Pakistan Parliamentary Libraries: A Historical Excursion and Hopes for the Future

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Abstract
Pakistan’s parliamentary libraries reflect the challenges that the democratic institutions they serve have faced since independence in 1947. This article provides a historical context to the development of the bicameral parliament in Pakistan and four provincial assemblies. It describes the founding and development of parliamentary library and research services in that context and presents some of the newest innovations and reforms that the institutions have initiated in recent years.

Introduction
I had the distinct honor and privilege to work in Pakistan from October 2005 until February 2008 as the project director of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Project implemented by the Bethesda, Maryland, based firm DAI. Our mission was to work with the national bicameral parliament and four provincial assemblies to assist each legislature with its specific needs related to the representation, lawmaking, oversight functions, management, and infrastructure requirements to support those activities. I soon learned that everything about Pakistan, from its history to its cuisine, is complex. There are no simple questions and no simple answers. The situation with parliamentary libraries in Pakistan also reflects this complexity. In the pages that follow I present a historical context and describe the contemporary state of parliamentary libraries in Pakistan. Any evaluations or recommendations present in this text are mine alone, and do not necessarily reflect the position of DAI or the U.S. Agency for International Development.
Pakistan’s Historical Development

Pakistan was described to me by a senior Pakistani parliamentarian in 2005 as a “disrupted democracy.” The Indian subcontinent was partitioned into Muslim-dominated Pakistan and Hindu-dominated India when Britain granted independence to both nations in August 1947. Leading up to independence, there was a mass migration of people across the new borders, and it is believed that up to one million people may have been killed in sectarian fighting during the weeks leading up to partition (Orr, 2007).

While India enjoyed stable governments after independence, Pakistan did not enjoy such stability—it had no fewer than seven prime ministers in its first ten years of statehood (Jones, 2003). Democracy was a difficult goal from the very beginning in a state where the two most developed sectors were the bureaucracy, comprising “a small cadre of highly educated civil servants” (Jones, p. 224), and the military—both with strong inherited British traditions. And though the procedures of the House of Commons may have been adopted, Westminster parliamentary traditions did not transfer nearly as well. The aide-de-camp of Pakistan’s founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, observed that “senior politicians had little experience of the running of government, for they had spent most of their lives criticizing government in power” (Jones, p. 224). In sixty years of Pakistan’s history, there have been four governor generals, fifteen presidents and twenty-five prime ministers. Between 1988 and 1997 alone, the people were called to vote in four national parliamentary elections (Jones). Pakistan struggled with its state-building while its national and provincial legislatures experienced repeated redefinition and reorganization, including shifting capitals and shifting status under different constitutional schemes and executive orders during the past six decades.

History of the Establishment of Parliament and Provincial Assemblies

It is against the background of the history of the state and of the establishment of the legislatures that one must look at the development of legislative libraries in Pakistan, as they are inextricably connected to the development of the state, the movement of the capitals, the development of the federation, and the character of each of the legislatures. Pakistan today is a federation of four provinces and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. This paper will not address the status of legislative libraries, the history or status of the Autonomous Region of Gilgit-Baltistan (until 2009 known as “The Northern Areas”), or Azad Jammu Kashmir, which is recognized as an independent state by Pakistan and has its own government and legislative assembly. This paper will look at the development of parliamentary librarianship in the national parliament and the four provincial assemblies of Punjab, Sindh, Northwest Frontier Province, and Balochistan.
THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

The Parliament of Pakistan, known as the Majlis-e-Shoora, was formed according to the provisions of the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and is comprised of two legislative houses, the Senate and the National Assembly. The Senate comprises one hundred members elected indirectly by the National Assembly and four provincial assemblies (since March 2006 half of the members are elected every three years for six-year terms). The 342 National Assembly members are elected directly in single-mandate elections every five years.

From independence in August 1947 until March 1956, the “Government of India Act 1935” was retained as the Constitution of Pakistan, and the Constituent Assembly served as the national legislature, which was located in Karachi. The unicameral Parliament of Pakistan was established under the first Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, adopted in Karachi in 1956. After the adoption of the Second Constitution of 1962, the capital of Pakistan was moved to the newly planned capital, Islamabad, and the unicameral parliament sessions were held both at Dhaka (East Pakistan) and in a newly constructed building (Ayub Hall) at Rawalpindi (near Islamabad). In October 1966, the Parliament was shifted to Dhaka.

After the secession of East Pakistan and Bangladesh’s declaration of independence from Pakistan in 1971, the 1970 Assembly returned to Islamabad. In 1972, the Assembly passed an interim constitution and framed the new constitution, which was passed on April 12, 1973, and promulgated on August 14, 1973. The 1973 Constitution provided for a parliamentary form of government with a bicameral legislature, comprising the National Assembly and the Senate. Because membership of the National Assembly is based on the population of each province, the Senate gave equal representation to the federating units. The Senate’s membership, which was originally forty-five, was raised to one hundred in August 2002.

After martial law was imposed on July 5, 1977, the new Parliament met in November 1985 after party-less elections, but on May 29, 1988, the president dissolved the Assembly. From November 16, 1988, to October 12, 1999, Pakistan witnessed four parliaments that failed to complete their five-year terms. Martial law was again declared in 1999 and it was not until 2002 that parliamentary elections were held again. In November 2007 the National Assembly that had been elected in October 2002 became the first in Pakistan’s history to complete its five-year term. Elections held in October 2007 resulted in a new parliamentary majority followed by presidential elections in February 2008. Currently Pakistan is ruled by a government resulting from a democratically-elected Parliament, democratically-elected provincial assemblies, and a democratically-elected president.
National Parliament of Pakistan 1946–2009

1947 Established as the “Constituent Assembly” in Karachi, continues as the first legislative Assembly of Independent Pakistan

1956 Constitution establishes the first Parliament of Pakistan as a unicameral body in Karachi

1962 Constitution maintains the unicameral Parliament, and capital shifts to Islamabad; Parliament Sessions shift between Islamabad and Dhaka (capital of East Pakistan)

1966 Parliament shifts to Dhaka

1971 After civil war, Bangladesh declares independence

1972 National Assembly meets in Islamabad (State Bank Building) under an interim Constitution

1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan establishes a bicameral parliament

1986 The Parliament—the Senate and the National Assembly—acquires a permanent home in the present Parliament House in Islamabad, inaugurated on May 28, 1986

1988–99 Four successive national parliaments elected, each of which is subsequently dissolved preterm.

2002 National Assembly elections

2003 Senate elections
2006  Half of the elected Senate stands for election (which Senators remain to complete their six-year terms is determined by lottery)

2007  National Assembly elections

2009  March, elections for fifty senate seats

Provincial Assemblies
The current four Provincial Assemblies were established in accordance with the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Article 106. The largest house is in Punjab Province with a total of 371 seats. Sindh Province has 168 seats, followed by the Northwest Frontier Province Assembly with 124 seats, and the Balochistan Provincial Assembly with sixty-five seats. The Chief Executive Order of July 2002, which set forth the number of seats to be filled in each house, also established quotas for women. The Order further required that all members in both the national parliament and the provincial assemblies should have had a college (fourteen-year) education, which was later interpreted to include Madrassa education as an equivalent (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2005–9).

It is important, however, to review the historical prelude to the current arrangement of the legislative houses in order to understand the context for legislative libraries in Pakistan and their development. The Punjab Assembly, a body of ten nominated members, was “born as the Council of the Lieutenant Governor in 1897” (Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, n.d.). It was replaced by the Legislative Council in 1921, ultimately becoming an “Assembly” in 1937 and occupying its current neoclassical premises. In 1955 all four current provinces were incorporated into “One Unit” called West Pakistan, and the West Pakistani Assembly was established, based in Lahore and housed in the current Punjab Assembly Building. In July 1970, the Province of West Pakistan was abolished and the status of the provinces was restored. The Constitution of Pakistan 1973 gave the present status to the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab. Though the Punjab Provincial Assembly currently occupies the original 1937 premises, the general campus has been undergoing expansion since 2007 and will include a new, larger session hall and secretariat offices. New premises for the library were also conceived in this construction project. The small but stately library located on the first floor of the 1937 building currently holds the book, journal, and law collections of approximately 60,000 volumes.

The building of the current Sindh Provincial Assembly in Karachi was the site of the formal establishment of the independence of Pakistan. The swearing-in of the founder of Pakistan and president of the Constituent Assembly, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, as its first governor general occurred on August 14, 1947. The Sindh Assembly’s preindependence roots were originally established in 1937 as the “Sindh Legislative Assembly.” After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the Sindh Assembly Building was redesignated as the National Assembly of Pakistan and continued with this status.
until 1964 when the federal capital was shifted to Islamabad. With the dissolution of the “One Unit” of West Pakistan in 1971, the Sindh Assembly was reestablished and resumed its work in the same building after a lapse of about twenty-four years (Provincial Assembly of Sindh, n.d.).

Though in 1901 the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) was declared as a Chief Commissioner Province, the NWFP Legislative Council came into being in 1932 under the Act of 1919 with 40 seats (Secretariat of the NWFP Provincial Assembly, 2008). It was not until 1937, when the Government of India Act 1935 was enforced in NWFP, that the NWFP Legislative Assembly was first formed. The first session was summoned on March 12, 1946, with fifty members. This Assembly was dissolved in 1951 and the number of members was increased from fifty to fifty-eight. The first postindependence election to the NWFP Legislative Council was held on December 15, 1951, and the session of the Assembly was summoned on January 10, 1952. The declaration of “One Unit” on October 3, 1955, and the division of the country into two provinces (West Pakistan and East Pakistan) meant the dissolution of the Assembly and, subsequently, the Legislative Assembly Building was given over for use as the Peshawar High Court. After the dissolution of West Pakistan in 1970, the NWFP Provincial Assembly was restored through a presidential order, the Legal Framework Order of 1970. General elections were held for the NWFP Provincial Assembly on December 17, 1970, for forty-three seats (of which two were reserved for women and one for minorities). The first session of the Assembly was summoned on May 2, 1972, in the hall of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARD) in Peshawar. Subsequent elections were held in 1985. The Assembly Secretariat shifted from the PARD to its own present building in 1987 (Provincial Assembly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, n.d.). The newly completed premises of the NWFP Assembly, which are immediately adjacent to the 1950 premises, were completed in late 2008.

The newest legislature in Pakistan is the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, constituted under the Chief Executive Order in 1972. The first Assembly session was held on May 2, 1972, with twenty-one members. The Provincial Assembly met in temporary quarters in the shahi Jirga hall (Town Hall) until the present Assembly building was inaugurated on April 28, 1987 (Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, n.d.).

The Parliamentary Library Collections and Services
Most of the Assembly libraries in Pakistan have similar collections and collection development policies. The collections are specialized, especially regarding legislative documentation. New acquisitions are often made by donation and purchasing upon the recommendation of members. The libraries collect primarily in English and Urdu with significant volumes in Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtu, and other languages.
The National Assembly Library has the largest collection, with over 80,000 volumes. It is the main archive of house documentation, including stenographic reports of plenary session debates, laws passed by the National Assembly, and executive ordinances laid before the house (executive ordinances in Pakistan have the authority of law until such time that the parliament might meet to decide the issue) since 1947. The debates of the National Assembly between 1947 and 1999 have been preserved in microfilm.

The National Assembly Library also holds a collection of House of Commons debates (England), 1066–1990; the Indian Legislative Assembly debates, 1921–47; the Council of State of India debates, 1921–46; Lok Sabha and Rajiya Sabha of India, 1947–76; the Gazette of Pakistan, since 1947; reports of the federal government, the United Nations and its agencies; and other documents. A number of law journals are also available in the National Library collection, namely, *Pakistan Legal Decisions*, *Supreme Court Monthly Review*, *Civil Law Cases*, *Monthly Law Digest*, *National Law Reports*, and *All India Reporter*. Through exchanges with some other parliaments, the National Assembly Library receives other parliamentary documents (National Assembly of Pakistan Library, n.d.). Since 2008 the
National Assembly Library has subscribed through the Pakistan Higher Education Commission to a digital library providing members with access to major academic and business journal resources through a dedicated website (Pakistan National Digital Library, n.d.).

In contrast, the Library of the Senate of Pakistan is much smaller. A 2007 effort to reorganize the collection revealed a total of just over 8,000 volumes. The primary collection is of law, history, and politics, and to a large extent it duplicates that of the National Assembly Library, which is now housed in the same building.

Similarly, the collections of the Provincial Assembly libraries include books, journals, newspapers, and parliamentary documentation. In accordance with the enactment of the National Archives Act of 1993, the permanent records of ministries, divisions, and federal government departments since 1947 are being transferred to the National Archives, which were formally established in 1951 as a subdivision of the Ministry of Education and since 1997 operate under the Cabinet Division (http://www.nap.gov.pk/evaluation.asp). However, this is a longer-term project and therefore, for the time being, each assembly library also serves as an archive of the house.

The Punjab Assembly Library, established in 1921, is the oldest Parliamentary Library in the country. It is also the largest provincial assembly library collection, with nearly 55,000 volumes including books, reference works, and proceedings of the Senate, National Assembly, Punjab Assembly, Sindh Assembly, and Balochistan Assembly. In addition, the library has a collection of proceedings of different assemblies of the world, that is, proceedings of Indian State Assemblies, the Legislative Assembly of India (preindependence period), Indian Lok Sabha, the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and the U.S. Congress.

The library’s collection also holds video films of proceedings of various parliaments of the world. Members have in-house access to reference books such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, directories, atlases, maps, almanacs, gazettes, *Pakistan Legal Decisions, All India Reporter*, periodicals, rare books, and newspapers. Out-of-print books and books in volumes are also available for use on the premises (Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, n.d.).

The Sindh Provincial Assembly Library has a very similar collection to that of the Punjab Provincial Assembly Library, though with fewer total volumes (about 25,000) and a special collection of documentation from the earliest years of the Constituent Assembly of 1947. One of the new initiatives of the Sindh Provincial Assembly Library was to digitize the earlier proceedings of the Sindh Assembly for purposes of preservation.

There is a small library facility located directly behind the striking tent-shaped session hall of the Balochistan Provincial Assembly Library. The library houses a collection of about 8,000 volumes including books,
journals, newspapers, and parliamentary documentation. The librarian and one assistant manage the collection and services to the members. In 2006, thanks to an allocated book acquisitions budget to bring the collection up-to-date, the library’s collection was significantly fortified.

During the nearly ten-year period of construction of the new building, the NWFP Provincial Assembly operated essentially without a library because the wing that had housed the library had been demolished to make way for the new building. During this period, the librarian’s main tasks were to provide newspaper subscriptions and occasionally find legal references. The new building was completed in 2007. However, plans for the new building had not included a dedicated space for a library. An early suggestion to convert the historic old session hall into the new library facility did not meet with approval, so a space was allocated for a library facility in a modernized wing adjacent to the new session hall building.

There has traditionally been a heavy dependency on newspapers as a source of information in all the parliamentary libraries, and all the houses collect English, Urdu, and local language newspapers in paper format. Increasingly these titles are also available online as well. Since 2005 there has been an increased effort by parliamentary libraries to collect resources from academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) as well.

Research branches were established in the 1990s in each of the houses of Parliament and Provincial Assemblies. Research officers may be requested to prepare background papers, position papers, briefing papers, and analysis of issues using print media and electronic information. They may also be asked to provide informational requirements arising from items on the Order of the Day and assistance in preparing papers to be presented at international seminars and conferences. Furthermore, they may be asked to compile the legislative history of bills under consideration by the house or a committee. In the past there has been some criticism that the research services catered only to the leadership (e.g., providing speech-writing services) or that they were merely a clipping service. In 2007 senior parliamentary researchers from Canada and the United States (Hugh Finsten and William Robinson) conducted a training of all research officers from all the houses. During the week-long session, officers were reminded of the tenets of parliamentary research and consulted on the next steps needed to raise the level of research services in their assemblies. As a consequence, some of the houses began more proactive research on behalf of their legislatures, sometimes even resulting in admonishment that their analysis was too critical of the government.

Management and Staffing of Parliamentary Libraries
While the inherited traditions of the British bureaucracy meant that there was a highly-skilled and well-educated civil service when Pakistan
was established, the successive disruptions in governance often led to its weakening. Historian Owen Bennett Jones (2003) observed that during the 1970s, although President Zulifkar Ali Bhutto argued that he wanted to make the bureaucracy more responsive to the government, he actually made it more politicized—one of his more “damaging legacies.”

The situation of librarians as a part of that bureaucracy, however, was even more challenging. At the time of independence there was no formal school of library education in Pakistan. In 1950, the Punjab Library Association started a six-month diploma course in Library Science, but it was not a regular course. The Karachi Library Association also started a four-month course in library science. By the 1990s eight institutions in Pakistan were engaged in teaching Library Science, and certificate programs were managed by the Pakistan Library Association in the main cities of the country. The purpose of such programs was to meet the demands for qualified library personnel and to provide continuing education to library personnel, especially on modern technologies. Since the 1990s, Library Science has been offered at the Intermediate and BA level in more than sixty colleges throughout Pakistan. The faculty includes practicing librarians who often teach on a voluntary basis (Marwat, [1994?]).

Consequences of this trend in library education have often meant that parliamentary librarians were treated as junior clerks rather than qualified specialists within their institutions. Though government librarian positions were set at upper-level civil ranks (BS 18 and BS 17), competitions to fill the posts did not always stress the need for professional qualifications. However, successful recruitment of librarians based on professional qualifications in the 1990s, when the first wave of modernizing the legislative libraries was initiated, has served as an example. This practice appears to have been resumed at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, when the Senate Secretariat recruited a young professional librarian who, at the insistence of the Senate Library Committee, is “well-versed in modern library science” (Bhinder, 2007, p. 7). It should also be stressed that parliamentary librarians, like many of the civil servants assigned to legislative bodies, suffered professionally during the years that the legislatures were dismissed, dissolved, or otherwise suspended. There were not many opportunities to assert innovation and initiative in library services if one’s primary clientele was absent. This absence of clientele also served as a demotivator, especially in the 1990s and first years of the 2000s, when there could have been many opportunities for modernization of library services but, instead, consisted of a period of multiple elections that ended once again with the imposition of martial law.

When legislatures are being formed, dissolved, and reformed, the opportunities for internal managerial reform, modernization, and introduction of new services can be somewhat limited. Add to this that many senior officers of the legislatures were either borrowed from other government
service (and thus needed to be educated about the special nature of parliamentary library and research services) or had been on leave from parliamentary service during times of political hiatus to pursue career goals outside of civil service (it is allowed for civil servants in Pakistan to take up to five-years leave from service and still be assured of a post at the level of appointment at the time of departure). These disruptions, even if they did not directly affect the librarians, often affected those who were in positions supervising the library services. In short, the environment made it difficult for parliamentary librarians to apply modern library management practices or introduce technological innovations. However, this did not preclude pursuing personal or professional development. During political hiatuses, often civil servants would pursue continuing study in Pakistan or abroad—this was particularly true of research officers—though they did not always find opportunities to apply their new knowledge or skills when returning to their posts upon the presumption of Parliament.

Library committees potentially had an important role to play in the management of parliamentary libraries in Pakistani legislative bodies. Traditionally they are chaired by the Deputy Speaker of the House and deal with library and house administration, though members often tended to be more concerned about house administration issues rather than the library issues. There have been times, however, when the library committees truly understood the potential of the libraries and served as advocates for their development. Such an example was the Senate Library Committee, which was chaired from 2006–7 under the leadership of Senator Muhammad Anwar Bhinder, a senior parliamentarian who had vast experience in both Provincial Assemblies, the National Assembly and the Senate. Senator Bhinder, in fact, had been the youngest Speaker of the West Pakistan Assembly and often told the story of how he had used all the resources of the West Pakistan Assembly Library to learn about his responsibilities when he was elected in order to best serve the interest of the house and the people whom he represented. It was not surprising, therefore, when after his election in March 2003, the Senator recognized that the Senate Library was not meeting its full potential. This was partly because it had never been properly reconstituted when the Senate moved to its permanent premises in the Parliament House in 1996, partly because the records of automation had suffered a catastrophic failure, and partly because of personnel lapses.

In July 2006 the committee undertook a thorough examination of the collection and services of the Senate library. In addition to a complete inventory of the collection, the committee examined usage patterns, accessibility, storage practices, and use of technology. The committee approved an increased budget to enhance the collection and technology base of the Senate Library, recommended personnel upgrades, approved an expansion of storage space (one of the members of the committee
even personally funded the new storage shelving), and negotiated a depository agreement so that the Senate Library would receive all statistical data and reports from government ministries. Moreover, the committee chairman personally undertook a project to create an index of Pakistani law references, which was carried out by student interns under his personal supervision. The team created an index of all the laws, rules, acts, ordinances, and regulations with their title, source, date of enforcement/expiry, and current status going back to 1836. Reference was made to the official publication of the acts (some commercial law databases mentioned the titles and dates of the acts but not where to find the official text). This unique resource was to be published by the Senate Secretariat and it was intended that it would be updated and maintained by the Senate Library in the future (Bhinder, 2007).

The issues that were manifest in the Senate Library were observed in varying degrees in other legislative libraries during the first decade of the 2000s as well. A USAID consultant working with the libraries and librarians in autumn 2005, Donna Usher, observed that the critical management issues facing the libraries were in the areas of human resources and strategic planning. In a series of meetings and workshops with librarians from all houses, she observed that the “the right people need to be in the right jobs and enough people need to be in the right jobs to provide the services required in a contemporary legislative information service”; and she further observed that in those institutions where qualified librarians provide high quality services, the status of the library also tended to be comparatively higher (USAID Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Project, 2006).

This was not necessarily a coincidence. A significant USAID assistance program had been launched through the Asia Foundation in the early 1990s with primary consultations on library management and establishment of research services provided by Jane A. Lindley, a specialist from the U.S. Congressional Research Services of the Library of Congress. She had addressed then the critical issue of hiring qualified personnel to manage the library facilities of parliamentary libraries. She had the support of the parliamentary leadership and was able to make significant progress in modernizing the library services in both houses of the national Parliament as well as the provincial assemblies. Lindley also helped the National Assembly and Senate to establish separate research services for members in this period based on best practices of parliamentary research services.

However, by 2005, Usher observed that none of Pakistan’s legislative libraries had a current library mission statement or strategic plan. Therefore, the first discussions at the beginning of the 2005 USAID assistance project provided basic management and library management consultations on strategic planning for the National Assembly Library in order to build awareness of the potential services that could be provided and the management techniques that would need to be in place to make those
services sustainable. These included staffing needs (defining qualifications, recruitment, and training), development of a mission statement, general library policies, and evaluating the potential for the introduction of new services. Usher made recommendations about how positions in the library’s organization that were not particularly suited to provide the types of services most useful to the legislators could be adjusted, as well as how current staff in other areas could be retrained to provide new services. A good example of this was the need to train staff in professional Internet research in order to help Members of the National Assembly and Senators to use Internet resources effectively. The results of these consultations were later shared and discussed with the librarians of the other legislative libraries in a workshop conducted for librarians of the National Parliament and all the Provincial Assemblies. A summary report with recommendations based on the consultations and trainings was submitted to the Legislative Development Steering Committee in each house. For some of the legislatures, this became a road map for further developments (USAID Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Project, 2006).

An issue that was assessed and addressed by both the USAID Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Project (PLSP) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union of the United Nations Development Program (IPU/UNDP) Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy Project (SDPD) was whether the National Assembly and Senate Libraries should be consolidated into a single parliamentary library and research service for optimum service to members. Arguments on both sides were that better service could be provided by a consolidated service, but there was a concern that the priority for use of services would always be with the “host” institution (in this case the National Assembly) to the detriment of the second chamber (in this case the Senate). At the time of this writing, the houses still maintain separate library facilities and separate research services, though traditionally any Senator who wishes to use the National Assembly Library has not been refused. In fact, now the National Assembly Library policy specifically states: “This Library also provides assistance to the Senators, within the library premises” (National Assembly of Pakistan, n.d.).

USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIES
In the early 1990s, there were about 4,000 libraries in Pakistan. There was no unified national bibliographic format for a library system. A project to develop library management software was launched by the Netherlands Library Development project in collaboration with the Pakistan Library Association (PLA). The PLA was responsible for marketing and software support for the Library Automation and Management Program (LAMP). LAMP is a DOS-based system based on CDS/ISIS software, which was a great achievement at the time in terms of the country’s library automation. Thanks in large part to the USAID assistance through the Asia
Foundation, the National Assembly and Senate of Pakistan as well as Provincial Assembly libraries developed management plans that included installing the LAMP system for cataloging and search of books (Marwat, [1994?]).

One of the recommendations of the librarians after the initial consultations with the PLSP consultant in 2005 was that the parliamentary librarians should meet regularly as a group in order to exchange experiences, participate in common training, and advocate for changes within their institutions. Thus, under the auspices of the USAID Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Project, the librarians working group was convened a number of times from 2005–7 and in 2006 took on the task as a group of evaluating a possible replacement system for the LAMP automation system. This was a major undertaking due to several factors. Although the library management software (commissioned in 2005 by the E-Governance Directorate) being developed by local software developer NETSOL for the National Assembly and Senate had originally been thought appropriate for all houses, it had come up short of the National Assembly’s expectations and needed further refinement. More importantly, the NETSOL solution would have been excessively labor and IT intensive for most of the Provincial Assemblies. After reviewing and evaluating a number of available off-the-shelf library management systems programs, the open-source Koha software was selected as a common platform for the Provincial Assembly libraries. PLSP engaged a local librarian experienced in library automation projects and familiar with the Koha program to adapt the software to the needs of the Provincial Assemblies, train, consult, and monitor the conversion of LAMP to Koha from 2006–8. This was the first project in Pakistan to adopt the Open Source Software at a national level. Rafiq and Ameen (2009) described this effort in detail:

In April 2007, the Librarians’ Working Group made a final assessment of the options for a common library management system and chose the open-source Koha program because of the systems’ adaptability to accommodate several languages and scripts, and the potential for use as shared catalog of all legislative assembly libraries. Koha’s ability to accommodate different languages script was the major attraction for legislative libraries which contained a large number of collections in different oriental languages (e.g. Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pushto, etc.).

Another important point of consideration was “sustainability.” It was assumed that Koha may be sustained after the conclusion of the PLSP, particularly since its maintenance cost is very low. Another positive point is that the OSRC may contribute in the sustainment of Koha in legislative libraries in [the] future. The history of Koha development in the forms of different versions, their availability, and active participation of both the users and developers through mailing lists make it a viable choice of librarians in developing countries like Pakistan. Furthermore, ample support is just an email away.
PLSP [had also initiated and funded the establishment of] Provincial Information Technology Resource Centers (PITRCs) in the four provincial assemblies that provide IT facilities and support to the legislators [but which also could serve as incubators to test new software]. Provincial assemblies also have their own IT/automation departments with dedicated IT professionals. It was assumed that these IT departments as well as PITRCs will provide the technical support to the assembly libraries to cope with troubleshooting of Koha. The provision of data conversion from a CDS/ISIS database (such as LAMP) to Koha was also another reason to go for Koha. (p. 605)

Currently, the provincial libraries are in the process of either converting old LAMP records to the Koha platform or entering records of their collection into Koha. NWFP Assembly’s collection has been restored and reclassified more quickly thanks to their recruiting local library school students as volunteers.

With USAID assistance, each of the provincial libraries had designed a new website by 2008 using content management systems to allow for more user-friendly searching of information and documentation. The intention was that as soon as library catalogs were established, they would also be made available online through the Provincial Assembly websites. To date, though, none of the Assembly library catalogs have been made available on the Internet (though the National Assembly catalog is available on an intranet). However, all the libraries now provide Internet access for members, staff, and clients of the Assembly libraries in their facilities.

Since the early 1990s, the National Assembly and the Punjab Assembly Library also have had microfilm sections for management and preservation of valuable collections of antique books, debates, and some other important documents. The microfilmed documents can be read through microfilm reader in the library premises.

A major issue for development near the end of the first decade of the 2000s was how to best plan for digitization projects. While some in leadership positions believed that every book in the collection of the Assembly library should be scanned and made available in digital format, a more reasoned plan was to subscribe to commercial e-library services and to digitize the parliamentary documents that should be preserved and can be searched for ongoing legislative work. The problem encountered in the process of developing a digitization plan was that the major documentation of Parliament and the Provincial Assemblies uses a specific font for Urdu language called “Nostalgic,” which does not lend itself particularly well to OCR scanning, making it difficult for documents to be searchable. Several attempts to solve this problem were undertaken late in the decade. Some houses began scanning documents in nonsearchable format as a preservation measure, but they were struggling with storage and retrieval issues.
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Librarians of the parliamentary libraries have been active in the Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Asia and the Pacific (APLAP) since the early years of the organization. In May 1992, the second Biennial Conference was held in Islamabad (Ku, 1998). Participation in APLAP activities has revived in recent years. In 2005, the biennial APLAP conference was hosted by the Indian Parliamentary Library. Delegates from three Provincial Assemblies included secretaries of the houses, librarians, researchers, an IT director, the National Assembly librarian, and the Senate head of research.

In 2007, the Pakistani delegation to the APLAP conference, hosted by the Parliament of New Zealand, again included secretaries, librarians, and research and IT officers from Provincial Assemblies as well as from the National Assembly and Senate of Pakistan. It was the largest country delegation at the meeting at which the librarian of the National Assembly, Haji Hattar, was elected vice president of APLAP.

Pakistan’s parliamentary librarians have also participated in International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) meetings—most recently in 2005 in Norway (Punjab Assembly and National Assembly delegates), 2007 in South Africa (Balochistan Assembly Secretary and Assistant Librarian), and 2008 in Ottawa (National Assembly, Senate, Balochistan, Sindh, NWFP, and Punjab Provincial Assemblies as well as the manager of the Parliamentary Resource Center in Islamabad). In 2009 the manager of the Parliamentary Resource Center in Islamabad attended the conferences in Italy.

In the past decade, a number of assistance programs have been initiated with the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies in Pakistan that include a significant component dedicated to building and fortifying legislative library and research services. At the request of the parliamentary authorities of Pakistan, a joint Inter-Parliamentary Union IPU/UNDP needs assessment mission was carried out in October 2003, which included an experienced parliamentary librarian on the team. Following the mission, a UNDP project entitled “Strengthening Democracy through Parliamentary Development in Pakistan” was established in 2005 to assist the Parliament in building its capacity to perform its constitutional (legislative, representative, and oversight) functions in a more efficient manner: the project commenced in 2005 and was supported technically and financially by the IPU under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Parliament of Pakistan. Among the project’s five objectives was “Improvement of parliamentary information services to provide timely assistance to members, the media and public” (Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 2005).

During 2006 under the SDPD fourth objective, a specialist in parliamentary libraries, research services, and management was engaged by IPU as a consultant to work with the National Assembly and Senate to
conduct a needs assessment and to work on a plan for more effective delivery of parliamentary library and research services. Other related points under this activity included developing a plan for marketing information services and enhancing communication flow between Parliament and the media as well as recommending appropriate ICT/Automation services for the two houses. The needs assessment report with recommendations was submitted to IPU, the UNDP project team, and the Secretaries of the National Assembly and Senate. Despite some internal discussions of the report, no subsequent action was taken on this issue. The Phase II project description extending the project to 2010 does not include a component dedicated to library and research development, nor does it mention the consolidation of the parliamentary library facilities (United Nations Development Program: Pakistan, 2006; United Nations Development Program: Pakistan, 2009).

As was mentioned before, in the early 1990s USAID provided assistance to the parliaments through a project implemented by the Asia Foundation. Starting in 2003, USAID funded two different legislative strengthening projects in Pakistan. The first, called “Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Consortium” (PLSC), worked with the National Assembly, Senate, Provincial Assemblies, and local Pakistani NGOs, conducting study tours to the

Figure 3. Secretary of NWFP Provincial Assembly, Amanullah, uses the facilities of the Canadian Parliamentary Library at the 2008 IFLA Pre-Conference
United States and India and seminars and training programs in Pakistan. The second program, the Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Program (PLSP), was launched in September 2005 in partnership with the National Parliament and Provincial Assemblies to develop a program for increasing transparency, improving training, and building research capacity. A major outcome of the PLSP, which is still operating, was the establishment of the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services. On November 19, 2008, the National Assembly unanimously passed the “Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services Bill” (PIPS) intended to establish an institution that will help promote research and provide training and information to parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. PIPS was preliminarily established at the Parliament Lodges in Islamabad and includes a computer lab and a multiple-use meeting facility. An interim director of PIPS was appointed in 2009. The intention is that a permanent facility for PIPS be built with a commitment from the Parliament to include a line in its budget to fund the institute. The PIPS programming continues, however. After the 2008 parliamentary elections, PIPS conducted New Member Orientation programs at the National Parliament and Provincial Assemblies.

Associated with PIPS is the Parliamentary Resource Centre (PRC), located within the Parliament Lodges in Islamabad, and the Parliamentary Information & Technology Resource Centres (PITRC), established at all Provincial Assemblies (Peshawar, Quetta, Lahore, and Karachi) to provide information and support services to members of the respective Provincial Assemblies (MPAs). Services are provided free of charge or at a minimal cost. The PRC is open seven days/week for eighteen hours daily. PITRCs remain open from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday through Friday, and provide most needed services such as Internet Access Terminals, daily newspapers, news magazines and journals, and a conference/discussion room with TV, photocopying, and scanner facilities. When the PRC and PITRCs were established, it was intended that they work as an extension of the library and research services in each house. As noted above, the library management system software was tested in the PRC and the PITRCs. In the resource centers, members and their aides can learn how to effectively use computer technologies for communication and Internet research. The resource centers have conducted computer training courses as well as language courses. The PRC has helped members use social networking tools in their constituency work. Services that cannot immediately be implemented by the legislative libraries can be tested at the resource center level. One of the contributions of the USAID project to the legislatures was upgrading the technology and other equipment for the libraries according to their respective needs.

The idea of the establishment of PIPs draws on the experience of a number of other countries and parliaments. One of the models that received much attention was in India. Because of the shared history of
Pakistan and India, some of India’s achievements in democratic practices have met with keen interest by Pakistani colleagues. The study tours of the PLSC had introduced members to the Library of the Lok Sabha and the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST), which was established in 1976 as an integral Division of the Lok Sabha Secretariat and is now the premier training body providing opportunities for systematic study and training in various disciplines of parliamentary institutions, processes, and procedures to the legislators and officials. The BPST is well equipped and housed in the state-of-the-art Parliament Library Building (Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training, n.d.).

The Parliament of Pakistan was invited to become the first Asian member of the Global Legal Information Network (GLIN) in an initiative of the U.S. Law Library of Congress in April 2004. This occurred during a visit to the United States by a group of Pakistani legislators led by the Speaker of the National Assembly to observe modern legislative practices under the USAID-sponsored PLSC (Mander, 2004). Subsequently, officers of the Secretariat of both the National Assembly and Senate began to contribute Pakistani laws to this database. The last entry, however, was made in July 2007. It may be that the new parliamentary leadership needs to be apprised of the merits of Pakistan’s participation in this endeavor.

Figure 4. Parliamentary Resource Center Manager Bushra Nazli organizes the print collection
FUTURE DIRECTIONS
The resources of the Parliamentary Libraries in Pakistan are not only key to preserving the parliamentary history of the nation, but also have the opportunity to be at the heart of the policy making and legislative processes in Pakistan in the future. For that to happen, it will be important for parliamentary librarians to hone their management skills in order to “compete” successfully for the resources to meet the needs of their clientele. This might mean developing, advertising, and promoting new services for members and staff. Promoting services will help to build demand from members; the higher the demand and appreciation of members of the services of the parliamentary library, the greater the chance that the library will be allocated adequate funds to meet needed services.

Whether or not to consolidate the library services of the National Assembly and Senate of Pakistan is not so much the issue as whether the library and information services are meeting the needs of the MNAs and Senators. Getting frank feedback from their clientele—whether through surveys, or library committees, or simply listening to members and staff about their information needs—will help modern librarians understand the context of their work and provide services proactively. New technologies provide an opportunity for the librarians to analyze the type of resources that members are using and therefore possibilities to adjust collection development policies toward those needs.

Cooperative activities among parliamentary librarians in Pakistan to continue the exchange of experience begun by the Librarians Working Group are important for future development. In addition to general exchange of experience, special projects might be taken on what would benefit all houses. This might include the initiation of a union catalog of collections of all parliamentary libraries, or further development of Koha. Work in isolation leads to duplication of efforts, both internally within an institution and externally in terms of cooperation with other libraries (legislative libraries as well as other types of libraries). With some effort, the legislative libraries will be able to overcome a past tendency to work in isolation. Parliamentary libraries in Pakistan might also benefit from cooperating in collection development, for example, to purchase access to commercial e-journals as a consortium, perhaps using the East European eIFL.net model as an example (Kupryte, 2009). Were more cooperative efforts possible, the resources of various legislative institutions could be mutually reinforcing.

The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) is a potential resource for parliamentary libraries to provide support for cooperative efforts and to help develop training programs for staff and for members on how to access and use the services developed. PIPS can also provide linkages between parliamentary libraries and expertise within the NGO and university communities.
There is an expectation as the OCR issues for Nostalgic are resolved that digitization of parliamentary documentation will become a priority project for all the houses. This will require close cooperation with the IT departments in the house to ensure optimal storage and online accessibility of the scanned records. This is yet another project that would benefit greatly from cooperation between houses for sharing files of digitized records, as well as pooling resources to purchase high-end digitization equipment.

Pakistani parliamentary librarians now have an opportunity for more interaction with parliamentary librarians from other countries through Internet technologies and by participating in international fora to learn about new practices and products and to exchange experiences with professional colleagues. However, it is also important for the librarians to brief parliamentary leadership on the merits of such activities to secure ongoing funding for regular participation. If librarians and researchers do participate in international meetings, it is important for them to share with their colleagues the lessons learned from those meetings not only by submitting reports on conference participation to the Secretaries and House Library Committee but making presentations for members and other units of the secretariats.

As Pakistan’s parliamentary libraries enter a new decade, they have an opportunity to redefine their role in their respective legislatures. The librarians have the skills and ability to access information about best practices to learn from each other and from professional colleagues from other institutions. The legislatures for which these libraries were created to serve are institutionally more stable, and the members more demanding in their informational needs. The Pakistani parliamentary libraries, librarians, and researchers have an opportunity to rise to the occasion.

Notes
The views expressed in this article are the author’s alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, Ohio State University, or DAI.

1. The Majlis e-Shoora, according to Article 50 the Constitution of Pakistan of 1973, actually also includes the president of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan who has the right and responsibility to summon the sessions of the National Assembly and Senate (Article 54) (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, n.d.).

2. Both houses of the National Parliament as well as each of the Provincial Assemblies include also members elected in special reserved seats for women and non-Muslims in numbers determined by the constitution.

References


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