

Parliamentary Best
Practices In Relation
To Budget:
Where Do We Stand?

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As a part of its budget-related advocacy initiatives, Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI-Pakistan) has prepared this document in the light of international best practices and after discussions with citizens and activists from diverse backgrounds. Purpose of this document is to highlight the process-related inadequacies and gaps in parliamentary proceedings during the previous Budget Sessions, and share them with parliamentarians and political parties to advocate for their more effective role in budget making.

This, however, is not an exhaustive document by any means. CPDI-Pakistan aims to further improve on it to make it a comprehensive paper, which could be used by legislators and political parties for self-monitoring, and by civil society groups for parliamentary watch and advocacy. We shall, therefore, welcome any views or additional ideas for its improvement.

No.	Best Practices	Practice in Pakistan
1	Parliament and/or parliamentary committees get adequate time to analyze the budgetary proposals. In many established democracies, legislatures take 2-3 months to discuss, scrutinize and pass budgetary proposals.	In 2004, only 10 days were spent by the National Assembly in analyzing, debating and passing the budget. These 10 days included the day when budget was presented, as well as the days when cut motions were moved and the budget was finally passed. In Senate, the Budget was debated only for 6 days including the days when it was formally presented and when it was discussed in the Senate Committee on Finance.
2	Budget proposals are discussed and debated in the parliamentary committees where legislators, often with relevant interests and/or expertise, are relatively better equipped to scrutinize the past year performance of related departments or ministries and make useful recommendations for allocations for the coming financial year.	Budgetary proposals are not discussed in any of the parliamentary committees before or during the Budget Session. Only exception is the Finance Committee of the Senate which discusses the budget for 3 days. Senate, however, has only a recommendatory role in relation to the Budget.
3	Political parties in the opposition coordinate with each other to ensure that all the main concerns related to budgetary proposals are highlighted effectively and without much duplication of effort.	Opposition parties sometimes try to coordinate with each other but there is a clear need for a lot of improvement on this count.

4	<p>Political parties prepare a comprehensive strategy to participate in budgetary discussions. Such a strategy includes (a) priority areas/issues which need to be highlighted; (b) designation of members with relevant expertise to talk about specific issues. This helps in avoiding duplication, and makes parliamentary debates substantive and more focused.</p>	<p>An analysis of previous years' budget sessions indicates that political parties don't give adequate attention to developing a budget participation strategy. As a result, one can identify a number of gaps in their performance including a lot of repetition, lack of focus and lack of depth/substance in the budget-related debates of their members.</p>
5	<p>Political parties take initiatives to ensure that their members adequately understand the budgetary proposals; and are able to effectively and competently participate in budget-related debates. These initiatives may include in-house trainings or briefings by senior parliamentarians. Such initiatives are important in view of the fact that budgetary proposals are often in technical language, and are hard to understand for parliamentarians without relevant background.</p>	<p>It seems that most political parties have yet to recognize the importance of such trainings and briefings for their members to improve their parliamentary performance. It is evident from the fact that, barring a few outstanding speeches from some political parties, participation of most members is rhetorical, lacking in substance and focus, and of poor quality by any standards.</p>
6	<p>Parliamentary committees, political parties and parliamentarians put in place mechanisms to receive suggestions from citizens and civil society groups; and incorporate them in their budgetary debates and discussions in the Parliament.</p>	<p>No such mechanisms are currently in place.</p>
7	<p>Parliamentarians come prepared and, instead of making general, rhetorical and nakedly partisan speeches, focus on specific budgetary proposals in the spirit of proposing improvements to ensure efficient, equitable and productive use of public funds.</p>	<p>In the last budget, 42% MNAs and 24% Senators didn't participate in the budgetary debates. Many others, who participated, were not adequately prepared – some actually talked about issues not even remotely related to Budget. Many talked only about their constituencies, which is hard to understand in the context of national budget.</p>

8	Parliamentary debates and discussions are focused on broader policy, planning and revenue generation issues, as well as the justification of proposed allocations for various departments/ ministries or projects.	Very little time is consumed on such substantive issues. Most of the time is consumed on partisan rhetoric, problems of constituencies or very general concerns related to budget.
9	All parliamentarians, who want to participate in the budget discussions, are given adequate time by the Speaker/ Chairperson of the House.	Barring some senior parliamentarians, MNAs and Senators don't get adequate time to express their views during the Budget Session. This partly explains why 42% MNAs and 24% Senators couldn't participate in the budget debates in June 2004.
10	Legislative secretariats have adequate research and analysis capacity to help parliamentarians in preparing for the budget debates.	Parliament has hardly any research/ analysis capacity in place to support legislators. There are only a few researchers working in the Parliament – most of them without adequate skills to provide budget-related analyses. On the other end, the problem is that even when such a support is available, most legislators are often not motivated enough to benefit from it.

CPDI-Pakistan

Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives, Pakistan(CPDI-Pakistan) is an independent, non-partisan and a not-for-profit civil society organization working on issues of peace and development in Pakistan. It was established in 2003. It works in the following five programme areas:

1. Promotion of Peace and Tolerance
2. Rule of Law
3. Transparency and Access to Information
4. Budget Watch
5. Legislative Watch and Democratic Development

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