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AFGHANISTAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STAFF SURVEY REPORT

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Executive Summary

The USAID Afghanistan Parliamentary Assistance Project (APAP) has been providing technical assistance to the Afghanistan National Assembly (NA)[1] since 2005 to promote the development of an effective, democratic, independent decision making Parliament. Given the significance of training to APAP's assistance efforts, APAP designed and administered the National Assembly staff survey to gauge staff members' impressions of the APAP training to help inform any future programming. The survey, administered by APAP staff to a random sample of 55 Wolesi Jirga (WJ) and Meshrano Jirga (MJ) staff members, with a 71% (39) response, was conducted from August 7-15, 2010.

In general, the survey found that APAP's training efforts were extremely effective and appreciated by the staff participants. Key findings were as follows.

Recognition of training needs: 41% (16) of the respondents identified the lack of knowledge about the roles and functions of Parliament, the legislative process, along with the need for computer, coordination and administrative skills as their major challenges. An additional 28% (11) indicated that working with Members of Parliament (MPs)/Senators made them realize the importance of the Parliamentary processes, particularly the legislative process including bill drafting, the importance of properly organizing the work of commissions, as well as learning how MPs/Senators make decisions in the plenary.

Relevance: 72% (28) of the respondents reported that APAP training courses were relevant to their work. With respect to specific topics 46% (18) of the respondents indicated that the Legislative process and Legal drafting courses were useful, while 50% (3) of the respondents that attended budgeting courses rated them as useful.

Impact: Not only did 64% (25) affirm that they applied the skills learned in training to their work, 54% (21) indicated that they transferred skills acquired through APAP courses to work colleagues. Interestingly, in a follow-up question among those who responded only 20% (8) of the respondents attributed their increase in knowledge to APAP training courses, while 26% (10) cited learning from work colleagues. Given the high percentage who indicated sharing their skills with colleagues, APAP training may have impacted this later group as well.

Training Methodology: A vast majority of the participants received their training through formal training course (80% of those who responded to the question),[2] with only a small percentage (13%(4)) noted participation in mentoring programs – not surprising as APAP's program on embedding APAP staff within the committees was only initiated this year.

Future Training Needs: Despite the numerous training courses offered to staff, the respondents reported the need for additional skills training. The additional skills training needed, in order of priority, are computer skills, legislative analysis skills, english skills, report writing and legal drafting.

Appreciation of APAP and International Implementers: 21% (8) of the respondents foresee a future role for APAP and other development organizations in strengthening staff skills and providing assistance towards enhancing the work of commissions. Given the strong positive reaction to APAP training, this finding must be viewed against the backdrop of some skepticism where 15% (6) felt that development organizations are a waste of time while 14% (5)

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[1] The Afghanistan National Assembly comprises of the Lower House (Wolesi Jirga) and Upper House (Meshrano Jirga)
[2] Given the fact that participants were selected from training rosters, those who did not respond nonetheless were likely to have participated in formal training as well.

felt that assistance or development organizations should augment staff salaries as an incentive for retention of talented staff.

1. Introduction

The USAID Afghanistan Parliamentary Assistance Project (APAP) has been providing technical assistance to the Afghanistan National Assembly (NA) since 2005. APAP's assistance is targeted at strengthening the legislative, oversight, representational and institutional capacity of the Afghanistan NA through a series of targeted interventions that address the challenges and responds to the needs of the National Assembly. The overall objective of the project is to establish an effective, democratic, independent decision making Parliament.

As part of the institutional capacity support, APAP provides training, conducts workshops, seminars and facilitates study tours to other Parliaments for both members and staff of the NA. The bulk of the training is provided through the Afghanistan Parliamentary Institute (API) set up by APAP in collaboration with the NA. The training responds to the skills needs of Parliament and cuts across APAP's focus areas of assistance (legislative, oversight and representation). Training of NA staff represents the single most important approach through which APAP has been improving staff skills to enhance staff support services for members of Parliament and the National Assembly commissions[3]. However, ad hoc one-on-one mentoring is also provided to committee assistants through the Committee Support Team (CST), involving the placement of APAP staff in each commission to work with staff and members to review legislation.

Given the significance of training to APAP interventions in the National Assembly, APAP designed and administered the National Assembly staff survey to gauge staff members' impressions of the APAP training to help inform any future programming. The survey, administered by APAP staff to a random sample of 55 Wolesi Jirga and Meshrano Jirga staff members, with a 71% (39) response, was conducted from August 7-15, 2010. This report outlines the survey findings and provides some insights on the utility of APAP training offered to the National Assembly.

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[3] There are 29 commissions in the National Assembly; 18 Wolesi Jirga and 11 Meshrano Jirga

2. The Survey

The USAID Afghanistan Parliamentary Assistance Project (APAP) conducted a survey of the Afghanistan National Assembly staff members in August 2010. The survey targeted staff members who attended APAP training courses, study tours and/or received one-on-one mentoring by APAP staff in the past year. The survey sought to obtain the targeted staff opinions on the utility of APAP training programs.

The survey included six categories of questions:

1. Background information about participant
2. Relevance and Usefulness of training
3. Application and transfer of skills
4. Factors contributing to increased knowledge among staff
5. Additional Skills Training needed
6. Future role of Assistance/Development organizations

The survey was administered by APAP staff members from the Legislative, Budget and Institutional Development Teams. In total, 11 APAP staff members administered the survey over a period of one week, from August 7-15, 2010. It was submitted to a randomized representative sample of 55 staff members out of a total pool of 184 trained over the past year, with a response rate of 71% (39).

The report presents the findings of the survey. It begins with an executive summary, followed by an introduction before a discussion of the survey methodology and sample selection. The remainder of the report presents the survey findings organized according to the six categories mentioned above.

3. Survey Methodology

The survey questionnaire, comprised of both open and closed questions, was developed by APAP's Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist with invaluable input from APAP Senior Associate, Chief of Party, Deputy Chief of Party, and Project Team Leaders. APAP staff members who administered the survey also provided their comments. As noted above, the questionnaire, prepared in English and translated into Pashto and Dari, was administered by APAP staff members between August 7-15, 2010 using face to face interviews where possible. The whole survey process included the following;

➤ Pre-survey work: questionnaire design, sample selection, instructions to interviewers
➤ Fieldwork: actual administration of the survey questionnaire
➤ Coding and data entry
➤ Data analysis and report writing

The survey sample was drawn from a population (184) of Afghanistan National Assembly staff who attended APAP's training courses, workshops, seminars, or participated in study tours and or received APAP one-on-one mentoring in commissions in the past year. Using stratified random sampling, the survey randomly selected 30% (55) of the total population (184) with proportional representation of both the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) and Meshrano Jirga (MJ) staff. As can be seen from the table below, the samples are proportionally representative of the total population. Since WJ staff members are more than MJ members, a significantly higher number of WJ staff attended APAP training courses, workshops, and seminars. The overall survey response rate was 71% (39), of which 82% (32) were responses from WJ and the remainder 18% (7) from MJ staff. The low response rate from the MJ staff is attributed to their non-availability due to work commitments since the MJ plenary was in session during the survey period. On the other hand, there was a high response rate from WJ staff because the WJ was not in session.

House	# of Staff who participated in APAP training	% of staff in Total	# in Sample	% in Sample	Response Rate
Wolesi Jirga	122	66%	36	65%	82%
Meshrano Jirga	62	34%	19	35%	18%
Total	184	100%	55	100%	100%

4. Findings

Since the questionnaire responses were either in Dari or Pashto languages, APAP staff translated the responses into English before data analysis. Therefore, the findings presented here are based on the analysis of the English translations.

4.1 Background Information

As noted above, the survey response rate was 71% (39), of which 82% (32) were responses from WJ staff and the remainder 18% (7) from MJ staff. In terms of gender disaggregation, 21% (8) of the respondents were female, the majority (5) of whom were from the Wolesi Jirga. The Pie Chart below (Fig. 1) summarizes the WJ and MJ staff proportions in the total number of staff who responded.

Despite the alleged high staff attrition, a look at the number of years of service (Fig. 2) with Parliament revealed that 59% (23) of the respondents joined Parliament at least three years ago. Almost one third of the respondents joined Parliament 5 years ago. While most of the staff members sometimes repeatedly attend APAP

training, APAP has no knowledge of whether these long term staff had prior APAP training.
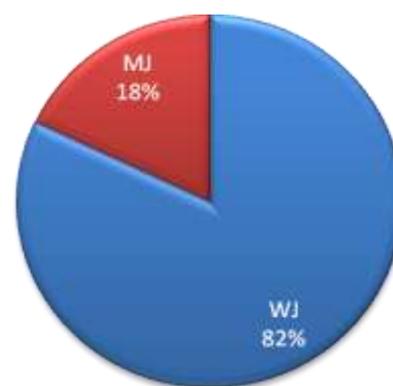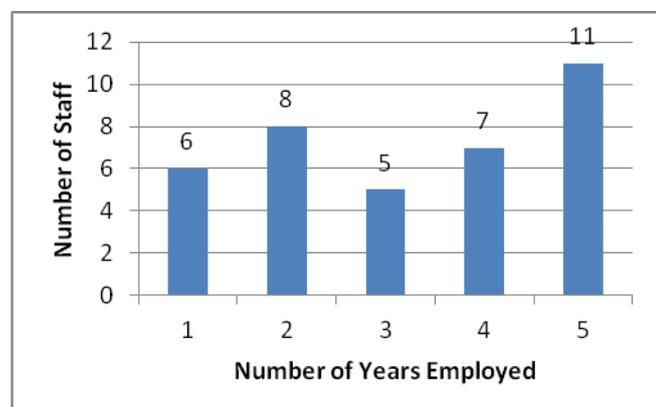
Figure 1: WJ and MJ Percentage Responses

Figure 2: Number of Years Employed by Parliament

4.2 Challenges and Experiences

The efficacy of training often depends upon participant motivation. One key source of such motivation is recognition by the participants that they need certain skills or knowledge. While it is often difficult for people to admit that they do not know something, in this survey a surprisingly large number did. In response to a question asking what were their greatest challenges when they joined parliament, 28% (11) of the respondents identified the lack of knowledge about the roles and functions of Parliament, the legislative process, and lack of computer skills as their major challenges, with an additional 13% (5)

reporting lack of coordination and administrative skills as major challenges. Moreover, in a related sense, 28% (11) of the respondents indicated that working with MPs/Senators made them realize the importance of the Parliamentary processes, particularly the legislative process including bill drafting, the importance of properly organizing the work of commissions, as well as learning how MPs/Senators make decisions in the plenary. This finding underscores the need for APAP to continue addressing these in future training programs to impart knowledge of Parliamentary processes to new staff members. While 26% (10) learnt that MPs and staff members can share experiences and need each other to enhance the work of Parliament, 13% (5) of the respondents did not respond.

While not reflective of training, 15% (6) of the respondents identified the lack of office equipment such as computers, chairs, inadequate office space, and remuneration. This highlights the National Assembly's resource constraints and subsequent inability to offer better remuneration to staff. The remainder of the respondents indicated they faced no challenges or did not respond.

4.3 Participation in APAP training

Among staff respondents: 77% (30) indicated that they participated in APAP trainings within the past year; 80% (24) of the 30 attended APAP training only and 13% (4) of the 30 had attended both APAP training and received one-on-one mentoring by APAP staff in commissions. 7% (2) did not respond to the question on whether they received one-on-one mentoring by APAP staff. None of the staff members had participated on a study tour.

The above finding indicate that most of the NA staff attended APAP courses but very few received one-on-one mentoring by APAP staff in the course of their duties. Putting this into context, it should be noted that APAP did not deliberately link training participants with one-on-one mentoring by APAP staff. However, the low number of staff receiving one-on-one mentoring by APAP staff members may partly be explained by the limited presence of APAP staff members in commissions in the past year. The Committee Support Team concept, though introduced a few years back, only gathered momentum in the second quarter of FY2010 following buy in from the Parliament leadership and commission

chairpersons. With the surge in the number of APAP staff embedded in each of the commissions, more NA staff members are expected to receive one-on-one mentoring, perhaps bolstering the application of skills learnt during training. However, the survey did not ascertain if the combination of training and one-on-one mentoring has any reinforcing effects.

Figure 3: Courses Attended by Staff in the Past Year
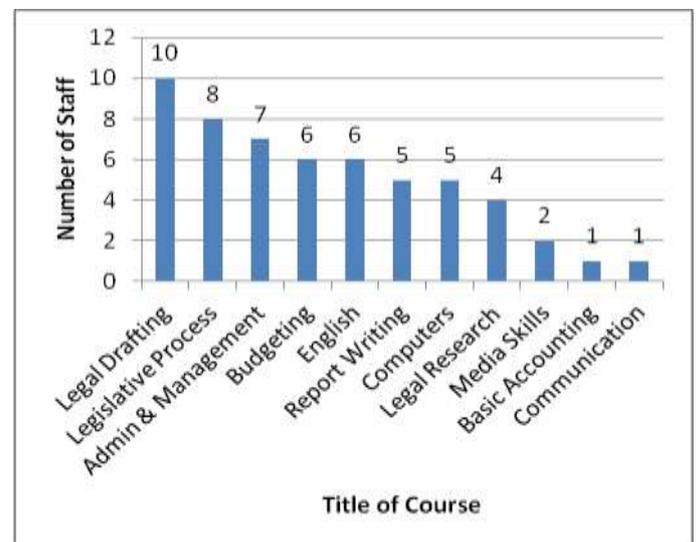
Regarding which exact courses they attended, the respondents cited a variety of courses ranging from Legal drafting, Budgeting, Library and Communications. Figure 3 above shows that the most highly attended courses, in order of priority, were Legal drafting, Legislative Process, Administration and Management, Budgeting, and English courses. Basic accounting and communication were the least attended courses. The responses are not surprising given that the majority of the respondents work for the commissions and therefore were targeted to participate in courses such as legal drafting, legislative process and budgeting. Moreover, in response to both structured and open ended questions about the challenges they faced and their

experiences, over 28% (11) indicated that the most popular and well attended courses (legal drafting, legislative process, etc) address issues that the participants work experience had identified as important to their work. However, none of the respondents participated in an APAP study tour. In fact, some of the respondents felt that APAP organized study tours for the Parliament secretariat only.

4.4. Course Relevance and Usefulness

In response to a question on whether APAP offered courses that bore relevance to staff duties and responsibilities, 72% (28) of the respondents indicated that the courses were relevant to their work. 15% (6) indicated that the courses were not relevant and 13% (5) of the respondents did not respond. A detailed look at the data reveals that the 6 participants who indicated the courses were not relevant did not generally take the survey seriously as they did not respond to most of the survey questions. For instance the same group of respondents either did not identify which courses they attended or if they identified, most did not correctly identify the courses they participated in. However, without ignoring their responses, it does not necessarily mean the courses were not relevant. Perhaps this suggests that the courses were just not relevant to specific people.

On the question of which courses were useful to their work, 26% (10) of the respondents indicated that the Legislative process course was useful while 20% (8) noted the Legal Drafting course as useful. Out of the 6 participants who attended the budgeting course, 50 % (3) noted that the budgeting course was useful. Other courses that were found useful included report writing, English, Leadership and management.

While approximately 50% (20) of the respondents did not respond to the question of which courses were least useful, 75% (15) of those that did not respond to the question had indicated that the courses they attended were useful. Legal research, report writing and budgeting were cited as least useful by one respondent each. One of the respondents commented and said, ""Budget course, if you talk about business, incomes or others to a person who is graduated from literature. It would not be useful and also the mind is not ready for such things."

Since budget oversight support is one of the most important APAP interventions, it is important to put the above comment into context. The respondent represents 17% of the participants who attended budget courses and 2.5% of the total sample (39). Moreover, as noted above, 50% (3) of respondents that attended budgeting course had found the course as useful. Besides, a further look at the data revealed that the respondent's duties at Parliament had nothing to do with budgeting. However, one of the respondents who identified the budgeting course as useful had duties that had nothing to do with budgeting.

In view of the above, two points are worth considering. Given that two participants whose duties do not have anything to do with budgeting having different opinions, it may be prudent to review the identification and selection of participants to APAP training. At the same time, since the budget bill is the single most important piece of legislation that is presented to the National Assembly each year, the findings perhaps underscore the need to review how the budgeting course is presented in order to both educate staff as to the need for budget training as well as offer technical training on budgeting for all National Assembly staff in general.

Figure 4: Course Relevance
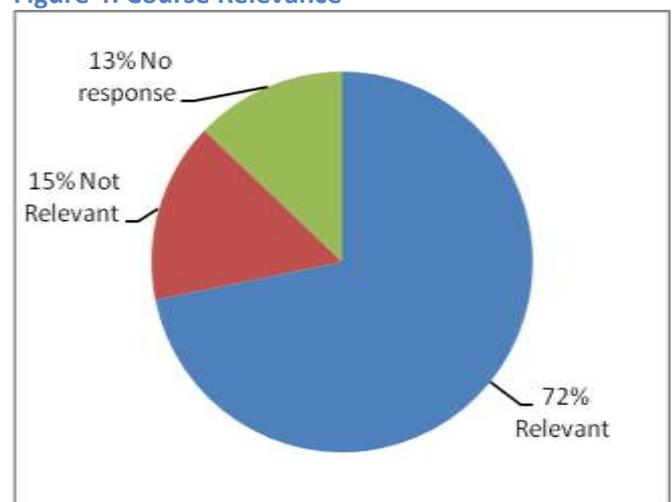
4.5 Application and Transfer of Skills

The expectation from any training/capacity building program is that participants will apply the skills learnt to their work and help improve their effectiveness. At the same time, staff may sometimes transfer skills to peers, thereby broadening the impact of training courses.

Asked about how frequently they apply skills in their work, 64% (25) affirmed that they applied what they learned (26 % of the respondents indicated that they apply the skills frequently, 38% indicated that they sometimes apply the skills.) The percentage of people who affirmed applying skills, though slightly lower, is consistent with the percentage of those who found APAP courses as relevant to their work. Aspects of work to which skills are applied include letter writing, report writing, legislative process, conducting commission meetings, and bill drafting. It should be noted that the Legal drafting and Legislative process courses are two of the most attended courses highlighted in Figure 3 above and also noted by 28% (11) of the participants as addressing issues that their work

experience had identified as important to their work. However, 18% (7) responded that they don't apply the skills at all. Another 18% (7) did not respond to the question. Figure 5 summarizes the responses on the frequency of application of skills learnt.

The survey also sought to know whether staff members transfer skills learnt to fellow workmates. 54% (21) respondents indicated that they transferred skills to work colleagues, while 18% (7) indicated they did not. Others (18%-7) did not respond. These results suggest the influence of APAP training may be far reaching.

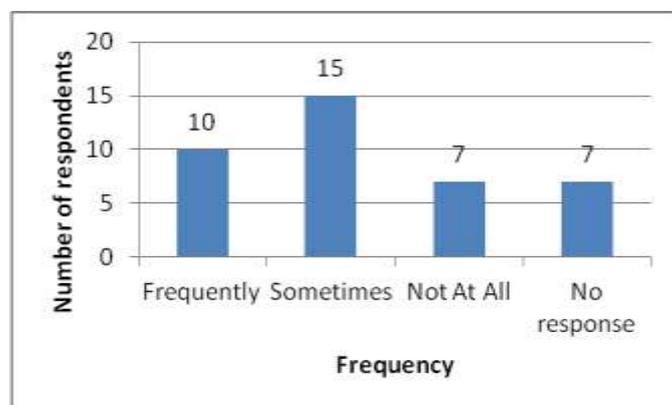**Figure 5: Frequency of Application of Skills Learnt**

4.6 Factors contributing to increase in knowledge

As shown in Figure 6 below, the respondents cited several factors as contributing to increasing their knowledge about Parliament. 26% (10) attributed their increase in knowledge to learning from other staff members. Given the report that 54% (21) of APAP trainees shared their skills with the fellow workers, APAP training may have also influenced this figure. Moreover, the influence may even be higher given that 20% (8) attributed increase in knowledge to APAP training. 13% (5) cited reading existing Parliament information documents as well as surfing from the internet.

While APAP may have contributed to some of the Parliament information documents, the data does not state whether APAP reading material was part of the information documents. However, overall, the findings suggest that APAP either directly contributed to the increase in staff knowledge through its courses or indirectly through staff transferring skills to fellow employees and reading Parliament information documents, some of which might have been prepared with APAP technical assistance.
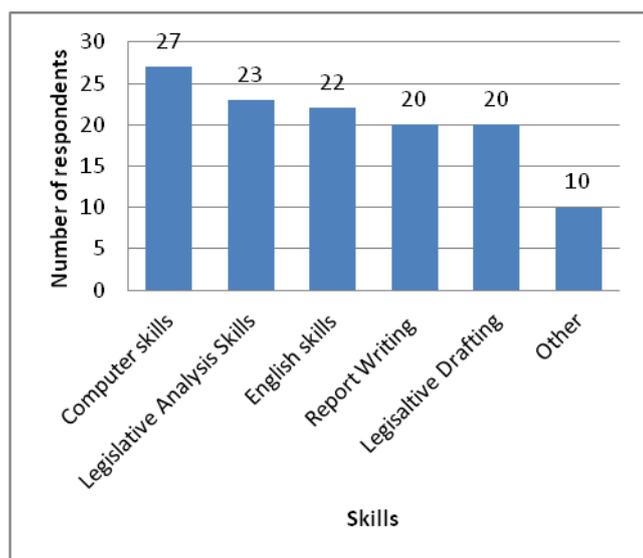
Figure 6: Factors contributing to increase knowledge
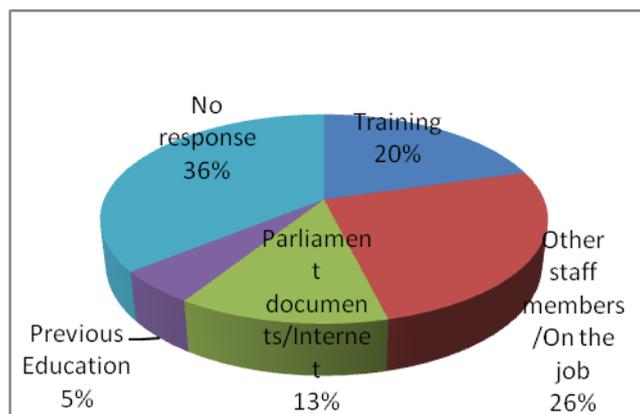
4.7 Additional Skills Training needed

In terms of additional skills training needed, in order of priority, most of the staff indicated that they need computer skills, legislative analysis,

English skills, report writing and legislative drafting skills. While these skills are already being regularly provided by APAP training, the responses suggest that there is still a demand for these courses which are considered relevant and useful to staff in carrying out their duties. For instance it is not surprising that computers rank high on the priority list despite APAP regularly providing computer training to staff through the Afghanistan Parliamentary Institute (API). This may be due to inadequate computers (perhaps stemming from inadequate resources) for all National Assembly staff to put into practice the acquired computer skills. Figure 7 below, summarizes the responses to the question.

Figure 7: Additional Skills Training needed

4.7 Future Role of Development or Assistance organizations

Asked about the future role of development partners in providing assistance to Parliament, 21% (8) of the respondents pointed out that development or assistance organizations such as APAP, National Democratic Institute and United Nations Development Program should continue providing training. Some of them suggested more long term training, seminars, workshops and study tours to other Parliaments to learn and share experiences.   This request perhaps is a reflection of the observed benefits of past training offered by development or assistance organizations. Perhaps staff would prefer continued training in the areas identified in Figure 7 above.

In addition to training, respondents suggested the need to support the work of commissions through technical assistance as well as facilitating in country filed visits to provinces by members of commissions. While respondents did not state what form of technical assistance, this probably stems from the realization that commissions can do more and therefore require further strengthening to enhance their effectiveness in light of the limited staff skills

14% (5) of the respondents felt that development organizations should augment salaries for NA staff. This, they believe would act as an incentive to retaining skilled staff working for Parliament. One of the respondents even suggested that APAP should share the allowances paid to participants of the NA

Fellowship program[4]. He said. "My request from these projects is not to assign fellows because they are not present every day because of no space for them, share their money with Professional Assistants to be convinced."The request for development or assistance organizations to augment staff salaries is not surprising given the limited financial resources available to the National Assembly. Moreover, the low remuneration was noted by 15% (6) of the respondents as a major challenge when they joined Parliament.

15% (6) of the respondents felt that development or assistance organizations were not effective and wasted their time. One of the respondents said, "The hope we have from development Non-Governmental Organizations were not effective. These NGOs only served secretariat. NGOs spent a lot and brought disposable equipment. These NGOs don't have good place amongst the people and only they served leaders of the both houses". Another respondent said, 'Development NGOs didn't perform good tasks and only they wasted time of the people, they sent only MPs to study tours and wasted their money." And another one said, "NDI and UNDP performed useful works for enhancement effectiveness of the employees but APAP didn't do except waste of time." These remarks suggest that development or assistance organizations could do better in future.

5. Conclusion

The survey findings provided some useful insights on the relevance and utility of APAP training courses. Undoubtedly, based on the above findings, APAP training courses had a positive impact on staff as they were largely viewed as relevant by 72% (28) of the respondents. However, very few respondents received one on one mentoring by APAP staff since APAP did not deliberately link training participants with one-on-one mentoring by APAP staff. While APAP does not have evidence that a combination of training and one-on-one mentoring reinforce each other, it hopes that through the Committee Support System recently invigorated, more staff will receive one-on-one mentoring by APAP staff. However, it may be worth exploring whether the combination of the two will have greater impact than the two approaches taken individually.

Also, the findings suggest that APAP training directly and indirectly contributed to the increase in knowledge about parliament processes amongst staff. 20% (8) of the respondents affirmed that APAP courses contributed to increasing their knowledge while 26% (10) attributed it to learning from fellow workers. Given that 54% (21) reported that they transferred skills to colleagues, APAP may have influenced this figure. Further to that, 13% (5) attributed their increase in knowledge to reading Parliamentary information documents. However, the survey data does not state if the documents referred to by the participants included documents created with APAP assistance, but there is a possibility that some of them may have been produced through APAP assistance.

The request by 14% (5) of the respondents for development or assistance organizations to augment staff salaries may be a reflection of the inadequate financial resources available to the National Assembly. Moreover, 15% (6) of the respondents reported that inadequate remuneration was one of their challenges upon joining Parliament. The inadequate financial resources are indeed an issue that the National Assembly should deal with in so far as it affects staff morale, inadequacy of office space, computers, and chairs among other things. However, even with adequate resources, the National Assembly's staff compensation is determined by the Executive. Therefore the National Assembly may have no power to improve the staff salary levels independent of the Executive.

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[4] The National Assembly Fellowship program is a one year Parliament internship program for University graduates who are afforded an opportunity to work in Parliament while at the same time receiving training on Parliamentary processes through API.

Looking ahead, a reasonable number of respondents (21%-8) foresee a future role of development or assistance organizations such as APAP in enhancing staff skills and assisting with the work of commissions. While not ignoring some of the negative comments from a few (15% (6)) respondents, the envisaged future role of development organizations is probably a reflection of the positive impact of APAP and other organizations assistance in fulfilling the National Assembly staff skills training needs. Therefore, APAP and other organizations should continue with efforts to respond to the future skills needs of staff, which as highlighted above, include computer skills, legislative analysis skills, English skills, report writing skills and legal drafting skills.