

UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments

COMMUNICATION

by

Mrs Barbara N. DITHAPO
Clerk of the National Assembly of Botswana

on

“Participation of citizens in the work of parliament”

Manama Session
March 2023

STRENGTHENING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FOR AN INCLUSIVE PARLIAMENT TOWARDS IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY AND SERVICE DELIVERY – THE CASE OF THE PARLIAMENT OF BOTSWANA

INTRODUCTION

In fulfilling the functions of lawmaking and oversight, a parliament represents those that elected them to parliament. For a parliament to maintain legitimacy, it is critical that accountability to voters should take place systematically throughout the parliamentary term, rather than just at election time. It is important that the people should have ample opportunities to provide feedback on the work of the parliament and of individual parliamentarians. (*Parliament's Role in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: A Parliamentary Handbook, 2019*)

The notion therefore that Parliament can be thought of as a public space where the public can engage with their elected representatives and participate in governance and decision-making processes that affect them is fundamental to participatory democracy. According to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, participatory democracy needs to be entrenched in representative institutions. Concretely for Parliaments, that means creating spaces for citizens and civil society organizations to voice their opinions.

Public engagement strengthens parliamentary representation and contributes to better laws and policies. In addition, it helps to ensure the involvement of the public, good governance and accountability by government to the citizens. It promises the progression from a simple representative democracy, where the citizens merely participate in electing their representatives during the elections, to a participatory democracy in which the citizenry are active and involved in decision-making on an ongoing basis. An active citizenry will invariably lead to a more open, dynamic and robust democracy.

Access to parliament by the citizens is imperative in a democracy. This is particularly important in facilitating public participation which in large involves:

- Providing information to help people understand issues, opportunities or problems, and alternative solutions
- Obtaining public input on matters being considered by Parliament;
- Considering the public's input when making decisions... consulting with the public in the design or decision-making process, including to identify alternatives or preferred solutions

For effective representation, Members of Parliament need to engage their constituents in continuing dialogue in order to understand their views and perspectives on issues of national development and policy making. Consequently, MPs should then use the powers vested in their office (i.e. legislating, oversight, budget appropriation,) to give voice to those aspirations and ideas. Members also have the opportunity through parliamentary committees, to use the formal structure of parliament to engage constituents and provide them with direct access to the decision-making process within the institution.

PRICIPLES FOR PUBLIC PARTICPATION

- The public should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect its members' lives
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision
- Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision-making agencies
- Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision

- Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate
- Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way
- Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

According to the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) the public participation spectrum describes the role of the public (or community) in planning and decision-making, and how much influence the community has over planning or decision-making processes. It identifies five levels of public participation (or community engagement). The further to the right on the Spectrum, the more influence the community has over decisions, and each level can be appropriate depending on the context. (IAP2, 2017)

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

© IAP2 International Federation 2014. All rights reserved.

In order to achieve public participation and representation, Parliaments must be equipped with the institutional capacities to facilitate the function of representation. Benchmarks indicate that parliaments have developed outreach programmes with the objective to facilitate the flow of information in and out of parliament. Ultimately, it has become evident that Parliaments have at their disposal a number of avenues to strengthen their representation role and improve public participation, either by way of

physical presence in geographic regions through constituency offices or improved telecommunications and outreach activities. Developments in technology have also contributed to the way parliaments engage and involve citizens and Parliaments ought to take advantage of this growth, kore especially given the recent experiences with outbreak of pandemics.

Effective democratic parliaments conduct outreach with citizens on an ongoing basis. A parliament may broadcast its sessions via television or radio, most now have websites, and publications designed to help include citizens in the policy process. Because citizens cannot know how they are being represented if the parliament is opaque and MPs uncommunicative, transparency has an important bearing on the representative function.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN BOTSWANA PARLIAMENT

Public Participation Model

Botswana Parliament developed a public participation model in 2018 through the assistance of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). The assistance was provided in terms of a Memorandum of Understanding that was signed between WFD and the National Assembly of Botswana (NAB) to assist the NAB to build an effective and efficient Parliament that is participatory and engaged with the citizens of Botswana.

The public participation model is premised on the understanding that in a democratic setup parliament should act as an effective avenue for opening up parliamentary processes to public involvement. In developing this model, we have referenced and borrowed from the South African model, which we have engaged with and had the opportunity to discuss with our neighbouring colleagues.

Through this model, the National Assembly of Botswana acknowledges that public engagement strengthens parliamentary representation and contributes to better laws and policies. In addition, it helps to ensure the involvement of the public, good governance and accountability by government to the citizens.

Mission, Vision and Values

The Parliament of Botswana is a unicameral legislature composed of the National Assembly (NAB) with the function to make laws, represent the people and exercise oversight over the Executive. It also includes the Ntlo ya Dikgosi which is an advisory body to the NAB. The parliamentary service/administration provides support to Members of Parliament (MP) in order for them to fulfil their legislative, oversight and representative roles. This is done through the provision of procedural advice, administrative support and information services in a transparent and timeous manner.

The institutional mandate to implement public participation is derived from the mission and strategic plan of the NAB. The mission of the Parliament of Botswana articulates clearly that "Parliament exists to make Laws, provide oversight and *to promote participatory governance* for the Peace, Order and Good Government of Botswana". It is this mission statement that encapsulates the importance of participatory governance within the democratic dispensation of Botswana. The mission statement thus implies that Parliament is committed to the realisation of the notion of a participatory democracy.

Within its strategic framework (2016-2023), Parliament also commits promoting public engagement and participation to strengthen Parliament and enhance accountable governance in Botswana.

The public participation model for the NAB thus takes into account parliament's role as the representatives of the people and consequently making decisions on their behalf. Given that parliamentary representatives generally go back to their voters each general election, it therefor makes great sense for parliament to remain in touch with the people it represents on an ongoing basis so that it better reflects the interests and wishes of the electorate. The laws that it enacts and the oversight that it carries out will be more reflective of society if it were to engage with and involve the public throughout its term. Public participation therefore requires that there is direct involvement of the public in the work of parliament, and that there is open discussion between the public and their parliamentary representatives and decision-makers.

The purpose of this model is to provide a framework within which the NAB public participation practises can be planned and executed so as to ensure that the public is provided with opportunities to participate, that they are better informed and they are more involved, and ultimately that the work of Parliament better reflects the will of the people.

The Public Participation Model further seeks to promote the values of good governance and accountability. The model recognises the right of all people to participate in decision-making processes that impact them. It requires that Parliament recognises the intrinsic value of all people and their ability to enrich the work of Parliament.

The public participation model was therefore developed with the following objectives;

- To **increase public awareness** of Parliament's legislative, oversight and representative functions.
- To **increase the level of understanding** of Parliament and its functions
- To **increase the level of public participation** in the law making, oversight and other functions of Parliament.
- To clearly define public participation within the parliamentary context;
- To detail the roles and responsibilities for key political and administrative role-players for public participation in parliament;
- To identify and detail the mechanisms for public participation in parliament;
- To build partnerships with relevant stakeholders;
- To provide opportunities for public participation;

Public Participation Mechanisms and Tools

Parliament of Botswana has adopted several public participation mechanisms and tools to achieve its public participation objectives. These mechanisms constitute a dynamic list of programmes from which the appropriate mechanism is selected for a particular situation or to achieve a particular outcome. Two case studies will be presented below;

Case Study 1 - Monitoring Service Delivery

The Community Scorecard

The Community Score Card (CSC) is a participatory, community based monitoring and evaluation tool that enables citizens to assess the quality of public services and interact with services providers to express their concerns. It is a community based monitoring tool that is a hybrid of the techniques of social audit, community monitoring and citizen report cards. The CSC is an instrument used to extract social and public accountability and responsiveness from service providers. It is used to inform community members about available services and their entitlements and to solicit their opinions about the accessibility and quality of these services. By providing an opportunity for direct dialogue between service providers and the community, the CSC process empowers the public to voice their opinion and demand improved service delivery.

The ultimate goal of the CSC is to influence the quality, efficiency and accountability with which services are provided.

A scorecard approach provides;

1. Community members with the ability to provide feedback directly to the service providers
2. A vehicle for systematically sharing feedback in a transparent and structured manner that enables action and accountability
3. Service providers and administrators with a direct link to their community
4. An opportunity to collect information that can be used by service providers to improve health care services in an informed manner that directly responds to their constituency

Community Score Cards are a power lever for change as they provide a vehicle through which communities and service providers can partner to identify and enact positive improvements together. The strength of the CSC tool and process is that it emphasizes immediate response to the scores and joint decision making and action among all stakeholders. Service providers

receive immediate feedback in a space that allows for mutual dialogue between community members and providers around the indicators and scores. Similarly, improvement actions are identified together and both groups take responsibility for implementing and monitoring them. By working together, the scorecard seeks to create a collaborative and constructive dynamic between all stakeholders that result in action, accountability, and positive change.

A scorecard approach provides communities and service providers with data which they can use to measure impact over time and use to advocate for measures to improve service delivery from governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders.

The National Assembly of Botswana rolled out this initiative in 7 of the 12 Districts from June to July, 2022, through five Portfolio Committees of; Health, HIV & AIDS; Education and Skills Development; Finance, Trade and Economic Development; Agriculture, Lands and Housing; and Local Governance and Social Welfare.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective is for Parliament through identified oversight committees, to conduct a participatory monitoring and evaluation process that puts ownership and responsibility for delivery of services in the hands of both the Government and the service recipients. Through scorecards developed around identified sectors and services, communities and implementing Departments remain in touch with progress made throughout the programme delivery cycle and are able to respond timely to bottlenecks.

Parliament further seeks;

- To improve accountability as relating to the implementation of the Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan and delivery on the existing transformation policies in Botswana, in a bid to take Botswana to high income status by 2036.
- Improvement of service delivery
- Improvement of monitoring and evaluation

- Consensus building and public confidence on Government
- To promote participatory democracy

The rollout of the CSC was successfully implemented, with scorecards developed in various communities across the country for monitoring of service delivery. Monitoring Committees were also established from amongst participating communities, with the responsibility of tracking progress, re-evaluating timelines and escalating issues to the offices of the area Members of Parliament. The Offices of the area Members of Parliament are therefore a critical stakeholder within the entire process, being responsible for escalating matters for further resolution. The five Portfolio Committees involved, also prepared their reports on the findings relating to the various sectors for adoption and follow up by Parliament.

Case Study 2 - Leveraging ICTs

Botswana Speaks – Digital Kgotla

Botswana, has been lauded as a *shining beacon for Democracy* in Africa, through her adherence to the Rule of Law, peace and stability. Since independence in 1966, Botswana has held free and fair elections. The country's rich history, culture, and sound institutions have greatly influenced its successful milestones which have translated in to economic development.

Consultation or *Therisanyo* as it is widely understood has for centuries and beyond played a vital role in the everyday undertakings of every unit of society in Botswana. This extends from the family unit to the highest being the Nation. Consultation is a custom globally, done so as to ensure smooth facilitation of change, developments, multi-lateral and bilateral agreements to be put in to effect. Therefore, Botswana place great importance and respect on *Morero*, which is when consultations take effect.

The Kgotla remains the platform and place where communities converge for consultations as is the tradition of the land. This is the cornerstone of Botswana's democracy where the principles of freedom of speech, participation or *mmualebe* in Setswana have been enshrined from time immemorial. These tenets have permeated and influenced Botswana's

transition into a multi-party democracy, where consultations continue to form the basis for National Development planning, community and Nation building.

Seeking to improve on this tried and tested method of facilitating dialogue between citizens and leadership, it was found that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can be used to enhance citizen participation on policy dialogue and further strengthen democracy in Botswana, hence the birth of *Botswana Speaks*.

Botswana Speaks is a parliamentary initiative aimed at enhancing democracy through public participation and policy dialogue. It is about enhancing the representative role of the Member of Parliament and building a responsive Parliament and Government for improved service delivery.

Botswana Speaks was successfully piloted in the four constituencies of **Nata/Gweta, Maun West, Boteti North, and South East** from April 2013 to March 2014. The Botswana Speaks Project pilot phase was a partnership project between the Parliament of Botswana, eGovlab (University of Stockholm), Gov2u (Non-Governmental Organisation based in Sweden) and the Swedish Trade Council.

Following the successful piloting, the Pilot phase report was adopted by the 10th parliament and recommended for a rollout to all constituencies during NDP 11.

Botswana Speaks is therefore about Voice and leaving nobody behind while enhancing and bridging the gap between our traditional consultation systems (Kgotla meetings) leveraging on new technologies.

Botswana Speaks uses a platform (case management system), which is web-based (a mobile application will follow), will allow citizens to send messages directly via an online system using computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones. The messages are uploaded automatically into a tracker, and viewed regularly by the members of Parliament for response. It has two components built in;

uSpeak-for constituents to submit issues, opinions pertaining to their constituency. **uSpeak** will also enable constituents to be in touch with their MP's and or request information from them.

Speak4Yourself -enables constituents to discuss, vote on (polls), make their position known about issues and legislation before Parliament. This will empower constituents to have more of a say and role with regard to policy making and motions tabled by their respective MP's at Parliament.

The Need for Botswana Speaks

A key observation is that beyond voting there is currently *limited contact* between constituents and their representatives. This can be due to a host of reasons like the vastness of the country as well as limited time of MP's to be in their respective constituencies and being able to actively engage with their constituents. Botswana Speaks will revolutionise the way MPs, Parliament and Government interact with citizens.

What Botswana Speaks will do

- Increase citizen participation in the democratic process
- Improve communication between elected representatives and citizens
- Reduce digital divide between rural and urban communities
- Harness opportunities presented by the more than 100% mobile penetration in Botswana
- Increase uptake and use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT's) in Botswana.

The power to communicate with your MP 24/7, 365

The platform enables constituents to communicate with their MP's 24/7, 365 and effectively capture and relay their suggestions and opinions on issues relating to service delivery and policy making amongst others all at the click of a button on your computer or any smart or mobile device.

Botswana Speaks is FREE

Use of the Botswana Speaks platform is very simple and access is made easy whether you are at home or in the office. For citizens without access to internet, Botswana Speaks is accessible free of charge at the constituency offices where there are dedicated Botswana Speaks officers to assist the public whether it's with registration or using the platform.

SMS based platform

For those that do not have access to internet or do not have a smart device but have a GSM phone, Botswana Speaks is still accessible via sms platform. For one to access the platform there is firstly a need to register either online or with assistance by the local Parliament constituency office.

Botswana Speaks Constituency Officers

Each of the 57 Parliament constituency offices across Botswana has a dedicated Botswana Speaks officer based at each office. The officers are extensively trained on Parliament functions and on using the Botswana Speaks platform and are ready to address any queries should they arise and ensure that every Motswana has access to the platform irrespective of their age, gender, religion and or political affiliation.

The programme is also now integrated into other national ICT programmes most especially the village connectivity programme which seeks to connect all villages to broadband internet connection. Access to internet in public areas free of charge also enables connectivity to Botswana Speaks through the Smart Botswana initiative of availing Government services online. In that regard it is very evident that even at Executive level, public access and meaningful remains a priority as a catalyst for national development.

Make your voice heard!

Botswana Speaks strengthens citizens' voices and at the same time assists elected officials become more efficient and lead transparent institutions by:

- Offering citizens and civil society the opportunity to participate individually and collectively in a highly democratic process, keeping their security and privacy uncompromised.

- Bringing the optimum of new technologies and best practices to serve the society and keep everyone up to date with what is currently trending in this ever-changing field.

As Parliament of Botswana, we strive for the progression from a simple representative democracy, where the citizens don't just merely participate in electing their representatives during the elections, to a participatory democracy in which the citizenry are active and involved in decision-making on an ongoing basis.

An active citizenry will lead to a more open, dynamic and robust democracy as well as ensure that Parliament is perceived as a public space where the public can engage with their elected representatives and participate in governance and decision-making processes that affect them.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating public participation will therefore, allow parliament to not only learn about the implementation of programmes and using that knowledge to make decisions about them, but to set goals and design effective programmes, adapt them to changing circumstances, and improve them along the way. The Monitoring and evaluating of these initiatives under the public participation model will involve *inter alia* the following:

- Developing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation tool
- All public participation concept documents and project plans must be provided to the Public Participation Team/Committee prior to implementation;
- Regular update reports must be compiled and considered at meetings of the Public Participation Team/Committee;
- The Public Participation Team must meet regularly to receive reports and updates on the various public participation activities taking place. A set day once a week or fortnightly may be considered.
- Developing and implementing Reporting mechanism
- Tabling and publication of reports

- Implementing a feedback mechanism
- How feedback must be given. Written, public gathering, publication in print, radio, television, etc

Conclusions

At its core, what distinguishes a democratic parliament from other branches of government is that its members are elected by and directly represent the citizens of a country. Much literature has been developed on the law-making and oversight functions of a parliament and an MP, but the role of the MP in the constituency has gone virtually unnoticed.

Public participation should not be considered as an add-on to any of the parliamentary processes. It is imperative that public participation be integrated into the processes and systems of Parliament and across the various organisational components. For example, the mainstreaming of public participation across all Committees will ensure that the public will be involved in law-making and oversight functions of Parliament.

It is this dialogue that is so important to the work of an MP and the parliament. Citizens must be provided with access to information about what is happening in the parliament and the positions being taken by their MP. In return, citizens must have venues for providing their opinions and inputs into the work of the parliament. In a functioning democracy citizens have knowledge and opinions about various draft laws under consideration. They also have access to information about how the government is implementing laws and spending their tax monies. This information must be used to ensure proper oversight of the Executive branch of government.

REFERENCES

- i. *Parliament's Role in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: A Parliamentary Handbook*: retrieved from-
<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/parliaments%20role%20in%20implementing%20the%20SDGs.pdf>
- ii. International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). www.iap2.org
- iii. Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: a guide to good practice.
<http://archive.ipu.org/dem-e/guide/guide-4.htm>
- iv. ParlAmericas. Citizen participation and the legislative process. <http://parlAmericas.org>
- v. AGORA. Parliament outreach. <https://agora-parl.org>
- vi. Botswana Parliament Public Participation Model, 2018
- vii. Constitution of the Republic of Botswana
- viii. Standing Orders of the National Of Botswana, 2017