

A guide to parliamentary practice

A handbook



Inter-Parliamentary Union



**United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization**



Foreword

UNESCO and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) are pleased to present this publication, which results from the fast developing co-operation between the two organizations in accordance with the Agreement signed for this purpose in 1997. The agreement has been followed up by regular dialogue between UNESCO and IPU to advance cooperation on common priorities. This exchange includes attendance at the meetings of the governing bodies of each organisation.

This Handbook constitutes a practical guide on parliaments and their methods of work. It is intended for use by the UNESCO Secretariat, including its Field Network of 57 field offices, and by the network of 190 National Commissions for UNESCO which act as the relay of the organisation's activities in Member States and Associate members.

In engaging parliaments and parliamentarians, UNESCO aims to promote dialogue and interaction with the world's decision makers. They have a stake in the current programme priorities of the organisation because of their relevance for the development of democratic and robust societies: education for all, water, the ethics of science and technology, cultural diversity and access to information for all.

In recent years, the IPU has developed innovative ways to ensure that parliamentarians are better informed so that their decisions result from a comprehensive analysis of trends and facts. For this reason, co-operation with the United Nations and its agencies such as UNESCO has become indispensable for understanding global issues and their resolution in country contexts. Milestones in UNESCO/IPU co-operation include the First Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Education, Science, Culture and Communication on the Eve of the 21st century (Paris, 3-6 June 1996) and a special Round Table on Parliamentary Dialogue during the 31st session on UNESCO's General Conference (2 November 2001). Recently, at the 32nd session of UNESCO's General Conference (6 October 2003), the two organisations have launched a parliamentary network designed to provide a channel whereby parliaments and parliamentarians worldwide can make a meaningful contribution to the implementation of both organisations' mandates.

Underpinning this cooperation is an understanding of parliaments and how they work. The IPU can provide this perspective for the UNESCO Secretariat and for the National Commissions for UNESCO which will be closely involved in this dialogue. UNESCO and IPU look forward to further collaboration in this important domain.

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Introductory note: some definitions

► UNESCO Secretariat and national commissions for UNESCO

The present Guide has been written with several audiences in view: first, the UNESCO Secretariat which includes the Organization's Headquarters in Paris and the network of 57 field offices through the world; second, the network of 190 National Commissions for UNESCO which are government entities assuring the relay for the Organization's programmes and activities in each Member State; third, members of parliament may also find this Guide useful in that it will enable them to understand better how UNESCO functions, what its current programme priorities are and how they can work with this Organisation in achieving its objectives.

► Medium-Term Strategy 2002-2007 including Priority Programmes

The Medium-Term Strategy 2002-2007 (31C/4) is UNESCO's official planning document for programme action. It has been prepared to take account of three major trends: programme concentration and alignment with the Millennium Goals of the United Nations, the accelerating pace of decentralization which involves the Field Network, and the accent on partnerships and alliances for programme design and delivery.

Details of the programme's unifying theme, cross-cutting themes, and main strategic thrusts and objectives are contained in the following summary. Each sector's programme has one principal priority: Education for all, fresh water and related ecosystems, the ethics of science and technology, cultural diversity, promoting access to information for all.

Against this background, UNESCO performs its functions as a laboratory of ideas, standard-setter, clearing house, capacity-builder in Member States and catalyst for international co-operation. Inside this context, relations with parliaments and parliamentarians constitute an area of partnership which is growing rapidly in importance and impact.

► The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

The IPU, for its part, is the world organisation of parliaments which administers institutional co-operation between the United Nations and its specialised agencies, and the world's legislatures.

I. Introduction

During the past several years, parliaments have taken on a more prominent role in the management of public affairs as a result of the drive towards democratisation and therefore good governance. The fact that out of the some 200 States in the world today, some 181 currently have a parliament testifies to their growing importance. Parliaments are increasingly being recognised as playing a crucial role in the management of the affairs of society. In so doing, parliaments work at national but also at international level.

What this guide contains

This Guide has been prepared by the IPU for use by the UNESCO Secretariat and by National Commissions for UNESCO. It provides basic information on the role of parliaments, how they function and how they can be engaged in promoting UNESCO's work in its fields of endeavour. It has also been written with Members of Parliament in mind and so contains basic information on the mandate and functioning of UNESCO as well as on those specific areas where they can make a substantive contribution, in this case, UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy 2002-2007.

Why the need for such a guide

Up until recent years, international organisations, including those of the UN system, have worked almost exclusively with representatives of the Executive arm of government. Working with parliament was seen as some kind of intrusion into the internal political affairs of a country with all the complications it entails. Besides, many parliaments still bore the stigma of rubber stamps. This situation has changed dramatically and many international organisations are now working with parliaments. One reason is that parliaments, especially those in the emerging democracies have gained prominence on the wave of democratisation that has taken place since the early 1990s. Parliaments and parliamentarians are increasingly being recognised as choice partners for the international organisations, especially those working in the area of development.

However, this increased co-operation has not always been accompanied by a better understanding of the role and working methods of parliaments. Officials of international organisations are not always fully conversant with the type of resources they can tap into within parliaments and how to access those resources. This has led to a lot of ad hoc working relationships which have yielded limited results.

On their own side, Parliaments and parliamentarians are not aware of the benefits to be derived from partnering with international organisations. Even when they have such awareness, they do not know who to target and how to target within these organisations, leading to a lot of misconceptions and misunderstanding.

It has therefore become important to devise a tool which will help to remedy this shortcoming and streamline the partnership between international organisations, in this case UNESCO, and parliaments and their members. This Guide aims to enable the UNESCO secretariat and National Commissions for UNESCO to interact with parliaments and parliamentarians in a more structured and rational manner so as to achieve optimum results.

Rationale for co-operation between international organisations and parliaments: divergent roles but convergent objectives

The respective roles of parliaments and international organisations are clearly distinct. International organisations are set up to manage issues of international concern and tend to see things from a global perspective. Often, parliaments are absent from global fora at which decisions are negotiated and adopted. When these decisions are then brought to the national level, parliaments have very limited leeway and usually are placed before a *fait accompli*. However, as a result mainly of globalisation, there is hardly any issue that is dealt with at the national level that does not have ramifications at the international level (and vice versa) and so many issues have taken on a global dimension. Increasingly therefore, parliaments should be involved in the process of negotiating and adopting decisions at the global level, so as to bring in the voice of the people and facilitate the implementation of internationally negotiated decisions at the national level. Besides, parliaments are being called upon to play an important role in the management of global politics so as to provide popular legitimacy to the international decision-making process. In this connection, greater demands for transparency and accountability in the management of international affairs, including of those organisations that have been set up for this purpose, call for greater involvement of parliaments in international processes.

International organisations have a major interest in involving parliaments in their activities mainly because these organisations are usually funded from public resources which are allocated by and/or with the authorization of parliaments. It is parliament that, in each State, is responsible for laying down the legal framework within which society functions. It is in the interest of international organisations, therefore, to engage parliaments in a partnership which ensures that parliaments take budgetary and other legislative decisions that allow these organisations to carry out their programmes. On the other hand, parliaments have an interest in working with international organisations insofar as the latter can contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the people they represent. The mutual advantages of such an alliance are therefore both political and material.

In the case of UNESCO, its Constitution gives it a clear mandate to work resolutely towards the improvement of the living conditions of the peoples of the world in the specific areas of education, science, culture and communication. In so doing, it works for the promotion of the universal ideals of peace, dialogue, tolerance and democracy. Besides, education is recognised as a fundamental human right by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. These are the same ideals which parliaments, as the institution representing the people in each State, endeavour to promote. Parliaments in their various functions always seek to promote the human rights of the people

they represent. In a sense, UNESCO and national parliaments have a common agenda to pursue, which requires the establishment of a strategic partnership between the two in both the national and global contexts. This means that the UNESCO secretariat and National Commissions for UNESCO need to be able to work with parliaments individually but also with those organisations which, at the international level are responsible for channelling and coordinating parliamentary inputs into the management of international affairs.

One of the functions of the National Commissions for UNESCO is to serve as a bridge at country level between UNESCO, the governmental structures of its Member States and civil society. As the elected representatives of the people, parliaments and their members constitute an important structured link between civil society and government. They ensure that the views and interests of society are articulated by the government into policies which serve the common good. It is therefore only natural that National Commissions for UNESCO should reach out to parliaments and their members in the implementation of their activities in accordance with the provisions covering National Commissions' outreach stated in 30C/Resolution 83 adopted at the 30th Session of UNESCO General Conference. In so doing, it is important for these officials to understand that while parliaments and parliamentarians are a key link with civil society and are representative of this society, they must not be mistaken for civil society itself. In a nutshell, parliament is at once a State actor and an emanation of civil society.

II. Role and responsibilities of a parliament in a democracy

The division of powers in a State

Traditionally, power in a State is exercised by three separate institutions which are and should be independent of one another. This division of powers is intended to curb the excesses that may occur when all powers are concentrated in the hands of a single individual or institution.

- Legislative power is exercised by a parliament which debates and therefore helps to shape policy, adopts laws, provides resources to the Executive for the implementation of this legislation and monitors implementation thereof;
- Executive power is exercised by a Head of State assisted by a government responsible for formulating and implementing policies for the common good of society;
- Judicial power is exercised by the courts which are responsible for ensuring that the laws are implemented properly and that any misconduct is punished appropriately.

What is a parliament?

A parliament is a generic term depicting a representative body of individuals to whom the people have entrusted the responsibility of representing them by laying down the legal framework within which society shall be governed and seeing to it that these legal conditions are implemented in a responsible manner by the Executive.

Parliament comes under different appellations in different countries. In the US, it is known as the Congress, in Japan the Diet, in Cameroon the National Assembly, in China the National People's Congress, in Israel the Knesset, etc.

Regarding the structure of parliament, some are monocameral, that is composed of a single Chamber/House (Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Sweden, Denmark, Viet Nam, etc). Others are bicameral, composed of 2 Chambers/Houses such as Gabon (National Assembly and Senate), Nigeria (House of Representatives and the Senate), Russian Federation (State Duma and Council of the Federation), South Africa (National Assembly and National Council of Provinces), United Kingdom (House of Commons and House of Lords), United States (House of Representatives and Senate), etc. Of the 181 parliaments in existence in 2003, 66 are bicameral.

In some countries, generally those with a federal structure, there is a national parliament and then there are regional parliaments. They perform basically the same functions with the national parliament focussing on major issues of national concern while the regional parliaments are given decentralised authority to legislate in areas of local or regional significance. In this Guide, parliament refers to both categories of parliaments.

How are parliaments formed?

Generally speaking, most parliaments are elected in the context of elections that are held at more or less regular intervals on the basis of universal suffrage. However, in some systems, especially the bicameral systems, one of the Houses may be appointed. Such mode of designation is usually applied to ensure the representation of certain sectors of society that may otherwise not be represented in parliament. In yet other situations, such as in a country which is in the midst of civil strife or is just coming out of one and where the holding of elections is not yet feasible, the membership of parliament is entirely appointed. Whether parliament is wholly or partially appointed does not diminish the important role it can and should play.

Most parliaments in the world are multi-party parliaments. This means that there is, on the one hand, a party or group of parties that make up the governing majority and which support the government of the day. On the other hand, there is a party or group of parties that make up the opposition whose main task is to hold the government in check and to make sure that it acts in a responsible and accountable manner. The opposition is also there to serve as a government-in-waiting, that is ready to take over should the current government fail or be voted out of office.

How are parliaments structured?

Generally, parliaments have a two-tier management structure.

- There is the political structure (Bureau, General Business Committee, Presidium, Mesa, etc) which is responsible for taking decisions regarding the political issues before the parliament. These bodies are usually representative of the political configuration of the parliament, that is both governing and opposition parties are represented therein. Normally, this body is presided over by a Speaker, President or Chairperson.
- There is the administrative structure which supports the political decision-making process. Generally, this function is performed by a secretariat headed by a Secretary General/Clerk, working under the authority of the Speaker and the leadership and providing administrative and other back-up services to the members of parliament. Usually, the secretariat is staffed by persons recruited and remunerated by parliament and who are independent of the political authorities and are required to provide services irrespective of the political affiliations of the members concerned. Many parliaments have an independent parliamentary service distinct from the Executive civil service.

Parliaments perform their work mainly through various types of committee (standing, select, portfolio, specialised or ad hoc committees) that are each entrusted with responsibility for a specific sector of State business. The composition and number of members of each committee usually reflect the political configuration of the parliament.

What are the functions of a parliament?

Parliaments are the principal representative institution in each State and are therefore responsible for representing the interests of all sectors of society, articulating these interests into relevant policies and seeing to it that these policies are implemented efficiently. Broadly speaking, they are responsible for protecting and promoting the human rights of the people.

Irrespective of their nature and structure, parliaments perform three main functions:

- **Parliaments legislate:** they adopt laws that govern society in a structured manner.
- **Parliaments oversee the Executive:** they monitor performance by the Executive to ensure that the latter performs in a responsible and accountable manner and therefore for the overall good of society.
- **Parliaments allocate financial resources to the Executive:** through their budgetary function, parliaments generally have responsibility for approving and allocating the revenue that the Executive requires to carry out the policies that it has formulated. They also monitor government spending.

In addition to the above functions, in the Commonwealth system, parliaments also have the function of forming a government. The Prime Minister is usually the parlia-

mentary leader of the party or coalition of parties which has a majority of seats in parliament. The majority party is thus considered the government and all ministers must be members of parliament.

What are the basic requirements of a democratic parliament?

In order to perform its functions in an efficient and legitimate manner, parliament should meet the following basic conditions:

- **Its powers (law-making and oversight) should be enshrined in and guaranteed by the Constitution.**
- **It should be constituted in such a way as to be representative of all sectors of society in its diversity:** political trends, sexes, races, ethnic groups, minorities, etc. In this context, it should be chosen by the sovereign people in free and fair elections by universal and equal suffrage.
- **It should be independent of the Executive.** It must have its own autonomous resources (budget and administration).
- **It should allow for plurality of expression:** all its members should be able to express themselves freely without undue pressure or fear of repression.

III. How the UNESCO Secretariat and National Commissions for UNESCO can secure parliamentary support for priority programmes

1. Parliaments at national level

In seeking to work with parliament, it is important to seek to establish institutional relations with the parliament concerned. Decisions taken within this framework stand a greater chance of being followed up. It is also important to target Members of Parliament in their individual capacity.

a. Law making and standards setting

In many countries, much of the legislative initiative lies with the government. Especially in the emerging democracies where the parliament does not have suffi-

cient resources in terms of legislative drafting services, the bulk of draft legislation comes from the Executive. The role of parliament is to scrutinize this draft legislation and to make sure it is consistent with international standards and requirements for the well being of the people. Most constitutions give the parliament the right to reject and/or amend draft legislation that does not meet these requirements. It is therefore said that in the legislative sphere, the Executive proposes and the parliament disposes.

What can parliament and parliamentarians do?

- ✓ **Ratification of international instruments:** while responsibility for the negotiation and adoption of international instruments lies with governments, these international instruments often require ratification by parliament. In other countries, ratification is done by the government but with prior authority from the parliament. Parliamentarians can therefore play an important role in this regard by ensuring ratification of international treaties relevant to or within UNESCO's mandate. In this context, they can seek from the Executive information on action it intends to take to ratify and implement the international instruments in question. Should any instrument require parliamentary approval prior to ratification, parliament can urge the Executive to bring the said instrument before parliament for ratification purposes. Thereby, parliament can bring about early ratification and therefore speedy entry into force of the instruments.
- ✓ **Harmonising national legislation with international legislation:** after ratification of international instruments, their provisions have to be incorporated into the national body of law for implementation. In some cases, new legislation has to be adopted while in others existing legislation needs to be reviewed and amended. Responsibility for ensuring that this happens lies squarely within the realm of parliament. Parliamentarians can therefore pressure government to bring before parliament legislation that is consistent with international norms. Furthermore, parliamentarians should be encouraged to use their constitutional power of initiating legislation by proposing private members' bills for consideration and adoption by the parliament.
- ✓ **Assistance in drawing up national plans of action:** parliamentarians, as representatives of the people and the emanation of civil society, are well placed to articulate the interests of the people. They maintain close contact with the people and electorate and so are fully aware of the problems and issues facing them. They can play a useful role in participating in the preparation of action plans meant to fulfil the country's obligations under international and national law. In this way, these plans can adequately reflect the real needs and concerns of the people.
- ✓ **Assistance in fulfilling national reporting obligations:** many international instruments require national authorities to submit periodic reports



on the action they have taken to implement the obligations entered into. Again, as representatives of the people, parliamentarians can participate in preparing such reports as they are present on the ground, often participate in such action in the field and therefore are in good stead to assess the impact thereof.

b. Oversight

As mentioned previously in this guide, parliaments have responsibility for holding the Executive to account by overseeing its work and making sure that it does not infringe on the rights of citizens and does not lead to the wastage of State resources and is consistent with the public interest. Parliament performs its oversight role in a number of ways: receiving regular reports from the Executive on its activities; putting questions and interpellations to members of the Executive, setting up special commissions and organising field visits to carry out enquiries into Executive conduct and propose remedial action, etc.

What can parliament and parliamentarians do?

- ✓ **Ensure compliance by the Executive with international standards:** parliaments and their members can bring pressure to bear on the Executive to make sure that they take action to comply with the State's obligations under international law.
- ✓ **Push for the establishment of a parliamentary commissioner or an ombudsman:** this official who may be responsible to parliament would investigate any complaints by citizens who may deem themselves the victims of discrimination in a particular field (e.g. Education).
- ✓ **Promote debate in parliament on issues of relevance to UNESCO:** parliamentarians can use their constitutional powers to question members of the Executive on issues of importance in the areas of concern to UNESCO, urge them to take the necessary action to correct discrepancies and ensure that every citizen has access to basic educational services.
- ✓ **Participate in the audit/assessment of the Executive's performance in the areas of relevance to UNESCO, for example the educational sector, and thereby promote policy reforms that are favourable to these sectors.**

c. Budget allocation

In most countries, the national budget must be approved by the parliament which thus has a major say in how State resources are allocated.

What can parliament and parliamentarians do?

- ✓ **Ensure that substantial resources are allocated to the sectors of relevance to UNESCO:** parliaments usually have the right to propose amendments to the draft national budget within the overall total volume of this budget. Parliamentarians can therefore make sure that adequate resources are allocated to the education sector in particular.
- ✓ **Ensure that the Executive pays in a timely fashion the country's contribution to the UNESCO budget:** these contributions should be adequately provided for in the national budget.
- ✓ **Encourage the government to increase its development aid budget:** this action applies mainly to parliaments and parliamentarians from the more affluent developed countries. They can ensure that their government allocates more substantial resources for establishing and strengthening required services in the developing countries.
- ✓ In many African countries (Cameroon, Gabon, for instance), individual parliamentarians receive an allocation which they can use to carry out development projects in their constituencies. They can thus be encouraged to **invest a substantial portion of these resources in a specific sector (e.g. in Education: building and equipping schools).**

d. Representation

Parliamentarians are, above all, representatives of the people who have elected them and in their various activities, they seek always to represent their interests. Besides, they are opinion leaders who wield considerable influence as parliamentarians or as members of political parties. In many countries, especially in the developing world, apart from the purely parliamentary functions of the MPs, they are often called upon to play diverse roles: community leaders, development agents, etc. They are also very good disseminators of information within society. In this regard, they can serve as a useful channel for conveying UNESCO's message to the grassroots communities.

What can parliament and parliamentarians do?

- ✓ **Initiate and implement community-based projects:** since they maintain close contact with the people, they know very well their needs and interests and can advise on what type of projects to initiate. They can also participate in the implementation of the projects in a cost-effective manner.
- ✓ **Organise campaigns to mobilise community support for UNESCO-related activities:** parliamentarians not only can carry UNESCO's message



to the local communities, but they can also convey the needs and interests of these communities to UNESCO authorities, who can then integrate them within UNESCO's programmes and activities. The advocacy role of MPs needs to be emphasized in this regard.

✓ **Ensure that their political parties include in their manifestos and other policy documents, education issues as a matter of priority:** MPs can certainly play an important role in ensuring that UNESCO's message filters through to all political parties.

2. How the UNESCO Secretariat and National Commissions for UNESCO can proceed in establishing contacts with parliaments and their members

What parliaments and parliamentarians need

In order to legislate efficiently, parliamentarians need to be informed adequately of facts underlying draft legislation and of its implications. It is therefore important that the UNESCO secretariat and National Commissions for UNESCO, in their contacts with parliaments, should endeavour to:

✓ **Provide relevant documentation** including texts of relevant instruments, facts, statistics, data, etc.

✓ **Propose technical assistance/advisory services**, on a non-partisan basis, in the form of experts and consultants as well as briefing notes/digests on the salient issues. These persons could also provide advice to parliament and its committees.

✓ **Help facilitate draft legislation and or amendments to pieces of legislation before the parliament.**

✓ **Organise briefing sessions** (seminars, roundtables, lectures, etc.) for MPs, committee staff and other parliamentary officials (including staff of the parliamentary political groups) on the issues pertaining to the proposed legislation.

✓ **Participate in building parliamentary documentation and research facilities in the context of capacity-building for parliaments:** this would help to promote one of UNESCO's missions, that of fostering the free flow of information, knowledge and data, encourage the creation of diversified contents and facilitating universal access to information and the means of sharing knowledge.



✓ **Encourage the creation of a local network of MPs on UNESCO issues**, provide them with relevant information and encourage debate, including through the use of the Internet. Internet access for these MPs could give them wider access to the resources available within UNESCO (e.g. various data bases, portals, websites etc).

In order to play their oversight functions efficiently, parliamentarians need:

✓ **Factual and accurate information** on the situation of the educational sector in the country.

✓ **Useful tips on questions of concern that should be raised with Ministers and other government officials.**

Potential entry points: who to target

It is important to identify specific entry points for co-operation with parliament and its members. They need to understand clearly the role of each actor and the contribution they can make to the advancement of UNESCO's mandate. Also, they must understand the distinction between the UNESCO secretariat and National Commissions for UNESCO. A list of the prominent potential entry points is provided below.

Parliamentary leadership

- The leadership of the Parliament, that is the Speaker and other members of the Bureau (or General Business Committee, Mesa, Presidium, etc.), is generally responsible for managing the affairs of parliament. They fix the agenda of parliament, assign various matters before parliament to the relevant committees and generally coordinate the proceedings. *It is therefore useful to establish a channel of co-operation with the leadership, first of all to obtain institutional backing for UNESCO's programme activities and also to ensure that, as a matter of priority, matters of relevance to UNESCO are placed on the parliament's schedule of business.*

Parliamentary committees

- Most parliamentary work is done in various kinds of committees which may be standing or ad hoc committees. Generally, when matters are brought to the plenary session of parliament, the relevant decisions have already been made, agreements have already been reached at the committee stage and are only then endorsed and formalised. The role of these committees is to scrutinise draft legislation referred to



them, to propose necessary amendments, to ensure that the legislation is consistent with international standards and the interests of the people and to scrutinise government performance.

Most parliaments have committees dealing with issues within the spheres of competence of UNESCO. It is important to identify in each parliament the relevant committees, their leadership and to establish co-operation with them.

Individual parliamentarians

- While it would be ideal for the entire membership of parliament to be favourable to the views and ideals espoused by UNESCO, it may not always be possible to achieve this ideal and so it may often prove fruitful to target *individual parliamentarians or groups of parliamentarians*.

Political groups represented in parliament

- Members of parliament usually constitute themselves into political groups or coalitions of groups in order to adopt a coordinated approach to issues dealt with in parliament. Many parliaments grant official recognition to these groups to which they give certain privileges and facilities proportionate to their respective numerical strengths. Some have their own secretariats with research services. They are also represented in the management structure of the parliament. Given UNESCO's multi-party approach to relations with parliamentarians, it is important to deal with all the parliamentary groups and refrain from targeting only some.

Women's parliamentary caucuses

- In many parliaments, women are playing an increasing role and are constituting themselves into caucuses to promote gender equity and equality in parliamentary processes. Such caucuses exist in Rwanda, Burundi, South Africa, etc. They constitute an important entry point for interaction with parliaments and should thus receive particular attention.

Parliamentary library, research and documentation services

- Parliaments generally have services which provide information that members of parliament require in their work as legislators. They prepare notes, information documents, and background papers, obtain other resource material from various sources on the items of legislation or issues on the parliamentary agenda. In this way, members can take decisions in an informed manner. *It is useful to be in contact with staff of these services and to make available to them relevant documentation on such issues and legislation. These staff need to be sensitised on what the issues are and should have all the relevant facts.*

How to target

- ✓ **Establish within each National Commission for UNESCO a focal point for information exchange and co-operation in parliamentary affairs.** This person would be responsible for monitoring parliamentary activity on a permanent basis and identifying potential entry points for interaction with parliaments and parliamentarians.
- ✓ **Encourage the parliament to appoint a parliamentary focal point for relations with UNESCO** at the local level. Ideally, these focal points should be part of the IPU/UNESCO network of focal points for UNESCO affairs. This would help to give the parliament's institutional backing to the relationship.
- ✓ **Promote formal/informal contacts and exchanges with Members of Parliament through various fora:** their parliamentary political groups, their political parties, constituency offices, and women's caucuses. Organise events to which MPs are invited: television debates, prize-award ceremonies, commissioning of UNESCO-funded projects, etc. Parliamentarians can attend these events not only as State actors but also as representatives of civil society. Quite often, in both capacities, they will have been closely involved in the realisation of UNESCO-funded projects.
- ✓ **Encourage the appointment of MPs as members of National Commissions for UNESCO.**
- ✓ **Encourage membership by parliamentarians in management structures of UNESCO-sponsored projects.** As representatives of the people, they can help ensure that the projects respond to the actual needs of the people. They can ensure accountable management and secure State backing for some of the projects.
- ✓ **Institute mechanisms for regular reporting to parliament on the activities of the National Commission for UNESCO in each Member State.**

Where to reach parliaments and parliamentarians?

Apart from the local directories, it is possible to find contact information for each parliament on the website of the Inter-Parliamentary Union: www.ipu.org. This site provides detailed information including the names of the Presiding Officer, Clerk/Secretary General of the Parliament, their telephone and fax numbers and their Internet address. Besides, most Parliaments now maintain a website on which they publish detailed information on their structure and working methods. These websites can also be accessed from the IPU website.

In many countries, parliamentarians have constituency offices where they can consult with their constituents. These are also important points of contact with parliamentarians. They can also be contacted through their political party offices.

IV. Parliaments and international relations: the role of inter-parliamentary organisations such as the IPU in furthering the agenda of inter-governmental organisations

The management of international affairs has traditionally been considered a preserve of the Executive. However, increasingly, parliaments have become involved in this sphere of activity. For example, they are playing a stronger role in the approval of treaties and confirmation of foreign service nominees such as Ambassadors. They are also increasingly debating global issues and making their views heard on these issues. This involvement should not be seen as attempts to interfere with the work of the Executive or to usurp its role. Rather, as instruments and actors of democracy, parliaments and parliamentarians bring legitimacy to the international decision-making process and ensure that these processes are transparent, accountable and are consonant with the interests of the people.

Parliaments have therefore, individually or collectively, been active in international co-operation. Many inter-parliamentary organisations have been created to channel parliaments' inputs into international affairs. The main objectives of these organisations are to:

- Foster the participation of parliaments in the management of global issues.
- Make sure that interests of the people occupy centre stage at the international level.
- Make the functioning of international organisations more transparent and accountable in order to build an atmosphere conducive to human development.

What the UNESCO secretariat and National Commissions for UNESCO should do

- **Establish official working relations with these organisations.** It is important that UNESCO establish such relations with those organisations whose membership has the institutional backing of the various parliaments. Decisions taken in such fora are most likely to be followed up by the parliaments, whereas those taken by networks of individual parliamentarians may not have the full support of the parliaments especially when the decisions involve delicate political issues.
- **Organise joint activities with these organisations at global, regional and local level:** conferences, symposia, and seminars on issues of relevance to UNESCO.

- **Encourage the forging of a global alliance of MPs in support of UNESCO objectives.** Such an alliance has been created within the framework of co-operation between the IPU and UNESCO. In this context, UNESCO focal points will be identified in each parliament and included in a global network that will promote UNESCO objectives.
- **Establish partnerships with these organisations, such as the IPU in building capacity within parliaments to perform** their role more efficiently. Many parliaments in developing countries and emerging democracy still need external assistance in terms of equipment and the strengthening of human resources to be able to cope with the challenges of democratisation. Well-functioning parliaments will be in better stead to promote UNESCO activities. Activities that can help build this capacity include the training, information and awareness-raising seminars and workshops organised by the IPU in the context of its technical co-operation projects. UNESCO could participate in the identification of themes for such seminars, provide documentation and expertise and sponsor participation by parliamentarians in regional capacity-building programmes.
- **Encourage governments to include parliamentarians in national delegations to UNESCO conferences** so as to provide a parliamentary dimension to the proceedings.
- **Sensitise Parliaments which vote national budgets of Education, Culture and Science departments** to the importance of these fields by providing information on UNESCO's activities in these fields.

V. Concluding remarks

The Medium-Term Strategy of UNESCO (2002-2007) states, in paragraph 37, that cooperation with parliamentarians will help build a pivotal constituency of support for UNESCO by forging linkages between the executive and legislative branches with respect to UNESCO mandate and domains of expertise.

To achieve this objective, several steps are foreseen notably the establishment of an international network with the IPU for cooperation, information-sharing, and advocacy in legislation in priority areas of UNESCO's mandate (Approved Programme and Budget 2002-3, 31 C/5 paragraph 17014). This network is to be launched at the 32nd General Conference of UNESCO on 6 October 2003. Similarly, action will intensify in the forthcoming biennium of 2004-2005 so as to ensure heightened awareness amongst parliamentarians about UNESCO and its programme priorities and so to strengthen the political commitment to progress in these areas.

The present Guide is intended to help the UNESCO Secretariat and National Commissions for UNESCO to achieve these objectives since the success of the approved strategy will depend greatly on familiarity with parliaments and their procedures.

Annex 1: UNESCO's medium-term strategy for 2002-2007

Unifying theme

- UNESCO contributing to peace and human development in an era of globalization through education, the sciences, culture and communication.

Two cross-cutting themes

- Eradication of poverty, especially extreme poverty.
- The contribution of information and communication technologies to the development of education, science and culture and the construction of a knowledge society.

Three main strategic thrusts

- Developing and promoting universal principles and norms, based on shared values, in order to meet emerging challenges in education, science, culture and communication and to protect and strengthen the "common public good".
- Promoting pluralism, through recognition and safeguarding of diversity together with the observance of human rights.
- Promoting empowerment and participation in the emerging knowledge society through equitable access, capacity-building and sharing of knowledge.

Twelve strategic objectives

Education

- Promoting education as a fundamental right in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- Improving the quality of education through the diversification of contents and methods and the promotion of universally shared values;
 - Promoting experimentation, innovation and the diffusion and sharing of information and best practices as well as policy dialogue in education.

Sciences

- Promoting principles and ethical norms to guide scientific and technological development and social transformation;
 - Improving human security by better management of the environment and social change;
- Enhancing scientific, technical and human capacities to participate in the emerging knowledge societies.

Culture

- Promoting the drafting and implementation of standard setting instruments in the cultural field;
- Safeguarding cultural diversity and encouraging dialogue among cultures and civilizations;
 - Enhancing the linkages between culture and development, through capacity-building and sharing of knowledge.

Communication and Information

- Promoting the free flow of ideas and universal access to information;
- Promoting the expression of pluralism and cultural diversity in the media and world information networks;
- Access for all to information and communication technologies, especially in the public domain.

Annex 2:

Model briefing notes to a member of parliament on education for all (EFA)

What is EFA?

Education For All (EFA) is founded on the principle that education is a fundamental human right. It provides children, youth and adults with the power to reflect, make choices and enjoy a better life. It breaks the cycle of poverty and is a key ingredient in economic and social development.

The World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, placed basic education high on the development agenda.

While substantial progress has been made in terms of increase in the school attendance rate for children and higher adult literacy rates, Education for All continues to face major challenges as levels of illiteracy worldwide continue to be high, especially in the developing world. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has compounded this situation and girls and women are most at risk.

The Dakar Framework for Action adopted in April 2000 at the World Education Forum seeks to respond to these challenges. It sets out the goals and strategies for achieving EFA.

Goals of EFA

- Expand early childhood care and education
- Free and compulsory education of good quality by 2015
- Promote the acquisition of life skills by adolescents and youth
- Expand adult literacy by 50% by 2015
- Eliminate gender disparities by 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by 2015
- Enhance educational quality.

What the Member of Parliament can do to further above goals?

Attainment of the above goals requires strong political commitment. The MP can provide that impetus by making use of the legislative, oversight, budgetary and representational powers conferred on the parliament in the following strategic ways:

- Mobilise strong national and international commitment, contribute to development of national action plans, and increase investment in basic education.
- See to it that the government puts in place an integrated framework for EFA including poverty elimination and development.
- Engage civil society in formulation, implementation and monitoring of educational development strategies.
- Ensure that the government implements responsive, participatory and accountable systems in the field of education.
- Pay special attention to the needs of education systems affected by conflicts, natural calamities and instability; emphasise mutual understanding, peace and tolerance as ways of preventing violence and conflict.
- Mainstream gender into educational policies and programmes.
- Contribute to the war against HIV/AIDS.
- Ensure that more resources are allocated to the creation of safe, healthy, inclusive and equitably resourced educational environments conducive to excellence in learning. In this connection, allocate more resources to the building and equipping of schools, creating a conducive environment for teachers by enhancing their status, morale and professionalism.
- Ensure that the government makes use of ICTs in the implementation of its EFA programmes.
- Put in place mechanisms for monitoring progress towards EFA goals and strategies at national level.

The MP can contribute through ensuring that the appropriate legislative framework (laws, acts, decrees, action plans, etc) is in place for the achievement of these strategies. During consideration of the State budget, the MP can insist on more financial resources being allocated to the education sector. The MP can also ensure that the government reports to parliament, at least on an annual basis, on its activities in the education sector.

At the local level, the MP can initiate and implement community-based projects in the education sector and organise campaigns towards community support for education-related projects.

Resources available within UNESCO and National Commissions for UNESCO

- Documentation: relevant instruments, facts, statistics and model legislation,
- Expertise: consultants, experts, etc.,
- Briefing sessions,
- Seed money for initiating basic education projects.

Contact details for local UNESCO Office/National Commission for UNESCO

- Name and title of focal point,
- Telephone, fax and e-mail,
- Website.

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