



Indicators for Democratic Parliaments

Assessment guidance



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.



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The Indicators for Democratic Parliaments are a multi-partner initiative coordinated by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in partnership with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Directorio Legislativo Foundation, Inter Pares/International IDEA, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD).

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Table of contents

- Foreword..... 4
- Acknowledgements 5
 - Project partners 5
 - Individual contributions 5
 - Contributions from parliaments..... 6
- Assessment guidance 7
 - Introduction 7
 - The Indicators at a glance 7
 - A self-assessment tool..... 7
 - How the Indicators support parliament 7
 - Contributing to the achievement of the SDGs 8
 - About the development of the Indicators 9
 - Structure of the Indicators 10
 - Overview 10
 - Details 10
 - Key concepts 11
 - For all parliaments 11
 - Self-assessment 11
 - Learning and development 11
 - Capacity and practice 11
 - Selecting indicators..... 12
 - Bicameral parliaments 12
 - Grades 12
 - Evidence 13
 - Recommendations 13
 - Advice and support 13
 - Phases of the assessment exercise 14
 - Phase 1: Preparation 14
 - Phase 2: Execution 17
 - Phase 3: Follow-up 20
 - Assessment checklist 22
- List of targets, indicators and dimensions 23

Foreword

Parliament is the central institution of a democracy. It has a unique mandate to represent the people, to pass laws, to adopt the budget and to hold the government to account. The decisions taken by parliament shape the future of society and of our planet.

The way in which parliaments carry out their functions is therefore of the utmost importance. As public expectations evolve, parliaments are challenged to be ever more effective, accountable and transparent. People want and need decision-making processes to be inclusive, responsive, participatory and representative.

These are the conditions for governance in the interests of the many, not the few. Parliaments that embody these democratic principles – as set out in the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – will be better equipped to take decisive action to fight poverty, to reduce inequalities, to ensure gender equality, to preserve the health of the planet and, indeed, to effect positive change in all areas of human endeavour.

The Indicators for Democratic Parliaments represent a significant milestone for the parliamentary community. The Indicators are a multi-partner initiative convened by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to create a framework for assessing parliamentary capacity and practice against SDG Targets 16.6 and 16.7, which seek to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions, and to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

Collectively, the IPU and its partners in this project – the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Directorio Legislativo Foundation, Inter Pares, the National Democratic Institute, the United Nations Development Programme, UN Women and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy – have decades of experience in working with parliaments in all parts of the world. In addition, more than 50 parliaments were involved in testing the draft and preliminary versions of the Indicators.

The core purpose of the Indicators is to support parliamentary learning and development. Notwithstanding the variety of contexts that make each parliament unique, all parliaments share common functions and a common aspiration to be the best possible institution in the service of the people. The Indicators therefore cover all aspects of parliamentary activity. They are relevant to all parliaments, regardless of size, geography or political system.

The Indicators provide a method for assessing parliament's strengths and weaknesses. They are intended primarily as a self-assessment tool for parliaments themselves, but they are equally useful for those who monitor parliamentary activity and support parliamentary development. Indeed, by measuring current capacity and practice, parliament is able to formulate plans for future institutional development and track progress towards its goals.

The IPU and the project partners believe fervently in parliaments and democracy. We believe that the Indicators can bring a new impetus to parliamentary development. And we stand ready to support parliaments in using the Indicators in order to help strengthen parliamentary institutions worldwide.



Martin Chungong

Secretary General

Inter-Parliamentary Union

Acknowledgements

The Indicators for Democratic Parliaments have been developed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in partnership with a group of organizations with decades of experience in supporting parliaments around the world. More than 50 parliaments have also been involved in testing and providing feedback on drafts of the Indicators.

Project partners

The project has been convened and coordinated by the IPU in partnership with (in alphabetical order):

- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
- Directorio Legislativo Foundation
- Inter Pares / International IDEA
- National Democratic Institute (NDI)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- UN Women
- Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)

The partners have worked together closely as a Project team to plan, draft, and revise the Indicators. The European Commission contributed actively to the work of the Project team.

In addition to these collective inputs, specific contributions from project partners are listed below:

- Directorio Legislativo Foundation: Spanish translation of part of the Indicators
- Inter Pares, in cooperation with the European Commission: significant financial support to drafting and translation of the Indicators
- National Democratic Institute: creation of the preliminary version of the Indicators website
- UNDP: financial support for drafting of certain indicators

Funding for the project was provided by the IPU through a grant from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Additional funding was provided to the IPU by Inter Pares in cooperation with the European Commission.

Individual contributions

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Contributions from parliaments

We gratefully acknowledge the more than 50 parliaments that contributed to the testing of the Indicators at different stages, as well as the almost 100 people who participated in the assessment events.

Stage 1: Testing of the Indicators framework (2021)

The parliaments of Ghana, Greece, Jordan, Kenya, Portugal, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia, as well as the Pan-African Parliament and the WFD/EU-JDID Office in Jordan, were involved in testing the Indicators framework. Special thanks go to Mr Christos Belias and Mr Vasilios Svoloopoulos from the Parliament of Greece, to Mr José Manuel Araújo from the Parliament of Portugal and to Ms Josephine Watera from the Parliament of Uganda for their high-quality feedback on the framework and for their contributions to its improvement.

Stage 2: Initial testing (2021)

The parliaments of Albania, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Liberia, North Macedonia and Paraguay, as well as the Kurdish Parliament (Iraq), provided feedback at this stage. Special thanks go to Mr Jochen Guckes from the German Bundestag for his very detailed feedback and many useful suggestions. We are also grateful for the support of the NDI offices in Albania, Georgia, Iraq, Liberia and North Macedonia.

Stage 3: Testing of the preliminary Indicators (2022)

MPs, Secretaries General, staff and others from the following parliaments provided feedback on the preliminary version of Indicators: Austria, Argentina, Bahrain, Botswana, Canada, Chad, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Lithuania, Madagascar, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Tanzania (United Republic of), Timor-Leste, Thailand, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay. Similar contributions came from the Parliament of Kosovo, the European Parliament, the Pan-African Parliament and the East African Legislative Assembly.

We are particularly grateful for the comprehensive feedback received from the Senate of Pakistan, which ran a self-assessment exercise covering all 25 indicators, as well as from the parliaments of Argentina, Paraguay, Thailand and Uruguay.

A substantial body of comments and suggestions on improving the Indicators resulted from a joint IPU-ASGP session during the 145th IPU Assembly in Kigali in October 2022.

In addition, 50 participants from 30 countries – including MPs, Secretaries General, staff and parliamentary experts – provided their comments and suggestions through eight focus groups organized by the IPU and partners.

Special thanks go to the Francophone Network for Parliamentary Ethics and Deontology, based in Canada, and to Ms Maria Mousmuti and Mr Franklin de Vrieze, for their comments on specific indicators.

Assessment guidance

Introduction

The Indicators at a glance

The Indicators for Democratic Parliaments (the “Indicators”) are a tool to support learning and development in parliament. They provide a framework for parliament to self-assess its capacity and practice across all aspects of parliamentary work and to generate new ideas for strengthening the institution.

No two parliaments are identical: they vary in structure, function and operation, influenced by the history and culture of each nation. Yet they share a common mandate: enacting effective laws, overseeing the actions of the executive and representing the people. To meet these expectations, parliaments increasingly engage in strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation. Globally, parliaments are embracing reform, modernization and inclusivity, and becoming more transparent and responsive to public voices. In essence, parliaments are seeking to enhance their capacity and practice.

The Indicators are founded on commonly accepted traits of strong institutions. They were developed through a multi-partner project with eight leading organizations from the parliamentary community, and 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 assessment criteria for parliament to evaluate its current capacity and practice. The assessment is informed by evidence and generates recommendations for improvement.

The Indicators are accompanied by detailed assessment guidance explaining how to use them. Parliaments that may have additional questions or require further assistance are encouraged to reach out to the IPU at standards@ipu.org or to any of the partner organizations.

A self-assessment tool

The Indicators are a comprehensive self-assessment tool designed to help parliament evaluate its practice against established democratic standards. Designed with expert input and careful planning, this tool is suitable for all parliaments, regardless of their political system or stage of development.

Self-assessment is a voluntary process and is most effective when initiated or supported by the highest authorities within parliament. This ensures that parliament takes ownership of the outcomes and recommendations.

Importantly, the purpose of self-assessment is not to rank or compare different parliaments. Instead, it empowers each parliament to evaluate itself. Both the process and the outcomes of this endeavour rest entirely in the hands of parliament. The decision whether or not to publicize the results of the assessment hinges on the exercise’s purpose. However, it should be acknowledged that transparency is a core democratic value, and that publicizing parliament’s self-assessment against international standards could positively influence public perceptions of the institution.

Parliament enjoys flexibility in utilizing this self-assessment tool: it can appraise its capacity and practice against all of the indicators, or instead select a specific subset. Each indicator is designed as a standalone package.

How the Indicators support parliament

The Indicators are designed for parliaments seeking to achieve self-advancement by identifying their strengths and weaknesses, learning and, ultimately, enhancing their capacity to serve the public.

In particular, the Indicators can support parliament in the following areas:

- **Learning and improvement:** The Indicators aim at helping parliament to learn and improve, with the ultimate goal of strengthening democracy. They serve as a tool for assessing strengths and weaknesses, leading to enhanced performance and progress tracking.
- **Parliamentary reform:** The Indicators are valuable for those involved in parliamentary reform and improvement – both those inside parliament and collaborating organizations.
- **Prioritizing and strategizing:** The Indicators can prove especially useful prior to strategic planning exercises, allowing for targeted improvements in focused areas such as transparency.
- **Readiness for external support:** The Indicators can help parliament to identify essential needs and priorities, effectively positioning the institution for the timely and strategic reception of external support.
- **Actionable ideas and solutions:** The Indicators aim primarily to promote the sharing of ideas, rather than just the assigning of grades. At the end of each dimension, there is a space for noting down recommendations for change – actionable ideas that can range from significant shifts to procedural adjustments.

Contributing to the achievement of the SDGs

The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, are the world's best policy prescription to combat poverty, achieve social justice, create conditions for peace, preserve nature and promote human well-being.

SDG 16 on promoting peace, justice and strong institutions is a key enabler of the entire SDG framework. This Goal recognizes that underlying the multiple crises of our time is a fundamental governance challenge linked to public trust in institutions of government and their capacity to meet the needs of all people equitably and sustainably.

Indeed, around the world, the social contract that binds people to each other and to their institutions of government is at risk. With specific targets on the rule of law, representative, effective and accountable institutions, fundamental freedoms, corruption, access to information, displacement, violence and criminality among others, SDG 16 shines a light on the “grey matter” that keeps societies together and governments running.

More than any other SDG, Goal 16 underscores the need for an effective public administration and for institutions of government – ministries, parliaments, courts, local councils, public utilities and others – that work for all people, leaving no one behind. Effective, accountable and representative institutions are needed to incentivize people's civic engagement at all levels, including through the ballot box, to support public services such as health care, education and environmental protection, to curb tax evasion and corruption, and to reduce those tensions in society that are often the root cause of violence, particularly against women.

The Indicators take as their starting point an assumption that countries have agreed that the concepts in SDG Targets 16.6 and 16.7 are desirable characteristics of institutions everywhere. The Indicators examine and interpret these SDG Targets through a parliamentary lens. They provide a framework for asking and answering the following questions:

- How effective is parliament?
- How accountable is parliament?
- How transparent is parliament?
- How responsive is parliament?
- How inclusive is parliament?
- How participatory is parliament?
- How representative is parliament?

- How can parliament improve its capacity and practice in all of these areas?

By using the Indicators to measure and enhance their capacity and practice, parliaments can contribute directly to the achievement of SDG Targets 16.6 and 16.7. And by making progress on these SDG Targets, parliaments will be better equipped to play a full role in the achievement of all 17 Goals and, therefore, to enhance human well-being.

About the development of the Indicators

The project was convened by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and carried out in partnership with leading organizations in the parliamentary community:

- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
- Directorio Legislativo Foundation
- INTER PARES
- National Democratic Institute (NDI)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- UN Women
- Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)

The project team began working on the Indicators in 2019. Contributions from the project partners have included the following:

- Experience acquired through decades of working with parliaments and in creating frameworks and tools to assist parliaments in evaluating their capacity and practice
- Access to their networks of parliamentary programmes for testing and feedback
- Specific in-kind and financial contributions (see the “Acknowledgements” section for details)

The main stages in the development of the Indicators are summarized below:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| September 2019 | Kick-off meeting and establishment of the project team |
| | |
| 2020–2021 | Development and pilot-testing of the Indicators |
| | |
| May 2022 | Publication of a preliminary version of the Indicators |
| | |
| 2022–2023 | Testing, feedback and revision of the preliminary version of the Indicators |
| | |
| October 2023 | Publication of the Indicators |

Following the publication of the Indicators in October 2023, it is expected that revisions will be made to both the assessment guidance and the Indicators themselves. The project partners will continue to support parliaments in using the tool to assess their capacity and practice.

Structure of the Indicators

Overview

The Indicators follow a regular four-level structure:

- **Targets**, each corresponding to one of the adjectives used in SDG Targets 16.6 and 16.7
- One or more **indicators** within each target
- One or more **dimensions** within each indicator
- An **aspiring goal** and one or more **assessment criteria** within each dimension

Details

Targets

There are seven targets, as follows:

- Target 1: Effective parliament
- Target 2: Accountable parliament
- Target 3: Transparent parliament
- Target 4: Responsive parliament
- Target 5: Inclusive parliament
- Target 6: Participatory parliament
- Target 7: Representative parliament

Indicators

There are 25 indicators in total, each corresponding to an area of parliamentary work. Each indicator contains one or more dimensions, which are all related to the theme of indicator. These dimensions are interdependent. Parliament should normally assess the whole indicator as a package.

Dimensions

There are 108 dimensions in total, each containing an aspiring goal and a number of assessment criteria.

Aspiring goals

Each dimension contains an aspiring goal, which describes an ideal situation that parliament can work towards.

Assessment criteria

There are 500 assessment criteria in total. Parliament assesses its capacity and practice against these criteria, each of which is structured as follows:

- Title: the subject of the assessment criterion
- Description: a short statement of what is to be assessed
- Grades: a space for parliament to record its self-assessed grade
- Evidence: a space for parliament to document the evidence supporting the assessment

Example of the structure of an indicator:

Target 1: Effective parliament

↓

Indicator 1.1: Parliamentary autonomy

↓

Dimension 1.1.1: Institutional autonomy

↓

Assessment criterion 1: Constitutional authority

Assessment criterion 2: Legal framework

Assessment criterion 3: Practice

Key concepts**For all parliaments**

The Indicators are designed to be relevant for all parliaments. They are grounded in the universally agreed concepts that make up Targets 16.6 and 16.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which have been endorsed by all States as part of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

All parliaments are unique in some ways. There are enormous differences between parliaments in some fundamental characteristics, such as the political system, the electoral framework, the number of MPs, and so on. And yet, all parliaments share fundamental roles, such as law-making, holding the executive to account and representing the people. By focusing on these commonalities, the Indicators are specifically designed to be usable by, and useful to, all parliaments.

Self-assessment

The principle of self-assessment lies at the heart of the Indicators. Self-assessment means that parliament is in the driving seat for the assessment exercise. Parliament owns the results and ultimately decides what to do with them.

Self-assessment means that parliament has to take many decisions itself. The design of the assessment exercise is in the hands of parliament. The project partners are available to support parliament, to provide expert advice and to facilitate the exercise. But parliament remains in control of the process at all times and is responsible for its outcomes.

The amount of time required for an assessment will depend on the choices made by parliament during the preparation phase (see Phase 1: Preparation).

Learning and development

The Indicators are intended to support parliament's own learning and development. The assessment exercise is an opportunity for parliament to step back, to examine its own practice, to see where it stands today and to discuss where it wants to grow.

Capacity and practice

The Indicators take a holistic approach to the assessment of capacity and practice. They invite parliament to consider both the rules in place – in the constitution, in the legal framework and/or in its own rules of procedure – and how these rules are applied in practice. Many parliaments observe that their rules of procedure allow for something to happen but that, in reality, this thing does not happen

systematically. The assessment exercise should help parliament to understand the reasons for this gap in capacity and practice and to generate ideas for how to reduce that gap.

Selecting indicators

Parliament can freely select any of the indicators it wishes to include in an assessment exercise. It may decide to assess itself against all 25 indicators, or to focus on a selection of one or more indicators. This decision depends on the objective of the exercise, and naturally has an impact on the time and effort required to carry out the assessment.

Normally, all of the dimensions within the selected indicator(s) should be assessed. The dimensions are interdependent and should not be divided up.

Thematic groups of indicators can be selected. For example, an assessment exercise that focuses on women's political participation would likely include indicators from *Target 1: Effective parliament* and *Target 7: Representative parliament*.

The project partners can help parliament to identify its objectives, and can advise on the selection of indicators.

Bicameral parliaments

In some countries with bicameral parliaments, there are clear distinctions between the powers of each chamber. The indicators are designed to be relevant for all parliaments, including bicameral ones. An assessment exercise can be undertaken jointly by both chambers, or by one chamber alone. In the few cases where an indicator is not relevant to a particular chamber – such as if the upper chamber plays no role in the budget cycle – it can simply be excluded from the assessment exercise.

Grades

Selecting grades is an important part of the assessment exercise. Grades are useful for representing a consensus on the current capacity and practice of parliament and for highlighting areas for improvement. Grades may also be a useful reference to look for signs of progress if parliament repeats the assessment exercise after a certain period of time.

There is always a temptation to focus on the grade itself. However, the evidence that informs the grade and the recommendations that emerge from the discussion on the grade are, in many ways, just as important as the grade itself.

The Indicators offer six descriptive grades. These are summarized below:

- **Non-existent:** This is the lowest grade, corresponding to 0 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion simply does not exist in parliament.
Note: "Non-existent" is not the same as "Not applicable". In some rare cases, the object of an assessment criterion might be "Not applicable" because the legal framework says that this object cannot exist. In most cases, however, there will be no legal obstacle to the object described in the assessment criterion. It could exist, but does not, for instance because parliament has not decided to do it or does not have the resources to do it. In this case, parliament should select "Non-existent".
- **Rudimentary:** This corresponds to 1 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion exists but in a rudimentary form. It is not an established part of parliament's capacity and practice.
- **Basic:** This corresponds to 2 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion exists in a basic form. It is part of parliament's capacity and practice but is not well-developed.
- **Good:** This corresponds to 3 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion is an established part of parliament's capacity and practice and is somewhat developed.
- **Very good:** This corresponds to 4 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion is a well-established part of parliament's capacity and practice.

- **Excellent:** This corresponds to 5 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion is a highly developed part of parliament's capacity and practice, with little obvious room for improvement.

Grades are awarded separately for each assessment criterion. It is possible to calculate grades at the dimension, indicator and target levels as follows:

- To calculate a grade at the **dimension** level, add together the numerical grades for the **assessment criteria** within that dimension and divide by the number of assessment criteria.
- To calculate a grade at the **indicator** level, add together the numerical grades for the **dimensions** within that indicator and divide by the number of dimensions.
- To calculate a grade at the **target** level, add together the numerical grades for the **indicators** within that target and divide by the number of indicators.

Evidence

Evidence is key to the assessment exercise. The Indicators rely on evidence-informed assessment, which is the best protection against subjective and arbitrary judgements.

Each assessment criterion contains suggestions on the type of evidence that parliament could gather for the assessment. Typically, evidence is drawn from the parliamentary record. These records may be publicly available on the parliamentary website, or may only be available internally.

In most cases, the parliamentary administration will be responsible for gathering evidence. It should be documented using the worksheets and presented to participants in the assessment exercise in user-friendly formats.

Recommendations

The assessment exercise is intended to generate recommendations for change. By examining the current state of capacity and practice, participants in the assessment exercise will identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. These ideas should be captured in the "Recommendations for change" sections of the worksheets.

It is likely that parliament will need to review and prioritize the list of recommendations. The most significant recommendations will normally be captured in the assessment exercise report and brought to the attention of the appropriate authorities in parliament.

Decisions on recommendations and follow-up action on these decisions are among the key outcomes of an assessment exercise. The "case studies" section of the Indicators website will highlight the results that parliaments have obtained from their assessment.

Advice and support

The assessment guidance below sets out the main steps in an assessment exercise. It contains questions for parliament to consider, as well as checklists. However, this guidance is only a starting point, since each exercise needs to be tailored to parliament's objectives.

The IPU and project partners therefore stand ready to advise parliaments about using the Indicators and designing their own assessments, drawing on experience from previous exercises.

To get in touch, please use the contact form on the Indicators website or write to standards@ipu.org.

Phases of the assessment exercise

The assessment exercise comprises three essential phases: preparation, execution and follow-up. This section provides guidance on the 12 key steps in this process and sets out both essential and recommended actions at each step. The phases and steps are summarized below:

Phase 1: Preparation

- Step 1: Clarify the objectives
- Step 2: Choose the right timing
- Step 3: Initiate the process
- Step 4: Identify the participants
- Step 5: Set up the working group

Phase 2: Execution

- Step 6: Collect the evidence
- Step 7: Hold meetings and discussions
- Step 8: Select the grades
- Step 9: Formulate the recommendations for change

Phase 3: Follow-up

- Step 10. Decide on priorities for change
- Step 11. Create an action plan
- Step 12. Monitor and evaluate progress

Phase 1: Preparation

Step 1: Clarify the objectives

It is important for parliament to have a clear understanding of the objectives of its assessment exercise and the envisaged outcomes. Is this exercise part of broader parliamentary reforms, warranting a comprehensive assessment? Is it aligned with the development of the parliamentary strategy, necessitating focused prioritization? Are funds on the horizon, demanding a thorough needs assessment?

A non-exhaustive list of possible objectives of an assessment exercise is given below:

- Identifying gaps
- Enhancing accountability
- Improving representation
- Optimizing efficiency
- Promoting transparency
- Strengthening engagement
- Adapting to evolving needs
- Boosting institutional capacity

Ideally, all participants in the assessment exercise should share a common understanding of the purpose of the exercise. Communicating these objectives across parliament fosters awareness, cultivates a sense of ownership and paves the way for the embracing of changes that may arise from the assessment.

The objectives will determine which indicator(s) parliament includes in the exercise. The scope and number of indicators for assessment might also be influenced by how much time is available, the structure of the exercise itself, and whether one or more groups of participants will be involved.

Essential:

- Clarify the objectives of the assessment.
- Determine the scope of the assessment, specifically identifying the indicators against which parliament wishes to evaluate its capacity and practice.
- Ensure that the objectives are commonly understood and clear to everyone involved.

Recommended:

- Consult internal and external stakeholders before clarifying the objectives.
- Consider communicating with a wider public and/or interested groups before starting the process.
- Identify the resources needed for the exercise.

Step 2: Choose the right timing

While it is for each parliament to determine its assessment approach and timing, certain moments in a parliament's life lend themselves especially well to self-assessment. Some examples are given below:

- At the beginning of a reform process
- At the start of a new term
- When preparing or reviewing a strategic plan
- Ahead of an external technical support project
- When monitoring progress over time

The Indicators can, however, be utilized at any time and for any other purpose, no matter how broad or focused.

Essential:

- Align the timing of the assessment with the timing of other processes to which the assessment will contribute (such as strategic planning or an external support project).
- Ensure that the timing aligns with the parliamentary agenda and allows participants to commit time despite busy schedules.

Recommended:

- Consult internal and external stakeholders about the timing of the exercise.
- Inform all potentially interested parties, including civil society organizations and donor organizations, about the timing of the assessment.
- Make a public announcement about the timing of the assessment.

Step 3: Initiate the process

The assessment process can be initiated by one or more individuals or bodies within parliament, including the parliamentary leadership, committees, individual MPs, political groups, groups of MPs and/or the parliamentary administration. It can also be initiated by individuals or bodies from outside parliament, such as civil society organizations.

Past experience shows that assessments tend to yield the best results when they are initiated by, or receive strong support from, parliament's political and/or administrative leadership. This action sends a

clear message to MPs, the parliamentary administration and the general public that parliament is committed to the assessment and to acting upon its outcomes.

Essential:

- Demonstrate political will to conduct the assessment by having the process publicly or internally endorsed by senior figures including the Speaker, party leaders and committee chairs.
- Demonstrate that parliament is invested in the success of the assessment by allocating resources for the process.

Recommended:

- Hold a meeting between the parliamentary leadership and the assessment working group.
- Organize a public meeting with civil society organizations, development organizations and any other bodies interested in parliamentary development in order to discuss parliament's commitment to the self-assessment and follow-up plans.
- Make a public statement committing to act upon the findings of the self-assessment exercise.

Step 4: Identify the participants

Before starting the assessment, parliament needs to decide who will be involved. MPs and parliamentary staff are typically the main participants. Inclusiveness is vital to the legitimacy and effectiveness of the exercise: the participants should represent the whole of parliament in terms of political party membership, gender and age, with due consideration given to underrepresented groups or other relevant characteristics.

A parliamentary committee might opt to conduct an assessment internally on a subject falling within its scope. Once it has assessed its capacity and practice, the committee could identify ways to enhance its procedures or introduce novel practices and activities. A productive assessment conducted at the committee level has the potential to create a positive impact throughout parliament.

A political group might also decide to carry out an assessment exercise specifically for its own members, using indicators that are of particular relevance to them.

Lastly, an assessment could focus on the independence, capacity and practice of the parliamentary administration.

Essential:

- Have the assessment conducted by a group of participants, not a sole individual.
- Ensure that this group reflects a diverse range of voices and perspectives.
- Involve MPs from various political parties.
- Involve staff who can support the process by collecting evidence, drafting reports, assigning grades and/or formulating recommendations.

Recommended:

- Extend the scope of the assessment by incorporating additional contributors.
- Involve civil society organizations with expertise in parliamentary operations or in specific fields in the assessment process itself, or gather their views in advance.
- Involve development organizations in the assessment process, as they could provide essential funds to support various facets of parliamentary reform.
- Consider involving the media in the process in order to raise public awareness and keep citizens informed.

Step 5: Set up the working group

Since the assessment is a collective effort, it is important for parliament to set up a working group with a clear structure and arrangements. When deciding on the format of working group meetings, parliament should consider the following aspects:

- **Objectives:** Clarify the specific objectives of the working group meetings. Are they meant for brainstorming, decision-making or progress updates? This will influence the structure and tone of the meetings.
- **Frequency:** Decide how often the meetings will take place. Consider the urgency of the tasks at hand and the availability of participants.
- **Duration:** Set a reasonable time limit for meetings to ensure they remain focused and productive.
- **Agenda:** Prepare a clear and detailed agenda for each meeting, outlining the topics to be discussed and the order in which they will be addressed.
- **Communication:** Establish a reliable communication channel for sharing information, updates, and materials related to the meetings.
- **Facilitation:** Designate a facilitator to guide the discussions, manage time and ensure everyone's voice is heard.
- **Decision-making process:** Determine how decisions will be made within the working group. Will it be through consensus, voting or another method?
- **Documentation:** Designate someone to take notes and document key discussions, decisions and action items during the meetings.
- **Flexibility:** Allow room for adjustments based on feedback and changing circumstances, ensuring the format remains effective and relevant.

Essential:

- Ensure that all participants understand what the assessment involves and how the process works.
- Hold working group meetings at opportune moments in the parliamentary agenda, during less hectic periods, in order to ensure that sufficient time is available.
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities within the working group.

Recommended:

- Consider holding an initial information session in order to foster mutual understanding of the objectives and scope of the exercise, and of how to use the Indicators.
- Set ground rules covering issues such as speaking time, the welcoming of all ideas, and flexibility.

Phase 2: Execution

Step 6: Collect the evidence

Collecting evidence is a key part of the assessment process, providing both a foundation for discussions during assessment sessions and a rationale for the chosen grade for each assessment criterion. The parliamentary administration – committee staff, research services and libraries – should gather data and information for each dimension and assessment criterion within the chosen indicators. This, along with the compiled written evidence, should be shared with all participants before the assessment, ideally a week or two in advance, in order to streamline the process, improve accuracy and enhance the overall effectiveness of the exercise.

Essential:

- Draw up the list of required evidence at the start of the assessment, aligning this with the assessment objectives and using the suggestions provided for each dimension in the indicator framework.
- Ask the parliamentary administration to gather the required evidence.
- Ensure that all participants have equitable access to the evidence well in advance of the assessment.

Recommended:

- Task the parliamentary administration or research services with preparing a research paper that highlights comparative practices and mechanisms in other parliaments, showcasing examples of good practices within the scope of the Indicators.
- Compile pertinent data from external sources .

Step 7: Hold meetings and discussions

Meetings and discussions are of particular importance, since the assessment process involves multiple participants. While the parliamentary context is inherently political, a more institutional approach that transcends partisan lines is crucial for the assessment exercise. The facilitator plays an especially important role in this respect, by keeping discussions on topic, managing time efficiently, ensuring equitable access to information and evidence ahead of time, and overseeing the documentation of all discussions.

Essential:

- Select a skilled facilitator to guide discussions, maintain focus, encourage participation and manage time efficiently. If necessary, the IPU or other partner organizations could offer organizational and expert assistance to support the facilitation process.
- Provide participants with relevant background information and materials prior to the meeting, so they can make informed and meaningful contributions.
- Designate someone to take comprehensive notes during the discussion, serving as a future reference for action and discussion.

Recommended:

- Consider sourcing multiple facilitators from a broader spectrum of experts both inside and outside parliament. This can help to bring varying insights and experiences to the discussions, contributing to a comprehensive and well-rounded assessment.
- Use visual aids such as presentations, charts and graphs to illustrate key points and concepts during the discussions.
- Invite external people with subject-matter expertise in the topics covered by given indicators and/or dimensions to participate in the meetings and discussions.

Step 8: Select the grades

Selecting grades is an important part of the assessment exercise. Grades are useful for representing a consensus on the current capacity and practice of parliament and for highlighting areas for improvement. Grades may also be a useful reference to look for signs of progress if parliament repeats the assessment exercise after a certain period of time.

The Indicators offer six descriptive grades. These are summarized below:

- **Non-existent:** This is the lowest grade, corresponding to 0 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion simply does not exist in parliament.

Note: “Non-existent” is not the same as “Not applicable”. In some rare cases, the object of an assessment criterion might be “Not applicable” because the legal framework says that this object cannot exist. In most cases, however, there will be no legal obstacle to the object described in the assessment criterion. It could exist, but does not, for instance because parliament has not decided to do it or does not have the resources to do it. In this case, parliament should select “Non-existent”.

- **Rudimentary:** This corresponds to 1 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion exists but in a rudimentary form. It is not an established part of parliament’s capacity and practice.
- **Basic:** This corresponds to 2 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion exists in a basic form. It is part of parliament’s capacity and practice but is not well-developed.
- **Good:** This corresponds to 3 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion is an established part of parliament’s capacity and practice and is somewhat developed.
- **Very good:** This corresponds to 4 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion is a well-established part of parliament’s capacity and practice.
- **Excellent:** This corresponds to 5 on a scale from 0 to 5. The object of the assessment criterion is a highly developed part of parliament’s capacity and practice, with little obvious room for improvement.

Grades are awarded separately for each assessment criterion. It is possible to calculate grades at the dimension, indicator and target levels as follows:

- To calculate a grade at the **dimension** level, add together the numerical grades for the **assessment criteria** within that dimension and divide by the number of assessment criteria.
- To calculate a grade at the **indicator** level, add together the numerical grades for the **dimensions** within that indicator and divide by the number of dimensions.
- To calculate a grade at the **target** level, add together the numerical grades for the **indicators** within that target and divide by the number of indicators.

An open and constructive discussion on each assessment criterion among participants should lead to common agreement on which grade best reflects the situation in a given parliament. If it is not possible to reach such an agreement, other options can be used, such as calculating an average grade or accepting a grade selected by the majority of participants (if a political balance is achieved).

In any case, the grades themselves should not be the sole focus. An assessment exercise using the Indicators also includes a qualitative analysis that helps parliament to prioritize its reform efforts. The Indicators are not intended to generate a comparative ranking of parliaments. The grades are valid primarily in the context of the parliament that is being assessed.

While the Indicators should be relevant and applicable in parliaments of all sizes, it is possible that some adjustments in assessment of a part of a criterion might be necessary for parliaments in smaller countries. It is understandable that parliaments with a small number of MPs cannot, for example, have separate committees for every single area, or entire specialized units for every segment of work. In such cases, small parliaments should adapt the criteria to their circumstances. They are also encouraged to contact the IPU and/or the project partners for assistance.

Step 9: Formulate the recommendations for change

As emphasized previously, the ultimate goal of the assessment exercise is not merely to assign grades, but rather to foster a rich exchange of ideas. This is why it is important to formulate recommendations for change.

During the assessment meetings and discussions, participants should focus on identifying gaps and opportunities for enhancements in parliamentary capacity and practice, ultimately leading to actionable ideas.

Essential:

- Capture the key findings and conclusions in the “Recommendations for change” section of the worksheet.
- Highlight priority areas for improvement, suggest possible actions and/or address potential hurdles to overcome. The proposed changes might imply significant shifts, such as constitutional or legal amendments, or may involve more modest procedural adjustments, resource allocation or the fine-tuning of existing practices.

Recommended:

- Consider drawing up a written summary for each assessment session capturing additional ideas and suggestions stimulated by the discussion, and circulate it among participants.
- Document discussions through audio or video recordings to provide an extra layer of detail and preservation.

Phase 3: Follow-up

Step 10: Decide on priorities for change

The assessment exercise is not an end in itself but a first step towards improvement. It is important to identify changes that parliament needs to make in the short and long terms, depending on its current capacity.

Essential:

- Discuss the findings of the assessment and recommendations with the parliamentary leadership.
- Take political decisions on which areas prioritize for future improvement.

Recommended:

- Discuss the findings of the exercise with a wider audience, including civil society and academia, and involve them in identifying the priority areas for change.
- Bring in external expert support from parliamentary strengthening organizations, or learn from the experience and good practice of other parliaments.
- Consult the sources and further reading provided at the end of many of the dimensions in order to gain a clearer understanding of the issues, and to gain insights into global trends, experiences and practices across parliaments.

Step 11: Create an action plan

Ideally, parliament should create and adopt an action plan or similar planning document to help translate the assessment outcomes and identified improvements into regular procedures and practice. Such a document should define clear tasks, responsibilities and timelines. Making this plan publicly available could be beneficial as a way of confirming parliament’s commitment to development and improvement, while also maintaining parliament’s accountability for its implementation.

Implementing the action plan may have financial implications. These will need to be taken into account in preparing the document, including identifying possible sources of funding. Expected costs should be estimated in advance, if possible at the parliamentary budget planning stage. If funds are not available from the current parliamentary budget, parliament can solicit external financial support.

Essential:

- Develop an action plan or similar planning document outlining what changes will take place in parliament based on the assessment exercise, and define related tasks, responsibilities and timelines.
- Involve interested parliamentary groups and staff in developing the action plan.
- Inform all relevant actors and responsible units/staff of the tasks assigned to them.

Recommended:

- Consider organizing a workshop or an open meeting for external actors interested in parliamentary work, such as parliamentary strengthening organizations and civil society organizations, and inform them about the action plan.
- Involve parliamentary strengthening organizations in supporting the implementation of the action plan.

Step 12: Monitor and evaluate progress

Regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of an action plan or other outcome document(s) is an important part of the process. It allows parliament to identify and address possible challenges or impediments to change.

Essential:

- Continue monitoring and evaluation even after changes have been made, in order to ensure that they are sustained and implemented well.
- Assess parliament's capacity and practice against the same indicator(s) at a future point in order to evaluate its progress over time.

Recommended:

- Report regularly to the public on the implementation of the action plan and on progress achieved.

Assessment checklist

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Objectives | <p>What are the objectives of the exercise?</p> <p>Does everyone involved share the same understanding?</p> <p>What is the scope of the assessment? Which indicator(s) will be assessed?</p> <p>What are the expected results?</p> <p>How is the assessment expected to contribute to parliamentary reform and development?</p> |
| Timing | <p>When will the assessment take place?</p> <p>How long will it last (number of days and sessions)?</p> <p>Will an introductory seminar be held for participants?</p> |
| Political engagement | <p>Is there political support for the assessment from the parliamentary leadership and from MPs?</p> <p>Is there a cross-party leadership group to lead the process?</p> |
| Participation | <p>Who will participate in the assessment?</p> <p>Are the participants sufficiently diverse?</p> <p>Is there strong engagement, at the administrative level, in organizing the assessment?</p> |
| Organization | <p>Is responsibility for organizing the assessment clearly assigned?</p> <p>Is there a need for external expert support? Is this support available?</p> |
| Facilitation | <p>How will the exercise be facilitated?</p> <p>Which partner organization can provide expert support in facilitating the exercise?</p> |
| Evidence | <p>Who will collect and prepare information and data for evidence? When will this be done?</p> <p>What additional background information can be provided to participants?</p> <p>Who will be responsible for distributing the indicators with evidence and additional information to participants?</p> |
| Documentation | <p>How will the process be documented and by whom?</p> |
| Outcome | <p>What outcome documents will be produced (e.g. report, plan of action)?</p> <p>Who will be responsible for producing these documents?</p> |
| Follow-up | <p>What will be done with the outcome documents?</p> <p>Who will be responsible for follow-up?</p> <p>How will follow-up be monitored?</p> |

List of targets, indicators and dimensions

Target 1: Effective parliament

- **Indicator 1.1: Parliamentary autonomy**
 - Dimension 1.1.1: Institutional autonomy
 - Dimension 1.1.2: Procedural autonomy
 - Dimension 1.1.3: Budgetary autonomy
 - Dimension 1.1.4: Administrative autonomy

- **Indicator 1.2: Members of parliament**
 - Dimension 1.2.1: Status of members of parliament
 - Dimension 1.2.2: Non-accountability and inviolability
 - Dimension 1.2.3: Incompatibility of office
 - Dimension 1.2.4: Access to resources
 - Dimension 1.2.5: Professional development

- **Indicator 1.3: Parliamentary procedures**
 - Dimension 1.3.1: Rules of procedure
 - Dimension 1.3.2: Emergency or crisis procedures
 - Dimension 1.3.3: Parliamentary calendar
 - Dimension 1.3.4: Convening sessions and setting the agenda
 - Dimension 1.3.5: Quorum
 - Dimension 1.3.6: Debate
 - Dimension 1.3.7: Voting
 - Dimension 1.3.8: Record-keeping
 - Dimension 1.3.9: Dissolution

- **Indicator 1.4: Parliamentary organization**
 - Dimension 1.4.1: Plenary
 - Dimension 1.4.2: Speaker
 - Dimension 1.4.3: Presidium
 - Dimension 1.4.4: Parliamentary committees
 - Dimension 1.4.5: Political groups
 - Dimension 1.4.6: Cross-party groups

- **Indicator 1.5: Administrative capacity and independence**

Dimension 1.5.1: Mandates of the parliamentary administration

Dimension 1.5.2: Human resource management

Dimension 1.5.3: Expert support

Dimension 1.5.4: Facilities

Dimension 1.5.5: Digital technologies

Dimension 1.5.6: Document management

- **Indicator 1.6: Law-making**

Dimension 1.6.1: Powers in law-making

Dimension 1.6.2: Constitution-making and amendment

Dimension 1.6.3: Legislative procedure

Dimension 1.6.4: Legislative drafting

Dimension 1.6.5: Enactment

Dimension 1.6.6: Official publication

Dimension 1.6.7: Post-legislative scrutiny

- **Indicator 1.7: Oversight**

Dimension 1.7.1: Election and dismissal of the executive

Dimension 1.7.2: Access to information from the executive

Dimension 1.7.3: Summoning the executive in committee

Dimension 1.7.4: Summoning the executive in plenary

Dimension 1.7.5: Questions

Dimension 1.7.6: Hearings

Dimension 1.7.7: Parliamentary committees of inquiry

- **Indicator 1.8: Budget**

Dimension 1.8.1: Formulation, examination, amendment and approval

Dimension 1.8.2: In-year and ex-post oversight

Dimension 1.8.3: Public Accounts Committee

Dimension 1.8.4: Expert support

Dimension 1.8.5: Supreme audit institution

- **Indicator 1.9: Representative role of members of parliament**

Dimension 1.9.1: Interaction with the electorate

Dimension 1.9.2: Opposition

- **Indicator 1.10: Relations with other branches of government**

Dimension 1.10.1: Relations with the executive

Dimension 1.10.2: Relations with the judiciary

Dimension 1.10.3: Relations with subnational levels of government

- **Indicator 1.11: Key parliamentary powers**

Dimension 1.11.1: Security

Dimension 1.11.2: Defence

Dimension 1.11.3: Foreign affairs and international agreements

Dimension 1.11.4: Parliamentary diplomacy

Target 2: Accountable parliament

- **Indicator 2.1: Parliamentary ethics**

Dimension 2.1.1: Anti-corruption

Dimension 2.1.2: Conflicts of interest

Dimension 2.1.3: Code of conduct

Dimension 2.1.4: Parliamentary income and use of parliamentary resources

Dimension 2.1.5: Lobbying

- **Indicator 2.2: Institutional integrity**

Dimension 2.2.1: Parliamentary expenditure

Dimension 2.2.2: Public procurement

Dimension 2.2.3: Freedom of information

Dimension 2.2.4: Professionalism of the parliamentary administration

Dimension 2.2.5: Institutional development of parliament

Target 3: Transparent parliament

- **Indicator 3.1: Transparency of parliamentary processes**

Dimension 3.1.1: Transparency of parliamentary work

Dimension 3.1.2: Transparency of the legislative process

Dimension 3.1.3: Transparency of the budget cycle and the parliamentary budget

- **Indicator 3.2: Parliamentary communication and outreach**

Dimension 3.2.1: Institutional communication

Dimension 3.2.2: Parliamentary website

Dimension 3.2.3: Outreach activities

- **Indicator 3.3: Access to parliament**

Dimension 3.3.1: Physical access to parliament

Dimension 3.3.2: Access for persons with disabilities

Dimension 3.3.3: Media access to parliament

Target 4: Responsive parliament

- **Indicator 4.1: Valuing public concerns**

Dimension 4.1.1: Responding to public concerns

Dimension 4.1.2: Responding to emerging policy issues

Dimension 4.1.3: Leaving no one behind and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Target 5: Inclusive parliament

- **Indicator 5.1: Inclusive law-making, oversight and budgeting**

Dimension 5.1.1: Human rights

Dimension 5.1.2: Impact assessments

Dimension 5.1.3: Gender mainstreaming

Dimension 5.1.4: Gender-responsive budgeting

Dimension 5.1.5: Youth inclusion

- **Indicator 5.2: Inclusive institutional practices**

Dimension 5.2.1: Workforce diversity

Dimension 5.2.2: Workplace environment

Dimension 5.2.3: Combating sexism, harassment and violence

Dimension 5.2.4: Multilingual service delivery

Target 6: Participatory parliament

- **Indicator 6.1: Parliamentary environment for public participation**

Dimension 6.1.1: Legal framework for public participation

Dimension 6.1.2: Institutional capacity for public participation

Dimension 6.1.3: Public education about the work of parliament

- **Indicator 6.2: Public participation in parliamentary processes**

Dimension 6.2.1: Participation in law-making

Dimension 6.2.2: Participation in oversight

Dimension 6.2.3: Participation in the budget cycle

Dimension 6.2.4: Managing public input and providing feedback

- **Indicator 6.3: Participation of diverse groups in the work of parliament**

Dimension 6.3.1: Engaging civil society organizations

Dimension 6.3.2: Reaching out to all communities

Target 7: Representative parliament

- **Indicator 7.1: Electoral integrity**

Dimension 7.1.1: Voting and election rights

Dimension 7.1.2: Candidacy, party and campaign rights and responsibilities

Dimension 7.1.3: Role of public authorities in elections

- **Indicator 7.2: Composition of parliament**

Dimension 7.2.1: Representation of political diversity

Dimension 7.2.2: Representation of women

Dimension 7.2.3: Representation of youth

Dimension 7.2.4: Representation of other underrepresented groups

- **Indicator 7.3: Composition of parliamentary bodies**

Dimension 7.3.1 Composition of governing bodies

Dimension 7.3.2 Composition of committees

Dimension 7.3.3 Gender and age balance in parliamentary bodies