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INTER PARES
Parliaments in Partnership
EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments



CASE STUDY

Using the IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments In the Context of a Parliamentary Development Project

This case study explores how the INTER PARES programme used the IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments in the context of a parliamentary development project to adapt its needs assessment and monitoring tools for reporting to the donor.

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Introduction

The Indicators for Democratic Parliaments (the IPU Indicators) is a comprehensive self-assessment tool designed to help parliaments evaluate their capacity and practice against established democratic standards. The 25 indicators align directly with the UN Sustainable Development Goal targets 16.6 and 16.7 which seek to develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels. The Indicators for Democratic Parliaments are a multi-partner initiative coordinated by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in partnership with leading organizations from the parliamentary community. The indicators framework, along with the draft and preliminary versions, were extensively tested and reviewed by parliaments around the world, with input from more than 100 people in 50 countries.

The 25 indicators are grouped into seven targets that correspond to the adjectives used in Targets 16.6 and 16.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): **effective, accountable, transparent, responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative**. Each indicator is broken down into several dimensions, each of which sets out an aspiring goal for parliament to work towards and contains the assessment criteria for parliament to evaluate its current capacity and practice. The assessment is informed by documented evidence and generates recommendations for improvement. The entire set comprises 25 indicators, 111 dimensions and 500 assessment criteria ([IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments](#)).

INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership is a global parliamentary development project funded by the European Union and implemented by International IDEA. The core component of the programme is to facilitate peer-to-peer parliamentary strengthening to enhance how partner parliaments perform **their legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary and administrative functions**. This peer-to-peer approach focuses on forming partnerships between European Member State Parliaments (EUMSPs) and partner parliaments in emerging democracies. The collaborations allow EUMSPs and partner parliaments to work on mutually agreed work plans emphasizing capacity development activities around one or more of the partner's core parliamentary functions. The programme design aimed to support approximately five parliaments each year for a one-year period. From 2019-2022, the 15 partnerships were designed and implemented.¹

In addition to the core component of peer-to-peer work, INTER PARES also aims to enhance knowledge production and the dissemination as well as interparliamentary collaboration and learning at the global level. Part of this latter set of activities includes supporting the IPU as a partner and with a financial contribution, to develop the IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments (see [INTER PARES](#)).

¹ The first EU project was conducted between 2019 and 2022, a second project was awarded to International IDEA that will last from 2023- 2025.

As an EU funded project, INTER PARES is required to develop and use a logical framework to monitor project results. Building from International IDEA's Learning Based Management Framework, the project wished to demonstrate not only that it had carried out activities as planned, but that it had contributed to advancing the project's outcomes. The project revised its log-frame in 2021 and proposed to track progress through several indicators about concrete partnership related outcomes. The first outcome indicator, *Outcome Indicator 1.1. Quality of the democratic processes of the Parliament of partner countries in relation to their core functions: representation, law-making, oversight, budget, administration* aims to measure partner parliament's capacities and practices during the project.

The indicator is measured by assessing the functions that partner parliaments were working on, both at the beginning and at the end of the partnerships. The idea was to assess the overall quality of parliaments' democratic processes and to identify tangible changes in the parliamentary functions that partnerships worked on. In the context of short partnerships, the tool needed to be:

- **Agile:** Able to be contextualized for each partnership, parliamentary tradition, and country context.
- **Rapid:** A quick assessment that could be carried out within a one-year timeline of programming.
- **Practical:** Identifying broad areas of partner needs for project planning.
- **User-friendly:** Based on a discussion between partners and project staff, and when possible, the participating EUMSPs. While the tool needed to provide for sufficiently deep analysis to understand partner parliaments' context and needs, and to assess any improvements or deteriorations in performing parliamentary functions, it also could not overtax the time and resources of partner parliaments.
- **Quantifiable:** To easily fit into the EU logical framework format which generally consists of quantitative measurements.
- **Qualitative:** To understand quantitative scores given, the instrument should also gather qualitative information about the status of parliamentary capacity and performance of functions.

Making use of the IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments in the context of a parliamentary development project.

To ensure that the assessment framework for the first indicator was based on established good practice, the project explored how to make use of several sets of benchmarks and indicators for Parliaments which have been developed over the last 15 years.² INTER PARES wished to draw on the recently produced Indicators for Democratic Parliaments, especially as the project is a partner in their development. However, the IPU Indicators-- as a comprehensive self-assessment tool, structured per SDGs 16.6 and 16.7, presented some challenges regarding their use for in the context of a parliamentary development project's planning and monitoring and evaluation.

Like many donor support programmes, The INTER PARES results framework is structured around core functions of parliament, traditionally articulated as the lawmaking, oversight, budgeting, and

² The IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments, Based on SDG Targets 16.6 and 16.7, the EU Guide to Supporting Parliaments Worldwide (2010), the Commonwealth Benchmarks for Democratic Parliaments, the EU DG DEV (Capacity4Dev) Indicators for Democracy, and the EU Study on Performance Indicators for Parliamentary Support (2012).

representation and administrative functions. In contrast, the innovation of the IPU Indicators is to consider them **through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals** 16.6 and 16.7. The indicators are grouped under seven targets that correspond to the adjectives used in Targets 16.6 and 16.7 of the SDGs: **effective, accountable, transparent, responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative**. The resulting 25 indicators do include an indicator for each of those five parliamentary functions. Some aspects needed for understanding how a parliament's core functions are working fall under different sets of indicators (for example, citizen engagement, part of the representative function, is covered under an additional ten indicators grouped under Transparent Parliament (3 indicators), Responsive Parliament (1 indicator), Inclusive parliament (3 indicators), Participatory Parliament (3 indicators). Some operational aspects which are transversal to core parliamentary functions like debates, or committees' mandates, procedures, and resources, are covered under Indicator 1.4 Parliamentary Organization. The 25 indicators include 110 dimensions and 500 assessment criteria, making wholesale adoption of the IPU indicators as the project's assessment tool, complex for a project like INTER PARES where partnerships were planned to include approximately 1 year of activities. For partner parliaments who might opt to work on several functions, conducting such a comprehensive assessment would have been too time consuming for project purposes. The project needed a framework that covered 5 functions and key dimensions of each, without, however, overburdening the assessment process and the time beneficiaries would be asked to dedicate to the effort.

The Approach Chosen

Given the above considerations, the project chose to draw on the IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments, using them to enhance the quality and completeness of the INTER PARES assessment framework which borrowed its format from the framework contained in the EU Guidebook Supporting Parliaments Worldwide (2010).³ That assessment framework is structured around traditional core parliamentary functions, so it is easily adaptable to a project structured around the same functions, but it was published 13 years ago. To use the more recent and excellent IPU resource, the project decided to structure its assessment around the core functions, and main dimensions listed in the EU Guidebook, but to use the IPU indicators whenever possible. This was accomplished by preparing a side-by-side comparison of all IPU indicators, dimensions, and criteria against the EU Guidebook's assessment framework's structure.

Designing the Assessment Tool

The project developed a capacity assessment matrix about the five core parliamentary functions (law-making, oversight, budgeting, citizen engagement and administration). The matrix serves as a guide which is filled out using interviews with key informants from the partner parliament at the beginning and at the end of a partnership. Developed in Excel, the instrument is divided into five work sheets, one per function. Within each function, the matrix proposes four or five main dimensions, or aspects that are key to carrying out the function, which are used to ask key informant(s) in partner parliaments to discuss and score each dimension on a 5-point scale. Under each dimension the tool lists *detailed considerations*. The list of considerations provides a general idea about how strong performance would look and aims to support a qualitative discussion among informants to explain their reasoning about the scores they assign, and the underlying causes which might be limiting parliament's effectiveness. With four or five dimensions

³ See Chapter two, section 2.3.5 page 58 which includes an Assessment Framework for four legislative functions (lawmaking, budget, oversight, and representation), each of which is detailed with several dimensions containing assessment questions, potential underlying causes, and a scoring matrix.

per function, the entire matrix for all five functions is thus limited to 22 dimensions that are discussed and then scored, making the instrument user friendly, practical, and short facilitating a rapid assessment. To encourage candid discussions, the baseline and endline scoring and narrative reports are confidential and are only shared between the parliament in question, the EUMSP working on the partnership, and the EU. Here is an example of how the matrix looks for the budget function, showing two dimensions, their considerations, the scoring and prompts about underlying causes.

ENDLINE SURVEY FOR INTER PARES LOG FRAME OUTCOME 1:1 - BUDGET														
Quality of the democratic processes of the Parliament in relation to the budget function	Non existent	Basic	Good	Very good	Excellent	Baseline Avg Score	Endline Avg Score	Comments	Underlying Causes (mark with an X) (see reflection points in guidelines)					
Key Informant Guide to Scoring matrix	1.0	2.0	3.0	4.0	5.0	2.77	2.63		Constitution	Procedures	Resources & Capacity	Experience	Politics	
<p>(iv) The Budget Function: The purpose of budget oversight is to agree national spending priorities, ensure that specific policy areas are being funded adequately and directed appropriately to meet policy objectives, and monitor income against expenditure. For this exercise the Budget function is scored on formal powers given to Parliament and on five dimensions (1. Budget formulation, 2. Consideration and debate, 3. Amending and approving, 4. Budget oversight monitoring and 5. auditing).</p>														
<p>Assessment Question on formal powers regarding the Parliamentary budget function: How strong and clearly defined is the legal framework (Constitution, legislation, rules of procedure) for all aspects of the legislature's consideration and approval of budgetary legislation including the annual budget? Please give your assessment score from 1-5</p>						3.13	3.00							
<p><u>Consider:</u> Does the legal framework provide sufficient time and opportunity for scrutiny, particularly by the opposition, minority party and independent MPs? Does it provide for the technical services (a Parliamentary budget office or specialized research service) to support the role of budget scrutiny?</p>														
<p>Dimension 4.1. Budget Formulation: Drafting and deciding spending priorities: In most cases budget documents are drawn up by government. However, parliament should be seeking to influence the budget process from the early stages, for example through gathering public input in advance of budget drafting, and preparing a report to government to assist the drafting process.</p>														
<p>4.1 Assessment Question: How strong are Parliamentary practices regarding participation in budget formulation? (EU DG DEV) (i.e.: does Parliament gather information and public and interest group opinion and present recommendations on budget formulation to the executive?) Please give your assessment score from 1-5</p>						2.40	2.25							
<p><u>Consider:</u></p> <p>Does Parliament participate in budget formulation? How far are the opinions of Parliamentary committees taken into account by ministries in setting their budget priorities? Are there adequate opportunities for individual Parliamentarians, Parliamentary parties and committees to contribute to budget-setting? Do MPs and or Committees gather information from experts, academics, CSOs, the public and interest group opinions and recommendations?</p>														

The matrix supports the initial needs assessment for project planning and is used to gather a quantitative score for the logical framework indicator at the beginning and end of the partnership. It aims to monitor a broad picture of capacity, assistance needs, and at the end of the partnership, progress (or lack thereof) in partner parliaments.⁴ The dimensional scores for each function are averaged to make one functional score. For parliaments working on multiple priorities, the average functional scores can be further averaged into one number. The resulting numerical scores can be used within the EU's logical framework, providing a quantitative result, while the dimensional scores and the qualitative discussions provide deeper analysis.

Enhancing the Assessment Tool Using the IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments

Once the basic layout was designed in Excel, INTER PARES carried out a side-by-side comparison of all IPU indicators, dimensions, and criteria against the functions, dimensions, and considerations in the matrix, and adapted the assessment tool so that it reflected the IPU Indicators in the following ways:

⁴ Some partner parliaments chose to fill out the questionnaire in writing providing scores and comments directly on the Excel sheet.

Including IPU Indicator assessment criteria: IPU dimension assessment criteria were used to refine the detailed considerations listed and discussed during interviews to guide the conversation or to probe for deeper understanding. Dozens of IPU assessment criteria were incorporated within the INTER PARES matrix considerations, either drawing on their substance, or in some cases, near verbatim wording. For example, the IPU Indicator dimensions 1.6.3 was used to complete the considerations about approving and implementing legislation in the INTER PARES matrix:

INTER PARES The Legislative Function	Indicators for Democratic Parliaments Effective Parliament
Dimension 4: Approving and implementing legislation	Indicator 1.6 Legislation
Assessment Question: How strong are parliamentary practices regarding the approval, publishing and follow up on the implementation of legislation as a regular oversight practice? Please give your assessment score from 1-5	Dimension 1.6.3 Legislative Procedure
<i>Detailed Considerations for discussion included (among others)</i> Does Parliament apply a method of monitoring or follow-up on the effective implementation and consequences of legislation? Does parliament do this on a regular and systematic basis, issuing findings and recommendations?	Assessment criterion No.2: Established Practice for Conducting PLS Designated parliamentary body (committee/dedicated body), in accordance with existing legal framework or without it, applies PLS as a part of the general parliamentary oversight mandate and conducts it on a regular basis, issues findings and recommendations.

Formal powers for each function are clearly identified in the IPU assessment criteria, then followed by criteria to assess parliamentary practice. INTER PARES adopted this logic which first assesses formal powers, then practice. Each of the five functional areas of the tool begins with a question and considerations about the Parliament’s formal powers, followed by questions related to parliamentary practice and capacity related to that function. For example:

INTER PARES The Budget Function:	Indicators for Democratic Parliaments Effective Parliament
Dimension: Formal Powers for the Budget Function Assessment Question on formal powers regarding the Parliamentary budget function: How strong and clearly defined is the legal framework (Constitution, legislation, rules of procedure) for all aspects of the legislature’s consideration and approval of budgetary legislation including the annual budget? Please give your assessment score from 1-5	Indicator 1.8 Budget
<i>Detailed Considerations for discussion included:</i>	Dimension: 1.8.1 Formulation, examination, amendment, and approval
Consider: Does the legal framework provide sufficient time and opportunity for scrutiny, particularly by the opposition, minority party and independent MPs? Does it provide for the technical services (a Parliamentary budget office or specialized research service) to support the role of budget scrutiny? (IPU)	Assessment criterion No.1: Legal Framework for budget consideration by the legislature There is evidence of the existence of a legal framework (Constitution, legislation, rules of procedure) for all aspects of the legislature’s consideration and approval of the annual budget and other budgetary legislation. The rules allow sufficient time and opportunity for scrutiny,

particularly by Opposition, minority party and independent MPs

Double checking the completeness of the matrix was done by using the full set of IPU dimensions and assessment criteria (listed in the design draft of the Excel matrix) to check if the project’s proposed **Dimension Statements**, the capacity and performance **Assessment Questions** and the detailed **Considerations** that are meant to guide the discussions with informants were sufficiently complete, yet succinct. For example:

INTER PARES Oversight function	Indicators for Democratic Parliaments Effective Parliament
Oversight Dimension 1: Efforts to obtain information: Parliament’s ability to hold ministers to account depends on its capacity to get timely, accurate and comprehensive information from government, public bodies, and the private sector.	Indicator: 1.7 Oversight
3.1 Assessment Question on Oversight: How effectively does Parliament use the mechanisms available to request information from government? Please give your assessment score from 1-5	Dimension 1.7.2 Parliamentary access to information from government
<i>Detailed Considerations for discussion included among others:</i>	Assessment criterion No.4: Consistency of Implementation
Does Parliament have established mechanisms to receive regular data/reports on executive performance and compliance with policies/laws/regulations/programs?	There is evidence of a rigorous and systematic process of obtaining information from the executive by parliament or individual MPs. Parliament keeps record of the percentage of timely and full responses, monitors justification for delays and follows up on failures to provide information.
Does Parliament have established , rigorous mechanisms/procedures to track Executive implementation of policies/laws/regulations/programs?	

Filling a lacuna in the EU Guidebook Assessment. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the IPU Indicators were especially helpful for developing the section of the tool related to the **parliamentary administrative function**, which had not been included in the EU Guidebook as a function. A second EU publication *Study on Performance Indicators for Parliamentary Support* (2012) did cover the administrative function and outlined three main dimensions for the function. Incorporating these three dimensions and adding dimensions for formal powers, committee functioning and gender, the project then used the IPU Indicators 1.4 Parliamentary Administration, Indicator 1.5 Administrative Capacity, and Independence (6 dimensions), and Indicator 5.2 Inclusive institutional practices, Dimension 5.2.1 Workforce diversity (4 criteria) to define considerations and benchmarks for administration as a function.

Including IPU assessment criteria in the considerations for discussion helped the project to understand scores that were unexpected. For example, when scores sent in writing showed unexplained improvements or declines, the project requested a follow up interview. In these conversations the project used the considerations as prompts to ask respondents to explain their assessments. The ensuing discussions clarified respondent’s reasoning in better detail and allowed the project to understand the scores, to learn about unanticipated outcomes, and to explain the reasons for changes. Details on one example of how the IPU criteria used in the interviews helped to clarify scores are described in the text box that follows:

Example of how IPU Indicators supported contextual analysis to understand assessment scores

At the end of the project, one partner parliament's administrative function scores changed at unexpected levels and on several of the dimensions. One score which fell by more than 0.50 points was the dimensions score regarding the establishment of a professional parliamentary public service. On this dimension, the initial baseline score given was 4.17 (very good) and the final score is 3.63 (good), with a significant decrease of 0.54 points. INTER PARES had insufficient contextual understanding to explain why the dimensional score had fallen significantly, so the project requested a follow-up interview to explore the respondents' reasons for lowering the score.

This was a dimension where the project had adopted the IPU Dimension 5.1 Establishment and institutionalization of a professional parliamentary public service and adapted several of the assessment criteria under the considerations. The IPU Dimension: 1.5.2 Human resource management, lists the following criteria:

- **No 1: Policies** - Clear human resource policies are established, implemented, and regularly reviewed to support the effective management of parliamentary staff. These policies govern the recruitment and retention of parliamentary staff, as well as disciplinary procedures, ethical conduct, working hours and leave allocations.
- **No 2: Processes** - Processes are in place for planning, performance management and reporting. Clear job descriptions are also in place, along with details of salaries, benefits, and other performance incentives. Human resources are sufficient to support all aspects of parliamentary business.
- **No 3: Recruitment and advancement** - Rules and procedures determined by parliament are in place for the recruitment and advancement of parliamentary staff. Parliamentary staff are recruited and promoted through fair and open competition, based on merit, without political involvement.
- **No 4: Training and specialization** - The parliamentary administration has a professional development framework for parliamentary staff, which includes training and specialization in specific areas, and which recognizes the unique skills and capabilities required.

In the follow up interview, ensuing discussions revealed a robust explanation for the decrease in the score. Summarizing the comments from the interview, respondents noted that 1) HR policies need to be better developed to ensure they promote merit-based hiring. 2) Processes for HR planning, performance management and reporting are insufficient to incentivize performance and motivation. 3) Rules on recruitment and advancement are either insufficient or not always followed, and suffer political interference, and regarding 4) training and specialization they noted there are few opportunities for professional development.

Overall, the respondents agreed that administration's HR policies are subject to political influence, and the executive finds ways to affect staffing and recruitment. These elements revealed by using the considerations as probing questions helped the project to understand and explain the lowered score for the dimension. Several other examples could be listed, the above is provided to illustrate how the IPU indicators can be applied to support political context analysis, complement and triangulate data from quantitative indicator measurement on a donor supported parliamentary development project.

Outcomes from the Approach and Lessons Learned

Adapting its tools by reviewing the IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments enhanced the practices of a the INTER PARES parliamentary development project. Drawing on this resource enhanced the delivery of project management, monitoring, and learning.

Enhanced the assessment tool: Using the matrix as an assessment tool proved very useful at the beginning of a partnership to get a detailed understanding of the partner parliament, its context, challenges, strengths, and weaknesses in the functions that would be covered by the partnership. When possible, the baseline assessment served as the basis for co-design of the partnership work plan as well as the individual partnership logical framework and indicators.

Adaptations proved useful for working within a logical framework: As logical frameworks are mandatory M&E tools on an EU funded action, the tool as developed and adapted, provided a simple quantitative score which was easy to insert in the EU logical framework. At the end of the project, the average score for all partners completing baseline and endline assessments, was entered as one numerical score. The scores on the various dimensions, across all partner parliaments, were added in a chart in the final report, as below.

Summary table of INTER PARES Baseline/Endline Results per function for five Partner Parliaments				
Function	Baseline	Endline	Change	Target
Average Numerical Score (indicator value reported in log frame)	3.16	3.24	0.09	Score improved by at least 0.02
Dimension scores reported in narrative				
Administration	3.64	3.70	0.05	
Budget	3.24	2.67	-0.57	
Law-making	2.65	3.13	0.48	
Oversight	3.02	3.19	0.17	
Representation	3.23	3.52	0.29	

Nuancing logical framework quantitative indicators and enhancing learning: At the same time and recognizing that scoring a parliamentary function is neither a simple exercise, nor easily described by one number, the tool allowed the assessment team to gather more detailed qualitative information using interviews and discussions around the considerations listed under each dimension. This provided valuable context and more detailed analysis to make sense of the scores. It also provided information for preparing a narrative report with qualitative analysis about the baseline and endline assessments for each partner parliament, describing respondent observations supporting their scores and explaining the endline scores that improved or declined.

Covering gaps from previous tools: with their comprehensive approach the IPU Indicators serve as an encyclopedic resource for defining and describing all aspects of parliamentary practice. This proved especially useful for INTER PARES when developing dimensions and considerations within the administrative function, whose definitions in the EU documents were only broadly described.

Enhancing confidence in the tool. In designing the INTER PARES M&E tools, the IPU Indicators provided a valuable doublecheck to ensure that the most important considerations were included for each function. Drawing on this valuable resource, developed by an expert cohort of leading organizations from the parliamentary community, and extensively tested and reviewed by parliaments around the world, enhanced both project and funder’s confidence that the tool rests on a high standard for good practice.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The IPU Indicators for Democratic Parliaments is a self-assessment tool designed to enable parliaments to diagnose gaps and weaknesses in any segment of parliamentary work, and to identify ways in which changes can be made. While parliaments are the intended primary users of the Indicators, they can be a valuable resource for parliamentary development projects. In the case of the INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership project, the IPU Indicators were useful in enhancing project management, monitoring, and learning.

Under the new project (2023 – 2025), INTER PARES will continue to use the project matrix applied to the development priorities expressed by partner parliaments as an assessment, monitoring and learning tool. In cases when and if, new parliaments’ expressed needs fit more narrowly to the IPU Indicators and Dimensions, the project hopes to adapt the matrix even more closely to the IPU Indicators, testing their use for project assessment, work plan design, and evaluation purposes. Further, should a new partner parliament wish to test a set of the IPU Indicators, the project hopes to facilitate the Indicator assessment process as designed, (see [Assessment Guidance](#)) and in collaboration with the IPU, to further explore how the Indicators for Democratic Parliaments may be used in the context of a parliamentary development project.