordinate and plan their work schedule and that of their staffs. As a decision making body, Congress needs to track legislative activity and record aggregate and individual voting behavior. Individual congressmen need to track constituent demands, improve their efficiency in dealing with them, and develop means for following up constituent interests in both the legislative and non-legislative realms. Congressmen in their legislative role need improved information for monitoring problems, developing solutions, predicting consequences, and facilitating influence strategies. In its role of overseeing the bureaucracy, Congress needs to monitor the success of ongoing programs and to identify areas of weakness”<sup>2</sup>.

He further argued that Representatives and Senators “ideally, (...) ought to have information that is complete, accurate, timely, relevant and at times confidential”<sup>3</sup>.

The need for information displayed by the US Representatives and Senators is in no way exceptional. The need for information is shared also by state legislators within the US and by parliamentarians outside the US. To quote Bradley, “legislatures, (...), are faced with increasingly complex and technical issues. The widening scope of government and the closing circle of societal interconnectedness have made increased information demands on legislatures”<sup>4</sup>. This need for information for the proper functioning of a democratic legislature has long been understood in consolidated democracies and developed countries.

This point can be illustrated: summarizing the findings of Morgan’s *Reinforcing Parliament*<sup>5</sup>, Lees observed that “the evidence presented suggests that there may be a significant relationship between the amount of oversight-type activities conducted by legislatures (...) and the range of staff and other research and information sources, including finance, available to legislators and committees”<sup>6</sup>. Morgan’s views are shared by others. Lees reported, for example, that “other observers of

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen E. Frantzich, “Computerized Information Technology in the U.S. House of Representatives”, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. IV, n. 2, (May) 1979, pp.255-280. On this point see p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen E. Frantzich, “Computerized Information Technology in the U.S. House of Representatives”, *op. Cit.*, pp. 256-257.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen E. Frantzich, “Computerized Information Technology in the U.S. House of Representatives”, *op. Cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>4</sup> Robert B. Bradley, “Motivations In Legislative Information Use”, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. V, n. 3, (August) 1980, pp. 393-406. The quote is taken from p. 393.

<sup>5</sup> Janet Morgan, *Reinforcing Parliament. Services and Facilities for Members of Parliament: Some International Comparisons*, London, Political and Economic Planning, Broadsheet N. 562, 1976.

<sup>6</sup> John D. Lees, “Legislatures and Oversight”, John D. Lees, “Legislatures and Oversight: A Review Article on a Neglected Area of Research”, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 2, n. 2, (May) 1977, pp. 193-208. The quote is taken from p. 202.

specialist committees also believe that increases in resources of information and personnel, and changes in the perception of MPs are important determinants of the future impact of the scrutiny or oversight activities of such committees”<sup>7</sup>.

Having recognized the importance of information is the reason why, for example, “in 1963, the (French) assembly created a parliamentary and administrative information division (within the parliamentary library) for the purpose of collecting and synthesizing administrative and governmental information relating to particular questions. This was only the beginning of an effort which was not completed until 1970, when the office of research and documentation was created”<sup>8</sup>. Very similar developments occurred in Germany, Britain and Canada.<sup>9</sup>

The need for parliamentary information is probably even greater in democratizing (and developing) countries, in which “substantive, policy-relevant information is often exclusively the province of the government”<sup>10</sup>. In these countries, the legislature needs free (of government influence) and reliable information to understand government choices, decisions and policies; to assess whether they are valuable or not and, if not, to criticize them and propose policy alternatives. Not surprisingly, legislatures’ inability to keep governments accountable for their actions often reflects legislatures’ lack of independent information or the inability of parliamentarians to process available information. If the only information available is provided by the government, or if the legislature is unable to understand the available information, then the legislature cannot question in any substantive way the content of government choices, decisions and actions<sup>11</sup>.

Miko and Robinson<sup>12</sup> adapted the earlier typology of parliaments developed by Nelson Polsby<sup>13</sup> by linking the information needs of parliament to the functional levels of parliament, arguing that the

---

<sup>7</sup> John D. Lees, “Legislatures and Oversight”, *op. cit.*, p. 203. The reference to Robinson 1976 is a reference to Ann Robinson, “The Power of Select Committees of the House of Commons - A Three Dimensional Consideration”, a paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the Political Studies Association, March 1976.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Campbell and Jean Laporte, “The Staff of Parliamentary Assemblies in France”, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. IV, n. 4, (November) 1981, pp. 521-531. The quote is taken from p. 527.

<sup>9</sup> On Germany see Werner Blischke, “Parliamentary Staff in the German Bundestag”, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. IV, n. 4, (November) 1981, pp. 533-558. On the British case, see Michael T. Ryle, “The Legislative Staff Of the British House of Commons”, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. IV, n. 4, (November) 1981, pp. 497-519. Updated information concerning the information resources available to German parliamentarians can be found in Thomas Saalfeld, “Professionalisation of Parliamentary Roles in Germany: An Aggregate-Level Analysis, 1949-94” in Wolfgang C. Mueller and Thomas Saalfeld (eds.), *Members of Parliament in Western Europe: Roles and Behaviour*, London, Frank Cass, 1997, pp. 32-54.

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard Loewenberg and Samuel C. Patterson, *Comparing Legislatures*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1979, p. 164.

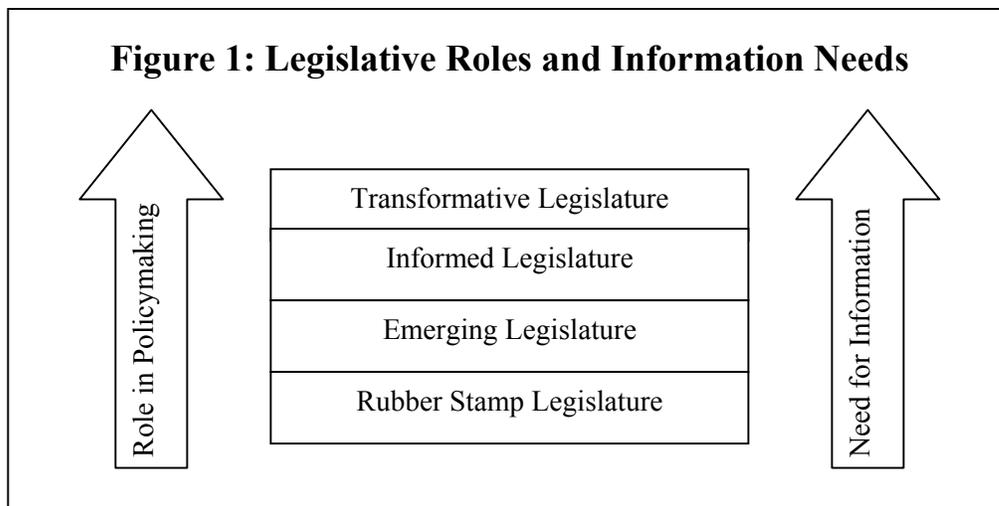
<sup>11</sup> This point is well recognized in the literature. Loewenberg and Patterson noted, in this respect, that “the availability of sources of information independent of executive agencies improves the ability of the legislature to exert influence over the executive branch”, see Gerhard Loewenberg and Samuel C. Patterson, *Comparing Legislatures*, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>12</sup> William H. Robinson and Francis Miko, “Political Development Assistance in Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Some Lessons From Experience”, in Lawrence D. Longley (ed.), *Working Papers on Comparative Legislative Studies*, Appleton, Research Committee of Legislative Specialists of IPSA, 1994, pp. 409-430.

<sup>13</sup> Polsby classified parliaments as *rubber stamp* legislatures operating at a minimum level, simply endorsing the actions and proposals of the Executive, *emerging and informed* legislatures, which exert increasing

desired level of parliamentary functioning will have an important bearing on the need for information and research.

Thus, the *rubber stamp* legislature has little need for information other than the time and place to vote. Moving up the continuum, the *emerging* legislature needs information in order to participate effectively in the legislative process; here, a parliamentary library is established, with reference materials, a research service may be created and permanent staff provided for parliamentary committees. The *informed* legislature typically has a parliamentary library and research service which provides reference services, produces reports, offers a clipping service that is distributed to all members and may track the progress of key legislation. At this level, the parliamentary information service is providing a full array of services and is distinguished from the next level only by the scale of resources and the fact that it stops short of providing substantial research and analysis services that identify policy options and their impacts. The *transformative* has substantial resource requirements and typically has a generous allotment of personal staff, strong and well-staffed committees and large research groups capable of developing policy options (see Figure 1).

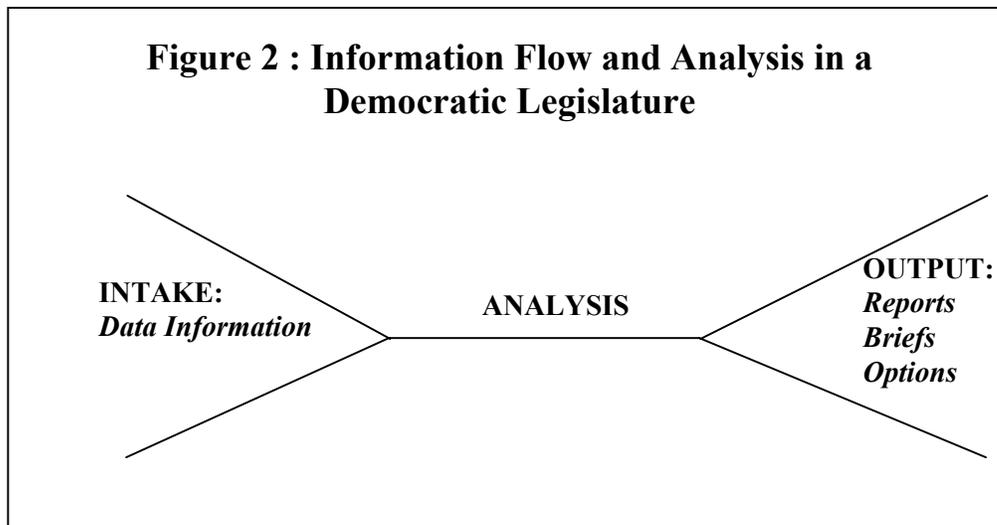


Source: Miko, Francis and William Robinson (1996)

Parliamentary “information providers” play a vital role as transmitters, interpreters and synthesizers of information. The *potential* sources of information to parliament are wide ranging; the challenge is to adapt available information into usable information, presented in easily accessible form, and provided in a timely manner (see Figure 2). Miko and Robinson liken this process to two funnels pushed together with their narrow openings joined and the bell-shaped funnels facing in either direction. The left-hand funnel captures a broad range of information for use by the legislature while the right-hand side symbolizes broad distribution. The narrow segment in between is the critical juncture occupied by the parliamentary librarian, researcher or analyst, whose responsibility is to sift information and to digest and shape it to make it readily accessible for use in the legislative process.

---

degrees of influence in the policy process and *transformative* legislatures, which regularly alter proposals offered by the government and develop their own policy options. See Nelson Polsby., “Legislatures” in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, *Handbook of Political Science: Governmental Institutions and Processes*, vol. 5, Reading, Addison-Wesley, 1975.



*Source:* Miko, Francis and William Robinson (1996)

The role of the parliamentary library or research service is to search for the right information, integrate it with other materials, synthesize it and translate it into non-technical terms and to disseminate it to all parliamentarians in a form that is as objective and nonpartisan as possible.

The purpose of this paper is to review the existing sources of information for parliamentarians and to suggest some policy solutions to help make parliamentarians more informed and better prepared to perform their tasks. With these objectives in mind, the paper is divided in four sections. The first section is devoted to the analysis of the parliamentary libraries both as a source of parliamentary information and training for parliamentarians. In this section, it is noted that parliamentary libraries represent the most common source of parliamentary information and that the range of tasks that they are able to perform is a function of the resources that they have. Building on this discussion it will be suggested that parliamentary libraries may be unable to provide the parliamentary information - and training - that parliamentarians need to perform their tasks effectively. The second section is devoted to an alternative information provider – parliamentary institutes – with a special reference to specialized parliamentary institutes: parliamentary (or congressional) budget offices. The third section considers international sources of information – or what some have called the “world wide parliament”<sup>14</sup>. The final section of the paper will provide some tentative conclusions and some policy suggestions.

---

<sup>14</sup> John Bosley, former Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons

## Parliamentary Libraries

The most common source of parliamentary information is represented by parliamentary libraries<sup>15</sup>. Such libraries perform several functions (they are a home for books, they provide reference service by looking up for facts, sources and available bibliographic material, they make available copies of specific items, they provide clipping service of relevant articles in the press...) and, “nearly all legislatures have parliamentary libraries to assist them in obtaining and using information in their deliberations”<sup>16</sup>.

Yet, there is great variation in the extent to which parliamentary libraries can assist parliamentarians. According to Robinson

“the library advertises the availability of information on topics of interest and even takes the initiative to provide photocopies of clippings of newspapers and other sources on topics of interest to members. In still others, the library provides a wide range of products and services that include answers to reference inquiries; creation of and access to legislative databases; research reports; materials describing and comparing current legislation proposals and their status in the legislative process; policy analysis studies that identify alternative courses of action for the legislature and the consequences if adopted; and seminars and training programs for legislators and staff”<sup>17</sup>.

These inter-parliamentary differences mostly reflect differences in available resources such as the size of the collection, the number of yearly acquisitions, the number of periodicals, the number of newspapers, the size of the staff and the size of the research staff. Using data from the Database of the World Directory of Parliamentary Libraries<sup>18</sup>, it was found that the size of the library collection varies from 50 items in Burundi to 110 million items in the US Library of the Congress; the number of annual acquisitions varies from 10 in Tajikistan to 3.4 million in the USA; the number of periodicals available in the parliamentary library varies from 1 in Paraguay, Sudan and Yemen to 157,000 in Japan; the number of newspapers varies from 1 in Saint Lucia and Tuvalu to 8,000 in Japan, the size of the staff varies from 1 in Benin, Cyprus, Guatemala, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malta, Macedonia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu and Western Samoa to 767 in the USA. The data concerning the research staff are of particular interest because only 71 out of 163 parliamentary libraries included in our sample provided evidence as to the size of their research staff. In all of the other cases, it is not clear whether data were not reported because there was no research staff or because information was simply not provided<sup>19</sup>. With this in mind, there is great variation

---

<sup>15</sup> The fact that parliamentary libraries are the most common sources of information does not mean necessarily that they are the most frequently used sources of information and it also does not provide any clue as to how often they are used. And unfortunately the literature provides little evidence with regard to the utilization of libraries. The lack of information is due to the fact that this question has rarely been investigated and the fact that the few studies on the topic are not comparative in scope. Some data concerning the British case can be found in Gerhard Loewenberg and Samuel Patterson, *Comparing Legislatures*, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> William H. Robinson, “Parliamentary Libraries. Information in the Legislative Process”, in George Thomas Kurian (ed.), *World Encyclopedia of Parliaments and Legislatures*, IPSA, 2 vols, 1998, pp. 815-829. On this see p. 815.

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, p. 816.

<sup>18</sup> [www.bundestag.de/datbk/library/wd\\_e.html](http://www.bundestag.de/datbk/library/wd_e.html)

<sup>19</sup> With the term ‘research staff’, we refer to those employees who are actively engaged to perform research activities for parliamentarians and legislators. Hence, the research staff should not be confused with other

in the size of research staff in the 71 countries for which data are available. The size of *research* staff varies from 1 in Algeria, Barbados, Burundi, Cameroon, Dominica, Iran, Jamaica, Micronesia, Mozambique, Namibia, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, Sudan, Syria and Trinidad and Tobago to 444 in the US Library of the Congress.

Not surprisingly, the distribution of parliamentary resources (collection, acquisitions, periodicals, newspapers, staff, research staff) is not random but it forms instead a relatively well defined pattern. Libraries with large collections are also those with the highest number of yearly acquisitions and with the largest research staff, while libraries with small collections also have a small number of yearly acquisitions and a small research staff. This conclusion is supported by the findings of the correlation analysis presented in Table 1: size of the collection, yearly acquisitions and the size of the research staff are almost perfectly and positively correlated.

**Table 1. Correlation Coefficients**

	Size of the collection	Yearly Acquisitions	Periodicals	Newspapers	Staff	Research staff
Size of collection	1	.999	.476	.200	.496	.939
Yearly acquisitions		1	.495	.216	.498	.950
Periodicals			1	.865	.686	.664
Newspapers				1	.548	.385
Staff					1	.789
Research Staff						1

Source: [www.bundestag.de/datbk/library/wd\\_e.html](http://www.bundestag.de/datbk/library/wd_e.html)

The almost perfect linearity detected among has some clear implications. The data analysis reveals that the deficiencies that some libraries may experience in some respects (e.g. size of the collection, number of yearly acquisitions, etc.) are not compensated by other characteristics (e.g. larger research staff). The libraries with the largest collections or research staffs are also the libraries with the highest number of yearly acquisitions, while the libraries with the smallest collections tend to be the least adequately staffed and tend to have a fairly limited number of yearly acquisitions.

This lack of independent and reliable information forces parliaments to rely almost exclusively on the government-generated information and prevents them from effectively overseeing the executive.

---

types of staff such as the staff of individual legislators, the staff of committees, the staff of the party caucus (or of the party parliamentary group), and with the central staff of the lower. Comparative data on these various types of staff can be found in Gerhard Loewenberg and Samuel C. Patterson, *Comparing Legislatures*, op. cit., p.161. Loewenberg and Patterson also provide some evidence, based on the US Congress, as to the amount of research and information provided by these various types of staff. Specifically, “congressmen report that they do 30 percent of their legislative research themselves; the rest of their research is done by their own staff (45 percent), the Congressional Research Service (9 percent), the staff of the committees on which they serve (11 percent), or by department and agency staffs (3 percent)”. See Loewenberg and Patterson, *Comparing Legislatures*, op. cit., p. 162.

But if free (and reliable) information is a necessary condition for the effective functioning of parliaments (and parliamentarians), it is not sufficient. Parliamentarians need to know how to use the information that they have. Often this requires training for both them and, perhaps more especially, for their staff. Indeed, evidence suggests that parliamentary libraries in developing countries are not effectively utilized by parliamentarians. Here, and most probably elsewhere, parliamentarians have proved to be unable to process the available information because of the “lack of proper understanding by members of parliament of their role as law makers and overseers of government action”<sup>20</sup>. Not surprisingly, training is one of the activities that some parliamentary libraries perform. However, since parliamentary training is a complex activity and the complexity of the activities that a parliamentary library is able to perform reflects its resources, it is not surprising that most of the understaffed parliamentary libraries are actually unable to provide courses and seminars for parliamentary members.

---

<sup>20</sup> Anders B. Johnson, Press Release of the Inter-Parliamentary Union n. 72, Geneva, May 16, 2000. This press release can be consulted online at the following web-address: [www.ipu.org/press-e/gen95.htm](http://www.ipu.org/press-e/gen95.htm).

## Parliamentary Institutes

In some instances, parliamentary institutes represent a solution to the problem of weak libraries. While such institutes are sometimes intended to compensate for the weaknesses of parliamentary library resources, in other cases they have much broader mandates than those typically assigned to parliamentary libraries – as is the case, for example, with the King Prajadhipok Institute (KPI) in Thailand.

From an organization perspective, it is possible to identify three types of institutes. Some are “internal” in the sense that they are part of the parliamentary bureaucracy, while others are independent organizations and are thus “external” to parliament. The Legislative Information Centre (LIC) in Bangladesh, the Parliamentary Institute in the Czech Republic, and the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST) in India are all examples of internal parliamentary institutes. The BPST, for example, is an integral Division of the Lok Sabha (Parliament of India, lower house) Secretariat, and its Director reports to the Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha. By contrast, the Parliamentary Centre in Canada, the Center for Legislative Development in the Philippines, and the Foundation for the Development of Parliamentarism in Russia are examples of “external” parliamentary institutes. The Parliamentary Centre, for example, is an independent NGO, originally established to provide contracted research for committees within the Canadian House of Commons. Thailand’s KPI is a good example of the third class of parliamentary institutes, that is “mixed”: it displays features that are generally associated with both internal and external institutes. Specifically, the KPI - originally created as a division of the Secretariat of the Thai House of Representatives - has been an independent and autonomous institute since the promulgation of the King Prajadhipok’s Institute Act in September 1998, thus making it comparable to external institutes. At the same time, however, the KPI also differs from other external parliamentary institutes in two basic respects. First, its Chairman is the President of the National Assembly, which establishes a formal link between the Institute and the Parliament. And second, KPI’s Secretary General has to submit an annual report to both the Council and the National Assembly, thus formally linking the Institute to the Parliament.

The location of the parliamentary institutes is of importance. Parliamentary institutes are often confronted with the following dilemma: To perform their task adequately, parliamentary institutes need to be operationally autonomous. They need to be free of government control, of partisan influence and also of the influence of other institutional figures such as the Speaker of the House. Should parliamentary institutes be influenced by the Speaker, by one of the parliamentary parties or by the government, they would not be able to gather and provide free and reliable information, nor would they be credible centers for the training of parliamentarians. Yet, in spite of their operational autonomy, parliamentary institutes need to be sufficiently attached to the parliamentary system. This second necessity is due to two different but related needs. The first is that parliamentary institutes need to be credible partners in the eyes of the individual parliamentarians and of the parliamentary administration. The second is that if parliamentary institutes are not sufficiently attached to the parliament, they might not be sufficiently sensitive to the needs arising from the parliamentary functioning and, thus, they might fail to provide appropriate and timely information, training or both. Parliamentary institutes of the mixed type may be in the position to provide the best solution to above mentioned dilemma: in so far as they are external, they are autonomous from any sort of partisan or government influence, while to the extent to which they are linked to the parliament, they are more fully aware of, and hence, able to satisfy Parliament’s informational needs.

The location of parliamentary institutes is important for different reasons, too<sup>21</sup>. External institutes such as the Russian and the Canadian examples have more freedom to innovate and initiate new approaches to contribute to the development of efficient parliamentary institutions. They are also in a better position to link parliaments and civil society organizations. By contrast, institutes organized within parliaments tend to be more innovation-averse. Conversely, however, internal institutes do not run the risk of upsetting parliamentary administration, since they are part of the administration. Finally, given their institutional collocation, internal parliamentary institutes run less risk of becoming the political arm of narrow, but well organized, interest groups. In other words, neither the internal nor the external parliamentary institutes are flawless. They both have merits and shortcomings. Institutional reformers should always pay some attention to the characteristics of the various types of parliamentary institute and select the one which is more consistent with the country characteristics.

Parliamentary institutes differ from each other not only because of their location vis-à-vis parliament, but also because of the functions that they perform. Some do research and provide information (LIC in Bangladesh), others provide parliamentary training (BPST in India), while a few provide both information and training (Center for Legislative Development in the Philippines, KPI in Thailand and the Foundation for the Development of Parliamentarism in Russia). The data concerning the various parliamentary institutes for which information was available is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Parliamentary Institutes and their Characteristics**

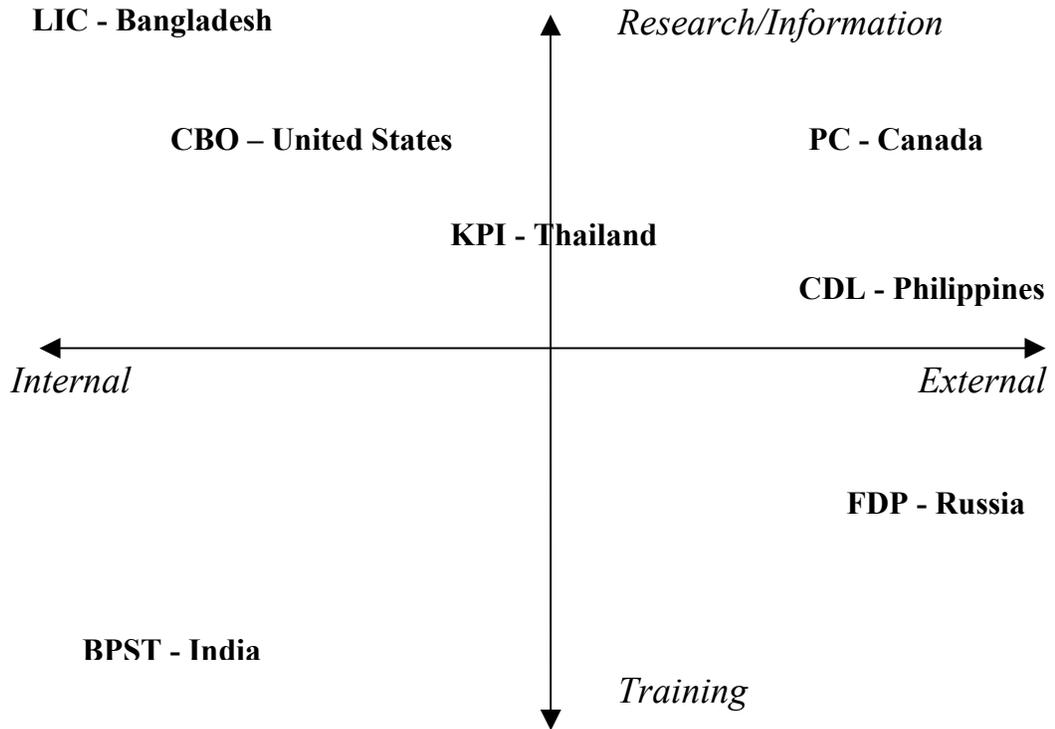
Country	External to Parliament	Research and information	Training
<b>Bangladesh:</b> Legislative Information Centre	No	Yes	No
<b>Canada:</b> Parliamentary Centre	Yes	Limited	Limited
<b>Czech Republic:</b> Parliamentary Institute	No	Yes	Yes
<b>India:</b> Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training	No	No	Yes
<b>Philippines:</b> Center for Legislative Development	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Russia:</b> Foundation for Development of Parliamentarism in Russia	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>South Africa:</b> IDASA	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Thailand:</b> King Prajadhipok Institute	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>USA:</b> Center for Legislative Development	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2 is instructive in that it shows that internal institutes tend to provide information (LIC in Bangladesh), training (BPST in India) or both (Czech Parliamentary Institute), while external institutes either provide information (IDASA in South Africa) or information *and* training (CLD in the Philippines, the CLD in the USA, the Foundation for the Development of Parliamentarism in Russia and the King Prajadhipok's Institute in Thailand), but they do not provide training to parliamentarians in the absence of providing information. This may be because of their distance from the par-

<sup>21</sup> This paragraph draws on points made in Miller, Robert Parliamentary Institutes unpublished paper, the Parliamentary Centre (1998)

liamentary administration and thus lack of flexibility in providing quick-response training. (This same information is provided by the Figure 3).

**Figure 3: A Typology of Parliamentary Institutes**



## “World Wide Parliament”

Parliamentary libraries, institutes and budget offices are no longer the only sources of parliamentary information (and training). International organizations and/ or parliamentary associations have become important instruments for the dissemination of information and good practices.

### PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICES

Some legislatures have developed specialized budget offices, which provide independent research capacity in budgetary matters. As for parliamentary institutes, there is considerable variation concerning how this independent research capacity is developed.

One option is to establish a research unit which has a broad mandate, including budget-related research. The Parliaments of Germany and the United Kingdom have adopted this approach. A variation is where there is a specialized budget research office within a broader parliamentary research unit, as in the case of Poland.

A second option is the establishment of an independent budget office, which specializes in budgetary analyses, but which is not part of other parliamentary services. The examples are the USA, the Philippines, Uganda and Georgia.

In the course of the past few decades, several international organizations and parliamentary associations have been created, although some date back over a century. These associations and organizations differ from each other in a variety of respects. First, is the geographic boundaries within which they operate, that is whether they are regional or global organizations. Some organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) are inter-national, inter-regional, inter-continental institutions, while others such as, for example, the *Parlamento Amazonico*, the *Parlamento Andino* are regional organizations.

However, there is a lot of variation within each of these two sub-groups. The point can be illustrated by looking more closely at some regional organizations. The *Parlamento Amazonico*, the *Parlamento Andino*, the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, the *Parlamento Centro-Americano*, *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* and the Baltic assembly are all regional organizations. Yet, the *Parlamento Amazonico* is concerned with the coordination of the legislative actions for the protection of the biodiversity of the Amazon rainforest. The *Parlamento Andino* is concerned with the promotion of peace, freedom, social justice, democracy and development in the region. The Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union is intended to provide a forum in which contacts among Arab parliaments can be promoted, dialogue can be promoted, similar legislation can be enacted, common activities can be coordinated and common Arab causes can be discussed. The *Parlamento Centroamericano* is meant to contribute to the promotion of sustainable development in a modern society, which is a requisite for peace and the respect of human rights. The Baltic Assembly and the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* are both concerned with cooperation and information exchange in their respective regions of interest.

The important point is, however, that both regional organizations - such as the Baltic Assembly and the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* – and global organizations – such as the IPU and the CPA – provide information to parliaments and parliamentarians. Such information is typically imparted through conferences, seminars and workshops in which parliamentarians share their ex-

periences and compare the institutional systems and the functioning of the parliaments of their countries, study missions and tours and secondments and attachments for parliamentary staff. In addition, the IPU maintains a substantial electronic data base on parliamentary practices and procedures, while CPA publishes a quarterly journal and provides a question-and-answer system for Commonwealth parliamentarians and staff.

## Conclusions

To the best of our knowledge, there is not sufficient empirical evidence to prove conclusively that the presence of parliamentary libraries, institutes or budget offices has significantly impacted the quality of legislation. However, based on our extensive interaction with parliaments in many parts of world, it is possible to draw to some conclusions. First, if parliamentary control of the executive is of vital importance for the proper functioning of democratic institutions, and if parliaments need free and reliable information to control governments' actions and prevent corruption, malpractice and authoritarian drifts, then the provision of free and reliable information represents a valuable contribution to the consolidation of democracy. Second, parliamentarians in developing countries often need training to be able to process the available information. With this in mind, several sources of information and training were identified and discussed in this paper. Specific attention was paid to parliamentary libraries, parliamentary institutes and international organizations. Third, although alternative sources of parliamentary information and training were identified, these sources are complementary and not mutually exclusive. Parliaments and parliamentarians should probably be exposed to as much information as possible from as many sources as possible to properly exercise their parliamentary functions. Moreover, the existence of multiple sources of information is often indicative of whether and to what extent democracy is taking root. Not surprisingly, it is in the USA, arguably the most solidly democratic country in the world, where there are more sources of parliamentary information. This leads to our fourth conclusion, that if democracy and good governance practices are to be consolidated in developing countries, the provision of parliamentary information (and training where necessary) is indispensable. And in order to provide parliamentary information it is necessary to institute specific sources of information keeping in mind that there are no perfect sources of information. For example, parliamentary libraries have proved to be extremely useful in established democracies (USA, Italy, etc.), while they have been less useful in those developing countries in which they are not adequately sustained in terms of resources or in which they are not utilized by the Parliamentarians. Similarly, Budget Offices have been found extremely effective in established democracies (USA) but they have been considerably less effective in democratizing countries (Georgia).

The fact that there is no perfect informational source suggests some clear policy prescriptions:

1. **Develop Domestic Sources of Information.** International organizations can help establishing domestic sources of parliamentary information (and training) and they can also monitor their functioning, but it is vital that democratizing countries develop their own sources of parliamentary information (and training). Only domestic sources can, in fact, provide the credible, timely and in-depth information that parliaments (and parliamentarians) require.
2. **Promote Informational Pluralism.** As it was previously anticipated, multiple sources of information may be beneficial to democracy. Parliamentarians' exposition to as much information as possible will improve their understanding of the problems at stake and possibly contribute to the identification of better solutions.
3. **Promote Non-Partisan Sources of Information.** However, it is important that at least some of the sources of parliamentary information (and training) provide technical, professional, non-partisan information. The provision of non-partisan information would increase the credibility of these institutions. Non-partisan institutions help politicians, parties and governments serve their state and citizens, instead of using the state to promote their own political objectives. The existence of credible institutions can also contribute to the neu-

tralization of otherwise divisive issues. This is particularly valuable in ideologically polarized or ethnically divided countries.

There is significant scope for additional research in this important area. While it may be difficult to definitively measure the quality of legislation, it will be possible to devise some measurable parameters to assess the value-add provided by parliamentary institutes in improving the quality of debate in parliament. For instance, we may be able to measure the use of technical references in debates in Parliament, cited from the briefings provided by the research service. It is also possible to conduct studies and surveys/ opinion polls on the quality and extent of support that parliamentary institutions actually provide to legislative bodies, and the perceptions of legislators about such information. As further evidence becomes available regarding the utility of the parliamentary institutions, it will be possible to make an even more convincing case to build such institutional capacities in a number of countries around the world.

## Bibliography

- Bannenberg, R.J.N., "Building Member Understanding and Support for Parliamentary Library", *IFLA Journal*, vol. 21, n. 2, 1995, pp. 102-105.
- Blischke, Werner, "Parliamentary Staff in the German Bundestag", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. IV, n. 4, (November) 1981, pp. 533-558.
- Bradley, Robert B., "Motivations In Legislative Information Use", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. V, n. 3, (August) 1980, pp. 393-406.
- Campbell, Stanley and Jean Laporte, "The Staff of Parliamentary Assemblies in France", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. IV, n. 4, (November) 1981, pp. 521-531.
- Frantzich, Stephen E., "Computerized Information Technology in the U.S. House of Representatives", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. IV, n. 2, (May) 1979, pp.255-280.
- Greenstein, Fred and Nelson Polsby, *Handbook of Political Science: Governmental Institutions and Processes*, vol. 5, Reading, Addison-Wesley, 1975.
- Johnson, Anders B., Press Release of the Inter-Parliamentary Union n. 72, Geneva, May 16, 2000.
- Kohl, Ernst (ed.), *World Directory of national parliamentary libraries*, 6th ed., 2 vols, Bonn, Deutscher Bundestag.
- Lees, John D., "Legislatures and Oversight: A Review Article on a Neglected Area of Research", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 2, n. 2, (May) 1977, pp. 193-208.
- Loewenberg, Gerhard and Samuel C. Patterson, *Comparing Legislatures*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1979 (especially pp. 159-164).
- Polsby, Nelson, "Legislatures", in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, *Handbook of Political Science: Governmental Institutions and Processes*, vol. 5, Reading, Addison-Wesley, 1975.
- Robinson, William H., "Building a parliamentary research capability", *IFLA Journal*, vol. 17, 1991, pp. 379-388.
- Robinson, William H. and Francis Miko, "Political Development Assistance in Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Some Lessons From Experience", in Lawrence.D. Longley (ed.), *Working Papers on Comparative Legislative Studies*, Appleton, Research Committee of Legislative Specialists of IPSA, 1994, pp. 409-430.
- Robinson, William H., "Parliamentary Libraries. Information in the Legislative Process", in George Thomas Kurian (ed.), *World Encyclopedia of Parliaments and Legislatures*, IPSA, 2 vols, 1998, pp. 815-829.
- Ryle, Michael T., "The Legislative Staff Of the British House of Commons", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. IV, n. 4, (November) 1981, pp. 497-519.

Saalfeld, Thomas, "Professionalisation of Parliamentary Roles in Germany: An Aggregate-Level Analysis, 1949-1994", in Wolfgang C. Mueller and Thomas Saalfeld (eds.), *Members of Parliament in Western Europe: Roles and Behaviour*, London, Frank Cass, 1997, pp. 32-54.

Wachira, Patrick, "Bid to halt debate on Motion is defeated", *East African Standard. Online edition*, Thursday, April 11, 2002, <http://www.eastandard.net/parliament/parl11042002008.htm>.

Webb Hammond, Susan, "Legislative Staff", in Gerhard Loewenberg, Samuel C. Patterson and Malcolm E. Jewell (eds.), *Handbook of Legislative Research*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1985, pp. 273-319.