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# OUTREACH, TRANSPARENCY & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE KYRGYSTAN PARLIAMENT

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## **DISCLAIMER**

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# INTRODUCTION

This report provides a baseline assessment of the transparency and accessibility of the Kyrgyzstan Parliament. It is based on interviews conducted by Kate Head, a senior communications consultant with Emerald Strategies, Inc., between May 15 and May 30, 2007. Included in the interviews were parliamentary staff, selected deputies, media and others working in the governance field. A complete list of the interviewees may be found in the Appendix.

The assessment focused on the following four topics as they related to the Kyrgyz Parliament:

- Global best practices for legislative communications and transparency
- Overall transparency of the Kyrgyz Parliament's business
- Public accessibility to the documents and proceedings of the Kyrgyz Parliament
- Public involvement in parliamentary work.

Based on the interviews and research conducted for this assessment, it appears that the Kyrgyzstan Parliament is an active body, especially when compared to other legislative bodies in transitional societies. For example, just in the short time field work was being conducted, the Kyrgyzstan Parliament conducted roundtables on the criminal code, electoral reform, and closure of the airbase, as well as hearings on financial security laws, local decentralization and traffic safety.

Both inside and outside the walls of Parliament, the people of Kyrgyzstan are discussing laws, amendments and issues. In contrast to other developing countries, there appears to be a significant amount of legislative debate and lawmaking activity. The pace and volume evokes the Balkan countries, where there have been active programs of modernizing statutes using ambitious benchmarks and timelines in hopes of gaining entry to the European Union.

## SCOPE

Given the limited time for field work, the scope of this communications assessment was necessarily high level and based on interviews and direct witness to Parliamentary proceedings and operations. To gain the greatest possible perspective, this assessment focused on the six key areas relating to legislative communications and transparency:

1. Meetings, including:
  - General sessions
  - Parliamentary schedule
  - Access to meetings
  - Public hearings
  - Public and media participation in hearings
2. Citizen involvement, including:
  - Individual citizen access
  - Organizational access to Parliament
  - Discussion through roundtables and expert committee
3. Press operations, including:
  - Parliamentary press service
  - Press office equipment
  - Media credentialing
  - Committee press operations
  - Deputies' press operations

- Coverage of the Parliament
- 4. Records, including:
  - Record of debate
  - Voting records
- 5. Parliamentary debate and identity, including:
  - Transparency of debate
  - Transparency of the amendment process
  - The Parliament's institutional identity
- 6. Online and offline public communications, including:
  - Citizen contact through mail and email
  - Web site content
  - Web site outreach
  - Web site governance

Legal considerations and the relationships between parliament and the executive and judicial branches were not in scope. The capacities of the library and archive were addressed in a previous report, and are also not covered, although debate transcripts in the archive are briefly mentioned as an accessibility and transparency issue.

Each of the factors addressed in the six key areas is discussed at three levels:

1. Observations, which includes the salient points gained through interviews and first-hand witness of parliamentary proceedings and operations.
2. Impact, which discusses the effects the key observations have on parliamentary communications, transparency, and public participation.
3. Recommendations, which provide suggestions for changes that will improve parliamentary communications, transparency, and public participation.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

Throughout this assessment a number of key findings, both positive and negative, stood out:

1. The Parliament provides almost unlimited access to the media.
2. The practice of conducting public hearings and roundtables with organizations, academics and government leaders is embedded firmly in the culture. It would now be impossible to imagine a major law being introduced without a public event of this nature.
3. The lack of access to debate records and member votes is a significant concern for transparency.
4. The debate preparation and actual debate from the Deputies and the organizations is less of a high-level discussion and presentation than expected.
5. The new, enhanced Web site promises to include many content changes. The committees and deputies will need assistance with their page creation.
6. Deputies have little editorial control over their comments in debate record. The transcription process should include the ability to make editorial changes to their comments.

These findings are discussed below in the context of their relevant parliamentary communications and transparency factors.

# 1. MEETINGS

This section discusses observations, impact and recommendations related to meetings in the Parliament, including:

- General Sessions
- Parliamentary Schedule
- Access to Meetings
- The House Rules on Open Meetings
- Public Hearings
- Executive sessions of Committees

## GENERAL SESSIONS

### OBSERVATION

General sessions of Parliament may be viewed from the Press Gallery. This gallery is a spacious second floor room with a view of the chamber floor below. A closed-circuit TV camera films the proceedings, which play back on screens to the left and right of the Speaker's chair. The coverage is also televised in



an overflow room below the Press Gallery. Both the closed-circuit TV crew and other television journalists receive floor privileges which enables them to film Members of Parliament while they are speaking. Journalists are also permitted to do cut-away shots during their coverage. Both are privileges not all legislatures permit journalists.

The Press Gallery was filled to capacity on the days we were observing the proceedings, which demonstrates significant media and public interest in the proceedings of Parliament.

Parliamentary debate is interpreted simultaneously into both Kyrgyz and Russian. Technology is in use which enables journalists to plug into the Press Gallery's sound system from their seats to listen to these interpretations, and we observed three journalists making use of this system. Because Members of Parliament routinely switch between Kyrgyz and Russian, and sometimes mix both in a single sentence, this interpretation service can be helpful to both the press and the public.

The closed-circuit television system also plays back in an overflow area where journalists, visitors and staff can congregate and watch the proceedings. However, simultaneous interpretation is not available in the overflow room. After the close of business each legislative day, this space may also be used by any Member of Parliament to conduct a press conference. The room is reserved through the Press Service Office.

Outside the floor of the Parliament and Press Gallery is a large lobby with seating where Members of Parliament, staff and journalists may congregate to discuss the issues of the day. Here journalists are often able to obtain comments from Members returning to their offices from the chamber floor.

## **IMPACT**

The Parliament of Kyrgyzstan has provided means for extensive coverage by the media of its proceedings, which is one of the most important components of legislative transparency. The fact that the Press Gallery is routinely filled also indicates that the media is interested in covering public policy debate, which is not always the case, even in the most open democracies in the world.

Additionally, in a society that functions in more than one language, it is a best practice for legislative proceedings to be translated and interpreted into both languages so that the greatest possible percentage of the population has access to the proceedings. In the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan, translation into both Russian and Kyrgyz is conducted without contention by the staff of the Press Gallery. A minority of the population speaks Russian, but Russian is the language of the region in which Parliament is located and of much of the debate. Additionally, there is a generation of the population with limited Kyrgyz language skills because they were not taught the language at home or in school. As a result of the translation of parliamentary proceedings into both languages of the country, however, public policy debate is linguistically accessible to the greatest possible percentage of the population.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We have no recommendations to improve access to and transparency of general sessions of Parliament. Parliament has provided the means for the press and the press to access debate. Additionally, the layout and design of the Parliament building is ideal for interaction between journalists, citizens and Members.\

## **PARLIAMENTARY SCHEDULE**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Parliamentary monthly and weekly schedules are provided to the chamber and posted on the parliamentary Web site. However, the weekly schedule changes daily based on the “issues of the day.” These daily changes are a major complaint of journalists and activists outside the Parliament because they are often not given advance warning about what events, hearings and debates are taking place on a given day. As a result, they are unable to anticipate or prepare for the issues of the day, which limits their abilities to report on or participate in the public policy debate.

The Members of Parliament also view the schedule changes as frustrating. For example, one Member indicated that it is impossible to conduct sufficient research or know what questions to ask or statements to make when there is not sufficient time to prepare for the day’s proceedings. Other Members, however, view responding to the changes as a part of parliamentary culture. As one deputy said, “Our duty is to respond to events of the day.”

In cases of national emergencies which demand Parliament’s immediate attention, such as landslides, it is important that the chamber reorganize its schedule to respond. However, many of the issues that trigger adjustments in the schedules are not actual emergencies. Rather, they are the result of “crises” from political or media pressure. Members of Parliament appear to be far more focused on the crisis of the day, and are, as a result, more reactive to issues that arise on a given day than proactive on the people’s agenda. Some of those who were interviewed complained that both the media and Members of Parliament are scandal-driven, and that Members are unduly influenced by the promise of media coverage. As a result, the issues of the day are often addressed before, and by default prioritized over, larger societal issues such as the economy, healthcare and education.

## IMPACT

An unpredictable parliamentary schedule has two fundamental impacts. First, it prevents Members, staff, and civil society from being prepared to conduct the high-level, informed debate that is necessary to construct effective law. Second, it prevents the Parliament from being viewed by citizens and civil society as a deliberative, methodical, authoritative body.

Although in many Parliaments, changes in schedule are used as a political tactic by the majority to see their agendas implemented, that does not always appear to be the case in the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan. Rather, the Parliament is largely reacting to the political and media crises of the day. In either case, however, the impact is the same. Members are not able to adequately prepare for debate by conducting thorough research and formulating high-quality legislative ideas. This limits the quality of debate and the quality of the resulting law.

Though the causes of changes in the parliamentary schedule may be different – delays in legislative drafting, responding to crisis or scandal, efforts by leadership to avoid certain debate or disarray – the impact on the reputation of the body remains the same. Parliament is viewed as disorganized and unprepared. The unpredictable schedule can reinforce the public’s perception that the government is unstable after the elections and recent protests. The schedule changes also influence debate preparation by members, journalists and citizens groups as they seek to impact the process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Making publicly available -- and, to the degree possible, adhering to -- schedules for the day, the week and the month are critical components of any effective parliament. Although many have stated that these are uncertain political times in Kyrgyzstan, it will be important to both the quality of legislation and debate and the reputation of the institution for Parliament to not only establish but also adhere to its schedule as closely as possible. In difficult political environments challenges to planning and keeping to a legislative agenda exist, but many nations with larger political problems than Kyrgyzstan have managed to do forward planning and to implement effective legislative schedules.

Although some flexibility to adjust floor schedules should be a leadership prerogative, greater predictability for major legislative activities, such as those related to the fundamental infrastructure of Kyrgyz society, would be of service to both Members and observers, and would help foster a public sense of parliamentary and societal stability. One means of doing this would be to exert greater discipline over the procedures used to post the schedule for floor activity to the government’s Web site. For example, schedules should be posted well enough in advance to facilitate effective preparation and participation, but not before leadership is committed to adhering to the schedule.

To use the Web site in this way, the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan may consider the Web site of the United States House of Representatives as a model. At [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov), documents from the leadership relating to the legislative schedule are routinely posted, including:

- Currently on the House Floor, which provides an almost real-time journal of the proceedings in the chamber;
- Today in the House, which provides an up-to-date schedule for the day;
- The Week Ahead, which provides the anticipated schedule for the week; and
- The Month Ahead, which provides the anticipated schedule for the month.

The House of Representatives also provides an annual schedule which provides information on days the chamber is expected to be in session and days the session is expected to be in recess. Additionally, in the

United States, it is also a common practice to use automated phone systems from the cloakroom of each party to “hotline” and alert lawmakers and their staffs about pending business on the floor.

To be successful in publishing a predictable schedule to the Web site, leadership offices must create deadlines with the committee chairs and the executive branch for public notices. A schedule that is in flux reflects badly on their office and staff, so there should be incentives to meet deadlines and force discipline in the schedule.

A focused schedule will also help the Speaker’s office and the executive branch plan media coverage on issues. For example, during the week when the government is advancing an important issue, the legislative schedule could slow or take up the issue too. Another benefit is that the Speaker’s office could assure that hearings are timed to enable journalists to give each the attention they deserve.

Another recommendation being made later in this report is to have the daily schedule sent out to not only journalists, but also to citizens and advocates who are interested and who registered to receive the schedule.

To make the Web site an important resource, however, the Parliament must foster its use. A survey conducted by the National Democratic Institute of 27 offices found most do not use the Internet daily to check the schedule. The Web schedule has not developed a reliable reputation that would warrant such tracking behavior. If the schedule were more reliable, it would be used more frequently, which would help improve information dissemination.

<b>Frequency of access to online information regarding upcoming hearings or schedule</b>	
26%	Daily
16%	2 or 3 times a week
11%	1 time a week
47%	Less than one time a week

## **ACCESS TO MEETINGS**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

The Internal Regulations of the Parliament determine whether a meeting is to be open or closed to the public. A deputy’s proposal, supported by the majority vote, can force a closed meeting if it concerns security issues, issues of corruption of high state officials, or economic or financial budget disputes within the Parliament. Members of the executive allowed to attend a closed meeting include the President, Prime Minister and Ministers.

Members of the press and the public have access to any open meeting of the Parliament.

Last year, two meetings were closed to the press, staff and public. The first was about a security issue, and the second dealt with an internal corruption problem of the Parliament (which was called an ‘economic issue’ to prevent embarrassment of the body.) Despite these closures, the consensus among journalists and advocates is that the Parliament is the most open institution in Kyrgyzstan.

### **IMPACT**

The Parliament’s rule on closed meetings is broadly worded to cover a wide range of circumstances and topics. The media did not challenge the closed meetings when they took place, but this is likely to change

over time as the press increases scrutiny of Parliament. This will be particularly true for hearings on corruption, economic disputes and the testimony of high government officials. State security issues are not likely to be challenge by the journalists.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The lack of specific circumstances to close a meeting is not seen as important by the Deputies or media at this time. This will only become a policy change after a Parliament meeting is closed and the press and public pressure the body to make a more detailed policy. At this moment neither the media nor the Parliament members state that this is an important or critical issue to them.

## **PUBLIC HEARINGS**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

The Parliament's public hearings are held in a variety of formats. For example, the hearing on the reforms to the local municipal law was similar to conference formats, with citizens and organizations on the floor taking the seats of deputies. However, roundtable discussion formats are also popular among Deputies, government staff and NGO leadership for public hearings.

Such hearings are usually moderated by the chairmen of the corresponding committees. At hearings, the following often present speeches: prime minister, vice-ministers, ministers, NGO representatives, deputies, experts, victims, labor unions, business associations and representatives of the political parties.

Sometimes the participants provide written testimony. The quality of testimony and advocacy is high, according to a lobbyist with the Kyrgyz Law Association. He suggested that hearings and roundtables are consensus-driven and successful when they are not concerned with political or divisive issues.

The national budget hearings take place once or twice a year in Bishkek. Last year there were regional meetings in the north and south of the country on the budget that were supported by USAID-NDI and UNDP. Observers said that the quality of testimony is often somewhat mixed within the regions, but the focus tends to be pensions, poverty and government worker salaries.

A list of speakers for a hearing is determined by deputies, but may also be suggested by an NGO, or a well-known expert. Tolekan Ismailova, with Citizens Against Corruption, said Deputies ask it six to seven times a year to help find NGO participants to provide testimony for Parliament hearings. The Coalition includes a wide network that in turn has local meetings to identify its agenda and speakers for these hearings.

### **IMPACT**

From a public relations perspective, the meetings and roundtables are well-run. In some cases, such as dealing with human rights groups, the Deputies are less prepared than the advocates when it comes to data, case histories and legal practice.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Parliament should identify two to three committees for a pilot program of interactive hearings with organizations, citizens and government leaders. The committees and issues that are selected should be of interest to the average Kyrgyz citizen, but not divisive so as to avoid exacerbating political divisions. Committee staff should be encouraged to work with other staff to monitor these hearings and create a best practice discussion of those who worked on the hearing to share with other staff members. A hearing checklist could be created for internal use to facilitate future modifications and to facilitate replication.

USAID could place a staffer to work with committee and deputy staff to research and substantiate the issue, work with the citizens groups to ensure their testimonials speak to the laws or amendments in question, and work with the media to present the many sides of the argument.

For this work, it would be useful to go beyond the advanced, Bishkek-based NGOs who already have these advanced skills. USAID implementers are working to expand advocacy efforts to trade, professional and issue-related organizations. Agriculture, healthcare and education are the concern of average families and are likely to encourage a broader interest.

The criteria for issue selection should include a pending piece of legislation that is broad enough to engage a variety of interested organizations. For example, the choice of education could include teachers, parents, university, and businesses interested in hiring graduates.

## **PUBLIC AND MEDIA PARTICIPATION IN HEARINGS**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

There was a wide disparity in public and media participation in observed hearings that did not always appear to track with the importance and impact of the issues being debated. We observed a financial



committee meeting, a base closure meeting and a hearing on traffic safety. Although these observations do not represent an exhaustive review of behavior at hearings, our observations are revealing about trends.

The meetings we observed were not routinely covered by the media or interest groups who would typically be expected to participate. The base closure had 27 participants around a roundtable, six TV cameras and over 15 journalists. The hearing on traffic safety had 25 participants and three cameras. On the other hand, the Finance Committee had no journalists in attendance.

The lack of participation at the Finance Committee was surprising to us. It was in the process of reporting legislation, a mark-up hearing, and was considering a range of important issues including a new financial/banking law, tax changes and the proximity of casinos to public places. Amendments on these topics were considered with a short comment from a deputy and questions or comments.

We found no banking industry representatives in attendance during this Committee hearing although the financial disclosure issues will directly impact the policies and practices of individual banks. A deputy close to the banking industry told us they were not interested.

It was not always apparent that adequate preparation had gone into the process of drafting amendments to legislation that was moving through committees. The Chair of the Finance Committee said to a Member at the hearing, “There is a collision between laws, it is necessary to study more,” before sending the amendment back to him.

The Chair asked a number of Members who presented their amendments or voiced an issue, to do additional research or to review the existing laws. In one instance, the Chair sensed the negative reaction in the room and asked the Member, “Would you like to work more on your draft, or vote?”

## **IMPACT**

There is a risk of being accused of legislating in the dark if mark-ups of key legislation occur without some degree of public participation and notice. Hearings that draw witnesses tend to be interesting for the press.

The packaging of both hearings to receive testimony and legislative mark-up hearings is critical to educating interested parties, the media and the public about the activity so that the legislating activity occurs in the “sunshine”.

Public debate over legislative issues can increase awareness and the likelihood that the initiative will gain strength and support as it moves closer to a vote by the full Parliament.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

More research is necessary to discover if committee staffs forge adequate relationships with organizations representing the interests of people impacted by that panel’s jurisdiction. We do not know if notice about mark-ups is published and circulated to impacted parties as expected. While it is up to the outside organizations to attend hearings and mark-ups and not the responsibility of the elected officials to draft their attendance, there may be seeds of trouble for transparency if adequate publicity and notice is missing.

A properly prepared package of materials distributed in advance of a meeting can serve an important function to make government more open to the people. For mark-ups, a section-by-section analysis of elements of the bill under consideration could awaken interests of those who would be impacted.

USAID should consider placing staff to do additional research in this area, and if necessary provide model packages of key issues that can be replicated by the staff of Parliament to drive public interest in these meetings. This could be viewed as a pilot program with several committees, to show how legal research, issue research and substantiation of an issue can increase coverage and the chance of successful passage.

## **2. CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT**

This section reviews issues of access and involvement by citizens and organizations, including:

- Individual Citizen Access
- Organizational Access to Parliament
- Discussion through Roundtables, Expert Committee

### **INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN ACCESS**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

Like the process for organizations, citizens do not have access to the Parliament building without an appointment or permission from a deputy or staff member. Though this limits the number of citizens that have access, they are there everyday at the permissions office on the phone with their deputy trying to obtain passes.

The Department for Letters and Citizens Appointments, from April 2005 to 2006, provided for 30,273 meetings of deputies with citizens concerning personal issues. Approximately 37,000 citizens met with

deputies and the staff of the Parliament during that time. There are no new numbers for this last year, but the Appointments staff told us the numbers are about the same as the previous year.

According to the deputies, many of the citizens that visit from the regions request that their personal problems are addressed – these are often legal problems, poverty issues or conflicts with local authorities. In the U.S., this is called “casework” and consumes a good deal of time for staff and lawmaker alike. In Kyrgyzstan, one staffer said that even though they field calls from citizens each day they are in session, his Deputy also uses Saturday hours to see roughly 15 people from the home district.

NDI shared their experience with town hall meetings that there was high attendance in the regions, but much of the focus was individual problems.

In a discussion of press officers of all the ministries a concern was raised about the ability to handle the volume of individual requests from citizens. Many were beginning to use e-government to have citizen contact, but were having problems dealing with the volume of requests and how to handle them internally.

## **IMPACT**

The challenge with the level of citizen access and casework Deputies currently provide is that, with their limited resources, they spend less time conducting legislative drafting and research, and more time dealing with individual problems. This can cause the Parliament to be more of a service organization than a public policy institution.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

A large amount of casework may signal the need for a root cause analysis to correct deficiencies in government agencies that may be underperforming. The government, through UNDP, is ready to launch e-government pages for citizen problems and benefits. We will be interested in seeing whether this will better equip offices to handle its casework.

We recommend that USAID undertake a field study of a sample of lawmakers’ offices to determine the ratio of casework to legislation, and study if the staffing structure and budget meets the public’s need for a responsive government.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL ACCESS**

### **OBSERVATION**

To get into the Parliament building requires visitors to show valid identification and have a staff or Deputy approve their visit at the front entrance office. This system is a leftover from the Soviet system of permission desks. The Bishkek-based NGOs have developed contacts within the legislative body, so they can contact friends and allies to gain access to watch the proceedings or visit offices.

The more sophisticated organizations draft documents, hold roundtables and directly lobby with their own legal drafts or amendments.

Protests are allowed outside the White House or the Parliament, with permits that are not difficult to obtain. This is a best practice, and reflects procedures in well-established democracies.

## **IMPACT**

The more organizations access the Parliament, the more advanced the advocacy efforts and the issue debate will become over time. The requirement to call-in provides a challenge to those who might be regular, serious advocates.

It is important that the ability to attend committee meetings not be dependent on inside friends and allies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is time to review the requirement that organizations and individuals must gain permission from a deputy or staff member to visit Parliament. It would be preferable if organizations would work through a non-political staff member to gain permission and access to the building, which would remove the taint of favoritism or insider-only access.

This can be done through a registry and identification system, or through an individual staff member who can pre-approve these visits. An identity card system could aid in the screening job of doorkeepers and security guards. We would advocate that organizations that are legally registered charities or non-governmental groups be permitted to attend Parliament without first obtaining inside access.

In addition, the idea of an open registry for lobbyists that is available for public inspection would enhance openness and transparency. An initial registry would list the lobbyists by name and who they represent before Parliament. Years from now, a more mature system might also include an accounting of the funds they take from clients to do their work so that the public can scrutinize how professional lobbyists are influencing legislation.

## **ROUNDTABLES & EXPERT COMMITTEES**

### **OBSERVATION**

Kyrgyzstan has embraced the roundtable discussion as a method of engaging in debate and reaching consensus. We observed the Minister of Justice having a very candid conversation about the criminal law with the human right community during a roundtable. The Deputy Minister of Justice attended a similar roundtable several days later, and was equally as honest about the criminal code.

The roundtable is not limited to government action. The tax law was drafted through a joint tax group that included the Finance Committee, the IBC (International Business Council), the Tax Accounting Group and the Ministry of Finance. Tax experts who discussed and designed the first draft became the group that invited comment and had hearings around the nation.

Participants are often a mixture of experts, including academics, non-governmental groups, government representatives and Deputies. A joint committee hearing of five Parliament committees held hearings on the U.S. Air Force Base at a roundtable and included members of the military and academics.

### **IMPACT**

Joint discussions add credibility to the debate with government and citizen groups. These discussions expand the scope of conversations and laws. The Deputy Ministry of Justice thought they would put three, one-page amendments together to amend the criminal code, but through discussions with other advocates and experts, those amendments grew to 200 pages.

Countries with democratic debates and discussion have more informed and stable political environments. Their populations are more likely to be tolerant of others' views and also understand more sophisticated

government questions and trade-offs. For example, in developed democratic countries, advanced concepts are better understood by the population, such as understanding that an elected official can support a project, but vote against funding of it for fiscal reasons.

Working groups and roundtables enable elected officials to test the public reaction to issues under consideration. Furthermore, by bringing conversation on public policy out from behind closed doors, roundtables put participants on the record about their position on issues being discussed.

Not every issue is ripe for a roundtable format, and there is a risk of meeting fatigue if these sessions mushroom past a manageable level for leadership. Selecting which issues are discussed with the public and stakeholders via official roundtable discussions is a political issue that should be reserved to officials of Kyrgyzstan. Topic and issue selection, as well as timing of the meetings, can impact the momentum and support for the topic at hand in official proceedings.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The practice of conducting public hearings and roundtables with organizations, academics and government leaders appears to be embedded firmly in the culture. It now seems impossible to imagine a major law being introduced without a public event of this nature.

Publishing an internal parliamentary check list for successful meetings will standardize this format for all committees. Providing recognition for exceptionally-run roundtable discussions with sample preparation documentation and information on logistics for other groups to replicate should be helpful.

USAID should provide advocacy skills and training. The interest here is in going beyond traditional organizations that have embraced these practices. If more institutional organizations – such as professional, trade and issue-based groups – embrace this format for public debate and discussion, it can have a healthy impact on the public discourse for the long term.

## **3. PRESS OPERATIONS**

Our review of press and media operations covers a number of factors, including:

- Parliamentary Press Service
- Press Office Equipment
- Media Credentials
- Committee Press Operations
- Deputies Press Operations

## **PARLIAMENTARY PRESS SERVICE**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

The Parliament Press Service has 14 staff. They belong to the Parliament's permanent apparatus, are non-partisan and are directed by the Director of the Press Service. The director reports to the Chief of the Apparatus that is appointed and reports to the Speaker of Parliament.

The Press Service staff writes the press releases for the body and committees and gets the deputies releases out for them. When a law is passed, they write the releases. In one instance, the body passed 27 laws that needed a release. Releases are done in both Russian and Kyrgyz language. They are emailed,

faxed and provided for pick-up. This was confirmed by journalists who said they received two to three press releases every day that the chamber is in session.

The Press service organizes press conferences for the deputies in the space of three hours and handles the logistics for the deputies and the press releases. They distribute information by email, fax and pick-up.

The Press Center updates the Web site regularly with press releases and also produces a weekly journal of Parliamentary actions that is disseminated to the media. They also do newspaper clips of the coverage of the chamber so the members can see the coverage.

There is no current staff designated to work on the Web site. There is concern that this Internet position will be difficult to fill given the pay scale of government in comparison to the private sector.

## **IMPACT**

It is considerable work to handle the press of the institution and the committees, the Deputies' event set-up and to proactively get out the information about the schedule.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Not staffing an Internet expert on this press staff is a problem with dimensions that will only grow over time if it is not addressed. It is a critical success factor for the staff to fulfill its role as the publishing arm of Parliament. If there is a mechanism to place an outside staff expert here as a short term fix, it would be appropriate. At some point in time, the government will need to change its civil service pay scale to accommodate the competitive technical positions and other in-demand job positions.

## **PRESS OFFICE EQUIPMENT**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

The Press Center has its own room where reporters can file their stories. There is some resentment that the Press Center filing room does not get much use because it reportedly does not have sufficient computers for committee staff. The Press Center has seven computers with Internet access, a fax and a photocopier, all for accredited media to use without cost.

The Press Center records the sessions, which is currently done with camcorders and VHS tapes. There is no tripod for the camcorder.

The Press Center provides information in written form at its offices and gallery through emails and faxes. About 60 percent of the journalists use email and the remaining get faxes. Pick-up is done by whoever is in attendance. Traditionally, this is about 10-20 percent of the accredited journalists (or around 20-40 reporters). The Press Center currently does not use a Blast Fax program and hand feeds documents.

Though organizations and ministries often request an overhead projector to display presentations, the Parliament lacks this technology, which forces organizations to provide their own.

### **IMPACT**

The importance of equipment is to save time and make operations more efficient.

The media outlets that do not have email access that get faxed versions of press releases tend to be Kyrgyz language media, according the Press Service Director. Hand feeding these documents is an unnecessary waste of staff time and the loading is prone to error.

Equipment purchases and infrastructure should reflect actual patterns of behavior in consuming news by the intended audience, or else resources are wasted.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Currently, the credentialed members of the press have little choice on how they can receive legislative information. With the expanded technology, we would encourage a survey to inform the Press Service on how to adequately provide for necessary equipment to do the job.

The options for transmitting information include:

- Fax
- Paper
- Email

We would encourage this to be expanded to include:

- Mail
- Video
- Audio
- Web site files
- RSS feeds

To the degree that faxing continues to be a vital part of the communication plan, the office needs a blast fax program to sit on a few computers. These programs are paperless and send a document from the computer through the Internet to a fax. The faxes arrive as they look on the computer. A fax program that can handle 500-1,000 fax numbers would be ideal.

The absence of overhead projectors is also easily remedied. This is a key piece of equipment for press conferences, public hearings and debates. The Press Center will need two, given the volume of the hearings in the building. The building has sufficient white wall space throughout for projections, but it would be helpful to have one stand-alone screen for the parliament floor, which has no bare walls onto which the slides can be projected.

## **MEDIA CREDENTIALING**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Press credentials are a mechanism that are often used to reward or penalize reporters and impact press coverage. This is not the case in Kyrgyzstan. According to the Press Office, over 220 journalists from 45 outlets are credentialed. No media request was denied, although several deputies encouraged the Press Service Director to deny some journalists their credentials.

Although the current track record is without fault, we wonder if there are published standards as to how one identifies and define the job of journalism.

### **IMPACT**

Journalists can come and go in the building. A regular press corps covers the events of the Parliament, but there are also enough accredited journalists in case those outlets need to send additional staff or relieve the beat reporters.

Without published standards, there is a risk that a credential could be denied in the future on a whim. Because the Press Director is a staffer of the Speaker, there is a risk of politics coloring decision making on press access in the future. In the U.S. a standing committee of journalists sets the rules for the press gallery and makes decisions on admitting or denying credentials. In addition, in the U.S. any publication that belongs to an organization that lobbies Congress is not eligible for a media credential.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Parliament of Kyrgyzstan should be commended for its tradition of open access to the media as exhibited by its record of never denying credentials to the media.

However, the time may soon arrive when it would be expeditious for the Speaker to provide a buffer between himself and criticism that he is unduly using his influence in these decisions. We recommend adopting the style of the U.S. Congress, where a standing committee of correspondents is elected and given the power to set the rules for the press gallery, such as defining who is eligible for credentials. This committee should be given the authority to determine who is given credentials.

## **COMMITTEE PRESS OPERATIONS**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

There are seven committees in Parliament. Most committee staff tends to be bunched in small offices with three to four staff sharing one computer. The committees rely on the press service to do their press releases.

The Budget Committee produces its own releases, which the press service distributes. It seems that the coverage of budget issues is perceived as generally being accurate and a fair description of events.

The UNDP is currently creating a new Web site. Each Committee will have its own page and will receive training on how to update its site.

### **IMPACT**

The reliance on the press service staff is unrealistic for the long-term. The committee staff is more familiar with the issues, and over time the committee chairs will want control over press releases and relations.

Each committee has to update its own Web site pages and draft its own press releases. The more senior committee staff should be prepared to take more of that burden.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Senior committees should do as the Budget Committee has done and draft their own releases, and use the Press Service to release them. Over time, it makes sense for the larger and more critical committees to have their own press officer. This will involve a staff training component alongside the Press Service staff.

The Web site will also take some time and effort to develop. The UNDP does not plan on working one-on-one with the committees to develop their pages, and this would be a place for MSI to work with the Chairman and staff as requested. The UNDP Web Director said this would be helpful to support their efforts.

## **DEPUTIES' PRESS OPERATIONS**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

As mentioned above, the Press Center handles the logistics for the Deputies when they are holding media events or conferences within the Parliament. The Deputies each have two to three staff assistants who answer constituent mail, handle the schedule and track the paper in the office.

Press conferences are done at a press center in front of a backdrop that reflects a location, as opposed to the relevant issue. The Bishkek Press Club, AKN, and the parliament press room are all very popular. Deputies that are also leaders of political parties use their party offices for press events.

Based on the five press conferences we attended, the deputy makes a speech and fields questions from the journalists. Remarks are typically off the cuff or are based on an outline or statements. In some instances, a press release may be distributed. In all cases, the television reporters and still photographers take cut-away shots of the other journalists taking notes in the room.

The real work of strategic communications is packaging stories to show the real significance of the policy or issue to the average citizen. In other countries, significant time is spent thinking of engaging visuals, explanatory props or photos and impacted individuals. In the press events we attended, the NGOs and the Ministries have a higher level of substantiation for their issues, but the Deputies do not.

For example, we saw the NGOs and the Ministries use PowerPoint presentations, written materials, pie charts explaining amendment changes, and substantiated documents.

### **IMPACT**

Worldwide, parliament or congressional journalists cover multiple stories every day the body is in session. Given the large range of hearings, press releases and government actions, the quality of coverage cannot be blamed on the journalists, who are jumping from one event to the next. The burden for presenting the issue or arguments is the responsibility of the lawmakers.

The challenge here is that issues are not examined or presented in a compelling way to the public or citizens. For example, a testimonial or story from an individual who is impacted shows the importance of a law or change to someone's life.

Several examples of ways to highlight an issue before the public are props such as dirty water, photos that show the problems, or statistics that tell the before and after numbers.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Deputies get coverage without making a significant effort, so it could be a challenge to get the Deputies and their staff to improve their communications. It is hard to show that the volume of coverage is not as important as having communications that resonate with the viewer.

As mentioned in the press service equipment discussion, the Press Office does not have an overhead projector to project presentations on a screen at group meetings. This technology may be an easier bridge to go from verbal presentations to more sophisticated and factual press conferences or presentations.

The use of electronic presentation tools such as PowerPoint could be a welcome mechanism for staff to communicate facts, photos, charts and graphs to illustrate their positions on the issue at hand. To be sure, engaging PowerPoint presentations are sometimes the exception instead of the rule, and an effort to communicate best practices here via training examples of best practices and common mistakes could pay

dividends. USAID implementers working with advocacy organizations can also encourage its use and adaptation. Advocates can expand their substantiation methods to make their cases stronger to government.

For example, in the two roundtables on criminal law, there were no names or case histories, photos of prison conditions and before-and-after statistics. On the other hand, during the discussion of the political party law, we saw PowerPoint used to reinforce a presenter's speech and outline the decisions made by the party coalition.

## **COVERAGE OF THE PARLIAMENT**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

There is soon to be unfiltered audio and television of the Parliament through the UNDP program. This will provide citizens around the country with a first-hand view of the body in action.

The Press Service Office does weekly clippings of the written press with Deputies' names highlighted so they can track their coverage. The Press Office does not have the capacity to monitor the television or radio shows and do transcripts of this coverage.

The Press Office and the Budget Committee staff believed their coverage is accurate and largely reflects what is in their releases. Although the papers tend to be identified by political orientation, many stated the coverage is accurate and press-release based if it is over a non-political issue.

The editor of the state paper said that the paper often publishes the laws, and, occasionally, one or two pages are devoted to new laws. But they sometimes ask for funds if the legal pages will take more than two pages.

There are some concerns about the access of state television to opposition figures. One of the opposition leaders that we spoke to said that sometimes he is interviewed because some television programs are sponsored by donor agencies and are more likely to demand equal time.

A media commission organization representative said he was more concerned about the supervision of the television station when it came to content rather than the technical side, where the station has improved over time. Without consistent media monitoring efforts and data collection, the extent of biased coverage is difficult to quantify. There is more access to independent television stations, which are active in covering the Parliament.

### **IMPACT**

Complaints about national television aside, there is extensive coverage of the Parliament by newspapers. The expanded UNDP radio and television coverage should lessen the impact of any political coverage of the national television.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The media will cover well-packaged materials in an accurate way. Issues that are non-partisan are a critical component for coverage. MSI's work with committees to package materials should build better coverage.

## 4. RECORDS

This report reviews record-keeping as it relates to two topics:

- Debate Record
- Voting Records

### RECORD OF DEBATE

#### OBSERVATIONS

The debate record is recorded in three ways:

- Video tapes
- Audio recording
- Transcripts done via stenographers

The General Service Department from April 2005 to 2006 processed 123 stenographer's verbatim reports, corrected 3,123 audio files and compiled 1,189 communications on laws and decrees for delivery to the appropriate state bodies.

The transcripts are not published, but filed away as audio, video and stenography files which are all sent to the archive. The Director of the Press Service was nervous about his DHS tapes standing the test of time and requested making them digital.

Deputies have access to the transcripts and can receive them on request. A leader of the opposition said he regularly requested and received transcripts. The media does not have access and the Director of the Bishkek Press Club complained they were unable to get transcripts. Organizations or the press could get the transcripts of a debate through the request of a deputy or permission of the Speaker.

#### IMPACT

Transcripts of a debate provide the historic record to examine the original intent of a law, conduct analysis and evaluate the Deputy's performance. There are financial and staff resource issues as to why these transcripts are not translated and made public. Some deputies had concerns that they use improper grammar and that they would be embarrassed by the transcripts.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy states there is access of citizens, but the practices regarding access to the archive needs to change for the body to be transparent to the press and public.

Draft transcripts should be published internally in Parliament in paper form within days of the actual debate. Elected officials and their staffs should have access to a transcriber's records, prior to publication, to make any modifications they deem necessary, which reflects practice in the United States. Another window for edits should exist for a week following the publication of the draft. When that week passes, copies of the official record of debate should be distributed via a mailing to public libraries throughout the state which are designated as depositories for this information and/or made available on the Web site archive.

We appreciate that the Parliament has resource challenges. A short-term solution to transcription issues is to charge journalists or citizens a low-cost fee to turn the stenography into transcripts. Ideally, public information should be available free-of-charge.

## **VOTING RECORDS**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

The vote on the floor is shown in aggregate numbers on two electric boards to the right and left of the Speaker's chair. The boards also show a listing of names of the Members in attendance. The votes are handled electronically, although sometimes secret ballot is used. The votes are recorded by Member, but are not released by Member. This is a policy decision.

A handful of Deputies have leaked the vote counts on major issues to the media and organizations.

### **IMPACT**

We heard that deputies are free from executive retaliation by not having recorded votes. The same is also true in the other direction, by hiding difficult votes from the public. We imagine that the executive has a firm handle on the Parliament and that this is an excuse in some cases to maintain the status quo.

The biggest impact of individual voting records is the lack of accountability with the public. It will be difficult for the public and voters to judge the work and positions of the Deputies during elections and hold them accountable for their positions. The elections will be reduced to a discussion of observations from opposing Deputies and media. In a politicized environment, it is important to have an accurate showing of a Member's vote.

Voting records by Member is also important for advocates and organizations. Advocacy efforts are always an effort to mobilize supporters, influence the undecided and minimize opponents. This is difficult to do without voting records to serve as guidance or as verification. For example,

Tolekan Ismailova, with the Coalition Against Corruption, said that she was surprised by those "who turned their back."

The Parliament sometimes has difficulty reaching a quorum to have a vote. The quorum was reduced so the body could move forward.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The lack of voting records is a priority, otherwise the Parliament cannot be held accountable for its actions.

A policy review and vote on making voting records public should be recommended to Parliament. In addition, the "scoreboard" of votes should be modified in the future to show the names of each elected official, and not just an overall tally to have more transparency on the vote itself.

We propose that a policy change document be drafted to serve as the start of an open discussion and debate. To create pressure and eliminate the myth that recorded votes mean more freedom from the executive, this roundtable should start with the most active organizations, including trade and business groups, working in Parliament. The circle should then be expanded to include Deputies. There is a timing issue here. This is more likely to happen before the Parliament begins to think about party creation or elections.

## 5. PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE AND IDENTITY

The following section reviews parliament debate – both for transparency and quality – as well as the institutional identity of the public body. This breaks down into three specific segments:

- Transparency of Debate
- Transparency of the Amendment Process
- The Parliament’s Institutional Identity

### TRANSPARENCY OF DEBATE

#### OBSERVATIONS

The UNDP has an operational radio station with three staff, which provides a real time broadcast of the Parliament’s debates. One committee staffer monitors the debate by keeping an earplug to the live parliament radio show while he goes about his business and attends meetings. Currently, it is broadcast in Bishkek and another town, with the expectation that it will be expanded nationwide by September.

The UNDP has also set up a television facility within the Parliament to provide live broadcasts. The Parliament has yet to determine how the television will be transmitted and whether it will be done through the national television or an additional channel. Currently the videotapes from the floor debates are provided to the national television to replay when scheduling permits.

It is not clear if the floor itself is TV-ready. An assessment should be made to establish if any visual or layout modifications would help communicate the sense of place. It is not clear if the angles of filming the proceedings are equally flattering to all positions on the floor, for example, or if some lawmakers enjoy a more official tight-shot while others appear to be “backed against a wall”.

#### IMPACT

Live television and radio debate from the floor can only advance the discussion and create a better understanding of the issues. The national reach of the broadcasts is likely to raise the interest and understanding of the debate in the regions. This is important for the long-term institutional strength and stability of this branch of the government.

When C-Span first broadcast live from the floor of the U.S. House and Senate, the culture of both bodies changed. Lawmakers had to speak to viewers instead of presenting to their colleagues or commenting for the congressional record. Many members of Congress were taken by surprise by the new technology and visibility, and were forced to adjust their speeches to be better understood by viewers watching the proceedings.

It is unclear what impact the video and TV transmissions of the Parliament’s proceedings will have on the Kyrgyz Parliament and public perceptions. The radio has done little to change the culture of the proceedings, but television is a more powerful medium. Mistakes are amplified on television that may go unnoticed on radio broadcasts. The Speaker, the agenda, the debate, and the amendments (both what and how they are said) might reflect on the institution.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

When the U.S. Senate adopted television in the mid-1980s, the architect of the Capitol made modifications to the Senate chamber to assure that each and every Senator had a Senatorial backdrop in which to be viewed by his or her constituents and the public at large.

The architect of Parliament, or another suitable representative, should do a visual assessment of the floor with cameras to determine if any structural or design modifications would be necessary to put each lawmaker on a similar visual footing should TV broadcasts be adopted.

Although this is not a part of the scope of USAID's parliamentary strengthening project, other implementers could do speech or video training for the Members to get them ready for a broader television audience.

Focus groups on the parliamentary debate would provide welcome data to inform the shift in communication tactics. If there were a focus group conducted on the Parliament's proceedings, it could include randomly selected citizens to watch and comment on their impressions of the television debate, participants and agenda. The results are not quantifiable, but do provide more objective, qualified findings. This could inform the body how it is being perceived and the leadership or Deputies could make adjustments.

## **TRANSPARENCY OF THE AMENDMENT PROCESS**

### **OBSERVATION**

A complaint of many deputies is that the ministries provide legal drafts only in printed and not in electronic form. The paper copies are more difficult to make amendments or adjustments with in language. If requested, the Ministry of Finance does sometimes provide electronic versions of the laws, according to a Finance Committee member.

The Coalition Against Corruption claims deputies thought to be allies deceived the advocacy community by swapping drafts. The draft that was produced and distributed as final was adjusted within a two-hour span to the surprise of the community. We heard from both Deputies and advocates that it is not uncommon to write amendments in the margin of laws or attach notes with changes.

### **IMPACT**

Electronic versions are a critical component to oversight of law making. Electronic versions allow email, printing, changes and posting to Web sites. Electronic versions save time and effort in re-writing documents. Working on drafts and amendments saves on confusion and error in the process.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Posting legal drafts, amendments and versions of the bill is a major focus of the UNDP enhanced Web site, [www.kenesh.kg](http://www.kenesh.kg). This was a high priority for advocates, media and deputies who want to track legislation and different versions of the law. It remains a high priority to assure this happens in a timely manner, whether this requires training, support or pressure on the leadership office.

The PowerPoint application can also be used in the chamber to show documents or track changes during the floor debate. It is often helpful to have a visual that everyone can see, and to move away from verbal-only discussion of changes.

## **INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY**

### **OBSERVATION**

The Parliament without functional parties or factions means every Parliament member serves the interest of their community or networks. There is a lot of debate about how many of the current Members of the

Parliament, whom many NGO leaders describe as Parliament businessmen, will remain within the institution.

There seems to be consensus that only ten to fifteen offices are strong and engaged in the process.

In many ways the apparatus becomes the permanent institution.

“In the Parliament whoever shouts the loudest gets covered...they need professional attitudes,” said the editor of the state-run paper. Journalists blame their focus on scandal on the public and subscribers’ interests. Members of Parliament blame journalists for ignoring their important work, while at the same time focusing their communications efforts on what they will cover— a scandal.

Some of the NGOs thought the Parliament was oppositional to the President, but others thought it was much too supportive of the executive. It is difficult to judge with anecdotal, and not quantifiable, evidence.

Based on the set of interviews conducted by this study, there seems to be a mixed view of the institution of the Parliament and its work. It is not known if there is any independent longitudinal data on confidence in the legislature. Asking the same set of questions to the public over time to track confidence would be a good tool for advocates of democracy to use to prod the institution to become more accessible and transparent.

## **IMPACT**

There is an unclear picture to the deputies about how they describe their work and how the apparatus should weave messages into their media work and materials.

UNDP did not conduct a poll prior to its radio, television and e-governance efforts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The project, through a research institute, should consider a series of focus groups to test the public perception of the Parliament, its debates and its agenda. Within the focus group, the group could watch a typical tape of the institution, and then comment on what they felt. The project should consider building on the focus groups and by conducting an information poll to provide some policy and process direction for the parliament.

Given the investment of the donors in the institution, it might be necessary to do a poll to determine the people’s priorities and also to do a check on political perceptions.

It would behoove the people of Kyrgyzstan if a consortium of credentialed media or an academic institution sponsored an annual public survey of public confidence in government. Asking the same questions over time would provide a yardstick for measuring improvements and prod those who resist transparency to become to be more open.

Traditionally USAID has worked through implementing partners like MSI and national sponsors like academic, research or media organizations to conduct research of this kind. It is critical that such a survey be seen as independent and not government sponsored.

## 6. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS: ONLINE/OFFLINE

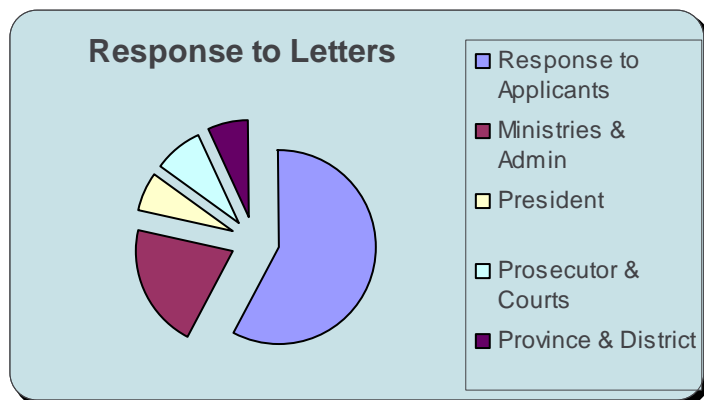
Our review of public communications concerns chiefly online communications, although we also cover letters/written correspondence from the public. Included in this section is:

- Individual Contact through Mail and Email
- Web Site Content
- Web Site Outreach
- Web Site Governance

### CITIZEN CONTACT THROUGH MAIL AND EMAIL

#### OBSERVATIONS

##### *Letters*



From April 2005 to 2006, there were 13,971 written letters to Deputies, which the Department for Letters and Citizens received and gave to Deputies and their staff.

Many requests were sent a response by the Deputy and then forwarded to government agencies.

There were 11,627 deputies' inquiries, of which:

20.7% were forwarded to ministries and administrative departments

6.4% were forwarded to presidential administration

8% were forwarded to prosecution's office and courts

7% were forwarded to province and district administrations

57% received a direct response to the applicants

An additional 14,881 letters or correspondence were mailed. These were not broken down by geography, recipient or purpose.

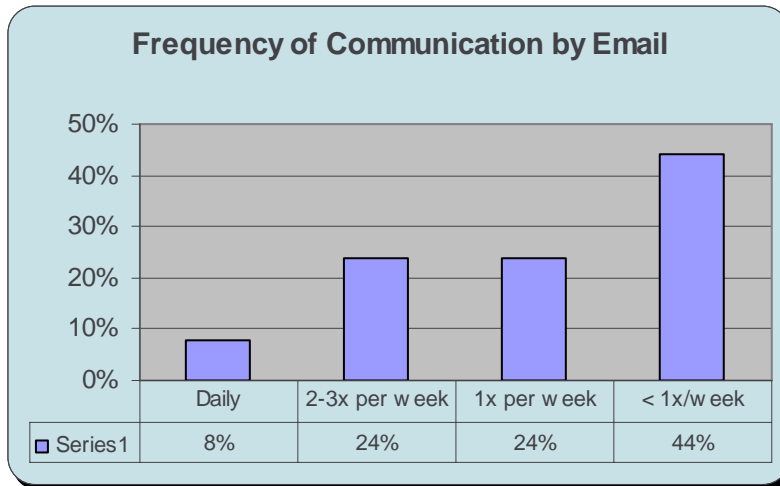
The Deputy's staff we spoke to said that they respond to letters everyday. The average seemed to be thirty a week (for a non-leader) and seemed to focus on legal, land and poverty problems. Among organizations, the region-based pensioner and farmer organizations also send letters, according to one staffer.

##### *Emails*

Many of the Deputies do not use email and have their staffs use the computer. It is seen as a staff assignment to check email and respond to requests. There is an internal email program and address

through [www.kenesh.kg](http://www.kenesh.kg), but some staff use individual email accounts with Gmail or other Internet based emails. One staffer downloads his email into Word documents before working or archiving them.

NDI conducted a random survey with 27 offices participating in the beginning of 2007. They found that among the Deputies' staff, most used email less than once a week.



In contrast, newspaper consumption among this group is high, with nearly 70 percent reading the primary newspaper on a daily basis.

Read Kyrgyz News	
69%	Daily
23%	2 or 3 times a week
4%	1 time a week
4%	Less than one time a week

## IMPACT

The Internet is mostly used to read the news and not to communicate. This is very low daily usage based on worldwide numbers. The Parliament uses dial-up through phone lines, but this does not stop the staff from reading the papers on a daily basis.

We asked the staff what programs they used on their computer. Many said they used Excel for databases and Word for documents, but not other programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be worthwhile for the staff to get a broader view of tools on their existing computers. This might be a good opportunity to do one-hour events or working lunches where the programs and their uses are introduced and reviewed.

Of particular interest are the Web-enabled applications (Software as a Service) and client-side applications that can save time and effort in responding to constituent email. Also of interest are database programs and PowerPoint web site content.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

The Information Technology Department is responsible for the Internet, software, and computers for every office in Parliament. The Press Service is responsible for the content, although the one staff person who was to work on the Web site got another job, so that position is currently vacant.

The re-design of the Web site is being driven by funds and staff of the UNDP, who have an e-government initiative that extends to all government. The Parliament Web Director and the UNDP Web Director make decisions related to the site. The UNDP has hired a Web site firm to build the site that will be completed by August 2007.

The current site is in Russian and Kyrgyz language. An English version is currently under construction. We asked what was one expects to see on the Web site, and there was interest in Deputies' biographies, the current schedule, press releases and proposed laws or amendments. The advocates and observers said they want a description of the committees work and schedule. For example, there was some interest in the difference between the Finance and Budget Committee's work.

There are concerns about timely posting of the schedule and press releases as well, which is seen as a priority. The NGOs and media said they wanted versions of laws and a schedule in real time.

## **IMPACT**

The Web site is the best mechanism to quickly reach a large audience of journalists and deputies to respond to schedule changes and legislative drafting.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The UNDP suggested that they would be interested in templates. They planned to have all the key components on the Web site including drafts, amendments and laws, including:

- Current laws, regulations
  - Search by key word
- Find a bill, their amendment, debate
  - Search by issue or key word
- Find a vote
  - Search by issue, key word
- About Parliament
  - History of Parliament
  - Parliament building
- Speaker's Office
  - Speaker bio
  - News from the Speaker
  - Issues
- Committees
  - Mission
  - Schedule
  - News
  - Hearings
  - Pending Legislation
  - Passed Legislation
  - Contact Us
  - Email Us

## WEB SITE OUTREACH

### OBSERVATIONS

Citizens hear what the Parliament is doing through the media or notification through organizations. The Parliament's Web site, [www.kenesh.kg](http://www.kenesh.kg), has only 100 external, original visitors each month, which is incredibly low.

The Press Office does communicate by sending out press releases when a law is passed, notifications of events, the schedule and a summary of the week's events. These are currently done through email and fax.

### IMPACT

An expanded listserv for existing materials is a high-impact, low-cost and limited effort communication mechanism. We suggest including citizens on the current listservs to receive emails or faxes on the schedule, press releases and weekly report.

This would allow outreach to those from other branches of government, organizations and interested citizens who are interested. For example, lawyers might find it useful to get the press releases of laws that were passed the day that it happens along with the press corps.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Web site could include a sign-up for existing documents that are created for the press. This would require increasing the circulation and distribution of these products without adding more staff time to create documents. The Web site sign-up could include the following content:

- Daily schedule
- Weekly schedule
- Monthly schedule
- Press releases
- Law passage press release
- Weekly review
- Kyrgyz language
- Russian language
- Email contact information
- Fax number

Any subscription list will incur management duties, including providing those on the list with automated ways to get off the list or update their preferences. For this reason, some have found e-newsletters yielding to RSS feeds as a preferred delivery mechanism.

We believe one should try doing both. In addition to the traditional e-newsletter sign up, use RSS feeds (Really Simple Syndication) for each of these information products. This distribution format will eliminate the need for list maintenance. It will be important to nurture early adopters by providing good user help and instructions on how to configure RSS feeds.

## **WEB SITE GOVERNANCE**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

The Parliament is the ultimate authority over the new design of the Web site. At the beginning of the process, the Speakers and Deputies were able to articulate their needs to UNDP Webmasters who are driving the project.

We suggested to Parliament and UNDP Web leads that they might want to consider executive input throughout the re-design process and not just at the kick-off. This is a best practice with government and institutional Web sites across the globe. We believe leadership has begun to understand that technical staff should not be the only body to make decisions.

The creation of policies and practices to maintain the Web site are underway, so that new coders, graphic artists and writers can understand and use decisions that were previously made.

We suggested a cross-cutting committee or a representative from the speakers' office. Both the Web director and the UNDP seemed to appreciate the politics, but preferred not to have Web novices involved in the process. They did understand that they ran the risk of having the leadership or the deputies unhappy with the results.

There also was little familiarity with Web documentation. Normally government agencies create style and governance guides to review the policies, branding, style and decision making. This is particularly helpful if there are large numbers of staff coding, posting or creating pages. This ensures consistency throughout the Web site, but the leadership was not familiar with this practice.

It is interesting that this process is first being done through the UNDP's work with the Ministry staff to create governance documents. They requested governance documents from us to provide in their presentations to the Ministry staff.

### **IMPACT**

The leadership of the Parliament needs some input into the process, otherwise the body will be divorced from its own site. We understand the Web developers' reluctance to involve what they perceive as outsiders because this slows the process down. It also requires education of those who are not familiar with Web site creation. This time and investment is worth a long-term effort.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the long-term, organizations often neglect documentation, but this will be key after the Web site is established and before staff is trained to make pages. Documentation on the existing site will ensure that the Web site pages are consistent.

The documents that should be created include:

- **Content Guidelines:** provides business rules and instructions for packaging content (language, packaging of content, navigation, quality of information); also provides rules on usability, readability, page and sentence length.
- **Style Guide:** provides branding guidelines (institutions' logo, fonts, colors, identity, picture choices)
- **Search:** provide instructions which will help your content providers create search engine friendly pages, with appropriate metadata for keywords, descriptions and title tags.

- Feedback: Set rules and expectations on what Web managers must do to provide feedback to users and make sure actionable feedback goes to the development team to improve the site performance.
- Workflow Guidelines: provides structural guidelines (governance) on:
  - Approval process for publishing content
  - Procedures for new page creation
  - Roles and responsibilities

For the long-term, healthy Web governance and maturity is judged by the success of the lifecycle of the documentation. Typically, each of the documents of standards goes through a lifecycle, where first, the standard is set, published, applied, enforced, and finally evaluated before it goes through another lifecycle.

As the chart below illustrates, by averaging each standard’s combination of scores for the lifecycle assessment – grading them on a 1-3 scale, where you are either satisfactory (three), making progress (two) or unsatisfactory (one) – management can get a window on performance for the governance of its Web assets.

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Set</b>	<b>Publish</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Enforce</b>	<b>Evaluate</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>Style Guide</b>	2	2	1	2	1	1.6
<b>Content Guidelines</b>	2	2	1	1	1	1.4
<b>Search</b>	3	1	2	1	1	1.6
<b>Roles and responsibility/ Workflow</b>	2	2	1	1	1	1.4
<b>Feedback</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1

Without published standards, the Web team appears arbitrary. By having a guidebook there is a way to establish and communicate Web choices, and to enforce consistency throughout the site. When one baselines current performance and set targets for improving operations, one can create a culture of continuous improvement.

## APPENDIX

The following are individuals who were interviewed for this report:

Rep. Kalmon	Deputy
Bolotbek Maripov	Deputy
Rep. Tekebayev	Deputy
Temir Burzhabaev	Senior Economist, Budget Committee
Staff	Finance Committee
Committee Staffer	International Affairs Committee
Emil Nijazov	Director of Press Service
Abdikadi Sultanbaev	Workers of the Press Service
Osman Ozozaliev	Director Web in Parliament
Azamat Egzbaev	Web Director, UNDP
Sako Mamarklkonov	Editor-in-Chief, National Newspaper Erkin Too
Gulnura Toralieva	Editor-in-Chief, Bishkek Press Center
Muratbek Azimbaev	Media Program Coordinator, Advocacy Program Coordinator
Tolekan Ismailova	Coalition Against Corruption
Kevin Gash	NDI
Zamira Djusupova	ICTD Component Coordinator, UNDP