Framework for Civic Engagement in the Parliamentary Procedure (CEPP) in the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR), FDRE

(Final Report)

Submitted to: House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

by:

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December 2020
Addis Ababa

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List of Acronyms

CEPP	Civic Engagement in the Parliamentary Procedure
CoBE	College of Business and Economics
CSSs	College of Social Sciences
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
HoF	House of Federation
HoPR	House of Peoples' Representatives
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NDI	National Democratic Institute
PADM	Public Administration and Development Management
PSIR	Political Science and International Relations
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

Executive Summary

- This framework/strategy for civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure (CEPP) in the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) has been prepared after a research was conducted by a team of consultants within the framework of a contract agreement between the HoPR of the Ethiopian parliament and Addis Ababa University Business Enterprise (plc).

- The findings and conclusions that came out of the study have been used as a basis for preparing a set of guidelines for an active and vibrant civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure in the House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) of the Ethiopian parliament.

- Civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure (CEPP) is an extremely important concept in building democracy and strengthening of parliament as a genuinely representative institution. It can serve as a potent vehicle for the voices and needs as well as the concerns of the people to be heard and considered in the governance and development realm.

- For quite a long time, there has been a dearth of civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure in Ethiopia because of a long tradition of authoritarian political culture and excessive domination of the political space by the state. Whatever citizen participation and involvement in governance and development has there been, it has always been highly structured and formalistic and not substantive.

- The current state of CEPP in the HoPR of Ethiopia leaves much to be desired, which indicates that the country has a long way to go towards participatory and democratic governance.

- In recent years, there have been some modest attempts by the current Ethiopian parliament to democratize its working practices and enhance its scrutiny over the executive. For example, an assessment has been conducted on parliamentary oversight tools and mechanisms used by the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR). In addition, a draft policy document on national civic engagement policy has been prepared and distributed for comment by relevant stakeholders. However, no concrete steps or tangible outcomes on civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure in the HoPR worthy of mention have been witnessed.

- There are many established tools and mechanisms that parliamentarians can employ to enhance parliamentarians'-constituencies' and citizens' interactions. Some of these include: public petitions, boycotts and demonstrations; citizens' initiatives; local and national referendums; field visits/site investigations; advisory committee; use of digital and social media; public meetings/town hall meetings; touring the constituency; tours of the assembly; surveys/questionnaires; constituency offices; newsletters; collaborating with NGOs; and parliamentary programmes/fellowships for citizens.

- A survey of the experiences and best practices of carefully identified countries has revealed that different countries employ different modalities and approaches to strengthen civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure. It has also been brought out that there are also varied tools and practices that countries use to encourage citizen involvement and participation in parliamentary matters.

- The lessons that we can draw from the comparative survey of other countries is that for the Ethiopian experience is that whatever tools and approaches are selected and used to promote parliamentary democracy and good governance by enhancing citizen/civic engagement, these should be contextualized to fit into the Ethiopian reality or situation in order to serve as potent vehicles to promote public or citizen participation/involvement in politics and development. The tools and approaches that are picked up should be creatively and innovatively used to make a meaningful difference in civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure in this country.

- Based on the perspectives and views of sampled members of the Ethiopian parliament, public engagement in the political landscape in Ethiopia, in spite of the recognition of its utility, remains an on-and-off kind of business in the House of Peoples' Representatives. This can be observed in all the core functions of the parliament and the budget approval process.

- Approving the federal budget for each fiscal year is also within the purview of the HoPR. The rules of procedure and code of conduct of the HoPR state that the budget approval process shall enjoy a period of one full month after reaching the house. This, however, is too short even by African standards where the parliaments of some of our peers in eastern Africa take up to three months before the conclusion of the budgetary process.

- The HoPR undertakes two rounds of engaging the public every business year. As per the rules of procedure and code of conduct, these rounds of engagements are conducted, during the month of February when the parliament adjourns for recess

and the summer recess during which the parliament closes for about a three-months' long vacation. The idea is to bring the local people on board in rectifying malpractices and enabling them to have their voices heard on matters affecting their lives. Despite the novelty of the idea, however, to begin with, the duration of their stay is too short so much so that they cannot afford to meet as many people as they wish.

- This study has brought out the fact that engaging the public in parliamentary activities in Ethiopia, in spite of modest attempts, has largely been unsupported by institutional arrangement, physical and technological infrastructure, trained and skilful human resource and enabling financial outlay.

- The involvement of non-institutional actors[1], including the media, civil society organizations and other non-state actors in the law- and policy-making process by the legislature is cardinal to participatory democracy and responsive governance and development. Considering the views and inputs of the constituencies as represented by these stakeholders can render government policies, laws and development plans responsive to public needs and concerns, and enhance their legitimacy and wide acceptance by the community.

- It was also revealed that there are different mechanisms of public participation were found to have been established for different actors. These mechanisms include organizing public forums and meetings; budget preparation and validation meetings; media usage; and direct participation by contesting elections and holding public offices. These are all indirectly fundamental principles and practices, and of global concern in line with the tenets of modern democracy.

- Respondents from the non-institutional sector contended that the nature and composition of the parliamentary system we had so far in Ethiopian politics was not suitable for the promotion of democracy. As almost all the parliamentarians are often drawn from a single party representing and promoting primarily party interests than public interests, it is hardly possible to argue that the type of the parliament was effective in creating, delivering and exercising functions stipulated in the constitution.

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[1] The phrase 'non-institutional actors' refers to groups or organizations that indirectly try to influence laws, policies and legislation by providing information or through advocacy and lobbying efforts. This is standard and acceptable practice in genuinely democratic systems.

- In focus group discussions, it was pointed out that the media constitute the key means for informing citizens about public affairs, and serves as a key channel of communication between parliament and the public. How well they fulfil these functions is vital for the quality of democratic life of a nation and society. Given the tendency for these functions to become distorted, whether by executive partiality in a government-controlled system, or by powerful economic interests in a commercialized one, parliament has a key democratic role in setting an appropriate legal framework for the media to ensure both their independence and their diversity.

- Even though there are several public and private media in the country, they do not have equal importance to the parliament and the role of the Ethiopian Broadcast Corporation (EBC) as compared to others was found to be magnified in supporting its function. Nonetheless, EBC has not played its role as expected in disseminating reliable legislative information to the general public. The legislature is not communicating well with the voters through the media.

- Print media have also platforms like assigning columns to parliamentarians. However, they are not effective and willing enough to regularly use the provided platforms. Even when they participate, the format and content of the writing was not found to be adequate and attractive to the readers. Hence, they fill up columns by reports rather than preparing articulated professional writings.

- As most respondents claimed, since the 2018- political transition, there have been a lot of changes in the state of democracy and human rights in Ethiopia, which has been reflected in a wider space for independent civil society organizations and opposition political parties. Prior to that, the relationship between civil society and the legislature was a hostile one, particularly in the post-2005 election period.

- Regarding political parties, the political parties consulted also criticized the pre-2018 EPRDF regime for being discriminatory in its party politics. Political parties were selectively invited to attend parliamentary sessions. Simply put, all "opposition" political parties were not equally treated and supported by the regime.

- To nurture a vibrant and active civic engagement by non-institutional actors, such as the media, civil society and opposition political parties, respondents for this study suggested the following steps:

- Reforming the electoral system itself;

- Clear set of criteria should be there to be selected as a potential parliamentarian than picking up individuals from party list;

- Need for attitude Change by politicians towards civil society and opposition political parties in particular, and parliament-non-state actors engagement;

- Narrowing down the gap between rhetoric and practice, i.e. allowing for and creating a democratic environment whereby all parliamentarians freely express their views as stipulated in the constitution and as an essential pillar of parliamentary democracy;

- Parliament-media relations have to be improved:-

- The need by parliament for establishing its own independent media.

1 Introduction

This framework/strategy for civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure (CEPP) in the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) has been prepared within the framework of a contract agreement between the HoPR of the Ethiopian parliament and Addis Ababa University Business Enterprise (plc). It was conducted by a team of highly experienced academic and research staff, viz. Dr. Berhanu Temesgen and Dr. Meheret Ayenew, Department of Public Administration and Development Management (PADM), College of Business and Economics (CoBE), and Dr. Fekade Terefe and Dr. Demeke Achiso, Department of Political Science and International Relations (PSIR), College of Social Sciences (CSSs), respectively. The consultancy team prepared this framework in accordance with the Terms of Reference (ToR) provided by the HoPR secretariat.

This CEPP framework report in the main contains a general literature review, tools and approaches to CEPP and political participation, comparative experiences and best practices from carefully identified countries, an overview of the state of CEPP in the Ethiopian parliament from embodying the views and perspectives of carefully selected members of the Ethiopian parliament and non-institutional stakeholders. The findings and conclusions have been used as a basis for preparing a set of guidelines for active and vibrant civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure in the House of Peoples' Representatives.

The House of Peoples Representatives forms the lower house of the federal parliament assuming the highest political authority in the country. Since its establishment following the adoption of the federal constitution, the House has been undertaking enormous functions in law making, oversight and representation. The undertaking of these important functions of the House vested in it by the constitution need, however, to be supported by established procedures and frameworks. Though the House has had such operating procedures, the need for having such documents in a reinvigorated fashion has become essential in light of the House's desire to avail its self as the best representative platform, the rising demands of the people to get involved in the undertaking of parliamentary functions particularly in light of the ongoing political reform which requires, among other

things, sustained engagement of stakeholders to make sure that diversity opinions and interests are adequately represented.

To respond to these developments, the House of Peoples Representatives ahs initiated the conduct of a research on parliamentary civic engagement the purpose of which is to develop a guiding framework. A team of researchers has been formed for this purpose. The team is responsible for revisiting the existing procedures and identifying shortcomings, garnering data from pertinent bodies and resource persons and consulting the experience of other countries with a view to developing a guiding framework that enables the House to solidify its best practices so far and enhance the engagement of the public in its functions.

2   Background

Civic engagement is a broad term and an important political practice given different shades of definitions by many academics, researchers and practitioners in parliamentary democracy and representative governance (Vowles, 2004; Adler and Goggin, 2005; Putnam 1993; Berger, 2009). At the outset, it needs to be reiterated that civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure (CEPP) is an extremely important concept in building democracy and strengthening of parliament as a genuinely representative institution. It can serve as a potent vehicle for the voices and needs as well as the concerns of the people to be heard and considered in the governance and development realm. Fundamental to any consideration of civic engagement in law and policymaking is the recognition that the citizens in a democracy have both rights and duties, and that democratic governance provides opportunities for citizens to participate actively in shaping their world (Research Paper no. 1 2011–12, Brenton Holmes, Politics and Public Administration Section, 22 July 2011).

As was alluded to earlier, civic engagement or participation in the decision- and law-making processes thus means a possibility for all non-state actors, including the citizens, CSOs and other interested parties to influence the development of policies and laws which affect them (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 2010). It also

means that citizens are recognized as full-fledged participants in the law and policy formulation process, and that their input is given substantial weight toward policy outcomes (Turnbull and Aucoin, 2006). This subsumes the sovereignty of the citizenry, which, needless to say, is possible in a representative democracy in which electors or citizens choose representatives who then rule on behalf of, or instead of, the voters.

For the purpose of this assignment, the term 'civic engagement' can be broadly interpreted as representing actions freely undertaken by citizens on an individual or collective/organized basis to identify and address matters of public concern (UN, 2007). These actions can take many forms – directly addressing an issue, working with others in a community to solve problems, or interacting with the institutions of representative democracy. Accountability and voice mechanisms that foster sustained civic engagement in national policy and budget dialogues are critical to the success of national development and poverty reduction strategies. Participatory governance through civic engagement today focuses on creating inclusive and responsive democratic institutions and increasing opportunities for citizens' voices in governments'-cum-parliaments' decision- and law-making processes.

From a different perspective, civic engagement can be meaningful when taken within the context of relations between government and citizens, and public participation in the policy/law making process with parliament serving as a democratic institution representing society. This in turn underlies the fact that democracy rests on the consent of citizens. In order to assure this consent, representative democracy bases itself on a set of traditional formal rules and principles – such as on elections and accompanying campaigns. Representative democracy is also based on on-going interactions among government and citizens in between elections, and a consideration of core importance in this principle is civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure.

More specifically, civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure can be defined as a phenomenon inherently explained by the theory and practice of participatory and deliberative democracy (Michels and De Graaf, 2010; Michels, 2011; Hartay, 2011); and (Graham Smith, 2011). Simply put, it is the practice of involving broad sections of society

or members of the public or what can be considered as non-state actors, a broad term that constitutes all actors outside of the state, including civil society organizations of different types; organized associations, such as labour unions, professional associations, business groups; the market, the media, academia, individual citizens, etc. in the agenda setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations/institutions, typically parliaments, responsible for law and policy development (Rowe and Frewer, 2005).

In sum, this task of designing a civic engagement mechanism for parliamentary engagement for the Ethiopian HoPR is guided by the fact that parliament is a potent symbol of the sovereignty of the people, which holds that it has absolute authority, and is supreme over all other governance institutions (Dawn, 2013). Historically as well as in the contemporary world, no institution can be more important than parliaments in the democratic transformation of a nation. Obviously, Ethiopia cannot be an exception in this regard. One of the best lessons that can be drawn from the world's longest and strongest democracies, including the UK and the USA, is that democracy and human freedom are inconceivable without strong representative institutions that serve as checks on absolute power and safeguard the rights and freedoms of the population who elected them.

The history of parliament in Ethiopia, in a modern sense, goes back to the early 1930s. It was formed following the adoption of the first written constitution of the country which was promulgated in 1931. Though a bi-cameral parliament was established along the British model with the senate and chamber of deputies, much of its powers remained to be that of advisory. Further, in its development, the revised constitution of 1955 also provided for the constitution of a bi-cameral parliament whose mandate was limited in practice despite the constitutional promises for defining and distributing duties and powers among the major branches of the government.

It was against this backdrop that the 1974 revolution came about and ushered in a new era where the constitution and the parliament of the old order were suspended and subsequently the country was ruled for the next thirteen years only by a series of decrees. In 1987 the *Derg* came up with a new constitution which, among other things, effected the establishment of a unicameral parliament called the national *Shengo.* It was however

short-lived. With the coming to power of the EPRDF, the Shengo was disbanded and a transitional Council of Representatives was established with 87 members mainly drawn from political parties which took part in the July 1991 conference.

Following the end of the transition period and the adoption of the federal constitution in 1995, the country became officially a federal democratic republic. The new constitution provided for the establishment of a bi-cameral parliament, an executive to be led by the council of ministers presided over by the prime minister and the judiciary as independent organ of government. The House of Peoples' Representatives, the lower chamber of parliament in which is vested the highest authority by the constitution having legislative authority and oversight functions, is made up of not more than 550 members of which 20 seats are reserved for minority groups. Members of this house are popularly elected for a five-year term from electoral districts on the basis of plurality of votes cast. The House of Peoples Representatives maintains the highest political authority as per the provision of the federal constitution. In light of this, it has the power to make laws on matters falling within the jurisdiction of the federal government, exercise oversight over the executive and undertake representative functions.

This study has, therefore, an overall objective of developing a guiding framework for parliamentary civic engagement which enables the FDRE House of Peoples Representatives to undertake streamlined and sustained engagement of stakeholders in view of discharging the responsibilities vested in it by the constitution, the will of the people and the conscience of its members.

3   Methodology and Approach

In light of the foregoing, the House of Peoples Representatives commissioned a study with a view to developing strategies of public engagement which eventually will help enhance citizens' participation in the undertaking of the core parliamentary functions. The empirical section of the report, therefore, forms a part of this study focusing on perspectives from within and outside the HoPR. This is to mean that in the report, perspectives within is informed by data from relevant offices and personalities of the

House of Peoples Representatives as well as from the Amhara, Oromia and Southern Ethiopia regional councils. Empirical data was gathered through pre-approved in-depth interview guidelines. However, the mode of administering the interviews varied because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which posed a serious difficulty on mobility of the research team. Under the circumstances, data was generated through face-to-face interviews, phone interview and by way of eliciting written responses from respondents mainly from the regional councils.

Accordingly, data generated through interviews with six key informants and nine written responses from the HoPR as well as the regional Councils of Amhara, Oromia and Southern Ethiopia regional states are analysed in a manner that helps to respond to the objectives of this research. Considering the views and inputs of the constituencies as represented by these stakeholders can render government policies, laws and development plans responsive to public needs and concerns, and enhance their legitimacy and wide acceptance by the community.

The involvement of other actors constitutes views from outside. In this regard, the media, civil society organizations and other non-state actors in the law- and policy-making process by the legislature is cardinal to participatory democracy and responsive governance and development. It is within this broader perspective that this assignment on civic engagement in the Ethiopian parliamentary procedure set out to examine the views and perspectives of these selected stakeholders in the country's path along the road to democratic governance and sustainable development.

Accordingly, using face-to-face and telephone interviews, the views and perspectives of representatives from the Ethiopian Broadcast Corporation (EBC) and Fana Television (broad cast media); the daily *Addis Zemen (*Amharic*)*, *Beresa* (Oromifa) and the *Ethiopian Herald* (English) newspapers (all government print media) were sources of primary information, representing the role of media. From among civil society organizations, the Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (CCRDA), which is an umbrella organization of more than 330 civil society organizations, the Ethiopian Women

Lawyers Association (EWLA) and the Ethiopian Association of Persons with Disabilities (EAPD) were sampled for data collection.

Unfortunately, however, data were generated only from the CCRDA. Despite our repeated efforts to reach out and arrange telephone or face-to-face in-depth interviews, it was regrettable that the other two remaining civil society organizations, viz. EWLA and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) and Ethiopian Association of Persons with Disabilities (EAPD) failed to provide required information. Political parties that were sampled for data collection include The Ethiopian Prosperity Party (EPP), *Medrek* (officially the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity (Forum), *Aben* (Amhara National Party) and *Ezema* (Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice) were included in our samples following a purposive sampling technique of selection. All of them heartily participated and gave us adequate time and explanation to our interview guide questions. As per our promise to our respondents to keep their institutions and personal names confidential and the ethical standards we strictly follow in this assignment, we will not be citing any institution or any individual by name in the analysis section.

The analysis section is organized based on thematic issue areas as identified in the in-depth interview guide questions. Accordingly, thematic issue areas provided a framework for organizing the data and subsequently for the interpretation and analysis of the research report

4   The Framework and Tools of Parliament-Public Engagement

4.1   Framework of Analysis and Guidelines of the Study

As in any other representative institution, the underpinnings for the preparation of HoPR's civic engagement mechanism/procedure in parliamentary matters will be the 3 core functions of the Ethiopian parliament: law/policy making; exercising oversight over the executive; and parliamentarians' interactions with the electorate involving different stakeholders (non-state actors) in the society. The effective fulfilment of these functions will enhance a democratic, participatory and representative governance and development

process. In addition, and, equally important, HoPR's role as the representative of the people will be further bolstered through effective civic engagement in parliamentary affairs by a wide cross-section of the electorate constituency. Simply put, the fact that the constant engagement of parliamentarians with the electorate involving many different stakeholders is the cornerstone for the institutionalization of a participatory and responsive law/policy making process to the needs and concerns of the society. In addition, this will further enhance accountability, transparency and trust in government by the electorate.

The preceding core principles of democratic governance and development will guide this study on civic engagement in the Ethiopia's parliamentary mechanism as depicted in the following diagrammatic framework.

Figure 1: Study/Design framework for Civic Engagement of the Parliamentary Procedures of the HoPR
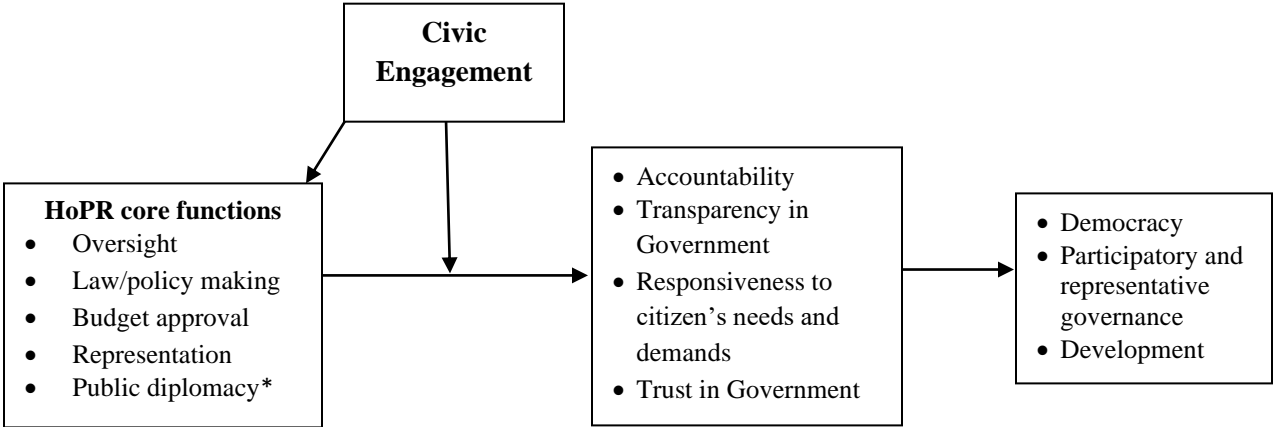
* The issue of Public Diplomacy, as important as it is, has been covered by a separate study.

4.2 Tools for Parliamentary Outreach and Citizen/Civic Engagement with Parliament

There are many established tools and mechanisms that parliamentarians can employ to enhance parliamentarians'-constituencies' and citizens' interactions. Some of these are presented below:

4.2.1 Public Hearings - invitation-only hearings; open public hearings; legislative hearings; and oversight public hearings

Public hearings are information gathering mechanisms that can be used by parliamentary committees as tools for analysing and designing policies and laws as well as for oversight and scrutiny purposes. Public hearings are most commonly held to review drafts and proposed laws.

Public hearings enable parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, invited experts, interested bodies and the public to review, scrutinise and investigate a range of issues connected to good governance. They help parliamentarians to determine the measures that are needed to improve a piece of legislation or the functioning of government. Public hearings can also inform

parliamentarians and parliaments about the level of public support for a particular law and allow citizens to play a part in the development of public policy. International good practices indicate that laws and policies supported by such procedures enjoy greater credibility.

A public hearing may be tabled as an agenda item at a regular or special committee meeting, or it may represent the sole purpose of a special meeting or series of meetings during which no other matter is addressed.

Public Hearing Formats: Some of these are briefly discussed as follows: -

A. **Invitation-only hearings**: This is an alternative used by a parliamentary committee to receive testimony or evidence from either invited experts who are called to provide information on the issue under consideration or from ministry or cabinet officials who appear to explain and defend agency activities and record. Simply put, the committee receives testimony only from those persons who are specially invited.

B. **Open Public Hearings:** In these, committees do not restrict the receipt of evidence to invited experts. Instead, interested parties and citizens are allowed to address the committee members without personal invitation. In a few parliamentary and legislative bodies, any interested citizen is allowed to address the committee, while in others, testimony is limited to representatives and spokespersons of groups and organizations that have a special interest and concern in the subject matter of the hearing.

There are several types of public hearings, which are listed below:

B.1. Legislative hearings: Parliamentary committees conduct legislative public hearings on issues and problems related to particular draft laws or to determine the necessity of a new law. Parliamentary committees sometimes hold such hearings to help initiate additional activities for the committee or parliament. More often, the purpose of a legislative hearing is to devise or amend draft legislation in a manner that takes advantage of the available expertise and reflects public interest.

Hearings often take the form of a forum at which facts and opinions on an act are presented by witnesses for consideration by the committee. The witnesses may be drawn from all walks of life and may include MPs, government officials, representatives of interest groups, NGOs and citizens who have an opinion to voice or have been (or would be) affected by the legislation in question. It is a good practice to hear people who have different views on a legislative action, including 1) those in favour of the bill, 2) those against, and 3) generally interested groups who can improve the contents of the legislation.

The common goal of all participants in legislative hearings should be to determine how best the matter under consideration can be legislated by an act of parliament.

B.2. Oversight public hearings – also known as supervisory hearings – examine the work of government, namely government implementation of promulgated laws, and the performance of government officials in executing legislative mandates and projects. Parliamentarians examine the extent to which the government's implementation of the law follows the letter and spirit of the legislation on which it is based and, more broadly, whether public interests are being served. They may also examine draft legislation and proposed acts of parliament. These hearings can also be fruitful when legislative houses are reviewing budgets.

Oversight hearings are used to promote effective and efficient governance. In the United States, for instance, it is common for congressional committees to conduct this type of public hearing when they are authorising funding for government programs, considering the passage of new programs or establishing government agencies.

B.3. Investigative public hearings are similar to legislative and oversight hearings, but they focus on the investigation of particular activities or issues. Investigative hearings take place when there is an indication, evidence or public concern that an offence has been committed by a public official or government department or when a private or public company has acted inappropriately in dealing with government bodies or officials. It is also possible that parliaments can establish special committees that are tasked with investigating a particular issue or series of events. In countries with democratic traditions, parliamentary working bodies may conduct such investigations as part of their regular activities.

B.4. Hearings outside of parliament: most public hearings are held in parliament, but a parliamentary committee or special committee may decide that there is a need for a public hearing to be held elsewhere. A public hearing brings parliament closer to

the people. Through hearings outside of parliament, committees may hear testimony from witnesses who are unable or unwilling to come to the seat of government to testify. Such hearings also bring the attention of the public to the matter being discussed, especially if the hearing is held in a relevant location, such as a hospital or school. By conducting a public hearing outside of parliament, the hearing may discuss a problem or issue with the people most directly affected by it.

4.2.2 Public petitions, boycotts and demonstrations

Public petitions are a tool used by citizens to provide input on public policy. Citizens may submit petitions to bring issues of public importance to the attention of the parliament or use them to make a formal request to the parliament to address a grievance. Petitions may also be used by citizens as a means of contributing public opinions and ideas regarding matters on the parliamentary agenda. Sometimes they are used to ask the parliament or a house to take a specific action. Petitions can be presented directly by citizens, or else citizens can ask a parliamentarian to present a petition on his or her behalf. Petitions serve as checks on the implementation of legislation and help measure the responsiveness of government institutions to citizen's concerns and can thereby be used by parliamentarians to strengthen public policy.

A boycott is the act of abstaining from buying, selling or otherwise dealing with a person or organisation. Usually, the goal of the boycott is to force the target of the boycott to change their behaviour, for example, a business practice deemed immoral or unfair. Economic sanctions are exercised by a state or several states on another state in order to influence the actions taken by means of economic penalties.

Constitutions of many countries guarantee everyone the right to arrange meetings and demonstrations without a permit, as well as the right to participate in them. These are stipulated in assembly acts that guarantee the exercise of the freedom of assembly, as provided in the constitutions, as well as to lay down the necessary regulatory provisions on the arrangement of public meetings and public events.

4.2.3   Citizens' initiatives

In direct democracy, citizen and local resident initiatives offer a channel for civic engagement. This involves the right of citizens entitled to vote to bring an initiative before the parliament as part of the legislative process. The initiative may include a bill or an initiative to commence legislative drafting. It may also concern an amendment to or the repeal of an act. If the initiative is formulated as a bill or law, it must incorporate the statute text. Also, the initiative must be limited to one matter and it must always be supported relevant grounds. Citizens' initiatives **are** very popular forms of civic engagement in the European Union, and have their own rules of procedure and mechanisms of administering them.

4.2.4   Local and national referendums

Referendums represent citizens' initiatives to give people the right to be involved in the decisions on local or national matters.   They are often guaranteed as rights in the constitution. Generally, referendums must contain provisions on the time of the referendum and on the choices to be presented to the voters. In addition, referendums can be either local, regional or national, and the final verdict is usually endorsed by the federal or central parliament. In some countries, referendums are consultative, i.e. kinds of public opinion surveys on what people want the government want to do about a particular issue.

4.2.5   Field visits/site investigations

A parliamentary field visit represents a useful tool to complement the functions at the disposal of a parliamentarian or a parliamentary committee. The visit is used to bring attention to an issue, gather information, review the situation on the ground, gather evidence, and possibly expose corruption or ineffective policy. If parliamentarians are to have an impact on policies and projects, it is essential that they enjoy the opportunity to make political assessments and check results on the ground. Monitoring, evaluating and reporting is crucial to parliamentary oversight of the implementation of legislation. Field visits involving an entire committee can take place to assist the committee's deliberations.

Individual committee members are also free to make any visits that they deem necessary for their personal information gathering.

4.2.6 Advisory Committee

If parliamentarians are interested in acquiring specialised or expert information from a specific constituency, they may consider forming an advisory committee. An advisory committee in many countries comprises a cross section of people who are interested in a particular subject or collection of subjects and are assigned specific tasks, such as preparing recommendations, conducting research, speaking with constituents or organising events. These advisory committees can be linked to individual parliamentarians, governing parties, oppositions, specific issue-based groups or standing committees.

If a parliamentarian would like to improve the quality of a piece of legislation that is up for debate either in the assembly or a committee on which the parliamentarian is sitting, the parliamentarian can first assemble an advisory committee of local merchants, lawyers, as well as interested NGOs and citizens. The advisory committee might then dedicate itself to reviewing the piece of legislation, writing letters, lobbying local and regional politicians for assistance, preparing reports that document the unique qualities of statistics, vocal support and professional input. By getting involved in the legislation, the advisory committee will also become invested in its success, and the individuals that form the committee might later be enlisted as useful allies in other key political projects in the constituency, including re-election campaigns.

4.2.7 Use of Digital and Social Media

With the movement toward a more technologically advanced world with a range of communications platforms, parliamentarians must examine the various possibilities of exploiting these new forms of communications to better engage with their constituents.

The prevalent use of social media creates an opportunity for parliamentarians, civil society and advocacy groups to connect with citizens, lead conversations on issues of interest and drive civic discussions. Social networking forums such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, make it possible to extend conversations virtually and reach large numbers of individuals. Messaging applications, such as Viber, WhatsApp and Skype, also provide

parliamentarians with the opportunity to communicate en masse with a wide range of constituents regarding their work in the assemblies or within their constituencies. Many of these communication tools also provide features that can be used to conduct online polling**.**

To combat citizen disengagement from politics and a growing feeling of alienation, digital and social media offers a means of re-connecting constituents and parliamentarians, thereby strengthening a sense of public responsiveness and accountability. These tools can help bridge gaps that emerge when parliamentarians prove unable to physically visit their constituencies (for example, during parliamentary sessions). Parliamentarians can develop **feedback mechanisms** to enable constituents to respond to or talk to political elites. Surveys or questionnaires seeking opinions from constituents can also be conducted using social media platforms. In invitation-only hearings, a committee receives testimony or evidence from either invited experts who are called to provide information on the issue under consideration or from ministry or cabinet officials who appear to explain and defend agency activities and record.

With the help of social media, citizens now have greater access to advocate parliamentarians regarding personal issues or ideological stances about which they feel strongly. Parliamentarians and political parties can also use citizens who are active on social media in order to better ascertain areas of public concern and to link up with like-minded groups on specific issues, such as human rights.

Parliamentary houses (such as assemblies or senates) can also use digital and social media to inform citizens about their activities.

4.2.8　8 Public meetings/town hall meetings

Public or Town Hall meetings represent an important means of developing and maintaining a local identity in the constituency and disseminating messages to constituents. Bringing a diverse audience together has its challenges. On the positive side, a public meeting affords parliamentarians the occasion to speak with a very large group of citizens all at once. This provides him or her with an opportunity to directly gain a sense

of the community's attitudes, problems and values. On the other hand, representatives will have to respond to challenging questions and can be bombarded with the type of requests that may prove impossible to accomplish as a public representative. Figure 1 below depicts one framework for conducting public hearings.

Figure 2: ISSUE FOCUS OR GENERAL TOPIC at a Public Hearing –Framework

ADVERTISING
THE MEETING

HOW MANY
AND WHERE?

QUESTION and
ANSWER TIME

PUBLIC
MEETINGS/
TOWN HALL
MEETINGS

MOBILISING
LOCAL SUPPORT

OPENING
PRESENTATION

**THE MEETING
AND THE
MODERATOR**

**LOGISTICAL
RESPONSIBILITIES**
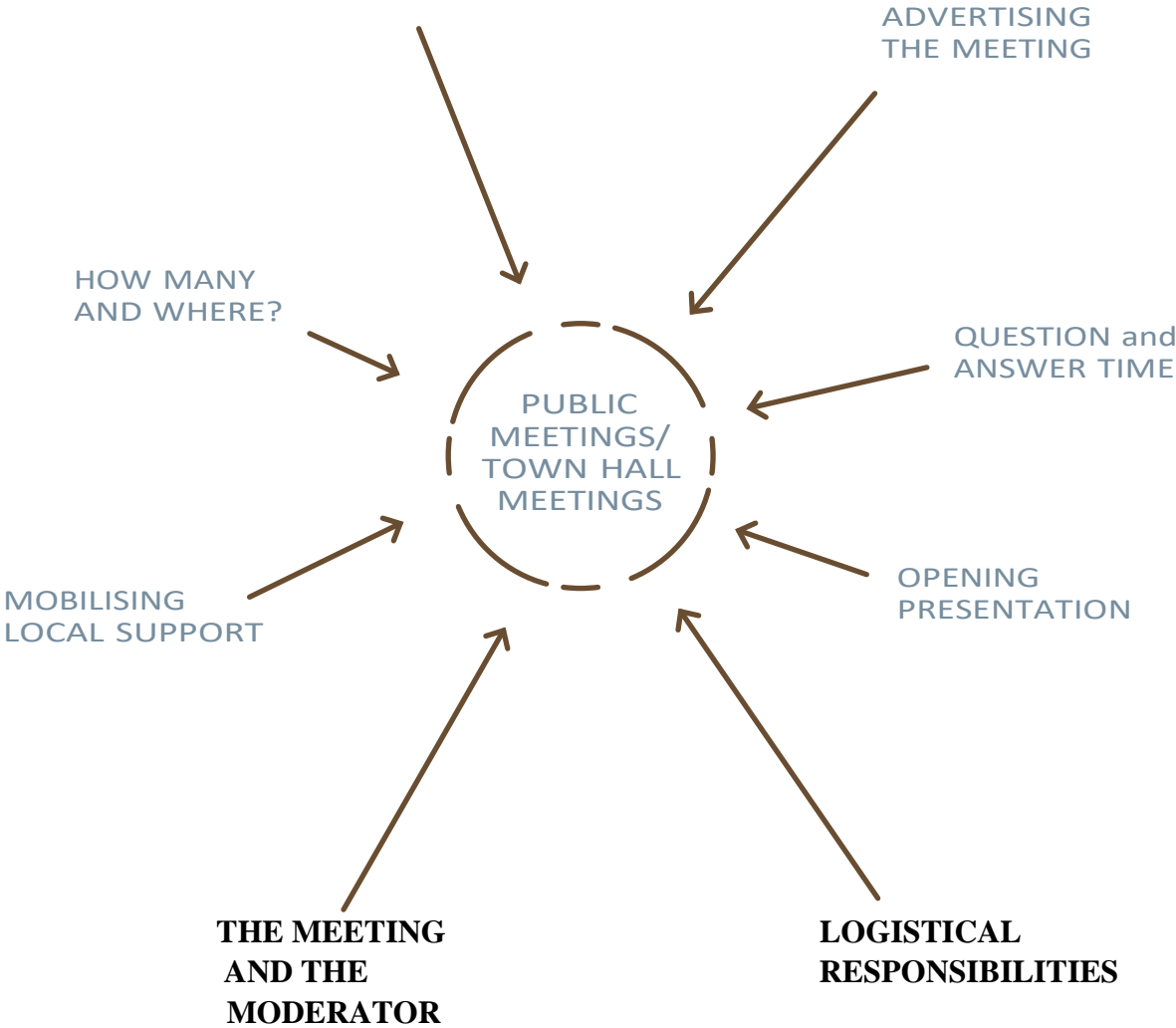
When structuring a public or town hall meeting, event planning becomes critical, and there are numerous ways to address this issue. Some parliamentarians regularly travel to their constituencies during the legislative recess; others hold weekly meetings at select locations. When planning any meeting schedule, here are some basic factors to consider:

Town hall meetings can involve either general or specific discussion, which will attract fewer people, but potentially draw a more engaged audience. In smaller towns and rural villages, an open forum may be more suitable if the parliamentarian rarely visits the area or if it is the type of community that is unaccustomed to receiving politicians. Whether town hall meetings focus on specific or general discussion, the following essential steps must be taken to make them more effective:

4.2.8.1 Advertise the meeting: Parliamentarians should advertise the time and place of the meeting well in advance of arrival. If it is feasible, staff or local volunteers should begin hanging posters in public spaces, on billboards, or place small advertisements in local newspapers approximately eight to 10 days before the event. Another possibility is to go door-to-door with flyers or have loudhailers drive around the area announcing the upcoming meeting. Social media can also be used to spread the word. For example, a parliamentarian can also publish the schedule of their visits through his or her website or social media accounts, such as Twitter and Facebook.

4.2.8.2 Mobilize local support: Organising meetings and event planning can be very time consuming. Help can be enlisted to assist with the task. Party members, NGOs, and interested local constituents or supporters can usually bring citizens together with their representatives in a more organised and coherent manner than someone trying to organise a meeting over a series of long-distance phone calls. This approach also offers a better idea of the type of people who might attend based on the affiliations of the local organiser.

If the parliamentarian is visiting a group or community that potentially disagrees strongly with his or her point of view, the parliamentarian should take measures to get to know the audience. Staff or local volunteers should acquire as much information as possible about the group. If this is a new place for the parliamentarian, research should be conducted by telephoning select officials from the parliamentarian's party or local media in order to get a better understanding of the political scene.

4.2.8.3. A moderator should facilitate the meeting: A successful public meeting requires a moving and focused discussion facilitated by both the parliamentarian and a **moderator.** Choosing the right moderator to guide the discussion is critically important to any visit. The moderator can be a local ally, a media figure, the leader of a local advocacy group or even a staff member. The moderator should introduce the topic of discussion, announce the rules for any questions and answers, and state what time the meeting is scheduled to end.

4.2.8.4 The need for opening presentation: When giving an opening statement, the parliamentarian should briefly address the topic of the meeting. Of course, the type of audience present is the key to the style of presentation. A parliamentarian would not be well served if he or she give remarks addressing a lawyer's association in the same manner as to a group of elderly pensioners. The parliamentarian should be prepared to discuss issues and not simply recycle old campaign rhetoric. A parliamentarian will be more appreciated as a speaker if he or she is prepared to discuss the audience's concerns and speak in a style that the audience can relate to and understand.

4.2.8.5 Need for question and answer time: Whether the visit is part of a tour across a district or a single issue stop, a public meeting should be considered a form of dialogue with constituents. Sharing information about important issues and the parliamentarian's activities can be useful, but a public meeting is not a debate and is not the appropriate place to lecture or teach an audience. Parliamentarians should try and be good listeners, seeking to understand before being understood.

4.2.9 Touring the Constituency

It is useful for parliamentarians to organise trips throughout key regions of their constituency and hold several different meetings in a short period of time. When planning these tours, parliamentarians should meet with a wide spectrum of interest groups and publicise the tour schedule through the local media or social media, if useful. The parliamentarian should also consider asking local party officials or a local NGO to organise the tour. This is particularly helpful when there is an NGO working on the specific issue or the specific geographical area within the constituency. This helps with the

basic organisation and logistics but, more importantly, local officials and NGOs have a much better sense of the kinds of issues that voters care about and popular attitudes towards a given party or ideology.

During their time in the constituency, parliamentarians may also want to set up meetings with constituents at specific locations (also referred to as "clinics" or "surgeries" in some countries). The parliamentarian should advertise the location, date and time as well as choose locations where people are used to congregating, such as cafes, restaurants or public squares. Several of these meetings can be scheduled throughout the day. In the absence of a district office, setting up clinics on a regular basis can help convey a parliamentarian's long-term commitment to constituents. If these clinics are to be held on a regular basis, parliamentarians should consider using a friend's or a party official's home to save money.

4.2.10 Tours of the Assembly

In a democratic society, parliamentarians should encourage activities that strengthen the notion that parliaments serve the people. Popular in many parts of the world, tours of the parliament and government offices help people to better engage in the political process. Allowing constituents to see the offices of the parliament meet staff, observer proceedings of the parliament or committees and ask questions, gives a human face to the parliament. Many constituents will remember their visits to a parliament for years to come, and this familiarity often brings with it the added bonus of loyalty to the individual parliamentarian, if not the party, who sponsored the trip.

Tours of the legislative houses are also a good way of imparting civic and political education. Many democracies encourage tours for students from schools, colleges and universities. Through these visits, students can learn not only how parliaments function but also the importance of why parliaments are necessary a democratic society.

4.2.11 Surveys/Questionnaires

Public opinion surveys offer parliamentarians and political parties' valuable information about a constituency's needs, priorities, and the perceptions of its citizens.

Parliamentarians are the representatives of the people in their constituency and it is therefore crucial for these representatives to know what their constituents think and what their concerns are.

Matters that parliamentarians and their parties consider a pressing issue might not be as high a priority or a concern of actual constituents. Surveys/questionnaires can reduce this disparity. Equally important, a benefit of public opinion research is that it lets citizens know that their opinions matter and that they have a stake in the parliamentary process. Public opinion surveys can either be quantitative or qualitative. A short description of the two is presented as follows:

4.2.11.1. Quantitative surveys: this involves interviewing a larger number of individuals using a set questionnaire. The individuals interviewed answer 'yes or no' to the questions or choose from a list of responses. By compiling the answers collected from these questionnaires, one can ascertain how a given percentage of constituents feels about the issue. The advantage of a quantitative survey is that it can be easy to design. The disadvantage, however, is that providing statistically valid (accurate) results requires interviewing a large number of people, and those people must be chosen randomly. This can be expensive and time consuming**.**

4.2.11.2. Qualitative surveys: Qualitative research includes less structured survey methods, such as free-form interviews or focus group discussions. The questions asked are usually open-ended and the person being interviewed generally answers in his or her own words. Formal qualitative research can be more complex to design, and does not provide easy numerical results, but it does allow for a more in-depth examination of people's opinions. It essentially asks why people feel the way they do about an issue. Informal qualitative research can be conducted on an ongoing basis, simply by talking to constituents and meeting with groups of people to discuss important issues.

Focus groups: Representing a relatively common form of qualitative research, focus groups involve assembling a small group of individuals (usually no more than 10) from the target demographic group. Each individual should be chosen

through random selection. The group is then asked questions from a discussion guide of questions relating to a given topic. Detailed notes are taken, and once several discussions have taken place, the parliamentarian and his or her staff can review the results and draw some conclusions about how constituents feel about the issues in question.

4.2.12 Constituency offices

In many countries, parliamentarians conduct constituent relations without the use of formal offices or other sites designed to facilitate interaction between parliamentarians and constituents. In these countries, meetings that take place between parliamentarians and citizens occur in homes, offices, restaurants, cafes or other locations.

In some countries, the parties or state give parliamentarians budgets to set up constituency offices to ensure that they remain closer to their constituents. Such offices have a separate staff from those in the parliament and often separate financial resources to purchase equipment and pay for staff and outreach activities. Funds are often allocated by the parliament for constituent relations activities and provided to each individual parliamentarian or to each party (which has representation in the parliament), who then determines how best to spend the money.

Well-run offices can increase a parliamentarian's visibility in his or her constituency and convey a sense of permanence about a parliamentarian's participation in a community. They can help to make constituent outreach activities more efficient by providing a consistent place to conduct meetings with constituents and a centralised location for dealing with casework or individual requests for help from citizens. Most of the techniques listed below and materials can be readily adapted to suit the needs of any parliamentarian, whether or not he or she benefits from an office.

4.2.13 Newsletters

Newsletters from an elected representative or parliament are a great way to communicate directly with constituents, disseminate a message, and reinforce the projects and priorities the parliamentarian has for his or her constituency. A newsletter neither has to be expensive, nor does it require specific expertise to produce – but it should look professional. Where computers are readily available, most standard word processing programs can be used. It is much better to produce a simple publication once a year than to publish a report indicating no activity**.**

A newsletter should describe the parliamentarian's, party's or assembly's activities and promote issues about which they care. It is also a forum to present views and opinions that have been expressed by constituents. To make the newsletter informative, a parliamentarian should think about what he or she has been doing in the assembly or parliament, around the country, in the constituency, and conversations he or she has had with constituents. A good newsletter can demonstrate to constituents that a parliamentarian is accessible and responsive, and can help to heighten the parliamentarian's profile in the community.

Generally, there are two types of newsletters: -

4.2.13.1. Targeted newsletters: These are a valuable way to save money and resources while getting specific messages across to key constituents. A short brochure updating the business community on efforts to improve industrial infrastructure, or a newsletter to a neighbourhood beset by utility problems is a way of demonstrating commitment to the constituency. Targeted newsletters should include quotes or pictures of individuals within the community who support the project or have been instrumental in advocating for the work that the parliamentarian is trying to accomplish.

4.2.13.2 Joint newsletters: If costs are a problem and the issue is broad enough, joint newsletters with the local party branch or local elected officials should not be ruled out. If several members of a party are working on a similar project (i.e. bringing job growth to the region or conducting a major opinion poll of the constituency), a joint newsletter can help promote these activities. The ruling party or opposition

could also issue a party newsletter to share the collective performance of their party.

4.2.13.3 Office handouts: A brief handout or brochure can help convey a positive first impression of the parliamentarian. These are generally brochures or leaflets allowing parliamentarians the opportunity to introduce themselves, their activities, and explain what an elected representative does. A good office handout does not necessarily need to be an expensive one. Whether creating a simple one-page flier or a detailed glossy publication, there are certain elements that can help create the right document for any office.

A good handout should contain some of the following elements: -

- A basic biography and/or introductory statement about the parliamentarian;
- Essential contact information;
- Pictures of the parliamentarian;
- A brief statement thanking voters for their trust and affording the parliamentarian the privilege of representing the constituency. The office handout is also the place to tell constituents what motivates the representative to want to serve. Tell them why public service was appealing, what issues are crucial to his or her legislative agenda, and what has been done to help constituents and the constituency more generally.

4.2.14 Collaborating with NGOs

Parliamentarians can also work with local and international NGOs and charitable organisations to encourage them to undertake development projects in the constituency. Parliamentarians should find out what NGOs are active in the constituency and meet with their representatives. Often NGOs are a good resource for research that can help parliamentarians in all of their functions: legislation, oversight and representation. Some NGOs many also be able to provide support in drafting bills where parliamentarians lack the resources to do so. Constituting citizen bodies, NGOs are also a great way to keep in contact with a wide spectrum of the society.

4.2.15 Parliamentary programs/fellowships for citizens

Many parliaments host fellowship programmes for students and young professionals in the fields of political science, law, international relations and other related areas. The programmes are often designed to equip fellows with practical skills in parliamentary work and increase their capacity for research. Fellows get the opportunity to work directly with parliamentarians and secretarial staff.

A good example of this kind of parliamentary tool to enhance public participation is the outreach and visits program of the British Parliament, which are organized across the country for a variety of audiences. For example, in 2016, just over 46,000 people attended these events. These included workshops explaining the role of Parliament as well as more specific seminars, for example on how to submit evidence to a select committee. In addition, almost 3,000 school groups from across the UK visited Parliament in 2016/17 and about 550 students studied the Parliamentary Studies module offered jointly with 20 universities. In 2015/16, about 211,000 people visited Parliament through their MP or a peer, or to watch proceedings in the House of Commons; a further 223,000 paid to do a tour of the building (Uberoi, Elsie, Public engagement in the UK Parliament: overview and statistics, House of Commons Library, November, 2017).

Such initiatives are beneficial for strengthening civic education and also useful for cultivating human capital for future parliamentary roles and work. These programmes may be initiated in collaboration with relevant civil society organisations, research and academic institutions and thinktanks.

5 Survey of Selected Country Experiences and Best Practices

5.1 Parliamentary Public Engagement in Canada: Lessons and Best practices from A Bi-Lingual Federal Democratic Country

In Canada, freedom of association, free speech and the right to participate in the political process are guaranteed by law. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* explicitly recognizes four fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association. Furthermore, under section 3 of the *Charter*, "every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein." To what extent do Canadians make use of and take advantage of those freedoms, either by participating in some kind of group, by voting in elections or by expressing their views on various political issues?

In Canada, people become members of and participate in groups or organizations for different reasons: to cultivate new relationships, to make themselves useful or contribute to social progress, or to participate in a sport or an artistic activity. Sometimes, as in the case of unions, people can become members of a group without necessarily taking any steps to do so. Regardless of the reason, civic engagement is perceived as positive, both for participants and for the community (Curtis, Baer and Grabb 2001; Claibourn and Martin 2007).

In one research carried out in the country, the following observations were noted regarding civic engagement and public participation in Canada:

- In 2013, nearly two in three Canadians were members or participants in a group, organization or association (65%). This proportion was the same as that recorded in 2008, but was slightly higher than in 2003 (61%).
- From 2003 to 2013, the increase in the rate of participation in groups was twice as high for women (up 6 percentage points) as for men (an increase of 3% percentage

points). As a result, women were just as likely as men to be members of a group in 2013, while they were less likely in 2003.

- With regard to the different age groups, the increase in civic engagement was especially pronounced for older Canadians. The proportion of seniors aged 75 and over who were members or participants was up 14 percentage points between 2003 and 2013, from 45% to 59%. This growth could possibly be attributed, at least in part, to better health on the part of older seniors.

- Regional differences in civic engagement are observed. The level of civic engagement varied significantly by province. In 2013, 58% of Quebeckers were members or participants in a group or organization, compared with 66% of Ontarians and 73% of British Columbians.

- Although, in principle, participation in groups and organizations is free and open to everyone, there were still differences in participation among people who were members of different socioeconomic groups.

- According to the 2013 data, people who had a higher level of education were much more likely to be civically engaged. In 2013, 78% of those with a university degree aged 25 to 64 years were members or participants of a group, compared to 56% of those with a high school diploma and 41% of those without a high school diploma.

- Among people aged 25 to 64, personal income was also positively associated with participation in groups: 81% of respondents with a personal income of $80,000 or over per year were members or participants in a group, compared with 56% of those whose personal income was less than $40,000 per year.

In liberal democracies such as Canada, one of the fundamental rights granted to all citizens is that of choosing their representatives in free and fair elections. The most common political act in the population is by far voting. However, there has been an overall decline in voting in the past 50 years, despite a number of blips over the years. More specifically, the voting rate fell from 79% for the 1963 federal election to 61% for the last election in 2011. An all-time low of 58.5% was recorded in 2008.

It is recognized that voter turnout rates, as measured in surveys, tend to be overestimated when compared with official rates (Uppal and LaRochelle-Côté, 2012). This was also the case in the 2013 GSS: among the people eligible to vote in the last federal election, 81% reported having voted. Despite this overestimation of voting rates, the factors associated with voting were similar to those observed in other studies. Among eligible voters 25 years and older, the lower voting rates were observed for the 25-to-34 age group, people with lower levels of education, recent immigrants, parents with children under the age of 5 and Aboriginal people.

Conversely, the people most likely to have voted were seniors, university graduates, people whose personal income was higher and who were homeowners, and people who were married or in a common-law union.

5.2   Parliament-Public Engagement in India: Lessons and Best practices from the World's biggest Democracy

India's population was estimated at 1.18 billion people in 2008, of which 446 million were under 18 years old. India has the largest population and largest economy in South Asia with a GNI per capita of $1, 070. With nearly half-a-billion youth population, there is no better illustration than briefly reviewing the Indian National Youth Civic Participation Program to serve as a good model in citizen engagement and public participation in democratic governance and development.

India has developed a robust and sophisticated civil society with diverse civil society organizations providing opportunities for Youth Civic Participation as well as strong governmental frameworks supporting youth policies and Youth Civic Participation. There are a number of Indian CSOs and institutions providing opportunities for young people to engage with social issues in a variety of areas. These organizations' strategies range from preparing young people for participation in local governance, to training them to run youth development organizations, to setting up youth resource centres.

A key form of youth active citizenship is youth involvement in local government. Many community development organizations support youth participation in political processes

by engaging young people in monitoring elections, helping young people identify civic and social issues that matter to them and equipping them to create change. Project Citizen gives students a chance to be competent and responsible participants in local and state government by implementing projects whereby students select an issue that matters to them, study the issue, meet with relevant government officials and devise an action plan or alternative policy aimed at addressing the issue.

Another approach to Youth Civic Engagement taken by organizations in India is preparing young people to become citizens through citizenship education, opportunities for exposure to social issues through volunteering, rural camps, internships, action projects and campaigns. Many educational institutions have also started programs to encourage student civic participation.

A further form is the development of youth resource centres. These centres are friendly, non-threatening spaces – often youth led – where young people can meet, discuss social issues, build skills, organize and implement collective action around an issue they feel strongly about. Some of these have transformed traditional neighbourhood clubs into youth resource centres. Additionally, the media, arts and communications have huge appeal for young people.

There are a range of international NGOs, whose involvement is also important in the development of youth civic engagement opportunities. International volunteer agencies such as Volunteer Service Overseas, Peace Corps and United Nations Volunteers work to build national volunteer capacity into their programs. The Commonwealth Youth Program also partners with Restless Development (formerly Student Partnerships Worldwide) to run its HIV/AIDS awareness program.

There are a number of Indian CSOs and institutions providing opportunities for young people to engage with social issues in a variety of areas. They use different strategies and approaches as they support youth civic participation throughout the country. Given the large amount of CSOs working with young people in India, it is not possible to capture them all in detail here. For more information about the initiatives in this snapshot and

many others, please see the ICP report Youth development through Civic Participation: Mapping Assets in South Asia.

The Government of India's two primary youth civic participation policies are the National Policy on the Voluntary Sector 2007 and the National Youth Policy 2003. Both of these policies seek to promote young people in the growth and development of communities, through recognition and encouragement of innovative Youth Civic Participation.

The National Policy on the Voluntary Sector seeks to "encourage, enable, and empower an independent creative and effective voluntary sector with diversity in form and function, so that it can contribute to the social, cultural and economic advancement of the people of India."[5] The policy clearly states that a multi-sectorial approach involving voluntary organizations is needed to address many of the nation's problems including poverty alleviation, skill promotion, entrepreneurship, and empowerment of women, population stabilization, combating HIV/AIDS, managing water resources, elementary education and forest management. The government seeks to encourage innovation and recognize pioneering work by CSOs; develop a database of CSOs working in different fields and levels to enhance communication within civil society and between the voluntary sector and the government; and commits to encourage volunteer's involvement in public service delivery such as family welfare centres, primary health care facilities, vocational training, schools and sanitation campaigns.

The National Youth Policy 2003 also includes provisions for an information and research network to facilitate the formulation of focused youth development schemes and programs. The policy designates the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development (RGNIYD) as the apex body of this research network along with the National and State Youth Centres and the Youth Development Centres under the Nehru Yuva Kendra Scheme (NYKS).

Among the most well-known schemes promoting Youth Civic Engagement are the National Service Scheme (NSS), Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangatham (NYKS), and the National Service Volunteer Scheme (NSVS). The NSS is a student program aimed at

stimulating the social consciousness of youth with an overall objective of student development through civic participation. Participants engage in 120 hours of community service per year for two years. The NSS conducts activities in several areas including: improvement of campuses; tree planting; constructive work in adopted villages and slums; blood drives; adult and non-formal education; public health, including nutrition, family welfare, and AIDS awareness campaigns; construction of durable assets; and sustainable development with an emphasis on wasteland development and watershed management.

While the India youth civic engagement landscape is vibrant, diverse and well-developed, there remain substantial opportunities to enhance the quantity and quality of civic engagement opportunities for India's young people. The various national service schemes can be reformed and modernized to incorporate international best practices and better monitoring and evaluation. Existing civil society programs offer invaluable lessons on how to help young people conduct advocacy and launch campaigns that are focused and sustained rather than just protest or riot. Such programs enrich the landscape of Youth Civic Engagement.

5.3   Parliamentary Public Engagement in Nigeria: Lessons and Best practices from Africa's Largest Democracy

Nigeria has a population estimated to be about 196 million people (according to the United Nations DESA, Population Division) and is expected to grow to a population of over 233 million people by 2025 (Khorker and Kashiwase, 2015) with the North West and North East driving most of this growth, as the average birth rate of a woman in Zamfara is 8.4 children (Nigeria: Standard DHS, 2018), and infant mortality rate in the state is about 104 per 1000 children, i.e. 10%.

Civil society in Nigeria has demonstrated its potential to serve as a critical change agent, but its progress has been limited by a lack of capacity and resources to effectively participate in Nigeria's governance ecosystem. Using an innovative accountability ecosystems approach, SACE strengthened the capacity of civil society clusters (comprising a variable mix of civil society organizations, policymakers, donors, and

private sector partners) to improve transparency, accountability, and good governance in a range of sectors and issues, such as education, health, extractives, economic growth, and social inclusion. Eighteen "anchor" civil society organizations (CSOs).

These CSOs in turn led collective cluster advocacy efforts and provided mentoring, training, and sub-grants to cluster members. Through this cluster model, SACE delivered capacity building activities to 157 CSOs and 8,769 individuals over the life of the project. The project also saw net organizational improvements across 56 organizations nationally and 44 in the Niger Delta, reaching a total of 98 organizations across the country.

SACE used a Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach, along with an evidence-based, inclusive methodology to civil society strengthening grounded in the premise that initiatives should:

- Take into account Nigeria's unique country context and accountability ecosystem (mobilizing actors across demand and supply lines)
- Promote a collective impact approach that mobilizes the actions of diverse actors around a common advocacy agenda
- Seek innovative "better-fit" solutions rather than transplanting "best-practice" solutions
- Prioritize adaptive design and learning
- Use iterative political economy analysis to capitalize on windows of opportunity

SACE's strategy was anchored in the understanding that traditional, management centered approaches are necessary, yet not sufficient to achieve the desired improvements in governance and accountability. SACE incorporated essential Capacity training into a broader Capacity approach, which focused on working with organizations to create and promote engagement with other like-minded organizations and enhance their ability to adapt and function in a rapidly changing, complex environment.

SACE's approach used a variety of innovative tools and strategies, such as:

Stakeholder analysis and dialogue. SACE's strategy and CSO partner selection were informed by an extensive contextual analysis of the Nigerian governance landscape, key informant interviews and focus-group discussions, and large-scale stakeholder dialogue sessions were conducted. This collaborative

process enriched the project's approach, informed CSOs' requests for applications for funding, and increased buy-in from partners and stakeholders.

Cluster approach and collective impact. Anchor CSOs and cluster members received intensive, ongoing training in collective impact principles and strategies, cultivating the necessary mindset shift to drive cross-sector policy reforms. Through cluster meetings and tailored coaching sessions, actors from diverse sectors developed common agendas for solving social problems.

System for Transformation and Results (STAR) methodology. SACE's suite of tools and change processes helped CSOs develop skills and competencies around core drivers that characterize high-performing organizations: voice and accountability strategies and tactics, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and evaluation, member engagement and development, alliance building, knowledge sharing, innovation and experimentation, and public awareness.

Equipped with improved advocacy skills and innovative approaches (developed with SACE's support), partner CSOs achieved impressive policy outcomes and progress in government engagement in a wide range of policy areas, including education; extractives; health; social inclusion for women, youth, and persons with disabilities; and budget transparency. Both national-level and Niger Delta partners worked across 87 areas of laws, policies, and administrative procedures, and SACE expects to achieve the target of 60 policy outcomes. These impressive policy outcomes were achieved in part because of CSOs' enhanced capacity, garnered through SACE's capacity building efforts to improve their advocacy skills, strengthen their networks and stakeholder relationships, and boost public awareness.

Specific Examples of Success Stories include:

- The Accountability in Education in the Northeast Cluster, anchored by the Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD), supported the creation of

a State House Assembly Committee in Yobe State to monitor education projects, and secured a commitment from the Bauchi State government to increase the education budget.

- The National Assembly passed the Petroleum Industry Governance Bill, with pressure from the Civil Society Legislation Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) and the Accountability in Extractives Cluster. The bill, which seeks to provide a governance and institutional framework for Nigeria's petroleum industry, restructures the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation's management and allows new taxation legislation to foster a more attractive investment environment.

- The Disability Rights Advocacy Centre and the Access to Health for Women with Disabilities Cluster made progress toward disability mainstreaming by providing technical support and sustained advocacy pressure for the approval of Nigeria's National Policy on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities.

- The Accountability in Education Cluster, led by Human Development Initiatives (HDI), advocated for budget transparency in education funding and engaged several states to provide universal basic education plans with joint CSO-government oversight of implementation mechanisms. The cluster also supported states to leverage millions.

- Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) and the Women Lead Agriculture Cluster drafted gender-focused agricultural policies and helped secure the inauguration of the first female executive member of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria in Osun State to amplify women's voices on agriculture issues.

- The Youth Advocacy Cluster, with leadership from Youth Alive Foundation (YAF), drafted the Akwa Ibom Youth Development Fund Bill. The bill, which addresses youth unemployment and poverty, has garnered public support and passed two readings and a public hearing in Akwa Ibom's State Assembly.

- NECA's Network of Entrepreneurial Women and the Women in Business Cluster successfully advocated for more transparent engagement regarding local taxation for informal female traders. They also pushed for the launch of the Project Monitoring Platform to track completion of abandoned projects.

- The Life and Peace Development organization and the Inclusive Agriculture Governance Cluster successfully advocated for Ondo State to include the Agro Women Initiative in its 2018 budget. They also garnered support from important politicians to serve as the advocate champions for a gender-friendly agriculture policy.

- NECA's Network of Entrepreneurial Women and the Women in Business Cluster successfully advocated for more transparent engagement regarding local taxation for informal female traders. They also pushed for the launch of the Project Monitoring Platform to track completion of abandoned projects. Effective reporting and handling of harassment cases for market women and more equitable allocation of markets stalls to women.

- The Effective Aquaculture Policy Cluster, led by the Ugboroke Progressive Fish Farmers Association, successfully advocated for developing a clear agriculture policy with a funded aquaculture component in Delta State.

- The Social Development Integrated Centre and the Open Budget Cluster opened the door for citizens to take part in budget processes throughout the Niger Delta, securing a commitment for CSOs to work with the Edo State Budget and Planning Committee, and River States to publicly publish annual budgets.

- Following sustained advocacy efforts from the Citizens' Centre for Integrated Development and Social Rights and the open Budget in Health and Education Cluster, Imo State released the call circular for the 2018 budget, and responded by completing previously abandoned capital projects, which improved basic service delivery.

- The Nembe City Development Foundation (NCDF) and the Peace Advocacy Cluster developed the Central Peace Working Committee, with participation from the police, Operation Delta Safe team, media, and others, to use an early-warning system to avert conflict and promote peace.

- SACE supported engagements that promoted an enabling environment and regulatory framework for CSOs to operate effectively in Nigeria. In 2014 and 2017, SACE supported CSOs to engage, question, and prevent the introduction of the "Act to Regulate the Acceptance and Utilization of Financial/ Material Contributions of Donor Agencies to Voluntary Organizations and for Matters Connected Therewith" (2014) and the "Bill to Provide for the Establishment of the Non-Governmental Organization Commission" (2017) in response to widespread apprehension that these pieces of legislation would constrict civic space and voice. Throughout the project, SACE worked with concerned stakeholders to create awareness of and facilitate broader CSO engagement with the National Assembly on this potentially damaging legislation.

5.4 Parliamentary Public Engagement in South Africa: Lessons and Best practices

In South Africa, there is the recognition that the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) is critical in addressing the gap between government and ordinary people to strengthen a democracy that ensures robust, accountable and effective public and government partnerships and representation.

In addition, a 'People's Parliament' requires an institution that prioritises and seeks active engagement with the public, and that is receptive and responsive to the needs of the people. The vision of Parliament, since the first democratic Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, was and remains to build a truly representative people's Parliament. Parliament's role and outcomes are to represent the people and ensure government by the people under the Constitution, as well as to represent the provinces and local government

in the national sphere of government. In addition, the facilitation of public participation and involvement in its processes therefore remains central to the mandate of Parliament.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are not only crucial for holding national parliament, provincial legislatures and municipalities to account, they can also strengthen the capacity, efficiency and accessibility of these representative chambers.

In South Africa, there is also the recognition that parliament is the pillar representative institution in a democracy. Parliament holds governments accountable, ensure that public services are delivered effectively and that public money is spent wisely. South Africa's legislatures consist of the National Assembly, the National Council of Provinces and the nine provincial legislatures. They are tasked with representing citizens, ensuring that public resources are prudently managed and that government delivers quality public services.

South Africa's model constitution gives a special place for civil society to play an oversight role over democratic institutions, such as Parliament, participate in policy and decision-making and monitor the implementation thereof (RSA 1996). Civil society has a crucial role to play to make legislatures accountable, responsive and act in the public interest (Diamond 1997; Govender, 2006).

Civil society also helps citizens especially the poor, vulnerable and excluded the tools to participate in legislative decision and policy-making, to know and assert their rights. South Africa's civil society organizations have increasingly become the last line of defence fighting on behalf of ordinary citizens to secure their input in parliament policies and decisions and holding elected representatives, the executive and country president accountable.

It is against the preceding background that the Republic of South Africa has recognized the need for civil society organizations to carry out the following activities relating to active civic engagement in the work of parliament:

Citizens cannot meaningfully participate in the decision, policy and law-making in Parliament unless they have full information (Constitutional Court 2006). Most of South Africa's citizens are illiterate, poor and do not have knowledge about their rights. Civil society organizations, therefore, play an important role in providing civic education about the rights of ordinary citizens and communities about the policy debates in Parliament, decisions made and the impact of these on them.

But civil society organizations also have a role in helping ordinary citizens' access to parliament, understanding their rights and the obligations of their elected representatives. Civil society organizations must lobby parliament on behalf of ordinary citizens and communities who are marginalized, illiterate and impoverished, and can be easily hoodwinked by unscrupulous elected representatives. The following are major parliamentary functions in South Africa.

5.4.1   Civil society holds parliament accountable

The first very obvious role is for civil society organizations to hold representative chambers accountable for their decisions and policies and for the behaviour of individual elected representatives.

Most of South Africa's citizens are illiterate, poor and have little access to representative chambers. Civil society organizations, therefore, have the responsibility to on behalf of such destitute citizens hold elected representatives accountable. Civil society can mobilise citizens and communities to protest against undemocratic policies, unresponsive executive and lack of legislative transparency.

The power of South African civil society has been demonstrated by its extraordinarily action been in part responsible for forcing out two ANC and South African Presidents since 1994 – both former presidents Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma when they behaved undemocratically. During this period Parliament proved impotent to hold the leaders' executive accountable. Civil society organizations mobilized for long against alleged corruption and manipulation of democratic institutions, including Parliament. It was only

consistent mobilization by civil society organizations that compelled many in Parliament to act against former politicians alleged to have been involved in corruption.

Civil society organizations – with their ideas, skills and community footprint can provide representative chambers with the capacity to come up with quality policies and decisions (Kaulem, 2007; Jones and Tembo, 2008). Civil society organizations could themselves write the policies, laws and decisions on behalf of representative chambers – and this way ensure that these are in favour of the poor, vulnerable and the excluded.

5.4.2   Civil society provides input to policies

But civil society organizations can also influence policies and decisions made by elected representatives (Nakedi, 2004; Allen, Forrester and Patel 2008). South Africa's elected representatives frequently come up with poor quality policies and decisions which are often counter to the interest of the constituencies that voted them in. Civil society organizations can give input to policies, laws and decisions which are under deliberation by representative chambers, ensuring that the views of ordinary citizens and communities are included. Civil society organization input to policies and decisions could ensure they are socially just, equitable and in the widest public interest.

Very few representative chambers have dedicated policy and research offices, or budgets which can provide policy drafting or analysis. If they do have, they are often poorly capacitated, without adequate budgets, resources and skills. The policy-making capacity of the national parliamentary, provincial legislature and municipal wings of political parties are often also equally under-resourced.

In fact, it is crucial that civil society organizations are involved in elected representative chambers' policy-making and decision-making – providing ideas, alternative policies and critiquing existing policies. Civil society organizations can mobilise society-wide experts who are not necessarily known to parliament representatives or the state, to provide expert input in policy and decision-making.

Over the past years, civil society organizations have kept social justice on the legislative agenda. Over the years, they have called for a Basic Income Grant (BIG). Many vulnerable citizens fall outside South Africa's current social security system, which focuses on pensioners, former war veterans, the disabled and children. Furthermore, the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA) provide protection only to a restricted number of recipients.

5.4.3   Civil society ensures budgets are inclusive

Civil society organizations should play a bigger role in drawing up budgets set by parliament, provincial legislatures and municipalities. Ordinary citizens do not have the capacity, resources or skills to influence public budgets – civil society organizations, therefore, have a vital role to play, to ensure the needs of poor communities are genuinely addressed in budgets. They should help ordinary citizens and communities to hold elected representatives accountable for their budget decisions.

Civil society organizations have also for years, under the umbrella of the People's Budget Coalition, campaigned for national Budgets which are focused on social justice, is pro-poor and participatory. The People's Budget Coalition includes trade unions, churches, and NGOs, including the South African Coalition of Churches, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC).

5.4.4   Civil society monitors implementation and impact of policies

But civil society organizations are also necessary to monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies and decisions adopted by representative chambers. South Africa is currently facing a policy and decision implementation crisis. Policies and decisions are often adopted by representative chambers, but ineffectively implemented, or not implemented, at all.

Civil society organizations can monitor the implementation of policies and decisions adopted by representative chambers, and alert them about implementation bottlenecks, and provide remedies to unlock such obstacles. But civil society organizations can also

evaluate the impact of policies and decisions on their supposed beneficiaries – whether policies and decisions adopted, actually serve the objectives they were adopted for.

5.4.5 Civil society monitors the behavior of elected representatives

But civil society organizations are also vital to monitor the behaviour of elected representatives. It is crucial that civil society organizations monitor dishonesty, incompetence and pork-barreling by elected representatives.

But civil society organizations' role is also to inform ordinary citizens about decisions and policies made by elected representatives, and whether such decisions and policies are in the public interest. Because of the high levels of illiteracy and poverty, and the social distance between ordinary citizens and elected representatives, ordinary citizens often do not have the information on the policies adopted and decisions made by representative chambers. Civil society organizations must police conflicts of interest of elected representatives, expose them when they occur, and shame elected representatives breaching conflict of interest rules. But civil society should also support democratically minded MPs who are pushed out by their parliamentary leaders for doing the right thing.

5.4.6 Civil society can foster cross-parliamentary political party alliances

Civil society must promote the idea of cooperation between opposition parties and between political parties and civil society, to strengthen democracy, participation and social justice. Civil society organizations could practically help foster cross-party legislative alliances on policies which go beyond party ideological lines, specifically centered on defending constitutionally enshrined democratic principles, such as gender equality, social justice and non-racialism.

At the moment, it can be concluded that civil society organizations are often seen by some politicians as the "enemy" that should be shunned. Often, when national or provincial legislatures host public sittings in remote areas, civil organizations are often not invited to participate (Ben-Zeev, 2012). This wrong view deprives representative chambers the

ideas, skills and community reach of civil organizations – and ultimately undermines the effectiveness of parliament.

There is the need to engineer a conducive regulatory environment for civil society, which guarantees them the freedom to operate, to receive external funding and access to information. Parliament can institutionalize civil society involvement in policy, decision and law-making, by making it compulsory for civil society to draft and comment on legislative policies, decisions and laws.

By effectively holding South Africa's parliament to account, civil society can also strengthen the capacity of parliaments to hold presidents, leaders and governments accountable; and to come up with better quality decisions and policies; behave more transparently and honestly (Gumede, William, Policy Brief 32: How civil Society Can Strengthen the Capacity of South Africa's Parliament, August, 2019).

In sum, based on the preceding overview, it can be observed that different countries employ different modalities and approaches to strengthen civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure. In addition, it has been brought out that there are also many tools and practices that countries use to encourage citizen involvement and participation in parliamentary matters. For example, the U.K. employs government sponsored activity to encourage public participation in parliamentary matters while Canada used political participation as a barometer to assess the extent of citizen/civic engagement in politics. On the other hand, India, which has one of the biggest youth population, uses youth civic participation approach to promote citizen/civic engagement in promoting accountable and democratic governance through civic/citizen engagement focusing on the youth. The two African countries selected for this study, viz. Nigeria and South Africa, employ vibrant civil society organizations to promote citizen engagement in politics, improve governance and enhance accountability and responsiveness to citizen needs and demands.

The relevant lessons that we can draw from the comparative survey for the Ethiopian experience is that whatever tools and approaches are selected and used to promote parliamentary democracy and good governance by enhancing citizen/civic engagement,

these should be contextualized to fit into the Ethiopian reality or situation in order to serve as potent vehicles to promote public or citizen participation/involvement in politics and development. Simply put, the tools and approaches that are picked up should be creatively and innovatively used to make a meaningful difference in civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure in this country.

5.5 Parliamentary Public Engagement in the United Kingdom (U.K): Lessons and Best practices

The United Kingdom prides itself as the oldest democracy in the world, and, as such has some good lessons and practices to offer to emerging parliamentary democracies like Ethiopia. The United Kingdom has seen a tremendous amount of government sponsored activity to increase the involvement of people in decisions, policies and services in public life. For a number of reasons UK governments, at all levels, have committed publicly to increasing the involvement and empowerment of ordinary citizens. The number of government initiatives has lately been astounding. In 2007 and 2008 alone we have seen the government produce or announce the following:

- **Governance of Britain Green Paper** –Reviewing how Britain is governed, including the division of powers between parliament and the executive
- **Participatory Budgeting Strategy** –Setting out the Government's intention to bring citizens into the budgeting process
- **Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act** –Increasing opportunities for citizen action, including 'Community calls for action'
- **Sustainable Communities Act** –led to the creation of local sustainability strategies which communities play a key role in drawing up
- **Empowerment White Paper** –marks a landmark step in embedding public participation and empowerment in central Government policy
- **Duty to Involve** –Upcoming requirement to 'inform, consult and involve the people they serve'

- **National Empowerment Partnership** –a new national partnership set up to 'improve the quality, coordination and evidence of empowerment across England'
- **Best value framework** – All local authorities are now obliged to consult residents much more than previously through mechanisms such as Best Value Performance Indicator surveys.
- **Quirk review** –Recommended wider transfer of assets to community groups
- **Lyons Review** –Recommended more power to communities alongside devolution to local councils
- **MoJ national framework for greater citizen engagement** – discussion paper exploring cross-Government methods and approaches to public participation and citizen engagement

In recent years, there has also been an increase in the scale of public involvement. For example, the 2003 "GM Nation" process involved 40,000 people across the UK in over 200 community events, and more recently debates on health and pensions both directly involved several thousand members of the public. There is a lot of activity and many state institutions have massively improved the way they engage and communicate with the public. Today the principle that the public has a right to be consulted on issues that will affect them is established to a degree that was not the case ten years ago.

What is important is that there is a new generation of civil servants that tend to be more open to the idea of citizen empowerment which means that we are likely to see further developments in this direction. This is not limited to England. In many ways, other parts of the United Kingdom are further ahead than England is in terms of supporting participation.

Also, it is worth noting that this enthusiasm for public engagement is not limited to the governing Labour Party. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have also committed themselves to the idea of a 'new politics' where citizens play a more active role. Compared to many other countries, public participation in the UK is more likely to be funded by government funds, rather than NGOs. It is also often clearly linked to the decision makers and is often delivered by market or social research companies. From this

list of initiatives, one can see the scale of activity taking place around citizen empowerment and engagement in the UK.

However, the lesson that can be drawn is that there are worrying signs that all is not well when it comes to citizens' empowerment in the UK. For example, many initiatives, such as the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health and the Scottish Civic Forum have been short lived due to a lack of long-term government commitment (Source: Potter, Dominic, Public Participation in the U.K.: Lessons from the U.K. Experience, October, 2008).

In addition, one of the biggest problems in UK participation today is that the focus has been on quantity rather than quality. Two common assumptions that many people hold are that 'participation is always a good thing' and that 'if we build it, they will come'. It is often assumed that there is a vast untapped reserve of active people who want to get involved. There has been an explosion in opportunities for the public to get involved in decisions over the last years. Today, one can be invited to take part in decisions through the following structures: *Foundation Trust membership School Governing Body Local Involvement Network Housing Association Management Board Citizens' Panel Service user panels Local Area Forum Surestart Board Residents/Tenants Association Focus Groups Police Consultative Committee Citizens' juries Participatory Budgeting meetings Local Strategic Partnerships (*Source: Citizenship Survey 2007). Despite all these opportunities the truth is that only a small proportion of the population take part in the UK today (The Audit of Political Engagement' survey, 2007).

6   Historical background of CEPP in the HoPR

For quite a long time, there has been a dearth of civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure in Ethiopia because of a long tradition of authoritarian political culture and excessive domination of the political space by the state. Since World War II, the Ethiopian state has had three regimes with radically different ideological persuasions and basis of legitimacy, viz. Imperial era—1931-194; the Derg military dictatorship –1974-1991; and the present multi-ethnic based EPRDF---1991-, currently ruling the country. All

the three have had the unenviable record of being authoritarian in the governance and democratic realm. More specifically, the parliaments under the three regimes were not genuinely democratic institutions, and there has been very little public participation and involvement in the policy- and law-making process. Whatever citizen participation and involvement in governance and development has there been, it has always been highly structured and formalistic and not substantive.

There might have been times when there has been some public participation or consultation in the formulation and adoption of important laws, like, for example, the ex-civil society law, but the inputs or suggestions that came from citizens were often ignored and did not have any impact on the structure and content of the final version of the law. Simply put, be it under the imperial regime or the successive republican regimes under the Derg and the EPRDF, the government-cum-party has most of the time its sway, and very little of the inputs and suggestions from citizens or the public are considered (Meheret, 2018; Dessalegn and Meheret, 2014). As pointed out earlier, the authoritarian political order and the tradition of top-down decision making administrative and governance structure entrenched under Ethiopia's three post-World War II regimes precluded any meaningful public participation in the law- and policy-making processes (Andargatchew, 1993; Harbeson, 1988; Keller, 1988; Meheret, 1997; Dessalegn and Meheret, 2014)

Due to various reasons, the current state of CEPP in the HoPR of Ethiopia leaves much to be desired, which indicates that the country has a long way to go towards participatory and democratic governance. Since coming to power in 1991, the EPRDF-led government has conducted 5 nationwide elections to institutionalize parliamentary democracy and participatory governance whereby citizens will have a say in government decision-making through their elected representatives. However, since the political system has largely remained authoritarian and top-down with a single ruling party monopolizing state power for long, the ideals of representative democracy with the needs and concerns of the people being taken into consideration through their representatives have remained far from a reality.

In recent years, there have been some modest attempts by the current Ethiopian parliament to democratize its working practices and enhance its scrutiny over the executive. For example, an assessment has been conducted on parliamentary oversight tools and mechanisms used by the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR, July, 2018). In addition, a draft policy document on national civic engagement policy has been prepared and distributed for comment by relevant stakeholders (UNDP and OPM, January, 2019). However, no concrete steps or tangible outcomes on civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure in the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) worthy of mention have been witnessed.

With the preceding in the background, the current state of civic engagement in the parliamentary procedure will be presented in Section Nos. 8 and 9 of this report. The findings and observations drawn are based on the views and perspectives of current members of parliament and selected respondents from civil society, the media and opposition political parties. The findings and conclusions that emanate from these, which have been generated through structured interviews and focus group discussions with different stakeholders, along with the comparative experiences of and best practices from other selected countries for this study, will serve as a basis for the set of recommendations and conclusions, drawn in this study and for the preparation of the guidelines to nurture an active and sustainable culture of civic engagement and robust political participation in Ethiopia's parliamentary politics.

7   Parliament-Public Engagement in the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR): A View from the Inside

7.1   The Conception of Parliament-Public Engagement

Parliament in principle is an embodiment of the will of the people. It is this will of the people that constitutes parliament to function on behalf of the people. The assembly of deputies which takes shape in an institution called parliament may be able to function on behalf of the people in the true sense of the term when it involves stakeholders in the discharge of its responsibilities. This is essential for ensuring legitimacy, quality and trust

in governance and development. The legitimacy of parliament depends on the support and engagement of the electorate. The primary function of any parliament: viz. legislation is also improved in terms of quality when it is informed by citizens' concerns, experiences and views. And, finally a parliament that is seen connected to citizens and is responsive to their concerns is in a good position to earn the trust of the people. Such arrangements in the discharge of parliamentary duties are generally anchored in constitutional/legal provisions.

So is also the case of Ethiopia. In the Ethiopian case, the constitution under Article 8 sub-articles 1 and 3 provides that sovereign power resides in the Ethiopian people and their sovereignty shall be expressed through their elected representatives as well as their direct participation. Further in this regard, article 54 of the constitution and its sub-article 2 affirm that members of the house of people's representatives are representatives of the Ethiopian people as a whole and in the discharge of their responsibilities they shall be governed, among other things, by the will of the people. Moreover, the Rules of Procedure and Code of Conduct of the House of Peoples Representative similarly provide for public participation in the conduct of the core parliamentary functions and outlines aspects of the mechanism of engaging the public. However, the practice so far has not been up to promises.

Engaging the public in the undertaking of core parliamentary functions is favourably viewed by all the respondents at the federal and regional levels alike. The need for having active and engaged public is premised in the very nature of representative democracy which takes care of citizens' concerns and demands through their elected deputies. Elected deputies to be able to, live up to expectations, need to always consult and be abreast of issues concerning their constituencies in particular and the country in general. This is all the more important especially in light of the fact that political systems in the modern world mainly rely on indirect democracy for the reason that the population and territorial size of states has made practicing direct democracy impossible despite modest attempts at grassroots level. Therefore, whatever the people would like to have executed is decided upon by their representatives. The does not mean, however, the people remain relegated. In this regard, the deficit in indirect participation is supposed to be filled by regularly

engaging the public in parliamentary functions, according to an MP interviewed for this study. Besides filling the deficit in indirect participation, the MP contends, public engagement in parliamentary activities can be rationalized on the basis of its usefulness for quality legislation and informed oversight. Public engagement is also viewed as an "irreplaceable instrument" for getting parliamentary businesses done, according to the Amhara regional council. The view is corroborated by the Women, Youth and Social affairs standing committee of the Oromia regional Council, which reasons that public engagement provides a sense of ownership and empowerment to the people.

 Further in this regard, an informant from the HoPR interviewed for this study argues that public engagement is especially important in countries like Ethiopia that have a lot more to do to achieve growth and development which, among others, requires unfettered participation of citizens in public affairs. This is all the more important especially in the context of the reform Ethiopia is undergoing since 2018. The reform, multi-faceted in its intended outcome and as a result may require policy, legislative and regulatory reorientation; essentially brings the role of the parliament to the fore, which in turn shall involve the public in every aspect of its undertakings.

Active public engagement essentially means strengthening the parliament in attending to its constitutionally enshrined mandate. The constitutional powers and functions of the HoPR as provided for under Article 55 of the federal constitution are so important and vital that article 50 (3) of the constitution accords the House with the highest political authority in the federal government. Therefore, as the parliament gets strengthened as a result of active public engagement, its leverage vis-a-vis the executive will be enhanced. This in turn undoubtedly puts in place a better mechanism of checking and balancing between the branches of the federal government. Though it may appear farfetched now, public engagement in parliamentary activities has a strong correlation with improving governance and causing the entrenchment of democracy in a wider sense.

7.2   Parliament-Public Engagement – As is

Representative institutions at the federal and regional levels alike concur on the idea that engaging the public in parliamentary activities remains to be one of the priority areas of their concern. This may attest to the fact that public engagement is pivotal for parliaments at whatever level.   In spite of this, however, the practice hitherto has never been impressive.

In the House of Peoples' Representatives, public engagement, in spite of the recognition of its utility, remains an on-and-off kind of business. This can be observed in all the core functions of the parliament and the budget approval process. The pillar of parliamentary functions is law making. As the parliament makes a piece of law, constitutionally on matters under federal jurisdiction, it becomes binding on all covered by the scope of application. From the outset, the mere fact that the law applies on citizens requires the participation of citizens in its making through their representatives and directly by engaging in parliamentary activities.

In view of the foregoing, the HoPR has rules of procedure and code of conduct which under article 52 provides that legislative procedures follow a three-tier reading in the course of which the standing committees which take responsibility for further scrutiny after the full house debate, call public hearings whereby officials of the institution which initiated the bill present the intent of the draft law and invited people raise questions and concerns for consideration. However, an MP interviewed for this study says public hearings usually draw very little attendance. There are various reasons for why people are not joining the debates on proposed laws even when they are called. She mentions, among others, that the calls for public hearing are most often on short notice. The calls themselves usually advertised on mainstream media are not attractive in terms of inducing the public to spare time to join hearings. The bias in choice of the media, mainly government ones, and the non-use of digital media are additional hiccups.

On the other hand, according to chair of a standing committer, people are selective in deciding what to debate on and what not. In this regard, drawing from her experience, she

says people with disability and the sports family turn out in large numbers for public hearings when a proposed law is tabled for debate. This is corroborated by another chairperson of a standing committee, who observes that the revised higher education proclamation has been the draft bill that drew larger attendance compared with others.

All others said, more glaring in this regard is the fact that public hearings on draft laws is limited to the capital Addis Ababa in terms of participation, observes an informant from the secretariat of the House of Peoples' Representatives. While the scope of application of the laws approved by the House embraces all federal matters, people in the regions are not taking part in debates. In fact, in calls for public hearings, the advertisement invites people from across the country to mail in their views. However, this has not been useful for two reasons. First, the calls are most often issued upon short notice and as a result people do not have time to send their views via mails. Second, in a country like Ethiopia where the degree of literacy is so dismal, the mail-in mechanism is not, obviously, an effective tool.

In what appears to be an effort to offset the deficit, an official at the HoPR approached for this study recounts, there were times when regional councils were taken on board in creating platforms for debating draft laws on behalf of the HoPR. This is, however, intermittent. Its utility is rediscovered when there is a feeling on the part of the House that the substance of any piece of draft law merits using the avenue. This in itself is testimony to the non-existence of an established mechanism for using regional platforms for public hearings on draft laws. Such a missing link between the two reinforces the problems which limit turn out to public hearings to Addis Ababa, whatever the size of the turnout is.

The other important parliamentary function is oversight on the performance of the executive. Parliamentary oversight is a litmus test to gauge whether there is a real, not theoretical, separation of powers and a system of checks and balances. In parliamentary democracy, it is the legislature that is sovereign. So is the case with Ethiopia, at least theoretically, because the constitution stipulates that sovereign authority rests in the HoPR. But, in practice the dominant party system guided by revolutionary democracy generally made the parliament a single party caucus. This is because, except in a few cases, such as some 12 non-ruling party seats following the 2000 elections and around 170

seats as a result of the eventful 2005 elections, the parliament has been dominated by the ruling party. Moreover, in both theory and practice, there is the fusion of the executive and legislative branches of government in parliamentary systems. This is more vivid when the case is with a dominant party system. Therefore, whatever modest oversight and limited public engagement in this regard the HoPR may have had over the past nearly three decades shall be viewed in light of the foregoing.

Against this backdrop, the oversight function of the parliament is undertaken primarily by standing committees. The House's rules of procedure and code of conduct in its chapter 23 article 162 states that standing committees may have a membership size of 11 to 25. The standing committees, currently ten in number, are entrusted with the power of oversight as per article 163 of the rules of procedure. In the discharge of their responsibilities, the committees follow different ways and means. These include requiring periodic reports and demand-driven reports from executive offices, scheduled site visits and unannounced site tours to get first-hand information.

When executive officials submit periodic reports, the forum for debating may be either the full house or a committee meeting. In cases when the report is to be presented to the full house, the responsible committee calls the public to send or register questions, comments and views to the committee by mail, email or call the committee and inform. The information thus gathered will be raised to the official at the plenary. If the executive official is to present the report to the committee, the public is called either to attend the meeting and raise concerns in person or to send questions, comments and views by mail, email or call the committee and inform. In both cases the turn out most often is very little. Exceptions are very few. It is when the reporting institutions are known for being shrouded by controversy that there is a relatively better turn out.

The other means of exercising oversight involves site visits, scheduled or unannounced. Scheduled visits are part of the annual plans of the committees and are known by all concerned when they are to be undertaken. Usually, on=site observations are guided by prepared checklists. Such visits avail the opportunity to be consulted and heard for operators/ordinary actors in the institutions concerned. That serves for fact-checking by

balancing official and unofficial data from the institution under parliamentary oversight. Likewise, unscheduled site tours are made by committees as part of their oversight over the executive. Such visits are usually induced by tip-offs from the public and scandals and gossips over the media pertaining to a particular public institution. Although such kinds of visits are useful in getting raw data 'not cooked for official purposes', there is no established working mechanisms in place. They simply are induced by sudden tip offs from the public or driven by controversies arising from media programming. Interestingly, media-related inducements for site visits start with individual MPs' access to information, perception and pursuit. Such individuals bring a topical issue on the media to the attention of the committee and that is where it starts in terms of whether to decide to make unscheduled visits. Though this appears to be helpful there is no system of making it sustainable. A committee chair in the HoPR affirms the lack of established mechanism in this regard. To offset such deficit, one useful strategy would have been putting in place a media monitoring unit which is responsible for tracking developments and undertaking situation analysis for submission to pertinent offices within the structure of the HoPR.

Approving the federal budget for each fiscal year is also within the purview of the HoPR. Though budget approval simply forms a part of the legislative task of the parliament, it stands out special because of the implication is has to the political economy of the country. Hence, unlike many other bills the budget bill takes a relatively longer period. The rules of procedure and code of conduct of the HoPR state that the budget approval process shall enjoy a period of one full month after reaching the house. In other words, the budget bill shall reach the house at least one month before the end of the current fiscal year. This, however, is too short even by African standards where the parliaments of some of our peers in eastern Africa take up to three months before the conclusion of the budgetary process.

After reaching the house and passing the first reading which is   normally followed by directing it to pertinent committees, the responsible committee organizes a lengthy discussion on the proposed budget, sometimes taking two to three days. Such discussions are meant to understand in a much more detail the basis, rationale and principles followed

in preparing the draft budget bill. In the course of deliberations, in attendance are predominantly members of parliament, invited experts, professional associations and, of course, officials from the Ministry of Finance. As a further step in the process, the responsible committee calls a public hearing in the usual way inviting anyone interested either to attend or to send their questions, comments and views or call the committee to get their concerns registered. And, finally the budget bill will have to be approved by the full house.

Despite the modest attempt in engaging the public, the budgetary process to begin with is heavily dominated by the executive. The executive responsible for preparing the budget is in a much better position in terms of the requisite knowledge and technical knowhow. On the other hand, the House of Peoples' Representatives, and particularly its secretariat, is by comparison under- sourced primarily in reference to trained man power, an informant from the secretariat of the HoPR emphasizes. Instead of making itself capable of producing counterfactuals, the House remains dependent on the executive for explanations on what is hazy to it. One way of boosting its capability in this regard could be creating a pool of experts within its structure. If this happens to be beyond its means, an alternative could be cultivating a network of experts, drawn from notable professionals, universities, civil societies, etc; who are not on regular payroll and parliamentary working space but can be tapped into use whenever the need arises not only for issues related to the budget but also for other parliamentary essentials.

In representation, which is an important and core function of parliaments, the HoPR undertakes two rounds of engaging the public every business year. As per the rules of procedure and code of conduct, these rounds of engagements are conducted during the month of February when the parliament adjourns for recess and the summer recess during which the parliament closes for about a three-months' long vacation. Therefore, MPs meet people in their constituency twice a year for about two weeks each including travel days. According to an official in the HoPR, whatever stems out of discussions with the local people is reported to the local administration and upwards in the structure of governance. A report is also similarly developed for submission to the speaker of the HoPR.

The idea in doing so is to bring the local people on board in rectifying malpractices and enabling them to have their voices heard on matters affecting their lives. Despite the novelty of the idea, however, to begin with, the duration of their stay is too short so much so that they cannot afford to meet as many people as they wish. As a result, they visit some select kebeles within the district and talk to few people mostly drawn from different mass-based organizations on matters of concern to the local people.

A hiccup in this regard is the fact that members of parliament will have always to fall in line with their party's perspective, an informant from HoPR asserts. Dismal as it may sound, whatever the reality on the ground and the concerns the local people raised, informed by their party's direction MPs tend to have the issue looked at from the perspective of the ruling party. This is a disincentive to the local people in wanting to meet their representatives and discuss their concerns. Furthermore, issues that arise from discussions with the local people and that require resolution are submitted to the various tiers of government. Once the duration of stay is over, MPs return back home leaving the issues seeking resolution at the mercy of different executive offices. Because of the absence of a system of follow up, the issues remain unaddressed until the next round of meeting between MPs and people in their constituency. Under the circumstances, the local people develop apathy as a result of the loss of confidence in the capability of members of parliament individually and in the legislative organ collectively. Moreover, facilities and funding are in short supply, eventually impinging on the quality of the task, according to an informant, who recalls that in one occasion a driver serving MPs had to sleep inside his car because his per diem was too small to cover accommodation costs.

Had it been in other contexts, for instance Kenya in Africa, members of parliament would have constituency offices in their electoral districts. Such districts enjoy substantial budget for the duration of the term of office of members of parliament which can be allocated for staffing and parliamentary outreach activities. As a result, MPs are in a good position to remain connected with voters and regularly abreast of developments in their constituency.

8 Parliament-Public Engagement in the Ethiopian House of Peoples Representatives: Views from Outside

8.1 Civil Society, Media and Political Parties' Conceptions of Public Engagement

The involvement of non-institutional actors, including the media, civil society organizations and other non-state actors in the law- and policy-making process by the legislature is cardinal to participatory democracy and responsive governance and development. Considering the views and inputs of the constituencies as represented by these stakeholders can render government policies, laws and development plans responsive to public needs and concerns, and enhance their legitimacy and wide acceptance by the community. It is within this perspective that this assignment on civic engagement in the Ethiopian parliamentary procedure set out to examine the views and perspectives of these selected stakeholders in the country's path along the road to democratic governance and sustainable development.

Almost all of the respondents agree that knowledge is not uniform and all the same at all levels but exists in different forms and types. Citizens and stakeholders even at the grass-roots level often possess and obtain wisdom and knowledge from sources other than those available to professionals and experts. Involving different actors in the process of decision-making, and thus broadening the basis on which decisions are made, is becoming increasingly important worldwide. Where policies, plans, programs, and legal instruments are prepared, the public is increasingly offered an opportunity to participate. The public, politics and administration can benefit optimally from such involvement particularly where the participation of the public is exercised at a high quality. This can be ensured through the application of standards and procedures aimed at maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of public participation. In addition, it is equally important to note that the public has to participate in policy and law-making processes only if it has a genuine interest and commitment to be involved.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that citizens and interest groups will be willing and be committed to work and get involved as partners and with joint responsibility for the

community in politics and administration if the political system opens avenues and opportunities for them. . Needless to say, public participation is a necessary cog to proper functioning of modern democracy and is an effective means of communication to transmit government policies, laws and plans to the public. Simply put, public participation is a core element of the transparent and citizen-oriented governance and administrative practice.

Public participation very often takes place within the framework of the Federal Constitution and any other existing legal provisions. Where there is room for flexibility and manoeuvrability concerning the design of public participation, the effective and efficient standards of public P̶ participation need to be applied. Hence, public participation is particularly recommendable where:

- many people are affected by or interested in the topic;
- the topic might be controversial;
- the implementation of the policies, plans, programs, and legal instruments requires the cooperation of those affected and interested; or
- aim to attain broader comprehension, acceptance, and a high quality result.

It is against the preceding background that many democratic governments have devised mechanisms for citizens to participate directly in law and policy making as well as decision-making and implementation processes by the legislature and the executive. In this regard, many respondents noted that in democracies, citizens are important stakeholders who should participate either directly or indirectly in governance and development. Indirect participation involves electing leaders to represent the interests of citizens while direct participation involves taking actions as citizens. According to the views of many respondents, public participation is a fundamental part of the public-government relationship in democratic and responsive governance as well as sustainable development. Public participation involves interaction between stakeholders and various governmental and non-governmental agencies at different levels and in contexts.

Based on respondents' views and perceptions, the goals and objectives of public participation could be generally summarized as follows:

- Public participation creates a sense of belongingness on the part of participants to consider policies as part and parcel of their affairs;
- Public participation has a goal to promote the exchange of information and experiences to make more realistic decisions and policies;
- Public participation fosters the comprehension for differing opinions and the coordination of interests;
- Public participation enhances the quality and transparency of decisions;
- Public participation ensures the acceptance and traceability of decisions, and enhances acceptance also of those whose social benefits will become evident only in the long run;
- Public participation strengthens the identification of real citizens and various group interests to make sound policy decision with the areas they live in;
- Public participation strengthens people's trust in politics and public administration provides broader bases of decision-making for political and administrative decision-makers;
- Public participation helps avoid delays and extra costs in the implementation of the policies, plans, programs, and legal instruments, thereby optimizing the use of resources;
- Public participation gives chances for the wider public to be involved in policy decisions from formulation to implementation and in the post-implementation phase to evaluate and monitor what has been implemented;;
- Public participation enhances government transparency and accountability, thereby overcoming possible confusions and evasion of responsibility and answerability.

With regard to the key principles of public participation, the following guiding principles were raised by different respondents:

Transparency and traceability: As the process of public participation has to be transparent, also its results are traceable. Transparency and traceability build confidence in politics and administration.

Joint responsibility: Public participation means for all participants to accept responsibility for the jointly performed work and its outcome. In this way, both the quality of the outcome and people's identification with it can be improved.

Room for manoeuvre: Public participation requires room for maneuver. At the outset of the process all participants should be exactly informed about this scope. Participants must be thus in a position to judge their scope for influence realistically.

Balance and equal opportunities: Within the clearly defined room for maneuver, public participation processes aim at offering individual or participating groups equal opportunities and equal scope for influence. All target groups should be addressed in a balanced way. The participation process has to be organized in a barrier-free manner.

Mutual respect: Public participation is a process of comprehensive involvement of the persons affected by or interested in decisions on policies, plans, programs, and legal instruments. All participants should be aware of their different roles in such a process. They should deal with each other respectfully. This enhances the good and effective cooperation of all participants in decision making processes.

Fairness: The concerns of participants have to be taken seriously. Participants should meet each other in a climate of partnership. Arguments and counter-arguments have to be dealt with in fairness in public participation processes. A fair way of dealing with each other is the basis for fruitful cooperation.

Clear language: In the process of public participation, information and framework conditions should be communicated and provided clearly and understandably. This facilitates mutual understanding and avoids potential time lags, disappointments or other difficulties in cooperation.

Decision and feedback: The decision-makers should take account of the results of the public participation process in decision-making. 'Take account' means that they deal with the results respectfully and include them as far as possible in the decisions. The decisions should be communicated in a way taking reference to the subject-matters of the public participation process. In this way, politics and administration can express their appreciation of the participants' contributions and build confidence.

It was also revealed that there are different mechanisms of public participation were found to have been established for different actors. These mechanisms include organizing public forums and meetings; budget preparation and validation meetings; media usage; and direct participation by contesting elections and holding public offices. These are all indirectly fundamental principles and practices, and of global concern in line with the tenets of modern democracy.

8.2   Civil Society, Media and Political Parties' Appraisal of Current Practices   in Parliament-Public Engagement

Apart from the preceding general perceptions and conceptions by different respondents, the following observations and findings with regard to existing practices of parliament-public engagement in Ethiopia and other pertinent issues were also noted during the interviews and in the written responses from the relevant stakeholders identified for this research:

According to the Ethiopian constitution (1995) and the RPMCR (2006), the House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) has the full mandate from initiating to adopting laws. As defined by the RPMCR (2006 Article 50), the members of parliament (MPs), the committees and the parliamentary groups have the right to initiate any kind of draft bills except financial bill. According to the law, the latter is limited to the government only. Nonetheless, in practice almost 99% of all bills have been initiated by executive departments than the parliament. But, bill initiation by the executive body does not necessarily mean that the doors are totally closed to the legislature to have its inputs in the preparation of the bills, the more so if it has the courage, interest and will to do so. The

issues and problems that arise frequently in the legislature often push the executive to prepare bills that would ease the problems. Hence, the legislature contributes to the initiation of bills indirectly.

Respondents contended that the nature and composition of the parliamentary system we had so far in Ethiopian politics was not suitable for the promotion of democracy. As almost all the parliamentarians are often drawn from a single party representing and promoting primarily party interests than public interests, it is hardly possible to argue that the type of the parliament was effective in creating, delivering and exercising functions stipulated in the constitution.

Parliament has two major functions, viz. legislating laws and exercising scrutiny over the executive. When it comes to the making of bills in the parliament, it is worthwhile to mention that there are some limitations of the process. Respondents argue that there are a number of fundamental factors that affect the law-making process in the parliament. One of the major reasons is that the executive overshadows the parliament in initiating bills and even during deliberation time, majority of the parliamentarians are unqualified to professionally criticize, comment and shape the introduced bills. The second major reason raised by respondents was that the majority of the parliamentarians are not aware even about their role in the legislative process. This is mainly because almost all of them are coming from a single party, and they wrongly assume that their role is approving whatever bill is initiated and introduced by the executive by raising their hands. If there are any few qualified parliamentarians, they do not have any political space to criticize bills introduced by the executive because of party discipline. Here, it is suffice to note how critical the internal "*gimgama*" culture is in Ethiopian parliamentary politics and administration.

Other factors raised by the respondents included time shortage, lack of competence and commitment of committee members, limited stakeholders' participation, undue pressure (being hasty) to approve bills by the executive (at times some important bills were approved by simple motion), referring a lot of bills by the executive to be approved urgently at the end of the fiscal year, absence of an annual legislative plan and so on.

An additional issue attributed to the low quality of scrutiny of bills are the problems that emanate from executive departments and nature of the bill itself. This is because some bills, like the land lease bill and the bill for the establishment of the federal police commission, for example, are adopted directly by motion after deliberation only within maximum of three hours. In addition, as respondents contended, bills, which are included in the president's annual opening speech and the government's legislative plan, are not submitted to the legislature timely as intended. This clearly indicates the lack of an annual legislative plan in the legislature. As a result, backlogs of dozens of bills are submitted at the end of fiscal year among which some are approved hastily. On the other hand, the end of the fiscal year is full of too much rush, and little time to scrutinize the large amount of bills. This situation forces the legislature to hasty approval of bills without sufficient deliberations. The perception held by the executive towards parliament is an additional challenge mentioned by respondents. According to the opinion of the respondents, executive departments are reluctant to accommodate the opinions of legislators as the wrongly perceive the legislature is devoid of knowledge of law-making process or does not possess sufficient knowledge to make laws.

As per the dictates of democracy, parliament is mandated to ensure that government effectively attends to and delivers the needs of communities. This refers to the constitutional obligation to hold the executive accountable to parliamentary oversight function. This is a cardinal principal for the proper running of a democratic system of government. For a democratic government to operate effectively, MPs who are elected representatives need to closely monitor the activities of the executive. Respondents stressed that amongst the benefits of effective oversight in a democratic system it is necessary to ensure that government has to implement policies and projects as planned for the good of the public. It could also be taken as part of parliament's role to safeguard the constitutional obligation of the separation of powers, and thereby ensure government transparency. It is a mechanism of establishing systematic checks and balances between parliament and the executive. Parliament oversight is a means to improve government efficiency and effectiveness of government operations; is also a component of evaluating programs and performance; is a means to investigate and prevent poor administration,

waste, abuse, arbitrary and illegal and unconstitutional conduct. It also helps to protect civil liberties and constitutional rights; inform the general public and ensure that executive policies reflect public interests; gather information to develop new legislative proposals or amend existing statutes; and ensure administrative compliance on legislative authority and prerogatives and the like.

As many respondents claimed, the aim of parliament oversight in parliamentary democracies is to ensure that public bodies and officials are performing to their full potential, providing value for money in the provision of public services, building confidence in the society, and being responsive to the community they are meant to be serving.

Parliament is the representative body of the people. This is mainly a mandate which is defined by how it is established as an institution of democracy. MPs are elected representatives, who represent the interests of the electorate and to a certain degree the mandate of their political parties. This underscores the political context in which parliamentary oversight takes place. Parliament is faced with competing roles as it is part of the machinery that confers legitimacy on the executive, yet it is constitutionally mandated to hold the executive to account for its actions to safeguard public interests.

As many respondents claimed, one of the bad experiences of parliamentary democracy is that the parliament oversight function is by and large unfortunately neglected and, in most instances, it is considered as a function of parliamentarians from opposition political parties. This is because the executive is established from a majority in parliament; and as a result, incumbent party parliamentarians largely undermine or are generally apologetic about the oversight function. Moreover, MPs in such systems tend to be most responsive to their parties' leaders who determine whether and where a candidate will be placed on the party list in the next election. This is because candidates are placed on a list, and citizens vote for parties rather than for candidates directly. It is for the above reasons, among others, that the oversight function encounters political opposition, and becomes constrained to a protective relationship between parliament and the executive.

It takes the willingness of parliament to attain effective oversight, and also the possible influence of the available incentives or lack thereof. Experienced respondents claim that parliament as an institution does not have financial, material and technological capacity to facilitate and enable parliamentarians to play an effective oversight function, In adequate transportation cost coupled with old vehicles were mentioned as other demotivating factors. Some respondents who had some information on the background of opposition parliamentarians claimed that sometimes operate through self-financing arrangement, and, and in their words, "I tried several times to have constituency level consultations. But my attempts had been interrupted by government security forces claiming that the meeting is illegal."

Oversight function in the Ethiopian context can be considered a "taboo", one respondent added. The absence of positive incentives coupled with lack of political good will among MPs is a systematic impediment in promoting effective constituency oversight. Effective oversight cannot be expected in an environment wherein the cost of conducting oversight outweighs the benefits. Some MPs may know what is expected of them, but the fear of losing their seats in parliament if they become more objective in their work is a hindrance. This insinuates that MPs may know the difference between right and wrong, yet they decide to do the latter as they are perpetually caught between serving the interests of the electorate and the mandate of their political parties. But, there are still others who are even not aware of the purposes and functions of oversight.

In conclusion, it is clear that while oversight is a constitutional mandate of parliament, it is faced with various challenges. The challenges are wide encompassing political opposition, partisanship, political competition and the power relations between the executive and parliament, resulting in the reluctance of the executive to cooperate. Analyses of data generated from participants on the oversight role of the parliament further revealed the following fundamental problems in connection to the HoPR:

- ✓ Lack of proper understanding and acknowledgement as to the supremacy of the house;

- ✓ Considering the role of the legislature as less important in the sense that it cannot do significant activity or cannot generate constructive ideas that can help ~~to~~ in the better implementation of policy;
- ✓ The "we know everything more than the legislature" attitude and ignoring the feedbacks of legislators;
- ✓ Overlooking the fact that the officials are accountable to the voter through the elected, and failing to consider it as a fundamental characteristic of democratic systems;;.
- ✓ Following a hypocritical approach instead of accepting or rejecting candidly the recommendations forwarded by the legislature;
- ✓ Considering the legislature as fault finding rather than a supporting institution.

Parliamentary core functions, law making, oversight and representations, are supported by important actors like the media and civil society. Particularly the media is an important tool for the proper functioning of the legislature because it can create the necessary communication interface among the legislators, the executive officials and the general public, they can as well influence each other by using it. The media constitute the key means for informing citizens about public affairs, and serves as a key channel of communication between parliament and the public. In their investigative role as well, the media have always been seen as a 'watchdog' against all kinds of abuse—be it administrative or political. How well they fulfil these functions is vital for the quality of democratic life of a nation and society. Given the tendency for these functions to become distorted, whether by executive partiality in a government-controlled system, or by powerful economic interests in a commercialized one, parliament has a key democratic role in setting an appropriate legal framework for the media to ensure both their independence and their diversity.

Because parliamentary outreach will ever physically touch only a small proportion of the population, one of the main elements of parliament-public engagement strategies is the mass broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings through radio and television, which dramatically widens the potential audience. The media and media usage is one of the

limiting factors to the quality of the legislative and oversight process. Thus, the media have important roles in promoting and supporting of the parliamentary activities.

Even though there are several public and private media in the country, they do not have equal importance to the parliament and the role of the Ethiopian Broadcast Corporation (EBC) as compared to others was found to be magnified in supporting its function. Nonetheless, EBC has not played its role as expected in disseminating reliable legislative information to the general public. The legislature is not communicating well with the voters through the media. It is obvious that the legislative scrutiny and most oversight activities are taking place at the level of the standing committees usually in closed meetings. More than 90% of the work of the legislature is done under the auspices of the committees. As there are quite a number of committees in parliament having several sessions simultaneously, it is unthinkable to attend and give coverage to all these debates, an EBC respondent claimed. "We have limited resources like professional camera and limited professionals," respondents added. So, practically, even if they are invited to give coverage for the works of the committees, they do not have capacity to do so. Hence, the media usually limit themselves to giving coverage for parliamentary opening sessions, closing and quarterly sessions and when the Prime-Minister attends. Other broadcast and print media do not have any chance to be invited. If the work of a committee is hidden from the public, so does the work of a legislature. Hence, the role of the media is crucial. In the absence of the media, the general public does not have the opportunity to know about the national issues being discussed within each standing committee particularly when most of the issues are discussed at ~~in~~ the committee level.

Some of the broadcast media used to have some platforms to specifically deal with parliamentary issues. In particular, two programs, viz. "*Min Enteyikilot*" and "*Enderase*" have been an exclusively designed media platforms to bring some of the public officials and parliamentarians to address questions directly raised by the public on live transmitted programs. Though the participation of the public was impressive and the program was one of the popular ones followed by the larger public, the program was short lived and interrupted because of the huge pressure from government officials, and at times due to reluctance and sometimes warnings given by officials to close the program.

Print media have also platforms like assigning columns to parliamentarians. However, they are not effective and willing enough to regularly use the provided platforms. Even when they participate, the format and content of the writing is inadequate and unattractive to the readers. Hence, they fill up columns by reports rather than preparing articulated professional writings.

Respondents claimed that as all the media is directly answerable and accountable to the parliament, what matters more is their interest and professional capacity to guide media in a way they like it, at least rhetorically. But, practically, the executive is more powerful over the media than the parliament. This is because all media managers and deputy managers of the public media are assigned not by the legislature but by the board appointed by the ≠ executive branch. The managers and deputy managers, who are accountable to the executive /state minister, are in control of the content of the media thus rendering media accountability to the legislature valueless. This, therefore, could be taken as one of the challenges for the legislature to not fully be in control of the media. This also partially indicates the existence of confusion in responsibility and accountability of the media.

Of course, the public media entertains some coverage of news, which is mostly fragmented, distorted and less substantive. According to most of the respondents, when the reporters of EBC make news on issues of standing committees' meetings, the orientation of their reporting focuses more on what the executive officials might have said, and usually takes the form of magnifying only their performance and achievements and not what the standing committees might have said. They do not have patience to attend what the standing committees questioned and suggested to executive departments during the meetings. The respondents have also observed some reflection of discriminatory approaches by some EBC reporters and editors in entertaining different news ranging from omission to discriminating in airing news from the committees. At times, the reports more fundamentally reflect the positions of the executive than the legislature. This entails the need to revise the editorial policy of the media.

There was also a time when the parliament had its own TV air time on Saturday and Sunday for last 16 years in the then Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency (ERTA). As the program failed to attract sufficient audience and has no attractive content, it was cancelled by the consent of the leadership of the House because it was unattractive and was subsequently substituted by another better program. The air time was also reduced setting it at 15-20 minutes a week. Finally, even this too was cancelled as the program content was not promising.

8.3   Views from Underrepresented Social Groups

Civil Society Organizations play a variety of roles in citizen empowerment, development, human rights advancement and equality. In Ethiopia, since the humanitarian crisis of the mid-1970s, CSOs have been participating in relief and rehabilitation, capacity building, advocacy, and development in a meaningful way. However, the space for CSOs has been passing through a range of ups and downs, with the CSO proclamation of 2005 being considered to be significantly restrictive in promoting human/democratic rights and participation. CSOs claim that they are ideal roots for democracy and sustainable development. An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and is an asset in itself. It represents and fosters pluralism and can contribute to more effective policies, equitable and sustainable development and inclusive growth. It is an important player in fostering peace and in conflict resolution by articulating citizens' concerns. Despite their positive role for development and democratization process, however, respondents claimed that the pre-transition parliament of Ethiopia passed a restrictive law under heavy pressure from government/executive branch.

All the respondents reflected that the relationship between civil society and the legislature was a hostile one, particularly in the post 2005 election period. Respondents fully agree that the then parliament was just a rubber stamp for the executive and used to pass any bill without even its minimal input. The major reason for this was lack of pluralism in the parliament as almost all are members of the incumbent party, the majority of them were unqualified and were not even aware about their duties and powers as stipulated in the

constitution. The party discipline, which was a kind of "written law", matters more for them, and this simply meant to pass whatever law was being initiated by the executive than being accountable to the public, the constitution and their free will as well as conscience. So, the parliament was described as nominal and devoid of real powers and constrained by its internal working procedures. Some CSOs–were selectively invited to participate in the then parliamentary sessions. But, in real terms, as most respondents asserted, the participating NGOs which were allowed to participate were GONGOs, otherwise known as –government Organized Nongovernmental Organizations.

As most respondents claimed, since the 2018, political transition, there have been a lot of changes in the state of democracy and human rights in Ethiopia, which has been reflected in a wider space for independent civil society organizations and opposition political parties. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed pledged to reform the authoritarian regime, and repressive terrorism and media laws were either repealed or amended. The new government also released political prisoners and legalized opposition parties, some of which had been either banned or labelled terrorist organizations. As most respondents claimed, the positive change that started since 2018 has continued. Some of the SCO respondents have underscored that for the Ethiopian civil society sector, the year 2019 has been a new beginning. This is because, in February 2019, the draconian 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation was amended, clearly signifying, among other things, the changing role of the parliament. The former draconian law imposed a lot of restrictions on civil society, especially when working for human rights, democracy and good governance. The new law changed the classification of civil society organizations (CSOs) and only distinguishes between local and international CSOs. It lifted restrictions on funding for CSOs and allowed for the re-entry of international organizations into Ethiopia. The old law stated that organizations receiving more than 10 per cent of their funding from international donors were to be considered foreign international organizations, and could therefore not undertake any human rights-related work in the country.

The scope of action for CSOs has now widened because unlike the old law, the new proclamation does not provide an exhaustive list of the permitted activities of CSOs. It

does not also set a limit to the activities that civil society can engage in, except for those that are against criminal law. This is more consistent with the right to the freedom of association, which means that anyone can form an association to pursue any legitimate objectives without restriction. Though this is the case for most respondents, a significant portion of the respondents claimed that it is too early to talk about the changing role of the parliament. Their advice to wait and see what will be happening in the near future of Ethiopia. They critically questioned the changing role of the parliament despite the fact that some parliamentarians have been harshly criticizing the Prime Minister and the executive branch of the government. According to some respondents, the process is overlooked as something "natural" than being a big deal in the parliament. The other interesting argument we had at the time of data collection was whether or not "that in real democracies, it is the CSOs that have to shape and support the government than government shaping and supporting them."

Regarding political parties, the political parties consulted also criticized the pre- 2018 EPRDF regime for being discriminatory in its party politics. Political parties were selectively invited to attend parliamentary sessions. Simply put, all "opposition" political parties were not equally treated and supported by the regime. Some of the political parties were labelled as "terrorist groups" and their leaders were unlawfully detained or forced to exile. Laws condemning party leaders and labelling parties as terrorist groups were passed by the then parliament. This indicated that the role of the parliament was nominal only promoting more the interests of the executive than public interest. It was also an open secret that all the seats in the parliament were also controlled by the single ruling party, and all parliamentarians got their seats through rigged elections.

In the pre-2018 period, what matters more was representing party interests than the interest of the public. In doing so, though the regime had some policy for under-representation of some sections of the society, such as women and girls, it was also true that policies were not implemented as planned. So, it is difficult to argue that there was a genuine policy for the representation of diversified interests. According to the view of some respondents, a practical move for the real representation of the hitherto underrepresented section of the society came in the post-2018 period. It was Prime

Minister Abiy Ahmed who fairly changed the composition of the cabinet of ministers by the sudden but surprising ratio of 50:50 men and women members. For the majority of the respondents, this was a fundamental policy shift in Ethiopian politics and attracted the attention of the international community as well. As many respondents claimed, diversity management and representation has been progressing very well since 2018. Nonetheless, some critical respondents made two important remarks while praising the achievements so far in the post transition period. One is that representation of diversity should not be exclusively based on the interest of individual leader. It has to be institutionalized for the capitalization of the remarkable achievements that have been gained in the post 2018 period. Leaders are not permanent creatures, and they come and go. It is only laws and institutions that guarantee permanence and durability. The second important remark was that it is valid and sound to have fair representation of women, who constitute a half section of the society. Nonetheless, care should be taken to ensure that the representation factor is genuinely and purely taken with a view for the promotion of peace and development for international recognition and to be labelled as a "different leader." One of the key issues addressed and that was a subject of intensive discussion with non-state actors and stakeholders was the conventional democratic practice of parliamentary oversight function over the executive.

9   The Way Forward – A Synthesis of Views and Best Practices

As can be drawn from what has been discussed in the relevant sections of this report, engaging the public in parliamentary activities in Ethiopia, in spite of modest attempts, has largely been unsupported by institutional arrangements, physical and technological infrastructure, trained and skilful human resource and enabling financial outlay. The problem in this regard stems from the other side as well. For lack of trust in the efficacy of getting engaged in having their concerns addressed, people shy away from reaching out to the parliament even when called for. Therefore, the problems from both ends need to be addressed for the HoPR to be a credible and an independent legislative organ reigning over its prerogative as laid down in the constitution. In the views of the respondents for this research, this may happen when the following views and recommendations are considered for possible action:

➢ From the very start, rectifying the problems observed in parliamentary public engagement requires a major overhaul in the country's politics. Though Ethiopia constitutionally adheres to the principle of 'multi party' politics, the political landscape was uneven and the parliament remained the preserve of the ruling EPRDF for much of its history since 1995. This has resulted in the twining of party and government interests. In that e event the parliament wants only to push its agenda through, and this eventually proved to be a disincentive for a significant section of the population to reach out to the parliament. This indicates a strain in the link between at least a section of the population and their representative institution, the parliament. Hence, from a strategic vantage point healing the damage in the link between the people and government (in this case parliament) is a major macro initiative that is required to improve parliament-public engagement.

➢ Revisiting the hitherto practice in legislative-executive relations. Recognizing the gains over the last two years, the backlog is so huge that a lot more will have to be done to change the entrenched status quo of executive dominance over the legislature. Tailoring this to parliamentary business, executive dominance over the legislature is a hiccup in exercising effective oversight. This lack of muscle exposes the weakness of the parliament in the eyes of citizens, causing in the end a loss of public trust in it. Evidences attest to this fact. During MPs' visits to their constituencies, public concerns that arise at deliberations simply await the good will of the executive officials. If not in principle, in practice there is no censure on defaulting officials. The end result is people shy away from engaging. Reclaiming its constitutional status is, therefore, a requisite for a more assertive role that may help induce people to engage the HoPR.

➢ The rules of procedure and code of conduct of the HoPR stipulate that MPs may go to their constituencies and meet the local people twice a year. The difficulties encountered aside, the data gathered tells that the practice has not been uniformly adhered to by all MPs. This is vivid particularly in light of the fact that some MPs, who happen to be ministers and ambassadors posted abroad, do not meet their

constituents at all. It, therefore, is incumbent up on the House to make sure that MPs regularly visit their constituencies y and meet with the local people to discuss matters of concern, including by using digital means when necessary.

➢ Besides, in a more strategic sense the HoPR shall needs to think about establishing constituency offices for each MP. Such offices shall be adequately sourced in terms of finance, manpower and facilities. The financial constraint in this regard is understandable. Nonetheless, it can be possible by reducing the size of MPs in the House, which, of course, requires a constitutional amendment. But, still it is not impossible in the long term. If so possible, savings from the overhead cost of MPs may be transferred for good use of opening constituency offices in all electoral districts.

➢ This research has brought out the fact that pertaining to law making and public participation, though at a modest level, is limited to people in the capital. Even though the scope of application of the law is so wide that people across the country are affected by it at least regarding matters falling within the federal jurisdiction, Ethiopians outside of the capital do not have the means to participate in its making. It is, therefore, necessary that the HoPR create a platform to engage the public in the processes of law making. Such platforms could be made available by partnering with regional councils and developing viable mechanisms to that effect. If need be, costs associated with this arrangement may be shared in consultation with regional councils or absorbed by the HoPR secretariat.

➢ Both in law making and oversight, the manner in which the public is called for participation needs improvement. The following are some suggestions/recommendations for consideration in this regard:

  ✓ The calls for public hearings should be given sufficient time; calls upon short notice must be avoided.
  ✓ The calls should all be tell-all, clear and attractive to induce the public to come.
  ✓ For people outside of the capital and who are interested to send their views, free of charge fax and postal service should be all availed

- ✓ The ICT system of communication should be more ~~all be~~ interactive; the communication should all be a two-way traffic. This helps people to realize that their communications are taken care of and, as a result, will be induced to continue engaging the parliament.
- ✓ The call centre should not be meant only for transcribing messages. It shall be organized like a front office in a hospitality industry. People there need to be store houses of information regarding the House and also show courtesy to callers.
- ✓ More needs to be done to make the nascent teleconference system at the House of people's representatives more efficient and better performing. It should be exploited to its full capacity.
- ✓ The format and content of the webpage must be improved to make it attractive, informative and in the process a frequent stop for visitors.
- ✓ Social media pages must be made much smarter, especially for the youth, who consume too much social media content but appear to be apathetic to mainstream politics.

➢ The secretariat of the House of Peoples' Representatives should have a separate unit for public engagement activities with all what it takes in terms of resources.

➢ Visitors' program for whoever is interested, residents of the capital, travellers from the countryside and even foreigners, should be arranged. It should not an ad hoc business. Rather it shall be a regularized practice drawing as many scheduled and unscheduled visitors as possible. For this to materialize, however, the secretariat of the HoPR should think about availing permissive physical infrastructure - for instance, space for briefings and some leisure inside the compound- and friendly security arrangements.

➢ The secretariat should think of launching its own TV channel or at least open broadcast media programming and newspaper columns in collaboration with the mainstream media, first to make its presence felt by disseminating information focused on its activities and then to attract the public as both consumers and providers of information. If this appears remote, online broadcasting and using audio-visual sharing platforms like Youtube can be an alternative for the short term.

➢ The secretariat should also think of creating a system of media monitoring and situation analysis. This helps the HoPR and its organs to keep abreast of the latest

reportage on parliament and what concerns it generally, as well as being able to respond to stakeholders as may be required.

➢ It is necessary to cultivate a network of experts, drawn from notable professionals, universities, civil societies etc; who are not on regular payroll and parliamentary working space but can be tapped into use whenever the need arises.

➢ A parliamentary system of government is known for the fusion of the executive and the legislative branches of government. Potential adverse effects that may stem from its very nature are tamed by maintaining the constitutional division of power and a system of checks and balances. When both are adhered to in both principle and practice, the parliament stands out as the real sovereign from a political point of view. In a more pragmatic way, however, the parliament can be taken as the embodiment of the will of the people when it involves the public in the undertaking of its core functions.

➢ Engaging the public in the undertaking of parliamentary activities helps to ensure legitimacy, trust and quality. These essentials for any parliament can be realized when public engagement schemes are supported by institutional arrangements, physical and technological infrastructure, trained and skilful human resource and enabling financial outlay.

➢ Reforming electoral system itself:- free and fair parliamentary election is one of the basic reform agendas proposed by many respondents. This is because, as respondents claimed, in the pre-election period, those who have been nominated to run for election in Ethiopian politics used to be people who have been loyal to the party, in primarily promoting and representing party interests than the public interest. Individuals to serve as parliamentarians have been picked to contest elections from a party list without getting the consent of their constituencies. It is necessary that the public   must have a chance to pick up potential parliamentarians who can run for election, and the potential candidates should pass through public criticism and there must be a culture of getting the public's vote of confidence to qualify for running for election. Election should also be free and fair.

In the post-election period, the public also should have a power to recall those who are not serving their interests.

➢ Clear criteria should be there to be selected as a potential parliamentarian than picking up individuals from party list. Although it is the responsibility and function of political parties to nominate candidates for election, it is necessary to set minimum set of criteria to be considered for parliamentary elections. For example, respondents for this study contended that as a bench mark, parliamentarians should be able to read and write properly. Some of the parliamentarians were not able to read and understand different documents. If this is the case then, it is hardly thinkable the parliamentarians to serve the interest of the public.

➢ Anyone who is expected to be MPs has to have interest and attest to some degree of commitment. Internal motive and goodwill to serve as a parliamentarian has also to be considered. Personal readiness and courage to serve the public rather than being derived by external pressure and force has to be taken into considerations. In Ethiopian politics, the majority of the parliamentarians are not duty conscious and were not interested in actively engaging themselves in parliamentary sessions. They role is undermined because they are perceived as cogs who raise their hands and approve and pass bills introduced and initiated by the executive.

➢ Attitude Change:-Concerning parliament-civil Society engagement, respondents stressed that parliament has to in the first place have a positive attitude towards CSOs and must heartily accept that CSOs are important and mandatory to build democratic political institutions, including the parliament. They have to underscore the positive roles played by CSOs like empowerment, their role in human rights, development activities and awareness creation. If they have hostile attitude towards CSOs, despite what the constitution and other proclamations provide, it is unthinkable to have functional CSOs. They need to cooperate than be engaged in conflict over public interests. Some of the respondents even claimed the parliament/ government need to support them financially and by providing other

resources as necessary. But others question and even have the view that the financial support and intervention of the government can be factors that will affect neutral role of the CSOs. But all the respondents unanimously suggest smooth relationships and cooperative practices were necessary to promote the interests of the public.

➢ Improving logistics and other incentives to have effective oversight function:- in the analysis part of the oversight function of the parliament, it has been underscored as almost nonexistent and taboo, and rhetorically left for parliamentarians joining the parliament from opposition camp only. Respondents responded that oversight has to be the main function of the parliament and parliamentarians need to visit not only their constituencies but also be responsible for other public interests all over the country if possible. They have the duty to control the executive and supervise the implementations of plans properly. Therefore, oversight is the best means to exercise this constitutional function. The institution has a mandate to motivate parliamentarians to pay visit to their constituencies and beyond by providing necessary logistics and remuneration to the parliamentarians. The institution has to play a positive role also to overcome political and security challenges for parliamentarians to freely have as many public hearings as possible.

➢ Democratization and reform of internal party discipline:- it has been observed that parliamentarians are in fear of party discipline and subsequent measures that would be taken against them if they challenge and criticize any single idea of the incumbent party agenda in the parliament. Be that as it may, however, this has to change for parliament to play its proper role of oversight effectively.

➢ Narrowing down the gap between rhetoric and practice:- allowing for and creating a democratic environment whereby all parliamentarians freely express their views as stipulate in the constitution is an essential pillar of parliamentary democracy. Though fundamental functions are clearly spelt out in the constitution,

parliamentarians are in practice constrained by the heavy hands of the executive and party discipline.

➢ Parliament-media relations have to be improved:- Though rhetorically, all public media is accountable to the parliament ; in its editorial policy and despite the confusions in the accountability-responsibility lines, the media is not properly transmitting parliamentary debates and discussions to the public. Most MPs also are not actively engaging themselves in the media and were not willing to address public questions directly. This has to be improved. In print media too, parliamentarians are not reflecting their views in the columns assigned for them and if at all they are involved, the articles presented are in report writing format and were not attracting readers.

➢ Establishing its own independent Media: The term e-Parliament report suggests that around one third of all parliaments now televise through their own channels and a further one third collaborate with other TV channels to broadcast political programs. As it has been stated, there are a number of standing committees having parallel sessions and engaging themselves in many parliamentary functions. The existing media do not have capacity to transmit all these important matters in an organized way. Therefore, as it is the case in many countries in the world, the parliament needs to have its own media.

➢ While it is clear that oversight is a constitutional mandate of parliament, it is faced with various challenges. The challenges are wide encompassing political opposition, partisanship, political competition and the power relations between the executive and parliament, resulting in the reluctance of the executive to cooperate. Analyses of data generated from participants on the oversight role of the parliament further revealed the following fundamental problems in connection to the HoPR:

✓ Lack of proper understanding and acknowledgement as to the supremacy of the house;

- ✓ Considering the role of the legislature as less important in the sense that it cannot do significant activity or cannot generate constructive ideas that can help ~~to~~ in the better implementation of policy;
- ✓ The "we know everything more than the legislature" attitude and ignoring the feedbacks of legislators;
- ✓ Overlooking the fact that the officials are accountable to the voter through the elected, and failing to consider it as a fundamental characteristic of democratic systems;;.
- ✓ Following a hypocritical approach instead of accepting or rejecting candidly the recommendations forwarded by the legislature;
- ✓ Considering the legislature as fault finding rather than a supporting institution.

10 Conclusion

Parliament, in any form so long as it forms a representative institution, is taken as the embodiment of the will of the people. It can, however, live up to expectations when it involves stakeholders in the undertaking of its functions. This is true for any kind of political system known to humanity, be it parliamentary, presidential or semi-presidential.

However, in a parliamentary system, the legislature holds a special place. It is the parliament that makes government. It is also the parliament that breaks government; through, in this case, the vice versa is also possible. It is for this reason that the legislature is the locus of sovereign authority in parliamentary forms of government. In Ethiopia, too, the House of Peoples' Representative is entrusted with the highest political authority as per article 50 (3) of the Federal Constitution. In spite of this, a parliamentary system of government is known for the fusion of the executive and the legislative branches of government.

Potential adverse effects that may stem from its very nature are tamed by maintaining the constitutional division of power and a system of checks and balances. When both are adhered to in both principle and practice, the parliament stands out as the real sovereign from a political point of view. In a more pragmatic way, however, the parliament can be

taken as the embodiment of the will of the people when it involves the public in the undertaking of its core functions.

In the Ethiopian case, the constitution stipulates that members of parliament shall be guided by their conscience, the will of the people and the constitution in the undertaking of their duties. This implies that parliamentary activities shall always involve and be informed by public opinion. Likewise, the parliamentary rules of procedure and code of conduct provide that standing committees of the House of Peoples' Representatives are duty bound to involve stakeholders in the undertaking of the core parliamentary functions. Despite such promises, the attempts at involving the public in parliamentary activities are modest.

Engaging the public in the undertaking of parliamentary activities helps to ensure legitimacy, quality and trust. These essentials for any parliament can be realized when public engagement schemes are supported by an enabling political environment, institutional arrangements, physical and technological infrastructure, trained and skilful human resource and sufficient financial outlay.

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Respondents

> **Interview**

The Honorable Ato Abebe Godebo, Justice Sub-committee head with the legal, justice and
      democracy affairs standing committee, interviewed at his office on 16 September
2020

The Honorable Wzo.Abeba Yoseph, chairperson of the Women, Youth and Social affairs
      Standing Committee, interviewed at her office on 25 September 2020

Anteneh Hailemariam, Addis Zemen Gazeta Chief Program Manager, Interview on 28
August
      2020, Face-to face interview Ethiopian News Agency, News Production Room

Ato Belete Molla, *Aben* (Amhara National Party) leader, Interview on 27 August 2020,
      Telephone Interview

Cherinet Hundessa, Beressa (Afan Oromo) News Chief Producer, Interview on 25 August
2020,
      Face-to face interview Ethiopian News Agency, News production Room

The Honorable Wzo. Emeye Bitew, chairperson of the Human Resource and Technology
Affairs
      Standing Committee, interviewed on 16 September 2020

Daniel Amare, Fana Television news producer, Interview on16 August 2020, Face-to face
      interview, Fana News production room

Eyuel Seifu, Fana Television program Editor, Interview on16 August 2020, Face-to face
      interview, Fana News production room

The Honorable Wzo. Helen Bedilu, Speaker of the Southern Ethiopia Nations,
Nationalities and
      Peoples' Regional (SNPPR) state council, interviewed by phone on 20 august
2020.

Prof. Merera Gudina, Party Leader, telephone interview held on 10 September 2020

Misrak Mekonnen (Dr.), Secretary General, interviewed at her office on 25 September
2020

Dr. Nigusu Legesse, CCRDA, Chief Executive Director, Telephone interview 08
September
      2020

The Honorable Wzo. Shitaye Minale, Deputy Speaker, interviewed at her office on 16
September
      2020

Seid Muhie, EBC, News channel executive, telephone interview, 15 September 2020

Dr. Temesgen Burka, Prosperity Party, Telephone interview 07 September 2020

Worku Belachew, Ethiopian Herald Chief Producer, Interview on 25 August 2020, Face-to face interview Ethiopian News Agency, News production room

Yeshiwas Assefa, *Mederk* (Forum for Democracy) party leader, Telephone interview held on 4 September 2020

> ➢ **Written Responses**

Head of the office of the speaker of the Oromia   Regional State Council

Head of the women and youth affairs standing committee of the Oromia regional state council

Head of the social affairs standing council of the Oromia regional state council

Head of the Secretariat of the Amhara Regional State Council

Head of the Secretariat of Southern Ethiopia Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State Council

Office of the Speaker of the Amhara Regional State Council

Office of the Speaker of the Southern Ethiopian Nations, nationalities and Peoples Regional State Council

Promotion and Communications Directorate, House of Peoples Representatives Secretariat

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