



# Capacity building efforts essential for strengthening governance and accountability

**Sound decision making is an integral part of implementing the democratic governance and accountability agenda, and requires access to timely, up-to-date and accurate information.**



Discussing the advantage of working in teams at the capacity development workshop for newly recruited staff of the parliament secretariat. Photo credit: SDGAP. January 2018.

*“Dynamic sessions are a new and different method of learning for some of us and programs such as these allow for interaction with staff from different departments,” Workshop participants.*

January 2018 – In an effort to support Members of the Parliament of Sri Lanka, during a critical turning point both politically and economically, the Strengthening Democratic Governance and Accountability Project (SDGAP), has developed a comprehensive support program for new staff, which is to be implemented under the guidance of the Speaker and Secretary General of Parliament.

SDGAP will build on lessons learned from previous research training programs, such as those through its predecessor, the Sri Lanka Parliament Project (SLPP), and provide interventions that will help improve the Secretariat staff's efficiency and awareness of procedures and processes, thereby increasing overall accountability and transparency.

The objective of these workshops is to reinforce the importance of subjects related to the daily demands of staff and their related job descriptions. Mainstreaming gender equality therefore, is an important topic, given Article 12 of the Constitution, which, through legislation passed earlier this year, reinforced a mandatory quota that calls for 25% of female representation in local government.

The first workshop in this series was held on January 19 and its purpose was to provide new recruits (who had joined Parliament in the last year and a half to a year) with an overview of how Parliament functions, and should function, including key initiatives such as the Right to Information Act, the quota that calls for 25% women nominees, the Code of Ethics, and so forth.

Led by the Secretary General of Parliament and USAID, through the SDGAP project, with 56 participants, this workshop focused on topics such as efficiency, professional ethics (a session led by the SDGAP Chief of Party), sexual harassment, and an interactive session on teamwork; what

### **Spotlight: Putting theory into practice**

When Sidath was asked about what made him nominate Isuri to represent the team, despite not having worked with her before; he talked of how he had started off the session with various suggestions from his teammates on how they could execute a tall standing balloon tower, and that it was Isuri who had the best suggestion. He said this showed that he could trust her to get the job done.

Isuri's response to this was that she appreciated that he chose her despite the fact that there were many men on the team. She said that she felt he did so, because he felt that she could do it better than them.

The lesson here, they both reiterated, is that gender should not matter when assigning someone a task. Rather it's about who can do it best. "Good communication, a team effort and flexibility are also key pieces in ensuring that we achieve our goals, together with assigning the right people with the right abilities", added Sidath.

Note: Sidath Nawarathne is a technical officer, in charge of the air conditioning sections, and, Isuri Sarathchandra works in the foreign relations and protocol office. Sidath has been in his role since September 2017, while Isuri has been in hers since November 2016. They had only met for the first time that day and had never worked together before, given that while they do both work at Parliament, they work for different departments.

drives a goal, impedes a goal and the importance of planning and delegation of tasks.

Participants especially enjoyed the more interactive and dynamic sessions. When asked about how future trainings could be improved, participants agreed that while the packed agenda was useful, it did not allow much time for further discussion. They also felt that it would be best to include a practical element to sessions on improving efficiency, so as to demonstrate what this would look like in real terms; to give them a better idea of how it applied to their daily tasks, and how they could apply such methods to their own roles.

During the gender session at the workshop SDGAP, raised the issue that parliament staff had to emulate the idea behind the 25% quota for women nominees and ensure that the spirit of this policy was put into practice, not just at work but possibly at home as well. Two participants, Sidath and Isuri, demonstrated what this looks like in real terms. Read their story in the spotlight section, based on an interview with SDGAP.

Participants were very receptive to the idea behind the implementation of these workshops. They talked of how they felt supported and recognized by their institutions for having developed this series of trainings, specifically tailored to their staff. They reported that it helped facilitate their learning and improve their overall professional experience, and were therefore, looking forward to participating in future training sessions.

The expectation is that through this series of trainings, those officers assigned to support Members of Parliament learn to work independently, become more self-confident in their own abilities to fulfil their roles and assigned tasks, and more willing to take on leadership roles.

SDGAP will continue to work closely with the Parliament Secretariat and provide technical assistance and support through these initiatives as part of its overall commitment to strengthening public accountability systems in the country.

*This training program series was supported by the USAID – Strengthening Democratic Governance and Accountability Project (SDGAP) in Sri Lanka. The project, which runs from 2016 – 2019, is implemented by DAI. The next training program in this series is aimed at mid and senior level officials and will be held on February 2, 2018.*

