

Parliamentary Benchmarks and Indicators

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Overview

- History of WBI's involvement in the work on developing benchmarks and indicators
- Examples of four frameworks and recent developments
- Discussion and some conclusions from the Brisbane Meeting (Sept. 2008)
- Next steps

History of WBI's involvement

- September, 2004 - panel discussion at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Annual Conference in Canada
- December, 2004 - WBI and CPA host a meeting in Washington DC on 'Parliamentary Standards for Democratic Legislatures', which brought together representatives of interested organizations involved in parliamentary strengthening.
- October, 2006 - CPA parliamentary Study Group on Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures

History of WBI's involvement

- At the same time, WBI supported the Parliamentary Centre's efforts to develop a first set of indicators on parliamentary performance in the budget process within its Parliamentary Report Card methodology.
- September, 2008 - WBI/Griffith University *Workshop on Legislative Benchmarks and Indicators* in Brisbane, Australia.

Frameworks discussed in Brisbane

- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's (CPA) Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures
- National Democratic Institute for International Affairs' (NDI) Minimum Standards Assessment Survey
- Inter-parliamentary Union's (IPU) Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments
- Parliamentary Centre's Parliamentary Report Card and related indicators of parliamentary performance in the budget process
- Also looked at International IDEA's State of Democracy Assessment Methodology (which now includes a new section on the democratic effectiveness of parliament), as well as several tools developed by CSOs (e.g. in Uganda, Pakistan and India).
- Frameworks not examined but which deserve further study include the Congressional Capabilities Index (IDB), the Parliamentary Powers Index - PPI (Prof. Steven Fish and Matthew Kronig, University of California at Berkeley), the IFES State of the Parliament Report, and additional indicators developed by UNDP (2001) and other donors such as USAID.

CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures

- Result of a CPA Study Group of parliamentarians in 2006.
- Include some 87 benchmarks developed around the following themes:
 - The Representative Aspects of Parliament
 - Ensuring the Independence, Effectiveness and Accountability of Parliament
 - Parliamentary Procedures
 - Public Accountability
 - The Parliamentary Service
 - Parliament and the Media
- Informed by Commonwealth Principles, previous CPA study group and conference recommendations, and NDI discussion paper on minimum standards.

CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures (con.)

- Benchmarks provide a platform and an opportunity to initiate a wider discussion in CPA's member parliaments.
- In 2008 CPA provided assistance to the SADC-PF to develop a set of regional benchmarks.
- CPA plans to ask its members to volunteer to apply the benchmarks and share their results.

NDI Minimum Standards Assessment Survey

- 2007 - *Toward the Development of International Standards for Democratic Legislatures*
- 2008 – Minimum Standards Assessment Survey: questionnaire which turns 35 standards into questions under three headings:
 - *Structure and Organization of the Legislature*
 - *Balance of power*
 - *Public access, transparency and accountability*
- Questions attempt to determine perceptions of the legislature's (formal) authority, and of its performance (behavior) on a scale of 0-5.
- Designed to be administered to parliamentarians themselves, parliamentary staff, and representatives of civil society – their perceptions are then compared.

NDI Minimum Standards Assessment Survey (con.)

Authority & Activity Relationship

Classification	Authority	Activity
Very High (4-5)	The topic area is addressed explicitly in the laws and/or constitution of the country.	Innovative and reoccurring action is a regular part of legislative activity in the topic area.
High (3-4)		There is regular, reoccurring legislative activity in the topic area.
Middle (2-3)	The topic area is explicitly addressed in a policy or procedure but does not enjoy full legal standing in law or the constitution.	There is sporadic legislative activity in the topic area.
Low (1-2)	The topic has no clear legal standing, but exists as the overlap of a variety of different legal documents.	The legislature occasionally takes action within the topic area but it lacks regularity.
Very Low (0-1)	The legal framework does not have any mention of the topic area.	There is little or no action taken by legislature within the topic area.

IPU Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments

- 2006 - *Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice*
- Sept. 2008 – *Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments* with 54 questions under six categories:
 - the representativeness of parliament;
 - parliamentary oversight over the executive; parliament's legislative capacity;
 - the transparency and accessibility of parliament; the accountability of parliament;
 - and parliament's involvement in international policy
- Uses a five point scale with 1 being very low/very poor and 5 being very high/very good to assess respondents judgements.

IPU Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments (con.)

- IPU identifies several scenarios (entry points) in which parliament may wish to use self-assessment:
 - to help prepare the parliamentary budget and strategic plan;
 - to stimulate a parliamentary reform process;
 - to promote gender sensitivity in parliament;
 - to enable new members of parliament to discuss key issues;
 - to validate the findings of a needs-assessment mission;
 - or to make an NGO assessment of parliament.
- Toolkit was presented to MPs during a workshop at the IPU annual assembly in early October and there are plans to train a group of facilitators who would be available should countries request their assistance.

Parliamentary Centre Parliamentary Report Card

		LEGISLATION	OVERSIGHT	REPRESENTATION	BUDGET
PERFORMANCE TESTS	LEVEL AND RANGE OF ACTIVITY				
	OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY				
	PARTICIPATION				
	ACCOUNTABILITY				
	POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPACT				

Parliamentary Centre Parliamentary Report Card

- First set of indicators developed on parliamentary performance in the budget process.
- Phrased as questions, with 37 in total.
- Uses a scale of 0-5. 0 means the performance indicator is not present at all, 5 means it is very strongly present and 2.5 means that it is somewhat present.
- PC has begun field testing but still in early stages.

Discussion and Conclusions from Brisbane

- No longer talking about whether or not to develop principles/standards/benchmarks/indicators. A first set of assessment frameworks already exists. Now they need to be tested.
- However, this work is still in its early phases, plural approaches, expect consensus building to be a long term-process.
- As with elections, we may never have one, universally agreed upon set of principles/ standards/ benchmarks/ indicators.
- Approaches may be somewhat different, but in terms of content, there is significant overlap between the tools.

Discussion and Conclusions from Brisbane (con.)

- All of the tools are “works in progress”, and all strive for certain levels of simplicity and accessibility.
- All of the frameworks are designed to be used by parliaments/ parliamentarians themselves, as well as parliamentary staff and civil society groups.
- Their use is voluntary – not imposed. And they are not an attempt to rank parliaments.
- Not focused on developing countries – and we suspect that many developed countries will fail to meet some of the standards (e.g. control over their own budget)
- General agreement that while context matters (constitutional powers, electoral system, cultural), the debate generated during assessment will allow for context to be explored.
- Many questions remain open for discussion.

Brisbane - Next Steps

- Creation of a small steering group (IPU, CPA, NDI, UNDP etc) to oversee taking this work forward.
- Present this work to donor coordination group on parliamentary strengthening.
- Seek feedback, identify areas of consensus and divergence, and adopt benchmarks at the regional level (e.g. SADC benchmarks).
- Promote a research agenda in which the different frameworks are piloted at the country level (in established, new large and small legislatures etc.), if possible comparatively.
- Hold a larger conference in late 2009/early 2010 with a broader group of participants to take stock of and present the results of the above research agenda.