

The second Global Parliamentary Report on *Parliament's power to hold government to account: Realities and perspectives on oversight*

Multi-stakeholder focus groups:

Guidance note for UNDP Country Offices and Regional Hubs

8 March 2016

As part of the process leading to the second Global Parliamentary Report, UNDP Country Offices and regional hubs are invited to convene multi-stakeholder focus groups to discuss ways to strengthen parliamentary oversight of the executive. Focus groups can be organized at national, sub-regional and/or regional level. This guidance note is intended to provide guidance to the UNDP organizers of national focus groups.

About the second Global Parliamentary Report

The second Global Parliamentary Report will be jointly published by IPU and UNDP. The report will focus on *Parliament's power to hold government to account: Realities and perspectives on oversight*.¹ The main objective of the Global Parliamentary Report is to develop practical recommendations for parliaments and other relevant stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight.

This project uses the term “oversight”. Some parliaments use different terms, such as “scrutiny”, “control”, “evaluation of public policies”, to describe what are essentially similar functions. “Oversight” is defined as any activity that involves examining (and being prepared to challenge) the expenditure, administration and policies of the government of the day.

Oversight activities include such things as questioning ministers, holding public hearings, reviewing reports from government departments, examining audit reports, etc. For the purposes of this project, oversight also includes, but is not limited to, parliament's work on the national budget (including preparation, approval, implementation of the budget); the evaluation of the implementation and impact of legislation (“post-legislative scrutiny”); and implementation of international commitments including for example in relation to human rights, gender equality, anti-corruption and the SDGs. However, the scope of the project does not include parliamentary law-making activities, except where outlined above.

About the focus groups

Whether organized at national, subregional or regional level, the objective of the focus groups is to bring together a range of stakeholders who will collectively identify the challenges to parliamentary oversight in the local context, identify innovations and good practices in parliamentary oversight, and

¹ In April 2012, IPU and UNDP published the first Global Parliamentary Report on the theme of “The changing nature of parliamentary representation” (www.ipu.org/gpr).

identify specific strategies and/or recommendations to address these challenges that can be considered for inclusion in the Global Parliamentary Report.

The output from each focus group will be a report that is framed as a case study for the Global Parliamentary Report. A template for the report is annexed to this note.

The expected benefits of convening a multi-stakeholder focus group include:

- Reports from focus groups will provide content (analysis of challenges, strategies, recommendations, quotes etc.) for the second Global Parliamentary Report.
- The identification of challenges, good practices and strategies for strengthening parliamentary oversight from a range of perspectives and discussed by a diverse set of stakeholders will serve as a starting point for greater commitment and collaboration to strengthen the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight, that will be relevant not only for the Global Parliamentary Report, but for catalyzing follow up action at national, sub-regional and/or regional levels.

In order to ensure they are completed in time to be referenced in the Global Parliamentary Report, the reports/case studies of the focus groups should be completed and submitted to the IPU and UNDP focal points on the GPR (Andy Richardson ar@ipu.org, and Suki Beavers suki.beavers@undp.org) ideally before the end of April 2016. In extenuating circumstances, some focus group reports/case studies can be submitted before the end of May 2016.

Participants

Focus groups should bring together a wide range of different stakeholders. Special attention should be paid to ensuring inclusiveness and gender balance. UNDP Country Offices, project and/or regional hubs will need to determine the most suitable people to invite, based on the national/regional context. In order to ensure that real discussion is possible, the suggested number of participants is about 20-30 people.

Participants in the focus groups should ideally include representatives of these stakeholders:

- Government: Ministers; senior government officials (female and male) ideally from a range of relevant Ministries;
- Parliament: Parliamentarians (female and male) from different political parties; senior parliamentary staff (female and male);
- Civil society organizations: for example, groups working on issues of parliament, democracy, governance, budget transparency, women's rights (female and male);
- Special attention should be paid to ensuring the participation of particularly excluded or marginalized people including; persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples and LGBTI groups (female and male); and
- Media (female and male).

Organization

Participating UNDP Country Offices and regional hubs are responsible for organizing and facilitating the national focus groups and providing a summary report/case study. Within the framework set out in this guidance note, decisions on organization should be taken by relevant UNDP staff, taking into account the national and/or regional context, priorities and opportunities.

No central funding is available from the IPU or UNDP to support the costs of convening a focus group or preparing the report/case study. Therefore, the UNDP country offices, projects or regional hubs that convene focus groups must do so with their respective existing financial and human resources.

Some participants in the two GPR expert meetings that have taken place (see list of participants in the annex) have expressed their interest and willingness to participate in focus groups. If it is appropriate

in the national context, and if there is the necessary funding available, the organizers of focus groups may wish to consider inviting one or more of the participants from the expert meeting (from the relevant country, region or from a different region) to support the focus group discussions.

The length of the focus groups will depend on the national and/or regional context. A half-day event is likely to allow sufficient time for discussion and reaching conclusions. Focus groups should normally be not less than two hours, but may take place over more than one day if preferable in the context.

It is likely that given the diversity in intended participants, there will be different levels of familiarity with the role of parliamentary oversight, and different perspectives on its effectiveness. Focus groups should therefore start with a general discussion on parliamentary oversight in the national context, before moving towards more specific conclusions about the main challenges and recommendations.

The organizers should develop an agenda for the focus group and distribute it to participants in advance. Suggestions for agenda items and a set of questions to frame the discussion are annexed to this note, which the organizers can adapt as required.

During the focus group, facilitators should ensure that all participants take part in the exchanges. Facilitators should emphasize the desire for a constructive and non-confrontational exchange, and keep the focus on ways to strengthen parliamentary oversight.

Facilitators should draw out the different perspectives on the challenges, examples of innovations or good practices, and elicit specific proposals for ways to respond to these challenges. To the extent possible, facilitators should aim to build a consensus around the conclusions of the focus group. Where no consensus can be found on certain points, the differing points of view should be noted in the report.

Reporting

UNDP Country Offices or regional hubs should submit a summary report of the focus group to the UNDP and IPU focal points for the Global Parliamentary Report by the end of April 2016, or exceptionally by the end of May 2016.

Reports can be written in English, French, Spanish or Arabic. The maximum length of the report is five pages (2500 words). The report should clearly outline: i) the main challenges to effective parliamentary oversight that have been identified by the stakeholder group, ii) the specific recommendations for addressing them, supported by examples (where appropriate). It should also capture quotes by participants that can be used in the Global Parliamentary Report to illustrate the discussion. A template for the report is annexed to this note.

The report should be circulated to all participants to ensure there are no objections to the content before it is submitted to the UNDP and IPU focal points. Quotes should only be attributed to individual participants if they have given their explicit permission.

IPU and UNDP may decide to publish all or parts of the respective focus group report in the print or electronic versions of the Global Parliamentary Report. If necessary, focus group organizers should indicate if all or any part of the report should not be made publicly available.

Contact

Organizers can contact Suki Beavers at UNDP (suki.beavers@undp.org) or Andy Richardson at the IPU (ar@ipu.org) to discuss the organization of national, sub-regional or regional focus groups.

The second Global Parliamentary Report is scheduled for publication in late 2016. More information about the report is available at www.ipu.org/gpr2.

Annex: Templates for the focus groups

Suggested agenda items

1. How effective is parliamentary oversight of the executive? What are the main challenges to effective oversight that are faced by parliament and other stakeholders?
2. Identification of an example of parliamentary oversight. What happened, and why? What lessons can be drawn from this experience? Multiple positive examples can be identified, time permitting.
3. Analysis of existing challenges to parliamentary oversight. Moving beyond theory to reality to analyse existing challenges, why they exist, and opportunities, good practices and innovations for responding to these challenges.
4. Identification of priority actions that should be taken to increase the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight. Who should be responsible for each of these actions?

Discussion questions

1. To what extent is parliament effective in overseeing the **expenditure, administration and policies** of the government?
2. How well is parliament able to influence and scrutinize the **national budget**, including from a gender perspective? What factors influence whether it is effective or ineffective?
3. How cooperative and responsive is the **government** to parliamentary oversight. What factors seem to influence government cooperation and responsiveness?
4. How effective are the procedures for parliamentarians to **question the executive**? To what extent is parliament able to **secure adequate information** from the executive?
5. How effective are existing **parliamentary committees** in carrying out their oversight function? What factors influence committee effectiveness?
6. How systematic, transparent and accessible are the existing procedures for **citizens and civil society groups** to make a submission to a parliamentary committee or commission of enquiry? How often are they used and by whom?
7. How can **parliaments and civil society** better work together to strengthen parliamentary oversight? Are there any good examples of the impact of civil society actors engagement in parliamentary oversight activities?
8. What influence does the **media** have on parliamentary oversight work? Provide examples where possible.
9. How systematic are the **partnerships** between parliament and other oversight institutions, such as Supreme Audit Institutions?
10. How systematic are arrangements for members to **report to their constituents** about performance of their oversight duties? Provide examples where possible.
11. Are there any **specific challenges and/or opportunities for women** to raise oversight questions, or speak in oversight debates?

12. To what extent are parliament's oversight activities gender-sensitive, and systematically attentive to the **needs of men and women**? Identify specific examples where possible.

13. Are there areas where parliament **does not carry out** oversight? Why, why not?

- What have been the biggest recent innovations or improvements in the areas outlined above?
- What is the most serious ongoing deficiency in parliamentary oversight?
- What measures would be needed to remedy this deficiency? Prioritize where possible

Template for the report

Reports should be no more than five pages (2500 words). The structure of the report should normally follow the headings below:

- **Summary.** One or two paragraphs, accompanied by three to five bullet points that encapsulate the main points emerging from the focus group.
- **Principal challenges to effective parliamentary oversight.** Five to ten bullet points analysing the principal challenges, with a brief discussion of how each one can be addressed
- **Examples of parliamentary oversight.** Description of at least one example of where parliamentary oversight was judged to have taken place effectively, including an analysis of why this happened, who was involved, what was the outcome.
- **Recommendations for strategies and/or priority actions to increase the effectiveness of oversight.** Bullet list of five to ten strategies and/or priority actions, including a brief description of what problem the action would address and who the action should be taken by. Indicate the level of consensus among participants on each priority action.
- **Any other points** emerging from the national focus group not addressed elsewhere in the report.
- **Quotes.** Five to ten quotes from a range of participants (female and male) that illustrate the exchange. Indicate for each quote if the quote can be attributed to a specific person.
- **List of participants.** Name, sex and affiliation of all participants in the focus groups

Annex: Consolidated list of participants in the Expert Meetings on the Global Parliamentary Report

22-23 June 2015 and 25-26 February 2016, Geneva (Switzerland)

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