

Summary Report

CPA Small Branches Capacity Building Workshop – Maldives 27–29 April 2026

This report provides a summary of the key discussions, observations, and outcomes from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Small Branches Capacity Building Workshop held in Malé, Maldives from 27–29 April 2026.

Purpose of the Workshop

The workshop focused on strengthening the effectiveness and independence of Parliaments in small jurisdictions and enhancing cooperation among CPA Small Branches.

Key Areas Discussed

Participants engaged in discussions on parliamentary independence, the importance of separation of powers between the Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary, accountability mechanisms, public financial oversight, committee effectiveness, democratic resilience, institutional capacity building, and the use of digital innovation to improve parliamentary operations and public engagement.

Public Financial Oversight and Budget Processes

Delegates emphasized the importance of strengthening Public Accounts Committees (PACs), improving transparency and accountability in public expenditure, and enhancing financial scrutiny mechanisms suited to small jurisdictions with limited resources. Discussions also covered national budget processes, parliamentary review of government expenditure, fiscal planning, and the role of Parliament in ensuring responsible and transparent budget approval and oversight.

Observations and Recommendations

While the workshop was informative and highly relevant, it was observed that the volume and complexity of the material covered during the three-day programme was extensive and highly condensed.

In particular, the case studies presented during the workshop were substantive and detailed. It is recommended that future workshops provide delegates with copies of case studies and supporting materials at least one week in advance to allow participants sufficient time to review and analyse the material beforehand.

It is also recommended that future workshops allocate additional time for discussion and participant engagement to maximize the effectiveness of the sessions.



CPA Small Branches Workshop participation.



Workshop delegates and networking activities.



Participants during official workshop sessions.



Official CPA workshop venue branding.



Workshop participation photograph.



Official group photograph of delegates.



Visit to the Parliament Chamber in the Maldives.



Presentation and cultural exchange activity.



Courtesy meeting and exchange of commemorative gifts.

Conclusion

Participation in the CPA Small Branches Capacity Building Workshop provided a valuable opportunity to exchange experiences and learn from other Commonwealth jurisdictions facing similar challenges.

Very happy to have attended,

Pearlina

> CPA Small Branches Workshop, Maldives Report



The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Small Branches Network's mantra is to support smaller parliaments and help them overcome distinct challenges related to resources, scale, and influence. In a recent survey, the Network identified maintaining a clear separation of powers — one of the key pillars of democratic governance — as one of the most pressing issues facing small parliaments. This workshop therefore sought to address that need by exploring how smaller parliaments can protect and strengthen their independence in the face of ongoing challenges and change.

Another key objective of the workshop was to strengthen the Small Branches community by fostering support, collaboration, and networking opportunities, allowing members to learn from one another's successes and challenges.



Mission

To strengthen and support small parliaments by promoting democratic governance, institutional independence, and effective parliamentary oversight.



Vision

To foster collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and practical solutions that help small jurisdictions address challenges related to governance, accountability, and the separation of powers.



> Day 1: Separation of Powers & Parliamentary Independence

Day 1 opened with a lovely opening ceremony featuring a recitation of the Holy Quran, the National Anthem of the Republic of Maldives, welcome remarks by the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the People's Majlis, as well as the Chairperson of the Small Branches Network, followed by a group photo.

Session 1 – Separation of Powers and the Three Branches of Government

During this session, Andrew Young, Former Clerk of the Legislative Council and Clerk of the Parliaments, Victoria, delivered a powerful presentation on the separation of powers and the distinct roles of the Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary.

The Parliament – Responsible for amending and making laws, passing bills, authorising spending, and scrutinising Government to ensure accountability.

The Judiciary – Administers criminal law and justice, interprets the law, makes judgments, and determines whether laws align with the Bill of Rights. The Judiciary is also the ultimate authority on the boundaries of each branch of Government.

The Executive – Does not make primary law or administer justice. Instead, it develops policies to meet society's needs, some of which are drafted into bills for Parliament to consider. The Executive also makes administrative decisions such as board appointments.

There were extensive discussions surrounding constitutionalism, institutional independence, the role of Standing Orders, qualified privilege, and administrative independence.

Session 2 – The Independence of Parliamentarians

This session explored the principles underpinning parliamentary independence, the importance of being free from undue influence, ethical obligations, and some of the real challenges faced by parliamentarians.

Session 3 – The Independence of the Judiciary

This session focused on judicial power, systems of checks and balances, judicial appointments (including transparency and clearly defined processes), tenure and terms of office (contracts, salaries, and benefits), and the removal of judicial officers.

The session also highlighted the five core values of judicial conduct:

- Independence
- Impartiality
- Integrity
- Propriety
- Equality

> Day 1: Separation of Powers & Parliamentary Independence

Session 4 – The Law-Making Process

Participants examined the drafting, debating, and passing of legislation while comparing different jurisdictions and the barriers experienced by various branches of Government.

All sessions concluded with real-life examples from different regions, along with case studies and scenarios that participants discussed and worked through collectively.



Julie Hunter, MP, Parliament Secretary



> Day 2: Accountability, Oversight & Governance

Session 5 – Parliament and the Judiciary

This session explored the importance of maintaining a respectful and independent relationship between Parliament and the Judiciary, while examining cooperation, checks and balances, and the need to prevent institutional overreach.

Discussions highlighted the delicate balance between Parliamentary Supremacy and Constitutionalism, with reference to Latimer Principle 2 – Separation and Balance, which emphasizes Parliament as the highest body.

Session 6 – Accountability: Mechanisms and Oversight of Government

This session focused on the role of independent oversight bodies such as the Auditor General, Ombudsman, and Information Commissioner.

These independent Officers of Parliament may be prescribed within the Constitution and form a critical part of the accountability framework supporting executive integrity institutions. Participants also explored the legal immunity afforded to these offices in the performance of their duties, as well as the importance of:

- Performance auditing
- Financial auditing
- Compliance audits

Session 7 – The Role of Civil Society

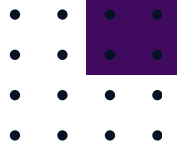
This session emphasized the importance of collaboration between Parliaments and civil society organizations in strengthening oversight and promoting responsive governance.

Civil society organizations play a critical role in monitoring both the Executive and the Legislature, combating corruption, promoting the common good, and building solidarity within communities. Their contribution remains essential to a healthy democratic society.

Session 8 – Reflection and Key Takeaways

During this session, participants were invited to share their key takeaways, reflect on what they had learned, and discuss how these lessons and principles could be applied within their own jurisdictions. Many participants highlighted the differences within their home countries, including how their legislatures operate, whether they function under one-tier or two-tier systems, and how they intend to strengthen and apply the principles shared throughout the workshop.

After lunch, participants were treated to a cultural visit to Maafushi Island. We were warmly welcomed and enjoyed an afternoon of food, dance, tours, and cultural presentations about Maafushi. Personally, I have never visited anywhere else where the locals were so warm and welcoming.



> Day 3: Budget Oversight & Public Accountability

Session 9 – Parliamentary Oversight Through the Budget Cycle

This session examined how Parliament can exercise effective oversight throughout the budget cycle. Participants discussed the importance of strong parliamentary scrutiny during the budget process and the need for key budget documents, including fiscal risk statements, to enhance transparency and accountability.

Living in an age of polycrisis, with little to no recovery time between global challenges, places significant pressure on Members of Parliament and reinforces the need for greater access to information and documentation to support effective oversight and reduce opportunities for corruption.

Discussions also emphasized the importance of parliamentary involvement during the budget formulation stage. Recommendations included:

- Pre-budget debates in Parliament
- Pre-budget consultations conducted by the Executive branch
- In some cases, pre-budget consultations facilitated by Parliament

Participants also engaged in a group exercise examining parliamentary input during the formulation stage of the budget cycle.

Session 10 – The Role of the Public Accounts Committee in Improving Public Spending

This session focused on the important role of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in ensuring accountability and improving public spending.

Participants shared examples of how their respective PACs operate to promote accountability and ensure that public funds are used effectively and for their intended purposes. Effective PACs hold public entities accountable, support the implementation of Auditor General recommendations, and help ensure that identified deficiencies are corrected.

Session 11 – Hidden Risks Within the Budget Process

This session explored risks that may not be immediately visible within the budget process. Participants discussed contingent liabilities from state-owned enterprises, potential revenue shortfalls, and climate-related exposures as examples of risks that may not always be fully disclosed or clearly presented within budget documents. The session emphasized the importance of Members of Parliament carefully examining these hidden risks during the budget review process.

After each session, participants engaged in practical exercises designed to strengthen their understanding and application of the principles learned throughout the workshop.

> Summary



The workshop was highly engaging and motivational. Participants gained valuable insight into the different jurisdictions represented and how their respective parliaments operate. Throughout the sessions, participants actively shared their perspectives on the various topics discussed, while the presenters facilitated meaningful discussions using their extensive knowledge and experience.

A recurring theme throughout the workshop was that the separation of powers remains a cornerstone of democratic governance. It was repeatedly emphasized that protecting this principle is one of the fundamental responsibilities of Parliamentarians if institutional independence is to be maintained amid shifting political dynamics and priorities.

Central themes explored throughout the workshop included:

- Judicial independence
- Parliamentary oversight
- Budget transparency
- Accountability and good governance

The only challenge I experienced was retaining the large volume of material covered within such a short timeframe. Personally, I believe the workshop could have easily been extended over four days to allow for deeper engagement with the topics presented.

Other attendees represented jurisdictions including St. Lucia, Belize, Samoa, the Isle of Man, Seychelles, Tasmania, Australia, and Sri Lanka.

On Day 1, the People's Majlis, along with its Speaker and staff, treated participants to a wonderful tour of the Parliament building and hosted a beautiful evening buffet.

On Day 2, participants enjoyed the cultural visit to Maafushi Island, as previously mentioned.

On Day 3, we presented the Speaker of the People's Majlis with a gift on behalf of the Cayman Islands. The staff of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association did an excellent job facilitating the workshop, which was extremely well organized. Additionally, the staff of JEN Maldives Malé by Shangri-La were warm, welcoming, and exceptionally helpful, contributing greatly to a memorable experience in the Maldives.



Julie Hunter, MP, Parliament Secretary