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# Second Expert Roundtable on the Common Principles for Support to Parliaments

## Discussion paper

### Background

1. In ten principles, the *Common Principles for Support to Parliaments* (IPU: 2014) identifies the basic structure of successful parliamentary development, and promotes parliament's<sup>1</sup> central place in driving its self-development. Many parliaments, parliamentary assemblies and partner organizations have committed to the *Principles*.<sup>2</sup>

### Roundtable

2. After the publication of the *Principles*, parliaments and partners agreed a series of roundtables aimed at deepening their application. The first event was held in October 2016, where participants identified good practices in applying the Common Principles to promote sustainable outcomes in support projects (*Roundtable 2016: Report*). **The purpose of the second Expert Roundtable is to support the drafting of a *Common Principles Guide* for use by parliaments and support partners generally.**

### Purpose of Guide

3. The purpose of a *Guide* is to assist parliaments and their support partners to strengthen parliament's development role in two main ways:

- **To enable parliament to better assess offers of support, and**
- **When offers of support are taken up, to ensure that parliament retains central direction of project/activity design and implementation.**

4. This steering paper is intended to kick-start discussion at the Roundtable.

### Content

5. The paper rehearses briefly the *Common Principles* rationale, notes the Roundtable program, and provides an example 'zero draft' outline of the *Guide* (***Annex***) – a prompt for discussion.

### Resource asymmetry

6. Our starting point is the 'core tenet' of parliamentary support: 'only Parliament can take responsibility for its own development.' (*Principles*: 3). How is parliament to apply it?

7. Parliament in developing countries is frequently resource-starved; many of the *means* of development rest with external support actors. This includes (but is not confined to) access to expertise and financial resources. Where a resource-strapped parliament does engage in development with external actors, a resource/power asymmetry may mean that it is the latter's priorities that predominate unduly. While these priorities may appear unexceptionable, asymmetry can create 'ownership deficit' for parliament.

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<sup>1</sup> By 'parliament' here we mean the leadership of parliament, usually a combination of the Speaker, Secretary-General, and party leaders.

<sup>2</sup> Currently 117 parliaments and partners organizations, see: <https://www.ipu.org/our-work/strong-parliaments/setting-standards/common-principles-support-parliaments>

## Ownership deficit

8. Ineffective delivery: One consequence of ownership deficit is that parliament's contribution to the development activity may be one of passive recipient rather than fully active partner. However, in the absence of parliament's input into support design and implementation (*Principle 7*), external 'agendas' are unlikely to prove fully effective. By their nature, external actors, however well prepared personally, cannot hope to implement fully the injunction that 'support programmes must take account of the variety of cultural, religious, political and institutional contexts' (*Foreword: 3-4*) without appropriate local contributions.

9. Lack of sustainability: A related consequence is that parliament may sometimes seem satisfied to stay on the sidelines of an externally funded and staffed support project, even though this will mean that key staff of parliament will be denied opportunities available for self-development through participating fully in development design and activity execution. This is deeply unsatisfactory because such a situation undermines sustainability, reinforces dependency and passivity, and encourages substitution and not capacity support. An ultimate good arising from development is the *exit* of the external practitioner, but where sustainability is not the focus this objective is placed at risk. All too often, there is no 'exit'.

10. Internalized development: The more local input and ownership there is, therefore, the better the chance that 'development' is likely to be internalized and institutionalized. In other words, there is a directly proportional relation between local ownership and sustainability. It follows that:

- Parliament needs to conceive of development as *self*-development
- External intervention buttresses, but does not determine, parliament's development objectives
- Sustainable parliamentary development will arise from all participants understanding, accepting, and remaining within their distinct roles.

## Parliamentary development

11. Relating modernity and democracy: Parliament's willingness to keep up to date with ways of carrying out its constitutionally mandated functions is a key criterion of its commitment to effective democracy. For example, developing capacity for more effective parliamentary oversight of government.<sup>3</sup>

12. Parliaments may however adopt a 'static' institutional view with little or no development being considered necessary. Not all parliamentarians or officials may appreciate fully the point of enhancing delivery of 'core' functions, or managing positive change proactively through targeted development.

13. Such a static approach leads to institutional atrophy. MPs cannot provide adequate oversight of government, pass effective legislation, or represent their constituents or nation well, unless the practices and procedures of parliament are relevant, modern and therefore easily communicable within society and achievable solely through active self-development..

14. If the *Common Principles* precepts, 'Whether internal or external, support should be based firmly on parliament's own well defined priorities.' (*Principles: 8*); and, 'Parliamentary support partners are guided by the needs of parliament' (*Principles: 15*) are to be realized, parliament will need to have taken prior steps to define those development priorities.

## Defining 'relevant' development

15. How is parliament to define what it needs, 'relevant' development?

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<sup>3</sup> *Global Parliamentary Report 2017: Parliamentary oversight: Parliament's power to hold the government to account* (IPU and UNDP), 101

16. Development mainstreamed in a strategy: The ideal is that parliament's self-development plan is set within its parliamentary strategy. A strategy provides a sound ground for development because it encapsulates an agreed, consensual whole-of-institution balance of objectives and resources. Having a strategy also implies a good level of institutional confidence and self-reflection.<sup>4</sup>

17. Where a strategy exists or is in process of creation, it should be perfectly possible to identify main self-development needs and to incorporate these in the document. Development support situated within the context of an overall parliamentary strategy ensures good synergy between the two.

18. The *Common Principles* text might feature routinely as an integral part of parliament strategies to frame relations between the development partners and as a guide for activity implementation.

19. Development without strategy: However where no strategy exists this will not be possible and a narrower, stand-alone 'needs assessment' designed to identify priority development requirements may be required.

20. It would be wrong for development to wait for a fully-fledged strategy covering all aspects of parliament's work. Consideration however could be given to working with parliament to produce such a strategy as being itself a key part of parliamentary development.

### **Current position**

21. Whether parliament considers its development within the context of a strategy, or 'stand alone', the *Common Principles* is itself a high level 'guide' to the way of 'designing and managing effective parliamentary support' (*Principles*: 2). Principles 1 and 3 (*Principles*: 16-17; 22-24) set out general conditions needed for parliament to fulfil its role in development.

### **Guide**

22. Nevertheless, while the *Principles* set a clear high-level framework for parliamentary development, an accompanying (annexed) and granular *Guide* would be helpful to:

- Provide a more practical tool for parliaments and partners
- Increase the profile of the *Common Principles* amongst MPs and officials
- Serve as a basis for promotion of/briefings on the *Common Principles*

23. Testing a Guide: Once a *Guide* is approved, a pilot application could be considered where parliament has, for example, the offer of external support or is seeking strategy development.

24. Purposes of Guide: The structure and content of the *Guide* is a matter for further development at the Roundtable. However, the *Guide* should be a process document that leads parliament clearly through effective ways of:

- Processing incoming offers of support or self-generated development
- Facilitating contribution to activity/project design
- Ensuring internal institutional buy-in for development execution
- Asserting parliamentary leadership of the process
- Enabling parliament to utilize to the full external expert support

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<sup>4</sup> Much parliamentary development is currently provided or/and funded by a relatively small number of open access order, upper income, advanced industrial countries to recipient countries with a range of radically different social and economic characteristics, many low income, limited access orders. The communications challenge this may present is a part of the 'resource asymmetry' picture noted above. (North, Douglass. C, J. J. Wallis, S. Webb, B. Weingast, *In the Shadow of Violence: Politics, Economics, and the Problems of Development* (CUP: 2013), 1-24.

### **Roundtable Program**

25. The primary purpose of the day is to facilitate further drafting of a *Common Principles Guide*.

26. The morning will include presentations from parliaments and practitioners; the afternoon will be devoted mainly to break-out sessions enabling participants to feed their ideas in on form and substance of the *Guide* text. The groups will report back to the Roundtable; summaries of each will be produced and discussed, and will be drawn on for drafting purposes.

27. A worked 'zero draft' example of a Guide structure is at *Annex* for guidance. This should in no way constrain alternative approaches being suggested during group work. The most useful way for groups to report back will be by presenting their own 'zero draft' of a *Guide* reflecting the form/substance that each group thinks may best suit the purpose.

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## Annex: Example ‘Zero draft’ Common Principles Guide structure<sup>5</sup>

### 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- *[Setting the scene. Purpose of the Guide. Audience for the Guide. Importance of Common Principles explained. Application of Common Principles to parliamentary development]*

### 2. PARLIAMENT’S DEVELOPMENT-RELATED INTERNAL INFRASTRUCTURE

*[Section 2 identifies key individuals and offices responsible for development. Absent such an internal structure, parliament is unlikely to be able to direct the development process effectively. The uniqueness of each parliament means each may adapt what follows to its own structure and procedures. The important point is not that an absolutely uniform process is followed but that the Common Principles are integrated satisfactorily into parliament’s self-development.]*

#### **Speaker**

- *[Final approval for a parliamentary policy of development applying the Common Principles (CP) and for development activities; chair of project/activities board.]*

#### **Administration [House] Committee**

- *[Many parliaments have a committee responsible for internal ‘nuts and bolts’ administration matters, and there may be the appropriate place to provide ‘political cover’ and legitimization for development matters. Alternatively, a dedicated ‘Development Committee’ could be formed but in parliaments with low numbers/strong political contention this could be impractical.]*

#### **Secretary General and secretariat [focal point]**

- *[The SG and his staff are a key part of the development picture. Development will not succeed unless they are fully on board. The SG will need to commit modest staff resource to managing the strategy/project development work on a day-to-day basis, and working with external partners. This means a specific manager with a job remit incorporating such work.]*

#### **Plenary**

- *[One of the objectives of development is to move the organization on as a whole. This cannot be done without the willing participation of all MPs. By default, MPs should be briefed on the Common Principles, parliament’s development plan and how the two integrate; formally sign off of the plan; and annually (perhaps in the context of approving the annual report on parliament’s strategy) comment on/approve development achievements.]*

#### **External partners**

- *[This section identifies and summarizes the roles and responsibilities of external development partners. Responsibility of the partners to fulfill their functions in ways that support parliament’s keystone role. Implications for external partners of applying Common Principles. ]*

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<sup>5</sup> The structure and content of this draft is meant as an example. In drafting and feeding back to the Roundtable, participants are free to discard, draw on, or accept material here.

### **3. PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS: PARLIAMENT AND PARTNERS [Actors script]**

*[Section 3 describes the process whereby the parliament and partners identified in Section 2 work together in their different roles to create meaningful development in parliament. They do so of course within the frame of the Common Principles.]*

#### **Mapping the parliamentary development process**

- *[Detailed mapping of process/actions necessary to ensure parliaments can assess development opportunities, whether internally generated or external approaches, in a rigorous way. Flow chart required? What in-house learning/briefing process is needed? Will there be a requirement for parliament-particular guidance in addition to the Guide? Timetabling issues dependent on parliament's sitting pattern may need to be addressed. ]*

#### **Strategy and development opportunities/priorities**

- *[Ideally, a parliamentary strategy will be in place to give reassurance that specific development opportunities/priorities involving external actors are well anchored within parliament's overall work. Where no strategy exists, then other assessment tools, for example, needs assessments, may be used. Each parliament should assess how it can leverage the appropriate frame for decision-making.]*

#### **External partners**

- *[Processes of external partners needed to coordinate with the parliamentary 'action map' to ensure timely progress. How flexible can these partners be? What are their requirements? Finance issues.]*

### **4. CONCLUSIONS**