



A PMG REVIEW OF CONSTITUENCY WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

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A PMG Review of Constituency Work in South Africa

Introduction

Constituency engagement is one of the primary mechanisms through which community issues are brought to the attention of the legislature. Direct communication with citizens is key for elected representatives to effectively represent and respond to their constituents' needs. Through constituency outreach activities, public representatives can become better informed and therefore better positioned to address the needs of the communities they serve in a timely and consistent manner. By connecting with citizens and getting involved with their day-to-day challenges, public representatives can solicit valuable information to develop more responsive and inclusive policies and legislation.¹

Constituency work is supposed to ensure elected representatives are visible, responsive, and accountable to citizens on the ground outside of election campaign periods. Through regular outreach and engagement with citizens, elected officials can work to build trust in the legislature.

There is very little known, written or consolidated information on the system of constituency work in South Africa. Information on constituency work and parliamentary constituency offices is mostly non-existent or hard to find on the political party websites. This is largely because of the current electoral system, where constituencies are artificially created after elections, and citizens have no long-standing connection to the public representative assigned to the area. Parliament's website offers a brief explanation and refers the public to contact "*the political party you support to find out about constituency work in your area.*"²

As a result, constituency engagement is unstructured, uneven, underutilised and is not deeply embedded in the public's mind.

This study seeks to contribute towards filling this gap by looking at how this important work is practically carried out. It takes a comprehensive look at constituency outreach and engagement in South Africa and makes observations about the extent to which Parliament (and to a lesser extent provincial legislatures), individual Members of Parliament (MPs), Members of Provincial Legislatures (MPLs) and other relevant stakeholders carry out constituency work.

This study includes interviews with MPs, analysis from other continental experts, and builds on research conducted by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) and other stakeholders over the years.

This study does not attempt to make an argument about whether the country needs to have a constituency-based system. It only focuses on current practices, and highlights shortcomings and opportunities concerning constituency engagement.

Flowing from the observations and findings, this study includes recommendations and constructive ideas on what can be done to strengthen constituency work.

A central theme in this report concerns information: its foundational nature is necessary to inspire action. Unfortunately, this report is constrained by the unavailability of complete information and the lack of response to requests for information.

¹ National Democratic Institute: Guide to Constituency Outreach:

<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Quick%20Guide%20to%20Constituency%20Outreach%20%28English%29.pdf>

² <https://www.parliament.gov.za/constituency-work>

Context

Constituency work occurs when elected public representatives speak, advocate, and act on behalf of their constituents. The work encompasses various forms of political representation, loosely defined as the activity of making citizens' voices, opinions, and perspectives *present* in public policymaking processes.

Embedded in the very concept of representative democracy is the idea that those affected by government decisions have a right to be involved in the decision-making process. The duty to support and facilitate this right falls on MPs, and it cuts across every role of the MP, from representative to legislative to oversight. None of these roles can be fulfilled successfully without meaningfully engaging constituents. The benefits of doing so are extensive, and they accrue to MPs individually, to Parliament as an institution, and to the public.³

Majoritarian electoral systems with single-member constituencies are known to yield and cultivate more proactive constituency relations.⁴ On the other hand, proportional representation (PR) systems, such as South Africa's closed-list ballot structure, have been observed to provide weaker incentives for maintaining active constituency relations. In PR systems, representatives are expected to behave more like trustees than delegates. This is largely because elected representatives oversee more abstract notions of constituencies – usually delimited to their 'party voters' who may or may not be territorially concentrated.

Typically, MPs split their time between parliamentary work, working in the constituency assigned to them, and political party work.⁵ Their work in constituencies takes different dimensions, but two activities are typically foremost: taking on and responding to casework, explaining their work in the legislature, and communicating (in various forms) with their constituencies⁶.

³ <https://www.iri.org/resources/iri-unveils-constituent-engagement-guide/>

⁴ Farrell, D.M., and R. Scully. 2007. Representing Europe's citizens. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵ What do MPs do: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/mps-and-lords/members/mps/>

⁶ Wilson & Gronke 2000, cited in Tomkova, T (2014). <https://cutt.ly/iK2LEOz>

Constituency work in South Africa

The programme of Parliament

The programme of the South African Parliament consists of two main components: parliamentary sessions and constituency periods. The programme blocks out certain days (every Monday) and weeks to allow Members to account to their communities. In reality though, constituency work is considered a daily part of an MP's duties.

One-third of the annual parliamentary calendar, give or take, is dedicated to constituency work (see *Table 1*). However, Parliament adjusts its programme from time to time and allows for extended constituency periods. This is typical in an election year.

Table 1

<i>Year</i>	<i>Weeks allocated to constituency work</i>
2022	14
2021	19
2020	17

Responding to our survey questions, MPs and MPLs said there is insufficient time allocated in the parliamentary programme for constituency work, given the challenges faced by communities. Freedom Front Plus (FF+) MP, Wynand Boshoff, said: *"There is insufficient time for anything in the parliamentary programme. Work is without limits, but a year still has only 365 days."*

Effective constituency engagement requires an investment of time and resources. Trips to remote constituency areas, for example, can be time-consuming and expensive. African National Congress (ANC) MP, Rachel Adams, mentioned that when Parliament is in session MPs have only one day of the week, which is a Monday, to deal with constituency issues: *"Sometimes you have your study group meeting on Mondays and cannot obey your visit to your constituency, then you have to reschedule"*, she added.

Western Cape Democratic Alliance (DA) MPL, Ricardo Mackenzie, also explained that there is not enough time for parties to raise matters in parliamentary plenary sessions which would have been brought to their attention by communities during constituency work.

DA MP, Adrian Roos, suggested two days a week dedicated to constituency work would be better than one but was also quick to point out that MPs work on weekends and holidays as well.

Notably, the impetus given by the COVID-19 pandemic forced Parliament to review its procedures and tools. Parliament was able to modernise its processes and make better use of technological advancement.⁷ A virtual system capable of connecting lawmakers scattered across the country was created. One of the benefits of working remotely for MPs, according to one DA MP, has been the ability to be closer, more visible and more accessible to constituents for more consistent periods than ever before. The barrier of travelling between Parliament and constituencies was removed. The virtual/hybrid setting means that public representatives can log out of a parliamentary meeting, walk out into their constituency and respond to community issues in real-time. Even when Parliament does return to regular physical meetings, the benefits of this approach should be considered so that these gains are not lost completely.

⁷ [Implications of a virtual Parliament on its constitutional mandate \(2020\)](#)

What constituency work entails

MPs and MPLs use a combination of different, yet interrelated, constituency outreach methods, such as policy discussions, special events, and other formal and informal methods for reaching out to constituents. Regardless of the outreach method, the fundamental goal is to create an ongoing dialogue between themselves and the communities they represent. Work performed in constituencies by lawmakers is important as it provides the closest interaction between legislatures and the public.

A major component of constituency engagement by MPs and MPLs is casework. Casework is an extensive and all-encompassing term that covers a lot of ground. It refers to assistance provided by MPs to constituents who need help. In a lot of cases, constituents do not know how to get help if they have a problem relating to government services or programmes. Casework gives constituents a chance to seek that help from their elected representatives.

Examples of casework would include supporting constituents in navigating bureaucratic hurdles; problem-solving when basic public services are not functioning, and basic needs are not being met; making inquiries of, or working directly with, government agencies to resolve disputes such as poor/slow service delivery; engaging with local or provincial government agencies, over which Parliament may not have direct jurisdiction, but where MP engagement can help expedite resolution.

We gathered that for MPs and MPLs, constituency work generally demands the following: meeting with stakeholders such as SAPS/Community Policing Forums, Ratepayers Associations, and business associations; oversight of ongoing projects, such as housing developments and road upgrades; meeting with the community on general issues; assisting with queries; directing constituents to services and taking up petitions, to mention a few.

In theory, appropriate constituency work does not include practices of clientelism, such as MPs paying out of their own pockets for funerals, school fees, and other personal favours that can be easily construed as buying support. However, in practice, some MPs might do this sometimes if community members are in need. It is also important to note that successful casework does not always involve directly solving constituents' problems for them but can often entail elected representatives acting as their advocates with government bureaucracies, identifying available resources, and being partners in resolving their cases.

The African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) MP, Wayne Thring, outlined that constituency work involves administrative and practical aspects. Administratively, MPs have to oversee staff, office rentals, communication, and such. On the practical side, it involves dealing with queries and demands from constituents, and community interventions required. He has two constituency offices, one in his home province, KwaZulu-Natal, and another in Mpumalanga. He says this adds to his workload because the ACDP has to spread its four MPs and three MPLs across nine provinces.⁸

DA MP, Adrian Roos, told us he is part of a constituency WhatsApp group and he gets to receive numerous direct enquiries on municipal and provincial service delivery issues in his constituency daily. Besides this, he also conducts oversight to national government service points in his constituency.

The Al Jama-ah's Constituency Officer, Ayesha Allie-Patel, also gave a detailed account of the party's constituency engagements since its sole MP, Ganief Hendricks, assumed office in the national legislature in 2019. *"Al Jama-ah plans a programme for oversight visits in the various constituencies across the country. The constituencies are informed about the MP's visit and advised to make the necessary arrangements: informing people and ensuring they are assisted to be present at such events and sponsoring them with transport if necessary. Their concerns are noted by the MP for further action. The MP physically interacts with the communities by meeting them in their villages, informal settlements and townships. Also, councillors and members of the party are encouraged to host events within the*

⁸ <https://www.pa.org.za/blog/get-know-wayne-thring>

community during the constituency period which the MP attends and interacts with the wider community.”

Constituency work also comes with pitfalls. It can quickly become overwhelming with the sheer volume of cases, not to mention difficulties in resolving cases and the complexities of the various challenges constituents face, often under circumstances that generate strong emotions. With high volumes of inquiries and requests and a thin complement of support staff, the majority of MPs and MPLs we interacted with said that staying on top of constituency engagements can be quite taxing at times. Mail, phone calls, and casework requests can quickly pile up, with limited time for responses in a timely way. One MPL had this experience to share: *“I find my time is spent a lot on the phone as opposed to dealing with matters on the ground. You can sit dealing with an urgent matter (murder or rape) and your phone rings 15 times.”* We imagine that all MPs experience these challenges in their constituency work.

Another challenge is that constituents often have unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of what an MP or MPL can do for them - a challenge that is characteristic in most developing and transitioning countries. They may expect personal favours, such as direct cash payments. Several elected representatives gave accounts of struggling with the need to manage expectations, educate constituents on the appropriate role of an MP, and keep constituent service in an appropriate lane. DA MP, Mr Roos, also gave this account: *“The public expects you to resolve issues in other spheres of government (local/provincial), especially in ANC-controlled areas where the ANC councillors and MPLs generally do not respond to their residents. This takes focus away from National Assembly work and the expectation is you have direct influence over service delivery execution of other spheres of government.”*

These challenges are seemingly not unique to South Africa. OpenParlyZW, an organisation that monitors the Zimbabwean Parliament, told us that while it is not regarded as constituency work, *“Communities expect their MP to attend funerals, help with buying coffins and food at the funerals, pay school fees for orphans, and assist the vulnerable members. MPs who do not do these things find it difficult to return to Parliament in the following elections. This is one of the reasons why it is expensive to run for office in Zimbabwe and why women shy away.”*

Constituency work in Iraq⁹

In Iraq, citizens’ lack of understanding of the political process and inability to differentiate between the legislative and executive branches of government was identified as a perennial challenge. To address this gap in understanding, collaborative efforts between non-governmental organisations and MPs through constituency outreach have been observed to provide citizens with a foundational understanding and involvement in political processes. A pilot programme undertaken in 2014, saw MPs involved being better able to build a positive working relationship with their constituents and meet their needs and expectations.

In dealing with time and resource constraints, building meaningful relationships with community leaders is an especially important tool for engaging constituents, and maintaining time-effective and productive dialogues with a wide range of communities. During our perspectives-gathering interviews with lawmakers, they also attested to the importance of ongoing engagements with focal people within their respective constituencies. ANC MP Duduzile Sibiya, noted that it always makes the work of MPs easier to have local leadership within communities as a conduit as they have a better appreciation of the lived realities of citizens within a constituency, rather than engaging with communities directly. However, engagements with community leaders, though critical, should be seen as an additional value-add. The emphasis is on proactive engagement with individuals and those who are excluded from the places where decisions are made. Even leaders of marginalised communities may not speak fully for the entire community. Therefore, working with leaders should always go hand-in-hand with an awareness of power dynamics and efforts to ensure everyone is included in constituency outreach engagements.

⁹ [Against the Void: Constituency Work and Connection Building](#)

Roles and responsibilities of Parliament and political parties in relation to constituency offices

Parliament	Political parties
Funding	Must establish the offices and recruit admin staff
Assigns every Monday and several weeks during the year for constituency work	Assigns MPs and MPLs to constituencies
Provide ongoing training, support and guidance to parties	During March of each year, provide the Secretary to Parliament with written information regarding the location of their constituency offices and the name of MPs allocated to each constituency ¹⁰
Ongoing review and enforcement of the Policy on Political Parties Allowances	Provide guidance and monitoring of MPs' activities

Role of Parliament

Constituency work in support of oversight is one of the Parliament's key deliverables as outlined in its five-year strategic plan (2019-2024)¹¹. *"Using constituency offices more effectively"* is listed as one of the main issues for consideration in efforts to enhance public involvement in parliamentary processes.

Parliament's Policy on Political Parties Allowances¹² outlines the forms of support extended to political parties and MPs to enable them to discharge their duties in constituencies. The system of constituency allowances was introduced to enable political parties represented in Parliament to set up infrastructure for the benefit of constituents. The Policy states that Parliament must provide ongoing training and technical support to parties. *"The Secretary of Parliament, if called upon in writing by a Party Leader, provides the following assistance to political parties free of charge: assist with the design of job descriptions; provides advice and practical support on all aspects of support staff recruitment, supervision, performance measurement, monitoring, resignation and termination; provides advice and practical support on staff administration and labour relations matters."*

This Policy, approved by Parliament's Presiding Officers on 20 July 2005, must be reviewed annually (*per 11. Review of Policy, page 9 of the document*). However, as far as we are aware, the stipulated review process has not been done to date.

The 2019 Legacy Report of the Fifth Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Financial Management of Parliament pointed out that *"constituency offices, which are funded by Parliament, were inadequately monitored. This has been confirmed by the administration. This has made it impossible to confirm whether the offices exist as indicated, and where they did exist, whether they were operational. Oversight visits rarely, if ever, emanated from the work parliamentarians performed in their constituencies. This could be indicative of constituency offices being under-utilised. The Committee is therefore of the view that the current monitoring system is inadequate."*¹³ In the same report, the Committee tasked the Sixth Parliament with the development of an appropriate monitoring system to assess the functioning of constituency offices. There are approximately 16 months left in the current Parliament and there is no evidence shared publicly what progress has been made in this regard.

Ideally, MPs and MPLs are expected to conduct work in their constituencies, and forward inputs to the committee system, thereby linking matters to committee oversight processes. Such matters could then be included in, or form part of, recommendations that are submitted for adoption by the relevant House during plenary sessions. Inkatha Freedom Party MP, Liezl van der Merwe, notes that: *"There are multiple opportunities to bring issues from our constituencies back to Parliament, among others, to raise issues during both weekly written questions, and oral questions to the various Ministers, as well as the*

¹⁰ Parliament's Policy on Political Parties' Allowances

¹¹ Policy Priorities for the 6th democratic Parliament (2019-2024): <https://cutt.ly/jKcmA7p>

¹² https://static.pmg.org.za/131101policy_on_political_parties_allowances.pdf

¹³ Legacy Report of Joint Standing Committee on Financial Management of Parliament. 20 March 2019. Observation 9.1.10: <https://pmg.org.za/taled-committee-report/3801/>

Deputy President and President. We are also able to take issues directly to our portfolio committees for consideration. Constituency issues can also be raised during members' statements and debates, even urgent debates."

Al Jama-ah gave an account of how constituency work is fed into the work of Parliament: *"In response to complaints from District Six Land Claimants over delays in moving back to District Six, Hon Hendricks raised this matter with the Deputy President during a parliamentary Questions for Oral Reply session in the National Assembly (NA) and invited him on an oversight visit to District Six. Deputy President Mabuza subsequently visited on 22 March 2022."*

MPs have continually lamented that oversight work performed in constituencies appears to have weak links with the committee and plenary oversight work, and this had to be corrected.¹⁴ We recommend that Parliament adopt a more structured approach to encourage MPs to feed constituency work into committee meetings. This can be done through dedicated quarterly meetings where MPs can raise issues from constituency work with the department and entities the Committee oversees - we found this useful example where a dedicated meeting was called with a focused discussion with the department on constituency matters.¹⁵

Another interesting dynamic is using constituency offices to broaden the reach and footprint of government agencies offering services. In a recent Committee report, the Portfolio Committee on Small Business Development found Parliamentary Constituency Offices (PCO) with members of Parliament in excess of 400, plus provincial legislatures, have not been utilised strategically to promote government-wide programmes.¹⁶ A similar point was also made in a recent Trade, Industry and Competition meeting.¹⁷

In mid-April 2022, Parliament embarked on a programme of remodelling and repurposing constituency offices as strategic points of the People-Parliament interface." NA Speaker Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula led this initiative by launching her constituency office in Makhanda on 11- 12 April. Parliament says it *"plans to roll out similar programmes of reengineering constituency offices and raising the bar in meaningfully engaging people in all provinces."*¹⁸ Two months later, speaking at the launch of his newly remodelled constituency office in Soweto, in July, NCOP Chairperson Amos Masondo indicated that over the years, there have been many efforts and ideas on how constituency offices could be strengthened: *"One of the innovative ways of equipping parliamentary constituency offices to meaningfully discharge their services was bringing the representatives from national Parliament, the provincial legislature, and the municipal council, under one roof and in communication with the people."*¹⁹

Another encouraging development is that Parliament's Communication Services has started to send updates via its mailing list of upcoming and concluded constituency outreach engagements on behalf of MPs. At this stage, this has been very limited, but it is an important step that underscores the kind of support Parliament should be providing.

In addition, Parliament's Public Education Office has told us that it is providing training, and has embarked on a project to verify the existence of constituency offices. This information has been shared with PMG.

¹⁴ <https://pmg.org.za/tailed-committee-report/3801/>

¹⁵ PC on Sports, Arts and Culture meeting: [Constituency Work Discussion with Department and SA Sports Commission](#) (June 2003)

¹⁶ [Budgetary Review and Recommendation Report of the Portfolio Committee on Small Business Development, Dated 19 October 2022](#)

¹⁷ <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/36097/>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.za/speeches/national-assembly-speaker-mapisa-nqakula-launches-makhanda-parliamentary-constituency>

¹⁹ <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/remodelled-parliamentary-constituency-offices-launched-soweto>

General conditions applicable to all political party allowances and Support from Parliament²⁰

“Political party staff recruitment. Political parties recruit and manage their own support staff in line with applicable legislation. Political parties are responsible for ensuring that support staff is paid timeously and at the contracted rate of remuneration. Parliament cannot be held responsible for the proper remuneration of political party support staff.

The Secretary to Parliament, if called upon in writing by a Party Leader, will provide assistance to political parties free of charge: assist with the design of job descriptions; provide advice and practical support of support staff recruitment, supervision, performance measurement, monitoring, resignation and termination; provide advice and practical support”

Political Parties

Political parties are a central cog in the effective execution of constituency work. Each party represented in Parliament is allocated funds to develop its method of constituency outreach, and each party makes its own constituency arrangements.

According to the Policy on Political Party Allowances²¹, *“The services provided at a constituency office must be available equally to all members of the public. A party determines the location of its constituency offices and allocates its members to serve such constituencies. A party must during March of each year provide the Secretary to Parliament with written information regarding the location of its constituency offices and the name of its members allocated to each constituency. A party must lease office space for exclusive use as a constituency office. The office must be clearly marked as a constituency office.”*

Also, as per the Policy, parties must, during March of each year, provide the Secretary to Parliament with written information regarding the location of their constituency offices and the name of MPs allocated to each constituency. *“Failure to provide the Secretary to Parliament with any information required, will result in the suspension of all party allowances until such a time as the applicable documentation in the required format is produced or such other remedial actions as is prescribed by the Presiding Officers is effected.”*²² PMG is not aware if parties comply and whether this provision has been enforced by Parliament.

Each political party has their own modalities and approaches to constituency work. This impacts how many offices they set up, where to establish them, who to assign to a particular office and what types of service they provide to constituents. For some, having a constant, daily presence in a community is the best approach while others will focus on events and rallies. The approach to constituency work varies where some constituency offices are reactive, wait for constituents to come in; or are proactive by being on the ground, or are a combination of the two.

When looking at modalities and approaches, we have observed that while the DA does not always establish an office in an area, it still assigns MPs to serve in these areas.

The ANC’s stated objective is to establish strong networks of relevant stakeholders within the constituency; to initiate programmes in constituencies and to identify communities requiring social services and initiating outreach programs to address these needs.²³

ANC MP Grace Tseke said that her party has guidelines on how MPs and MPLs should conduct constituency work. *“Constituency work is facilitated through the Office of the Chief Whip of the Majority Party and of our Provincial Caucuses. We report back on outreach programmes we have*

²⁰ Parliament’s Policy on Political Parties Allowances: <https://pmg.org.za/policy-document/418/>

²¹ Parliament’s Policy on Political Parties Allowances: <https://pmg.org.za/policy-document/418/>

²² Ibid

²³ ANC Parliamentary Caucus: [Constituency Office Fieldworker vacancies](#)

implemented and complaints resolved after every constituency period on a quarterly basis,” she added.

MPs sponsoring petitions on behalf of communities is an aspect of constituency work. The DA has been successful at bringing in petitions from their constituents to Parliament, and this seems like a conscious strategy by some MPs. These formal requests to Parliament for intervention in various matters take the form of either a request for assistance on a specific issue or the redress of a grievance. These are referred to committees by the Speaker's Office for processing. In our research for the piece, we have also seen DA MPs creating awareness around petitions through their social media accounts.²⁴

While conducting research for this study, we had hoped to compare party approaches and/or guides as part of our study. We attempted to gather information on the modalities and approaches to constituency work of the other political parties, but this information was unavailable through simple online searches and our requests for information were not responded to.

²⁴ <https://cutt.ly/F14csqd>

Funding

Under the constitutional imperative for an open and accessible national legislature, a “constituency allowance” has been paid to political parties by Parliament since the First Parliament of 1994.²⁵ The system of constituency allowances was introduced to enable parties represented in Parliament to set up infrastructure for constituency work for the benefit of communities.²⁶ The constituency allowance is paid as a total amount to political parties and not to individual MPs.

The payment of constituency allowances is consistent with Section 57(2) of the Constitution which prescribes that the rules and orders of the NA must provide for *‘financial and administrative assistance to each party represented in the NA in proportion to its representation, to enable the party and its leaders to perform their functions in the Assembly effectively.’* As per Parliament’s Policy on Political Party Allowances²⁷, the NA Speaker and the Chairperson of the NCOP must *“annually, with due regard to national budgetary constraints, determine an amount per member of Parliament to be budgeted for distribution to political parties as a constituents’ allowance during the next ensuing financial year. The total amount to which a particular political party is entitled is determined by multiplying the number of members of that political party, including Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Presiding Officers that are members of the political party concerned, with the amount per member determined by the Presiding Officers.”*

Parliament funds constituency work under programme 3 of its budget structure: ‘Associated services and transfer payments’. The programme is meant to provide facilities and financial support for political parties including leadership, administrative and constituency support. Political parties get these allocations in four tranches every year, on receipt of audited financial statements.²⁸

Parliament has said these transfer payments to political parties place a severe burden on its already limited operational budget and causes a shortfall in funds. Hence Parliament is of the view that funding political parties to carry out constituency work should not be its burden as it distorts the legislature’s financial records and results in expenditure violations.²⁹ Instead, such funding would go straight to political parties, which then account directly to National Treasury.³⁰

Between the financial years 2009/10 and 2021/22, parties have received R13.9 billion in total public funding.

In the medium term, the following amounts have been budgeted for Parliament’s associated services and transfer payments: 2022/23 (R919.7 million); 2023/24 (R964. 9 million); 2024/25 (R1.01 billion).³¹

Some MPs have lamented that the funding is inadequate. They argue the funds are insufficient to fully resource parliamentary constituency offices, which negatively impacts their ability to conduct constituency work effectively.³²

Beyond the direct allocations from Parliament, political parties represented in Parliament and/or in any of the nine provincial legislatures, are entitled to an allocation from the Independent Electoral Commission’s Represented Political Parties Fund (RPPF).³³

The additional funding received from the IEC, as per Section 5(1)(b) of the Public Funding of Represented Political Parties Act, may be used *“for any purposes compatible with [the party’s]*

²⁵ Parliament’s Policy on Political Party Allowances

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ https://static.pmg.org.za/Draft_APP_Parliament_22_23_V4_ES.pdf

²⁹ <https://pmg.org.za/blog/Budget%20Vote%20-%20Parliament>

³⁰ Daily Maverick (01 June 2021): [Speaker Thandi Modise tackles parliamentary gripes and criticism of her apology at Zondo commission](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-06-01-speaker-thandi-modise-tackles-parliamentary-gripes-and-criticism-of-her-apology-at-zondo-commission/)

³¹ Ibid

³² <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/30197/>

³³ <https://www.elections.org.za/pw/Party-Funding/Party-Funding-Background>

functioning as a political party in a modern democracy", and these include: the development of the political will of people (allowing voters to choose); bringing the party's influence to bear on the shaping of public opinion (providing voters with a choice); inspiring and furthering political education (keeping voters up to date with what is available and who is offering what); promoting active participation by individual citizens in political life (getting people involved); exercising an influence on political trends; ensuring continuous, vital links between the people and organs of the state (developing the interface between citizens and public administration." Our understanding of the above Section is that constituency work falls under "any purposes compatible with [the party's] functioning as a political party..."

It is a requirement that parties account for the money allocated to them by the IEC under these classifications: personnel expenditure, accommodation, travel expenses, arrangement of meetings and rallies, administration, and promotions and publications.³⁴

Further, the Political Party Funding Act establishes a Multiparty Democracy Fund (MPDF), also administered by the IEC, to raise and distribute donated funds from the private sector to represented political parties. Funds from the MPDF are distributed according to the formula: one-third equal (33%) representation; two-thirds proportional (67%) representation. As with the RPPF, funds from the MPDF are only available to political parties represented in the NA or any provincial legislature.

Parties may also receive funds from private donors which might be used to finance constituency work. Since the commencement of the political party funding legislation in 2021, parties have to submit their audited financial statements annually to the IEC by the end of September. These statements must include details of all donations, loans, membership fees and income, as well as lists of bank accounts into which this money is deposited.³⁵

Funding of Constituency Work in Kenya

As part of this study, we reached out to Mzalendo³⁶, a non-partisan entity in Kenya that keeps an eye on the Kenyan Parliament with a mission to facilitate public participation in parliamentary processes. We gathered that, as is the case with South Africa, Kenya does not have a structured mechanism for MPs to account for the time they spend in their constituencies. Kenyan legislators are however judged by how they manage the Constituency Development Fund (CDFs), so if it is spent well this would loosely imply that the MP would have spent more time in the constituency supervising projects under this fund.

CDFs, introduced in Kenya in 2003, are central government funds given directly to MPs for expenditure on their constituencies, also called electoral districts. The fund was designed to support constituency-level, grass-root development projects. It is aimed at achieving equitable distribution of development resources across regions and to control imbalances in regional development brought about by partisan politics. It targets all constituency-level development projects, particularly those aiming to combat poverty at the grassroots level. The CDF program has facilitated the putting up of new water, health and education facilities in all parts of the country, including remote areas that were usually overlooked during funds allocation in national budgets. Three-quarters of the CDF amount is divided equitably between Kenya's 210 constituencies whilst the remaining quarter is divided based on a poverty index to cater to poorer constituencies.

The fund aims to bypass often inefficient local structures and deliver public services directly to constituencies. It is argued that the funds can have a significant impact if efficiently used. To date, over 20 different countries have adopted or are considering adopting CDFs.³⁷

³⁴ <https://www.elections.org.za/pw/Party-Funding>

³⁵ <https://pmg.org.za/bill/744/>

³⁶ <https://info.mzalendo.com/>

³⁷ CDF for Development: <http://psam.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/CDF-Blog-1-Final-3.pdf>

Proponents of the concept assert that CDFs demonstrate key principles of local ownership by enhancing local voices and increasing community participation in decisions affecting them. It is also believed that it is a vital and innovative means to achieve tangible development.

However, there are contentions of CDFs based on empirical evidence. Historically, the fund has been subject to abuse due to loopholes in its administration as cited in various audit reports of Local government authorities over the past years. As such, its rollout has in the past been faced with accountability and transparency challenges as well as low levels of community participation and civic engagement; significant misappropriation and corruption at the expense of local community development and benefit for which it was intended; abuse of the Fund towards advancing political agendas for parliamentarians and elected councillors; weak procurement or contract work and poor workmanship in community projects; failure to follow procurement procedures in the purchase of goods and services; questionable and inflated expenditures.

Where does accountability lie?

Accountability is a layered, complex and nuanced issue. MPs are accountable to constituents by being responsive to issues as elected representatives. MPs also account to their political parties for the work that they do. Political parties have to account to Parliament for the allocated funding and other requirements outlined in the Policy. Parliament must ensure that political parties are compliant and that the information submitted is verified.

The reality is that constituency information and activity is opaque, with scanty information available and coupled with vague accountability mechanisms. There is insufficient information and documentation to make a complete assessment on the accountability measures in place. We urge Parliament and political parties to be more transparent.³⁸

Accountability Challenges in Zimbabwe and Kenya

As in South Africa, the accountability of elected representatives is an observed challenge in many developing countries. OpenParlyZW told us that Zimbabwean legislators are not required to account for what they do when they are in their constituencies. *“This is the reason why there are MPs who never visit their constituencies and only show up for elections when they are now seeking to be re-elected. They don’t give feedback or do consultation meetings with the constituencies. There is a huge percentage of MPs who represent rural constituencies, or constituencies in other towns, but they stay in Harare which is the capital city.”* However, this could change soon as the government has started giving MPs allowances to enable them to visit or travel around their constituencies. Currently, no law has been gazetted to state the conditions on how allowances will be accounted for.

In Kenya, Mzalendo says there is no structured mechanism for MPs to account for the time they spend in their constituencies. However, MPs manage the national government Constituency Development Fund allocated to their respective constituencies. Therefore, in most instances, MPs are judged by how they manage this fund - judicious or impactful spending is loosely translated as to mean an MP would have spent more time in his/her constituency supervising projects under this fund. *“The voter is the one who makes the judgment on whether an MP spent their time well during the next election.”*

³⁸ Read more about constituency work funding: <https://www.oua.co.za/blog/newsroom-1/post/your-mps-are-supposedly-off-doing-constituency-work-that-costs-r339m-but-where-are-the-results-1073>

Lack of Information and Visibility of Constituency Offices

Information is the cornerstone of participatory democracy. Creating awareness and providing information about the existence of constituency offices is the first step to getting the public to engage with these offices. However, there is currently no central source the public can access to find their constituency office or information on constituency offices.

Over the years, a number of civic society organisations have found that obtaining party constituency information is often a lengthy process requiring a lot of back and forth. Often, where information is shared, it is incomplete or incorrect. PMG made ongoing efforts to get constituency office information from political parties currently represented in the NA.³⁹ These efforts have been difficult and largely unsuccessful with most parties submitting partial, outdated or no information.

In its Report on the 2021/22 mid-year performance, the Joint Standing Committee on the Financial Management of Parliament expressed concern that not enough was being done to ensure information about the work of Parliament, including constituency engagements, reaches as many citizens as possible despite this being one of the two strategic objectives of the Sixth Parliament.⁴⁰

Constituency information should be publicly available and accessible. If the public does not know who their representatives are or where the nearest constituency office is located, it is not possible to communicate with them or make use of the office.

Political parties must make information on their constituency office and assigned representatives publicly available. Parliament must also ensure complete information on the constituency offices of each MP is easily accessible. This is the most basic information regarding constituency work. Complete information on constituency offices includes the address and contact details of the offices, the names and contact details of MPs assigned to specific constituency offices, the office administrators' contact details, office hours and when an MP would be in the office.

Linked to this is awareness. Political parties must make a concerted effort to actively promote and popularise the office, showcase the work and highlight constituency engagement periods and opportunities. They can use local and community media, technology and stakeholders to assist in this regard.

Constituency offices provide a visible point of entry for constituents to engage with their elected representatives. Parties determine the location of these offices, whose services must be available equally to all members of the public. We were unable to establish how many constituency offices currently exist across the country.

The role of these offices includes, but is not limited to: developing constituency outreach strategies in consultation with MPs and MPLs; receiving constituents, registering their issues, and making appointments for meetings with elected representatives; keeping and securing records of individual constituent visits and cases; working to solve cases according to the instructions given by the respective MPs; informing constituents about progress made on solving their cases; developing and distributing promotional materials for the constituency office; and providing assistance to MPs on constituency-related tasks and assignments, and their work in Parliament.

Functional constituency offices give citizens the opportunity to share their lived experiences. They also give confidence that elected representatives are open and listening to public input, which helps to create a virtuous cycle of constructive civic engagement. Further, these offices help streamline constituency work and improve the efficiency of outreach activities as they provide citizens with a space to meet with their MPs and MPLs to share their needs and concerns, as well as provide a centralised location for dealing with casework or individual requests for help from citizens. They also help increase the visibility

³⁹ PMG launched the People's Assembly website's '*Rep locator*', where members of the public can find the representative closest to them as well as information about political party constituency offices: <https://www.pa.org.za/search/location/>

⁴⁰ <https://pmg.org.za/tailed-committee-report/4839/>

of MPs in their constituencies and convey a positive message to citizens about their commitment to the community.

However, the existence of these offices is indistinct to many citizens. A 2014 poll by the People's Assembly showed that 83% of South Africans do not know where their local constituency office is.⁴¹ We ran a follow-up survey in September 2022 as part of this research. Nearly half of the respondents did not know that constituency offices exist; 79% did not know where their nearest constituency office is located, and worryingly, only 11% of the respondents have made use of these important offices.

Another survey by the Centre for Public Participation⁴² also claims that there is a general perception among community groups that MPs do not make adequate use of their constituency offices to liaise effectively with the communities to which they are assigned and that these offices are not serving as an effective means to channel community concerns to designated MPs. The survey report also criticises the role of political parties in managing constituency work, citing the party-political identity which may make the offices - intended to be apolitical - inaccessible to certain groups within communities, and even in cases where no discrimination is present, members of the public may avoid approaching these offices. The Centre for Public Participation further notes that among stakeholders within Parliament, there appears to be no common understanding of the roles and functions of constituency offices.

We can infer from the surveys referenced above that knowledge of constituency offices is low because there is inadequate information and awareness created of their existence and role.

The visibility of constituency offices greatly depends on their location. However, there are complex dynamics associated with the location/visibility of constituency offices. Offices located in high-traffic areas and prime locations such as malls and central business districts would have more impact on visibility and accessibility. However, many constituents live in marginalised, remote locations with reduced capacity for travel, or face other barriers, and should also have access to constituency offices close by. Discussions on accessibility and visibility should be mindful of these nuances.

PMG Citizen Survey on Parliamentary Constituency Offices

- We asked the public what would make it easier for them and their communities to get in touch with their MP/MPL.

A majority of the respondents highlighted the importance of regular engagements between public representatives and their constituencies:

"Currently, our community does not even know that there is an MP/MPL for them, let alone know who they are."

"It would have been easier if there was an updated and easily accessible list of every constituency office, the address and an administrator (or platform) where one can see the availability of the MP and make a booking or process an engagement/enquiry."

One respondent noted that some MPs/ MPLs forget about the community once they are in the legislature or Parliament. Social media visibility also found expression in the responses.

Nearly all respondents indicated they would make use of parliamentary constituency offices. Some of the reasons why people visit constituency offices would be *"seeking info about our laws as well as bills that are being prepared for public comment in order for our community to be knowledgeable and empowered; getting information about government programs and how to use these programs to benefit the communities."*

⁴¹ <https://www.pa.org.za/blog/83-do-not-know-where-their-local-constituency-offi>

⁴² Hicks. 2013. Government Mechanisms for Public Participation: How Effective Are They?

- *On what Parliament can do to better improve parliamentary constituency offices*, some of the views expressed in the survey include: employing competent people who know and understand the localities served by the constituency offices; ensuring that the offices are centrally located, manned by caring admin staff who want the best for the country and are not part of any corruption or bribery rackets. Also, the offices could deliver services virtually – by migrating to social media to enable more people to access them easily; at least have a central repository/register where all requests to MP/MPLs are recorded and tracked and progress reported periodically/quarterly; and that Parliament must reach out to inform and accommodate people in less-privileged communities who don't have access to technology and let them know about the services offered by PCOs.

Staffing

Parliamentary Constituency Office staffers are at the coalface of constituency engagements. They are meant to be the eyes and ears of the MPs. The nature of their work is quite broad and all-encompassing- from dealing with individual queries to arranging community engagements.

During a visit a few years back to an ANC constituency office in the Western Cape, based at its regional headquarters in Salt River, PMG met with a parliamentary constituency officer who told us that the role of constituency office admin staff is often that of a social worker as they get to deal with queries about everything from anyone, from school goers to pensioners. *"We mainly deal with community issues. If people can't meet with their MPs they come to us and ask us to take their queries forward,"* he said. When asked if people ever approach this constituency office to gain more information about what is going on in Parliament, he replied, *"Yes, occasionally if a law is being discussed that has received a lot of publicity then people come and ask about it. We try and get them material or arrange for a public debate or arrange for them to go to Parliament to attend a committee meeting."* He also arranges parliamentary tours for school kids and the elderly and is involved in outreach programmes. A lot of his time is spent doing logistics, such as booking venues, and coordinating his MPs' schedule, whether they need to attend branch meetings or an election rally. *"I also have to mobilise communities. I need to speak to NGOs, businesses and other stakeholders to try and get them to come to mass meetings,"* he said.

Hiring the right staff in constituency offices is important as they are often the first point of contact for constituents. Effective staffing of constituency offices also requires regular training of staff. The AI Jama-ah identified poorly-trained staff as one challenge in running constituency offices, apart from money, leading to *"frustration that complaints received from communities are not receiving sufficient attention and replies are not soon enough... Perhaps Parliament should look at offering training on how to manage a constituency office which includes learning the structures of government which will assist in more efficient services to its constituencies."*

As such, competent staff must be hired by parties, who are well-versed in government/parliamentary processes and are committed to serving the public. ANC MPL, Nobulumko Nkondlo, believes that constituency offices should be manned by at least three staff members- an Office Manager, Administrator and Programme Officer/Fieldworker, with the latest computer technologies linked to government services and agencies such as SASSA and Home Affairs. The skillset of ideal staffers should enable them to conduct the following effectively: establish strong networks of relevant stakeholders within a constituency; provide effective and efficient constituency field work support; provide information to the community on how to access various government services; coordinate public programmes initiated by the party's parliamentary caucus in the constituency; attend public community events and meetings on behalf of the MP and or MPL.

In addition, constituency offices should be equipped with proper record-keeping and case management systems to keep track of queries and constituency matters. Although it is well-understood that constituency office staffers are more or less political appointees, they ought to provide services free from prejudices relating to political affiliation. The case of Zimbabwe is worth mentioning here. OpenParlyZW points out that most political parties in Zimbabwe, both the opposition and the ruling party, often use constituency offices to further their party interests. For example, if the majority party has a seat in a specific constituency, they will employ their party supporters to be admin staff; this then deters people belonging to opposition parties from accessing the office of the MP, because it would be manned by political activists. The situation is further worsened by the polarity and violence that characterises Zimbabwean politics.

The Success Story of Macedonia⁴³

The success story of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia is worth emulating as it shows that public perceptions of parliamentary processes can change for the better through effective engagement. When the Assembly of North Macedonia launched a nationwide program of constituency offices for its MPs, constituents assumed that the offices were available as a means to receive personal favours such as a job offer. By employing best practices for constituency offices and casework, MPs were able to ensure that constituent expectations evolved, putting into place a system in which MPs focus on impactful and appropriate casework and constituents focus on utilizing the offices effectively and appropriately. The best practices that were used include: using municipal buildings to reinforce the non-partisan nature of constituency work; employing professional staff and training them well; conducting civic education on the roles of MPs; making constituency offices widely accessible throughout the country, and conducting a Constituency Day every Friday. Positive outcomes yielded following this project included: keeping casework focused on helping constituents navigate government bureaucracy, expediting important infrastructure projects, and resolving challenges with public service delivery; improving MPs' legislative and oversight work; changing public perceptions of parliament from a faceless institution to a personal connection to their MP; promoting social cohesion.

Technology

Technology has a central role when reimagining or thinking of ways to reform constituency work. This would include but is not limited to record-keeping and case management technologies, and interactive technologies.

The traditional approach to constituency outreach, such as town hall meetings, although tried and tested, should not be considered the only approach. Internet platforms and social networks could increasingly be used as quasi-virtual constituency offices when we think about reimagining constituency work. COVID-19 compelled Parliament to carry out its work virtually and great gains were made in the online space⁴⁴. The same could be done for constituency work. While an online platform is not expected to replace physical engagement, representatives can capitalise on it to further enhance their constituency work.

With constituency offices dealing with queries from various sources and formats, including physical appointments, paper files, emails, digital documents, audio recordings and videos, staying on top of queries and cases can be overwhelming. Records and case management systems are also important to ensure constituency issues are dealt with methodically and systematically.

Despite obvious pitfalls, social media is an easy win for MPs to connect to constituents. It is generally a low-cost way to reach large audiences for both sharing information and receiving input. For example, some MPs and MPLs use chat platforms (such as Telegram or WhatsApp) to maintain contact with the public. Of course, we can only encourage the public to make use of these tools to interact with their MPs and constituency offices if the basic information on how to reach MPs and find constituency offices is made available.

It is recommended that Parliament and political parties conduct best practice studies on technological tools or creative methods used in other countries especially as legislatures navigate the post-COVID way of working.

⁴³ <https://www.iri.org/resources/iri-unveils-constituent-engagement-guide/>

⁴⁴ https://static.pmg.org.za/PUBLIC_ACCESS_TO_ONLINE_COMMITTEE_MEETINGS_FINAL_VERSION_19_May_2022.pdf

Concluding remarks and recommendations

The study has explored and presented a current review of constituency work carried out by MPs and MPLs. Most times, gathering information for the study proved difficult, and we believe this is in some way an indication of the state of constituency work – lacking transparency. South Africa does not follow a constituency-based electoral system, and assigning MPs to areas or offices is largely artificial, constituency work is an important aspect of the work of our representatives.

Parliament allocates specific days and periods in the calendar for this work. Since the start of 2022, 105 days have been dedicated to constituency work yet there is no transparency on whether our representatives did indeed spend their time in their constituencies.

Since 2014, PMG has tried to obtain constituency information from parties represented in the national legislature, and this has been a challenge from the outset.

It is a concern that accessing constituency information is very difficult or impossible. There is no consolidated place where one can find exactly which area or office an MP represents – this information is scattered and often outdated. Various studies show that knowledge of constituency offices is low because there is inadequate information and awareness created of their existence and role. Information is the backbone of participatory democracy, and therefore more must be done to share information on *a) what constituency offices are, b) where your nearest constituency office is and c) which MPs represent which areas or offices.*

While there are deep systemic issues around constituency engagement, it is important to acknowledge that some MPs are active, present and responsive to their constituents. There are many who speak passionately about their communities and advocate for them. An example of this is Al Jama-ah, a one-member party, which has five constituency offices across the country. This is a pocket of excellence we wish to highlight as it is a clear demonstration of the impact the party hopes to make through constituency engagement by stretching itself across the country.

Regarding funding for constituency work, our overarching concern is the lack of transparency around the funding allocated by Parliament to represented political parties for constituency work. If political parties are indeed accounting to Parliament for the use of these funds, this information should be made public.

Parliament has annual programmes for “Taking Parliament to the People”⁴⁵ but it is through regular constituency outreach that MPs can bring Parliament to the people. Dealing with the concerns of constituents, gaining on-the-ground experience and understanding service delivery challenges within constituencies is how MPs can truly come to represent the public’s interests in Parliament.

Our report findings have shown and presented an interesting picture of how this work is carried out by some MPs and the challenges they face, but this only really scratches the surface. While we applaud Parliament for the increased media coverage of newly-launched constituency offices, Parliament should be much more explicit about what “reimagining, repurposing and remodelling of PCOs” means.⁴⁶ For now, the reality is that the majority of this work remains unstructured, inconsistent, limited and not transparent.

⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.za/about-government/government-programmes/parliament-people>

⁴⁶ <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/remodelled-parliamentary-constituency-offices-launched-soweto>

The study made a number of recommendations which are condensed in the table below.

Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The virtual/hybrid setting should be formalised as a permanent feature of the parliamentary programme to maintain gains established through hybrid working relating to constituency work - Must develop a robust policy on accountability for constituency work - Must urgently review the Policy on Political Party Allowances. The review process, which is provisioned as an annual exercise, is almost two decades overdue - Must develop a robust structure to deal with issues emanating from the work of MPs in constituencies. Time must be allocated by parliamentary committees to discuss constituency work as a line item in certain meetings - Must ensure constituency information is publicly available and accessible, and that political parties are held to account if they fail to submit this basic information
MPs and MPLs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elected representatives should account for the work they do during constituency periods. If this is already done, this information should be publicly available
Political parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must make public and accessible, information regarding the location of their constituency offices, and the name of MPs and/or MPLs allocated to each constituency - Should publish a constituency outreach strategy, keep and secure records of constituent visits and cases, work to solve cases, inform constituents about progress made on solving their cases, and develop and distribute promotional material for constituency offices - Must equip constituency offices with proper record-keeping and case management systems to keep track of queries and constituency matters

Civic society, government departments and other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MPs and MPLs should collaborate with community leaders, media houses and other focal people in constituency engagement - It is recommended constituency offices be used strategically to broaden the reach and footprint of government agencies offering services.
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MPs and MPLs' Guide to Effective Constituency Work⁴⁷

General

Crafting sound policy. Ongoing, two-way communication with constituents is important for identifying commonly occurring problems and systemic issues, and then, in turn, developing effective legislative fixes. MPs' engagement should be focused on gleaning these essential insights and bringing them back to parliament for action; whether that be for new initiatives, for legislative review on how the current law is implemented, or to respond to the need for additional oversight.

Building trust. Low public opinion polling is an unfortunate reality that political processes and institutions face. Constituency work should be focused on cultivating this trust and building enduring relationships with communities throughout communities.

Time-effectiveness- MPs and MPLs ought to use their constituency time effectively to engage with the public. This is because as public representatives they are well-positioned to identify issues on the ground directly from the public and to ensure that these are speedily relayed for intervention. Being in a position to understand and monitor communities at a more granular level is an important element in developing appropriate and context-specific responses to issues and plights.

Advancing civic education. Transparency with constituents and regular dialogue is critical for fostering a better and deeper understanding of what legislatures and elected officials are doing and how citizens can play a constructive role in the process. There should be a specific focus on advancing the opportunities, particularly for children and youth to learn about the legislative process and how their government should work for them.

Building consensus. Every constituency includes diverse communities with a range of views, perspectives, needs, and experiences. Part of the role of MPs and MPLs is to understand this range and create space to find common ground.

Improving lives. The ultimate, overarching objective of constituent engagement is to address the real-world challenges that constituents are facing and to have a tangible impact on their lives for the better.

Specific

Provide information. The appropriate level of engagement for elected representatives may be to simply serve as a resource for your constituent to assist in their efforts to resolve their problems. This can

⁴⁷ <https://www.iri.org/resources/iri-unveils-constituent-engagement-guide/>

include providing them with links to government or CSO resources, brochures or other informational documents your office has created, or other sources of helpful information.

Referral. MPs may be able to provide a formal referral to a government agency at the national, provincial, or local level, or to a CSO or other private sector entity that can help to resolve their problem or provide direct assistance.

Direct resolution. If appropriate, and the problem is within an MP or MPL's power and authority to resolve or assist, he/she may choose to directly intervene on a constituent's behalf and actively work to resolve the situation.

Decline to assist. If MPs determine that the request is not one that you can faithfully respond to, including requests for favours or payments, they should respectfully decline to get involved, with a clear explanation as to why the request falls outside of their role as an MP. (In some cases, they may also be able to direct them to other resources for assistance.)

Active Assistance and Resolution. Once the challenge is understood and the appropriate form of response is determined, MPs or their staff can take the necessary follow-on steps to assist and resolve the case. These can include: making calls to government agencies or CSOs; sending formal letters of inquiry; engaging in ongoing interaction with the relevant agencies and organizations; incorporating any new information from the constituent into the case file and action plan; providing updates to the constituent at appropriate intervals. Upon closing the case, ensure all pertinent details are recorded and archived for future reference and analysis.

Principles for Effective Constituency Work⁴⁸

Transparency. *Good constituent communication, like good governance, begins with openly sharing critical information. MPs are constituents' most direct conduit to the national government. Engagement should be built on a commitment to share openly the work MPs are doing on constituents' behalf, as well as to be a source of information more broadly on government action, how decisions are being made, what the costs are, and what the impact is.*

Accessibility. *Having MPs and MPLs and their staff regularly available to constituents, through a variety of digital and in-person mechanisms, is essential. Constituents should be able to easily submit their requests, comments, or questions, and elected representatives should take steps to ensure that they are all fully able to do so, regardless of disability or other barriers they may face.*

Responsiveness. *Meaningful engagement demands more than MPs simply broadcasting messages to constituents. Elected representatives need to create a feedback loop, in which constituents are able to provide their input, and in which MPs actively work to integrate and apply their input.*

Authenticity. *Elected representatives should build credibility with constituents by being honest and authentic. Speaking candidly (yet respectfully) can be particularly important when there are differences of opinion, setbacks in plans, or government failures that demand change and progress.*

Inclusivity. *It is essential to engage the full range of individuals and communities within constituencies, including those who traditionally have been marginalized. This often includes women; youth; and those with disabilities. Issues of poverty, inequalities, social norms, and legacies of social injustice create barriers to participation that must be overcome, which requires deliberate action on the part of elected representatives to ensure community voices are heard and heeded.*

⁴⁸ <https://www.iri.org/resources/iri-unveils-constituent-engagement-guide/>

Consistency. *Engagement with constituents must happen in an ongoing way. It is not just for campaign season or when a controversial issue arises. It should be a continuous dialogue that grows, deepens, and builds upon itself.*
