

Working with parliamentarians to increase demand for evaluation

Key messages:

- **Parliaments around the world have the power to create real change for people by strengthening the demand for evaluation.**
- **Several CSOs, VOPEs and other stakeholders pro-actively engage with parliamentarians. However this engagement must be a long-term process that is built into evaluation advocacy strategies.**
- **Engaging with parliamentarians requires a thorough understanding of the political and policy-making environment, ways in which the parliament functions and the level to which parliamentarians currently use evaluation and evaluative thinking in decision-making.**
- **Depending on your context, identify strategic entry points for engaging with parliamentarians, such as through parliamentary leadership, parliamentary committees, individual parliamentarians, and parliamentary caucuses. Look out for pending bills related to evaluation that can be used as an entry point to start a discussion.**
- **A promising movement is the Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation in South Asia that is supporting parliamentarians to take the lead to advocate for national evaluation policies in South Asia. Other initiatives include a project on 'Engaging Parliamentarians for an Innovative Evaluation Culture', which won EvalPartners Innovation Challenge in 2013.**

Engaging parliamentarians to build a culture of evaluation¹

Parliaments can allocate resources for evaluation from national budgets, establish strong national evaluation policy directions, and debate, shape and enforce evaluation-focused laws and policies that protect people. They can ask tough questions, demand answers and hold governments, industries and civil society accountable. It is for these reasons that an increasing number of CSOs, VOPEs and other stakeholders strongly engage with parliamentarians.

¹ The contents of this chapter are adapted from UNICEF. (2009). *Guide to working with Parliamentarians*

Ten Reasons for Parliamentarians to Engage in National Evaluation Policy Process²

1. Parliamentarians have vested interest in the country in giving vision and leadership and to gear the country in the right direction. The vision and right direction should be informed by evidence.
2. Parliamentarians are the first pillars to approve/ allocate resources for development initiatives in the country, through parliamentary procedures. Therefore parliamentarians should be well informed with up-to-date information about effective initiatives and development programmes through evaluation so that resources are wisely invested in the country.
3. Parliamentarians have the opportunity and authority to supervise and question progress of any development initiative/ use of public funds in the country. Therefore relevant data and information are useful to properly monitor the progress through the Parliament.
4. Parliamentarians are the key in making legislation and policy in the country. It is important that policy and legislation is evidence-based so that they are useful for and contribute to make a difference in the country.
5. Parliamentarians represent Citizens' interest and therefore should respond to Citizens' demands. Parliamentarians need correct and updated information so that the public is informed about the correct picture.
6. Parliamentarians are members of different parliamentary committees, which review effective use of funds by public institutions. To engage effectively in such committees and raise the right questions in them, parliamentarians need information about the efficiency and effectiveness of public funds.
7. Parliamentarians do safeguard equity and human rights. Equity and human rights measures can be well maintained with the right information and evidence, which comes through evaluation.
8. Parliamentarians support the executive who in turn rely on the Parliament to pass laws and allocate resources. Therefore parliamentarians are key to influencing the executive regarding the National Evaluation Policy.
9. Each country has Millennium Development Goals' targets, which need to be evaluated, and needs to set new targets for Sustainable Development Goals, which need a new set of indicators. Therefore it is important to have a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for the country, which should be in line with the National Evaluation Policy.
10. Parliamentarians have a limited term and they need to seek re-election to continue their service to the people. It comes handy for the parliamentarians to go back to people for re-election with some concrete results/ achievements from their current term. Therefore parliamentarians need evidence to show results of their achievements.

Effective parliamentary engagement is a long-term process that needs to be integrated into CSO, VOPE and stakeholders strategies to strengthen the enabling environment for evaluation. To work effectively with parliaments, advocates must understand the political context of their respective countries, the working methods of parliament, the level of parliamentary familiarity with evaluation and how it can be put to use in policy-making.

Parliamentary and political structures: CSOs and VOPEs should understand their specific parliamentary process and the larger political context within which the parliamentary processes and structures function. Become familiar with parliamentary calendars and turnover among parliamentarians. Work plans must take into account the timing and impact of elections,

KEEP IN MIND

To maintain continuity despite regular turnover of elected officials, it is essential to also support key parliamentary staff (such as clerks, administrators and committee secretaries), who tend to have greater permanence and institutional memory.

² Developed by Asela Kalugampitiya, EvalPartners Secretariat for EvalYear; Coordinator, Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation. Resource material published by the Parliamentarians Forum on Development Evaluation in partnership with EvalPartners to commemorate International Year of Evaluation 2015.

post-election learning curves, legislative floor periods, legislative recesses and changes of political leadership. *(You can get this information as part of your policy analysis. See Question 2: Who can give it to us? for more details)*

Remember to look into parliament's relationship with the executive branch. In many countries, the separation between parliament and the executive is not well defined; in others, it is so great that parliament is barely involved in policy debates and has little power to monitor government actions.

Identifying Strategic Entry Points

Potential entry points for increasing engagement with parliament and its members include the following:

- **Parliamentary leadership:** The leadership of parliament, such as the Speaker of the House, is generally responsible for managing the affairs of parliament, determining its agenda and assigning the matters before parliament to the relevant committees. It is therefore useful to establish a channel of communication with the leadership to obtain institutional backing for evaluation related issues.
- **Parliamentary committees:** Most parliamentary work is done in committees, which may be standing or ad hoc committees. Stakeholders should identify the relevant parliamentary committees and their leadership and establish cooperation with them.
- **Individual parliamentarians:** Identify and support individual champions within parliament and urge them to advocate for use of evaluation and evidence in policy-making. You could also encourage the creation of a network of parliamentarians that support the use of evaluation and provide them with relevant information. It is important to ensure a non-partisan approach when targeting individual parliamentarians and, where possible, engage a representative number of parliamentarians from all political parties. This will avoid the identification of CSOs, VOPEs and stakeholders with a particular political faction.
- **Parliamentary caucuses:** In many parliaments, caucuses devoted to the promotion of human rights are generally playing an increasing role. As informal groupings, caucus memberships tend to be open to all parliamentarians and constitute an important entry point for interaction with parliaments on promoting a culture of evaluation.
- **New Members of Parliament:** New parliamentarians may be particularly open and receptive to becoming involved in development issues as they are often looking for an area of work where they can make a personal contribution.
- **Parliamentary library, research and documentation services:** Parliaments generally have services to provide information that parliamentarians require in their work as legislators. These services prepare notes and background papers and obtain other resource materials pertinent to legislation or issues on the parliamentary agenda, allowing parliamentarians to make informed decisions. It is useful to be in contact with the staff who service these facilities and to make available to them relevant evidence from evaluation on issues and legislation.
- **Pending bills that resonate with stakeholders' concerns:** In many countries, bills fester for years without passage. CSOs, VOPEs and stakeholders can survey the legislative landscape, identify bills already proposed, and use evidence from evaluation as an entry point to push for their adoption by parliament.

Tips to meaningfully engage with parliamentarians:

- Provide parliamentarians with relevant documentation and data in user-friendly formats. It is essential to translate CSOs and VOPEs expertise and evidence-based knowledge into messages that resonate with parliamentarians and constituents.
- Obtain constituency-level disaggregated data from evaluations. Provide support to national institutes that collect data.
- Work with all political parties and parliamentary candidates to integrate the use of evaluation into their political and electoral platforms.
- Provide parliamentarians access to individual evaluation experts. CSOs, VOPEs and other stakeholders can make highly qualified national or international technical experts available to parliament.
- Make parliaments aware of the many benefits of partnering with CSOs and VOPEs.