

Getting Information to the People:

The role of the Parliamentary Monitoring Group

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Introduction

This short booklet aims to outline some activities of the Parliamentary Monitoring Group of South Africa (PMG) since its formation in 1995, and to briefly look to its successes and some of the challenges it has faced and overcome. A summary is also provided of some of the work done by other Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations across the world, together with a consideration of how PMG or similar bodies, including those newly created, could benefit from other ideas and practices, and grow or adapt their work in the future.

What are Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations

It has been emphasised consistently, in many sources, that access to information is the key to citizens' full participation in the democratic process. Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations essentially seek to provide access to information about parliament and its functioning, public policy and legislation, with the aim of making parliament and MPs more accountable to citizens, and to encourage citizens to engage more actively not only at election time, but also in the legislative and oversight process.

Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations (PMOs) are quite widespread in countries with democratic parliaments and strong parliamentary and legislative traditions. Over 191 PMOs monitor more than eighty Parliaments across the world, with most monitoring national parliaments, 24% monitoring sub-national legislatures, and 19% monitoring both. 8% of PMOs monitor regional or supra-national legislatures, such as the European Parliament.

The number of PMOs in sub-Saharan Africa has grown to 24 over the last few years, now that more emphasis has been placed on tracking and monitoring constituency development funding.

Most PMOs are non-profit entities, although some may have for-profit affiliates. Almost all PMOs participating in a survey conducted by the National Democratic Institute and World Bank Institute in 2011 said that they were non-partisan. The most effective PMOs maintain independence, but have managed to establish good working relationships with their parliaments and political parties.

PMOs vary in their approaches to parliamentary monitoring. Some include monitoring as only a part of their activities, or seek to collaborate with other organisations. PMOs vary in whether they take a neutral or more adversarial stance towards parliament, and in whether they monitor the institution, or its components, such as party groups or committees, or members of parliament (MPs). All are, however, seeking to enhance parliamentary engagement in one form or another, and to improve transparency. Some more detail on the approaches adopted by a selection of PMOs can be found from page 20 onwards.

Currently, PMOs communicate across a number of platforms, including websites, conferences and workshops. Despite the fact that many have faced similar challenges, they have not, until quite recently, begun to share their practices, and tended rather to develop their own tools and methodologies, although some PMOs in established democracies like the USA and UK provide funding, as well as technical and institutional support, to those from developing nations. About 95% of PMOs maintain a website, and about two thirds devote their websites to parliamentary monitoring, according to a survey done by Andrew Mandelbaum, under the auspices of the National Institute and World Bank Institute (hereinafter referred to as "the Mandelbaum paper"), entitled: "Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability, Citizen Engagement and Access to Information: A Global Survey of Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations" (www.ndi.org/files/governance-parliamentary-monitoring-organizations-survey-september-2011.pdf)

In recent years there has been a far more collaborative approach, with recognition that PMOs should support networking and sharing of tools and good practices towards improving parliamentary transparency. Many PMOs are now aiming, in addition to their own work, to develop minimum transparency standards across all parliaments. They may also call for PMOs to be consulted whenever norms and standards of democratic parliaments are debated. Recently, several PMOs have worked on drafting the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness (www.OpeningParliament.org), whose principles are more fully discussed on page 15..

The South African context

Apartheid South Africa displayed no culture of openness or promotion of human rights. As the apartheid structures were dismantled, it was recognised that there was an urgent need to foster human rights and citizens' involvement. The new government that came to power in 1994 therefore committed itself to

promoting and practicing democratic principles of transparency, public participation in government, and the protection of human rights. These principles were later entrenched in the Final Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, which, throughout, calls upon government to foster transparency by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information.

Around the world, democratic principles are brought to life in parliaments, which, in view of their multiple roles of public representation, lawmaking and executive oversight, have the potential to contribute significantly to growth of democracy and good governance. In fact, in many new or developing democracies, Parliament may be in practice the only institution capable of providing checks and balances to executive power, of insisting upon oversight and of addressing corruption. That is precisely the reason why so many PMOs have been formed to monitor parliamentary work.

In South Africa, the new democratic Parliament, in 1994, immediately expressed an intention to take a far more active role and to change the perception that it was merely a rubber-stamp for executive decision. Prior to 1994, the work of the eighteen parliamentary committees was largely conducted in secret, and they did not really have a well-defined or independent role from the House. However, in the new structure, the number of parliamentary committees was greatly expanded. In recognition of the fact that a parliament should not operate in isolation of the people, these committee meetings were now opened up to attendance by the public, and were intended to provide a forum for departments and, when invited, for private or civil society bodies to present their views on policies, budgets and proposed legislation. In this way, the parliamentary committees took on increased responsibilities and functions as the “engine room” of Parliament, where vital debates and developments would occur.

Important though it was for advocacy organisations to capture what was happening at these crucial meetings, it soon became apparent that Parliament itself was unable to provide sufficient information about its activities. This ranged, at the time, from the most basic information about the schedules for meetings, to reporting on what was discussed in the meetings and at media briefings. Not only was there no ongoing current information, there was also no institutional memory being created. In the following two years the Constitutional Assembly and Bill of Rights process and the drafting of legislation setting up the Chapter 9 institutions resulted in a rapid rise in the number of meetings.

At this time a number of advocacy organisations were trying, individually, to follow committees pertinent to their areas of interest, largely so that their representatives would then be in a better position to make public submissions. The Black Sash, Institute for Democracy in South Africa and Human Rights Committee (an NGO not to be confused with SAHRC), although dealing with different issues, were all concerned with trying to get as much information as possible about the workings of the parliamentary committees, for the purpose of their advocacy efforts. These three bodies collaborated and managed to build up a team of volunteers, who were reimbursed for their transport costs only, to attend and take hand-written notes from the meetings they attended, which were then circulated between the three organisations. There was some difficulty in achieving consistency through use of volunteers only. Over time, it also became apparent that there was a greater need in broader civil society also for independent, unbiased and consistently accurate and timely information about the workings of the committees, which was not available from parliamentary sources, to enable other bodies to monitor, intervene and hold both the executive and parliament accountable.

The decision was therefore taken by these three bodies to form the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG), a formal structure that would make use of paid interns, and have a full-time management structure, to prepare reports of committee meetings. Slightly more formal report forms were devised that required those attending the meetings to answer a number of questions about the format, structure and functioning in the meetings, and to record the main points and all MP questions and presenter responses. These handwritten forms were circulated by fax. In the years up to 1997, PMG’s paid interns and volunteers reported back on the proceedings of as many committees as its resources and funding would allow. Over these years, the system developed so that reports now had to be submitted in typed format, with strict deadlines for submission once payment was made for the reporting. In 1998 it launched a website on which its reports, as well as other targeted information, were published and made available to subscribers and to other organisations who were exempt from paying subscriptions. By 2000, PMG was managing to attend all parliamentary committees. Its offerings were expanded over time, as more fully detailed below.

PMG was registered as a fully independent non-profit organisation in July 2009, but maintains liaison with its two remaining founding organisations by having a representative of each on its Board.

The First Parliament (1994 to 1999) mainly focused on unravelling the apartheid legislation, and concentrated on legislative development, repeal of old laws, and forming stable relationships. Within one year of going online in 1998, PMG managed to triple user access to its website. The Second Parliament

(1999 to 2004) continued with the legislative work.

During the Third Parliament (2004 to 2009), South Africa undertook a self-assessment, including the role of parliament, as part of the African Peer Review Mechanism. Subsequently, an Independent Panel Assessment conducted a review of the South African Parliament, between 2007 and 2009. Its Report (which can be accessed at <http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=94365>) called, amongst others, for a stronger public participation process and more effective oversight. Towards the latter part of the Third Parliament, each department was now required to report on strategic plans and budgets, which meant that the number of meetings increased, with up to 1 196 meetings per year being recorded.

The Fourth Parliament (2009 to 2014), was marked, from the outset, with a large increase in the number of departments, and therefore also of committees, increasing the pressure on PMG, particularly during the busy periods. During the Fourth Parliament, committees have continued their legislative mandate, but have been conducting far more probing oversight, increasing the pressure on the administration and executive to take accountability, thus deepening democracy. Since PMG focuses on collecting, processing and disseminating records of all committee work, its work remains of enormous importance and relevance. Over the last few years, PMG has attended, on average, over 1 200 meetings per year. It published 1514 reports in 2012.

The Parliamentary Monitoring Group and its work

Mission statement

The Parliamentary Monitoring Group monitors parliamentary committees, with the purpose of making them accessible, to enable all sectors of society to follow parliamentary proceedings, intervene in the policy and law-making process and monitor committee oversight of government entities. This information is provided to:

- promote participatory democracy in South Africa
- promote transparency in the parliamentary committees
- promote accountability of the parliamentary committees
- promote accountability of the executive
- facilitate the work of Parliament.

PMG has been described, by one of its subscribers, as " a reliable place to go for the information that Parliament should provide, but does not".

Currently, PMG covers all parliamentary committees in the National Assembly and National Council of Provinces, including joint, standing and ad hoc committees, except for the Standing Committee on intelligence, which is closed to the public. Its website contains records, and a searchable database, of all meetings and documents from January 1998 to the present.

It is hoped that transparency of the parliamentary committees will lead to greater accountability of both Parliament and the executive. A society that is able to track parliamentary proceedings will be better empowered to engage in participatory democracy, by intervening in the policy and law-making process and monitoring committee oversight of government entities. This information also facilitates the work of Parliament, including its MPs.

Over the years, the board and management committee of PMG have frequently discussed whether it needs to move away from its role as a provider of information only, and where it should position itself. At the moment, it is a neutral information service and does not attempt to analyse information, or to comment on the quality of performance. Instead, it merely provides the information and leaves it to the readers to draw conclusions. This role has been informed by two main factors. Firstly, PMG recognises the limitations that it has faced, since inception, in relation to funding and its own human resource capacity. Secondly, the number and consistency of endorsements, from civil society, public institutions, parliamentary staff and MPs, about the accuracy, relevance and timely provision of its information service have served as a solid indicator that it is being successful in its niche offerings, and should therefore continue in this role, at least whilst no other institution is able to provide the information in the same efficient and unbiased manner.

PMG also has considered, from time to time, whether it should extend its coverage of national parliamentary meetings. To date, it has not had the capacity or funding to monitor provincial and local levels of government, particularly since local government has had difficulty in getting committees to meet. However, this is something that will need to be revisited over time.

During 2005, an independent evaluation of PMG was conducted by Getti Mercorio (referred to as "the 2005 evaluation"). He concluded that PMG was perceived by all participating stakeholders as professional, diligent

and appropriate in its approach to the work. Its documentation was perceived as accurate, objective and timeous. It was regarded as an invaluable resource for Parliament, government, the media, academics and civil society. Less formal evaluations and surveys have been done amongst users from time to time in the succeeding years.

Subscriptions and free offerings

Initially, PMG managed to work without charging subscriptions, but by 2002, when donor funding was diminishing and costs were increasing, the decision was taken to charge subscriptions to commercial institutions and government parastatals for some committee reports, to build sustainability. The point was also raised that it was, in principle, not correct that commercial enterprises should be permitted free access to services from non-profit organisations. During the 2005 evaluation, 1.5% of those interviewed had reservations about paying a subscription, but it became apparent that some of these respondents thought that PMG was a government service, and that it should be free. There was initially a fall-off in the number of daily visitors to the site after the decision was taken to charge subscriptions, but this did recover. PMG initially closed off free access to only a few committees, and presently only 15 of the 50 committees require a subscription to be paid, whilst the rest are open. Those requiring a subscription are those of most commercial interest to business subscribers. They are the committees on Communications, Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs, Defence & Military Veterans, Economic Development, Energy, Finance, Health, International Relations & Cooperation, Justice and Constitutional Development, Labour, Mining, Police, Public Enterprises, Trade & Industry and Transport. All those committees dealing with socio-economic issues remain as free access.

In 2011, PMG was forced to take another decision to further limit free access; this time by government departments, Parliament and provincial legislatures, municipalities, and trade unions. Individual MPs continued to get free access through their parties. This decision was necessary to boost PMG's income so that it could sustain itself and remain independent. Parliament and government were, in general, affronted at being asked to pay for the services, despite the irony that whilst Parliament itself receives a large slice of taxpayers' money to provide information services, it is PMG, a body that continuously battles for funding, who in fact provides that information. Government is a major user of PMG's services; the 2005 evaluation noted that 35.84% of those accessing the website are from government. Each department is required to pay only one subscription fee, irrespective of the number of users.

Parliament initially indicated that it would subscribe to PMG, but then failed to pay. This was apparently on the advice of a parliamentary legal advisor, who had suggested that Parliament should not be paying for what was essentially "parliamentary information". This opinion failed to take into account the value-add by PMG, its own intellectual property. There seemed to be some conflict around the policy, as the decision flew in the face of numerous pleas by parliamentary researchers, librarians, content advisors, law advisors, committee secretaries and other staff for continued access. In 2012, Parliament apparently reconsidered this decision and has requested a subscription to PMG.

Once again, with the limitation of free access by the media, government departments and trade unions, the statistics for use of the website showed a 16% decline. Although uptake of paid subscriptions was slow in that year, eventually PMG did manage to exceed its budget targets for subscription by government departments, but only sixteen new entities subscribed. In 2012, the statistics had recovered, with a 19.75% growth.

PMG's current subscription rates are very competitive, given that an organisation may, against payment of a single subscription, make the information available to all its staff. It is also possible to arrange for short access to one committee's reports for a three-month period, or single meeting access.

The PMG service remains free to non-government and community based organisations and educational institutions, and in respect of the "free access" committees, although users are required to log on to show an ID record of who is accessing committees. The list of civil society groups logging on shows wide diversity, which gives an encouraging picture of the reach of PMG to this sector.

How PMG operates

PMG operates through a core staff of five full-time administrators, including its Director. It usually employs four interns, for a period of ten months, and also makes use of international interns and part-time monitors, to prepare reports.

When PMG developed to the point where it needed full-time monitors, it forged relationships with three Western Cape universities, to encourage Masters degree students to enter internships, enhancing their

marketability and work experience through the training and work opportunities that PMG could offer. At one stage, University of Stellenbosch's Department of Political Studies included an internship at PMG as part of the MPhil course requirements.

At present, PMG hires three to five local historically disadvantaged interns per year (depending on funding), on a ten-month contract, which offers them an excellent opportunity to gain work experience as a bridge from their degree to their chosen career. It also offers opportunities, through international partnerships, to foreign interns, to allow them to experience South African politics first hand. Local interns are encouraged to apply for longer-term jobs during the ten months of their contracts. Over the last few years, the developmental impact of the training and opportunities that PMG provides have been consistently highlighted, by both former PMG staff and committee chairpersons, as one of its major successes. All former interns were hired quickly on the strength of the work experience and skills that they gained with PMG. Many have moved to Parliament or other NGOs that work with parliamentary matters, or have been employed by government departments in their legislative drafting divisions, have obtained legal articles, or have moved to embassies or the Department of International Relations.

In addition to the interns, PMG also offers part-time work opportunities to about 35 to 50 part-time monitors, ranging in age from 20 to over 70 years. Most of them are graduates, or are still studying for postgraduate degrees in law, politics or the social sciences, as these are fields that tend to best equip them to cope with the high standards of language and writing skills that PMG requires. They may work for two to four days a week, depending on the number of meetings, their availability and the speed with which they can submit reports. They too undergo a short training process, and feedback is given on their reports, all of which are edited before being posted to the website.

Subscribers demand high quality reports, and the monitors must therefore be articulate and able to grasp and report accurately on a variety of complex matters. PMG ideally tries to appoint "specialist" monitors to track particular topics, and particularly to report consistently on a particular piece of legislation, as this is particularly helpful when summarising or reviewing progress. However, its ability to do this is limited by the low rates of pay that it can offer and the fact that it cannot offer continuous work, due to recesses and constituency periods.

PMG's current website offerings:

Currently, PMG provides the following on its website:

Committee reports

PMG has a searchable database of all minutes and documents since 1998.

PMG aims to publish, within three working days, detailed reports of the proceedings of all committees and media briefings. The reports include a summary of the essential points and questions, followed by a full report of proceedings, including all questions and answers. A note is included of all documents issued at committee meetings (such as briefings on policy and legislation, working drafts of bills or public submissions, research documents and press statements), and electronic copies of those documents, which are in the public domain, are made available from the PMG website. The documentation is not available on the Parliamentary website in most cases. In many instances, PMG struggles to obtain documentation from Parliamentary Committee Secretaries or even from Parliamentary Liaison Officers of many government departments. When it is unable to obtain electronic copies, it may scan hard copies, although this is costly and time-consuming. If it is not practicable to scan, and if documents are integral to the meeting, a note is put on the website asking for requests to be sent through for the document immediately it becomes available, to avoid delaying the publication of the reports.

The whole report passes through a quality control and editing process before being published. PMG has consistently achieved its target to provide minutes of every committee throughout the year, and, in 2012 managed to achieve publication of the reports, in 88% of cases, within the three-day timeframe.

Website statistics and the list of exempt users show a healthy usage of the PMG website. During the 2005 evaluation of PMG, committee chairpersons expressed appreciation for the neutral style, and said the reports were a vital means of mass dissemination that led to nation-building through debate and discussion. The opportunity to follow the thinking behind the changes to policy and legislation, in particular by those situated far from Cape Town, was particularly welcomed upon by the public. 57% of respondents indicated that the PMG website had helped them to lobby Parliament or make a submission. Opposition members and support staff also were appreciative of the reports, as the smaller parties frequently cannot attend all committee meetings. The availability of a searchable database of all committee minutes has been cited as particularly useful.

So far, the South African parliament has not managed to provide the work of the committee to the public via its website. Only a few of the committees produce and approve minutes within seven days, with time constraints, lack of capacity, varying skills levels, lack of guidelines, lack of commitment, and lack of detail all being cited as problems. "Political approval" is required before such minutes can be made available to the public, and this would further delay the release of the information. At the moment, extensive minuting of discussions and clause-by-clause deliberations on legislation are not included in any committee minutes, which makes them of limited use to those who cannot attend the meetings. Due to these factors, PMG sees that it has a role to play for some time to come.

PMG has never been recognised by Parliament as providing official reports, although several chairpersons and MPs are supportive of its work and respect its commitment. The civil society organisation that brought the Constitutional Court case of *Doctors for Life International v Speaker of the National Assembly and Others* 2006 (12) BCLR 1399 (CC); (accessed from <http://www.saflii.org.za/za/cases/ZACC/2006/11.html>) relied on the PMG reports to prove its contention that Parliament had not complied fully with its constitutional obligation to ensure adequate public participation when processing three pieces of legislation. Parliament countered this by insisting that PMG's reports were not recognised as "official minutes". The applicants noted that Parliament's own minutes were shorter and, it was submitted, less comprehensive than the PMG minutes, and stated that "The PMG have no axe to grind whatsoever; they simply act in the public interest by providing an independent and comprehensive monitoring service from tape recordings of the proceedings". It is of course open to parliamentary officials to challenge their accuracy as soon as they appear. No challenge is made as to the accuracy of the content of the PMG minutes." The Constitutional Court took note of the abundant material taken from the Parliamentary Monitoring Group website and declared that there was insufficient compliance with the Constitution.

PMG has from time to time done surveys of the reasons why people visit the PMG website, which has shown that their reasons are about equally divided between reading the meeting reports and getting access to documents. Subscribers have commented that both are important to indicate future developments.

There has been debate, over the years, as to what PMG should include in its reports, and how much of the committee process should be covered. Whilst, on the one hand, PMG has noted a comment from a community organiser that "[committee meeting reports] are very long, so it's quite boring sometimes", it also recognises the need to quote figures and statistics, since the reports are not intended to be in journalistic, but rather in factual style. It also does include a summary, in recognition of the fact that not all subscribers will go through the full report.

PMG also believes that comments by Chairpersons on, for instance, poor attendance by committee members, or failure of the executive to attend, are important for a subscriber who may be doing research on the workings of Parliament. PMG emphasises on the website that it does not seek to provide a verbatim transcript (particularly since that is available on the audio recording) but to provide an accurate, concise, yet sufficiently detailed report of the proceedings. It acknowledges that there are limitations to what it can cover, and specifically refers to its offerings as "meeting reports" rather than "minutes".

□ *Audio recordings*

From about 2004, monitors had been provided with tape-recorders to assist them in transcribing their reports. Following the *Doctors for Life* case, and requests from government entities such as the Ministry of Defence, it was decided to ask those attending the meetings also to make a digital recording of the meeting. The digital recording is posted on the website on the same day as the meeting, guaranteeing immediacy and accuracy.

PMG has recently been asked whether it would consider offering live streaming on its website, but this is not viable. Quite apart from the cost, the technological expertise required, and the necessity to obtain parliamentary approval, it is more appropriate for Parliament itself, perhaps in conjunction with news channels, to expand its live filming to all venues.

□ *Ministerial replies to written questions*

PMG provides up-to-date information on ministers' responses to written questions from Members of Parliament (MPs). This is provided in a searchable database, and the replies are now grouped by ministerial portfolio, allowing readers to assess each minister's responses for direct answers to the point, consistency, and transparency. The questions are another very important source of parliamentary oversight, and increases in transparency should lead to calls for better accountability.

□ *Subscriber alert service*

PMG, in response to requests, instituted a system in June 2000 to alert subscribers, by e-mail, of matters arising from the work of the committees to which they subscribe. The matters may include notification of new bills, requests for public comment and the daily schedule of committee meetings. Subscribers have been particularly appreciative of this service.

□ *Featured content*

PMG's editors include a regularly-updated "featured content" selection that alerts readers to particularly topical discussions, public hearings or controversial issues.

□ *Committee and parliamentary programmes*

Committee and parliamentary programmes are provided for each of the four sessions, when these are made available by Parliament. These include the programmes for plenary debates.

The Independent Panel Assessment of Parliament said that it would be useful to specifically draw a correlation between events such as the Women's Parliament and the legislative programme, to note what bills may directly affect women's rights. The usefulness of such links was borne out by the fact that, in 2012, the NCOP Committee considering the Traditional Courts Bill, which directly affects the status of women, only sought submissions from the Portfolio Committee on Women, Children and People with Disabilities after the relevant Minister had asked that she be allowed to make a presentation.

□ *Legislative programme for each department*

Information on the legislative programme of departments is supposed to be sent by the Leader of Government Business to PMG, who tries to publish this information when it can.

□ *Calls for public comment and public hearings*

PMG encourages public participation by alerting its subscribers to calls for public comment on policy, tabled bills, draft bills and regulations, via email. These calls for public comment are published by departments in the Government Gazette, a publication that is not accessed by the average citizen. For this reason, PMG has added this to its list of activities, to afford broader opportunity to all sectors to give comment at a much earlier stage in the policy or law-making process, particularly at a time when the department is still drafting policy or legislation.

In addition, in recent months, PMG has been attempting to boost a broader civil society input, having noted that the same bodies tend to make regular representation to Parliament. When PMG sends out calls for comment, it now also tries to encourage the early sharing of submissions, and reminds its readers that PMG would like to circulate comments, or at least a short summary of them, to other subscribers. The intention is to make the process less daunting for subscribers who may not be well-versed in making submissions, but who nonetheless may wish to indicate their support for, opposition to, or addition to what others may have say. PMG still has challenges with this; the time given for submissions is often very short, and most people finalise them only on the deadline date, leaving little time for PMG to screen and circulate them. However, it will continue to try to encourage earlier and wider sharing of ideas.

Details of public hearings are noted, and where time allows, alerts are also given in the monthly newsletter.

□ *Hansard full-text searchable database*

In most countries, an equivalent of Hansard, reports on plenary sessions and debates, is made available, but in South Africa, as in many other countries, it is not widely accessible to the average citizen, and of course is less "immediate" than committee reports, in that it represents the debates at the end of the legislative process.

In South Africa, unlike the National Assembly for Wales, which manages to release the transcripts of its plenaries within 24 hours (and summaries of business conducted in committees 30 minutes after the end of the meeting!), the South African parliament will not release even the unrevised version without at least a preliminary edit, as the quality of the transcriptions is not up to scratch. Given that there are far too few editors in the Hansard unit, it takes three to four months before PMG is able to publish Hansard reports. However, as soon as it is able, PMG provides Hansard full text in a searchable database, as distinct from Parliament's plenary session record that is not easily searchable

□ *New Bills and weekly updates on Bills*

PMG reports on bills to be tabled shortly. It obtains the basic information on bills from Parliament, and updates its information on a weekly basis on the status of legislation, including the progress of bills to acts, as well as noting the date of assent by the President. Dates of promulgation are at present only made

available through the Government Gazette and PMG only obtains this information if it is released by Parliament. Although the Parliamentary Bills Office produces its own internal document tracking progress, and its Programming Office prepares another document with an update, neither is published on Parliament's website, despite the fact that the Independent Panel Assessment Report, urged Parliament, in order to be effective, to ensure that the information on its website was constantly updated.

A detailed briefing on the Bill is presented to the committee to which the Bill has been referred, and this will of course then be reflected in the PMG committee reports and supporting documentation.

Although PMG at one stage gave consideration to producing summaries of legislation, similar to what some other PMOs produce, it does not presently have the capacity to do this itself.

□ *Information on Committees and their members*

The parliamentary website details on committees are also not always up to date. PMG ensures that its lists of committees are kept up to date, showing all members serving on them, and publishing the daily committee programmes, and term programmes, if these are made available, whenever any changes are picked up by the monitors attending the meetings.

□ *Information on MPs and constituencies*

Some details on MPs appear on the Parliament's website, but this is regrettably not always totally up to date, and is limited to details of names, party, and contact details. In 2005 another non-government organisation (NGO) had provided a one-off, detailed book, for which it had received separate funding, but it struggled to obtain the information and the exercise has not been repeated. PMG therefore provides the correct contact details for MPs, and a list of the committees on which they serve, on its website. PMG is also in the process of creating a monthly blog, by MPs, about their working life, with a heavy slant on their constituency work, and hopes that the media would make use of the blog also to publish newsworthy stories.

One of the problems that South Africa has experienced since 1994 relates to constituencies. South Africa's electoral system is based on proportional representation, and a party list is used. After the elections, each political party assigns its own MPs to a constituency. The funding and parliamentary programme indicate that MPs should be spending about a quarter of their time on constituency work. At present, however, there is no oversight mechanism for this work. It is also very difficult for the public to get information on their assigned representatives, since this information has not been given consistently on parliamentary or party websites. PMG has, over the last few months, managed, albeit with difficulty, to obtain constituency information from a variety of sources. It is now aiming to create an "MP-Locator" that allows a person to select an area, and be shown the nearest constituency office, with contact details and the name and details of the elected MP. A feedback interface will be built into the "MP-Locator" to allow citizens to feed back whether the offices were effective, in order that their parties can hold the MPs responsible more accountable. The option for using non-smart mobile phone technology is also being investigated, as this would also allow access to this information by more citizens.

□ *Reaching grassroots organisations*

PMG has relied on social justice networks, and particularly the advocacy organisations, to pass on useful information from its reports to their networks, and alert communities to events of particular importance to them. Recently, in addition to the full reports that it publishes for subscribers, PMG also has been writing two publications aimed at community based organisations, such as advice offices, working at grassroots level. These attempt to ensure that rural areas are also reached by PMG to promote their ability to interface with government and parliament.

The quarterly "Spark" newsletter is produced in print and electronic format, highlighting, in plain language, about five to ten good practice ventures between local government and community organisations that have effected positive changes in service delivery, public participation or economic development. This information is intended to spur others on to replicate their efforts. Around 13 000 copies are provided to Parliamentary Democracy Centres, to the executive committee of all 278 municipalities, and to selected parliamentary constituency offices. It is included as an insert in the "Delivery" magazine, which reaches every municipality and the majority of ward councillors. Examples of good practice are sourced from municipalities and grassroots organisations with whom PMG has developed links, and from reports to Parliament.

The focus of the initiatives remains largely on the five priorities of government – namely, health, safety and crime prevention, job creation, education and rural development - as well as how to implement a working model for public participation.

The other innovation over the last two years has been the monthly publication of the "Monitor" newsletter.

This aims to summarise, in plain language, the most essential socio-economic developments discussed in Parliament that would affect grassroots community based organisations, and to disseminate it to those organisations. The types of issues highlighted would typically include matters relevant to women, children, the disabled, veterans, social grants, refugees and basic education, or policies around economic sustainability, land reform or rural development. About 5 600 subscribers to key committees receive it by e-mail, and it is also e-mailed or posted to about 600 recipients at community advice offices, as well as being accessible from the website.

□ *General assistance*

A large part of PMG's work is not something that is apparent through its website. PMG assists the public with requests for information, by phone or e-mail, on a wide variety of queries relating to governance, human rights, legislation or the work of committees. The Women's Parliament of 2004 noted that although groups made representations, it was seldom that they received feedback, a problem that still persists. The reports that PMG publishes, or the directions that it is able to give, on executive responses to the public hearing submissions are thus very important.

A very small number of complaints are received about the reports themselves and corrections are made immediately.

□ *Social networking*

PMG has, in the last year, entered the social networking field, on Facebook and Twitter. However, it remains cognisant that the value of any contact must be judged by its ability to make a positive impact in improving access and information.

□ *Networking with other PMOs, and inter-continental work*

PMG is now part of the global network of PMOs, which has received more attention in the last two years. It is on a mailing list where there is a continual exchange of ideas and updates on the latest trends. The National Democratic Institute (www.ndi.org) has played a leading role in creating this network, which has been immensely supportive. Several guides are available on parliamentary monitoring issues, and the particularly useful *Political-Process Monitoring: Considering The Outcomes and How They Can Be Measured*, (accessible <http://www.ndi.org/political-process-monitoring-outcomes>) was recently made available to PMG. This guide sets out the research and findings on citizen voice, political space, and government accountability with different types of monitoring, suggesting some questions to be explored, and including some country-specific case studies. It also suggests some tools that can be used, easily tailored to specific circumstances.

The NDI also has been instrumental, along with five other organisations, in recently launching the website, OpeningParliament.org, "a forum intended to help connect the world's civic organizations engaged in monitoring, supporting and opening up their countries' parliaments and legislative institutions".

PMG was invited to, and did participate in giving some drafting input into the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, briefly outlined on page 15. This is similar to the declaration signed by President Zuma in October 2011 at the launch of the international initiative, the Open Government Partnership.

□ *Cooperation activities*

PMG has been asked to collaborate in the establishment of a continental PMO network, and to be a mentor to emerging PMOs in Africa. This would not only be an ideal opportunity for PMG to establish a larger network, but would be of immense assistance to the furtherance of democratic ideals on the African continent.

During July 2012, PMG applied for, and was accepted to give a presentation in a Paris conference on Open Legislative Data. The ability to participate in this conference was of enormous benefit and provided a fertile ground to discuss possibilities for the future.

PMG has joined a network of organisations in Cape Town, the Open Data and Democracy Initiative, who wish to collaborate on using informatics systems to aggregate data and make it accessible to citizens. This is a concept already applied by other PMOs, and more fully discussed on page 22. This network is open and non-partisan, consisting of activists, IT coding experts, journalists, entrepreneurs, and concerned citizens who wish to develop a way to use open technology and promote open data to enhance efficient governance, increase transparency and improve service delivery in South Africa. The first "Hackathon, Coding for Democracy" was held in August 2012, and PMG is pursuing how it can make more information available.

PMG also joined forces with eight other non-government organisations to organise a conference, in August 2012, on *People's Power, People's Parliament* to improve the role of public participation in Parliament. Some of the main issues raised are outlined on page 16.

Challenges facing PMG and other PMOs

Many of PMG's challenges are mirrored in other PMOs, but some are unique to its specific mandate and circumstances.

Limited access to information

During a recent international conference in Paris (<http://www.lafabriquedelaloi.fr/OLDP>), it was confirmed that the challenge of accuracy and accessibility remained common to all PMOs. The extent to which their parliaments may operate in the open, or make information available, will directly affect whether PMOs can easily get access to information, in order to then disseminate it or use it in creative ways

All PMOs have traditionally advocated for greater access to government and parliamentary information. If PMOs find that their parliaments do not make information available, their starting point should be basic advocacy for more openness and availability of parliamentary information, without any copyright restrictions. Commitment by the institution and members of a parliament to making information available consistently and transparently is vital to a proper democratic process.

Even such relatively simple functions as providing all the correct details of MPs can help to build a culture of transparency and openness. Regional comparisons may be useful, paying heed to the need for increased collaborative dialogue with the world's parliaments around parliamentary reform to meet certain standards.

Recently, several PMOs, including PMG, have worked on drafting the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, launched at the World e-Parliament Conference in Rome on the International Day of Democracy on 15 September 2012 (www.OpeningParliament.org). This Declaration is intended not only as a call to action, but also as a basis for dialogue between parliaments and PMOs. It calls upon parliaments to promote a culture of governmental and parliamentary openness to enhance citizens' understanding, to ensure that citizens can have recourse to legal action to access documentation, and promote proactive publication of their activities, including information about Members of Parliament (MPs), to allow citizens to make informed judgments about their integrity. The information should be broadly accessible to all citizens on a non-discriminatory basis, through multiple channels, including personal attendance, print, radio and visual media, and live and on-demand broadcasts and streaming. It urges that all parliamentary information be made available, free of charge, in multiple national and working languages, and for other tools such as plain language summaries to assist citizens' understanding. It requests parliaments to release the information online, in open and structured formats, such as structured XML, ideally using open source software in a format that will allow for easy access to and reproduction of documents, with search and download functions that allow citizens to analyse and re-use the information. Finally, it urges parliaments to share good practices and work collaboratively with PMOs. Initiatives in Africa include the Akoma Ntosa and Bungeni applications, more fully discussed on page 24.

Approaches used by different PMOs to encourage transparency may differ, with some choosing to adopt a more confrontational approach, taking legal action, or reporting perceived breaches directly to the media and asking the media to run with the cause. Others such as Institute for Social Accountability, (www.tisa.or.ke) may indulge in quieter advocacy with the parliament itself, including offering training or more constructive suggestions, or offering its parliament the right of reply, or even of correction, before publicising anything to the media. Most PMOs realise that they can enhance their credibility within and cooperation by parliament by supporting their parliament in reaching out to the public.

Translating access to action

Access to information, although obviously needed, should not be seen as an end in itself, as there is a need to translate it into something useful. This has been borne out by several surveys and enquiries. For instance, the Independent Panel Assessment in South Africa produced a detailed and useful report, which identified several institutional problems that needed to be addressed, including better research and minuting capabilities. However, regrettably, in practice, it sparked little change, since the report was in some cases discussed only perfunctorily, and few of the recommendations have been implemented.

For this reason, a *People's Power, People's Parliament* conference was convened in Cape Town, in August 2012, with the aim of opening constructive dialogue with national and provincial legislatures in South Africa to implement and build on the Independent Panel Assessment, stressing the need for active citizenship in

building an accountable, representative and participatory government. This report acknowledged the substantial strides that Parliament had made to transparency, access and public participation, as well as the country's progress in building research and oversight capacity, but suggested that some of the Independent Panel Assessment recommendations had to be revisited, as well as addressing the concerns, in the National Development Plan, on whether "Parliament is currently fulfilling its role adequately in the building of a capable, accountable and responsive state that works effectively for its citizens." Some of the suggestions made to take that report further included a call for a public debate on the possibility of a different electoral system, legislation for transparency and regulation of funding of political parties, and faster dissemination, by Parliament, of committee minutes and Hansard. The conference also recommended use of broader citizen-information platforms, including MXIT and other non-established platforms, and greater receptiveness and responsiveness, in public participation forums, to both assenting and dissenting viewpoints. It also urged MPs to strongly assert their oversight powers to improve service delivery and quality of governance,

In the meantime, the Auditor-General and National Treasury in South Africa both commented that regular access to information by PMG does result, albeit passively, in the building of a culture of involvement that encourages "accountability as a norm" in government entities. In order to encourage more active involvement in the oversight activities of the national parliament, PMG has registered officials and political heads in provincial portfolios to receive information relevant to their portfolios, through sponsored subscriptions.

If the aims of the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness are achieved, many PMOs, including PMG, may need to re-consider their functions and focus. Whilst the act of monitoring is valuable, it remains of limited impact if it merely reproduces information and does not in some way meet the needs of citizens not only to access, but also to understand and work with that information. A simple example may be that many PMOs restate the information in a more accessible format, perhaps using visual presentations rather than statistics or tables. Another is that they may, like PMG, provide a succinct written summary as well as the recorded proceedings of meetings. Other PMOs, as more fully examined from page 20, use the information in a variety of different ways.

Perceptions and resistance by Parliament

Linked to the question of limited access to information is the fact that in South Africa, and in other young democracies, there remains some degree of suspicion to PMOs and their activities. The nature of their scrutiny means that PMOs are often perceived as simply waiting to criticise or highlight any imperfections of political leaders. Any PMO must expect that it will take some time taken to forge credible and effective working relationships with Parliament's presiding officers, MPs and staff, and bias or poor methodologies by PMOs may overshadow their positive contributions. Some PMOs, such as the Hansard Society in the United Kingdom (www.hansardsociety.org.uk), have managed to enter into a memorandum of understanding with their parliament, whilst others, such as National Democratic Institute have been able, whilst determining their own policies and remaining completely independent, to agree with their parliaments that they have a niche role that augments parliamentary work.

Some democracies have been prepared to show a greater commitment to the processes of accountability. However, in many countries, parliaments and MPs still are nervous about the concept of civic scrutiny, and are thus even more unlikely to be readily accepting of rigorous civic oversight of their work.

Perhaps the most important defence open to PMOs is that their information must be thoroughly credible, so that they might choose only to use publicly available information, so that its results are more easily verifiable - in the words of Iftekhar Zaman Transparency International Bangladesh, quoted at page 69 of the Mandelbaum paper, "We need to provide information that is impeccable and defensible... Whatever we say and do, we must have information to back it up". This was one of the reasons why PMG took the decision to make audio recordings available on its website.

Where PMOs advocate for improved transparency or parliamentary information, they should ensure that their own organisations maintain high standards of transparency, and some have suggested that this means that they should adhere to the same rules as MPs, in relation to disclosure of funding and assets.

Another way in which poor perceptions may be addressed is through education of MPs, and indeed also the public, on the benefits of monitoring to society as a whole. Whilst it cannot be expected that the mere fact of public support will necessarily protect PMOs from MP or institutional scepticism, the importance of public opinion should not be underestimated. Particularly where PMOs engage with citizens directly, providing interactive sites, this creates a better match between public concerns and parliament.

Good performance is another positive factor. In South Africa, there is broad recognition from the majority of committee chairpersons, government departments, civil society, MPs and some committee secretaries, that

the committee section of Parliament does not currently produce minutes in the same degree of detail as PMG. Many committee chairpersons respect and maintain a good working relationship with PMG, offering a cordial and welcoming atmosphere in their committees. Many MPs and their support staff, from all parties, both use and praise PMG's reports and other services. However, some presiding officers of Parliament, , prefer not to engage with PMG. The South African Parliament, as an institution, would ideally prefer to have more control over what the reports of meetings contain. Only a small minority of MPs claim not to know about PMG's work, or have been actively impolite or obstructive to monitors, even to the extent that a few claimed, incorrectly, at one stage that PMG had been banned from attending meetings. Many of those who maintain opposition to PMG have in fact never accessed its reports, but base their objections on their perception that PMG is interfering with, or holding itself out as a competitor in the work that Parliament should be doing, rather than seeing its work as actually improving access and recognising the potential to boost their own profiles.

In 2010, one of PMG's funders questioned whether PMG should or could participate in putting pressure on Parliament to fulfil its obligations to release minutes more swiftly. The PMG Board did not think it was appropriate, particularly given PMG's current position, to contribute to any pressure group, although it was of course open to other advocacy organisations to take up the point. PMG certainly did not want to cause antagonism in an already tenuous relationship.

In ongoing attempts between 1998 and 2002, PMG had attempted to publicise and promote its services to Parliament. At one time Parliament announced that it was about to provide services that would allow the public to "attend meetings, debates and parliamentary sessions 'virtually' and in real-time", as well as invite the public to make comments and contribute to debates via its website. The PMG Board then suggested that PMG should perhaps find out whether Parliament might consider entering into partnership with PMG, since PMG could no doubt offer useful assistance to Parliament's venture. However, Parliament eventually responded that it would not consider this, as it saw PMG as essentially "on the other side" by reason of the fact that it was tracking Parliament, although the "monitoring" was then essentially confined to "minuting". The PMG Board, after further discussion, came to the conclusion that it would in any event be preferable for PMG to maintain its independence.

Instead, PMG moved to marketing its services by keeping parliamentary staff and officials advised of what it aimed to do, and what it could offer by way of assistance. Initially, PMG was requested to produce an induction manual as a basis for training, but ceased doing so when Parliament began to offer its own induction sessions.

In 2005, Parliament hired PMG as a service provider to record and transcribe the minutes of a public hearing and conference for the first time. It has not repeated this.

In 2006, it was suggested that PMG still needed to be more proactive and more visible to the political and administrative managers within Parliament, combining its monitoring with parliamentary support. During the three-week parliamentary recess in that year, PMG attempted to create more awareness of its activities and website, by giving about 50 full website demonstrations to support staff such as Personal Assistants of Chairpersons, Parliamentary Liaison Officers from the ministries, library staff, legal advisors, the tours subcommittee, and personnel from Media Relations and the Committee Section. The demonstrations were generally well received. While some were very familiar with the website, others had hardly ever used it and needed a full introduction.

PMG still wishes to pursue closer cooperation with Parliament as an institution, and will emphasise the value of direct and indirect support that it can offer to the parliamentary institution.

A PMO faced with negative perceptions must ensure that it adopts sound methodology for whatever form of monitoring it conducts, especially where the PMO might do quantitative assessments. There should also be recognition of the fact that whatever is accessible may not present the full picture, so there is a need to continuously develop tools that can better answer challenges. Finally, engagement with MPs has been useful for many PMOs.

Communication

The value of communications is directly linked to perceptions. PMOs need to continually ask themselves if they are reaching their target audiences, and need to reconsider the targets regularly. Despite the fact that there may be resistance, PMOs do need to keep up communication with the institution of Parliament, and also communicate effectively with individual MPs. Some countries have reported an active lack of interest by the public in what their parliaments are doing, and apathy in promoting citizens' engagement. This is not apparent in South Africa, although there is a challenge of reaching those who are illiterate, based in remote

areas, or who are otherwise unable to access technology.

PMG continues its attempts to facilitate more engagement by publishing calls for comment, information and by its marketing efforts to reach broader audiences. It continually promotes its free services and reminds bodies of their right to free access, which has resulted in increased access to its website on each occasion. It also urges the grassroots organisations to whom it sends information to call for more copies and try to disseminate the information to wider audiences. In recognition of the fact that it may be daunting for the smaller community based organisations to find PMG, register on the website and select their areas of interest in order to get e-mail alerts, PMG tries, wherever possible, to isolate likely recipients and make the linkages itself. It has run a telephone campaign that involved talking directly to people at community-based organisations in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Northern Cape and Western Cape to establish their interests, register them on the PMG website and ensure they received alerts or are posted the monthly newsletter if they have no internet connection. In 2013, the campaign will extend to Limpopo, Free State and Kwa-Zulu Natal

PMG is aware that communities without web access are largely excluded from its network in obtaining the information within the timeframes generally required. More direct communication would be extremely costly both in terms of staffing and direct overheads. To try to overcome this problem, PMG has tried to network extensively and try to get links to other NGO's websites, and coalition sites, so that these organisations can spread the information more widely to their rural members. It has also been investigating the use of other technology, particularly social networks and cellphone technology, particularly the new applications that have been designed in South Africa for communication to non-Smartphones.

PMG ran a pilot project in 2004 with 34 community radio stations to boost public awareness of issues being debated in parliament. There was an initial assessment to establish the content needs of those stations in relation to policy and legislative development, through semi-structured telephone interviews with community organisations. Eleven fact sheets were created over the year on matters being discussed in Parliament that were of relevance to them, sometimes including contact details of local community organisations or provincial department staff. In general the project was not hugely successful for various logistical and financial reasons. In different circumstances, these kinds of projects may be effective in other PMOs. Transparency International Georgia (<http://transparency.ge/en>) organisation now records and publishes podcasts of the most interesting events, in the local languages, for re-broadcast to grassroots communities.

Whether a PMO runs an active or passive communication strategy depends to a large extent on the funding that it has available. Citizen interest may be fairly simply and cost-effectively promoted through the internet – as shown by TheyWorkForYou.com, the website of MySociety (www.mysociety.org) which has attracted more than three million visitors who can get a vast range of information about Parliament. Improvement of a web presence and generation of more traffic can be achieved through search engine optimisation, which can make a PMO's website more visible on sites such as Google. Mobile phone technology will be, for many PMOs in developing countries, more cost-effective and more easily accessible by the majority of the citizens. Finally, the value of communication and networking between the staff of a PMO and other institutions and individuals who attend parliament should also not be discounted.

Self-assessment

PMG and all other PMOs need continually to assess the value of their services. PMG is confident that its operation is delivering services in many ways. It has assessed its delivery in both quantitative and qualitative ways. It has carried out formal surveys and assessments, and will, for instance, compare website statistics, the usage by particular organisations and the number of new subscriptions each month. However, it also takes into account a myriad of unsolicited comments and approaches from Parliament, departments and civil society. These have, for instance, included chairpersons, departments or researchers, having seen the monitors "in action" at meetings, asking for even a first draft of the report before the monitor leaves the meeting. Some entities telephone to get PMG's reports, to check whether media coverage accurately reflected the tone of a meeting, or tended to sensationalise some issues. Ministers have sent their parliamentary liaison officers to PMG's offices to ask for assistance directly, or parliamentary staff have asked to get copies of recordings. All of these indicators have led PMG to conclude that it is succeeding on delivering of its objectives.

Even if PMG only counts the direct users of its services, it is obvious there are far more people being reached, with the small funding that is available, than it would be possible to reach through workshops or conferences. Many organisations either forward PMG's information directly to their affiliates, or interpret and feed it through their networks to smaller entities.

Because of the rapidly changing dynamic of parliamentary monitoring, any PMO, including PMG, must

continually follow and seek to understand who is using the website, and for what purpose, to enable it to adjust its strategy, remain relevant to the needs of its audience, or identify new audiences. PMG has recognised the need to re-design the website from time to time to clarify the core functions, and to make information more readily available, as well as seeking comment from users, including its own staff, on the new design.

Funding

In common with all PMOs, and with other non-government organisations (NGOs) in South Africa, PMG faces an ongoing challenge in ensuring that it has sufficient funding for sustainability. This is despite the fact that its “virtual cyberspace” operations allow it to cut its costs to a minimum.

In the South African context, after 1994, many international funding agencies who formerly supported a range of anti-apartheid NGOs then channelled their funding directly to the new democratic government. This resulted in increased competition for funding, a decreased variety of services, and, in some cases, compromised independence in the NGO sector, where donors made their funding conditional on conformity to specific agendas. Many NGOs had to become dependent on governmental structures for tendered paid work. PMG has fortunately not been forced into that position, but does need to seek funding continually from both international and local donors who fund, or themselves work to promote democracy. The international community is a vital source of funding for more than half of PMOs in developing countries, making the competition quite fierce.

All PMOs need access to both start-up funding, and continuous funding for ongoing projects. Several sources of funding will always be required. The experience of PMG and other PMOs has been that subscription services alone are not sustainable, nor can it be assumed that current subscribers necessarily will continue their interest in the reports in the longer term. PMG managed, in 2012, to fund 39% of its expenditure via subscriptions. It has also been the experience of PMG that it is useful, at the outset, to try out new projects initially as smaller pilots, rather than commit to long-term projects immediately.

It takes time for PMOs to develop credible and effective methodologies that will create good working relationships with their parliaments, in order to deliver services, and to investigate the most effective ways of engaging with citizens, and during this period, medium to long term investments by international donors are needed. It is, however, also recognised that whilst in the past most of the assistance offered was on the technical or practical side, there is now also value to be gained from the free sharing of information and informatics systems.

Few PMOs have funding models that can be transferred readily to other countries. The Netherlands Instituut Voor Publiek en Politiek (<http://www.prodemos.nl>) manages to remain independent and non-partisan although some of its projects are subsidised by the central government, and it also generates commission from provincial and municipal authorities, other government agencies and NGOs, in order to promote participation of citizens in the meetings and conferences that it organises. Other PMOs are wary of accepting any public funding, and many are simply not offered the opportunity.

PMOs may wish to continue diversifying their activities to secure several streams of funding, but this will depend on their own mission statements and what they intend to monitor. Some PMOs, such as MySociety (www.mysociety.org) have developed a for-profit website development business to supplement and help fund the monitoring work that it does through its own website. The German Abgeordnetenwatch (www.abgeordnetenwatch.de) obtained extensive donor funding after a large campaign, and is sponsored by media outlets, and has achieved such a substantial profile that MPs are willing to pay for premium profile pages on the website. Once again, this may not be appropriate for all PMOs, depending on perceptions of independence.

PMG has explored other ways of boosting its income in the past, apart from its subscriptions and donor funding. At one stage it explored banner advertising on its website but the web advertising industry was still in its infancy and likely advertisers were few and far between. This does remain an option for PMG and other PMOs, if they can generate sufficient website traffic that the advertisers require.

Staff continuity and training

The difficulties in ensuring continuity of funding have an effect on the remuneration that PMG is able to offer to both its full and part-time staff. PMG's turnover of administrative staff is quite high, because they are lured by more attractive salaries and more opportunities for advancement elsewhere. The expectations of PMG from subscribers, and PMG's own mission to provide thoroughly accurate and reliable information, mean that professional monitoring staff must be hired, but funding limitations force PMG to hire interns and part-time

staff only. The funding also proscribes the range of services that PMG is able to offer, and most PMOs do not have the sort of capacity that the Hansard Society has to contract in experts to write and publish journals and research. Whilst some of the older part-time monitors at PMG are not primarily motivated by the rates of pay offered, this is certainly an issue with the younger monitors, leading to high turnover and the need for continual training of new monitors.

The burden of training is tackled in various ways. Internal monitors are hired after a preliminary assessment of their capabilities, and PMG tries to assign them to specific committees where they will be able, more rapidly, to develop their specialist knowledge and skills. With the part-time staff, PMG will firstly assess the competence of interested applicants by way of a practical test requiring notation of a portion of an audio recording of a meeting. A written manual, compiled by PMG's permanent staff with input from editors, is provided to all new monitors and interns. All monitors and interns attend their first meetings together with a more experienced mentor, who will introduce them to the procedures, provide guidance on report-writing, and allow them to become familiar with the proceedings and procedures, as they will not generally be required to submit a report of the first meeting. Later, however, when they attend meetings on their own and submit their reports, the editors will give feedback and guidance, and there will, in addition, be general reminders and feedback provided by PMG's full-time Monitor Manager.

Extension of PMO services

It is necessary to stress again that PMG set its initial goals and focus in the context of what was needed at the time, and what it had the capacity to provide, both in terms of funding and expertise in its own staff. From the outset, the PMG board took the view that it should not engage in analysis, but leave that to the various other advocacy organisations already in existence, many of whom employed full-time experts in their chosen fields. PMG has always been cognisant of the sensitivities that Parliament has about the work that PMG is doing, and remains convinced that it would not have been able to advance to its current position, or have the degree of cooperation that it currently enjoys from individual MPs, had it sought to interpret, or comment upon, the performance of parliamentary committees in the past. It strives always to maintain a neutral stance, even to the point where an MP making a particularly controversial statement will be quoted verbatim, rather than a monitor attempting to summarise what has been said.

In more recent years, PMG has extended its services to a degree, in that it is now moving more to isolating some trends, or preparing more detailed reports or tracking trends. It is still not attempting to give its own interpretation, but provides the information for other analysts to interpret.

In addition, as the next sections of this report will show, recent trends and useful practices have, over the last two years, been highlighted by other PMOs across the world, as well as major opportunities for regional or international cooperation. PMG and other PMOs, including those in the course of formation or further development, may wish to consider how some of these might be adapted or implemented either in their own internal functions, or through collaborative engagements.

The international context: a brief summary of what some other PMOs offer

Whilst the context of each PMO differs, and each works to a specific mandate that takes into account its particular strengths and weaknesses, it may be instructive to outline briefly a selection of some of the activities in which other PMOs across the world have chosen to engage.

Much of the information that follows has been drawn from the paper by Andrew Mandelbaum, "Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability, Citizen Engagement and Access to Information", which resulted from the survey of PMOs conducted between 2009 and 2011 by the National Democratic Institute and World Bank Institute. This booklet does not attempt to present all the information, nor isolate each of the PMOs mentioned, in a comprehensive manner, but cites some examples only.

Broad Outline: some comparative services

There is a wide range of services and initiatives undertaken by other PMOs internationally, from the most basic access to information - such as notification of what Parliament is doing - in the form of a session, monthly or weekly report, to sophisticated tools and websites that allow for MPs and the public to interface directly. However, in general, all PMOs, as stated earlier, aim to improve access to information about their parliaments. Many PMOs, particularly those that are newly formed, may need, at the very least, to explain how their parliaments function and how citizens can participate in the legislative process.

There are some organisations that, although describing themselves as offering "monitoring" services, in fact are closer to academic researchers or socio-political public affairs consultancies. For instance, the African Legislature Project of the University of Cape Town (accessed from www.cssr.uct.ac.za/daru-research-

[projects#alp](#)), conducts academic and applied monitoring aimed at learning “everything important there is to know about how African legislatures function”, drawing comparisons between twenty parliaments in the sub-Saharan region and collecting data on more than 400 variables that can explain development, performance and outreach of legislatures. It describes this as a bridge between academic research and practice. Others, like Dodds, deHavilland or Randall’s consultancy services, offer contract services providing summaries of policy developments in specific areas, including trends analysis and information about the key political figures involved in that policy and legislation, and a political contact management system, to strengthen their clients’ ability to plan and evaluate future strategies. They also give advice on what schemes are likely to receive full government support, and what threats and opportunities these pose.

The functions that each chooses to undertake are determined by the needs of their countries, their resources and sometimes by their interaction with other organisations. Some, like the Fundacion Directorio Legislativo in Argentina (www.directoriolegislativo.org), and Transparency International in Bangladesh (www.ti-bangladesh.org), act as the liaison point for several civic organisations or groups with similar goals, helping them to become more involved in the legislative process, and coordinate their activities. Others, such as the Institute for Social Accountability in Kenya (www.tisa.or.ke), assists institutions in capacity building for social audits. Kosovo’s Democratic Institute (www.kdi-kosova.org) not only monitors the Assembly of Kosovo itself, but assists other civil society organisations in boosting their skills to do so and boost public dialogue. Liberia Democracy Watch (www.liberiademocracywatch.org) encourages other NGOs to be more professional in its attempts to boost transparency in parliament.

PMG, during its early years, entered into a partnership with another entity to try to share resources and cover different committees. This worked well to a degree but later on the other entity needed to reconfigure itself. Any PMOs contemplating partnerships or interaction would be well advised to ensure that this will enable them to meet their objectives while also building their own identity.

Most non-governmental organisations will engage in a degree of parliamentary monitoring in their specific focus areas, and for internal purposes, but may not describe themselves as PMOs, as they do not seek to disseminate the information consistently or in raw form to the broader public.

Some PMOs track selectively, or may have a specific focus that is unrelated to broader parliamentary development or considerations. They might, for instance, focus only on education policy, or do their monitoring in order to undertake an analysis of trends or initiatives that affect specific sectors of society. Others may complement a broader monitoring with approaches that seek to support development in specific policy areas. Some, for instance, may look at how legislation is implemented, once passed, in national and provincial courts, or use their monitoring on the content of legislation to initiate justice reform.

Most PMOs seem to monitor national parliaments, but some, including PMG, may well consider extending this to provincial legislatures. Some, as detailed on page 29, may extend their monitoring to local government. Either the full institution, or selected aspects of it, may be monitored. For instance, whereas PMG has found it useful to monitor all committees of the national Parliament, the Fundar, Centro de Análisis e Investigación in Mexico (www.fundar.org.mx) closely monitors three committees only; the budget, gender and human rights committees, and tries to identify systematic applications of policy, interaction with civil society and transparency in these areas. In doing so, it has also developed a high degree of technical and policy expertise, which it applies towards analysis, oversight and goals in other human rights areas.

Some PMOs couple their own monitoring activities with building tools for monitoring. For instance, mySociety, in addition to monitoring the UK Parliament, builds and maintains websites that monitor parliaments, encourage interaction between MPs and citizens and facilitate access to government information, and runs a variety of public service websites, including those allowing for petitions and reporting of service delivery needs. The Sunlight Foundation in the United States of America (www.sunlightfoundation.com) similarly not only aims to make government information online itself, but develops and encourages new policies for transparency within government, and builds tools and offers “transparency grants” for organisations using the web to create tools for better sharing of information. Its advocacy campaigns have included use of social media by lawmakers, or achieving posting by parliaments of expenditure reports.

The Sunlight Foundation is one example of a PMO with a diversified portfolio of three different components. This may not be ideal for all PMOs, depending on their circumstances, as there may be a possibility of conflict if, on the one hand, the organisation is seeking cooperation in getting access to information, but on the other (like Sunlight) performs a journalistic function, which may be perceived as adversarial. The various functions that a PMO conducts should sit comfortably together, and will vary from country to country.

In practice, no PMOs monitor parliaments in more than one country, other than the African Legislature Project of the University of Cape Town, which may not fall within the narrower definition of monitoring”.

One trend that has become increasingly apparent, as touched on earlier, is the increasing focus by the international community on attempting to improve parliaments consistently, in order to strengthen democracy worldwide. This can include drafting and promotion of standards and codes of good practice. The more consistency that can be achieved, the more effectively can the work of parliaments be benchmarked. If parliaments are willing to follow codes and standards, the more possibility exists for sharing of resources, and more effective use of scarce donor funding, by PMOs. It would be even more useful if PMOs can build sufficiently good relationships and respect with their parliaments so that parliaments, in turn, are willing to consult with or include PMOs in discussions on parliamentary reforms and improvements.

Use of parliamentary Informatics

There is a growing trend for use of parliamentary informatics, which is, broadly, the application of information technology to parliamentary activity. About 40% of PMOs surveyed in the Mandelbaum paper currently use this tool, mostly in developed democracies, although its use is growing rapidly in South East Asia, Latin America and parts of Africa and the Middle East. Informatics is most useful where PMOs are already able to conduct a fairly advanced form of monitoring because their institutions are given support by parliaments or other entities that have the “raw data” available.

Selected tools

Informatics includes *Web scraping tools* that can automatically collect, collate, and organise or aggregate information from parliamentary websites and other information sources, and then generate visualisations (such as political finance maps), which can be automatically updated whenever new information is posted on parliamentary websites. One example is the OpenCongress.org website developed by Sunlight Foundation. Another, the Atviras Seimas project in Lithuania (<http://www.atviras-seimas.info>), which automatically collects all quantitative data from the parliamentary site, and presents it in a more easily accessible format on its own site,. This project apparently requires minimal maintenance.

The *Scout application* (<http://scout.sunlightfoundation.com/tools>) allows for citizens to receive an SMS or e-mail alert whenever a topic in which they have indicated their interest is mentioned in parliament. It is primarily intended for updates on bills.

Word-cloud applications are search tools that allow a visitor to a websites to search instantly through all of the comments made by an individual MP, in relation to a selection of topics generated by that visitor, to allow for comparison of debates online. They may use visual depictions, such as increasing the size of the font, or line graphs to indicate more citations of the word selection – as used by Regards Citoyens to monitor the French National Assembly (www.nosdeputes.fr).

The *Logilab application* merges news data and open data, allows for selection of nouns and places, and provides automatic tracking from a variety of news sources.

Other sites, such as the USA Open Government initiative use *crowdsourcing techniques* or *wikis* to facilitate public participation, by allowing citizens to comment, on the site, on legislation or converse “virtually” with their MPs. On many such sites, users can not only search sites, but many sites allow them to add or adapt content, and create new platforms for citizens to interact with MPs or participate in parliamentary monitoring and policy analysis. The comment has been made that this is a far more transparent indicator of public opinion than reporting only on voter results at election time, which may be rigged or affected by violence or intimidation at voting stations. Systems that allow citizens to send questions to the MP assigned to his or her constituency have been promoted by the Sunlight Foundation in America and Abgeordnetenwatch in Germany (www.abgeordnetenwatch.de), and have met with success as the MPs feel obliged to respond to direct queries. The Mzalendo organisation in Kenya (www.mzalendo.com) has blogs, which it puts up itself on the site, and has recently added a “comment” box to the page that profiles election candidates. It says that it hopes to add an “information sharing” facility at some stage.

Taking this concept further, the *Popvox application* provides an interface between Parliament, the public and the media, as it tracks public opinion, particularly on legislation, by showing citizens’ support for or opposition to a bill, lists organisations supporting or opposing a bill and their comments. Italy’s Openpolis Organisation (www.openpolis.it) allows for e-participation of local communities on municipal matters and budgets, as distinct from only national matters.

It has been said that this concept is often less daunting for citizens to participate in than using a formal submission route. However, in South Africa, many people from previously marginalised groups have

appreciated the opportunity to actually “have their say” before their MPs, the public and the media. If a PMO decides to do this, it may wish to consider how it might filter offensive or inappropriate comment from the website. The experience in South Africa has shown that many misunderstandings about legislation are able to be aired and explained at the public hearings, but a properly-crafted website could also minimise misunderstandings by better communication at the outset.

In Africa, mobile phone applications are even more relevant, as there are currently more than 450 million mobile phones being used in Africa, with this method of communication more affordable and available particularly to those in the most remote areas. The Praekelt Foundation (<http://www.praekeltfoundation.org>), for instance, has already developed scalable, open source mobile technology that allows for a host of other applications to be built. At the moment, the types of services covered on mobile platforms include public health, medical care, education, banking, commerce and governance, delivered via systems similar to Mxit, which can be accessed from non-smart phones. The systems are being constantly developed and are designed to facilitate dialogue between service providers and phone owners, so that NGOs, governments and social organisations have an ideal opportunity to build shared networks. Whilst these may be, initially, useful for disseminating information, they of course offer a superb opportunity for citizens and MPs to interface directly.

Informatics is often used to analyse the work of individual MPs, by gathering together information from various parliamentary, and sometimes also media sites, on how they have commented on and dealt with various topics, or their voting record on similar matters. These can be usefully extended to monitoring the whole institution of parliament, or its committees, for instance detailing how many meetings were devoted to topics, what topics were discussed at various meetings, and voting records (if these are available).

Each of these informatics applications aims to promote further citizens’ awareness and involvement.

The Mandelbaum paper indicates that whether or not PMOs use informatics may affect the way in which they engage with their parliaments. Most of the PMOs from donor countries use informatics, and there is a tendency to view aggregation and dissemination of information as their primary function, and to analyse the work of individual MPs. Those PMOs who do not currently use informatics tend to engage more directly with their MPs, make submissions in parliament (where appropriate), or engage in activities that may extend to other government institutions as well. Mandelbaum suggests, at page 25 of the paper, that PMOs who are investigating using informatics should try to ensure that the informatics meet their stated objectives, rather than allowing the informatics to dictate their future focus. In other words, he says that “parliamentary monitoring should be technology-enabled, rather than technology-driven”. Whilst there are various possibilities, PMOs should be quite clear about what they want to do before considering the extent to which the informatics may help. As its name suggests, this technology is a tool, but not necessarily a solution.

It must be remembered that if the parliament itself does not present substantive information about its work on its own website, and make it easily accessible, even the most effective informatics tools will be of limited use. Sourcing from sites such as media or other organisations may carry the risk of biased information. Some parliamentary or government websites may actively be closed off to the public, such as Kenya, or (at a stage) Croatia. The tools also provide little real assistance if the information is not posted in machine-readable or open data formats that are readily accessible to citizens. Differences in formats, standards and basic structure of parliamentary sites may prevent ready transfer or automatic access and transfer of information from one website to another. There is also the separate consideration of whether the PMO’s own website is readily accessible or whether users have to download other applications in order to read the documents, or wait long for images to upload. This is particularly where citizens might have access only to outdated computers. New Zealand’s TheyWorkForYou.co.nz, which was run from London, managed to develop its own site entirely with free and open source software but ran into difficulties at one stage when the New Zealand parliamentary website blocked access to overseas visitors. Later, the site closed, and the volunteer who ran it noted that the process of loading Hansard data each week from the www.parliament.nz site proved manually too intensive to allow other features to be developed. The New Zealand parliament did not have a dedicated software team who could remove deviations from the html formats at source. These were apparently specifically designed in the first place to prevent erroneous content being allowed through to the public website. It did not see this as a priority as it had other projects that it was pursuing.

Where the information is not yet available in the right format, it has been suggested that it may be more appropriate for PMOs to rather encourage the adherence of parliaments to the “open data” standards that the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness is trying to promote. In Africa, a United Nations / DESA programme “Africa i-Parliament Action Plan” (www.parliaments.info) is promoting two initiatives. Akoma Ntoso is a collaborative programme (www.akomantoso.org) that promotes open standards and open source applications, in XML format, for parliamentary, legislative and judicial documents. This should enable inter-

parliamentary cooperation, and reduce the costs of parliamentary IT support systems. A set of guidelines for parliamentary services, specifically within a Pan-African context, has been drafted. The second application, the Bungeni Parliamentary Information System (based on the Ki-Swahili word for “inside the Parliament”) is an end-to-end suite of applications for parliaments to use when drafting, managing, consolidating and publishing legislative and other parliamentary documents, which incorporates the Akoma Ntosa standards. Bungeni aims to increase the efficiency of parliamentary activities and make Parliaments more open and accessible to citizens. These applications are being piloted at present in the websites of the parliaments (not PMOs) of Uganda and Zambia, but no report-backs are available as yet on the parliaments.info website. The possibilities of each of these applications to assist the work of PMOs would also need to be considered.

Security, social, ethical and copyright issues around disclosure will have to be considered, depending on the type of information presented.

All of this serves to emphasise that PMOs cannot work in isolation and have a constant need to promote cooperation with their parliament to try to ensure that the maximum amount of information about the work of that parliament is made available.

PMOs with substantial in-house technical expertise have also cautioned that informatics can be expensive, particularly when they are being developed, although they are not so labour-intensive once they are fully implemented. At the outset, the purchase of equipment and hiring of expertise can be costly. A PMO will need to investigate what data it wants to present, as well as how comprehensively it intends to seek information, how often to scrape websites and update the information, and whether it must be re-stated or simplified. When visitors to the website state their preferences as to what they would like to obtain, many adaptations may be required to achieve compatibility with the data obtained. It must also be remembered that informatics may not be universally effective to all audiences, and the profile and needs of the audiences must be carefully considered. It has also been noted that the use of informatics does not necessarily translate into a sustained user-base.

One positive outcome, however, of informatics is that the ongoing developments in this field offer the opportunity to strengthen international networking, including setting of standards for parliamentary developments, particularly if parliaments invite PMOs to join in discussions and debates on their future path.

Information gathering

As mentioned above, the provision of information by Parliament lies at the heart of what PMOs can offer to the public. In some countries where some parliamentary committee proceedings may be conducted in private, PMOs have sometimes tried to work with accredited journalists, or tried to access information from inside Parliament, to obtain information on the proceedings. This is not ideal, since it poses the risk that quality and truth of information cannot be independently tested.

In Croatia, the GONG project (www.gong.hr) worked extensively in the 1990s with its Parliament, to encourage it to open to the public. It managed to achieve the release, in 2003, of a new internet page by Parliament that did contain information about agendas, draft laws and committee and parliamentary minutes. GONG also advocated for and contributed to the new 2003 Rulebook for Transparency of Parliament’s Work, and to developments to more transparency in Croatia’s election systems.

Some PMOs monitor, but have no strategy to take that much further than publishing a report on their findings, or announcing the release of the information. Others take a more active role in trying to enforce access to information. Some encourage and assist citizens to make use of access to information laws, including posting details of all applications on their websites, whilst others actively bring applications themselves under such laws, particularly in relation to information about election funding or voting. The Mandelbaum paper indicated, at page 24, that it is more likely that PMOs in developing countries will make freedom of information requests, engage in litigation aimed at developing proper practices around freedom of information laws, or even engage in public interest litigation.

In South Africa, PMG has not taken the step of using the Promotion of Access to Information Act itself. That Act is currently monitored by the South African Human Rights Commission (a function that will in future move to the Information Regulator), and also falls under scrutiny by the Public Protector. Other non-government organisations have assisted the public to pursue actions under this legislation.

Some PMOs request this information to verify accuracy of statements, and others actively seek to disclose conflicts of interest and instances of corruption, for instance where asset declarations lack detail. The Sunlight Foundation in the United States of America has been advocating the adoption of a public on-line information act, which will make large amounts of public data publicly available, without the necessity of

requesting it using forms or more formal requests.

Publication and dissemination of information collected

It must be recognised that in most countries, there will be both MPs and citizens who are not sufficiently digitally-literate to get the information provided by websites to work for them. The political, cultural and social gaps between parliament and its people may result in citizens simply not being interested in, or unable to make the effort, to use their parliament's own resources. For this reason, most of the PMOs that, like PMG, concentrate on gathering information, also re-present or re-state that information, or present it in a searchable format.

The frequency and scope of how PMOs may report and disseminate information depends on their mandates and funding. Some may present weekly, or session reports, whilst others may do daily, or even more frequent updates.

Portugal's Demo.craticea (<http://demo.craticea.org>) suggested, in a paper delivered at conference in France in July 2012, that ideally a website should enable citizens to access "what they want, and what they did not know that they wanted". (<http://openetherpad.org/OLDP-plenary>). In addition to designing the sites to be attractive and easily readable, it was suggested that users should have to take no more than three actions to get to the relevant information.

41% of PMOs follow up the gathering of information by publishing summaries of parliament's activities in a year or session, either in general, or specifically in relation to number of pieces of legislation passed, meetings held, or public hearings arranged. Typically, they emphasise that the information is presented without political bias, because impartiality of their work remains critical to their relationship with Parliament.

Many PMOs not only publish reports on the activities of the Parliament, but include information on MPs themselves, more fully examined from page 35.

Tracking of legislation

29% of PMOs track legislation. Some may merely confine themselves to stating when it is expected, or introduced, whilst others use more sophisticated methods to track progress, summarise or invite commentary, which lean more towards a research and advocacy function. PMG, as indicated earlier, has always ensured that comprehensive information about the bills and their progress through parliament is published under its "Bills" section, will publish full reports on the introduction, explanation and progress of a bill in the committee, and will often also highlight notable progress on a bill by way of the "Featured Content" tag. Similar services seem to be offered by PRS Legislative Research in India (www.prsindia.org) which also gives bi-monthly legislative update reports. Govtrack, a service offered by Civic Impulse (www.civicipulse.com) allows people to receive immediate updates on bills of their choice through an RSS feed to their own computers or webpages, and also adds links to related bills and votes.

Some parliaments lack legislative tracking system, or, like the South African Parliament, do not use it to full advantage, whereas other parliaments are still reluctant to open up the process, or to publish drafts. In these cases, PMOs may be the catalyst to making the information available. In Georgia, for instance, where the Parliament did not disseminate draft laws in advance of their consideration, Transparency International Georgia (<http://transparency.ge/en>) did so, also organising public discussion and consolidating the feedback for its parliament.

Many PMOs obtain the bills or updates either directly from their parliaments or by using informatics software that accesses information automatically. They will then re-state the legislation in a more accessible format or style, ranging from merely making the documents easier on the eye, to adding descriptions, commentaries and analysis. Some PMOs provide brief descriptions of Bills, or summaries, which help citizens to understand the context. PMG does not do this, but in South Africa the Memorandum on the Objects of the Bill outlines the motivation for introduction of the new legislation, and PMG's reports on the presentations to committees on bills do use plainer language with less jargon. In addition, essential details of bills, in quite a simplified form, are included in the *Monitor* newsletter, in keeping with its grassroots audience.

Other PMOs give more detailed explanations of legislation. PRS Legislative Research in India develops four to six page documents, in plain language, providing a non-partisan view of all the issues contained in the bills, and their implications. These are then sent out to all MPs, journalists, civil society organisations and corporations. Regards Citoyens, an initiative of NosDeputes.fr, seeks to simplify the text, explain why it was proposed, separates out each section and links all references to other laws with the original text, explaining also the new changes. Washington Watch (www.washingtonwatch.com) tracks the development and makes

estimates on the costs or savings linked to those bills.

The tracking may relate not only to individual bills but also to trends. Some PMOs have tracked the extent to which parliaments engage in legislative development, tracking positive changes in legislation from one parliamentary term to the next, and highlighting past and current concerns. This can be seen within a broader context of monitoring the functioning of parliament as an institution, discussed in more detail on page 31.

Some of the more sophisticated sites are able to provide for very rapid access to the updated format of a bill. The *Git tool*, which allows for sharing of data, is used by Regards Citoyens to track amendments, also using an artificial intelligence algorithm to match data on the amendments to MPs' stated views or commitments. The system tracks who the last person was to work on particular wording, and colour coding is used to indicate whether a committee, individual MPs or government suggested modifications. All amendments are shown as a visual plotting over time. The *Solon application*, used to track the French Senat, allows senators to send amendments on line, and allows citizens also to obtain real-time information and follow bills closely. Here, as soon as the amendments are tabled and checked by the Sitting Committee, they are put online. The application links all the tools of Senate, National Assembly, Prime Minister and Journal Officielle (the official gazette that includes the parliamentary debates).

Inviting citizens to participate

In order to further their goal of seeking more public input, some PMOs actively encourage their citizens to participate in debates on legislation, in particular, by including wiki tools that allow visitors to comment on, join discussions on, or even annotate the legislation with comments. This is part of what is described as E-democracy. Iceland used this kind of collective participation for its new constitutional proposals, devoting a website to public comment, and receiving 370 formal proposals and 3 600 comments. Washington Watch had more than 100 000 comments at one stage on legislation. The Openparlamento.it project of the Openpolis Association in Italy amongst others, allows visitors to comment, vote and amend legislation. Annotations made may be seen by all visitors. Logistical considerations would dictate to PMOs to what extent this might be viable, and how the comments would be filtered and dealt with.

The *PopVox application* also provides a real-time metric of public sentiment for specific legislation, with the report on each bill also linked to an "opinion pie" chart and a line graph displaying support or opposition, over time. Since this information is public, transparent and free, it is suggested that all citizens, including civil society and the media, can get the real story on what issues are truly important to ordinary people. "Virtual contact" is thereby established between Parliament, individual MPs and voters.

As already noted in respect of parliamentary informatics in general, the possibility of extending PMO services to these kinds of applications is obviously heavily dependent on Parliament's and MPs' willingness to engage, and to work outside of the traditionally-accepted structures. Like other new developments, this may need to be treated with some caution, depending on the circumstances. Commentators at a recent informatics conference in Paris (<http://lafabriquedelaloi.fr/OLDP/Presentations/2%20-%20Plenary>) cautioned that whilst citizens may see such websites and applications as a "chance to concretize the fiction of a tribunal of public opinion", the legislatures may still view ICT as a challenge to their traditional way of working. PMG has been alive to the possibility that if the PMG website is perceived as the repository for submissions by the public, and these are forwarded to Parliament, this might cause affront to the parliamentary structures.

In South Africa, for a short while, submissions were invited on a very limited Public Participation Framework, and it may be that Parliament regards its current public comment process – through public hearings and the two committees to whom petitions may be addressed – as sufficient, although in practice they have considered very few petitions since inception of democracy. It must also be remembered that the traditional purpose of the constituency offices is to allow for engagement between MPs and citizens.

The PRS Legislative Research in India has taken a slightly different approach to promoting engagement with citizens. Its website instead provides a platform, through its LAMP Fellowship, for young citizens to support MPs in their parliamentary duties, as well as offering workshops where MPs can interact with experts in given fields.

Advocacy and lobbying

Ultimately, the question always has to be asked what will be done with the information gained and published. Openpolis states that its site aims to give individuals or organized groups a set of tools with which to perform their own lobbying, and to allow parliament to use the feedback itself. Other PMOs may use the information that they gather in order, to support their own lobbying efforts. Liberia Democracy Watch

(www.liberiademocracywathc.org) does not publish the findings of its monitoring, but uses this purely to inform its own campaigns on a general strengthening of the legislature. Several PMOs on the African Continent engage in this kind of activity, including the Institute for Public Policy Research in Namibia (www.ippr.org.na), which, as its name suggests, uses its monitoring as part of a process of independent, analytical and constructive published research into social political and economic issues.

40% of PMOs link their parliamentary monitoring to the advocacy work that they conduct. About half of these carry out advocacy that aims to stimulate parliamentary reform, either to create a more open parliament, or reform that will, typically, help to stem corruption or promote ethics across government system. 22% of PMOs have proposed a code of conduct for MPs. In South Africa, Parliament has an ethics committee (reported on by PMG), which concerns itself largely with whether financial disclosures are being made by MPs. Transparencia por Colombia (www.transparenciacolombia.org.co) did a study on the management of conflicts of interest in the legislative process, aimed at promoting institutional transparency.

Many of the PMOs, as already indicated, direct their advocacy efforts to using the freedom of information laws to have access to information. The Sunlight Foundation (quoted in the Mandelbaum paper, at page 221) has engaged in advocacy for new laws that require government to make data available in real time, which will obviate the need for access to information requests.

Many organisations that provide a lobbying service are commercial organisations. They may undertake the lobbying themselves, or provide sets of tools with which to lobby, including training on lobbying.

PMG's Board has on several occasions debated whether PMG should be taking a more active stance and lobbying on certain legislation, but it has always concluded that, at the moment, the value and expertise of PMG lies neither in lobbying nor in advocacy. In 2011, the Board again confirmed that PMG should be concentrating on presenting facts, in an unbiased and clear way that would allow users to make up their own minds. The online survey that PMG did at one stage indicated that more than half of the users of PMG's services had used the documentation provided in their own advocacy, lobbying and development of submissions, so it considers that it is playing a useful role in deepening democracy, without aligning itself to any specific causes.

Analysis and research

Where PMOs choose to and have the capacity to include analysis of or research into the information they collect, this takes the monitoring services to a completely different level. 44% of PMOs covered in the Mandelbaum paper said that they provided a research and analysis service at the request of MPs or other parliamentary or political actors.

Quite a number of PMOs not only re-state or summarise information in different formats or language, but analyse statistics or trends, budgets and spending, or track and comment upon the outcome of recommendations.

There have been some questions raised by observers and commentators of PMG in the past that it might be useful if it could undertake some research. PMG has never had the full-time research capacity, nor the funding, to develop this further. It has also been suggested that for PMG to enter into the field would duplicate work done by other civic or public organisations, professional statisticians and Parliament's own Research Unit, all of whom have more funding and more specific expertise available to them. These research reports are often publicised on the PMG website, when such research is presented in Parliament, which is a passive way of building community involvement.

If a PMO wishes to take on the task of analysis, this could perhaps start in quite a neutral way, perhaps cross-referencing issues across a range of different committees, which would allow for both consistency in political approach and unintended contradictions in those committees to be highlighted. It might also be useful to compare approaches in one parliament to approaches in other countries. As the analysis function develops, it can, however, impact upon perceptions of neutrality.

One initiative that PMG has started to use recently is that, whilst it does not do the research itself, it has started to "showcase" more commentary by other organisations on its website. For instance, it has included commentary by a constitutional law expert at one of the universities in the Western Cape, some of the public submissions on important topics, and links to the monthly column by one of the parliamentary journalists in the *Cape Times*. One of the South African NGOs recently commented that a PMO should be very careful not to expressly align itself with any views, or to quote any one organisation consistently. Perceptions of neutrality may be enforced if the PMO emphasises that anything it highlights is merely one example of commentary on the issue, and is aimed at a wider information service to the public.

Opinion polling

Opinion polling of how citizens view parliament is carried out by 38% of PMOs, including Nigeria. It is perhaps most frequently linked to either legislative developments, or in the lead up to elections. PMG does not conduct any such polls. PMOs who do engage in this may publicise the results in visual forms, such as maps showing where MPs received the highest number of votes, or charting of election polls and results. The opinion polls may be linked to other applications on the website, such as the ability to contact MPs, ask them questions or call for comment as to whether their activities are seen to match up to their election promises.

Election monitoring

For many PMOs, election monitoring is viewed as complementary to their parliamentary monitoring, both in terms of timing and organisational capacity. If PMOs are also funded to conduct other activities during the times that their parliaments go into recess to carry out campaigning, they can be assisted to stay open during the campaigns and given a better opportunity for more realistic planning of activities over the whole life of the Parliament, and sufficient time to analyse the information that they have gathered, particularly if it is linked to MP behaviour or promises during campaigns.

Azerbaijan's Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (www.smdt.az), a non-governmental organisation set up after registration of the official election Monitoring Centre was annulled, conducted its monitoring of elections through journalists accredited by parliament, undertook surveys of different election districts, and also organised meetings with citizen forums and the public, with participation of MPs and municipal officials.

Many of the PMOs will monitor national elections, but the Kosovo Democratic Institute (www.kdi-kosova.org) is one example of a PMO that also extends this to monitoring of five municipalities and their local elections.

Some PMOs, such as the Czech Republic's KohoVolit (<http://kohovolit.eu>) offer a service of voting advice applications, to match citizens' preferences to those of MPs and political parties, based on answers to series of questions about policies under discussion.

Other PMOs, such as Bosnia Herzegovina's UG Zašto ne (www.zastone.ba) publishes findings that are used by most parties in the pre-election campaign, to increase voting, and then monitors whether public statements are consistent and truthful. This organisation, and many others who monitor elections, then go on to monitor the delivery on the promises made during elections by individual MPs and parties.

Party and MP funding

22% of PMOs quoted in the Mandelbaum paper aggregate information related to finances of parties and MPs, with many tracking the funding that political parties or individuals have received for their election campaigns. This kind of information may be very simply stated, as done by the Center for Responsive Politics (www.opensecrets.org) that tracks money in federal politics in the United States of America, including contributions and expenditures for congressional and presidential campaigns, lobbying, and the personal finances of politicians. Others seek to draw inferences between the funds received during the election campaigns and the way in which MPs or parties have voted during the subsequent parliamentary term.

Many PMOs, as already mentioned, make requests under freedom of access to information laws, and many of these are made to pursue possible connections between election campaign donations, timelines of contributions to parties, and interest groups who would support or oppose certain legislation. Many parliaments and MPs purposely do not make information about campaign contributions open. In Armenia, the Freedom of Information Centre (www.foi.am) monitors all campaign financing of political parties, submitting requests for information during and after parliamentary elections, and bringing court applications where information is withheld illegally, or where there is "mute refusal". It also monitors the transparency of financial information provided by individual MPs, and publishes its findings.

The Fair Play Alliance in Slovakia (www.fair-play.sk) encourages electoral candidates to submit far more detailed and complete online asset declarations, over and above the minimum requirements, to Fair Play's own publicly accessible database. This, like many of the other PMOs, may also go further, correlating funding to later viewpoints, showing how public money is spent, or highlighting any conflicts of interest in MPs or the executive. MAPLight.org (<http://maplight.org>) also combines various sets of data on voting campaign finance and positions of interest groups, and conducts studies on how contributions may have affected the final outcome of legislative amendments.

Monitoring Constituency activities

In many countries, MPs regard their work in the constituencies as equally important to the work that they do in parliament. The Mandelbaum paper, at page 24, concluded that PMOs in developing countries are more likely to monitor constituency development funds and allocations that are intended to support local development projects. This is because it is more likely that these countries will allocate a significant portion of the state budget to finance socio-economic development projects that are supposed to be managed or overseen by MPs. This kind of spending has, in many countries, been linked to allegations of corruption or poor oversight, and the potential for abuse means that constituency activities and funds are coming under increasing scrutiny by PMOs.

In South Africa, the *People's Power People's Parliament* conference reiterated that constituency work must be central to any participation, legislation, or oversight process. It called on Parliament to consider how regular constituency meetings can contribute to oversight and other responsibilities.

Many PMOs start their monitoring of constituency services simply by publishing information about the constituency offices, their opening hours and how they can be accessed, and the activities of the MPs assigned to them. In South Africa, there is limited and inconsistent information both on the parliamentary website and in some political party websites, about which MPs represent which constituencies. PMG, as mentioned earlier, is trying to gather more information at the moment to extend its information about constituency work. The ease with which the offices can be contacted may in itself be an important indicator of constituency activity. As PMG has discovered through its other attempts to contact often remote offices, it is a labour intensive, and sometimes difficult exercise to gather and verify the information. Cambodia's Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia, quoted at page 38 of the Mandelbaum paper, monitored field visits of MPs to the 23 provinces, attended a sample of field visits and collected information that was then placed on a database. Although its analysis was intended to be neutral, this PMO, which had experienced difficulty in accessing the data, was criticised for allegedly under-reporting. However, its experience was that once MPs and political parties had an incentive to report, the number of visits to constituency offices, and their follow up on citizens' problems, apparently increased.

Uganda's African Leadership Institute (www.alinsitute.org) developed a scorecard from the information it gained on constituency work, which included attendance of MPs at local council meetings, proper accounting for community development funding, and ease of access to the local offices and the MP. Other "social audits" on constituency development funds have been developed by other PMOs, in India, Kenya and Tanzania, to evaluate how well public resources are being used. The team used for the social audit process will typically, as cited at page 40 of the Mandelbaum paper, include local community members, and involve the holding of public meetings where the MP is invited to report on the spending, which is then compiled into recommendations to authorities for possible improvements in the future. These kinds of tools, which are developed to match the specific context, are undoubtedly useful in increasing citizens' engagement with the processes, but should not actually duplicate the work of government or other agencies.

Monitoring of provincial and local government

Some PMOs are able to extend their work beyond the national, to also monitoring the provincial and local government. Some institutions, recognizing that real service delivery takes place at the level of local government, organize round tables with municipalities to strengthen cooperation between MPs, Local Authorities and citizens, establish networks of concerned citizens' committees in administrative districts, or do surveys and petition on local government reform.

Egypt's Justice and Citizenship Center for Human Rights, (www.agora-parl.org/es/node/8664) targets five local councils and monitors their performance, effectiveness and transparency. Pakistan's Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (www.cpd-pakistan.org) has undertaken active monitoring of selected district councils, in addition to its work on the national parliament.

However, there is at this level probably quite a distinct difference between monitoring of policies and legislation and monitoring of services, and a PMO would need to be clear on what it wished to do and how easily it would be able to access information.

Training initiatives

Many PMOs undertake active training as part of their functions, in addition to the more general information that they provide that boost citizens' understanding of the legislative processes.

Some PMOs, where they have capacity, may offer training courses for national and provincial parliaments, where appropriate.

The Armenian Freedom of Information Center, in addition to quite extensive monitoring functions that include bringing freedom of information requests, offers a series of training sessions to its National Assembly staff on how to apply the freedom of information legislation, to ensure that there is the required transparency in its parliament. This organisation has also prepared a handbook for journalists on rights of access to electoral information and meetings of electoral commissions.

In India, PRS Legislative Research offers a series of training workshops to journalists. To date, it has trained over one thousand journalists on legislative reporting. The topics covered include correct protocol for addressing MPs, and how to access information about parliament. This PMO also gives ongoing input to the media. Similar courses are offered in Pakistan.

In some countries, quite apart from whether PMOs would have the capacity to offer such training, they would need to be accredited. The question also arises whether this might not be perceived as impinging upon independence, if media houses are seen as pushing a particular agenda. However, it is certainly useful for PMOs to build effective cooperative relationships with the media, for when they are quoted in the media, this increases their public outreach. This is particularly important for the local and regional media that do not always have representatives in Parliament directly.

The Egyptian Democratic Institute (accessed through <http://www.agora-parl.org/es/node/8662>) trains school students to form a mock democratic parliament, and make them more aware of election procedures. Other PMOs have facilitated youth engagement initiatives, which may also include encouraging MPs to visit local schools to engage with students in discussions about the legislative process, to try to promote involvement, through innovative and enjoyable programmes, of the next generation of voters. PMG has not become involved in this work, since South Africa has various youth development agencies and initiatives, and offers (although not offered every year) the *Youth Parliament* and *Taking Parliament to the People* initiatives.

Some Parliaments themselves offer interactive games or access to documents pitched at school learners on their websites. It might be instructive for some PMOs to consider creating similar documents, if they have the capacity to do so, or seek permission for links.

All PMOs are offering a degree of public education by making information available, but some take a more active role and offer specific general public education campaigns on, for instance, freedom of information laws, the parliamentary processes, the concepts of good governance and the rule of law, or human rights in general. Some do not train individuals one-to-one, but aim to build capacity in other groups who can then convey the information to their target communities. Others, although they may not actually offer any training, might give support to teaching campaigns, particularly in the schools. Public training may tie in closely with the mandate common to most PMOs to encourage creative thinking, problem solving and proper public participation, if they have the resources to offer it.

The Liberia Democracy Watch (www.liberiademocracywatch.org) offers dual-focus workshops that, on the one hand, seek to educate citizens, but also simultaneously train local leaders, to enhance an overall understanding of parliamentarians' responsibilities to represent the interests of their electorate. Uganda's African Leadership Institute facilitated the transition in that country to a multi-party political system, and also hosted a mock multi-party debate to familiarise and educate the current and aspirant political leaders and the general public on the workings of a multi-party system.

Some PMOs may go even further and establish agreements with reporting networks, to offer radio or television programmes to highlight the activities of Parliament. Others may offer targeted political training on a commercial basis.

Annual conferences that look at themes like financial oversight, the balance between executive and legislature, or leadership workshops may be other useful tools, particularly if media attention given to them.

Assessing the functionality of Parliaments

Many PMOs use the information that they gather to then assess the functioning of the institution of Parliament, the functioning of committees, or the performance of political parties or individual MPs, the last mentioned being particularly prevalent in PMOs that use informatics. There are a number of sensitivities around these assessments, they may be subjective or open to differing interpretations, and some assessments may also overlap.

The analysis of individual MPs is possible when a fairly substantial volume of information is available about their work. It is particularly relevant to electoral systems that do not rely on proportional representation. Thus,

in South Africa and other countries that are based on proportional representation, where citizens do not vote directly for individual MPs, it is of limited usefulness. In addition, it must be remembered that in countries like South Africa and Ireland, MPs are not permitted to depart from the “party line” so analysis of bloc voting in parties is also not particularly useful.

There are several aspects that may be included in monitoring of the functioning of the institution, political parties and individuals. Once again, the monitoring may be limited to merely stating information and leaving website visitors to draw their own conclusions, or may be translated into active analysis or conclusions by the PMO.

Monitoring and assessing the functionality and administration of Parliament as an institution

37% of PMOs monitor the administration of Parliament, and about 41% of this figure prepare and publish summaries of parliament’s activities in a session or year. In South Africa, some parliamentary committees, but not all, prepare annual reports of their activities and these will be published by PMG when tabled. PMG has, during some recess periods, compiled summaries of the work that committees have covered.

Institutional monitoring can help PMOs to identify shortcomings within a parliament’s overall framework, particularly if the monitoring highlights performance or productivity. Institutional shortcomings may also be one of the reasons why the work of individual MPs may appear to fall short of expectations.

Some of the tools that can be used to monitor and then assess institutional performance can include:

□ *Representivity in Parliament,*

Representivity figures can be analysed, either by party, or specific groupings such as women or minority groups, with perhaps a comparison of the composition over a number of terms, or, less frequently, a comparison of how the occupational background of MPs compares to broader society

□ *Effectiveness of Parliament’s administrative systems.*

IDASA, one of the organisations helping to found PMG, participated in the Independent Panel Assessment of the South African Parliament. Often, it may be inefficient administration, rather than a deliberate desire to conceal something, that causes ineffective communication or difficulties. Many MPs have noted their own concerns in South Africa about the lack of researchers assigned to each committee, or the functioning of Parliament’s committee section. There have also been concerns by the public about the transparency of the processes for hiring these staff.

Many PMOs in fact supplement the administrative capacity of their parliaments, by making documentation available, or updating statistics, whilst at the same time Parliament’s inability to deal with these matters hinders the PMO’s own access to information.

□ *The existence of parliamentary rules aimed at transparency or openness* Some PMOs look to whether their parliament has rules aimed at transparency or openness, and, if so, whether the institution complies with the rules. This may require an analysis by the PMO of what “transparency” means, and what might be regarded as the minimum standards of transparency. Examples of the weighting systems used to assess transparency, across a number of PMOs that do this kind of benchmarking, have included the nature of the parliamentary website, the work done in committees and houses, the resources and administrative tools provided to allow MPs to carry out legislative work, work done by MPs in districts, and hiring of consultants by legislatures. The World e-Parliament Report of 2010 (<http://www.ictparliament.org/wepr2010>) did a survey of the transparency of parliamentary websites worldwide, which PMOs may access to draw comparisons with the websites of their own parliaments. Some PMOs, as already indicated, send through regular requests for information to check the extent to which Parliament does allow access to information, and the ability of its systems to respond.

The Mandelbaum paper, at page 66, cites an effective approach used by the Jordanian Al-Quds Center for Political Studies in 2010, to secure transparency in the institution of Parliament. This PMO asked parliamentary candidates to sign a “good governance pledge” as part of their election campaign, making a public commitment that if they were elected, they would strive to ensure transparency of the Parliament throughout their term of office.

Other indicators for transparency may include the time allocated to business in general, whether proper records were maintained of the business conducted, whether documentation was made available, declaration of MPs’ interests on matters and how well the committees functioned.

Transparency also extends to the actual workings in committees or the House. PMG has been asked

whether it is able not only to report on active attempts to conceal information in committees, but to highlight nuances of tone or attitude that may point to reluctance to be open. The difficulty with this, given PMG's specific mandate, is that this runs the risk of becoming a subjective analysis, particularly since so many MPs from all parties are not speaking in their first language and their comments may be open to misinterpretation. However, PMG did recently change its document forms to give a specific indicator of whether the public, or PMG, were excluded from receiving documentation. Another possibility might be for a PMO to note whether documentation was made available by parliamentary staff, or had to be obtained from presenters or another source.

Another option for measuring transparency might be to analyse whether bills debated in Parliament in general promote transparency across government, or whether sufficient technical reports and analyses have been presented to allow committees to deal properly with complex matters.

□ *Productivity of Parliament.*

This may be measured by indicators such as the number of meetings held in a committee, or on a specific topic, whether a quorum was achieved, or time spent in session. Transparency International Bangladesh (quoted at page 49 of the Mandelbaum paper) was concerned about the fact that time and resources were being wasted whenever Parliament convened late. It therefore started to track the time wasted and calculate the cost of this time to taxpayers. This caused initial embarrassment to the ruling party, but resulted in improvements to that parliament's time-keeping.

The Pakistan Institution of Legislative Development and Transparency (www.pildat.org) does a quantitative count of what its parliament covers, and then compares this with performance of previous parliaments across a number of indicators. Qualitative assessments – such as the chairing of public accounts committees by an opposition party member – are also included. Another indicator suggested in the Mandelbaum paper, at page 53, could be how quickly public accounts committees, where these exist, review government accounts, and how soon they might then draw reports for other oversight committees. In general, public accounts committees may be a very useful indicator overall of accountability and how well public spending is monitored.

□ *Attendance of MPs*

This monitoring includes attendance from each of the parties at the plenary sessions or committees, and their participation in debates and discussions. However, if there are any inconsistencies this can be controversial, and within the South African Parliament, several MPs have noted their concern that the official minutes prepared by committee secretaries have not always reflected their presence, or apologies. Whilst there are limitations to counting contributions by parties or individuals, one useful indicator might be to note whether enough attention is being paid to the rights of the opposition parties to contribute to debates.

□ *Tracking of legislation*

The tracking of legislation handled by a parliament may look at general indicators, or compare what was handled by other parliaments, or be analysed according to the type of legislation, such as bills that promote economic development or promote minority rights. The European University Institute, at a recent French conference (<http://www.lafabriquedelaloi.fr/OLDP/Presentations/2%20-%20Plenary>), suggested that some apposite indicators could be, for instance, whether crime and security legislation received less thorough scrutiny than other types of legislation, counted by the speed of process, the number of committee debates and the length of the word-count, the number of changes effected, and the roll-call for the voting.

Whilst comparisons of performance over time may give rise to difficulties of interpretation, a simple tracking of what types of matters were considered, and whether amending legislation was then proposed, may be useful.

In systems where political parties or individual MPs introduce the legislation, a comparison by political party or MP may also be useful. In South Africa, the majority of legislation comes from the executive, and a few bills from committees. Private members may also propose legislation, but the former committee to deal with allowed virtually no legislation to be processed through to other committees. Its role has recently been changed, following a Constitutional Court ruling that its procedures for private legislation were unconstitutional, and PMG will need to consider the possibilities for monitoring once a new system is in place.

Tracking the process and timing of bills that deal with budgeting and financial matters can also provide useful insights into how well the review process is working.

□ *Behaviour of MPs at sessions of the Parliament*

MP activities can be assessed at plenaries or committees. This may include a statement or assessment of any impediments or bottlenecks in the procedure, such as party walk-outs or blocking, and, where this is available or relevant, the way that they voted. Even if this is not applicable, a statement of whether or not transparent procedures were followed in taking the vote may be of importance.

□ *Systemic problems highlighted by MPs*

MPs' own views are also an important indicator of the functioning of the institution. This is why it is considered so important for PMG, whilst not attempting to give an analysis of the information, to make full and detailed reports available that reflect all views expressed. In South Africa, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts has commented, during meetings, that its difficulties lie not only in the fact that it is reviewing accounts eighteen months after their preparation, but that often the Accounting Officer now appearing before the Committee is not the one who was responsible for the problems, so that it is difficult to hold anyone ultimately accountable. MPs may also express appreciation or frustration about the quality of reports, or presence of research and legal staff at meetings.

□ *Links between measures proposed and civil society concerns*

These have been the focus of some PMOs. For instance, the Institute for Social Accountability in Kenya reviews, overall, the progress that the coalition government is making on the implementation of the stated Reform Agenda.

The Mandelbaum paper, at page 48, makes the point that the most useful information or analysis about institutional performance will combine a number of indices, and try to establish trends over time. This paper also notes that a reliance on quantitative "counts" only may not necessarily lead to the correct conclusions. For instance, a simple count of the number of meetings does not necessarily take into account the import of what was being discussed, and similarly, a simple count of numbers of bills covered in each parliamentary term does not take into account that some bills may be far more complex and far-reaching than others. However, as with the African Legislatures Project, it is useful to compare trends. That Project, for instance, found that the Kenyan and South African legislatures amend legislation quite substantially at committee stage, compared to the Zambian and Namibian legislatures, which effect few amendments in committees, but more in the plenary sessions (Mandelbaum paper at page 51).

PMOs, as well as developing their own tools for their own situations, are now increasingly doing evaluations using methodologies that have been developed by international organisations, which in some cases are seen as conferring more legitimacy, particularly if they have been developed through collaborative processes between PMOs, MPs and parliamentary staff. Examples are the Inter-Parliamentary Union Self Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments (<http://www.agora-parl.org/node/474>), the African Leadership Institute's Parliamentary Scorecard Project and parliamentary associations of the Commonwealth, Francophile countries and Southern African Development Community, all of whom have either already adopted benchmarks or are in the process of doing so. PMOs can offer useful assistance in developing or endorsing normative standards, as well as monitoring adherence to them. OpenPolis made the point that in trying to improve formulas and policies, it would also seek input from the MPs who were working "at the coal face". Pakistan's Free and Fair Election Network used trained observers to monitor performance of national and provincial assemblies against a checklist and reporting forms, then measured back against what were perceived as neutral and objective rules of procedure.

Once again, the sensitivities of parliaments should be taken into account. Although one committee chairperson in South Africa, in 2012, suggested that it would be useful for Parliament to conduct self-evaluation exercises in this way, other MPs had some reservations about benchmarking against foreign standards, particularly those from more developed countries. This is not to suggest that the tools should not be used, but it would be useful to have buy-in from different groups. The development of tools specifically on the African Continent, as now being promoted by the Africa i-Parliament project, (www.parliaments.info) may be more readily accepted.

□ *Committee functioning: Executive responsiveness to the institution of Parliament*

PMG has not, to date, specifically analysed the resolutions of Committees to see to what extent they were executed, although one of the other advocacy institutions in South Africa did attempt to highlight trends and recommend issues that needed to be carried forward, in six committees, from the Third to Fourth Parliament. One committee chairperson expressed the view, during the independent review of PMG in 2005, that PMG should be tracking the progress of implementation, and particularly scrutinising the way in which committees were handling annual reports by departments, to ensure that they were being held to account. He was of the view that "deepening democracy means active, informed criticism". The PMG Board did not support this approach, feeling that it would make PMG too adversarial. Whether or not another PMO may wish to follow this route will depend on its chosen focus.

Indicators that measure the executive's responsiveness to Parliament can provide Parliament with a greater stake in the monitoring activities. Several PMOs have used indicators such as the attendance of ministers (which is noted specifically by PMG in its reports), the number and nature of questions put, and meeting of deadlines by the executive. PMG, in its reports, also notes questions put by committee members to the executive that are not answered in the meetings. However, unless the committees follow up on those questions in a subsequent meeting (which few do) the information may actually not be made publicly available at all. The *People's Power, People's Parliament* conference urged that from 2013, the legislature should introduce steps to track executive implementation of House resolutions until they are resolved.

PMG has recently decided to try to extend its monitoring to more explicit tracking of department and executive responses in six identified committees. A summary of questions not answered in the meeting, and a tabulation of whether those questions were ever answered in public will be prepared. It is important that answers be obtained, not only for the intrinsic information that they contain, but to ensure that committees are performing effective oversight.

PMG is now also noting specifically in its reports when departments are refused audience, or are sent back because of failure to produce the requested documentation on time. (It is, however, also important to recognise that in some instances the departments have indicated that invitations were not sufficiently clear).

However, during the current Parliament in South Africa, it is interesting to note an increasing trend, whether as a result of institutional changes, or an initiative in certain committees by strong committee chairs, that MPs undertake much more focused and critical interrogation of departments.

Insofar as monitoring of finances is concerned, the introduction, over the last two years, of the Budget Review and Recommendation Reports in South has also led to increased recording and follow-up, by the committees themselves, of resolutions from year to year. These reports are made readily accessible, and searchable, in a separate section of the PMG website.

□ *Committee functioning: Committee Oversight Visits*

Oversight visits and study tours taken by parliamentary committees may also be used to measure their oversight, although the effectiveness of this tool, in the experience of PMG, has been limited by the fact that not all committees report back on their oversight visits during committee meetings, whilst some also table the official reports about the study tour very long after the trip and do not follow through on the recommendations. Since one the primary functions of a committee is supposed to be oversight, it would be important for PMOs to consider whether and how to track this function.

Challenges in analysis of the institution

All of these analyses of the institution of Parliament have the potential to be adversarial if they are reflected merely as a list of transgressions, but do not accurately reflect improvement in performance or give due credit those who do respect the rules. If PMOs not only report the facts, but attempt to draw conclusions and benchmark, there is a risk that their efforts may, so far from inviting buy-in by the public in the process, instead cause cynicism. The main challenge, as with any other qualitative assessment, is how the information can be used most constructively.

Some PMOs have opted, when they undertake assessments or draw conclusions, to take the route of actively seeking media attention when releasing information, hoping that "naming and shaming" will spark change. Others have preferred a less confrontational approach. In Kenya, the Institute for Social Accountability (TISA) used its assessments to develop a proposal to reform parliamentary practices, but this was presented first to its parliament for comment and discussion before the report was publicised. PMOs may need to consider very carefully, if they are intending to adjudicate upon issues or conduct advocacy, how they will do so. The Mandelbaum paper, at page 61, points out also that affording some measure of privacy to parliaments and political parties is often useful, particularly when they might be engaging in difficult political considerations.

Monitoring and assessing the functioning of political parties and follow up of election promises

60% of PMOs monitor political parties' positions, and around 50% monitor party groups or blocs. In some countries this would be limited to whether parties complied with their election promises. Party blocs would be relevant only in countries where individual MPs are permitted to vote counter to their party's stated position. This is not applicable, for instance, in South Africa and Ireland.

The Turkey Association of Committees for Monitoring Parliamentarians and Elected Officials (www.tumikom.org) prepares comparative and measurable monitoring and performance reports of political

party groups as well as individual MPs. These are based on their legislative activity in the year, their attendance at meetings and other activities. Prior to elections, this Association asks ten questions of the parties who participate in elections, and then, over the term of Parliament, tracks whether they have kept, reneged upon, or partially fulfilled election promises, producing a report prior to the next election. Similar tracking is also done of individual MP promises (only relevant in systems that are not based on proportional representation).

Possible conflicts of interest and the links between party positions and the funding that they receive are tracked by a number of PMOs. Hungary's K-Monitor Watchdog for Public Funds, as presented at the French La Fabrique de la loi conference (<http://www.lafabriquedelaloi.fr/OLDP/Presentations/3%20-%20Workshop%20Sessions%20I/Session%202%20-%20Parliamentary%20Monitoring>) uses manual systems, tags and scrapers to collect information on the business connections between 20 000 individuals and 25 000 organisations, across 30 000 transactions. It uses systems to cross-check information from a number of sources, including parliament, procurement information, companies and the media. It is up to the individuals accessing the information to analyse the information, but the possibilities of conflict are highlighted on the website.

Monitoring and assessing the actions and performance of individual MPs

The Independent Panel Review Assessment in South Africa proposed in 2007 that Parliament itself should have an oversight and advisory section to provide advice, technical support coordination tracking and monitoring mechanisms on oversight and accountability activities of MPs. However, this has never been implemented.

The majority of PMOs, including PMG, give some information on individual MPs. There are a number of different ways in which individual MP information may be presented and used.

About 30% of the PMOs surveyed in the Mandelbaum paper create scorecards of individual MP performance from the information that they have compiled. As already indicated, this may be of limited usefulness to voters in systems based upon proportional representation. However, if scorecards use tools such as cloud searches on topics of particular interest to website visitors, this will at least allow for more accurate identification of MPs who might usefully be lobbied on certain issues.

Some ICT systems, as outlined earlier, also create ways in which citizens can communicate, through their sites, with MPs, publicly or privately. Some sites allow citizens to post comments or reports on an MP's performance. The Adote um Vereador in Brazil (<http://vereadores.wikia.com>) also enlists citizens to monitor local council members, by way of a wiki site on which citizens will sign up and edit content themselves.

A comparison of the tools that some PMOs use to gather information, and more specifically to then make assessments or give ratings, may include any or a combination of a number of factors.

Profiles of MPs,

Profiles of MPs built by PMOs may include profiles of MPs, including personal statistics and photos, details of education and professional experience. 29% of PMOs develop their own profiles of MPs. However, there is a need to be sensitive as to what exactly is published. In Kenya, the entire parliamentary website was shut down to the public, after MPs objected to their individual profiles and resumés being posted online. Other information that PMOs may post about MPs may include descriptions of their work in parliament, either limited to their mere attendance at committees or extending to more specific statements of their focus areas.

22% of PMOs also aggregate information about finances of parties and MPs, without any political bias or attempt to draw correlations with subsequent events.

A more specific approach has been adopted by the Turkish Association of Committees for Monitoring Parliamentarians and elected officials. It makes its reports on MP performance available through the media, and it will also report specifically about MPs when requests are made to lift their parliamentary immunity or allegations are made about them.

Listing responses to questionnaires

Some PMOs have sent questionnaires to MPs asking what competencies and experience qualify them for the office for which they were running, or asked them to give an indication of their areas of particular interest or expertise. The Polish Association 61 (www.mamprawowiedziec.pl) stated that it had undertaken a "rewriting" of statements and declarations, by Presidential candidates, on selected topics that were considered by the Association to be of particular importance. It is unclear whether this was merely a restatement, or re-ordering, or commentary.

□ *Listing details of MP affiliations* Some PMOs have included details of other organisations, membership of committees and clubs with whom MPs are affiliated.

□ *Monitoring and reporting upon declarations of interest, or public disclosure of assets*

As already indicated, some PMOs advocate for more detailed reporting than officially required, whilst others may link interests to voting patterns. In South Africa, MPs are required to declare their financial interests to Parliament, although these declarations are frequently not made on time. This is a useful matter for PMOs to monitor, even if they merely report whether the declarations have been made as required, or not.

□ *Monitoring or assessment of individual MPs through scorecards:*

86% of PMOs monitor performance of individual MPs, using scorecards that may include their attendance at meetings, their participation, measured either by the time spent in addressing the meeting, or a word-count of their speeches, public statements that they might have made, voting records and their work in constituencies and committees. Their focus on particular issues may also be assessed, and an analysis of whether (where applicable) this was in line with their election promises. The intention of this type of monitoring is to persuade MPs to take their jobs seriously, to develop a culture of accountability, and to help citizens understand more about the work of the MPs. The problem, however, with these kinds of scorecards are that they may not present an entirely accurate picture.

An analysis of attendance records of MPs may be regarded by PMOs as one indicator of their participation in democratic processes, on the basis that attendance and participation is reflective of their attitude to the institution of Parliament and the voters. However, this is too simplistic, particularly in South Africa where the reality is that the smaller parties simply do not have sufficient representatives to send to all the meetings. Many MPs have complained that records of attendance in the “official” parliamentary documents were not accurate. Attendance at meetings may, in addition, represent only a small portion of MPs’ involvement in Parliament. One committee, at the end of 2012, made reference to a “standing apology” from an MP who had not managed to attend a single meeting of that committee, due to the numerous other commitments placed on him by his party. In South Africa, not every member of a committee may be given the opportunity to attend oversight visits or tours. The MPs’ work in the constituencies is generally not recorded in the national Parliament, and few MPs report back, other than in passing, to issues being discussed at constituencies. The value of a purely quantitative count of meetings cannot assess the overall quality of the work achieved by MPs. Some PMOs, such as in Liberia, draw figures of attendance, but do not seek to publish them, instead using them to inform initiatives on strengthening of the legislature.

□ *Monitoring or assessment of individual MPs by voting records*

Some PMOs record how often MPs vote against their own party. This is not relevant to systems in South Africa, unless conclusions may be drawn from abstentions from voting, or even absences from meetings where controversial issues are to be finalised. In the United States of America, where some Congressional opinion polling organisations give different rankings to missed votes and abstentions, the recording of voting and voting scorecards have been seen as confrontational.

Holder de Ord in Norway uses voting records to compare votes by MPs to their election promises, general or specific (<http://www.lafabriquedelaloi.fr/OLDP/Presentations/3%20%20Workshop%20Sessions%20I/Session%202%20-%20Parliamentary%20Monitoring>). However, it acknowledges that the challenges with tracking performance by way of voting include isolating what triggers voting patterns, processing votes and coordinating input. Any statistics prepared must be understandable to the users. Many PMOs that use these methods may seek to sum up the “performance” in a single result for each MP and party. Another possible shortcoming is that this type of tracking only includes existing politicians, not candidates, in a continuous monitoring tool. The method is apparently also very labour intensive and will have to be supported by stable financing; Holder de Ord runs it by way of internships with universities.

Other PMOs catalogue voting by noting whether the votes themselves were secret, by roll call or voice, and may seek to highlight what drives each category, and what effect the type of vote may have on the position that MPs adopt. It seems that the most useful PMO sites on voting, such as EPvote.eu (www.EPvote.eu), facilitate citizens’ access to information about the voting record on a particular topic and others related to it, the voter turnout, and then allow them to click on links to view the bills and debates, without attempting to draw any conclusion about the voting performance.

□ *Monitoring or assessment of MPs’ spoken input*

Some rating tools used by PMOs record the amount of time that MPs have spoken, or number of times they are mentioned in Hansard (a system used in Namibia), the number of times they speak with the media, or

the number of questions asked, and may also compare their participation to other averages. This may have the perverse incentive of encouraging MPs to engage in more, but not necessarily better debate, to boost their rankings. Few of these kinds of tools, which generate information automatically, can analyse the value of the MP's contribution, as this only be assessed by reading the reports. Some PMOs try to reach their own qualitative assessments of statements in parliamentary debates, but these are very subjective and difficult to measure against a reliable standard. In addition, if the questions asked are recorded, but the impact of the answers or the results they elicit is not, this may skew the information. OpenPolis used a productivity index from feedback given by MPs in a questionnaire about their participation, and attempted to address the limitations of a simple counting exercise by assigning grades, but this kind of approach can be subjective.

PMG has found that sometimes MPs do not follow up on insufficient answers to the questions they ask in meetings, or the executive is not held to account for answers. For this reason, it finds it more useful to note questions and answers in full, but not to analyse them. Sometimes, as happened in 2011 and 2012 in the South African Portfolio Committee on Police, information was elicited from accounting officers only after a barrage of highly charged and very specific questions, some of which were also very brief, asked in combination, by all political parties. No one question could be isolated as eliciting the full response, but inconsistencies and failure to answer became apparent when one question followed another, and it would have been very difficult to conclude that the performance of one MP or one party was the direct trigger for the whole committee calling for independent investigations.

□ *Monitoring or matching of statements to election pledges*

Some PMOs, such as the Open Data network (<http://opendata-network.org>) merely attempt to assess the truthfulness of statements made during election campaigns. Some PMO sites allow citizens to record pledges made by officials, so that they can later be tracked. The Peruvian Manos Limpias (quoted in the Mandelbaum paper, page 202) has started an "Adopt a Congressman" initiative, which drafted and trained over 2 000 citizens to specifically follow the promises and functions of a specific MP each, and assess that person against a set of defined indicators.

□ *Monitoring through peer assessment*

Some PMOs may ask MPs to rate 15 other randomly selected MPs in areas of quality, analysis of issues, teamwork, oversight, party influence and public conduct. Although this may be done by way of a randomly-assigned request, it is not objective.

Challenges with attempting to monitor and assess institutions, parties and MPs

The type of "counting tools" that generate the information and inform the way in which PMOs may assess the institution, political parties or individual MPs tend to be used where a large volume of information is made available by Parliament, or where webscraping or informatics applications are being used. Often a large body of data is collected by the PMOs, but the question arises consistently how it should be used. Often, the information needs to be re-stated in a different format to increase public accessibility, and if attempts are made to reduce it to simplified analyses, the information may, as already indicated, not be comprehensive enough to generate objective analysis. Citizens may struggle to understand or access data presented in the form of statistics, and PMOs may lack their own capacity to present it in other ways. In order to be used effectively, this type of data has to be produced regularly, which requires significant time and funding, and, as indicated earlier, must be able to be easily accessed from parliamentary websites.

PMOs who carry out individual monitoring of MPs, where this is appropriate to the electoral systems, are essentially aiming to increase the quality of voter preferences, by informing them of the performance of their representatives. They suggest that the monitoring of performance will also develop a greater culture of accountability amongst MPs, by making them aware that they are constantly subject to public scrutiny. However, a counter-argument is that MPs, rather than becoming more active, develop a resistance to PMOs, which compromises the PMO's ability to engage in discussions around improvement of the systems. As noted already, some of the reasons why MPs may not perform effectively may be linked to institutional lack of support.

It has been suggested that perhaps PMOs and Parliament should play a greater role in developing tools that directly incentivise positive behaviour and encourage systematic reform. It has been suggested that PMOs should perhaps focus on the role that committees and MPs can play in holding the executive to account, which is an objective shared by citizens and MPs alike. The Fundación Directorio Legislativo in Argentina (www.directoriolegislativo.org) grants an annual "Most Innovative MP" award, which not only brings public recognition of good work, but has been combined with a study opportunity for the individual MP to learn more about linked reforms or innovations in other countries.

Another possibility for PMOs, which PMG is exploring currently, is for them to make available interviews or

profiles of MPs, for public information as well as to encourage media interest in the positive work done by MPs. PMG is currently working on a project, in conjunction with The People's Assembly and mySociety, that will link MP personal and constituency information (via a locator) to information about their participation in plenary sessions, the questions they ask of Ministers, and perhaps financial disclosures in the future.

Other suggestions for more direct and non-confrontational engagement between PMOs and MPs have included PMOs offering technical training programmes, although the limitations to this have been discussed above. The extent to which PMOs can support individual MPs also depends on the attitude of the Parliament.

Possible future activities for PMG and other PMOs to consider

Parliamentary monitoring is a dynamic and evolving field that must be responsive to changes. It is necessary for any PMO to ensure that it remains relevant, dynamic and sustainable, and offers services that will meet the overriding aim of strengthening public knowledge of, and participation in, the parliamentary process. Some of the practices outlined briefly in the previous section may give some directions and suggestions for discussions on possibilities for the future.

In the case of PMG and other PMOs in Africa, two specifically African initiatives must be noted. Africa i-Parliaments" (<http://www.parliaments.info>) is the portal for the regional initiatives of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, aims to strengthen African Parliaments in fostering democracy and good governance by developing common information services and tools, and building information management capabilities "with the objective of making Parliaments i-nterconnected, i-nformed i-ndependent, or in short, i-Parliaments". The Akoma Ntosi and Bungeni applications, as outlined on page 24, are being promoted for parliamentary sites, and if they are adopted, PMOs will need to see how their own monitoring fits in with the new technology. At the moment, Uganda and Zambia have been provided with virtual equipment and Bungeni has been set up, but no report-backs seem to have been publicised yet.

The Africa i-Parliaments project, on its website, commented that most parliaments on the African continent are affected by lack of capacity, in areas of policy and programme formulation, monitoring and oversight. It noted that even if they were to adopt new ICT techniques, they must be receptive to, and trained in the modernisation and change management that must follow. Currently, many are hindered by lack of strategic vision, insufficient qualified professional staff, lack of capacity building for MPs and lack of comprehensive information systems to support even routine workflow (www.parliaments.info/rationale/gap-analysis). This would suggest that even if the South African Parliament does comply with the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, and make all information available free of charge, it does not necessarily mean that the functions offered by PMG will cease to be relevant. As other PMOs have shown, even where information is provided, it is often desirable to find more creative ways of getting the data, in a uniform and understandable format, to the public. Even if information is made available in a simplified format by the parliaments themselves, the public still benefits from an external analysis of the Parliament's work and functioning.

As already indicated, the focus of PMOs is in many cases moving to trying to promote better functioning and transparency of the institutions of Parliament across the globe, in particular through debate on, and the adoption of frameworks, or even assessment tools, for a democratic legislature.

Perhaps the most important task for any PMO, whatever its function now or in the future, is to constantly evaluate and try to improve the credibility and ease of its working relationships with its own parliament, and increasingly also with regional parliaments. It could be useful for PMOs, as they move forward, to emphasise two points. The first is the importance of involving MPs in the PMO's own discussions, since MPs are at the coal face of the institution. The second is to persuade parliamentary institutions to engage more constructively with PMOs, as outside but objective observers, on the services that are delivered by parliaments. Perceptions from both inside and outside the institution should be compared.

Some possible new initiatives for PMG and other PMOs could include the following:

Networking

The National Democratic Institute is eager to work with PMG to assist other African countries to initiate and grow PMOs and to establish a continental network of PMOs. There are regional networks being established for parliaments, such as the SADC network, but there does not, as yet, seem to be substantial collaboration between them and the PMOs in the individual countries. Concerted regional initiatives could promote collaboration with newly-formed PMOs, which could also then usefully supplement what they are able to access by way of donor funding.

On the international front, PMG and other PMOs in the region may want to explore more opportunities for collaboration and closer relationships with other international PMOs. MySociety and Hansard Society, to name only two, have international scholarship programmes that could benefit interns and staff.

It was suggested, in 2004 that PMG should use its database for generating information and have an article published in the print media, reporting on an interesting issue. Whilst it was not considered quite within the function of PMG to write the article, it could be useful for PMOs at least to establish, from other research institutions, or journalists themselves, what kind of statistics they would like to be able to access in order to write their articles, with the PMO's contribution being specifically noted.

Monitoring the Pan African Parliament

In Africa, it may be instructive for PMG or other PMOs to debate what impact the Pan-African Parliament has, and to what extent it is being monitored. One consideration for the future might be whether the Pan-African Parliament is perceived to, or has actually impacted on sovereignty of individual Parliaments in the affected countries. Useful comparisons may be drawn also to the European Parliament, where similar studies are being carried out. PMOs may wish also to report on, and perhaps to track, the cost implications of this Parliament, particularly to South Africa, where it is based.

Monitoring the Interplay between spheres of government

Although there is much of importance that should be considered in the provincial parliaments, the reality for PMG - and probably also other PMOs - is limited funding and logistics would probably prevent most from extending their reach to these legislatures. In South Africa, the National Council of Provinces should be monitoring the interplay between national, provincial and local matters in a more structured way. The August *People's Power, People's Parliament* conference aimed to build knowledge of all parliamentary processes, particularly oversight, and recommended a closer alignment of the work of national Parliament and the provincial legislatures, specifically the oversight and budgetary functions, to service delivery and socio-economic rights. Although it is unlikely that PMG could extend its reach to provincial and local systems in the foreseeable future, this might well be a focal area for PMOs with a different agenda.

Some other possible options, if there is capacity to do this, could be for PMOs to do comparative tracking, across legislatures, on selected topics (such as interrogation of budgets, or the functioning of public accounts committees). At the very least, it would be useful for PMOs to try to engage with provincial parliaments as well as national parliaments on how their websites could be designed to make data available, and to urge them, when they acquire new systems, to try to comply, as far as possible with the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness.

Monitoring intra-Parliamentary collaboration

In South Africa, the public and Parliament itself have for some time been critical of the "silo approach" that was, and in many cases is still prevalent in government, which has led to insufficient co-operative planning between departments. It could be useful for PMOs to tag their websites to highlight matters that cross-cut different committees or departments. PMG has developed this so that a person accessing committee reports on a certain topic will be directed to other linked matters.

It has not, however, been the experience of PMG that many committees table and debate reports from the public accounts committee. Although the Budgetary Review and Recommendation Reports state that these are one of the sources consulted, it is in practice the researchers, and not the committee, who tend to access and extract information from these reports.

A related matter which PMOs could usefully track would be the number of committees that sit jointly, or that collaborate on oversight visits, or hold joint hearings by the two houses.

Tracking budget information

In South Africa, the introduction of the Money Bills Amendment Procedure and Related Matters Act, and the tabling of Budgetary Review and Recommendation Reports annually, are intended to give Parliament better powers to monitor budgets and executive spending more efficiently. The fact that Parliament is now permitted to amend money bills (although it has not done so yet) raises the potential for better independence and increased power of the legislature over public finance. The *People's Power, People's Parliament* conference stressed that it was vital to establish the Parliamentary Budget Office, with stable sources of funding, and to allow provincial legislatures to amend budgets as well. Should this be done, it would be very important for PMG, and other PMOs where similar systems pertained, to extend their monitoring to cover these aspects.

Tracking spending by Parliament

Joint meetings and oversight have the potential to use parliamentary resources more efficiently. Another matter that PMG may in future consider tracking more specifically, as part of institutional monitoring, could be the study tours that are undertaken by committees in the South African Parliament, looking at how much was awarded, whom they visited, and how the information translated into action by Parliament, including whether the committee drew and tabled a detailed report and recommendations following those visits. In an ideal world, the budgets for those visits should also be available for reporting, but in practice it may be that a PMO can only draw this information retrospectively, after the Annual Report is made available.

It is necessary to note that not all committees' oversight programmes can be the same. For instance, in South Africa, the Portfolio Committee on Justice and Constitutional Development conducts very few oversight visits, but this is directly as a result of its very heavy legislative programme, and is certainly no indicator that it shirks any of its duties.

IT innovations

Now that PMG has become more aware of the possibilities of informatics, it is conscious that it needs to enhance its IT capacity by introducing more sophisticated applications, including following up on the offers of assistance by organisations overseas in applications, tools and programmes, particularly from Sunlight Foundation and mySociety. In doing so, however, PMG will be mindful of some of the cautions sounded by those already using informatics tools, as well as appreciating that it will need to give careful consideration to whether the information offered to citizens is being usefully extended and translating into opportunities for more citizen participation. As already noted, the specific role that a PMO has set for itself must always be borne in mind when selecting IT tools.

Using IT for public education

Many parliaments, and PMOs, engage in some public education projects themselves, and most parliamentary websites do attempt to explain how laws are passed. However, PMOs such as the Sunlight Foundation have presented this kind of information in diagrams and cartoons that are much more appealing to the public, particularly to school learners.

PMG's website already has a searchable section for "FAQs" and it is considering the possibility of including, under this, particularly important or useful reports – for instance, on budget or audit processes – or articles written by other advocacy organisations, to avail them more permanently than the "Featured Content" section that changes from week to week.

The question arises whether this is really the function of PMOs. Ideally, all this kind of information would be made available by parliaments. However, if PMOs see their "monitoring" as essentially making as much information as possible available to the public, to grow the public's ability to participate, particularly in the newer democracies, then it might be appropriate to work on these kind of initiatives.

Wider outreach to the public

The possibilities of social and business networking sites, including Linked In, Twitter and Facebook, is something that PMOs should continuously explore, as well as mobile networking.

Conclusion

This publication has aimed to give some pointers to new PMOs of where and how they may wish to direct their focus. Obviously, the particular circumstances will dictate the aims and work of each organisation differently, but it is hoped that the examples of successful practices and the brief indication of the potential pitfalls may give some guidance and enable them to promote better Parliamentary practices in their own countries.

Appendix 1: List of paying subscribers to PMG: October 2012

ABSA Bank	Actuarial Society of SA	Altech Management
Association Certified Chartered Accountants	American Consulate General	ANC Caucus
Accenture	Annelize Crosby	Arcus Gibb
Aristocrat Technologies Africa	Aurecon	
Bell Dewar Inc	BHP Billiton	BHP Billiton
BMI Technology	Bowman Gilfillian Attorneys	British Petroleum
British Consulate General/ Embassy	Business Connexion	Business Unity SA
BYTES	Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration	Chamber of Mines
Capitec Bank	CITI	City of Cape Town
Cheadle Thompson Haysom Attorneys	Constitutional Court	Corporate Image
Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research	Commission for Promotion and Protection of Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities
Deloitte & Touche	Delegation of the European Union to SA	Denel
Department of Communications	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs	Department of Justice and Constitutional Development
Department of Trade and Industry	Development Bank Southern Africa	Die Burger/ Media 24
Discovery Health	Distell	
ETV	Edward Nathan Sonnenberg Attorney	Elsabe Klinck Consulting CC
Embassy of France	Embassy of Spain	Embassy of USA
Eskom	Engineering Council of South Africa	
Federation of Unions of South Africa	Financial & Fiscal Commission	Financial Services Board
First National Bank	Fitch Ratings	
Garlicke & Bousfield Attorneys	Gauteng Provincial Legislature	Gauteng Provincial Government
GDF Suez Energy SA	GIZ (German Development Corporation)	Global Business Solution
Group Five Infrastructure Development	Heinrich Boell Stiftung	Health Professions Council of SA
Independent Communications Authority of South Africa	Innovation Group	Independent Electoral Commission
Independent Regulatory Board for Auditors	Independent Police Investigative Directorate	Innovative Medicines SA
Industrial Development Corporation	Intel Corporation	Independent Newspapers
Internet Service Provider Association	International Marketing Council	Juta publishers
KwaZulu Natal Provincial Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs	Law Society of KwaZulu Natal	Law Society of Northern Province
Land Bank	Legal Aid South Africa	Lexinfo CC
Law Society of South Africa	Liberty Group	Lonmin Plc
LexisNexis	MarPless	Mail & Guardian
Magnum Magazines	Media 24	Medical Protection Society
Media Development and Diversity Agency	Mergence Investment Managers	Milton Matsemela
Mediclinic	MTN	Multichoice Africa
Mostert Opperman Goodburn Inc	National Treasury	Nedbank
National Association of Broadcasters	Netcare Management	National Economic Development and Labour Council
Oceana Group	Office of Auditor General	Office of Public Protector
Old Mutual Life Assurance	ORACLE	
ProActive Management Services	PetroSA	Petroleum Agency SA
Pharmaceutical Industry Association of SA	Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union	Print Media SA
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority	Public Investment Corporation
Rand Merchant Bank	Reserve Bank	South African Human Rights Commission
South African Institute of Chartered Accountants	South African Institute of Government Auditors	South African Medical Device Industry Association
South African Revenue Services	South African Petroleum Industry Association	South African Property Owners Association,
South African Breweries	SASOL	SA Bingo & Casino
South African Medical Research Council	South African Bureau of Standards	South African Canegrowers
Siemens	Sentech	Shepstone & Wylie Attorneys
Telkom SA	Standard Bank	SureBank
Tobacco Institute	Thales SA	Tigerbrands
Vodacom	Tongaat Hulett	Transnet
Webber Wentzel	Western Cape Provincial Government	Werksmans Incorporated (Attorneys)

Appendix 2: List of institutions accessing the 15 closed committees in April 2013

Note: This record does not provide the full picture of all visitors, as "logging on" is required for only 15 of the 51 committees or for requesting email alerts. Open access committees do not require one to log-on to get access. The open committees are those such as Agriculture; Education; Human Settlements; Public Works; Rural Development & Land Reform; Science & Technology; Social Development; Water Affairs; Women, Youth, Children & Disability.

<p>(KZN) TB and HIV/AIDS Care Association 1000 Hills Community Helpers 90 by 2030 AB Consulting Absa Capital Accenture Active Women's Association Adcock Ingram Healthcare Pty Ltd Advocate's Chamber's Harare AfriSpace Agricultural Research Council Alexandra Homes for the Aged Alliance Against HIV and AIDS Altech Management Services AMD American Consulate General ANC Anglo American Platinum Architecture department Arcus Gibb Aristocrat Technologies Africa Armscor ARTerial Network: South Africa ASISA ASSIST - Change in Action Association for the Prevention of Torture Athalia Outreach Athletics Free State Attorneys Miltons Aurecon Beeld Bell Dewar Inc Bidvest Panlapina Logistics Big News Black Sash Bloemfontein Chamber of Commerce and Industry BMI-TechKnowledge Board of Airline Representatives of South Africa Bowman Gilfillan Attorneys BP British Consulate General / Embassy Brotherhood of Blessed Gerard Business Day Business Leadership South Africa Business Unity South Africa Butler University Bytes Cambridge University Cancer Association Cape Town Heath Department Careline Crisis and Trauma Centre Careways Catholic Community Service Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office CCMA Central University of Technology, Free State Centre for Constitutional Rights Centre for Health & Environmental Education Awareness Centre for Advancement of Science & Mathematics Educat Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation Charities Aid Foundation SA Cheadle Thompson Haysom</p>	<p>Education with Enterprise Trust Eduloan Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs Elsabe Klinck Consulting CC Embassy of Spain Embrace Dignity Energy Governance Initiative (Idasa) Equal Access Campaign Eskom Exporters Forum Fairheads Benefit Services Families South Africa - FAMSA Welkom, Northern Free State Family Policy Institute Financial and Fiscal Commission Financial Services Board First National Bank FOMSCU - WHO Free Life On Earth Free Society Institute Free State Care in Action Free State Provincial Legislature Freedom of Expression Institute French Embassy Garlicke & Bousfield Gauteng Provincial Government Gauteng Provincial Legislature GDF SUEZ Energy Southern Africa GIZ Global Business Solution Government Communication and Information System Graduate School of Business (UCT) Graphic B&S Group Five Infrastructure Developments GunFreeSA Hope Prison Ministry Human Sciences Research Council Hurter Spies Attorneys ICASA Independent Complaints Directorate Independent Newspapers Independent Police Investigative Directorate Industrial Development Corporation Ingwenya Engineers Inkatha Freedom Party Youth Brigade Innovative Medicines South Africa Institut für Evangelische Theologie und Religionspädagogik Institute for Economic Research on Innovation Institute for Security Studies Intelligence International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) International Laws Centre Internet Service Providers Association IPAS IRIN/PlusNews Isandla Institute Information Technology Association SA ITWeb Ltd Johannesburg City Municipality Just Detention International (US NGO) Juta KwaZulu-Natal Department of Local Government and Traditional KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport Kwazulu-Natal Provincial Legislature</p>	<p>Oxford University Parliament of RSA Patient Health Alliance of NGOs (PHANGO) Pelindaba Working Group Petroleum Agency SA PetroSA Phangela Storage Tank Farm Phuhlisani Solutions Pioneer Foods Politicsweb.co.za Powertech Prasad Pretoria University PricewaterhouseCoopers Prime Solution Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority Pro-active Management Services Project Preparation Trust KZN Public Affairs Research Institute Public Service Accountability Monitor Qholaqhwe Advice Centre Radamel Rand Merchant Bank Regenesys Business School RegimentBloemspuit Rentworks Reserve Bank Road Traffic Management Corporation Rowley George Marolen SA Airlink SA Express Airways SA Petroleum Industry Association SABC Sabeil Oil SABINET SACE SANDF SANMVA SAP South Africa SAPO (South African Post Office) SAPS Saps Academy Philippi Sasol SATaxi Finance SAWEA Scalabrini Section 27 Sediba Rural Youth Development Sentech Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Task Force (SWEAT) Shepstone & Wylie Attorneys Shukumisa Campaign Shuttleworth Foundation Siemens Sizakele Umzantsi Development Trust (SUDT) Sizani Foods Small Arms Survey Social Justice Coalition Software AG South African Breweries Limited South African Bureau of Standards South African Constitutional Property Rights Foundation (SAC South African Council for Planners South African Embassy</p>
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<p>Chevron South Africa (Pty) Limited Christian Social Council Limpopo Ciber Consulting (Pty)Ltd City of Johannesburg City Press Civil Society Alliance Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr Clowns Without Borders South Africa Coastal Horse Care Unit Columbia University Commission for Gender Equality Community Law Centre Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (Corms Constitutional Court COPE CORE Corporate Image Holdings Corruption Watch Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitutio Council for the Built Environment Creamer Media Crossroads KZN CSIR DA Dante Trading Enterprises Datacentrix David Rattray Foundation DBSA Deaf Federation of South Africa Decentralised Environmental Solutions Delegation of European Union to SA Deloitte & Touche Democratic Alliance Democratic Alliance MPs Denel Department of Communications Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Dept of Defence & Military Veterans Dept of Economic Development Department of Energy Department of Health Department of Justice and Constitutional Development Department of Labour (SPFA) Department of Mineral Resources Department of Police Department of Public Enterprises Department of Public Safety Dept of Public Service Administration Department of Rural Development Department of Safety & Security Department of Science & Technology Department of Social Development Department of Office of President Department of Tourism Department of Trade and Industry Department of Water Affairs Development Bank Development Consultants of SA Die Burger Die Rapport Disabled People of South Africa Discovery Health Distell Dlalanathi DMR DNA Project DOTHCAP Drakenstein Municipality Durban and Coastal Mental Health Eastern Cape Provincial Treasury Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council Easttel Eden District Municipality</p>	<p>KZN Law Society L2B Land Bank Lanseria International Airport Law Society of South Africa Lawyers for Human Rights Lebone Village Legal Aid South Africa Legal Resource Centre Legal Resources Centre Lenz Caemmerer Lets Collaborate Lexinfo CC LexisNexis Liberty Group London School of Economics Maboloka HIV/AIDS Awareness Organisation Magnum Magazine Mail & Guardian Newspaper Makaphutu Childrens Village Malvern Children's Home Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection MarPless Matlosane Development Forum Media Development and Diversity Agency Media24 Member of Parliament Mergence Investment Managers Mineral Resources Mlnus273 Consulting MMC Consulting Services Molo Songololo Mostert Opperman Goodburn Inc Mpumalanga Provincial Government Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature Mr Price Group Ltd MTN Group Mulaudzi Community Development Agency MultiChoice Africa Mundua Trading Enterprise Municipal Demarcation Board MusaweNkosi Mvemve Gasela MyBroadband - online IT publication Mzamo Child Guidance and Training Initiative of KZN N S Copley Consultancy CC NAB National Brands Limited National Consumer Tribunal National Department of Transport National Prosecuting Authority National Treasury National Union of Mineworkers Ndifuna Ukwazi Nedbank Ltd Nedlac Nelson Mandela Metro Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Netcare Management Networking Aids Community of South Africa (NACOSA) Neumann Attorneys Nkosi Gawe Trading and Projects cc North West University Norton Rose National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS) NUMSA ODADI Office of the Auditor General Office of the Public Protector Ohio State University Oliver Schreiner School of law Open Democracy Advice Centre Open Society Foundation Cape Town</p>	<p>SA Human Rights Commission SA Institute of Chartered Accountants SA Institute of Race Relations South African Insurance Association SA Legion of Military Veterans SA Local Government Association Sa Medical Devices Industry Association SA Property Owners Association (SAPOA) SA Medical Research Council South African National Deaf Association South African Nuclear Energy Corporation South African Revenue Service South African Social Security Agency South African Weather Service South Africans Against Drunk Driving (SADD) SA Institute of Government Auditors SA Institute of Driving Instructors Special Investigating Unit Sports & Recreation St Nicholas' Childrens Hospice Standard Bank State Street Southern Africa Statistics SA Stellenbosch University Students for Law and Social Justice Superitum SweetChilli Communications SWOP Technology Innovation Agency Telkom SA The Medical Protection Society The Mvula Trust The Poin Art The Siyazisiza Trust The Sunday Times The Sunflower Fund Times Media Group Tlameo Agri Industries Tobacco Institute Tongaat Hulett Trade Law Centre for Southern Africa Traffic Transnet Treasure the Karoo Action Group Tshwane Municipality Umgeni Water Board Umphilo waManzi UNICEF Universit of Stellenbosch University of Cape Town University of Hong Kong University of Johannesburg University of KwaZulu Natal University of Pretoria University of Rhodes University of South Africa (UNISA) University of Texas at Austin University of the Free State University of the Western Cape University of Witwatersrand US Embassy Visionaries in Africa Foundation Visual Arts Network of South Africa Vodacom VU University Amsterdam Webber Wentzel Inc Mallinicks Wendy Watson Consulting Services / Road Safety Foundation Werksmans Incorporated Western Cape Provincial Government Women's Legal Centre World Resources Institute World Wide Fund for Nature Xikhovha Advisory Yade Caring Action Zonkulu Consulting</p>
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