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PAPER PRESENTATION ON THE TOPIC: THE ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES (KSAs) HELD BY NEW OR CONTINUING PARLIAMENTARIANS AND THE DETERMINATION OF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS - THE ZAMBIAN CASE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The legislative power of the Republic of Zambia is vested in Parliament which comprises the President and the National Assembly.¹ In addition, Article 63 (Constitution of the Republic of Zambia, 1996) states that ‘the National Assembly shall consist of one hundred and fifty elected members; not more than eight nominated members; and the Speaker of the National Assembly’. The privilege to nominate persons to Parliament is a preserve of the Republican President. Those elected to Parliament must meet the criteria set out in Article 65 of the Constitution of the Republic of Zambia. In terms of qualifications required on the part of a Member of Parliament, the Article stipulates that he or she must be ‘literate and conversant with the official language of Zambia’. This means that a potential candidate must be able to read, write and speak English, the official language.

Gaining entry or membership into Parliament is one thing, being effective in the duties of a parliamentarian is another matter. Being an effective Member of Parliament (MP) goes beyond merely knowing how to read and write the official language. A parliamentarian needs to be schooled in parliamentary

¹ Article 62 as amended by Act No.18 of 1996, Part V, Constitution of the Republic of Zambia.

practice and procedure. Following familiarisation with these tools comes the challenge of grappling with the sometimes complex and various policy matters discussed on the floor of the House and in parliamentary committees. How can a parliamentarian gain insight into the workings of parliament and rise above the inadequacy of comprehending the variety of issues tabled before the August House? The answer lies in providing parliamentarians with necessary training and professional development.

This paper focuses on the assessment of the levels of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) held by new or continuing parliamentarians and the determination of training and professional needs in the Zambian Parliament.

THE NEED FOR PARLIAMENTARY TRAINING

There are very few places which offer parliamentary studies for parliamentarians. There is no one standard curriculum for teaching parliamentarians. In some cases, the qualifications of an MP are either not clearly stated in the country's constitution or are outlined vaguely. In Zambia, anyone can become an MP as long as they are literate and meet the age criteria. There are no specific guidelines as to what level of schooling they should have attained to qualify them as literate. Because of this background (the lack of parliamentary training and different education levels), the majority of MPs when elected to Parliament are ignorant of the parliamentary practice and procedure. Consequently, the Zambian Parliament must seek ways of determining how it will arrive at deciding the training and professional needs of its MPs so that they can acquire skills in parliamentary practice and procedure.

CONTEXT

This study shows how the National Assembly of Zambia assesses the knowledge, skills and abilities of its Members of Parliament by examining their levels of education, qualifications and previous exposure to the operations of parliament. In addition, the professional backgrounds of the MPs provided information as to the skills they possessed. Furthermore, the

number of new parliamentarians versus continuing parliamentarians assisted in determining the level of availability of knowledge, skills and abilities in Parliament.

The paper intends to show how this information proved useful in determining the training and professional needs of Zambian Parliamentarians. However, an interesting question arises. Why should we be concerned with the knowledge, skills and abilities of the Members of Parliament? Isn't the mere fact that they are 'chosen' by the people enough to satisfy the procedure of Parliament and allow them to 'get on with their business' as it were, by doing their job? Well, the answer lies in the fact that what a Member of Parliament says, how they say it and when they say it will determine whether their contributions in the House will have a positive impact or not on the lives of the people they represent. It is that simple. It is also that serious. What are needed are parliamentarians who will bring about effective oversight of the Executive. Note that the emphasis is on effective oversight and not just oversight for the sake of 'appearances'. This kind of oversight is something that both the people and their representatives expect and aspire to.

Enhancing the knowledge and developing the skills and abilities of its parliamentarians is very important to the National Assembly of Zambia. This is especially so since the institution has undergone tremendous transformation since the re-introduction of multi-party politics in the country. It is in the context of the parliamentary reforms that this paper presents its analysis and findings. The paper also pays particular attention to a distinct component of the Parliamentary Reforms Programme, which is capacity building.

PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS IN THE ZAMBIAN PARLIAMENT

The parliamentary reforms in the Zambian Parliament began in earnest towards the end of 2002.

The reforms are directed at enhancing parliamentary oversight on the activities of the Executive and increasing participation of the citizens in the affairs of the country. The reforms also aim to bring about accountability, transparency, good governance and an improved legislative role of Parliament in the government system.²

A lot of successes were scored during the implementation phase of the Parliamentary Reforms Programme (PRP), referred to as PRP II, which took place from 2003 to 2007. Included among these were the several amendments to the Standing Orders aimed at improving the legislative, oversight and budget processes in Parliament. Several workshops were held for oversight committees in order to expose MPs to best practices so as to enhance their capacity to execute their oversight role. Towards the end of the life span of PRP II, the Parliamentary Reforms and Modernisation Committee (PRMC), the committee mandated to oversee the reforms, agreed that the next phase, PRP III, should have a distinct component on capacity building to run from 2008 to 2011.

THE CAPACITY BUILDING DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The implementation of this project began in 2008 and is expected to end in 2011. The Capacity Building Project will assist parliamentarians to be more effective in their oversight role by honing their knowledge, skills and abilities according to the operations of parliament.

The Capacity Building Project has many facets, namely: building the institutional; human; and operational capacities of Members of Parliament and the staff of the National Assembly of Zambia. It also has its own objectives and deliverables. However, for purposes of this study, only information on the human capacity facet was tapped into.

² Capacity Development Project for a 'Real' Parliament Component of Parliamentary Reform Programme III, 2008 -2011 (2008) National Assembly. 1.

It is worth noting that this study considered capacity building falling under the jurisdiction of the overall Parliamentary Reforms Programme which includes the distinct component of the Capacity Building Project aimed at aiding parliamentarians adapt to the reformed parliamentary system as overseers of the activities of the Executive.

ASSESSING THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES

The study formulated three objectives to allow for a detailed analysis of the knowledge, skills and abilities of MPs in the Zambian Parliament.

1. To assess the knowledge, skills and abilities of parliamentarians by examining their levels of education, previous exposure to the operations of parliament and number of years in parliament.
2. To analyse the various training in form of workshops, seminars, exchange visits and other similar opportunities that parliamentarians have been exposed to in the current parliament (from 2006 to date).
3. To determine the effectiveness of the training by scrutinising whether training undertaken resulted in the increased use of parliamentary oversight tools such as questions, motions, private members bills and other similar tools.

Target Group

The target group was the 150 elected Members of Parliament in the Zambian Parliament during the period 2006 to date. The end of 2006 was the year when the new Parliament was elected. However, it should be noted that the starting year for analysis was 2007 as that was the year when the work of the new Parliament began in earnest.

The results of the analysis revealed the basis upon which the Zambian Parliament designs its professional development of MPs.

The Knowledge, Skills and Abilities of Parliamentarians

Under this objective, the study examined the levels of education, previous exposure to the operations of Parliament and the number of years in Parliament of MPs.

It was discovered that out of the 150 elected MPs, 47 had spent more than one term in Parliament. Of these 47, two were presiding officers (the Deputy Speaker and the Chairperson of Committees of the Whole House). The remaining 45 included 37 who had served for two terms, 4 for three terms, 3 for four terms and only 01 for five terms. Politically, out of the 45, a total of 26 were from the opposition and 19 from the ruling party. Since the ones who utilise oversight tools are the backbenchers, it is worth mentioning that from the 19 members of the ruling party who had served more than one term, only three were backbenchers.

The 47 elected MPs who had spent more than one term in Parliament translates into 31% of parliamentarians who had previous exposure to the operations of Parliament. It can therefore be stated that only these MPs had the necessary skills and knowledge in parliamentary practice and procedure arising from their previous service as parliamentarians.

Table 1: Levels of education of elected Members of Parliament

LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE	NUMBER OF MPs	PERCENTAGE (%)
Certificate	37	25
Diploma	45	30
First Degree	41	27
Masters Degree	20	13
PhD	07	05
TOTAL	150	100

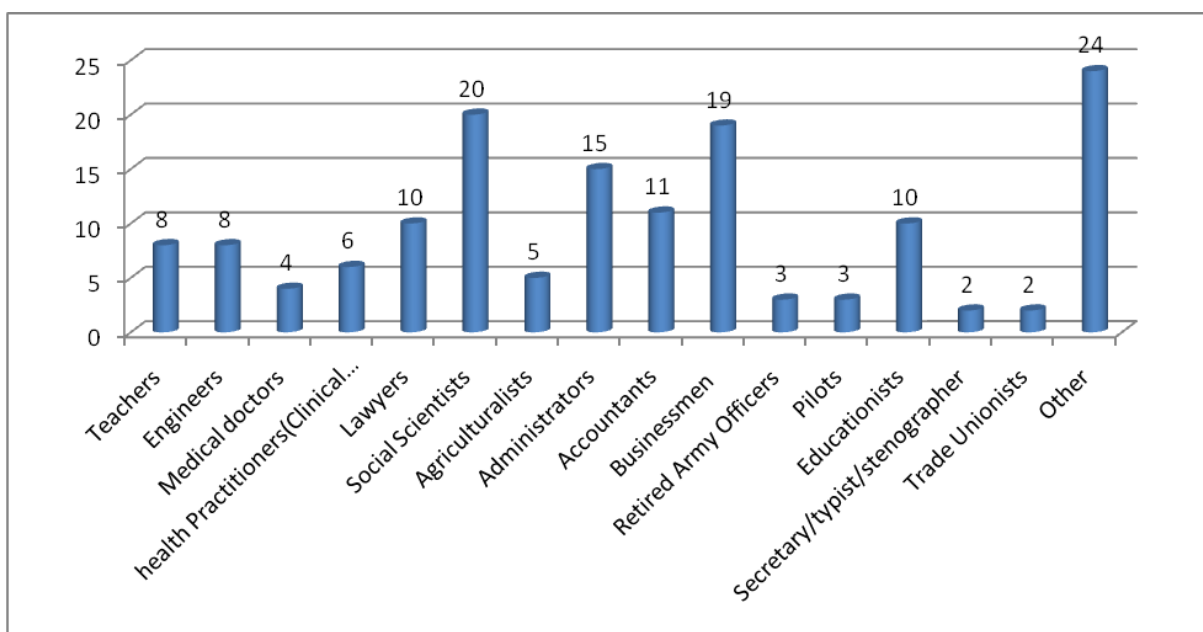
Source of data: Public Parliamentary Handbook of the Tenth National Assembly of Zambia.

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of MPs (30 %) had a Diploma, followed by those with a first Degree (27 %). All the MPs had met the eligibility criteria stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Zambia which says that in order for a person to qualify as an MP, he or she must be literate. The fact

that all the parliamentarians in the Zambian Parliament had attained a certain level of education and were literate indicated that they had the ability to comprehend parliamentary practice and procedure. It also showed that they had the ability to understand different policy matters brought to the House by the Executive wing of Government, albeit at different levels owing to the differences in levels of education and areas of specialisation.

The professions of the MPs reinforced the fact that they had the ability to assimilate information presented to them in form of training as indicated by the information below (National Assembly of Zambia, 2009).

Figure1: Profession of MP



Source of data: Public Parliamentary Handbook of the Tenth National Assembly of Zambia.

Workshops, Seminars, Exchange Visits and Other Similar Opportunities that Parliamentarians had been exposed to in the Current Parliament

Despite the challenge in accessing information due to the manner in which some of the data is stored, as well as the fact that a new system of storing

records and information in the library is under way, effort has been made to itemise activities under this objective year by year. It should be noted, though, that it was difficult to find information on exchange or study visits to other parliaments and countries as that information was still being organised for storage. However, generally speaking, MPs undertook exchange and study visits to Ghana, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, Botswana, and the United Kingdom.

2006

After the General Elections in October, 2006, an orientation workshop was held for the new parliamentarians in the Chamber of Parliament to train and orient them in the operations of Parliament. It was also during this workshop that Members were introduced to the revised Standing Orders (2005), the Members Handbook and the etiquette of Parliament, among others. During the presentation on the National of Zambia Standing Orders (2005), it was emphasised that owing to the Parliamentary Reforms Programme, the revised Standing Orders made a provision for the presentation of Private Members' Bills, an undertaking which had not been possible previously due to the fact that the costs were borne by the MP. It was highlighted that in the new system, the burden of cost for Private Members' Bills would fall on the National Assembly of Zambia.

2007

Following the orientation of the new Parliament towards the end of 2006, the year 2007 saw several local workshops held for oversight committees with a view to exposing them to best practices. This enhanced the capacity of the committees to execute their oversight role. Training was carried out on topics such as anti-corruption, the budget process, the tendering process, media relations and computer appreciation involving the use of software packages like Microsoft office, internet and email. The Ministry of Local Government and Housing also organised a workshop on the National Decentralisation Policy for all MPs. Some parliamentarians were also exposed

to workshops, meetings and conferences outside the country. These were based on various themes such as: human trafficking and legislative responses; the role of parliamentarians in building strong democratic institutions for promoting development in the 21st century; climate change and the environment; gender issues; democracy for development; and investing in science, technology and innovations. In addition, some MPs attended meetings of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific and European Union (ACP-EU) meetings and were thus exposed to issues of trade in various sectors.

The parliamentarians proactively sought information by submitting information requests on matters which included the Zambian Government's position on issues of global water and energy use towards sustainable development, protocols dealing with women and children's rights, request on the budgetary allocation towards irrigation by Government since 1991 to 2007, and request on re-entry policy on girls' education.³

2008

The preparations for the implementation of the much anticipated Capacity Building Component of PRP III began in 2008. Activities scheduled to take place included the training of MPs and staff on effective management and organisation of constituency offices, and updating the Constituency Office Guide Book.

It should be noted that due to the death of the third Republican President, Dr Levy Patrick Mwanawasa, State Counsel, 2008 proved to be a rather short period for implementing the capacity building programme as Parliament had to adjourn prematurely for a while to accommodate the election of a new Republican President.

³ Research Department Annual Report (2007) National Assembly of Zambia. 6-16.

During 2008, parliamentarians had the opportunity to attend workshops and meetings outside the country. This exposed them to various issues among which included: parliament and accountability; parliamentary oversight of state policies on foreign aid; reviewing laws that discriminate against women; ensuring support for persons with disabilities; combating corruption; and parliament and civil society.

Information requests by Members covered topics such as: trafficking in women; utilisation of funds in Government ministries, provinces and other spending agencies from November, 2007 to January, 2008; women and the budget process, to name but a few.⁴

2009

Training workshops in 2009 begun with a local workshop in budget process for all MPs. The training introduced Members to the budget analysis guidelines that had been produced to assist them analyse the budget and contribute effectively to the process of approving the budget.

Other local workshops and meetings held during the year included those on: the Citizens Economic Empowerment Fund by Citizens Economic Empowerment Commission; the effective management of parliamentary committees for chairpersons of committees; the operations of constituency offices and the role of professional staff in order to make the offices operate effectively. There were also workshops on the role of the Competition Law in national development, climate change, Private Members' Bills; and anti-corruption.

Issues discussed in conferences and meetings outside the country included: the role of Parliament in sustainable and domestic electoral systems in Africa; the challenge of meeting information needs of the MPs in Africa;

⁴ Research Department Annual Report (2008) National Assembly of Zambia. 5-10.

gender and renewable energies; trade liberalisation; the role of Commonwealth Parliaments in combating terrorism; and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), among others.

Information requests submitted by MPs covered topics such as the Millennium Development Goals, poverty reduction and the budget process, Zambia's adopted policy responses to climate change, wind energy and whether Zambia has carried out a national wind survey.

The institution also published 6 parliamentary procedure abstract series on various topics to equip MPs with knowledge on the practice and procedure in the Zambian Parliament. ⁵

To provide MPs with more information, the Library purchased 483 new titles on a variety of subjects including democracy, globalisation and gender matters.⁶

2010

In 2010, MPs were capacitated in the following issues which were discussed during local workshops, seminars and meetings: elections, media and democracy; operations and new developments at the Bank of Zambia; Millennium Development Goal on education relating to gender equality; fight against the illegal exploitation of natural resources; budget oversight; climate change; public procurement of goods and services; parliamentary code of conduct; Standing Orders; and the 2010 census of population and housing.

Workshops attended outside the country touched on topics which included Information, Technology and Communication (ICT); climate change; the committee system; HIV/AIDS; water-preserving our oceans; energy and

⁵ Research Department Annual Report (2009) National Assembly of Zambia. 6-16.

⁶ Parliamentary Reform Programme Phase Three Capacity Building Component, Annual Report (2009) National Assembly of Zambia. 5.

environment; parliamentarians and natural disaster management; parliamentary reforms; child poverty and vulnerability in Africa, among many others.

Another notable achievement was the stocking of the National Assembly Library with 500 new and high quality books worth US\$32,000 published in the United Kingdom and United States of America on global contemporary and topical issues. Like all aspects of the parliamentary reform programme, this acquisition was made possible with the aid of cooperating partners.⁷

2011

The early part of 2011 opened with a consultative workshop between MPs and civil society organisations aimed at enhancing parliamentary oversight through partnership. Other in-country workshops tackled issues such as trade within the Commonwealth; accountability and transparency; and budget process.

Like in the preceding years, MPs had an opportunity to attend meetings and conferences outside the country which discussed topics on migration, women and the land issue, terrorism, food security, democracy, Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), to name but a few.

Not much happened in 2011 in terms of capacity building as this was the last session of the tenth Parliament.

The Effectiveness of the Training by Scrutinising Whether Training Undertaken Resulted in the Increased use of Parliamentary Oversight Tools such as Questions, Motions, Private Members Bills and Other Similar Tools

⁷ Research, Public and International Relations Department, Annual Report (2009) National Assembly of Zambia. 5-12.

Scanning through the questions for oral and written answers, it became evident that MPs usually asked questions on infrastructure (roads, bridges, hospitals), procurement, HIV/AIDS, education, water and sanitation, health, mining, the environment and trade.

The National Assembly of Zambia Votes and Proceedings for the years 2007 to 2011 revealed details regarding how the parliamentarians had fared in terms of the use of parliamentary tools such as questions, private members motions and private members bills.

Table 2: Utilisation of Parliamentary Tools by Members of Parliament

PARLIAMENTARY TOOL	YEAR				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Questions (oral & written)	1125	556	570	705	642
Private Members Motion	5	2	2	3	1
Private Members Bill	3	0	0	0	0
Information Requests	16	10	13	8	-

Source of data: Parliamentary Order Papers, National Assembly of Zambia.

DETERMINING THE TRAINING NEEDS

In determining the training needs of MPs, the Zambian Parliament took the following into consideration:

- i. That only 31% of MPs had the knowledge and skills in terms of parliamentary practice and procedure.

The Administration of Parliament therefore carried out an orientation seminar and trained the new parliamentarians in parliamentary practice and procedure. However, continuing parliamentarians were also included in the training so that they too could be reminded on the workings of Parliament. This was in line with the old adage 'repetition is the mother of retention';

- ii. Due to the implementation of the parliamentary reforms, the practice and procedure in the Zambian Parliament keeps evolving. This helped the Zambian Parliament determine that both new and continuing parliamentarians needed to attend the orientation seminar. Consequently, both groups of MPs attended the orientation;
- ii. That all MPs had a certain level of education and therefore the ability to understand issues of social and economic governance if exposed to training. Therefore, the institution realised the need for training of parliamentarians on various matters which might be contained in the policy documents of the Executive and on topical issues which might affect the country. Thus during the life of the recently dissolved Parliament (18th July 2011), workshops, seminars, conferences and meetings targeted at building the capacity of Members of Parliament were arranged throughout the whole five year period.
- iii. the realisation on the part of the Zambian Parliament regarding the mandate of MPs in Parliament and in the constituencies also determined that MPs should be exposed to capacity building. It was expected that well informed MPs would be able to explain government policies and the effect of those policies on their constituents once they themselves had understood them, hence the need to equip the MPs with such knowledge.

Having outlined how the Zambian Parliament determines its training and professional development needs, it is imperative to examine what impact capacity building had on parliamentarians by means of a comparative approach based on the years 2007 to 2011.

It can be noted that the year when capacity building yielded maximum impact was 2007. Consider the following: As outlined above, this was the only year which had around a thousand questions asked by the MPs and the only year when a backbencher presented Private Members Bills. To crown it all, it was also the year with the highest number of information requests. Could this be attributed to the training the MPs underwent during that year? Most likely. However, other reasons cannot be ruled out completely. For example, it could be argued that the output in Parliament as indicated by the figures in 2007, was due to the enthusiasm on the part of the new MPs. They just could not wait to get into Parliament to try out the new tools and exercise their oversight role on the Executive. This might be true to a certain extent. However, this eagerness found fertile ground on the tools and knowledge learnt during the orientation seminar. Without the knowledge acquired during the orientation seminar and other workshops, enthusiasm could have remained just that, enthusiasm, without yielding any tangible results or outputs.

The effect of capacity building is also evidenced in the sense that the three Private Members' Bills hinging on corruption were presented to Parliament by an MP who had attended a conference and a workshop on anti-corruption. Inspired by what transpired in other countries as related in those meetings, as well as what is outlined in the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, the MP took advantage of the new provision in the revised Standing Orders (2005) as explained during the orientation seminar that MPs could bring Private Members' Bills to Parliament. Although the Bills did not go beyond second reading, this action marked a milestone in the life of the new Parliament, that if they so wished and were determined, MPs could bring Private Members Bills to Parliament.

The impact of training was also evidenced in the motions presented by Members to the House. For example, drawing on the benefits of the training in budget analysis, a Member picked out an issue on disbursement of Government funds to the road sector and presented a motion urging the Government to review its policy on funding roads so as to allocate the funds available in each financial year to roads planned for completion in that particular year.

Another example is a question asked by a Member who regularly attended meetings of the ACP-EU. Based on the reservoir of knowledge acquired from these meetings, the MP challenged the Government to explain Zambia's stand on the assertion that a new EU trade deal would ensure that ACP countries were able to regulate trade aimed at national and regional development.

On the response to the ICT workshop carried out between 2007 and 2008, the ICT department observed that upon acquiring basic computers, 20 out of the 80 MPs who did not have computers requested the ICT department to purchase laptops for them for personal use. Moreover, the MPs requested the department to install computers at the Parliament Motel so that they could access the computers, and in particular the internet whilst at the Motel and not just at main Parliament buildings.

The commencement of the Capacity Building Component in 2008 showed a low start on the number of parliamentary questions and the other parliamentary tools such as motions and information requests. It also revealed a wide gap in the use of these tools between 2007 and 2008. Perhaps, the enthusiasm of the MPs had now waned after a fantastic start preceded by orientation. In any case, the demise of the third Republican President contributed to the low output in 2008 as mentioned earlier.

The following year, 2009, revealed a slight improvement in the number of questions asked; a difference of 14 questions between 2008 and 2009. In reference to the utilisation of knowledge acquired in workshops, seminars,

and meetings, it could be deduced that when a Member used a tool, namely, a point of order, regarding the tender procedure followed in the privatisation of a state owned company, he was drawing, among others, on information acquired during a workshop on procurement or that on competition law. Another example is a ministerial statement which arose out of a point of order regarding the transfer of funds from the Lusaka City Intercity Account to the Zambia Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Account. The MP who raised this point of order could have been a beneficiary of training in budget analysis.

One of the Members processed information he had requested for on wind energy to formulate a motion urging the Government to conduct a national wind survey and produce a national wind map to promote and facilitate investment in the production of energy by wind.

The training of 120 MPs in constituency office management resulted in an increase in the number of people visiting constituency offices. There was a 22 % increase from 2008 to 2009 in rural constituencies and a 44 % increase in urban areas during the same period. This was because MPs had now learnt how to plan their programme with their staff in the constituency offices so as to attract more people to come to the offices even when they were not there. The MPs had also started taking materials on the Zambian Parliament and committee reports to their constituencies for people to read them. Further, the Constituency Office Guidebook has continued to provide guidance to MPs and staff in constituency offices making it possible for both of them to adhere to the guidelines and hence work harmoniously.

The number of those who made reference queries in the Library was impressive from 384 in 2008 to 600 in 2009. Reference queries are requests for information from MPs on specific subjects which are usually submitted during debates on the subject in question. The other seemingly positive impact was the utilisation of the Library by the Members after the restocking of the Library. The number of Members who borrowed books increased slightly from 36 in 2008 to 39 in 2009.

In 2010, the number of questions increased by 135. However, in 2011 the number reduced by 63. This could have been due to the fact that 2011 was an election year and the focus of MPs was on political campaigns and therefore, they couldn't wait to finish parliamentary business so that they could attend to their re-election campaigns.

Another noteworthy tool to build the capacity of parliamentarians has been the publication of parliamentary abstracts on parliamentary procedure. A total of 12 different abstracts were printed between 2007 and 2011. Parliamentarians especially found the abstracts useful when preparing for their radio (including Parliament Radio) and television appearances. They also used the abstracts when they carried out visits to schools and community groups in their constituencies.

Since the Capacity Building Component of PRP III begun to be implemented in 2008, the knowledge, skills and abilities of MPs were to a certain extent enhanced and led to the utilisation of parliamentary tools. This was evidenced in the steady increase in the number of questions asked in Parliament: a total of 556 in 2008; 570 in 2009; and notably 705, in 2010. A decrease to 642 in 2011 is still above that of 2008 and 2009, respectively. However, there is still need to improve the use of other parliamentary tools. For example, there have been very slight changes in the number of motions presented in the House and inconsistency in the number of information requests. The amount of effort invested in building the capacity of MPs should be matched by the output measured by how frequently the Members utilise parliamentary tools. It would have been better if the momentum created in 2007 in using parliamentary tools could have been sustained throughout the five years. The year 2007 was truly exceptional and showed the potential that training and professional development could reap if adhered to.

CONCLUSION

The outcomes presented in this article are revealing. They point to the fact that the Zambian Parliament determines the training and professional development needs of its Members based on the education, knowledge and skills of the MPs as well as taking into consideration the operations of Parliament and the reforms programme. The findings also sound the call for the need to continuously monitor the use of parliamentary tools by Members of Parliament vis a vis the training they undergo.

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