

# **Knowledge Sharing on Safeguarding Democratic Space**

An E-module for Pakistani Parliamentarians

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## List of Acronyms

CCA — Common Country Analysis

CEDAW — Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

COVID-19 — Coronavirus disease 2019

CSEM — Conseil supérieur de l'éducation aux médias

EU — European Union

GSP+ — Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus

G7 — Group of Seven

ICCPR — International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR — International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

ICPD — International Conference on Population and Development

NATO — North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OECD — Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PBC — Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation

PIPS — Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services

RAS — EU Rapid Alert System

RRM — G7 Rapid Response Mechanism

RTBF — Belgian Radio-Television of the French Community

SDGs — Sustainable Development Goals

SIPA — School of International and Public Affairs

UDHR — Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN — United Nations

UNCT — United Nations Country Team

UNDP — United Nations Development Programme

UNRCO — United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office

UNSDCF — United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

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## Executive Summary

The United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) in Pakistan, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pakistan, and UN Women Pakistan, are aiming to collaborate with the Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services (PIPS) to enhance parliamentarians' capacity for inclusive policy making and legislation in the country. The project revolves around creating e-learning training modules for incoming Pakistani legislators who may be new to, or relatively inexperienced in, inclusive policy making in order to enhance their ability to debate on pertinent issues in the parliament, and cement democracy in Pakistan in the process. In line with their project needs, the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) team has developed a needs assessment and recommendations based on desk and field research, and proposed a training module attuned to the distinctive requisites and milieu of the Pakistani parliament.

The views and conclusions contained in this report are the authors', and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

## Background

### Project Introduction, Rationale & Objectives

Pakistan faces a dynamic landscape as it strives to align itself with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a comprehensive roadmap for achieving multidimensional sustainable development by 2030, the SDGs encompass a wide array of social, economic, and environmental objectives. These SDGs were adopted by the Government of Pakistan as its own national development agenda through a unanimous National Assembly Resolution in 2016,<sup>1</sup> and are aligned with the country's national development framework, Vision 2025.<sup>2</sup> The Government's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can also be seen in the establishment of SDG support units at the federal and provincial levels and the approval of a National SDGs Framework in 2018 for the prioritization and localization of the SDGs.<sup>3</sup> As a key partner for the Government of Pakistan, the UN in Pakistan aims to identify strategic points of alignment to foster support for the 2030 Agenda.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) is an overarching framework containing a set of outcomes to be jointly achieved by the Government of Pakistan and the UN in Pakistan between 2023 and 2027.<sup>4</sup> This can act as a crucial instrument for planning and implementing collaborative development activities between the two. The UNSDCF's theory of change is based on a "Common Country Analysis" (CCA) — conducted by the UN to assess needs, challenges and opportunities in Pakistan — and its priorities are aligned with Pakistan's National Sustainable Development Strategy, sectoral strategies and national planning instruments.<sup>5</sup> The Cooperation Framework prioritizes five development outcomes to improve people's lives in Pakistan, particularly those at the greatest risk of being left behind, with UN Women leading Outcome 2, i.e. "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment," and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) leading Outcome 5, i.e. "Governance."

With the Cooperation Framework embodying the spirit of partnerships that are the core of the 2030 Agenda, the UN in Pakistan decided to pilot a project with the Pakistani parliament in mind. The SIPA team from Columbia University provided its support for the project, which aims to develop innovative e-learning training modules for incoming National Assembly parliamentarians, in collaboration with the Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services (PIPS). PIPS serves as an independent research and capacity

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. (n.d.). "United Nations in Pakistan." Retrieved from [pakistan.un.org/en](http://pakistan.un.org/en).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Country Team. (2022). *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027 Pakistan*.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations. (n.d.). "United Nations in Pakistan." Retrieved from [pakistan.un.org/en](http://pakistan.un.org/en).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Country Team. (2022). *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027 Pakistan*.



building facility for parliamentarians, meant to provide non-partisan, expert analysis on various subjects, as well as essential training for incoming parliamentarians.<sup>6</sup>

The National Assembly of Pakistan can play a pivotal role in shaping the country's development trajectory and aligning it with international commitments and the UNSDCF. According to the country's Constitution, the authority to make laws rests solely with the legislature, empowering National Assembly parliamentarians to play a significant role in policymaking during their five-year terms. In light of Pakistan's tumultuous political history, building the capacity of democratic institutions on inclusive development planning, gender-responsive policymaking, and safeguarding democratic space becomes essential. The digital nature of e-learning represents a transformative approach to parliamentary training within the National Assembly of Pakistan and this project hopes to redefine their learning experience by offering flexibility, accessibility, and interactivity. By providing a self-paced learning environment, where parliamentarians could grasp essential knowledge at their convenience, the project hopes to break down geographical barriers to facilitate widespread access across Pakistan.

This iterative project therefore hopes to facilitate parliamentarians' understanding of the UNSDCF, national legislative and development planning processes, as well as international human rights instruments ratified by Pakistan. Its intended specialized topics include *strategic visioning for inclusive development planning, gender equality and women's empowerment, and safeguarding democratic space*, which can collectively provide avenues for alignment with SDGs 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

The SIPA team was engaged for this project, from November 2023 to May 2024, by three main client agencies from the UN in Pakistan:

- a) **United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office:** which brings together different UN agencies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations at the country level. As chair of the UN Country Team (UNCT), United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) plays a central role in facilitating this coordination in order to ensure that UN assistance is aligned with national development priorities, plans and capacity building in the context of internationally agreed treaty obligations and development goals.<sup>7</sup>
  
- b) **UN Women:** which coordinates and promotes the UN system's work and positions gender equality as fundamental to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.<sup>8</sup> It works with the Government of Pakistan and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes

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<sup>6</sup> Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services. (2022-2023). PIPS Brochure 2022-23. Retrieved from <https://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/agora-documents/PIPS%20Brochure%202022-23.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations. (n.d.). "The UN Resident Coordinator Office in Pakistan." Retrieved from [pakistan.un.org/en/about/about-the-resident-coordinator-office](https://pakistan.un.org/en/about/about-the-resident-coordinator-office).

<sup>8</sup> UN Women. (n.d.). "About UN Women." Retrieved from [pakistan.unwomen.org/en/about-us-pk/about-un-women](https://pakistan.unwomen.org/en/about-us-pk/about-un-women).

and services needed to ensure the effective implementation of standards to truly benefit women and girls.<sup>9</sup>

- c) **United Nations Development Programme:** which works with the Government of Pakistan and civil society to build lasting institutional capacity, provide technical expertise to improve development outcomes, and help link the Government and people of Pakistan to innovative global solutions.”<sup>10</sup>

The graphic below provides a summary of these interrelationships:

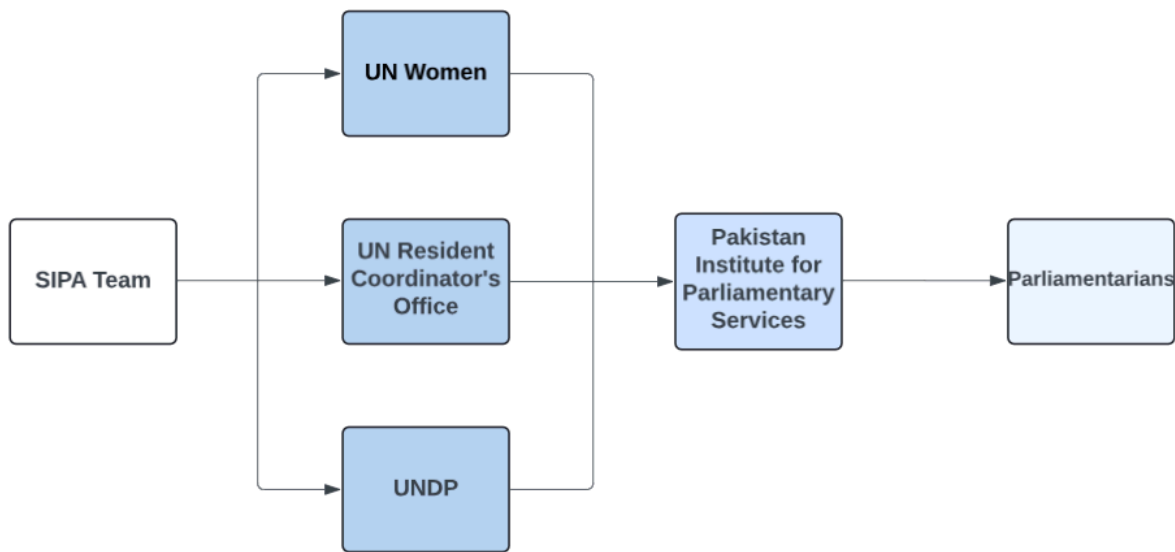


Chart 1. Interlinkages between teams for project on developing innovative training for new parliamentarians

## Country Context

It is critical to understand the country context — especially in relation to the specialized topics of *inclusive development planning, gender equality and women's empowerment, and safeguarding democratic space* — for this project to be meaningfully effective and sustainable.

Pakistan is the fifth most populous country and has the ninth largest labor force globally.<sup>11</sup> The country's population of over 220 million is growing at an annual rate of 2.4%, with 51% of the population consisting of men and boys, 48.76% being women and girls, and 0.004% constituting transgender persons.<sup>12</sup> The nation consists of four provinces, two federally administered areas and a federal capital, and has a population density of 265 people per

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). "UNDP Pakistan." Retrieved from [www.undp.org/pakistan](http://www.undp.org/pakistan).

<sup>11</sup> *Pakistan Common Country Analysis*. (2021, June 25). United Nations Sustainable Development Group.

[https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/b357260a-1727-4366-bf98-e22475f2d619\\_CCA\\_Pakistan\\_final\\_2020-21.pdf](https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/b357260a-1727-4366-bf98-e22475f2d619_CCA_Pakistan_final_2020-21.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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square kilometer<sup>13</sup>. It is consistently ranked as amongst the ten most vulnerable countries to the effects of global climate change, with this vulnerability expected to intensify in the future with rises in heat stress and water demand across the country.<sup>14</sup>

The nation grapples with a heavy debt burden and elevated inflation rates — exacerbated by the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and devastating floods in 2022 — with the floods disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups such as rural agrarian women.<sup>15</sup> Alarming statistics, such as the estimated 1,000 annual “honor killings” of women, 200% surge in complaints to domestic violence helplines during COVID-19 lockdowns,<sup>16</sup> and a reported 640,000 adolescent girls at increased risk of coercions, gender-based violence and child marriage in the aftermath of the floods,<sup>17</sup> underscore the urgency of addressing gender-based issues in the country.

Pakistan has a number of domestic and international obligations to uphold gender equality. Domestically, this is enshrined in the Constitution in the following places: Article-25, calling for no discrimination on the basis of sex, Article-34 guaranteeing full participation of women in all spheres of national life and Article-37 ensuring promotion of social justice make it essential that the Parliament delivers on the promises made with the citizens of the country through meaningful policy decisions.<sup>18</sup> Pakistan also created and reported gender goals and provisions in 2013. In particular, the Government of Pakistan devised a four pronged strategy to “reduce the prevalence of poverty amongst women, promote gender equality, curb violence against women and enact legislation to empower Pakistani women.”<sup>19</sup>

Internationally, Pakistan has signed the Beijing Platform for Action, ratified Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and partaken in other agreements and declarations including Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+), Beijing Declaration, Vienna Declaration, and the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for Advancement of Women.<sup>20</sup> Despite adopting these international commitments on gender

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Gender equality in Pakistan: Climate, politico-economic stressors. Retrieved from [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/genderequality\\_in\\_pakistan-climate\\_politico-economic\\_stressors.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/genderequality_in_pakistan-climate_politico-economic_stressors.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2021). World Report 2021: Rights trends in Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/pakistan>

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Gender equality in Pakistan: Climate, politico-economic stressors. Retrieved from [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/genderequality\\_in\\_pakistan-climate\\_politico-economic\\_stressors.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/genderequality_in_pakistan-climate_politico-economic_stressors.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Strategies for Implementing Gender Budgeting in Pakistan. Accessed May 6, 2024. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/20513.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Human Rights, Government of Pakistan. (n.d.). *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. Accessed May 12, 2024. <http://www.mohr.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/CEDAW5thperiodicreport.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> “Gap Analysis.” UN Women. Accessed May 6, 2024.

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2020/12/pk-Federal-EVAW-Gap-Analysis.pdf>.

equality and women's rights as well as the SDGs, the country's ranking for gender equality has been one of the lowest in the world.<sup>21</sup>

The country's rankings on global gender indices further highlight the need for comprehensive efforts to bridge gender gaps in various sectors. The country ranked 135th<sup>22</sup> out of 170 countries on UNDP's Gender Inequality Index 2021<sup>23</sup> and is reported to have ranked 161st out of 191 countries on the Human Development Report's 2022 Gender Inequality Index.<sup>24</sup> Most recently, Pakistan ranked 142nd out of 146 countries on the World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Gender Gap Index, which is its highest position since 2006.<sup>25</sup> While it did improve by 5.1 percentage points on the Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex in the last decade, its level of parity still remains one of the lowest globally at 36.2% parity.<sup>26</sup> Pakistan's widest gender gap - at 15.2% - is notably related to political empowerment, with the country having had a female head of state for only 4.7 years of the last 50 years. Additionally, a mere one-tenth of the nation's ministers, and one-fifth of its parliamentarians, are women.<sup>27</sup> It ranks at the bottom in terms of the gender gap in senior, managerial and legislative roles, with "less than 5% of professionals in senior positions being women."<sup>28</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the integral issue of women's marginalization in decision-making forums as women who had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, and constituted 70% of the world's frontline workers, represented only 5.5% of COVID-19 Committee members in May 2020.<sup>29</sup>

Mis- and disinformation is becoming a serious problem in developing countries like Pakistan where low-cost smartphones and mobile internet access are increasing the use of social media platforms.<sup>30</sup> Internet penetration in Pakistan stood at 45.7 percent at the start of 2024, with an estimated 111 million internet users.<sup>31</sup> Out of these, 71.7 million - i.e. 29.5 percent of the total population - were social media users in January 2024.<sup>32</sup> Social media platforms have been growing as "sources of information and place(s) for social and political activity," especially among populations with low digital literacy and limited technological experience.<sup>33</sup> The "lack of digital literacy, political economy and market power (in Pakistan)

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<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. (2022). Launch of National Gender Policy Framework on the International Women Day. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.pk/web/gender>

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (2021). Human Development Report 2021-2022: Statistical Annex GII Table 5. Retrieved from [https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-22\\_HDR/HDR21-22\\_Statistical\\_Annex\\_GII\\_Table.xlsx](https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-22_HDR/HDR21-22_Statistical_Annex_GII_Table.xlsx)

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). Country data: Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/PAK>

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Gender equality in Pakistan: Climate, politico-economic stressors. Retrieved from [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/genderequality\\_in\\_pakistan-climate\\_politico-economic\\_stressors.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/genderequality_in_pakistan-climate_politico-economic_stressors.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> World Economic Forum. (2023). Global Gender Gap Report 2023. Retrieved from [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2023.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Pakistan Common Country Analysis. (2021, June 25). United Nations Sustainable Development Group. [https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/b357260a-1727-4366-bf98-e22475f2d619\\_CCA\\_Pakistan\\_final\\_2020-21.pdf](https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/b357260a-1727-4366-bf98-e22475f2d619_CCA_Pakistan_final_2020-21.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Ayesha Ali and Ihsan Ayyub Qazi, Countering Misinformation on Social Media Through Educational Interventions: Evidence from a

Randomized Experiment in Pakistan, July 2021, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2107.02775>

<sup>31</sup> Simon Kemp, "Digital 2024: Pakistan," Data Portal, February 23, 2024, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-pakistan>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ayesha Ali and Ihsan Ayyub Qazi, Countering Misinformation on Social Media Through Educational Interventions: Evidence from a

exacerbates the overall situation for information disorder on leading social media platforms<sup>34</sup> and “poses a threat to social and political developments, public discourse and democratic values in the country.”<sup>35</sup>

Media Matters for Democracy found that at least 64% of news consumers in Pakistan stated that they rely on social media platforms for news and information about political affairs, despite most of them acknowledging social media sites to be huge spreaders of misinformation.<sup>36</sup> This may be explained by the general belief “among the masses” that Pakistani media institutions and journalists are dishonest, biased and under the influence of corrupt political leaders - with the “age of digitalization” strengthening the idea that journalists are “not performing their ethical duties and responsibilities properly.”<sup>37</sup> Low trust in state and international actors further contributes to the rapid spread of mis- and disinformation, particularly when state authorities may be seen as corrupt because of poor public service delivery or questions over their legitimacy.<sup>38</sup> In a context marked by high political polarization and media consumption, effective media literacy education becomes essential for promoting public trust in institutions as well as a sense of accountability and transparency by those institutions.

The correlation between mis- and disinformation and incidents of hate speech, discrimination and violence against members of vulnerable and minority groups in the country can be seen through multiple examples: The annual *Aurat March* (“Women’s March”) mobilizes women - as well as members from transgender and other marginalized communities - against systemic oppression, patriarchy and violence in Pakistan. It has, however, become a “flashpoint for online abuse and violence”<sup>39</sup> in the contemporary digital age with organized disinformation campaigns against its organizers, participants and supporters. Fake posters circulated each year on social media depict the women involved in the March as morally and financially corrupt and as being opposed to religious and cultural values.<sup>40</sup> Doctored material falsely showing Aurat March participants chanting blasphemous slogans<sup>41</sup> led to the actual registration of a blasphemy case against them in

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Randomized Experiment in Pakistan, July 2021, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2107.02775>

<sup>34</sup> Media Matters for Democracy Pakistan, “Freedom of Expression and the Gender Dimensions of Disinformation - Civil Society Submission by Media Matters for Democracy, Pakistan,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/cfis/gender-justice/subm-a78288-gendered-disinformation-cso-media-matters-democracy-pakistan.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Ittefaq and K.M. Baharul Islam, “Perception of Electronic News Media of Pakistan in the Digital Age,” *Asian Journal for Public Opinion Research* 8, no. 3 (2020): 224-245, <https://www.ajpor.org/article/27243-perception-of-electronic-news-media-of-pakistan-in-the-digital-age>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Usman Shahid, “Aurat March: A Symbol of Women Empowerment and Target of Disinformation in Pakistan,” *Digital Rights Monitor*, March 8, 2023, <https://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/aurat-march-a-symbol-of-women-empowerment-and-target-of-disinformation-in-pakistan/>

<sup>40</sup> Amel Ghani, “Misinformation on YouTube - Use of Misleading Titles to Promote Hateful Narrative Against Aurat March in Pakistan,” *Media Matters for Democracy*, July 2022, <https://mediamatters.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2-Misinformation-on-YouTube.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

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2021.<sup>42</sup> This is particularly dangerous in Pakistan as individuals accused of blasphemy - as well as their lawyers, family and community members - bear the risk of lengthy, unfair trials and threats of, or actual, violence by vigilantes.<sup>43</sup> Rumors of blasphemy also preceded the brutal murder of a university student, Mashal Khan, in 2017 and have been observed before attacks on Ahmadis, a marginalized religious sect.<sup>44</sup>

While mis- and disinformation may not be new in Pakistan, the criticality of the issue - and the need to properly correct it - is imperative for policymakers and relevant media stakeholders as public trust in state and media institutions deteriorates along with the country's democratic processes. A caretaker government had been running the country since parliament was dissolved on 9th August 2023, with a "mandate (to) ensure the holding of a transparent election" and delayed elections finally took place in February 2024.<sup>45</sup> Despite this, evidence of democratic sliding was seen for the nation in the months leading up to the elections. Concerns about "election engineering" were raised, with some analysts concerned that the February 2024 vote could be among the most manipulated in the country's history. Actions such as crackdowns on the former prime minister and his political party, the rejection of nomination papers, and the manipulation of legal charges against political figures fuelled fears of widespread rigging and unfair contest conditions.<sup>46</sup> Such incidents can sow confusion and further distrust among the public, making it even harder for citizens to discern factual information from falsehoods.

Technology-facilitated gender based violence is becoming another dangerous consequence of the misuse of digital technologies and social media in the country. Some examples of such violence include abusive behaviors such as online harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, stalking, identity theft, doxing and surveillance.<sup>47</sup> While certain laws - such as the *Prevention of Electronic Crime Acts 2018*, the *Pakistan Penal Code*, the *Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010*, and the *Anti-Rape Act (Investigations and Trial) Act 2021*, may be used for combatting this extremely harmful issue, there is a crucial need for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to this problem.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Media Matters for Democracy, "Freedom of Expression and the Gender Dimensions of Disinformation - Civil Society Submission by Media Matters for Democracy, Pakistan," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/cfis/gender-justice/subm-a78288-gendered-disinformation-cso-media-matters-democracy-pakistan.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> Amnesty International, "Pakistan: How the Blasphemy Laws Enable Abuse," December 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2016/12/pakistan-how-the-blasphemy-laws-enable-abuse/>

<sup>44</sup> Asfandiyar Mir and Niloufer Siddiqui, "Losing to Facts: Fiction, Nationalism, Misinformation, and Conspiracy Theories," United States Institute of Peace, November 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/losing-facts-fiction-nationalism-misinformation-and-conspiracy-theories>

<sup>45</sup> Al Jazeera, "Pakistan to hold delayed elections on February 8, electoral commission says," November 2, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/pakistan-to-hold-delayed-elections-on-february-8-electoral-commission-says>

<sup>46</sup> Abid Hussain, "Election engineering: Is Pakistan's February vote already rigged?" Al Jazeera, January 12, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/12/election-engineering-is-pakistans-february-vote-already-rigged>

<sup>47</sup> National Commission on the Status of Women & UNDP. (2023). *Digitalisation & Women in Pakistan - NCSW Report*. United Nations Development Programme. [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/digitalisation\\_women\\_in\\_pakistan\\_-\\_ncsw\\_report\\_2023.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/digitalisation_women_in_pakistan_-_ncsw_report_2023.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Ibid



## Methodology

### Desk Research & Literature Review

The SIPA team conducted comprehensive desk research of resourceful documents provided by the UN client agencies and a literature review based on the following sub-topics:

- (a) Parliamentary Trainings
- (b) E-training
- (c) Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
- (d) The UNSDCF
- (e) Mis- and Dis-information
- (f) Tech-Facilitated Gender Based Violence

The results of this secondary research are embedded throughout this report, particularly within the "Country Context" provided and within our "Findings & Recommendations" section.


### Stakeholder and Subject Matter Expert Interviews

During the months of January and March 2024, members of the SIPA team visited the UN client agencies in Islamabad, Pakistan, and were able to conduct primary research through interviews with relevant stakeholders and subject matter experts. The results of this research have been highlighted throughout this report, particularly in our "Needs Assessment" sub-section and the recommendations provided.

Due to the diverse nature of the actors interviewed, the SIPA team identified potential obstacles relevant to the project, which have been incorporated within the "Challenges & Limitations" discussed in this section.

### Integrated Module

In consultation with the UN agencies, the SIPA team has proposed one integrated module named "Knowledge Sharing on Safeguarding Democratic Space." The term "integrated module" has been used to describe this training e-module as it focuses on the intersection of the multiple topics important to each of the UN agencies. The module aims to address the interconnected nature of these issues and their impact on inclusive development and policy-making in Pakistan, as well as a comprehensive understanding of how these challenges are interrelated and how they can be addressed



through targeted capacity building for parliamentarians.

The team adapted the tools and knowledge from the desk and field research for the Pakistan context. As parliamentarians are entering with varying degrees of knowledge on inclusive development topics, the team decided to begin by laying out the groundwork for the rest of the training and introducing fundamental topics such as bias for the gender component, the harms of mis- and disinformation, and introducing the UNSDCF.

## Challenges & Limitations

While developing the training module for Pakistani parliamentarians, the SIPA team conducted extensive research, held interviews with subject matter experts and former parliamentarians, and performed a thorough assessment of the target audience's needs and preferences. This comprehensive approach allowed us to identify and address several key challenges, that could potentially impact the effectiveness and reception of the training program, and are discussed below:

- 1. Incentivizing training and sustaining participant interest:** Parliamentarians often resist the idea of training. To overcome this, the team carefully chose alternative terminology, such as "knowledge sharing" and "capacity building," to frame the initiative positively. Additionally, as parliamentarians are very busy and have competing interests, the team kept the training concise, divided it into manageable sections, and incorporated visual and interactive elements to maintain engagement.
- 2. Addressing resistance to adopting technology:** Many parliamentarians, particularly those from older generations, may be less familiar with technology. To ease the transition into e-trainings, the team recommends a two approaches: a) conducting hybrid trainings with staff available to assist parliamentarians with the interface and technology, and b) ensuring the trainings are accessible and formatted for both computers and mobile devices, as parliamentarians may be more comfortable with the latter.
- 3. Enhancing interactivity and learning outcomes:** The team recognized the importance of making the module interactive to retain participants' interest and improve learning outcomes. They incorporated interactive elements and designed mechanisms for evaluation and feedback to ensure that parliamentarians achieve the intended understanding.
- 4. Evaluation and feedback:** To assess the effectiveness of the training, the team integrated evaluation and feedback components into the module. This allows for gauging parliamentarians' understanding, gathering insights for future improvements, and ensuring that the training achieves its desired impact.

By addressing these challenges and adapting the module to the Pakistani context, the SIPA team has proposed a training program that is engaging, relevant, and effective in building parliamentarians' capacities for inclusive development policy-making.

# Findings & Recommendations

## Findings

During the field visits, we found out that parliamentarians are generally resistant to engaging in modes of training that excessively use technology. Thus, they prefer a blended learning approach where there is significant human interaction, instead of self-pacing. They also prefer short and concise modules spread over days, instead of full-day training packed with content.

We also found out that training programs with simple theoretical knowledge do not do well with the participants, thus, an interactive component has to be added, both in the form of videos and activities, as well as pre- and post quizzes for each section of the module. Since there has been some reluctance in the past regarding attending the training sessions altogether, we were asked by the clients to brainstorm some initiatives to encourage parliamentarians to attend the sessions, such as making it “official” by getting the Speaker of the House to sign on to the program, or distributing certificates at the successful completion of the program, signed by the UN Resident Coordinator.

Regarding the legal aspect of the consequences of the training, we found out that in some cases, discussion on mis- and disinformation, as well as hate speech, leads to parliamentarians inadvertently supporting legislation that clamps down on freedom of speech. Thus, we had to propose actions to combat mis- and disinformation that did not clash with the basic freedoms enshrined in the constitution of Pakistan, yet are effective.

As WhatsApp is a major form of social media and information dissemination in Pakistan, the team included WhatsApp examples in the training as well as other relevant scenario-based examples and interactive exercises and parliamentarian reflection and action.

## Needs Assessment

There exists a capacity gap in parliamentarians’ abilities to engage in inclusive development policy making. Below are various stakeholders’ views of training needs and the workshop team’s assessment of them.

Stakeholder	Capacity Gap	Assessment
PIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="581 1845 781 1913">Artificial Intelligence</li> </ul>	Parliamentarians may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively leverage artificial



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence-based learning</li> <li>• Data-driven approaches</li> </ul>	<p>intelligence, evidence-based learning, and data-driven approaches in their policy-making processes.</p> <p>These gaps can hinder their ability to make informed decisions based on reliable data and cutting-edge technologies. Addressing these gaps through targeted training programs can enhance parliamentarians' capacities to utilize modern tools and techniques for effective governance.</p>
Young Parliamentary Associates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation</li> </ul>	<p>Parliamentarians may struggle with translating their decisions into concrete actions and ensuring the successful execution of policies on the ground. Training programs focused on implementation strategies, monitoring and evaluation techniques, and stakeholder engagement can help bridge this gap. By enhancing parliamentarians' implementation skills, they can more effectively contribute to the realization of inclusive development goals.</p>
Former Parliamentarians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget</li> </ul>	<p>This indicates that parliamentarians may lack the necessary financial management skills and knowledge to effectively allocate resources and oversee the budgeting process. Strengthening their capacities in budgeting principles, financial oversight, and resource allocation can enable them to make informed decisions and ensure efficient utilization of public funds. Training programs on budgeting can equip parliamentarians with the tools they need to promote financial accountability and support inclusive development initiatives.</p>
UN Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical toolkits to support parliamentarians in their efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment</li> </ul>	<p>These toolkits would cover various aspects of gender-responsive policy making and legislation. Providing parliamentarians with practical resources, guidelines, and best practices can enhance their capacity to integrate gender considerations into their work and advocate for inclusive policies. Collaborating with UN Women to develop and disseminate these toolkits can significantly strengthen parliamentarians' ability to</p>




		advance gender equality and inclusive development.
Other UN Technical Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing legislation with implementation clauses</li> <li>• Climate change adaptation</li> </ul>	UN Technical Teams may identify capacity gaps related to localizing and aligning parliamentary efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Training programs that help parliamentarians understand the SDGs, their targets, and indicators, and how to integrate them into national and local policies can be valuable. Additionally, parliamentarians may require support in monitoring and reporting on SDG progress, using data and indicators to track achievements and identify areas for improvement. Furthermore, mainstreaming human rights in legislative processes is crucial for inclusive development. Capacity building on human rights principles, international conventions, and how to incorporate them into legislation can strengthen parliamentarians' ability to protect and promote the rights of all citizens.
Subject Matter Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	

### International Best Practices

The efficacy of the parliament hinges on the abilities of its members to execute their duties competently. Therefore, parliamentary training is conducted to teach the procedures of the House to the elected officials. Countries around the world have established research and policy institutes to facilitate the training for legislative officers. One such leading program is Rose-Roth Seminars and Parliamentary Trainings Programmes organized by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Founded as a result of the cooperation between Central and Eastern European parliaments, its original purpose was to assist partner countries in their transition to democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but has now expanded to include parliamentarians from non-NATO countries as well, focusing on enhancing parliamentary awareness, providing experience and expertise, building contacts, and developing effective military oversight. These training programs are held two to three times a year.<sup>49</sup>

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is a training organization for parliamentarians from Commonwealth countries. While the training programs cater to legislators from all across the globe, the association gives separate attention to women, disabled, and young

<sup>49</sup> NATO Parliamentary Assembly. (n.d.) *Rose-Roth Seminars & Parliamentary Training Programmes* | NATO PA. <https://www.nato-pa.int/content/rose-roth-seminars-parliamentary-training-programmes>



parliamentarians. The organization not only has a global network of affiliates, but also maintains a strong online presence which allows the members to take courses and certifications through e-modules, with the use of case studies, real-life examples, and practical advice for the students. The e-platform also offers Masterclasses which are aimed at addressing a specific issue, such as parliamentary procedure, trade, or gender, and are aimed at building capacity and knowledge in a specific subject area.<sup>50</sup>

The parliament of Australia suggests a three-pronged approach to conducting the training. The first one includes in-house training organized by the parliamentary staff with support from external providers, focusing on the orientation and induction of the new parliamentarians. The second technique is to source the support from political parties, as loyalty to their respective parties is more likely to motivate the parliamentarians to attend these programs. The third approach is to encourage parliamentarians to engage in a self-learning process by accessing the library of the parliament. Evidence suggests that only senior parliamentarians prefer this style of training.<sup>51</sup>

E-training has become increasingly important, especially in the wake of COVID-19, as events, workshops, and meetings move online. When designing e-training for parliamentary groups, it's crucial to consider inclusivity to ensure that all learners can access, participate in, and benefit equally from the online events. Trainers should aim to mainstream inclusivity across all aspects of design and implementation to make the e-training more effective and impactful.<sup>52</sup>

Countries around the world use e-training as a fast and targeted pedagogical tool through its limited use of resources, and extensive reach. In 2014, the Central Anti-corruption Bureau of Poland launched an e-training platform to tackle corruption in public and private institutions. The modules created were thematic in nature, spanning over 45 minutes each, and used infographics, animation, and voice-over to make them more interactive. They were also available to the participants in both Polish and English to increase the outreach.<sup>53</sup> Another similar practice has been adopted by The Commonwealth, in collaboration with Intel, to launch an e-learning platform for public sector officials to help them achieve the development goals. The courses on this platform are self-paced, and teach the use of Artificial Intelligence to the policymakers in different areas, such as digital governance, technology, agriculture, and infrastructure, emphasizing the benefits of globalization.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), *About Us*. (n.d.). <https://www.cpahq.org/>

<sup>51</sup> Coghill, K. (2023, April). *How Should Elected Members Learn Parliamentary Skills?*. Parliament of Australia. [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Senate/Powers\\_practice\\_n\\_procedures/pops/pop59/c04](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/pops/pop59/c04)

<sup>52</sup> United Nations Institute for Training and Research. (n.d.). Learning Solutions - Online Learning Solutions. UNITAR. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.unitar.org/learning-solutions/online-learning-solutions>

<sup>53</sup> European Commission. (n.d.). "E-learning platform of the Central Anti-corruption Bureau", [https://antifraud-knowledge-centre.ec.europa.eu/library-good-practices-and-case-studies/good-practices/e-learning-platform-central-anti-corruption\\_en](https://antifraud-knowledge-centre.ec.europa.eu/library-good-practices-and-case-studies/good-practices/e-learning-platform-central-anti-corruption_en)

<sup>54</sup> The Commonwealth. (2023). "Commonwealth and Intel launch AI learning platform for public sector leaders," <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-and-intel-launch-ai-learning-platform-public-sector-leaders>




To make e-training interactive and engaging, several strategies can be employed:<sup>55</sup>

1. Incorporating interactive elements such as quizzes, gamification, and live sessions can significantly enhance learner engagement. Short quizzes strategically placed throughout the course can serve as both assessments and motivators for learners to stay engaged. Gamification features like badges, points, and leaderboards provide incentives for learners to progress through the material and achieve milestones. Additionally, hosting live sessions or webinars allows for real-time interaction, Q&A sessions, and discussions, fostering a sense of community among learners.
2. Break down content into short, digestible lessons (microlearning) to accommodate shorter attention spans and encourage regular check-ins. This approach increases engagement, improves retention, and allows for flexibility and personalized learning. To successfully implement microlearning, course designers should identify key learning objectives, use diverse media formats, and incorporate frequent assessments. By leveraging microlearning, online training programs can create an engaging, effective, and user-friendly learning experience that supports learners in achieving their goals and retaining valuable knowledge.
3. Offering continuous feedback and support throughout the course keeps learners engaged and motivated. Providing prompt responses to learner questions, offering constructive feedback on assignments, and facilitating peer-to-peer interaction through forums or discussion boards fosters a supportive learning environment. Additionally, incorporating mechanisms for learners to track their progress and celebrate achievements further motivates them to stay engaged and committed to the course.
4. To make the learning experience more practical and actionable, interactive activities, job aids, and additional resources can be included. Activities such as case studies, scenarios, and examples enable learners to apply their knowledge in real-world situations, reinforcing learning outcomes. Providing downloadable job aids, checklists, and templates supports learners in implementing course concepts in their work and enhances the transfer of learning to real-life scenarios. Incorporating a variety of visual formats and multimedia elements can make the course content more engaging and accessible. Utilizing videos, audio recordings, animations, infographics, and interactive elements helps break up the text-heavy content and appeals to different learning styles. Visuals not only enhance learner

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<sup>55</sup> Kolman, R. (2023, September 14). *How to Make Online Courses More Interactive*. LearnDash. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.learndash.com/how-to-make-online-courses-more-interactive/>



understanding and retention but also make the learning experience more enjoyable and memorable.

When conducting e-training for parliamentary groups, it is essential to tailor the content to their specific needs and challenges. This may include topics such as legislative processes, policy analysis, and effective communication strategies. Trainers should also consider the diverse backgrounds and technical abilities of the participants, ensuring that the e-training platform and materials are accessible and user-friendly.

To foster collaboration and peer-to-peer learning, trainers can incorporate discussion forums, live webinars, and synchronous sessions.<sup>56</sup> These tools allow participants to learn from each other, share ideas, and discuss challenges specific to their parliamentary roles. Trainers should provide job aids, resources, and workbooks to help participants implement what they've learned after the course.<sup>57</sup> This can include action plans, templates, and best practices tailored to the parliamentary context.

By considering inclusivity, interactivity, and the specific needs of parliamentary groups, trainers can design and conduct effective e-training that enhances participants' knowledge, skills, and ability to fulfill their roles in the legislative process. As the e-module will be designed to be used at the beginning of their five-year parliamentary term, the project can be leveraged for refresher courses later in their term and in accordance with the parliamentarians' pace. Once the training modules have been developed for National Assembly members, they are expected to be customized for provincial legislatures to ensure their sustainable and relevant use.

Training incoming parliamentarians on the importance of strategic planning, understanding the role and relationships with various stakeholders (including civil society, the private sector, development partners, academia and think tanks, and media), and how to align their legislative work with the overall ecosystem (e.g., the UNSDCF, Pakistan's international and regional policy and treaty commitments, GSP Plus, etc) is crucial to ensuring sustainable development.

The UNSDCF for Pakistan (2023-2027) is integral for incoming parliamentarians to understand, as it sets a precedent for aligning national development goals with global sustainability agendas. Strategic visioning in this context implies not just recognizing the framework's objectives but also integrating them into the legislative and governance processes effectively.<sup>58</sup> The Framework also outlines partners relevant to each Outcome which can help streamline the project in an effective way, with measures taken to leverage appropriate parliamentary bodies such as the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, which is a "non-partisan informal forum for women parliamentarians" and was established "to enhance women's participation and engagement in all Parliamentary affairs."<sup>59</sup>


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<sup>56</sup> Neher, K. (2022, October 14). Online Training: 11 Ways To Make It Engaging. eLearning Industry. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://elearningindustry.com/ways-to-make-online-training-more-engaging-and-actionable>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Pakistan 2023–2027." *United Nations*, 2023, UNSDCF\_2023-2027.pdf.

<sup>59</sup> Women's Parliamentary Caucus. (n.d.). "WPC overview." Retrieved from <https://wpc.org.pk/wpc-overview/>



Also important for Parliamentarians to understand is the UN 2.0 Initiative. This “Quintet of Change” aims to make the UN more agile, diverse, and impactful, enhancing its support to member states. It emphasizes the need for a forward-thinking culture that promotes agility, creativity, and adaptability, fostering a dynamic environment that values diversity, inclusion, and youth empowerment. This approach is geared towards effectively supporting global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.<sup>60</sup> Parliamentarians should be trained to appreciate the foresight and structured planning involved in documents like the UNSDCF. Understanding the strategic priorities, such as enhancing social services, empowering marginalized groups, promoting sustainable economic growth, and ensuring robust governance, is crucial.

Comprehensive training should be provided on the dynamics and importance of engaging with various stakeholders including civil society, private sector, development partners, academia, think tanks, and media. Recognizing each stakeholder’s unique contribution and perspective can enrich the policy-making process and ensure a more inclusive approach to development. Legislators need to understand how to align their work with not just national priorities but also with international frameworks like the UNSDCF. Training should include modules on interpreting policy documents, understanding Pakistan’s commitments under various international treaties, and leveraging platforms like the GSP Plus for sustainable development. The training should highlight the importance of aligning national legislation with Pakistan’s international and regional policy commitments. Understanding the nuances of these commitments can aid parliamentarians in drafting laws and policies that are globally compliant and locally relevant. Some of these commitments include the SDGs, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for regional development, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Belt and Road Initiative with China. Parliamentarians should be trained in monitoring and evaluation techniques to assess the impact of legislation and policies. This is crucial for ensuring that the strategic vision for inclusive development is not just a plan on paper but translates into tangible outcomes for the country. Overall, training incoming parliamentarians in strategic visioning for inclusive development planning is a multidimensional process. It requires a thorough understanding of strategic frameworks like the UNSDCF, an appreciation of the complex web of stakeholders involved in the development process, and the ability to align legislative and governance work with both national priorities and international commitments. Such training is pivotal for fostering informed decision-making and ensuring that development planning is both inclusive and strategically aligned with broader goals.

Gender mainstreaming is a global commitment under various UN frameworks, notably the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on achieving gender equality.<sup>61</sup> It is also emphasized in regional commitments like the Beijing Platform for Action<sup>62</sup> and treaties such as CEDAW.<sup>63</sup> These frameworks advocate for integrating gender perspectives into all areas of policy-making, including legislative work by parliamentarians, to ensure inclusive, equitable development.


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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.un.org/two-zero/en>

<sup>61</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm#:~:text=French%2C%20Russian%20%2C%20Spanish-,The%20Convention%20on%20the%20Elimination%20of%20All%20Forms%20of%20Discrimination,bill%20of%20rights%20for%20women.>



The integration of gender mainstreaming into strategic visioning for inclusive development planning is essential for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. The reviewed documents highlight the importance of aligning legislative efforts with global and regional gender commitments, such as the SDGs and CEDAW, emphasizing the need for targeted training for parliamentarians. By focusing on gender-sensitive policy-making, addressing Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE), and promoting inclusive political participation, Pakistan can fulfill its international commitments while fostering an equitable and prosperous society. Training modules for parliamentarians should therefore include comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategies to ensure that development planning is inclusive, equitable, and aligned with Pakistan's global and regional policy commitments. This synthesis underscores the pivotal role of gender mainstreaming in strategic development planning, advocating for a concerted effort to educate and guide incoming parliamentarians on implementing gender-inclusive policies.

There exists three types of legislative gaps: normative gaps, implementation gaps, and monitoring and information gaps.<sup>64</sup> Normative gaps are where there is an absence of legislation. Implementation gaps are when there is legislation, but it is not being implemented. Monitoring gaps occur when there is no enforcement mechanism, and information gaps are when there is a lack of information, and it is uncertain whether the legislation is being implemented and used or not. All three of these pieces are needed for policy making to work. We employ this framework to understand the capacity gaps of Parliamentarians and to analyze certain gaps in the needs assessment section.

Combating mis- and disinformation while avoiding censorship and a clamp down on freedom of speech is tricky to navigate. Therefore, organizations around the world recommend creative solutions that prevent the spread of false information, without infringing upon basic human rights. The European Commission's High Level Expert Group (HLEG)'s report on Fake News and Online Disinformation (2018) recommends ensuring transparency of online news by sharing data about the systems that circulate the information. It also recommends promotion of media literacy, and propagates the use of information technology to tackle disinformation.<sup>65</sup>

OECD creates a direct link between mis- and disinformation, and the weakening of democracy and national security. It recommends a collaboration between media, civil society organizations, fact-checkers, and social media platforms to support the government's efforts to curb mis- and disinformation. On the international level, it suggests collaboration between countries, such as the EU Rapid Alert System (RAS) which facilitates sharing of information regarding disinformation campaigns between EU member states, the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) for G7 member countries, and NATO's StratCom Centre of Excellence, which aims to contribute to the strategic communications capabilities of NATO allies and partners, including via research and preparations regarding threats

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<sup>64</sup> "Gap Analysis." UN Women. Accessed May 6, 2024.

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2020/12/pk-Federal-EVAW-Gap-Analysis.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> *Final report of the High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation*. (2018, March 12). Shaping Europe's digital future. Retrieved April 30, 2024, from

<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>

posed by disinformation. The organization further recommends tracking, monitoring, and analyzing the sources from where the misinformation first disseminates.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from multilateral organizations, individual countries themselves have also become proactive in countering the spread of mis- and disinformation. During the pandemic, youth organizations in Guatemala and Mexico started campaigns named “#youthagainstcovid19” and “#QuédateEnCasa” respectively to debunk myths about Covid, and to fact-check information. The Italian government initiated a similar campaign named “#bastabufale,” meaning, “stop hoaxes,” to counter disinformation. The Government of Latvia has engaged with the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence, to establish an informal network bringing together journalists, election officials, security services and government officials in order to enhance communication and co-operation in case of threats to election processes. Similarly, Canada has established a Digital Citizen Initiative which funds research and digital/civic literacy activities with an aim to better understand the sources, spread, and impact of disinformation in Canada, and how literacy activities could best inoculate citizens and build resilience.<sup>67</sup>

Media literacy initiatives become all the more necessary in such a challenging political environment. Artificial Intelligence enables the easy creation and spread of mis- and disinformation, while existing Pakistani legislation, such as the *Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016*,<sup>68</sup> has proven insufficient or been misused.<sup>69</sup> The Pakistani government should introduce more positive and effective legislation, instead of laws leading to overregulation and suppression of freedom of expression. It could do so by promoting media literacy through its laws, policies and institutions. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, e.g., introduced a national media education policy document in 2019, with the Finnish Public Libraries Act and Finland’s National Audiovisual Institute also being used to promote media literacy in the country.<sup>70</sup>

News outlets and state actors should play a more active, honest and responsible role in sharing accurate information with the Pakistani public. The Belgian Radio-Television of the French Community (RTBF),<sup>71</sup> e.g., is a public service broadcaster in Belgium which introduced a multi-year media education plan for the period 2023 to 2027.<sup>72</sup> They decipher the media for audiences “in order to develop critical thinking, individual emancipation and social cohesion.” RTBF broadcasts content that decodes the media, and the media’s treatment of current affairs, and invests in investigative, constructive and solutions-based

<sup>66</sup> OECD. (2022, November 17). Mis- and disinformation: What governments can do to reinforce democracy. *Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy*. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1f76484d-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/1f76484d-en>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan, “The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016,” 2016, [https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1470910659\\_707.pdf](https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1470910659_707.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Digital Rights Monitor, “Sources within MoIT Confirm Incidences of Misuse of PECA; Civil Society Concerns Initially Termed ‘Alarmist’ by

State Minister Anusha Rehman Start Coming True,”

<https://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/sources-within-moit-confirm-incidences-of-misuse-of-peca-civil-society-concerns-initially-termed-alarmist-by-state-minister-anusha-rehman-start-coming-true/>


<sup>70</sup> Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, Media Education Policy in Finland (Helsinki: Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019),

<https://medialukutaitosuomessa.fi/mediaeducationpolicy.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> “Cultural Life,” in Belgium, Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Belgium/Cultural-life#ref391210>

<sup>72</sup> European Broadcasting Union, “Media Literacy in Focus: RTBF’s Strategy,” October 2023,

<https://www.ebu.ch/news/2023/10/media-literacy-in-focus-rtbfs-strategy>



journalism to counter misinformation. The public broadcaster also has an application for analyzing, verifying and certifying information on RTBF's website. Their methods of creating connections with all their audiences by developing "appropriate mechanisms for relations, interaction and dialogue," and explaining their editorial choices to the public, are examples Pakistani media and state actors can learn from to rebuild trust with the public. RTBF's accountability mechanisms also include periodic evaluations of, and annual reports on, their media education plan, as well as training courses and regular meetings with staff to raise awareness on media literacy. Their editorial staff participates in ongoing training in "advanced techniques for verifying fake news and in the use of new investigative tools" and, where possible, in partnership with other media.<sup>73</sup>

Traditional media outlets such as radio broadcasters can stay relevant to the changing media landscape using examples such as RTBF's application. The application can be accessed through their website and offers "media decoding content, particularly in cases of disinformation and manipulation of information."<sup>74</sup>

Social media-driven misinformation could similarly be addressed regardless of the nature of the medium and using multiple channels of communication, when needed. "Easy-to-navigate digital literacy campaigns" are likely to gain traction among the Pakistani public due to their concern about the spread of misinformation and "appetite for corrective approaches."<sup>75</sup> Conducting needs assessments to understand the extent of digital literacy skills in communities would help policymakers and media stakeholders design media literacy solutions for the large number of social media users in Pakistan.

The technical expertise of fact-checking organizations, especially tools introduced in Pakistan such as the United Nation Development Programme's iVerify fact-checking tool,<sup>76</sup> should be leveraged to help the general public combat mis- and disinformation. Finland's experience as "Europe's most resistant nation to fake news"<sup>77</sup> can be learnt from here. While Pakistan's education system is complex<sup>78</sup> and might face considerable challenges in formulating a national curriculum like Finland, the Finnish model of "multi-platform information literacy"<sup>79</sup> could still be applied innovatively. Media education skills are incorporated as basic training in various occupational sectors in Finland, e.g., with many organizations offering supplementary training in media education and producing materials to support professional development.<sup>80</sup> Media platforms and institutions in Pakistan should

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Asfandyar Mir and Niloufer Siddiqui, "Losing to Facts: Fiction, Nationalism, Misinformation, and Conspiracy Theories," United States Institute of Peace, November 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/losing-facts-fiction-nationalism-misinformation-and-conspiracy-theories>

<sup>76</sup> Dawn.com, "UNDP-accredited fact-checking platform launched ahead of general elections," Dawn, January 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1804764>

<sup>77</sup> Jon Henley, "How Finland starts its fight against fake news in primary schools," The Guardian, January 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/28/fact-from-fiction-finlands-new-lessons-in-combating-fake-news>.

<sup>78</sup> Shahper Richter, "A system dynamics study of Pakistan's education system: Consequences for governance," Electronic Journal on Information

Systems in Developing Countries, Volume 85, Issue 1 (2019), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/isd2.12065>

<sup>79</sup> Jon Henley, "How Finland starts its fight against fake news in primary schools," The Guardian, January 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/28/fact-from-fiction-finlands-new-lessons-in-combating-fake-news>

<sup>80</sup> Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, Media Education Policy in Finland (Helsinki: Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019),

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similarly collaborate with the government, private sector employers, advocacy organizations such as Media Matters for Democracy Pakistan,<sup>81</sup> and university departments such as the Centre for Excellence in Journalism,<sup>82</sup> to implement tailored trainings for different groups of Pakistani society.

Belgium’s RTBF also collaborates with notable education players, such as the CSEM (*Conseil supérieur de l’éducation aux médias*), for public events and partners with organizations active in media education, including the Council of Europe and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. By doing so, they are able to build bridges between their activities and those carried out within teaching, education, and youth.<sup>83</sup> Examples such as these could be used by the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) as they also strategize on their digital migration policy<sup>84</sup> during the contemporary digital age.

Another useful example is that of Canada’s Centre for Digital Media Literacy, MediaSmarts, which organizes a Media Literacy Week annually to promote digital media literacy across Canada, with the help of schools, libraries, museums, and community groups.<sup>85</sup> The collaborative nature of this initiative mobilizes a wide range of stakeholders from education, government, and the media industry and should be used similarly in Pakistan. Governmental support is also seen through the Canadian Heritage’s Digital Citizen Contribution Program which provided \$225,000 to support the Media Literacy Week in the years 2020, 2021, and 2022.<sup>86</sup> The importance of media literacy education in Pakistan could also be exemplified through funding for research- and citizen-focused activities that support democracy, social cohesion in the digital world and efforts to counter online disinformation.<sup>87</sup> However, the allocation of government budgets could pose a significant challenge and funding would likely need to be secured through the help of projects by external actors.

Inclusive media literacy initiatives should focus on “countering politically powerful misinformation beliefs” and mitigating “damaging nationalist narratives.”<sup>88</sup> This can only be done through positively highlighting the highly diversified composition of the country and promoting peaceful coexistence among the many communities living there. Collaborating with civil society organizations - such as those working on the rights of religious and gender minorities and with individuals with disabilities - can prove crucial to understand the needs

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<https://medialukutaitosuomessa.fi/mediaeducationpolicy.pdf>

<sup>81</sup> Media Matters for Pakistan, “The Work,” <https://mediamatters.pk/the-work/>

<sup>82</sup> Centre for Excellence in Journalism at IBA, “Who We Are,” <https://cej.iba.edu.pk/who-we-are.php>

<sup>83</sup> European Broadcasting Union, “Media Literacy in Focus: RTBF’s Strategy,” October 2023, <https://www.ebu.ch/news/2023/10/media-literacy-in-focus-rtbfs-strategy>

<sup>84</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Sheikh, Ali Ab Ul Hassan, Muhammad Tariq, and Muhammad Zia, “Radio Pakistan in the Digital Age,” *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 11, no. 02 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2023.1102.0401>

<sup>85</sup> MediaSmarts, “About Media Literacy Week,” MediaSmarts, <https://mediasmarts.ca/media-literacy-week#about>

<sup>86</sup> Government of Canada, “Supporting Media Literacy to Stop the Spread of Online Disinformation,” October 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2020/10/supporting-media-literacy-to-stop-the-spread-of-online-disinformation.html>

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

<sup>88</sup> Asfandiyar Mir and Niloufer Siddiqui, “Losing to Facts: Fiction, Nationalism, Misinformation, and Conspiracy Theories,” United States Institute of Peace, November 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/losing-facts-fiction-nationalism-misinformation-and-conspiracy-theories>.

of various communities present in the country. Audiopedia<sup>89</sup> is a platform providing accessible audio content to empower women and marginalized communities worldwide by providing free, easy-to-access educational materials in multiple languages including Urdu.<sup>90</sup> Initiatives such as these could be adapted to share information for combating mis- and disinformation to reach vulnerable communities.

The *Medienbildung Jetzt!* networking initiative in Austria could be used as a model as it unites institutions and organizations “from the school sector, as well as the educational sector out of school (e.g. street work, youth centers etc)”<sup>91</sup> and organizes networking meetings and BarCamps (“unconferences” or “open” conferences with no keynote speaker or predefined content to discuss.)<sup>92</sup> These could provide safe platforms for diverse communities to share their experiences and concerns.

RTBF also ensures that it meets the needs of its diverse audiences and can be learnt from as it disseminates media education content for all their audiences, regardless of age or level of education or information.<sup>93</sup> Enable the public to confidently differentiate between mis- and disinformation versus accurate information about trustworthy and genuine international actors through holistic media literacy initiatives. Facilitate open communication about such issues between states and encourage discussions which can help alleviate fears within the Pakistani public. Share positive examples and highlight mis/disinformation against international actors such as UN agencies that may be trying to do actual positive work for the country.

## Recommendations

Based on our analysis and findings, the team has compiled the following recommendations for the UN agencies:

- 1. Pilot Program Expansion:** There is both need and demand for additional training for parliamentarians, and this program should be expanded. The team recommends scaling up the pilot program into a comprehensive and sustainable initiative that addresses a broader spectrum of parliamentary needs.
- 2. Topic Selection:** The team recommends conducting a comprehensive needs assessment to identify specific gaps and areas of interest among incoming parliamentarians. Future topics should align with the evolving needs of

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<sup>89</sup> Audiopedia - Accessible Knowledge for All Women, Everywhere. (n.d.) *Unlocking Knowledge for Everyone, Everywhere*. [https://www.audiopedia.org/Main\\_Page](https://www.audiopedia.org/Main_Page)

<sup>90</sup> [https://www.audiopedia.org/Category:Playlists\\_%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88](https://www.audiopedia.org/Category:Playlists_%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88)

<sup>91</sup> European Audiovisual Observatory, Mapping of Media Literacy Practices and Actions in EU-28 (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016), <https://rm.coe.int/1680783500>

<sup>92</sup> “Barcamp: What is it actually and what is the point?,” MoreThanDigital, <https://morethandigital.info/en/barcamp-what-is-it-actually-and-what-is-the-point/>

<sup>93</sup> European Broadcasting Union, “Media Literacy in Focus: RTBF’s Strategy,” October 2023, <https://www.ebu.ch/news/2023/10/media-literacy-in-focus-rtbfs-strategy>



parliamentarians, such as data literacy training, advanced sessions on gender-inclusive budgeting, and modules addressing emerging issues like climate change adaptation.

- 3. Incentives:** There is significant resistance from parliamentarians to training, and the team recommends that the UN create incentives for parliamentarians to engage with the training. One potential incentive is to offer a hybrid training model which creates press opportunities and a chance for parliamentarians to interact with one another. Another is creating a UN certificate that is received upon completion that can be posted online or added to their credentials.
- 4. Sustained and Continuous Engagement:** The team recommends maintaining regular communication and ongoing support for parliamentarians beyond initial training. This can aid in sustaining engagement for other training as well as enable parliamentarians to apply the skills developed in the training.
- 5. Formalize Collaboration:** The team recommends establishing an MOU or DOI between UN Pakistan and PIPS to formalize this collaboration.
- 6. Stakeholder Coordination:** The team recommends strengthened coordination with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and academia, to comprehensively address parliamentarians' needs. This can be accomplished through regular meetings to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration.

## Conclusion

The UN in collaboration with PIPS has designed a project to enhance Pakistani parliamentarians' capacity for inclusive policy making and legislation. Building parliamentarian's capacity to develop and uphold inclusive policy making is necessary for the smooth functioning of government and democracy in Pakistan.

The SIPA team has conducted rigorous research on the topics and the needs for inclusive policy making in Pakistan. This report and the accompanying training module aim to contribute by increasing parliamentarian's capacity for inclusive policy making and making recommendations for the UN on furthering their program.

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