

Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung
Center for Development Research
Universität Bonn



ZEF Bonn

**Official Structures in the Service of Research
and Information in the Egyptian Parliament**

Karim El Sayed Ahmed Abdel Razek, Researcher at the People's Assembly, MA in
Political Science

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. WHAT ARE THE OFFICIAL STRUCTURES OF INFORMATION SERVICE IN PARLIAMENT?.....	4
3. OFFICIAL PEOPLE’S ASSEMBLY STRUCTURES IN THE AREA OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION:.....	7
3.1 Sector of Speaker of Assembly’s Affairs	7
3.1.1. <i>Manager of the Speaker’s office:</i>	7
3.1.2. <i>Parliamentary Research Center</i>	8
3.1.3. <i>Department of Press and Media:</i>	10
3.1.4. <i>Members’ Affairs Sector</i>	11
3.1.5. <i>Complaints and Popular Organizations Sector</i>	11
3.2. Departments affiliated to the General Secretary.....	11
3.2.1 <i>Technical office of the Secretary General</i>	11
3.2.2. <i>Legal Affairs and Investigations Sector</i>	12
3.2.3 <i>Information Center</i>	12
3.2.4 <i>Conferences’ Department</i>	13
3.2.5 <i>General Department for International Communications</i>	14
3.2.6 <i>General Department for Research</i>	15
3.2.7 <i>People’s Assembly Bulletin</i>	16
3.2.8 <i>Training Department</i>	16
3.3 Secretariat of Committees’ Affairs	17
3.4 Parliamentary library	19
4. RECOMMENDATIONS	21
4.1 In the area of training:	21
4.2 In the Area of Research and Analysis	23
4.3 In the Area of Information Technology (the library)	23
4.4 In the Area of Institutional Development.....	24
4.5 Risks of Reforming the Information and Knowledge Base of Parliament	24

1. INTRODUCTION

Parliament is a vital feature of the democratic society. It is associated with the freedom and integrity of elections, freedom of expression and political participation. Parliament is also an embodiment of the values of the supremacy of the public, freedom and equality. When compared to other institutions, Parliament should be more open and accessible to the public, through the transparency and openness of its discussions and debates.

Two perspectives can be used to view Parliament. The first is as a representative institution where people express their views, demands and visions. The second view of parliament is as the main legislative authority or the institution with the main jurisdiction in the legislative process.

Several factors have had recent impact on enhancing the role of Parliament. These include: the increasing interrelatedness of political, economic and social aspects of life, the rise of globalization, the growing absence of a link between the inside and the outside world, the fact that the world is increasingly becoming a small village, and finally the rising role of Parliament and its new tasks and jurisdictions. All these factors have made it technically difficult for Parliament to undertake all its legislative and control responsibilities, making it imperative upon Parliament to try to cope with the new challenges i.e. develop and enhance its institutional capabilities to serve its members, consequently consolidating its role in society and helping create a balance between powers particularly the legislative and executive powers.

No doubt modern information systems are now required to ensure the efficient performance of institutions in general and legislative institutions in particular. However, it is not easy for Parliament and its MPs to obtain data needed to address various issues. At the present time, Parliaments require technically-complex and large bodies to offer such services and information. This in turn explains the vital and indispensable role of the Assembly's General Secretariat in designing and implementing the Parliament's policy and plan of work.

In recent years the Egyptian Parliament has witnessed important developments in the area of information and research. The Egyptian Parliament offers technical and

administrative assistance to its members through different organs, with the main objective of empowering MPs to carry out their legislative and control tasks and in this study an attempt is made to describe and evaluate the official institutional structures that offer information and research services in Parliament. We mean by ‘official structures’ the People’s Assembly’s Technical Secretariat.

2. WHAT ARE THE OFFICIAL STRUCTURES OF INFORMATION SERVICE IN PARLIAMENT?

Official structures of information service in the People’s Assembly are departments and bodies that are authorized by Parliament to offer MPs with data, to classify data and assist MPs with information-related tasks (e.g. research). These bodies are under the jurisdiction of the General Secretariat and function in accordance with Parliament’s internal laws and regulations¹. Official structures are binding and available to all members without distinction; they are also free of charge. Parallel structures, on the other hand, are not binding. No one intervenes in determining the rights and duties of individuals in charge of them and in most cases they cost money and require some efforts on the part of MPs to have good access to them.

According to the internal regulations of the People’s Assembly, the Speaker supervises the Assembly’s General Secretariat and undertakes all administrative, financial and technical functions (internal regulations, Article 402). Based on the suggestion of its office, the Assembly proposes regulations for personnel affairs that have the force of law. In cases where there are no regulations, other laws and statutes that apply to state civil servants apply to the Assembly’s employees (Article 403).

The Speaker of the Assembly enjoys the powers granted to ministers and the prime minister or the minister in charge of financial affairs as referred to in laws and regulations. The Speaker may delegate some of his financial and administrative tasks to either of his two deputies.

¹ These internal regulations determine the jurisdiction of the Assembly’s General Secretariat in addition to the jurisdictions and powers of the office of the Speaker of the Assembly, who is generally responsible for the activities of Parliament. The General Secretariat of the People’s Assembly includes different departments; as a single unit, it is affiliated to the Assembly Speaker.

The Secretary General of the Assembly, on the other hand, is chosen according to Article 406 of the regulations. He is appointed by a decision of the Assembly's Bureau based on the nomination of the Speaker of the Assembly. The Secretary General attends the sessions of the Assembly and supervises all General Secretariat departments. He is responsible for the smooth running of the Assembly activities².

The Peoples' Assembly personnel regulations determine the rules of appointment and promotion. Vacant positions are announced together with job descriptions and requirements. The Assembly's Bureau determines the rules for each position and positions that require examinations and others that don't. Appointment to the senior administrative positions is done by decree of the Speaker of the Assembly, while other less senior positions are filled by decree of the Speaker following the approval of the personnel committee.

Taking into account that employees have to fulfill the requirements and be able to meet the specifications of the higher position they wish to fill, they are promoted from one category to the next. Promotions from the third category and above take place by selection guided by the principle of sufficiency. Promotion to other positions is done by selection or seniority depending on the regulations of the Assembly's Bureau.

With regard to the financial regulations for employees of the Assembly's General Secretariat, employees receive the amount of money fixed for their particular employment category and provided for by the law of state civil servants. Employees receive a regular bonus that does not exceed the last amount of wage fixed at the beginning of the new year. Employees also receive allowances and financial incentives.

² According to the Assembly's regulations, the tasks of the General Secretary can be summarized as follows: a) Supervising, following up and coordinating the activities of Parliament and its departments; b) Supervising all correspondence from the Assembly after their completion by the authorized bodies in the Assembly and ensuring their expeditious dispatch; c) Attending parliamentary sessions, supervising the editing of proceedings and meeting the requests of the Speaker during the sessions; d) Drafting the agenda for the Assembly's sessions and ensuring their distribution to members before the meeting time; e) Participating in conferences and seminars and presenting reports on activities and events to the Speaker; f) Representing the Assembly's General Secretariat to Arab, regional and international general secretariats associations; g) working jointly with directors of the Assembly's departments to enhance the efficiency of employees and promote their performance and their knowledge; h) Regularly reviewing the performance of the Assembly's staff in cooperation with the committees' secretaries; i) Supervising the activities of the General Secretariat of the international parliamentary department and assuming responsibility before the head of the department.

In addition to all the above, they have independent social security schemes for aging and sickness through the special fund for medical services and social welfare for Assembly's employees.

According to the internal regulations of the People's Assembly, the Assembly should seek to attract sufficient expertise to offer information and research services to its members. The Assembly provides this information to assist its MPs in performing their tasks. These research talents are usually selected through competition tests to choose the best and most qualified elements³.

The People's Assembly applies principles of centralization to regulate the work of researchers and technical professionals who assist MPs. The large General Secretariat acts as the central pool of resources for MPs to obtain required information. The Assembly does not provide MPs with personal assistants to work for them in the Assembly or in their electoral constituency. This is unlike the decentralized way of work by which MPs are provided with financial and human resources for their direct use. Such resources would work for MPs in their own offices in Parliament or in the electoral constituency. In such decentralized contexts, there is usually no need for a central or large General Secretariat and its role is minimized to act as a coordinator or mediator⁴. Thematic committees in the two Houses are distributed between the majority and minority, with the majority enjoying two thirds of the resources and the minority the remaining one third. The assisting team in the committees helps coordinate and serve them. Both majority and minority members receive equal treatment.

It is important to view this picture from legal and realistic perspectives. Legally, the General Secretariat comprises a number of technical, administrative and service units which together form internal structures or sectors such as the Committees' Sector

³ This greatly affects the way the Assembly works. Since the end of the 90's the General Secretariat organized two competitions only to recruit researchers to work at the People's Assembly. Fifty were chosen. In the past, top graduates of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science and the Faculty of Law used to be recruited. However, much nepotism is exercised and personal connections manipulated to hire researchers at the Assembly at the present time.

⁴ For example, in the US Congress each Congressman/woman has a budget and a plan to form his/her own office, which usually includes 25 persons. Congressmen select researchers and administrators to work for them. Senators, on the other hand, have larger budgets and their assisting teams are also larger and range between 40 and 50 individuals.

(supervising the technical work of committees, the performance of researchers and their distribution over the different committees), the Information Sector (which includes the information center and the library) the Financial and Administrative Sector (personnel, support services, financial department) in addition to departments that are directly affiliated to the Speaker (such as the Parliamentary Research Center) or independent departments (Assembly police, the office of the minister of state for People's Assembly Affairs, Central Audit office and military facilities). From a realistic point of view, however, this large technical and administrative body (more than 1200 individuals) does not fulfill the needs of MPs of information and analyses. Often members have to approach sources outside Parliament to obtain data and information such as the press, information centers, syndicates, NGOs, research centers and international reports. Some well-to-do MPs, particularly businessmen have also established private technical offices.

3. OFFICIAL PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY STRUCTURES IN THE AREA OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION:

In the next section we shall review the official structures that offer research and information services and technical assistance to MPs. This will be accompanied by a critical analysis of the quality of performance and suggestions for its development.

3.1 Sector of Speaker of Assembly's Affairs

3.1.1. Manager of the Speaker's office:

The office comprises three individuals in addition to the manager, and is responsible for organizing the office affairs i.e. appointments, meetings, interviews and receiving foreign delegations. This office does not offer any information but is concerned with the administrative affairs of the Speaker.

Also affiliated to the Speaker's office are three different departments. The first is responsible for the Speaker's information services i.e. information bureau, and provides the bulk of information to the Speaker on visits to other Parliaments and countries. It also prepares files for the Speaker's participation in events on the Arab and international levels, as well as a press archive. The second department is responsible for the

technological support to the Speaker i.e. it acts as a center for electronic information and data bases for MPs, providing legislative and comparative data. The third department takes care of petitions and requests and service to the electoral constituency.

3.1.2. Parliamentary Research Center

This is a new addition to the Assembly that provides parliamentary information and research. Eighteen researchers work in the center representing different specializations, but dominated mainly by the disciplines of economics and law. Some of the staff members have MA and Ph.D. degrees.

The Center which was established in 1996 and is directly affiliated to the Speaker, provides parliamentary research studies that help MPs adopt correct attitudes and visions in the analysis of public and legislative policies. They present summaries and interpretations in a number of specialized economic and social areas as well as in new domains such as IT and communications. They also provide studies on public attitude towards certain issues which help MPs interact with public opinion in a proper way.

Given the recent technological and scientific developments, and the increasing use of information technology in the management of Parliaments, Parliamentary research shifted away from macro research services, to simplified services that rely on analysis and information in the form of graphs, charts and statistics that explain the relevant issues without going into too much detail.

The Center was set up to achieve the following objectives:

1. Encourage innovation and creativity, enhance expertise and independent opinion in undertaking research.
2. The formation of work teams and the provision of continuous training and guidance.
3. The supply of reports and research studies to MPs, committees and competent organs in the Assembly.
4. Consolidate the concept of “research service” and provide larger space for innovation and quality research work. This implies synchronizing the center’s system of work with parliamentary needs.

5. Measure achievements through laying efficiency criteria, performance indicators, and measurement of performance satisfaction in order to rationalize the system of work and the center's research agenda.
6. Ensure continuity i.e. make sure that the research service is demanded by and useful to MPs and is an integral part of the General Secretariat.

The above review indicates that certain factors influence the performance of the Center for Parliamentary research, that need to be taken into account when offering services. These include:

- Offer objective analyses without reflecting any political bias or party affiliations
- Take into account differences and similarities between MPs who represent different political and party trends; MPs are not a homogenous group in terms of their educational and professional backgrounds.
- Time is an important element in offering services which have to take into account the flow of information and data, their interrelatedness, speed, accuracy, continuous follow up of events and impact on decision making.
- Provide comprehensive and integrated data bases that take into account new technologies and their constant update.

Suggestions to make sure that the Center for Parliamentary Research plays an effective role:

- Form work teams of experts from among independent individuals who are not affiliated to any particular political trends or policies, including academics and activists, and determine the view of NGOs and civil society organizations.
- Organize researchers' work plan according to needs and apply the system of seconding or temporary and part-time work assignments in research projects of interest to Parliament.
- Link the Center's research agenda to the Parliament's agenda as a whole. This should also match the needs of MPs of different research services. (A questionnaire should be administered to identify the needs of MPs of research studies and Parliamentary data)

- Adopt a comparative perspective towards Parliamentary research in order to illuminate other expertise and models in the area under study. This should be done chronologically i.e. comparison with previous Egyptian experiences, and thematically i.e. with other international and Arab experiences on the same issues.

3.1.3. Department of Press and Media:

It includes 20 employees representing different educational backgrounds, including mass communications and humanities. Some of them are informal journalists since regulations prevent Assembly staff members from combining two jobs.

The department undertakes a number of activities including:

- Providing press reports and media coverage – particularly press coverage – to the public on the activities and sessions of the Assembly, in addition to the meetings of the committees, the Speaker and the Assembly's organs
- Documenting the Assembly's press coverage in the form of files or press reports; documenting Assembly's activities and assisting in the production of Assembly's monthly magazine.
- Coordinating the work of journalists and Parliamentary reporters accredited in the Assembly and offering them assistance (communications, reports, documents)
- Providing other Assembly units such as the library, the departments of research and conferences and the information center with press reports and information, the Assembly's bulletin and magazine.
- Strengthening the relationship between the People's Assembly and the different press institutions and helping them with press materials.

Thus, the services of the department are not addressed directly to MPs. However, the department acts as the Assembly's external and media façade or the liaison between the Assembly and the media and press. It would however be unusual for MPs to use the services of this department in their Parliamentary debates.

3.1.4. Members' Affairs Sector

It includes the general department of MPs affairs and is internally divided into MPs requests in a) service ministries and b) production and sovereign ministries. Thirty five employees work in this department and are concerned with MPs personal or public service requests for their electoral constituency or services that are local in their nature. This department does not offer research and information services to members but help them fulfill their needs from different ministries i.e. the department regulated the relationship between the Assembly and the government.

3.1.5. Complaints and Popular Organizations Sector

This sector includes two departments, which employ more than 25 individuals in administrative work, one for complaints and the other for popular organizations. It represents the liaison between Parliament and public opinion. It receives complaints and petitions from the public but does not offer information or studies to MPs. The department is subdivided into four offices representing the political parties' parliamentary bodies in the People's Assembly. They represent the NDP, the Wafd Party, the Progressive Unionist party, the Nasserite Party in addition to independent individuals who are not affiliated to any political parties.

3.2. Departments affiliated to the General Secretary

The structure affiliated to the Secretary General comprises three main sectors in addition to the departments of research, conferences and international communications.

3.2.1 Technical office of the Secretary General

It comprises 30 researchers, administrators and clerks who offer technical assistance to the Secretary General in the following areas: a) Draft the agenda of the Parliament's sessions; b) Register and classify MPs petitions; c) Prepare a file for the speaker for each session. The file contains the MPs statements, their requests and the main amendments suggested for discussion; d) Assist in the activities of the Egyptian Parliamentary department participating in international conferences and fora.

The needs of the General Secretary's technical office:

- Personal computers so that each researcher would have his/her own computer; provide constant training for members of the general secretary's technical bureau particularly researchers.
- Refrain from administrative and logistic matters and pay more attention to technical issues such as the organization of sessions and presentations of MPs
- Provide employees with specialized training in some technical areas, to help them undertake their tasks.

3.2.2. Legal Affairs and Investigations Sector

It comprises 15 legal specialists, all graduates of the faculty of law and is concerned with investigations with Assembly's employees. It has nothing to do with services, information or studies to MPs

3.2.3 Information Center

Information and research are essential for the Assembly. They facilitate its technical, administrative and financial work, and offer services and facilities that enable MPs to do their required tasks. Not only does the information center offer services and information to members, but it also offers technological and training assistance to staff members and sometimes to the MPs themselves. It is primarily responsible for the Assembly's website, and assists researchers in the different departments - through the Assembly's internal network - to exchange data and information between the different departments and committees.

The main services the Center offers are:

- Provide personal computers to researchers in the different committees and departments
- Provide legislative data bases, classify laws and update them
- Assist in the preparation of data for the financial and administrative departments
- Store documents on CDs

- Arrange and classify the Assembly’s library electronically
- Design the Assembly’s website, update data, make it available in different languages and link up the website with other parliamentary sites.

Challenges facing the information center:

- Center does not provide comparative statistics and studies on different issues
- Center does not provide comparative legal studies
- Center does not regularly update its data base. Minutes and laws approved by the Assembly are made available only after a long time
- Serious gap in the English and French websites
- Center does not issue the Assembly’s publications (like the analytical and documentary reports on the Assembly’s activities) during the parliamentary session itself nor does it publish the studies prepared by the General Research Department. It does not have a program to invite expert speakers nor does it provide training opportunities abroad like the Center of Parliamentary Research.

3.2.4 Conferences’ Department

It comprises 15 researchers of different specializations (e.g. economics and political science). Among its main functions are technical arrangements and preparations for the participation of Egyptian Parliamentary delegations in conferences and meetings held by international and regional organizations in which the People’s Assembly is member⁵. The Conferences’ Department also documents the decisions of meetings, follows up their implementation and prepares the technical report of the activities of the Egyptian Parliamentary section within the period of one year. Finally, it prepares memoranda and bills of decrees on behalf of the department to be presented to meetings referred to above. It also prepares studies derived from the constitutional information bulletin issued by the International Parliamentary Union.

⁵ These include the International Parliamentary Union, Arab Parliamentary Union, the African Parliamentary Union, and the International Francophone Parliamentary Association.

The General Department of Parliamentary Conferences plays an important role in consolidating and activating the role of the Egyptian parliamentary department in practicing diplomacy as follows:

- The department is considered the technical secretariat of the People's Assembly parliamentary department. It is in charge of technical and scientific preparations to ensure the high quality of Egyptian parliamentary division's participation in parliamentary conferences, both regional and international;
- The department prepares files that include full information on the country where the conference is taking place (regionally and internationally) or that the delegation is visiting, particularly information related to foreign policy issues, the most prominent parliamentary figures in the host country and the position of its legislative council;
- The department receives correspondence and documents from the International Parliamentary Union and other parliamentary organizations and prepares the necessary correspondence to be presented to the General Secretary for decisions;
- It makes arrangements for the meetings of the parliamentary divisions, documents what takes place in the meetings and the decisions reached, and takes the necessary measures to implement decisions and follow up their execution;
- It prepares reports for the annual follow up of the activities of the Egyptian Parliamentary Division on parliamentary organizations and forwards them to the secretariat of the competent union or organization;
- It prepares suggestions on bilateral issues which may be addressed by the talks between representatives of the Egyptian division and representatives of other parliamentary divisions within the framework of visits to other parliaments or visits from other parliaments.

3.2.5 General Department for International Communications

This department comprises 10 women between 45 and 55 years of age. The department prepares memoranda on countries whose parliament MPs will visit. This includes an

analysis of their political regime and parliamentary system in addition to their foreign policy and external orientations, position towards international issues and finally an analysis of bilateral relations (relations with Egypt) and potentials of their promotion in the future.

3.2.6 General Department for Research

The Egyptian Parliament witnessed major developments in the area of updating its information and research organs. Most important among these developments is the establishment of the Department of Research Services. The department prepares files on the pivotal issues of concern to MPs and its activities are linked to those of the committees and the service offered by researchers. The department comprises 30 researchers from different specializations, but mainly graduates of the faculty of economics and political science. It also includes graduates of law, arts, commerce and agronomy.

The department serves as the technical secretariat of the special committee that responds to the government statement and is headed by one of the Assembly's two deputy speakers. The department prepares analytical and comparative studies and briefs based on the scientific approach which helps MPs undertake their tasks and take a rational decision on various issues. It also provides the special committee formed to respond to the statement of the Prime Minister on the cabinet activities, with analytical papers and evaluations of public policies. It undertakes comparative study of the contents of the cabinet program and the report of the committee in response, in addition to the final analysis of the discussions of the responding committee. Finally, it prepares an analytical report on the performance of the Assembly in each session supplemented by statistical data, graphs and illustrations. The report is usually divided into a narrative and an analytical section.

Suggestions to enhance the research department

- Provide a sufficient number of computers for all department employees and link them to the internet;
- Continue to organize training rounds particularly outside parliament to encourage exposure to the outside world;

- Recruit a number of researchers to assist in providing services such as data and information to MPs and members of the General Secretariat;
- Facilitate access to international literature and documents which help researchers carry out their work in preparing the report of the committee that responds to the government statement.

3.2.7 People's Assembly Bulletin

The General Secretariat introduced a major development in the sources of information in Parliament, namely the People's Assembly Bulletin which includes reports on the activities of the Assembly and members affairs on a bi-weekly basis. It also allows members to learn about the important sentences passed by the constitutional court particularly on the constitutionality and conflict of laws. It is therefore important to continue to invest in the bulletin. This will entail more work on publishing policy, editorial staff, various columns, strategy to determine goals and the required material and human facilities to achieve goals.

The bulletin includes a comprehensive review of parliamentary activities in the legislative, control, financial and political areas, in addition to parliamentary diplomatic practice in all occasions. It also follows up the activities of the Speaker, the different organs of the Assembly, and the activities and reports of the Assembly's permanent thematic committees and other special committees. It documents parliamentary precedents, follows up responses to ministers on petitions and inquiries presented by MPs and monitors the responses of ministers to public demands.

3.2.8 Training Department

The Egyptian Parliament is characterized by the presence of a special department for training which seeks to promote the standard of employees in the Assembly's General Secretariat. Departments also offer training rounds for assembly staff particularly in the area of information technology.

There are two types of training

1. Self managed training: This is offered by the department and presents an orientation to the activities of the Assembly, the preparation of parliamentary research and reports, the reports of the committees as well as some specialized training rounds in languages, particularly the Arabic language. To hire new employees in the General Secretariat of the Assembly, personnel regulations require that they pass at least two training rounds.

2. Out-sourcing training both inside and outside the Assembly: Training may be organized inside the Assembly, like in cooperation with different departments or committees to perform tasks, or it may be organized outside the Assembly. In the latter case, it could be completely outsourced to the Faculty of Economics and Political Science or the Faculty of Arts' department of libraries, or be jointly organized between two entities. In case of joint organization in training, these entities may be international. This takes place through joint cooperation between that entity and the Assembly's training department, for example, training rounds with the Red Cross or the Red Crescent in the area of human rights, and international human rights. The international agency may organize travel abroad or undertake training inside Parliament. A prominent example is the training organized by the US Congress Research Entity (CRS) for Assembly employees who traveled to the US and received research training there. This was followed by the same kind of training but in the Parliament.

3.3 Secretariat of Committees' Affairs

The Assembly's thematic committees are its 'main kitchen'. The Assembly has 18 permanent thematic committees in addition to the general, special and joint committees. They act as the Assembly's guide in undertaking activities. The committees discuss different legislation and agreements and prepare reports that are presented before the Assembly. They also discuss issues referred to them by the Assembly and pay field visits. They may also be assigned some fact finding tasks. In brief, the committees undertake all the Assembly's activities but they are more accurate and specialized, since MPs join the committees based on their qualifications, specialization and areas of interest.

Researchers shoulder the main responsibility in the thematic committees. They are carefully selected by the Assembly so they can be good support to the MPs. Committees have a number of researchers headed by the Committee's secretary, in addition to his assistant secretary, administrators and support staff, all in charge of the smooth running of committees' activities. Each committee comprises 25 researchers, and assisting administrators and clerks. Committees also invite specialists and experts to carry out tasks and assignments.

Information and communications technology play an important role in facilitating the work of the committees. Permanent committees have been supplied by personal computers and link to the worldwide web. A group of training programs are also put in place to enable committee members to use the technology and manipulate it for their goals.

Needs of thematic committee employees:

- Organize training programs with emphasis on languages, particularly Arabic;
- Provide committees with computers (one per researcher);
- Increase incentives to researchers to encourage competition i.e. through training rounds and exchanges with other countries;
- Provide committees with specialists in the different areas, particularly legal staff.

Other secretariats help expedite procedures for the general sessions and the meetings of the committees. The secretariat for sessions' affairs consists of the following two sectors:

1. Sector for preparing minutes of sessions: This sector supervises drafting the minutes of the general sessions from a technical point of view to ensure their conformity to the regulations, consistency and correctness from a linguistic point of view. Internal regulations stipulate that minutes of the sessions be circulated to MPs for review, ratification and publication in the official gazette. No request may be made to amend the minutes after they have been ratified.

2. Sector of sessions' services: It prepares the draft agenda for the Assembly's sessions to present to the Assembly's Bureau; it monitors all Assembly's decrees and reports and supervises the shorthand activities⁶. It is worth mentioning that all the previous departments are not in charge of information and studies. They mainly assist the bodies in charge of parliamentary research and studies.

3.4 Parliamentary library

This is the library that serves MPs, employees of the General Secretariat in addition to individuals concerned with parliamentary life. It helps them accomplish the following:

- Issue legislation
- Identify similar parliamentary environments and benefit from their experiences
- Obtain information on different issues on local and international levels

In addition to all the above, the library produces up to date information on its new services. Its main function is to help produce and make available information to MPs in

⁶ The sector of sessions' services comprises the following departments:

- General department for agendas whose function is to receive and collate all issues that will be listed in the Assembly's agenda.
- General department for execution of decisions whose job is to monitor bills and suggestions to draft laws, decrees, and presidential decrees to enforce international conventions based on the sessions' agenda. It takes the necessary measures to refer them to the specialized committees according to the decisions of the Assembly in this connection.
- General department for statistics and table of contents which prepares the table of contents for each set of minutes based on the agenda, and the decisions taken on the different issues presented to the Assembly for discussion. It prepares an alphabetical and a topical table of contents for the minutes of each session in addition to providing statistics on the activities of the Assembly in each session
- General department of review which receives the minutes of the sessions according to their numbers, supervises the publication and proofreading of minutes, and reviews and corrects information and publications issued by the Assembly.
- General department of shorthand which is in charge of all the shorthand- related activities in the sessions of the Assembly and its relevant organs

order to enhance their parliamentary activities, make available their expertise and enable to them to learn about the experiences of other nations.

The People' Assembly library comprises a number of units as follows:

- Publications sector: It contains a variety of publications and periodicals which are mainly legal and political, in addition to publications produced by international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the League of Arab States.
- Press archive: The library chronologically and thematically collates newspapers clippings and places them in files that cover the most important local and international topics on the scene.
- Internet services: In line with the technical and technological developments and rich flow of information, the library is supplied with computers and linked to the main network of the Assembly. Work is currently underway in an internal network that links all the departments of the information sector.
- Services and research sector: The library added a new unit for research services that prepares information files on a number of topics and important issues. These are often produced in the form of summaries and abstracts, reports and background and analytical papers.
- Microfilm unit: This is the unit that documents, preserves and retrieves library materials as well as all other important minutes of Parliament.
- Audio visual unit: This unit provides audio-visual services of library possessions.
- Photocopying and printing services: This unit offers printing and photocopying services to researchers in the Assembly's, General Secretariat and MPs to help them prepare research studies, reports and files.

It is important to mention here that the role of library should not be limited to collating and preparing books and studies; it should also be able to deduce results from available data bases.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 In the area of training:

Training witnessed major developments in terms of numbers and quality. This opens the door for more opportunities to upgrade and diversity staff skills. Training has covered the areas of politics, economics, law, government and public finance as well as organizational behavior and leadership in addition to the computer, internet, English language skills, and specialized programs for library staff. All these programs have been offered over many hours of training by a distinguished group of experts, academics and practitioners.

The infrastructure witnessed major developments in the area of information technology, computers and electronic networks, in addition to interaction with advanced foreign expertise in different areas, which reinforces the ability of the Assembly to automate and update its operation systems.

Some areas require more urgent attention. These are:

Training strategy to open the door to the upper and middle level leaders to interact with foreign expertise, on one hand, and continue to modernize management and operation systems on the other, in addition to providing on- the- job (on site) training, that is more applied in nature and seeks to find solutions for actual problems that employees face in their daily life; diversify the expertise that undertakes training and make use of experts with long years of experience in parliamentary training. Finally, there is a need to balance theoretical and practical training. This would require the availability of equipment such as computers.

It is important to intensify communications with MPs in order to determine the extent of their knowledge and appreciation of the development of legislative information systems, on one hand, and identify their suggestions and needs on the other. It is also important to encourage interaction with other legislative systems in the West (USA, France, UK etc..) and developing countries which have made advances in this regard such as India, and the Asian Tigers. Cooperation should address the challenges facing different

parliaments in coping with economic developments that are shifting towards free markets and global blocs.

This all means:

- Synchronize work requirements i.e. timing and quality of trainees, with areas of training programs;
- Train in light of an accumulative training plan and components that complement each other; interim evaluation of trainees must be undertaken;
- Train with maximum use of information technology;
- Train trainers.

Incentive of MPs

But all of the above suggestions would not have an impact if the MPs are not convinced of the usefulness of knowledge. To increase their incentives, the following need to be enhanced:

- Provide them with opportunities for comparative research with other legislative systems
- Encourage the trend to maximize the use of legislative information systems inside Parliament
- Encourage research bodies to address issues of priority among MPs, present them in a comparative fashion and make use of public opinion polls
- Provide appropriate training opportunities for MPs and allow them to learn from successful parliamentary experiences in Arab and international Parliaments.
- Encourage and motivate competition between members in parliamentary partnerships particularly in the area of legislation and control, and monitoring the statistics of MPs participation in different parliamentary discussions and debates.

4.2 In the Area of Research and Analysis

- Enhance the analytical ability of researchers in the methodological and technical areas, focusing on other expertise and comparative studies.
- Develop and update reports and research services in Parliament and supply the necessary technical equipment (computers, photocopying machines, enhance language and translation abilities) particularly in the political and legislative areas.
- Emphasize practical training using the most up to date parliamentary and political research and tools of analysis, and ensure steady and constant parliamentary modernization and update.
- Provide opportunities for interaction between researchers (in the technical office of the General Secretary, the committees, the information center, the department of research, the center for parliamentary research, the department of research services, the department of conferences and the library). Researchers should be exposed to local and international expertise through workshops, seminars and study groups both inside and outside Parliament, particularly with Arab and other regional and international Parliaments.
- Pay more attention to the new research units i.e. the department of research services and the center for parliamentary research.

4.3 In the Area of Information Technology (the library)

- Enhance library's administrative and planning abilities and promote library technologies
- Help underline the mission of the library and researchers in the service of legislators.
- Enhance the research abilities of library staff through training programs, and workshops; upgrade the activities of the department in charge of working papers, and the collation and classification of different subjects
- Help implement the plan for the automation of the library

- Plan to develop library acquisitions and supply library with up- to- date books and studies in the different areas.

4.4 In the Area of Institutional Development

- Improve information technology to enhance the institutional capacities of Parliament (planning and administrative capacities to cope with new technologies)
- Enhance human capacities in the area of identifying and solving Parliamentary institutional problems.
- Continue to update systems of monitoring and evaluation (through questionnaires, and documents of research departments and activities of committees)
- Make use of monitoring and evaluation results in developing parliamentary activities, services and assistance granted by some donor countries
- Transfer expertise in monitoring and evaluation to competent authorities in Parliament

4.5 Risks of Reforming the Information and Knowledge Base of Parliament

The questions that need to be addressed are as follows:

- Does the People’s Assembly follow a clear line or legislative policy with well-defined features?
- Does Parliament truly examine the laws and decisions referred to in the preamble of laws, the majority of which (95%) are from the government?
- Is there transparency in the data and information provided by the state’s different organs which help Parliament perform its tasks?
- Does Parliament take into account market mechanisms while reviewing draft laws? Does it use public opinion polls and examine previous laws approved by the Assembly?

- Do members access studies that evaluate the gains and losses of applying laws and legislation and different policies approved by the Assembly?
- Do MPs study the impact of the application of law on different social groups, its impact on the market as well as public reaction after the application of law?
- Do MPs have the opportunity to interact with other experts? Are they aware of the experience of similar laws in different settings and previous experiences in different areas?

Clearly, Arab Parliaments in general and the Egyptian People's Assembly in particular are far from being able to answer these questions positively. One cannot claim that the People's Assembly has a legislative policy. MPs rarely examine the impact of the application of laws on the man in the street. They pay more attention to the general objective of the law or to slogans raised by the government that it uses to exert pressure for the enactment of the law. Most of the laws are presented by the government and approved by the Assembly. It is true that the Assembly often makes amendments to the law, but in the final analysis, it is not the initiator of the law and does not have a legislative policy to follow. The government, on the other hand, often presents contradictory laws. For example, there is conflict between the law of investment guarantees and incentives, and the law of special economic zones. Investors in special zones tend to operate under the law of investment incentives and guarantees and not the law of special economic zones because of the incentives the former offers. All laws presented by the government state in their preamble "with reference to law number ...", but the Assembly rarely goes back to examine these laws or identify differences and similarities between them and the proposed bill.

The People's Assembly suffers lack of transparency of information and data and difficulty of accessing data. For example, the Central Bank, the Economic Bulletin of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Industry and the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics all have different and conflicting figures for the same phenomenon. For example, there is no agreement on the number of population in Egypt among different population-related agencies. There is no law to regulate data and information in Egypt. Furthermore, the Assembly relies on the fact that MPs represent the people and so does not use public opinion polls offered by parallel external agencies.

The Assembly, or its General Secretariat, does not present comparative studies on the expertise of other countries or their experiences with issuing laws. This may be due to the lack of research capacities or short time available for MPs to study the bills which are usually presented by the government in a big rush. -Not all researchers in committees have the ability to use foreign languages to learn about the experience of more advanced nations. Moreover, the clerical work and time spent in drafting minutes and proceedings does not leave researchers much time to do research work. Add to that the weak wages and lack of financial and moral support to enhance competitiveness between researchers

Finally, one cannot claim that the General Secretariat of the People's Assembly is solely responsible for the services of data, information and research studies in Parliament because of the presence of a strong trend to rely on parallel structures in this area. Nor can one attribute the weak performance of Parliament to the lack of information. This problem should be examined within the framework of the system of interaction between the government and Parliament, in addition to the ability of citizens to select their representatives through free elections and finally, the presence of an environment that encourages public opinion leaders and intellectuals to take part in elections.