



REPORT ON THE TRAINING FOR STAFF OF PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICE ON BUDGET SCRUTINY, AND FOSTERING ACCOUNTABILITY TO SUPPORT THE OGP PARLIAMENTARY WORKING GROUP



Committee Room 2

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1. Executive Summary

The training on Budget scrutiny, and fostering accountability was organised by the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) in partnership with Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), to adequately capacitate staff of PBO as well as other participating staff members on the Appropriation Questionnaire and to give support to the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Parliamentary Working Group.

The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) was established in 2017, by section 13(1) of the Parliamentary Service Act of 2007. It was established in line with international best practices from other parliamentary jurisdictions to support the Parliament of Sierra Leone with the provision of high-quality research information which are of financial and economic interest, especially those related to budget matters.

The one day training which was held in Committee Room 2 at the House of Parliament was delivered by the Deputy Director PBO for the most part, but it also included contributing presentations from OGP on Transparency and Accountability of Government, as well as PBO specific presentation on staff induction.

A skills assessment study that was conducted in Parliament brought out recommendations for capacity development of the current crop of PBO staff, in order for them to adequately respond to research information needs of Members of Parliament (MPs) and parliamentary staff. A key area that was identified is the Sub-Appropriation Questionnaire. In order to deliver on the capacity and collaborative needs of the Unit, the PBO and WFD teamed up to undertake a one day training session. The training was planned to ensure participants from especially the PBO will have a relatively good understanding of what to look out for in the Questionnaire document.

This report which also reflect outcomes of the training, provides detailed outline of the Presentations and highlight of statements from the Deputy Clerk, Deputy Director of the Parliamentary Budget Office, the Country Representative of Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WDF), the Chair of Open Government Partnership Working Group in Parliament as well as presentations from representatives of OGP. The main presentation on

the Appropriation Questionnaire was translated into a simple message that provided information for participants when taking part at Committee of Supply meetings.

The outcomes contained in the report clearly reveal the need for the Training which provides an opportunity for the Parliamentary Budget Office to enhance its capacity in order to meet the critical information demand of Members of Parliament.



2. Introduction

The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) was established in 2017, with the aim of maintaining a high quality research, and studies in a bid to providing information on economic and financial interests, advise the Legislature on budget matters, and support the legislative process through the costing of proposals initiated by the Executive arm of Government. The above is achieved through the deployment of many processes and procedures such as preparing analysis, and briefs relating to the Economy and Public Finances, analysing government budget policies and intentions, and assist in strengthening the work of Parliamentary committees responsible for budget oversight.

The PBO has 11 staff headed by the Deputy Director under the Directorate of Finance. All the current staff are mostly experienced in economics and financial analysis but with limited experience in the work and mandate of the PBO.

They need the requisite experience to prepare budget analyses and policy costings on request by Members of Parliament and Parliamentary staff. Since Legislators require reliable, unbiased information to be able to participate in a constructive manner in formulating the budget, the PBO is required to have in place staff with the right skills to adequately support them in the budget preparation process and other key processes such

as the Budget Appropriation process. However, the team is passionate and focussed on their tasks.

Vision

The vision of the PBO is to be the principal hub for impartial budget, economic and fiscal research and analysis in strengthening the effectiveness of parliament's oversight, legislative and law-making function in the national budget process.

Values

The Parliamentary Budget Office has positioned itself to contribute to the work of Parliament in agreement with a set of core values and features which make its work professional and convincing. Our values include: INDEPENDENCE, TRANSPARENCY, NON-PARTISANSHIP, EXPERTISE, and DEPENDABILITY.

The PBO has so far delivered on producing documents like the District Development Fact Sheets, Budget Brief of Government Expenditure of Selected Sectors, First and Second Quarterly 2019 Economic and Budget briefs, Half Yearly 2020 Economic and Budget briefs among others.

Nevertheless, the Unit has not been able to adequately show case efforts done in pursuit of its mandate, but committed in its determination of carrying out professional analysis on macro-economic and fiscal policy, for the purposes of raising the quality of parliamentary debate and promoting greater budget transparency and accountability.

Through its Strategic Plan Matrix, it identified capacity building as one of the key actions needed to deliver on its core mandate.

With support from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the PBO commenced a one day training on 10th September 2020 for staff members of the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO), and staff members invited from Committees, Parliamentary Research, Human Resource Admin, and Public Relations Units. The training was mainly intended to build the human capacities of staff members in order to be able to deliver services independently, professionally and impartially to MPs.

3. Training Objectives

The main objective of the training is to enhance the capacity needs and the reporting effectiveness of the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO). The specific objectives are related to the following:

- Increase the understanding of PBO staff on the Appropriation questionnaire and Review.
- Adequately equip PBO staff in scrutinising the questionnaire and promote accountability, transparency, responsive and inclusive governance,
- Improved support to Members of Parliament.
- Improve the knowledge and awareness of PBO staff members needed to fulfil the mandate of the PBO.

4. Training Methodology

The training was characterized by expert and professional presentations from within and outside of Parliament. The plan, topics and duration of training were carefully selected to reflect the training outcomes. The training was also planned to be organised in strict adherence to government guidelines on the prevention and control of COVID 19 and aimed at helping participants acquire knowledge relative to skills for analysis, document understanding and interrogation; inculcating attitudes of professionalism and objectivity in the conduct of their work.

The core delivery processes covered presentations that provided details on matters related to analyzing the Questionnaire budget, staff induction and implementation strategies. The presentation from OGP showed how concrete commitments from governments can promote transparency and accountability, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.

The workshop implementation also made room for the eliciting of feedback from participants through various discussions to determine the outcome of the training process. Through the deliberations, participants were expected to confirm understanding of the various topics delivered and required to provide details on how acquired skills or knowledge will help them in their work.

5. Statements

Welcome Statement by the Deputy Director of PBO- Mr. Ibrahim Jimissa

The Deputy Director of PBO, Ibrahim Jimissa opened the training by thanking WFD for their support towards the PBO. He recalled that the rationale for the training was to fulfill the deliverables in the PBO strategic plan 2020-2022, a document that was developed to provide a road map for the Unit. He also intimated the audience that the training on the appropriation questionnaire was borne out of needs assessment which was recently conducted in Parliament. He went on to emphasize that the Unit is on the verge of assuming Directorate status, thanks to the ongoing support from WFD and other development partners coupled with the PBO's commitment to grow.

Statement by the Hon Clerk of Parliament 2 – Mr. Cyril King

The Hon Clerk 2 in his address began by thanking the Deputy Director of PBO for giving him the platform to grace the occasion. In his goodwill message he lauded the Deputy Director for his dynamism as one of a few who are committed to ensuring that Parliament continues to develop onto new heights.

Statement by the Country Director, WFD – Mr. Alusine Diamond-Suma

In his statement Mr. Diamond Suma expressed his delight in supporting the training event. He commended the PBO for its determination to make an imprint in the affairs of Parliament by choosing to upskill staff on the Appropriation questionnaire which he believes will greatly instill confidence in staff when interrogating the document. He emphasized on the need for OGP as a conduit for promoting accountability and transparency.

Statement by the Chair, OGP Working Group in Parliament – Hon. Alice Kumabeh

Hon. Alice Kumabeh began by thanking PBO and WFD for the invitation. She briefed on the mandate of the Group such as overseeing of the implementation of the Parliamentary commitments on the OGP, support the National Action Plan (NAP3) actions through legislative and oversight to the OGP commitments, hold quarterly meeting to discuss on the OGP progress, make representation in national and international engagement, and to develop an action plan on the implementation of the Parliament of Sierra Leone commitments on the OGP.

Statement by Director, Department for Parliamentary assistance Coordination (DePAC) – Mrs Finda Fraser

Mrs. Fraser thanked PBO whilst echoing the already expressed sentiments from other speakers before her. She affirmed her passion for the PBO, as well as her commitment to ensuring that the Unit develops further in its journey to becoming bigger and better. The Director also went on to inform delegates of her desire to work with all departments to ensuring that Parliament achieves all of its responsibilities under the OGP mandate. That she is actively engaging interests to erect a Service charter that will be strategically placed and visible when entering Parliament.

6. Training Presentations

The Appropriation Questionnaire – Mr. Ibrahim Jimissa, Deputy Director, PBO

The objective of this presentation was to highlight what it means to have a good understanding of the document in order to be able to perform our individual roles at committees. The Deputy Director focused on what constitutes a good understanding of the Questionnaire such that it must be fully completed, Vote Service Ledger must be checked as most MDAs do not always address its requirement, the **original** of all Bank statements, and other relevant financial information.

A strategic priority he also mentioned will have to do with supporting the Public Accounts Committee in designing questions during post-audit report hearings, and collaboration with Committee Clerks in the preparation of PAC reports.

Critical Areas to concentrate in Reviewing the questionnaire, Challenges & Recommendations - Mr. Ibrahim Jimissa, Deputy Director, PBO

The Deputy Director engaged participants on areas of particular focus and delved into some of the reasons why the Questionnaire should be reviewed, among other things like:

1. Critical areas to concentrate on when reviewing the Questionnaire
2. Challenges faced in the last appropriation process
3. Question and answer Session

There was a practical session in which the Deputy Director took participants through the content of the questionnaire.

Presentation on OGP to PBO – Marcella Samba-Sesay, Executive Director, CGG

This was a dual presentation which commenced by an overview of the existence of the OGP;

- Its vision, to see more governments become sustainable more transparent, more accountable and more responsive to their citizens, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of governance, as well as the quality of services that citizens receive. This will require a shift in norms and culture to ensure genuine dialogue and collaboration between governments and civil society.
- That it aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency and accountability, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance
- The key objective is to make sure that government is open and transparent to the benefit of citizens

The Executive Director highlighted key requirements on Commitment 7 for open Parliament in updating of the parliamentary APP for more public engagement; institute a platform for CSO and Parliament to interact on various national issues;

Parliament to establish and train OGP Parliamentary working group for improved service delivery; Develop annual report in accessible format, access to parliament for persons with disability; parliament to erect service charter in 5 strategic locations and use other media platforms.

In closing she informed that it will be beneficial for all if Parliament embraces the principles of OGP, leading to better service delivery, enhanced representation, accountability, and transparency.

Presentation on Induction Module – Faiz Rahman, PBO

The Objective of this presentation bordered on providing update on work done so far within the PBO, identification of strategic issues for consideration and potential challenges, as well as the provision of highlights on the way forward for the Unit. The slides served as an orientation exercise for the recently assigned new staff to the PBO but also as a refresher session for existing staff members in the Unit.

Going Forward he maintained that the focus of the PBO will be on the production of quarterly economic and fiscal Briefs, periodic fiscal infographics, policy and bill costing, research publications and reports and macroeconomics forecasts. He also set out a proposed structure/Organogram of what the Deputy Director would like there to be for the PBO.

7. Training Outcomes/Recommendations

The training of PBO and other Parliamentary staff was considered timely and critical not only to build internal capacity, but also to equip them to ensure inter-departmental collaboration and cooperation. This is especially so with the imminent arrival of the annual Committee of Supply in November. Following various deliberations during the training, recommended actions have been identified to serve as the way forward.

Recommendations
1. The PBO to visit other jurisdictions with the view of learning best practices in carrying out their mandate.
2. The PBO should be adequately informed on specific legislative bills or statutory instruments that are passed into law in the Well of Parliament, especially those that are finance related. It also highlighted the need for the state budget be taken first through the PBO in the future before committee on supply's review.
3. Work with the Finance Committee and Committee Clerks to enhance the scrutiny of public finances during the appropriation stage of the budget approval process.
4. Through discussions at the training it was observe that some MDAs did not properly understand and respond to the questionnaire appropriately. There should be Staff attachment on institutional learning to line MDAs. The Parliamentary management to ensure engagement frameworks are signed with relevant MDAs
5. Work with the Finance Committee Clerk(s) in upgrading the robustness of the contents of the questionnaires issued to MDAs during the appropriation process
6. For a successful Appropriation process, every effort should be made by Parliament through individual clerks of committees to request copies of the MDA annual statement of accounts from the Auditor General's office in advance of the Hearing. In addition there should be training workshop for Vote Controllers and appropriate staff by Parliament and MoF on the expectation of MDAs in the approval process of the budget.
7. The Budget questionnaire to be periodically reviewed so that it is simplified and well understood by MDAs.
8. Engage the Finance Committee to initiate discussions with the Ministry of Finance for the review of the budget calendar to allow for deepened and thorough involvement of Parliament in the budget oversight and scrutiny process.
9. There is genuine need for capacity building of MPs on the appropriation process
10. Advanced capacity Building of staff/ training on Infographics to be able to produce 'at a glance' briefs on various subjects in Macroeconomic and Fiscal development

11.Improve the skills of staff in the use of Microsoft office programmes (word, power point and excel)

12.Train the Trainer. Develop 'experts' who will be responsible for delivering workplace based training for members of Parliament (MPs)

13.On Open Government Partnership, if the Sierra Leone Parliament embraces the OGP principles in an inclusive way – through working in alignment at both the national and community levels with women, youths and other politically marginalized groups - OGP can be used as a tool to aid the Sierra Leone Parliament to carry out its legislative, oversight and representative roles to ensure better service delivery and enhanced representation, accountability and transparency