



Mandate and Duties of a Member of Parliament (MP)

Section 130 of the Constitution provides that "... in the exercise of their legislative authority both the Senate and the National Assembly have power to initiate, prepare, consider or reject any legislation". This means that Parliament should not just rubber-stamp bills (draft legislation), but should interrogate or question them to ensure that they are not only constitutional, but also address matters of national interest. Put differently, Parliament is obliged to debate thoroughly and scrutinise bills to ensure that there is value added before passing them into law.

The Constitution emphasises the fact that all institutions and agencies of the state and government are accountable to Parliament. For instance, section 107 of the Constitution states that "... every Vice-President, Minister and Deputy Minister must attend parliamentary committees in order to answer questions concerning matters for which he or she is collectively and individually responsible".

Picture Source: Bill Watch - Parliamentary Committees 45/2014



What is the role of an MP?

The roles of a parliamentarian are often summarised as lawmaking, representational, financial oversight and policy oversight.

These core functions are comprised of

- a lawmaking function,
- the consent to taxation and control of public expenditure, and
- debate on government policy and scrutiny of government administration.

Lawmaking role: This is what most people see as the central responsibility of an MP and means the passing of legislation (law), whether new or by making changes to existing laws. To legislate is "... to make or enact laws".

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- Lawmaking refers to the making or laying down of laws that will govern the nation.
- The new Constitution of Zimbabwe implores Parliament, wherever possible, to be transparent in the manner it executes its mandate. In all lawmaking, therefore, MPs must ensure that transparency and accountability are built into all laws. This should enable the citizens themselves to engage more closely with, or at least to be able to follow, what happens in Parliament and how their money is spent.



Representational role: To represent is to "... act for and on behalf of some other party or estate ...".

- As elected officials, MPs are expected to speak for and air the views of those who elected them to power or office. They are expected to represent the aspirations of the electorate and engage in debates that give value to the wishes and will of citizens.
- MPs must communicate effectively and give feedback to their constituencies so that the electorate is kept informed of key national developments.
- There must be a two-way interactive and effective communication interface between the electorate and their elected representatives to ensure that key issues are taken up and addressed by the relevant authorities and feedback is given to the electorate.



Oversight role: This describes the scrutiny or supervision that parliamentarians are expected to exercise over the workings of the executive, including the implementation of laws passed by Parliament and the expenditure of funds allocated in the national budget. The Constitution clearly provides that "*public funds must be directed towards national development and must be utilised in a transparent and accountable manner*".

- In this function MPs support or critique proposals placed before Parliament by the Government.

- Oversight also entails the informal and formal, watchful, strategic and structured scrutiny or analysis exercised by the legislature in respect of the implementation of laws, the application of the national budget and the strict observance of statutes and the Constitution.
- MPs conduct this role through parliamentary committees in which they monitor all government policies and programmes to ensure the efficient use of national resources.



The Constitution and the role of Parliamentarians

The new Constitution of Zimbabwe states that the legislature of Zimbabwe consists of Parliament and the President. Legislative authority (the power to make laws) in Zimbabwe comes from the people, through democratic elections founded on values of fairness and transparency, and is vested in the legislature.

Section 117(2) (b) of the Constitution states that the legislature has power to amend the Constitution and to "*... make laws for the peace, order and good governance of Zimbabwe*". Primary law making powers are given to Parliament and the President; however, the power to make laws may be given or delegated to other bodies and authorities.

Section 119 of the Constitution provides that Parliament is given supreme authority to promote democratic governance in Zimbabwe and to ensure that the state and all institutions and agencies of government at every level act "*constitutionally and in the national interest*". In this role Parliament has the responsibility to call various institutions to give explanations when their actions are not in line with the Constitution. National Interests can be defined as the claims, objectives, goals, demands and interests which a nation always tries to preserve, protect, defend and secure in relations with other nations and its citizens.