

PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

Parliaments have been at the centre of governance development work since this type of institutional development work became more prevalent in the 1990s in response to the demands of a post-Cold War world and in support to newly-democratic governments in eastern Europe and elsewhere among emerging democratic states. Parliament is the core representative government institution within almost all democratic governance systems that is responsible for the approval of laws and the foundation for representative decision-making. Parliaments have an integral role to play in ensuring governance systems are effective, accountable, transparent and participatory.

Professionals engaged in the parliamentary development field are focused on supporting the building of parliaments based on these core principles, and in line with their core representative, legislative and oversight functions. Given the political nature of the institution, such work often requires a somewhat different approach than the standard development methodologies, but the opportunity to build relationships with and direct support to decision-makers can result in significant reforms to the political system that can have a direct impact on every citizen and society at large.

Yet parliamentary development also faces challenges. Many who work in international development have a preconceived negative notion of politics, politicians and, in turn, parliaments. Many would prefer the “cleaner” work of development where there is limited or no interaction with political actors—even though the whole of society relies on the political process to accomplish sustainable change. More broadly, many development actors are hesitant to be perceived as interfering in domestic politics and any work with a parliament brings them close to perceived development “red lines.” There is also a feeling among some donors that high levels of turnover following most elections means a never-ending cycle of financial and technical support to parliaments, anathema to their prioritisation of sustainability and exit strategies.

In the past there have been opportunities for parliamentary development implementers to gather to share experiences and to discuss innovative approaches to the work. From 2006 to 2016 a biennial Donor Coordination Meeting was held. This platform included donors (bilateral & multilateral) and implementers and provided an opportunity for high-level discussions on parliamentary development. Flowing from such meetings were some of the issues that have driven the field of work for the past 15 years – benchmarks for democratic parliaments; the [AGORA web portal](#); parliamentary monitoring best practices; working with parliaments in fragile contexts; and the value of “thinking politically” as part of such development work.



However, for a number of reasons, the momentum that had allowed for six such donor coordination meetings in ten years has dissipated.¹ Perhaps more than coincidentally, there has likely been a reduction in funding for parliamentary development work (though exact numbers are difficult to pin down given differing reporting and tracking approaches amongst donors). In the past, donors had full-time, senior officials who were responsible for providing internal advice and quality assurance for projects related to the work of parliaments. Implementers that have been leaders in the field have had their global budgets cut or have had a change in senior staffing that have allowed their focus to be diverted.

With the rejuvenation of AGORA as the parliamentary development web portal in 2020, a small group of implementers – led by International IDEA (through the EU-funded INTER PARES project), and including the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), the German Bundestag, the Netherlands Institute for Multi-party Democracy (NIMD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the *Directorio Legislativo* have determined that a global Community of Practice (CoP) is an important step in re-establishing parliamentary development as a key component of governance development work. An active CoP will both highlight and share innovative practices as well as help ensure the level of funding necessary for effective support to these key democratic institutions.

To that end, IDEA contracted a consultant to develop a concept of the CoP. This report is the culmination of a process that included interviews with a selection of implementers, academics, parliamentary networks, parliaments and civil society organisations working in support of parliamentary development.

Outputs & Objectives

Before delving into the details of the proposed CoP, it is important to clarify the added value of a CoP for the parliamentary development community. CoPs are a viable aspect of professional development amongst international development experts and organisations in a range of fields and specialisations. They are an opportunity for development professionals to engage and interact with others who work in the same field. At its foundation, a CoP is a network of counterparts sharing their experiences and learning from each other.

Given the disparate nature of development work, with field experts working oftentimes in isolation or in small groups, the opportunity to discuss professional matters and for professional development are limited. A CoP has value in creating space for such interactions. But it can also be an opportunity to discuss next generation or cutting-edge issues and ideas that may form the next most-effective development modality or approach to the work.

An example of this can be found in the field of anti-corruption work. UNDP, UNODC and Transparency International have taken a joint leadership role in organising a CoP. This includes

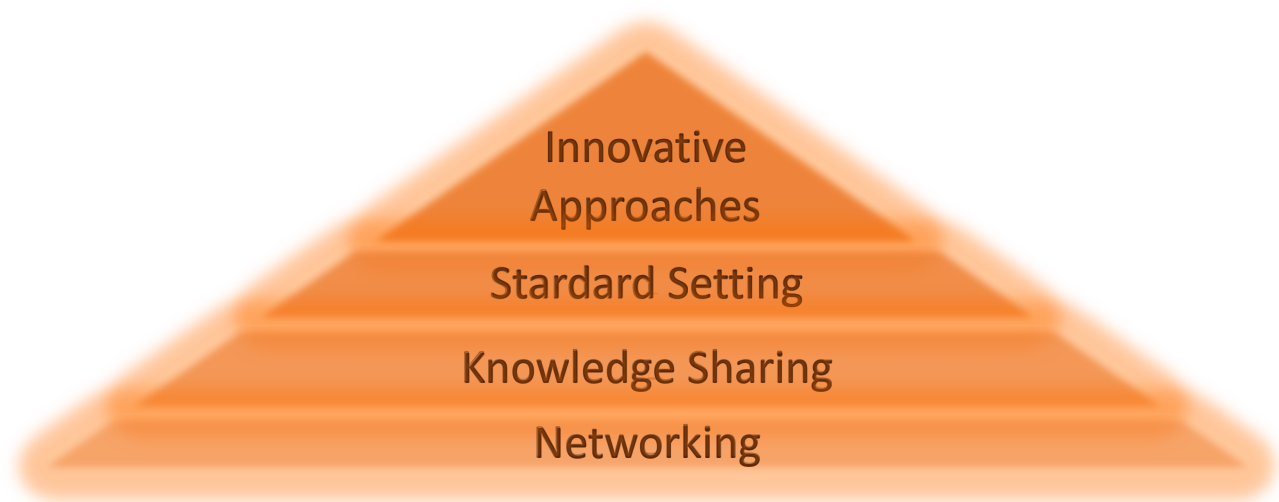
¹ Thematic groups, such as the Legislative Openness Working Group (later the Open Parliament e-Network (OPeN) related to transparency by parliaments, have been established and maintained, but there has been no whole-of-sector coordination or engagement.



TI's organising of a biennial global event – the International Anti-Corruption Conference² - for which TI is the Secretariat. In addition to the conference, the CoP includes opportunities to interact, engage and learn for AC professionals. For example, UNDP has developed dedicated courses, both online and in-person, related to professional development.³ UNDP also holds an internal CoP for its AC professionals as a side event to the global conference.

Another example of an active CoP can be found amongst European national parliaments. The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD)⁴ was established in 1977 as a means of sharing knowledge amongst national parliaments. The network has a permanent secretariat which manages a system of queries and answers and organises annual seminars hosted by member parliaments.

Having considered examples of CoPs it is important to define the **core outputs** under which the parliamentary development CoP would operate.



- **Networking:** At its core a CoP is an opportunity for those working in the same field of work to engage and build a network of associates from which collaboration, information exchanging and learning can occur. This may be especially important for smaller or regional practitioners and stakeholders who see the additional value of recognition in their participation in such a network and their ability to access new knowledge related to parliamentary development.

² <https://www.transparency.org/en/the-organisation/international-anti-corruption-conference-iacc-series#>

³ <https://anti-corruption.org/courses/>

⁴ <https://ecprd.secure.europarl.europa.eu/ecprd/public/page/about>



- **Knowledge Sharing:** A network can also be an opportunity to share knowledge about how professionals are managing their work and for them to seek inputs into challenges they are facing.
- **Standards Setting:** Where a CoP is sharing knowledge it may also be an opportunity to define and promote standard practices for the profession.
- **Innovative Approaches:** Perhaps not at the core of a CoP, but the opportunity to consider innovative work approaches, to test and try in a practical setting and to gather lessons learned can be a key opportunity to allow the field of work to evolve.

In addition to defining the outputs of a CoP, it is important to define the objectives to be achieved. There are three objectives that can form the basis of a new CoP⁵:

- *Innovating & Experimenting* – The nature of the work of a parliament is dynamic and this requires those working with parliaments to be always innovating to meet the needs of their beneficiaries.
- *Distilling & Disseminating* – A CoP should also be an opportunity to gather lessons learned, establish core components and to share techniques for the work in the field.
- *Promoting & Advocating* – A CoP must also be a venue for advocating for parliamentary development, in general, and new and innovative approaches to such work, more specifically.

With regard to the last point – advocacy – the CoP can be an opportunity for all parliamentary development stakeholders to work collaboratively to provide a “value proposition” with regard to why development work with parliaments is vital to the broader governance and development agendas for bilateral and multi-lateral donors. This will require engagement of the broader development community, donors and development agencies through the community of practice. The timing may be apt for this advocacy work, given the recent uptick in discussions regarding democracy promotion and the value of good governance (especially in regard to managing the current COVID-19 pandemic).

Proposed Details of a CoP

Having considered the broad principles under which a CoP should be organised, it is important to also consider the specific details of how the CoP will be organised. This requires the answering of three questions: (i) who should be a member of the CoP; (ii) what should be the format of the CoP; and (iii) what should be the initial topics/themes for a CoP?

Membership

The consensus that emerged from the consultations upon which this report is based was that the CoP should be as open as possible, allowing all organisations and individuals that work in the

⁵ The three objectives are taken from a policy brief produced by Global Partners Governance in 2017



field of parliamentary development to participate. But it is important to reiterate at this stage that the CoP is for parliamentary development and is not a parliament CoP. Therefore, the focus should be on those that work to develop parliaments. These would include the following categories:

Parliaments: Many parliaments globally are directly interacting with other parliaments to support their development. (e.g. – Swiss Federal Parliament; INTER PARES partner parliaments. European Member State Parliaments; Australian state parliaments; US House Democracy Partnership; the European Parliament)

Parliamentary Development Implementers: Those organisations and professionals that work to develop the capacity of parliaments, their staff and MPs.(e.g. – NDI; WFD; UNDP; UN Women; IDEA; NIMD)

Networks of Parliaments: Certain networks of parliaments are also implementing development work and those networks should be a part of the CoP. (e.g. – SADC-PF; IPU; ParlAmericas; CPA)

Networks of MPs: Separate from parliament networks are groups of individual MPs who organise, usually around a theme, to promote the development of parliaments (e.g. – GOPAC; Globe; PGA)

Donors: Not only the keepers of the purse, but a wealth of knowledge with regard to numerous and varied projects they have implemented in support of parliaments. (e.g. – FCDO; European Commission; USAID; SIDA;)

Civil Society Organisations: A number of CSOs engage parliaments to advocate for reforms that relate to a number of issues, including greater transparency and accountability. Other CSOs monitor the work of parliaments and report on their development. (e.g. – OPI; Directorio Legislativo; national CSOs)

Academia/Think Tanks: There is ongoing academic work, both applied and theoretical, that could be of value to the development of parliaments and the attendance of those working in this field would be of added value to the CoP. (e.g. – academics focused on legislative studies; University of Hull (UK); McGill University (Canada); PIPS (Pakistan); PRS (India))

Format

Beyond the question of who should attend the CoP is the further question of its format. Lessons from other development CoPs have shown that a mix of online and in-person activities seem to be appropriate. Since 2020 and the global pandemic, there has been a shift to fully online activities for the rest of 2021, but that should not preclude an in-person event during 2022. However, even where in the future there are in-person events they will likely be hybrid with the streaming of the events online and even the possibility of remote participation.

A second question with regard to format is related to types of events. There seems to be added value in a flagship event, such as a multi-stakeholder conference. A conference could be biennial and should be a stand-alone event or linked to a larger gathering or conference as a side or parallel event. Between such flagship events is the possibility of formal and less formal interactions within the network established by the CoP. For example, through AGORA there could be monthly virtual brown bag lunches hosted by different partner organisations. It may also include working groups that develop think pieces or discussion documents for conferences or in response to rising issues.

Beyond meetings and events, the CoP could also be a source for knowledge sharing through online courses for parliamentary development professionals. It may also have a discussion forum, similar to the one operated by the ECPRD, where queries can be posted and replied to by other members of the community. A CoP can also provide routine communications to its members as a means of spurring collaboration and information sharing through means such as a monthly newsletter or media monitoring.



A challenge can be observed in the implementation of online events. Many are familiar with “Zoom Fatigue”. But one of the benefits of communities of practice and in-person events is the



ability to interact with colleagues on the sidelines of an event at coffee breaks, lunches and elsewhere. To date, online events have not been able to replicate this, less tangible, added value of a CoP. However, there are a few online tools and approaches that have had some success:

- *Virtual Coffee Breaks* – Facilitated breaks with a key discussion question (perhaps on the less serious side) or open discussion on the previous session. It may also include a poll question that can be reported back to the full plenary after the break.
- *Breakout Rooms* – the use of group work can break up a longer session and allow for less formal discussions. It may be aided by online tools for capturing ideas and comments, such as Google Jamboard or Zoom Whiteboard⁶.
- *5/20 Rule of Online Presentations* – Ensure that participants are challenged to think or respond to a query every five minutes and no presentations are longer than 20 minutes.
- *Half-Day Events* – Instead of having a 1-2 day conference, the conference can be broken into three or four half-days. This allows the participants to engage for a finite period of time. This may include having an online conference held for four consecutive weeks on the same day and time.
- *Time Zone Hubs* – This would see a conference hold sessions that are aligned to three primary time zones – Asia-Pacific; Europe and Africa; and North & South America – with events organised around these time zones.
- *Debates* – An alternative to the standard lecture of panel discussion, where two or three experts or keynote speakers hold a debate centred around a provocative proposition.

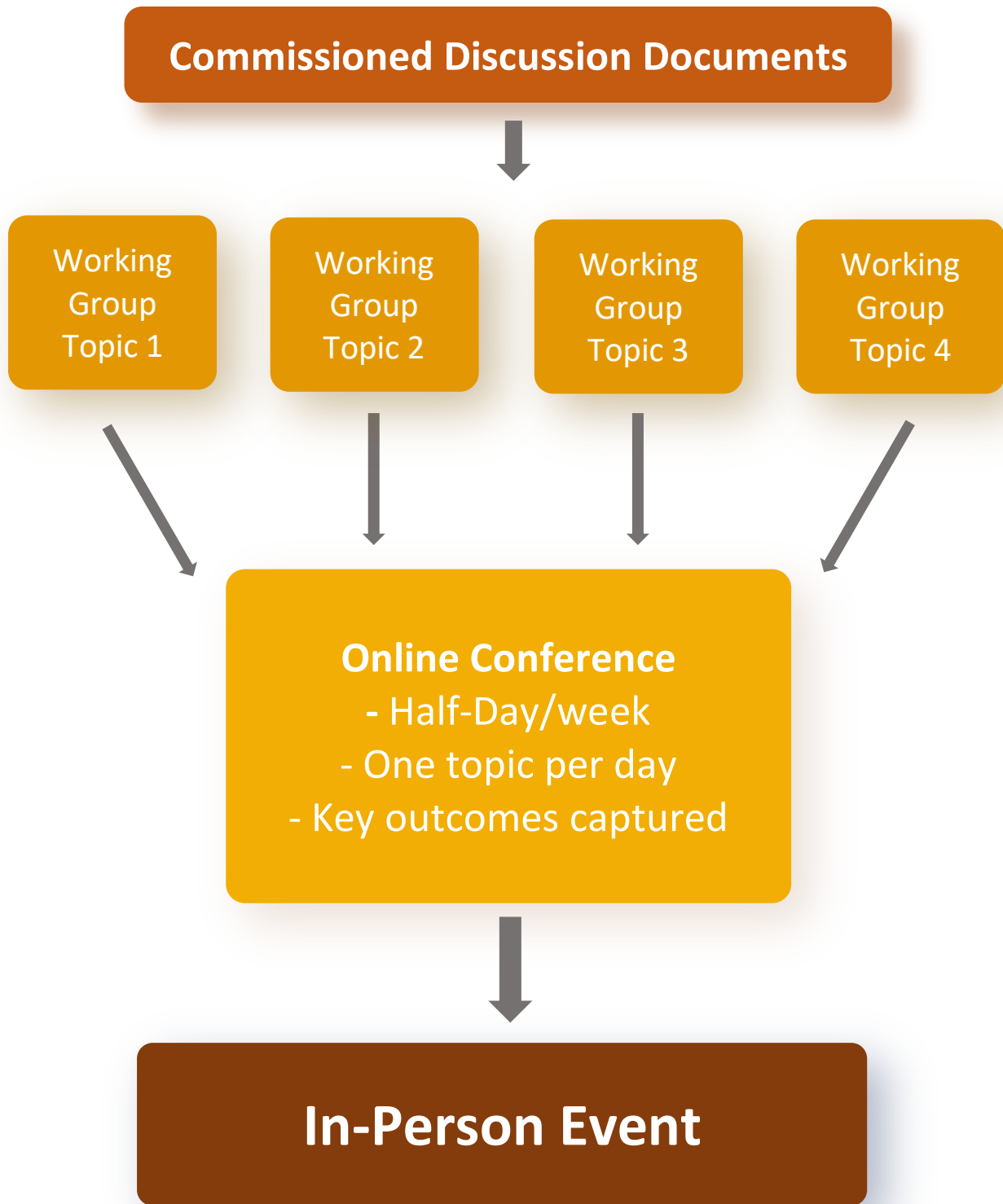
A further discussion point related to the parliamentary development community of practice is the proposal that an in-person event be held in 2022. Discussions with stakeholders generally regarded an in-person component as valuable. This may come in two formats. There are already stand-alone events planned in the second half of 2021 and early 2022 to which the work of the CoP can be linked. These include the Open Government Project biennial conference (week of December 13, 2021), a WFD Environmental Democracy Conference (February-March, 2022) and the planned Summit for Democracies in 2022. Many suggested that the CoP could, in part, be organised around such events with a full in-person component of the CoP to be organised as a side event to the Summit of Democracies that is planned for 2022 in Washington, D.C.⁷

Based on all of the above considerations, the following format and events are proposed for the CoP in 2021 and 2022.⁸

⁶ <https://edu.google.com/products/jamboard/>

⁷ The Summit of Democracies is in the early stages of development, but three themes will be the focus of the event – authoritarianism, corruption and human rights/civil society.

⁸ A more detailed work plan is provided in Annex 1 to this report





Key outputs for the CoP in the coming 18 months would include:

- Promoting collaborative work on key themes/topics prior to each session, including the use of surveys or working groups
- Online conference where papers are shared, discussed and inputs captured
 - o November 2021 to April 2022
 - o Conference will be run over a six-month period for six half-day sessions
 - o Each half-day session will correspond to a theme/topic
 - o Key partners will assume responsibility for organising each session, including networking opportunities
- Linked to stand-alone conferences relevant to the work, including:
 - A virtual session linked to the OGP Conference in December 2021;
 - A virtual session linked to an environmental democracy conference being organised by WFD in February 2022; and
 - A side event to the Summit for Democracies (December 2022)
 - o Hosted by US House of Representatives
 - o One-day event

All online activities would be managed through the AGORA web portal, including conference materials, working group sessions and discussion documents.

Depending on the success of this format, in 2022 other activities may be added to the CoP, such as brown bag lunches and online courses for professional development.

AGORA at the Heart of the Community of Practice

As development communities of practice have evolved over the past few years (expedited by the global pandemic in 2020-21) to be primarily an online platform with some in-person events, there is an opportunity to use current resources to be the base for the CoP. AGORA web portal was an idea that grew from the previous parliamentary development donor coordination meetings and has been a valuable asset for the community with the collection of a significant library of resource materials, online courses and information on parliamentary development. The community will use AGORA as a collaborative base to build a new CoP. In the short-term (2021-22) AGORA can host working group discussions, conduct surveys to spur development of discussion documents and be the venue through which the online conference is held. The portal can also be the repository for all reference materials and conference documents.

Looking further ahead, as the CoP becomes more institutionalised, and in-person meetings and events become more feasible as COVID-19 related restrictions are lifted, it will be important for AGORA to remain the base of its work. This may include hosting of brown bag lunches and thematic working groups. It could also develop professional development courses for implementers and enhanced courses and materials for core parliamentary development work, such as inductions.



Topics/Themes

A third key area for consideration with regard to the parliamentary development CoP is topics or themes that will be discussed at the initial online conference proposed for later in 2021.

It is proposed that the **themes** for the conference (and any work completed prior to the conference) be related to topics that are:

Timely: Topics that are relevant to the community currently and for which there is some experiences or stories to share;

Partner-led: Each partner who will organise an event will ensure that the topic draws on their experience and expertise, and at the same time is of broad interest to the parliamentary development community;

Relevant: It may go without saying, but topics should be related to parliamentary development (and in particular new areas and approaches to such development in a post-pandemic world); and

Forward Looking: Topics should focus on issues and aspects of parliamentary development that are on the horizon, but not yet generally seen by practitioners as standard practice for parliamentary development professionals.

A second issue related to the topics relates to the level of the discussion. To put this in development parlance, should the discussion be at the output or outcome level? At the output level the discussion will centre around how parliamentary development is implemented, while if at the outcome level the discussion would focus on how parliaments can be effective, inclusive, accountable and transparent.

It is proposed that the conference topics be focused on the outcome level of discussion. If one of the goals of the CoP is to reinviograte the work of parliamentary development and to encourage donor re-engagement with parliaments, then the topics discussed should be at a level that focuses on the place of parliaments in their respective governance system and the broader development agenda.

It is also important to promote innovation and new ways of working in the field. Therefore, the topics for the conference should be provocative and showcase new and emerging ideas and approaches show support for parliaments can be a critical component of political and governance development efforts.



Suggested Topics for CoP

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How do parliaments remain relevant in the 21st Century? ○ Peer-to-Peer engagement and capacity development ○ Deliberative democracy – what is the role for parliaments? ○ How has the pandemic impacted parliaments and parliamentary development? ○ Countering illiberalism/ authoritarianism ○ Parliaments engagement in sectoral issues (e.g. – environmental democracy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parliamentary Monitoring Standards ○ Post-Legislative Scrutiny – next steps ○ Effective oversight of government – emerging trends ○ Monitoring government debt ○ Benchmarks and measuring parliaments’ progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Digital transformation and impact on transparency ○ Citizen engagement – emerging trends ○ Constituency Development Funds and reporting on results ○ Establishing a culture of openness in parliament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Women’s Political Empowerment – mentoring as an effective means of engagement ○ New approaches to engaging youth in the work of parliaments ○ Impact/Risk assessments – managing a proliferation of tools ○ Innovative tools for building strong relationships between parliaments and civil society ○ The role of parliament sin inclusive peacebuilding
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Communications/Advocacy

In addition to the organising of a virtual conference, working groups, and discussion documents, there is a need for the CoP to have a clear strategy for how the work produced by the CoP can be effectively communicated to external actors, such as the broader development community and donors/development agencies. This can be achieved through the development of a concise communications strategy that can outline how the work of the CoP and the results of that work are fully communicated. Such a strategy can also reflect on the value of communications as part of an advocacy campaign in which the CoP can lead the promotion of parliamentary development work.

Conclusion

A community of practice for those working in the field of parliamentary development is an opportunity for professionals to establish a network of those working in the field. It can also be an opportunity to share knowledge and exchange experiences as a means of allowing peer-to-peer professional development. But it can also be a platform for innovation, including new methods of working and, importantly, new and innovative tools for advancing the effectiveness of parliaments within their respective political systems.

The CoP being proposed for the parliamentary development community should be able to meet all of the four outputs noted above. This will be achieved through a process of discussion, juxtaposition and the development of new tools that are tried and tested. Lessons learned from such experimentation can be gathered and shared, which will lead to the need to advocate on



behalf of the community in dealing with that support such work, including donors and development agencies.

In achieving these objectives and outputs, the CoP should encourage all those that work in the field of parliamentary development to participate. To be clear, the CoP is focused on the development of parliaments and not just a network of parliaments. Thus those that participate should be actively engaged in the development of capacity in parliaments.

The format for the CoP, at least for the first 12 months, should be a process that is primarily online and participative through the AGORA web portal, with the promotion of collaboration amongst practitioners and organisations, including the use of surveys and the commissioning of discussion documents or papers that are presented at an online series of half-day sessions to run monthly from November, 2021 to April, 2022. But this should not preclude an in-person event in 2022 once the pandemic is brought under control. Eventually, the CoP can build on its early work to be more dynamic and to allow for more organic activities and opportunities for engagement through the AGORA web portal.

If a key objective of the CoP is to identify innovative tools and approaches and to test them through applied experiments and piloting within the field of parliamentary development, then the themes and topics that are initially discussed at the CoP should promote a robust discussion amongst participants on outcome level topics – for example, parliaments role in a democratic governance system; new tools for citizen engagement; parliament in the age of deliberative democracy. From these discussions should come, beyond professional networking and knowledge sharing, new ideas that will potentially define the work of parliamentary development in the coming decade.



Annex 1: Proposed Work Plan for Parliamentary Development Community of Practice

Inputs	Timeline/Deadline
Approval of Concept Note	September 2021
Confirm Topics and Dates for CoP Conference	September 2021
Confirm Partner Inputs/Commitments	September 2021
Session Programmes Finalised	2 months before the start of each session
Development of Communications Strategy for CoP	October
Collaborative Working Processes Established by Leads	October
Notification of CoP to Stakeholders	September 30
Conference Materials Uploaded to AGORA	November 01
Online Conference (6 half-day sessions)	2021-2022
Organising of In-person Side Event to the Summit of Democracies	2022
Summit of Democracies	December, 2022



Annex 2: Proposed Community of Practice Programme

Session	Date	Topic	Lead Organisation(s)
1	17 November 2021	Peer-to-Peer Parliamentary Strengthening	German Bundestag, INTER PARES
2	24 February 2022	Advancing Parliamentary Accountability in Crisis Contexts	NDI, WFD
3	17 March 2022	Leveraging Transparency to Counter Illiberal Influences: The Role of Legislatures	NDI, OGP
4	April 2022 (TBC)	Parliaments and CSOs – Imagining a New Relationship	NIMD, WFD
5	May 2022	Global Parliamentary Report Launch at AGORA Pa CoP: the Present and Future of Public Engagement	UNDP