External Inducement and Internal Constraint

Strengthening the Bangladesh Parliament

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Objectives and Methods of Research

• Broad Objective: Explore the scope and limits of external assistance to Parliament in Bangladesh

• Specific Objectives
  • Nature of parliamentary assistance received since 1997
  • Mechanisms used for implementation
  • Activities and outputs of Parliament projects
  • Achievements and pitfalls
  • Explaining the gap

• Methods
  • Case study method
  • Review of documents and interview with some key actors
Introduction to Bangladesh

- **Bangladesh**: formed part of Pakistan from 1947 to 1971. It became an independent country after nine months of armed struggle with the Pakistan army killing three million people.
- **Nature of state**: Unitary
- **System of government**: Parliamentary
- **Party system**: Multi-party/two-party
- **Electoral system**: simple plurality
- **Nature of constituency**: Single-member
Introduction to Parliament of Bangladesh

- **Structure of Parliament:** Unicameral
- **Tenure of Parliament:** Five years
- **Number of Members:** 345 total: 300 elected directly, 45 women elected indirectly
- **Scope of Parliamentary Power:** Parliament is formally very important
  - legislative supremacy
  - Cabinet accountable to parliament
  - frames its own rules of procedure
  - validity of proceedings cannot be questioned in any court
- **Limits**
  - **Constitutional:**
    - Provision for judicial review
    - restriction on independent voting
  - **Political:**
    - Extreme party control
    - Over-centralization of power in each major party
    - Lack of internal party democracy
    - Enemy discourse in inter-party relations
  - **Behavioral:** Most MPs work part-time as lawmakers and have outside employment
Development of Parliament

• Parliaments elected since 1991 are different than their predecessors
  • more representative
  • more legitimate
  • more active

• Introduction of reforms
  • restoration of parliamentary system
  • establishment of an independent parliament secretariat
  • introduction of non-party caretaker system to ensure orderly succession of government
  • introduction of PMQT
  • committees democratized and granted more powers including scrutiny of bills after the first reading
  • live telecast of parliamentary proceedings

• Significance of reforms
  • improvement in quality of legislation
  • MPs have scope to develop expertise
  • Committees meet more regularly
  • Increase in number of questions
Decline of Parliament

- Boycott of parliament including PMQT by opposition (of both parties)
- Short duration of parliament sessions and sittings (when either party is in power)
- Lack of scope for accommodation
- Dominance of the ruling party
- Party political role of Speaker
- Partisanship in questions, especially PMQT
- Negative effects of live telecast of proceedings
Parliamentary Assistance in Bangladesh

- Many actors are active in parliamentary strengthening elected
  - UNDP
    - PPAP (2008-2009): $494,000
    - SDPDB (2010-2014): $11,200,000
  - USAID
    - PROGATI (2007-2011): $4,000,000
    - PRODIP (2010-2015): $10,200,000
  - World Bank
    - SPAC (2007-2009): $900,000
    - SPO (2010-2014): $5,000,000
  - WBI/CIDA
    - SPP (2007-2011): $2,500,000
  - WFD
    - BPPPBP (2011-2015): $1,500,000
### Parliamentary Assistance in Bangladesh (Contd.)

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<th>Donor</th>
<th>Project(#)</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Amount ($)</th>
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Mechanisms for Implementation

- **UNDP projects**
  - Steering Committee headed by Speaker (1997-2007)
  - Steering Committee headed by Secretary
  - PIC headed by NPD
  - PMU headed by CTA

- **USAID Projects**
  - For PROGATI
    - Steering Committee headed by Secretary
    - DAI (COP and DCOP)
  - For PRODIP – No formal arrangement with Parliament yet
    - TAF/SUNY-CID (COP and DCOP)

- **WB Projects**
  - Advisory Committee headed by the Speaker
  - Steering Committee headed by Secretary
  - PMCU headed by a Project Director
Types of Donor Support

- **Structural support programs**: to improve institutional infrastructure and technical capacity of parliament

- **Procedural support**: to improve procedure and powers of parliament

- **Functional support**: to improve MPs’ ability to understand and perform core functions
  - Legislative
  - Oversight
  - Representational
Areas of Activity (1997-2010)

- Modernizing Rules of Procedure (UNDP)
- Reforming the Parliament Secretariat (UNDP)
- Streamlining Parliamentary Committees (UNDP)
- Strengthening Parliamentary scrutiny of public finance (UNDP, USAID-PROGATI)
- Digitalizing the Parliament (UNDP)
- Making Parliament Accessible (UNDP)
- Training of Staff and MPs (UNDP, USAID-PROGATI, WB, WBI-CIDA)
Areas of Activity (Contd.)

• Modernizing Rules of Procedure
  • Institutionalization of PMQT
  • Introduction of balloting for selecting questions
  • Referral of budget to committees
  • Introduction of zero hour
  • Provision for allowing a member dissenting with the majority to speak on note of dissent

• Reforming the Parliament Secretariat
  • Reorganization of the Committee Wing
  • Creation of a new human resources division
  • Delegation of authority
  • Skills development through training
Areas of Activity (Contd.)

- **Streamlining Parliamentary Committees**
  - Reorganization of Committee Wing
  - Skills development through training of committee chairs and staff
  - Development of new formats for committee reports and writing committee proceedings
  - Updating committee records
  - Strengthening relations between committee officers and council officers in ministries
  - Professional support to finance committees
  - C&AG reports classified to help PAC scrutiny
Areas of Activity (Contd.)

• Strengthening parliamentary scrutiny of Public Finance

• UNDP
  • Attempted rule change for committee scrutiny of the budget
  • Pre and post-budget workshops for MPs
  • Helped establish BAU later renamed BAMU

• PROGATI
  • Pre and post-budget workshops for MPs
  • Made BAMU operational
  • Preparation of briefing papers
Areas of Activity (Contd.)

- **Digitalizing the Parliament**
  - Introduction of e-governance (through establishing LAN, supplying hardware and training of staff)
  - Establishment of Parliament website
  - Transformation of the library into a legislative information center (LIC)

- **Making Parliament Accessible**
  - Establishment of Parliament Visit Cell
  - Organization of outreach programs for MPs
Expectation and Achievement: Exploring the Gap

- Gap between output and impact
  - More outputs, less impact
- Factors Causing the Gap
  - Lack of ownership and strong commitment by Parliament leadership
  - Risk with becoming modernizers
  - Parliament strengthening not important for re-election
  - Lack of initiative by MPs – more interested in local issues than in national issues
  - Lack of a professional parliamentary service
  - Resistance by the bureaucracy
  - Deviant political culture
Role of Donors

• Limits of donor intervention
  • Right diagnosis, wrong strategy (BAMU)
  • Inadequate political mapping
  • Lack of diversity in approaches
  • Focus on ‘one best means’ of reform – public hearings, internships, town hall meetings – with limited application

• Donor Support Limited but not unimportant
  • Made Parliament secretariat (PS) aware of the need for change in its structure, work procedure, and behavior of its workforce
  • Reorganization of PS and delegation of authority
  • Skills development
  • Generation of parliamentary knowledge
Bridging the Gap

• **Short-Term Measures**
  • Parliament to sit longer (sitting days and duration)
  • Encourage opposition participation
  • Ensure coordination
  • Local ownership

• **Long-Term Measures**
  • Rule change
  • Change in constitution
  • Change in political culture
  • Development of professional parliament service
  • Adoption of an integrated/balanced approach to democratic development, focusing on parliament, parties, and bureaucracy
Lessons Learned

• Targeting only the parliament for change is unlikely to be successful without simultaneous reforms of other political sectors, particularly bureaucracy and political parties
• Need for a balanced approach to democracy promotion
• Aid to parliament be made part of wider democracy assistance package and not to be provided in isolation
• Coordination of programs aimed at strengthening parliament and other political sectors
  • Intra-project coordination
  • Inter-project coordination
  • Coordination between donors
• Need for adequate political mapping
Donors’ Dilemma

- Reasons for surge in donor interest in parliament strengthening
  - To stop the institution from further descent into ineffectiveness
  - To help strengthen democracy in the recipient countries
  - Strengthening parliament is seen as a means to achieving other important donor objectives
  - Aiding the parliament is less prone to backlash than assisting other political sectors
  - Scope to extend patronage to those who matter both at home and in recipient countries