

# 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 on 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
    - SPD (1997-2007): \$7,402,395
    - 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.)

Donor	Project(#)	Time	Amount (\$)
USAID, WB, WFD UNDP	4	2010-15	\$28,000,000
USAID, WB, UNDP WBI/CIDA	4	2007-2010	\$7,894,000
USAID, UNDP	4	1997-2007	\$11,532,395



# 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