CONTRIBUTIONS OF PARLIAMENTS TO PRIMARY RESEARCH: THE RESEARCH UNIT'S SAFEGUARDING SOUTH AFRICA'S LAND BORDERS PROJECT

A paper presented at the 31st IFLA Pre Conference for Library and Research Services for Parliaments, Cape Town (South Africa) 12 – 14 August 2015.

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INTRODUCTION

Although it is not their primary task, Parliaments (and other Legislatures) are in a unique position to positively contribute to primary research, because they often interact with strategic role-players and decision-makers. As institutions that make laws, conduct oversight and facilitate public participation, Parliaments are given access to both governmental and non-governmental institutions, which can contribute meaningfully to primary research. As the central provider of research support to Members of Parliament, the Research Unit is in a similarly unique position to utilise the institution's access to data sources to conduct primary research and produce a high quality research output. The Research Unit recently embarked on one such primary research project which has yielded invaluable lessons and results. The project may be understood as part of the evolvement and innovation to the information needs of Parliament. More importantly, the project may contribute to scholarly knowledge based on primary research.

The aim of this paper is not to present the findings of the study, but to illustrate the contribution of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa to primary research. This will be illustrated by using the Research Unit's Safeguarding South Africa's Land Borders project as a case study. This paper provides the background to and rationale of the study on border safeguarding, its purpose, and significance and research methodology. It further delves into research concerns such as the ethical dimension of interviews, including the Consent to Participate in Research, procedures, potential risks and discomforts, confidentiality, and participation and withdrawal as adhered to and administered to the participants. It then focuses on the practical considerations of the study during qualitative data gathering, specifically interviews and observations from the Maseru Bridge, Ficksburg Bridge, Beit Bridge and Lebombo ports of entry and surrounds. It also provides a brief explanation of how

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recommendations can assist Parliament's oversight function and concludes with an overview of Parliament's contribution to primary research.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE BORDER SAFEGUARDING PROJECT

South Africa's land borders are known to be porous, which enables, inter alia, the illegal migration of people, the spread of diseases from neighbouring countries, human trafficking and other cross-border crimes. Contemporary examples of such crimes include the rustling of livestock, vehicle smuggling as well as smuggling of arms, drugs and counterfeit goods.[3]

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) was traditionally charged with the safeguarding of land borderlines until a decision was made to initiate a phased takeover of this function by the South African Police Service (SAPS) between 2003 and 2009. However, in 2009, the decision was revisited and the SANDF was returned to the borders. Despite its return, significant problems in land borderline control continue and long-term solutions seem to remain elusive at this current juncture.

In executing their functions, the Department of Defence (DOD), the Department of Police and the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) are the main contributors to Government's Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) outcomes and the National Development Plan (NDP)[4] in terms of border security. Some of the contributions of the SANDF and the SAPS are outlined in Chapter 7 of the NDP (Position South Africa in the World). The two departments play key roles in ensuring human security within South Africa and the prevention of transnational crime such as piracy (sea borders) and the smuggling of counterfeit goods (land and sea borders).[5]

Simultaneously, the DHA contributes to border safeguarding through border control (the implementation of migration and other legislation aimed at ensuring the improved movement of goods and people across South Africa's borders). The border environment thus requires a comprehensive approach which strikes the balance between human security and economic/trade/humanitarian imperatives. To strike this balance, the DHA will lead a soon-to-be established Border Management Agency (BMA) to coordinate the security of all land, air and maritime ports of entry and to support the efforts of the SANDF to deal with the threats to areas other than the ports of entry.

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[3] Department of Defence. (2014). pp. 6-1 to 6-3.
[4] The MTSF reflects the Government's five-year strategic plan while the NDP refers to a long-term (15 year) strategic planning vision.
[5] National Planning Commission. (2013). pp. 248 to249.

The rationale for the study fits well into the scope of Parliament's oversight role. Clear shortcomings in land border safeguarding as well as Government efforts to strengthen border security informed the rationale for the study. Parliamentary Committees providing oversight of the said departments should be empowered with current information on relevant issues related to borders and, notably, the challenges faced in this regard.

LINKING PRIMARY RESEARCH TO THE PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Although the border safeguarding project had elements of an explanatory and exploratory study, its purpose was largely descriptive.[6] This is a major purpose of many social scientific studies in which the researcher observes and then describes what was observed.[7] The main aim of the study was to analytically describe the contributions of the SANDF, SAPS and DHA in safeguarding South Africa's land borders.

To ensure originality and relevance, the study included an aspect of primary research. This, firstly, provided an insider's perspective of the current state of border safeguarding. By incorporating primary research, it allowed for an in-depth understanding of actual challenges faced on the borders. Secondly, primary research supplemented the information that exist in the public domain from both Government and other sources. It is imperative to assess the performance of departments on operational levels in order to ascertain if their actions support the strategic level; in this case, Government priorities. In this regard, it is important to comprehend how higher order decisions impact on service delivery on the ground, and vice versa. The thorough understanding of this interplay is essential to Parliament's oversight role. Primary research thus ensured that relevant and current information informed the Research Unit report. This assists Members of Parliament and Committees in both the National Assembly and National Council of Provinces to fulfil their monitoring and oversight functions relating to land border safeguarding effectively during the Fifth Parliament, in line with this prioritisation in the NDP and the MTSF.

LINKING PRIMARY RESEARCH TO THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design of the border safeguarding project made use of a case study. One of the types of a case study is *studies of events, roles and relationships*.[8] Thus, the roles of the various departments and agencies executing land border safeguarding was studied using the

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[6] Babbie. (2007). p. 89.
[7] Babbie and Mouton. (2012). p. 80.
[8] Babbie and Mouton. (2012). pp. 280-281.

case study-approach. The unit of analysis for the project were organisations and institutions of the DOD, DHA and the Department of Police.

The importance of primary research is closely linked to the research methodology of the border safeguarding project. In terms of the nature of the study, this research project utilised a qualitative approach using multiple sources of data which is important for case studies.[9] The techniques or data collection methods used in the project included a literature study, interviews and observations in selected South African borders. Primary sources (official publications by the respective departments as well as previous Parliamentary Committee Reports on border control) and secondary sources (books and articles from accredited and non-accredited journals as well as internet articles from reliable websites) formed the basis for initial research. The essential contribution of primary research was, however, in the form of interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with knowledgeable practitioners on land border safeguarding ranging from high ranking officials to members from the SANDF, SAPS and DHA deployed along the borders and border posts to gather more information on the challenges in border safeguarding. The primary data gathering exercise also allowed for observations. Researchers visited the South Africa/Zimbabwe border, the South Africa/Mozambique border and the South Africa/Lesotho border which further informed the final research product.

Primary research was thus conducted within the framework of a qualitative research methodology. Semi-structured interviews and observations were the data collection methods employed. This did, however, bring challenges in terms of ethical considerations.

ETHICAL ISSUES OF INTERVIEWS

Prior to conducting interviews, clearance was requested and received from the relevant departments. The support from the various Chairpersons of the relevant Parliamentary Committees was instrumental in gaining such clearances. The ethical dimensions of the study were outlined in the Consent to Participate in Research, which outlined the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks and discomforts, potential benefits to participants/or to society, payment for participation, confidentiality, and participation and withdrawal of participants.

- *Purpose of the study*: The purpose of the study was to analytically describe the contributions of the SANDF, SAPS and DHA in safeguarding South Africa's land borders.

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[9] Babbie and Mouton. (2012). p. 282.

- *Procedures*: Participants were requested to volunteer to participate in this study in order to provide the researchers with their knowledge on land border safeguarding (details were contained in the Semi-Structured Interview Schedules/Questionnaires each focusing on the different role players).

- *Potential risks and discomforts*: There were no foreseeable risks or discomforts identified. The researchers ensured that the principles of no harm to the participants and informed consent were adhered to.

- *Potential benefits to participants/or to society*: The final product was made available to the relevant Parliamentary Committees and other Members of Parliament, as well as to the relevant departments and participants of the study.

- *Payment for participation*: There was no payment for participation. Participants volunteered without any form of compensation.

- *Confidentiality*: All the information obtained in this study and that could be identified with a participant remained confidential. No information was disclosed without permission or as required by law. However, the validity of the project depended heavily on the use of authoritative sources. Illustrating that members involved in land border safeguarding have been consulted, added more value to the credibility of the study. However, no names were revealed without consent of the participant. It was explained that in cases where a participant gives consent, names may be revealed. Where participants provided information 'off the record' their identity remained anonymous. Participants were also requested to give permission for the audio recording (where so mutually decided upon) and that the researchers may make notes of the views and experiences. Only the researcher/s had access to information provided. After the information of the recordings and notes were used, it was securely stored and will remain stored for a minimum of two years after which it will be expunged. For the final document, confidentiality was maintained by using code name official/s where necessary.

- *Participation and withdrawal:* Participants were informed that they could choose whether to participate in the study or not. Furthermore, if they volunteered to be in the study, they could withdraw at any given time. Additionally, participants could choose to refuse to answer any questions and still remain in the study. The investigator could also discontinue with the interview if circumstances arose which warranted doing so.

The combination of institutional permission and practical means of addressing ethical considerations laid the theoretical foundation for the conducting of primary research. There were, however, some practical aspects of qualitative data gathering, such as the need to

ensure validity and reliability, which needed to be addressed for the study to truly contribute to primary research.

THE RESEARCH UNIT AND DATA GATHERING: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The conducting of independent primary research by Parliamentary researchers is relatively new and brings a myriad of challenges. One of the main challenges is limited opportunities to conduct primary research as a means of corroborating secondary information, including information brought before Parliament by the various departments. The land border safeguarding project provided researchers with an opportunity to conduct independent investigations into such secondary information. To ensure the success of the project, however, sufficient and high quality information needed to be obtained in the context of the qualitative methodological framework.

Reliability, Validity and Perspective

The aim to produce reliable information is essential to any research product and is highly dependent on the validity of the information obtained. Reliability refers to the "quality of the measurement methods that suggests that the same data would have been collected each time."[10] While qualitative interviewing can experience challenges in terms of reliability, due to the inherent differences among researchers, it does provide greater validity than many other forms of data gathering.[11] Babbie notes the need to differentiate between 'face validity', which refers to aspects of indicators that make it seem reasonable, and 'criterion-related validity' which focuses on "the degree to which a measure relates to some external criterion."[12] Both these form of validity were addressed during primary research conducted along the borders and was assisted through the diversification of interviews.

To illustrate the diversification of interviews, the approach used at one of the SANDF's operational bases can be utilised. Researchers identified three core groups of SANDF personnel to be interviewed. This included lower ranking members stationed at the base, base management (including the operational commander) and, finally, the senior commanders responsible for countrywide border control coordination. During interviews with lower-ranking individuals, challenges of a practical nature were revealed. One member noted, for example, that more ambulances were needed to service deployed troops in the region. The 'face validity' of such a statement highlighted a serious and reasonable concern to researchers. However,

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[10] Babbie. (2013). p. 188.
[11] Babbie. (2013). p. 353.
[12] Babbie. (2013). p. 191.

interviews with base management provided context (criterion-related validity) to this statement and it was indicated that the number of ambulances were sufficient given the size and location of deployed troop contingents. Validity of information was thus enhanced through the cross-cutting nature of interviews across the various rank groups.

In addition to efforts at enhancing validity, researchers were also surprised by the perspective provided by the various groups interviewed. Gaining various perspectives is an essential part of qualitative interviewing.[13] Researchers found that perspectives often correlated, but that operational and senior commanders provided valuable context. A prime example reflecting this is that low-ranking SANDF forces and base commanders faced challenges in terms of the availability of vehicles. While this was raised as a concern in all border regions, senior commanders pointed out that they are fully aware of the problem and that an acquisition process is underway to provide more suitable vehicles. This perspective is essential as it directs the research product's eventual outcomes and recommendations.

The research environment
Babbie notes that, when conducting field research, the establishing of rapport with those being interviewed is essential.[14] He further highlights the value of being relaxed and appropriate to the setting as a means of establishing rapport. Elwood and Martin also focuses on the setting of an interview stating that "the interview site itself embodies and constitutes multiple scales of spatial relations and meaning."[15] During the research project on border safeguarding, participants from the SANDF, SAPS and DHA were interviewed at their places of deployment. For the SAPS and DHA personnel, this referred to the various border posts. In terms of the SANDF, researchers intentionally visited deployed platoons and sections[16] operating along the borderlines as well as operational bases near the borderlines. By interviewing participants in their areas of deployment, it not only contributed to a relaxed environment, but it also provided researchers with a broader understanding of the areas of operations of these personnel. Elwood and Martin also notes that by "paying attention to what the participant says about the place, may generate useful research material."[17] Researchers gained such value by, for example, noting SANDF members' concerns regarding the state of accommodation along some areas of the border or the lack of computers and CCTV cameras pointed out by SAPS personnel at the border posts.

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[13] Boyce and Neale. (2006). p. 2.
[14] Babbie. (2013). p. 345.
[15] Elwood and Martin. (2000). p. 649.
[16] A platoon consist of approximately 30 members, while a section consist 10 members.
[17] Elwood and Martin. (2000). p. 656.

Combined interview approaches

Given the number of military units, deployment areas and border posts visited by researchers in a short space of time, a combination of interview approaches were used. Researchers decided to make use of individual as well as focus group interviews to ensure maximum coverage. Richard Krueger (in Babbie)[18] notes the advantages of group interviews as bringing about flexibility, fast results and a high level of face validity. Researchers subsequently chose to conduct group interviews where time was limited and/or, in the case of the SANDF, a larger group of the same rank was deployed in a specific area. The latter refers, for example, to group interviews held with SANDF sections deployed along sections of the Lesotho and Zimbabwe borders. These sections were generally of the same rank and experienced similar challenges. Researchers did, however, make efforts to interview commanders of these units separately. Where specialists were present (such as Intelligence personnel and Medical orderlies), efforts were also made to interview these members separately. The primary advantages of using the focus group approach in some instances was that it provided information on collective views[19] which could then be corroborated with information obtained from individuals.

Through the process of obtaining the primary data, corroborating it and ensuring maximum validity, the researchers faced the remaining challenge of packaging primary data obtained to be client-specific (focused on support to Members of Parliament).

DIRECTING THE MEANS TO JUSTIFY THE ENDS

The means utilised above highlights the success that primary research can have in contributing to the knowledge base of Parliament. Parliamentary research, however, differs fundamentally from academic research in that it ought to be client-specific. As noted, the aim of the Research Unit at Parliament is to support the Members of Parliament. As such, all research produced should have the inherent aim (end state) of assisting Members in executing their oversight role.

The research project on border safeguarding aimed to fulfill its primary supporting role in two ways. Firstly, the final research product was aimed specifically at the Members of Parliament of four Committees, namely the Portfolio Committee on Police, the Joint Standing Committee

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[18] Babbie. (2013). p. 349.
[19] Gill et al. (2008). p. 291.

on Defence, the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans and the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs. This aim was also reflected in the structuring of the final document which addresses the various departments (DHA, SAPS and SANDF) separately. An integrated approach was, however, provided by including a chapter on intersectoral collaboration. This approach thus provided a cohesive report that allowed for sector-specific reading.

Secondly, the research project fulfilled its supportive role to Members through the inclusion of recommendations. Recommendation were structured in a way that is similar to the rest of the document. It provides general recommendations that spans the various departments involved. These represent higher-order recommendations related to the broader functioning and management of border safeguarding. Thereafter, sector-specific recommendations were made for the relevant departments (DHA, SAPS and SANDF). The recommendations are structured to improve the oversight capacity of Member and for Members to positively engage with the relevant departments on improvements in border safeguarding.

While assisting Members in their primary task, subsequent developments have highlighted further advantages of primary research through parliamentary structures. Although the document was written for specific Committees, it has found broader application in Parliament. A subsequent request was made for the provision of an overview of South Africa's maritime and air borders. The Research Unit is currently in the process of conceptualising a primary research project focusing on maritime and air border safeguarding.

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

The project on border safeguarding addressed its principal function related to supporting Members of Parliament in their oversight role. Furthermore, it holds a secondary value in its potential contribution to scholarly knowledge.

Support to Parliament
The main aim of the project was to support Parliament in its oversight role. The success of the project was based on the following:
- *Clear alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP)*: In terms of the NDP, one of the priorities contained in Chapter 12 is to ensure that the Criminal Justice System realises the vision of ensuring that by 2030, people living in South Africa feel safe at home, at school and at work and that they enjoy a community life free of fear. For this to happen, various Departments and agencies will work together to realise the MTSF outcomes.

Chapter 7 of the NDP, dealing with positioning South Africa in the world, highlights two aspects related to border safeguarding. Firstly, regional integration and cooperation is recognised and, secondly, it is noted that civil society "that share borders with neighbouring countries"[20] should be included in all planning relating to integration. The study was thus informed by the focus placed on border safeguarding and the intersectoral nature thereof highlighted in the NDP.

- *Clear alignment with the Medium Term Strategic Framework and other policies:* The NDP focus areas informed the 2014-2019 Government priorities, which make up the 14 outcomes for the current MTSF. These outcomes include Outcome 3 (All people in South Africa are and feel safe), which speaks specifically to border safeguarding. The MTSF states that "South Africa's land and maritime borders, as well as the airspace, need to be effectively safe guarded and secured to curb transnational organised crime and corruption, particularly at ports of entry and land borderline."[21] By focussing on the aspect of safeguarding, the project was thus demarcated to address the concerns of the MTSF and thus had the potential to direct Members of Parliament in attaining these medium-term goals.

- *Proactive research and forward thinking*: The research was initiated by the Research Unit on the initiative of researchers themselves, based on the identification of border safeguarding as a priority in recent Government policies. The 2015 xenophobic attacks in South Africa brought about significant debate in Parliament and one of the areas identified as a concern related to border safeguarding. Given the proactive nature of the research project, information on border safeguarding was thus available immediately when needed by Members.

- *Support from Chairpersons*: The Chairpersons from the relevant Committees were informed and consulted about the project and Chairpersons assisted researchers in gaining access from the departments. This ensured that there were no delays in granting permissions for primary research to be conducted.

- *User-friendly packaging of information:* The packaging of the final product is in a format that serves the needs of Members. The information was easy to read and presented in a format which allowed for relevant sections to be consulted without the need to read the entire document.

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[20] National Planning Commission. (2013). p. 244.
[21] Republic of South Africa. (2014). p. 2.

- *Solution orientated recommendations*: As noted, the general and specific recommendations contained in the document are solution-orientated. This assists Members to oversee the relevant departments. They detail how to improve Parliamentary oversight and suggest how several challenges may be addressed by the relevant departments.

Contribution to Scholarly Knowledge

The primary advantage in a Parliament-driven primary research project relates to *access*. The Parliament of the Republic of South Africa is in a unique position as it is tasked with the function of oversight over government institutions. Consequently, accessibility to information from government departments and entities is not a major challenge as they account to Parliament. Parliament thus obtains primary data in two ways. Firstly, government institutions make regular presentations to Parliament. Examples include Annual Performance Plans, Quarterly Reports, Annual Reports, and other operational matters. Secondly, Parliament, through its various Committees, conducts oversight visits to oversee the activities as reported on. It is important to note, however, that the Parliamentary programme often does not provide sufficient time to focus on matters at the operational and tactical levels. Additionally, it is also not possible for Parliamentary Committees to visit all places of interest to its oversight mandate.

As a provider of research support to Parliament, the Research Unit has the capacity to fill the vacuum in oversight pertaining to matters of operations. Through conducting primary research, the Research Unit can provide Parliament with access to quality information to inform its oversight function. Furthermore, the publishing of such information has the potential to make findings based on the primary research available to the broader academic community for additional scrutiny. Parliament's often unparalleled access to state and other institutions thus holds the prospect of expanding on scholarly knowledge based on the Research Unit's packaging and publishing of its primary data findings.

Challenges

Although there are prospects regarding the contribution of Parliament to primary research, several challenges exist. These range from publication to time constraints.

- *Lack of a Publication Ethics Committee:* Most institutions have Ethics Committees that deal with matters pertaining to primary research. The ethical dimensions of the project

followed good practices of most academic institutions as Parliament currently lacks one. When undertaking primary research, ethical considerations are very important.

- *Publication of research:* The major challenge remains the publication of such pertinent research output to allow for greater contribution to the scholarly knowledge on various subject matters. It should be noted, however, that not all research conducted by the Research Unit may be available for public consumption due to security reasons. For instance, some issues pertaining to border security have restrictions as they pertain to national security. This should not, however, undermine the primary research efforts as its value remains applicable. Where primary research makes determinants on restricted information, such information will still have value to Parliament's oversight role. A need does exist, however, to explore the publication of primary research findings without security implications for broader academic consumption. For research to be published, Parliament requires a publication policy. Currently, there is no publication policy. Although efforts have been made towards a publication policy, there have been challenges.

- *Dealing with two Worlds (Balancing the needs of clients versus scholarly inquiry)*: The parliamentary environment and academia represent different worlds of inquiry. The former may be regarded as World 1 (everyday life, focusing on pragmatic interest), while the latter may be regarded as World 2 (science, focusing on epistemic interest).[22] The challenge is that what is often accepted as a norm in academic circles is not necessary viewed as such in a parliamentary environment. For instance, while academic inquiry is generally conducted with the freedom associated therewith, parliamentary researchers are required to be cognisant that they serve Members of an array of different political parties. The main aim is thus to inform Members and not reflect decision-making or raising criticism for academic value.

- *Time constraints:* Parliamentary researchers, more often than not, are faced with time constraints. The research that is mostly undertaken is time-bound. More importantly, there is often insufficient time to conduct primary research, while balancing other research requirements.

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[22] Mouton. (2001). p. 139.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Moving towards the future, institutional support for primary research remains important as part of evolution and innovation to meet the information needs of Parliament. Having access to information based on primary research will not only assist Members in their oversight roles, but also potentially contributes to the body of scholarly knowledge. It is, after all, access to primary data that underscores Parliament's contribution to primary research. With adequate support this may lead to the expansion of the primary research capability of the Research Unit and the level of support it offers to the Institution. In addition, the commencement of the publication of research projects will add value to scholarly knowledge based on primary research (due to the access which Parliament has to information). The establishment of an Ethics Committee is a prerequisite if Parliament is to venture into primary research and contribute meaningfully to the body of scholarly knowledge through peer reviewed publications.

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