

AGORA, Portal for Parliamentary Development



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You will be able to explore numerous tools and features and interact with the online parliamentary development community of practice.



Welcome to the AGORA Newsletter!

AGORA, the Portal for Parliamentary development, is proud to announce its first newsletter.

AGORA is a multilateral initiative of the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#), the [World Bank Institute \(WBI\)](#), the [National Democratic Institute for International Affairs \(NDI\)](#), the [International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance \(International IDEA\)](#), and the [European Commission](#). The Portal was successfully launched in March 2010 in Paris, and marked the birth of the first virtual platform for knowledge sharing on parliamentary development.

This quarterly newsletter presents the latest information, knowledge and activities in the field of parliamentary development, and keeps you informed of recent activities in this growing field. For more information, we invite you to consult AGORA at www.agora-parl.org, or visit our partner institutions.

If you want to contribute or have any questions, please mail to:

moderator@agora-parl.org

Parliamentary digest

To find out what has happened these past months, [click here](#).

Recent Resources

To consult the newest and upcoming resources in our library, [click here](#).

Calendar

To view the complete calendar of upcoming events, [click here](#).

Area of Expertise



Standards for Democratic Parliaments - by KEVIN DEVEAUX, UNDP Parliamentary Development Policy Advisor. "Every institution should be able to measure its progress over time, to ensure it is improving its capacity to meet its mandate and to continuously review its efforts to become a better institution. Parliaments are no exception. In many countries, parliaments are under-resourced and not able to fully conduct the key constitutional functions mandated to them, such as passing quality ..." [Click here to read more](#)

Chronicle



Lord ALDERDICE, Convenor in the House of Lords (UK). "Human Rights should not be a partisan issue. Everyone's rights need to be protected or they are not human rights all. For this reason it is best if parliaments can establish cross-party Human Rights Committees and independent Human Rights Commissioners or Ombudsmen to monitor Human Rights concerns in regard to monitor Human Rights concerns in regard to legislation and policy and act as a focus for investigation and enquiry in the particular cases. It may seem trite but my appeal to..." [Click here to read more](#)

Analysis

Parliamentary Development: Tackling Corruption - by NIALL



JOHNSTON, Asia Regional Coordinator for WBI.

"Corruption is a clear threat to development, democracy and to international security. It distorts economic development and subverts political, stunting growth, ..." [Click here to read more](#)

AGORA: A New Valuable Tool in Parliamentary Development

Around the world, parliaments and parliamentarians are being increasingly viewed as key drivers of development.

It has been indeed undeniably recognized that parliamentarians are an important potential driver of change and programmes in support of parliaments can sometimes have a disproportionately large impact relative to the amount of funding allocated to them. Recent studies link the presence of strong parliamentary institutions with the existence of a strong democracy and an open society. Therefore, as institutions that strengthen responsive mechanisms and public accountability, responding to the concerns and interests of poor people, women, and other vulnerable or excluded groups, parliaments are a key driver of development.

While the pivotal role of parliaments is widely recognized, they sometimes lack the institutional and political space to translate their potential into tangible results.

AGORA, the Portal for Parliamentary Development, has been developed to respond to these challenges. Indeed, given the surge in interest in parliamentary development on the part of the international community, it was agreed that the parliamentary development community of practice would benefit greatly from the creation of an online knowledge centre, as would parliaments themselves, in their role as primary actors in the field.

As a multi-lateral, global initiative AGORA, promotes parliamentary institutions as the basis for healthy democracy and national development. Furthermore, it enables all actors to strengthen the role of the legislature and brings together parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, donors, practitioners, as well as academics, civil society and the media.

A reliable, centralized source of information on parliamentary development facilitates more efficient planning, reduces the risk of overlapping and duplication, and enhances the sharing of expertise and lessons learned. A knowledge hub of this kind leads to a better use of donor funds, more effective parliamentary development and, ultimately, stronger parliaments.

AGORA consists in an online knowledge centre feeding parliamentary development as the progressive force for development and democratic governance.

For instance, due to their unique position, parliaments have a crucial role to play in enacting sound legislation and overseeing effective policies that boost the drive towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. For this reason, AGORA supports parliaments engaging with the MDGs in the most efficient, transparent and successful way possible by providing parliamentary institutions and their staff with the relevant knowledge.

AGORA is therefore in line with the Paris Declaration, endorsed on 2 March 2005, which aims to increase efforts towards harmonization, alignment and ownership and to the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) which 'acknowledges the critical role and responsibility of parliaments in ensuring country ownership of development processes'.

First launched at the French National Assembly in Paris in front of over 150 Members of Parliament, delegates of international organizations, and representatives of parliamentary associations from all over the world, AGORA has been presented in Indonesia, the United States of America, Bangladesh, Thailand, Ghana and Poland.

AGORA is proud to count more than 20 partners or affiliated organizations including the European Parliament, the French National Assembly, the United States Congress, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). Recently, the European Commission has joined the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank Institute (WBI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) as a member of the AGORA Implementing Board.

Since its launch, AGORA – so far available in English and French - has attracted visitors from over 175 countries, including India, Kenya and Colombia. In spite of the technological challenges in many parts of the world, AGORA is already reaching a highly diverse range of members and continues to see its audience grow. The projected launch of the Portal in Russian (end of 2010)

and Spanish (2011) is expected to help enlarge AGORA's scope even further.

AGORA creates a true community of practice by enabling each and every individual engaged in parliamentary development to take part in and share ownership of the Portal. AGORA facilitates coordination amongst parliamentary development organizations at the global, regional and national level.

AGORA has also a tangible impact on facilitating the use and application of existing knowledge, information and

expertise for those working in parliamentary development in the field. The highly interactive nature of the Portal allows for easy communication; lessons learned can be shared and peer support is available only a few clicks away.

Through embracing the latest communication technologies, AGORA offers a unique opportunity for you to connect to the wider community of practice and share your own experiences. ■

AGORA in a nutshell

The Public Area of the portal offers extensive information on parliamentary development, whereas the restricted access Trusted Area acts as a virtual meeting space for registered members.

The following features are available:

The PUBLIC AREA

- **Virtual library** - providing access to over 1000 knowledge products
- **Ask the Expert** - allowing for anyone to consult the Senior Advisory Board on issues in parliamentary development.
- **Project mapping** - gathering information about parliamentary development projects
- **Areas of Expertise** - gathering key information about the main aspects of parliamentary development.
- **Expert Roster** – database gathering specialists from around the world



The TRUSTED AREA:

- e-discussions
- Thematic groups
- Calendar of events
- Newsfeed
- Job postings
- Articles
- Interactive editor
- videos

Launch of AGORA, Portal for Parliamentary Development

AGORA, the Portal for Parliamentary Development, was launched in the presence of over 150 Members of Parliament, delegates of international organisations, and representatives of parliamentary associations, at the French National Assembly in Paris on the 2nd of March 2010. The event marked the birth of the first virtual platform for knowledge sharing on parliamentary development.

Jointly organised by the French National Assembly, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNDP and DFID, AGORA's launch brought together some of the leading actors on parliamentary development. Sharing their views on the crucial importance of parliamentary strengthening, and the key role AGORA will play in this, were Jacques Legendre, Secretary-General of APF, Dr. William F. Shija, Secretary-General of CPA, and Henriette Martinez, Member of the Committee for Foreign Affairs of the French National Assembly.



Mr. Olav Kjørven, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of Bureau for Development Policy, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), explained that the portal will reach a wider audience so as to share knowledge and ultimately bring about policy change. It is a tool particularly relevant for development, considering that strong political institutions are a prerequisite for creating the right framework for efficient development.

Following Mr Kjørven's statement, Hon. Abdirahim H. Abdi, the Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), officially launched the portal. He stated that AGORA embodies the global recognition of the important work undertaken by parliaments. He also appealed to the donor community to see parliaments as their allies, as their members are the ones lending credibility to donor aid through parliamentary approval.

The International Conference on Benchmarking and Self-Assessment for Democratic Parliaments, held in Paris on March 3rd and 4th, followed up on these statements by officially recommending AGORA as a tool for *"sharing knowledge and experience and developing a community of practice committed to parliamentary development"* in its final declaration. A symbolic step, this is undoubtedly only the first of many landmarks for the Portal. ■

AGORA is a reference hub for knowledge sharing on parliamentary development.

The portal has three main objectives: to act as a hub of information and expertise on parliamentary management and parliamentary development programmes; to promote the global streamlining of parliamentary development activities and advocate for parliamentary development worldwide; and to consolidate knowledge and expertise by creating an active online community for those working in parliaments and in the field of parliamentary development.

The public part of the portal offers extensive information on parliamentary development, whereas a restricted access platform will act as a virtual meeting space for registered members.

Want to find out more? Visit AGORA at www.agora-parl.org and start exploring its features.



15 - 18 March 2010: Wilton Park Conference - Delivering Effective Political Party Assistance: Challenges for Policy Makers and Practitioners (Steyning, United Kingdom)

The findings of recent seminars and research point to persisting challenges and the need to deepen debate and discussion on many aspects of party assistance. They also point to the need to develop more effective support programmes to political parties based on sound analysis of political context, including formal and informal institutions and dynamics.

[Click here to go to the public calendar on AGORA](#)



15 - 19 March 2010: Consultative Seminar – A Dialogue between the South African Legislative Sector and the European Union (Cape Town, South-Africa)

Presented by the Speakers' Forum on behalf of the South African Legislative Sector, this conference focused on the theme "Strengthening democracy through global collaboration of Legislatures".

[Click here ...](#)



22 - 26 March 2010: Barcelona Thematic Workshop on Elections, Violence and Conflict Prevention (Barcelona, Spain)

The Joint EC-UNDP Task Force, in collaboration with its partners through the Train4Dev initiative, the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), the UNDP Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) and the Barcelona International Peace Resource Center, organized a Thematic Workshop on Elections, Violence and Conflict Prevention in Barcelona 22-26 March 2010.

[Click here ...](#)



11 - 14 April 2010: World Movement for Democracy - 6th Assembly : Solidarity across Cultures, Working Together for Democracy (Jakarta, Indonesia)

The Sixth Assembly brought together a richly diverse group of participants representing every region of the world in the spirit of shared democratic values. They taught and learned from each other, built collaborative relationships, and thereby strengthened the World Movement as a network committed to mutual support, exchange, and cooperation.

[Click here ...](#)



21 April 2010: Parliamentary Event at the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Issues (New York, United States of America)

During the Ninth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, together with the United Nations Development Programme and the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations organized a side event on Promoting inclusive parliaments: The effective participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making.

[Click here ...](#)

04 - 06 June 2010: Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight of the State Budget in the Western Balkans (Becici, Montenegro)



In May, members of parliaments (MPs) and representatives of finance ministries from the Western Balkans gathered in Becici, Montenegro for a National Democratic Institute (NDI) conference on parliamentary practices for conducting oversight of state budgets across the region. The conference was convened as part of NDI's Western Balkans Legislative Strengthening Initiative and aims to enhance the transparency and efficiency of the legislative process and to strengthen the representative and oversight abilities of parliaments in the Western Balkans.

[Click here ...](#)

07 - 11 June 2010: Commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Frost-Solomon Task Force (Warsaw, Poland)



A commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Frost-Solomon Task Force, which provided assistance from the U.S. Congress to new parliaments in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union from 1990 to 1996, was held in Warsaw June 7. The event was sponsored by the Senate and Sejm of Poland and the House Democracy Partnership (HDP), a successor organization to the Frost-Solomon Task Force.

The commemoration was followed by a Parliamentary Staff Institute, June 8-11, focusing on the development and strengthening of parliamentary research services. Attendees at the institute were members of parliament and staff from 11 member parliaments of HDP as well as representatives from some of the original Frost-Solomon countries. The institute was organized by HDP in cooperation with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

[Click here ...](#)

22 June 2010: Parliamentary Centre: Strengthening Governance - The State of Parliaments (Ottawa, Canada)



Panel Discussion - An update from the Parliamentary Centre:

- * Governance and Parliaments: Views from the Field
- * Reflections on Governance in Canada: the State of the Parliament

[Click here ...](#)

28 - 29 June 2010: UNDP Regional Seminar: "Towards Strengthening the Role of Parliaments in Crisis Prevention and Recovery in West Africa" (Accra, Ghana)



- Strengthen regional parliamentary activities in West Africa through parliamentary fora and parliamentary working groups
- Developing mechanisms and approaches to facilitate swift response to parliamentary assistance requests in Africa
- Knowledge sharing and dissemination of good practices

[Click here ...](#)

06 June 2010: IDA 16 and Aid Effectiveness campaign



Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB), in partnership with European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA), is pleased to announce the launch of the IDA 16 and Aid Effectiveness campaign.

The Campaign calls on the World Bank to deepen its commitment to aid effectiveness throughout IDA 16 replenishment, implementation and monitoring by focusing on four key areas, with the ultimate goal of bringing the world closer to meeting the MDGs in 2015.

[Click here ...](#)



John, Lord Alderdice (born March 28, 1955), Convenor in the House of Lords (UK), was Leader of the cross-community Alliance Party of Northern Ireland 1987-1998, Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly 1998-2004, and since 1996 sits in the House of Lords as a Liberal Democrat. He was Vice-President of the Brussels-based European Liberal Democrats 1999-2003 and President of Liberal International (the world-wide federation of liberal political parties) 2005-2009. On 10 June 2010, he was elected to the new position of Convenor (Chair) of the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Party in the House of Lords (Upper Chamber of the British Parliament). He has extensive experience of speaking and engagement in various regions of the world where there is violent political conflict. He is a medical doctor and psychiatrist by profession.

Legitimately elected parliaments provide a forum for the concerns of diverse societal actors (including women and minority groups) to be aired and incorporated in processes of dialogue, reconstruction and conflict resolution. In your experience, do parliaments play that key role? What are the crucial conditions for a parliamentary institution to perform this function? What attributes must they have, and what criteria must be met, for them to affect any real change?

Parliaments can indeed play such a role, but whether they do or not varies a great deal from place to place and in differing times and circumstances. In the first place the membership of the parliament must be widely representative and regarded as such by the population. Free and fair elections

play a key part in this, but they are not the whole story.

"It may seem trite but my appeal to parliamentary colleagues is that as public representatives they need to act with integrity in the public interest"

If a minority feels that despite elections they are not properly represented or their representatives are unable to get a fair and effective hearing in parliament they will have no confidence in its value. Procedures that protect the rights of minorities (and majorities) to be elected, to attend, to speak and to

participate fully are important, but there also needs to be a constructive engagement by both the majority and minorities so that each is prepared to listen and take heed of the other's reasonable concerns.

Effecting change is another matter. Minorities have to recognize that they will not be able to have everything their own way, but majorities must also appreciate that unless minorities are able to bring about some change on behalf of the community they represent the whole democratic process will lose the confidence of those communities in favour of non-parliamentary actions.

Parliaments have crucial responsibilities to play in national and local development policies. Parliamentarians can actively engage in the development and implementation of policies and laws that are pro-poor, minority- and gender-responsive, and environmentally sensitive, all of which broadly reflect efforts to achieve the MDGs.

Moreover, parliaments play key roles in the promotion and defense of human rights. What is your opinion on the view that parliamentary core functions are essentially development tools, enabling them to play crucial roles as strong, constructive and dynamic democratic institutions? What recommendations would you offer your parliamentary colleagues and their parliamentary

institutions with respect to fostering their role in development?

Everyone sees institutions through the lens of their own priorities and experiences. For me the essence of a parliament is that it is an institution that enables us to deal with disagreement, aggression and conflict through talking about problems rather than by resorting to physical violence. This is common to all human societies because it addresses fundamental elements of the human condition.

Parliaments do indeed have a role in policy development though precisely how depends a great deal on the particular constitutional arrangement. In some cases parliamentary committees may be intimately engaged in the policy development, but in the majority of instances their role is to raise issues in questions and debate, hold the executive to account and to accept, amend or reject legislative proposals. This is true of national and local, as well as international development policies, but in each society parliaments also address many other concerns and these are often quite different in developed and relatively well-off societies than in under-developed and developing countries. In some cases the lack of infrastructure may require more direct government intervention and investment while in other cases where society is well capable of providing services itself parliament's role may be to protect the community from excessive government intervention.

Human Rights should not be a partisan issue. Everyone's rights need to be protected or they are not human rights all. For this reason it is best if parliaments can establish cross-party Human Rights Committees and independent Human Rights Commissioners or Ombudsmen to monitor Human Rights concerns in regard to legislation and policy and act as a focus for investigation and enquiry in the particular cases.

It may seem trite but my appeal to parliamentary colleagues is that as public representatives they need to act with integrity in the public interest (as distinct from their own private interests) and that they should always be aware that as public representatives they have responsibilities not only to their own constituency, their own supporters and their

party, but also to the wider community and the wider world, and never to let these broader aspects of their responsibilities be crowded out by the daily pressures of elected public life.

In post-conflict situations, parliamentary institutions often remain weak in relation to the executive, armed groups and other non-state actors. Building effective democratic governance requires a correction of this imbalance. In such cases, what is the most adequate strategy available to the parliament and its partners to strengthen the parliamentary institution?

The honest, transparent, devoted, long-term commitment to the interests of the community as a whole is the strategy that has the best prospect of success, though it cannot be guaranteed. If the population doubts the ethical standards of the parliamentarians, they will have no leverage against any other power bases. If the workings of the parliament and the elected officials are not observable and observed by

“The citizenry can be persuaded to place their trust in elected representatives instead of armed groups, or powerful government or other non-governmental figures if over a long period they come to see the political class as public servants.”

the people they will more likely assume that either nothing or nothing good is being done on their behalf.

The citizenry can be persuaded to place their trust in elected representatives instead of armed groups, or powerful government or other non-governmental figures if over a long period they come to see the political class as public servants. This is the most powerful position from which to strengthen parliament and hold others to account and it is a joint challenge for parliamentarians across the

political divisions. They either sink or swim together on this one.

As the peoples' representatives, parliaments speak and act with unrivalled democratic legitimacy. However, in some places, parliamentarians and parliaments have been losing credibility in the public eye. This situation weakens the parliament's power, in particular its function of executive oversight. How, in your view, could the trust of the population in its representatives be restored?

I am not sure that parliaments have unrivalled democratic legitimacy. Directly elected Presidents have democratic legitimacy, and the people also confer legitimacy on other figures and groups too (such as judges and the courts), but parliaments certainly have a strong claim to public credibility, if they have been elected fairly and if they are seen to have acted with integrity, as a group. Trust is the outcome of undertakings freely given and honestly acted upon. There is no short cut.

In truth I have to say that the population do not always treat their elected officials fairly and a hungry press corps can overnight devour and destroy a decent man's career with no real recourse. Politicians have a responsibility to justify the trust of the people, but the people have to be prepared to allow trust to develop.

For good reasons or ill, there is these days a harsh cynicism of public representatives which politicians may not be able to overcome on their own, even though it is their responsibility to try as best they can.

It is often helpful for politicians to accept some external independent oversight of their parliamentary standards and governance arrangements especially with regard to financial matters since then when accusations are made there is a better chance that they can be addressed to the satisfaction of the citizens.

Political parties and parliamentary groups are widely recognised to be important political actors. Their potential impact on peace-building can be positive, but experience teaches us that it can also be negative. How can political parties and parliamentary groups, with the aim of playing a constructive role in national governance, enhance their internal democratisation and their capacity to define policy platforms? How can parliamentary groups be supported to play a positive role in their parliamentary institution? In your experience, what are the main challenges in achieving these goals?

“The opposition is not merely a government-in-waiting. It also has an irreplaceable role in facilitating genuine policy debate and holding the government to account.”

It is important that parties continually be aware of their need to develop and refine their internal governance procedures and party policies. This may be best achieved with outside help because others can often see easily what only with difficulty becomes clear to us about ourselves. In addition we can benefit from the experience of others who have been through the same problems before us and have found solutions. In the main however wise, courageous, honest leadership is what is needed. Too many leaders fail to appreciate the contribution that can be made by being a proper parliamentary opposition.

The opposition is not merely a government-in-waiting. It also has an irreplaceable role in facilitating genuine policy debate and holding the government to account. Too many opposition

parties believe it is their job to paint the government in as negative a light as possible however they are acting, rather than trying to make their contribution as opposition to making the governance of their country the best possible.

Politics should not be seen as a dirty game of self-aggrandisement, but a high calling to public service, and using the time of silence, reflection or prayer at the start of a parliamentary day to remind oneself of this, is time well spend. ■

Standards for Democratic Parliaments

By Kevin Deveaux

The Necessity of Standards or Benchmarks

Every institution should be able to measure its progress over time, to ensure it is improving its capacity to meet its mandate and to continuously review its efforts to become a better institution. Parliaments are no exception. In many countries, parliaments are under-resourced and not able to fully conduct the key constitutional functions mandated to them, such as passing quality legislation, scrutinizing the actions of the government and conducting an ongoing dialogue with citizens. In other countries, parliaments and parliamentarians are unable to maintain a stable institution as a result of fragility or conflict within the state. And yet other countries have focused primarily on ensuring free and fair elections but have not considered the need for strong democratic institutions once the elections have concluded.

For these reasons and others, parliaments must have a set of standards or benchmarks by which they can evaluate themselves and measure their progress as they commit to reforms and capacity development to ensure the institution is able to meet its mandate.

Kevin Deveaux, UNDP Parliamentary Development Policy Adviser, has been Member of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly from 1998 to 2007.



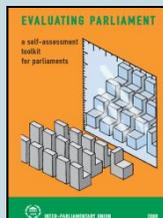
In order to promote transparent accountable parliaments, Kevin started to work with the NDI in Kosovo, Cambodia and the Middle East. Then in 2007, he started to work for UNDP as Senior Technical Adviser to the National Assembly of Vietnam and, in 2008, was made the UNDP Parliamentary Development Policy Adviser, at global level.

A Work in Progress

Based on previous standards-based approaches in the fields of human rights and elections, the global parliamentary development community commenced working on standards or benchmarks for democratic parliaments in 2003. An important step in this work was the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs' (NDI) *Toward the Development of International Standards for Democratic Legislatures*, published in 2007.



Commonwealth Parliamentary Association produced Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures covering among other things the representative aspects of parliament, and parliament's independence, effectiveness and accountability.



The Inter-Parliamentary Union introduced its self-assessment toolkit to help parliaments conduct their own needs assessment



The Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie, with the support of UNDP, published a francophone version of the standards



This document published by National Democratic Institute for International Affairs is intended as a basis for discussion within the international community regarding standards for the functioning of democratic legislatures.

“ From past experiences, as a parliamentarian and as adviser to legislatures, parliaments have a tendency to work in isolation, always reflecting upon their own rules and procedures with little or no consideration of how other parliaments conduct their work. The development of standards for parliaments will allow parliaments, parliamentarians and secretariat staff to engage in the important job of improving the capacity of a parliament, based on the best practices of their neighbor parliaments within the region and global considerations. The development of the standards will ensure all parliaments have a basis upon which to measure their work and their efforts. ”

- Kevin Deveaux -

The draft NDI document served as an important input to a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) parliamentary study group, resulting in 87 recommended benchmarks by which to measure an effective and democratic parliament. In 2008, building on their 2006 study of good practices, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) developed a toolkit for parliamentary self-assessments. Though the three documents are different in how they approach benchmarks and standards, together they represent an important milestone in defining best practices for a parliament that hopes to be democratic, open and accountable.

This global work has been followed by regional initiatives for which UNDP and the World Bank Institute (WBI) have been major supporters. So far, regional benchmarks have been developed in the CPA's Asia Regions (Asia, India and South-East Asia) and Pacific Region (Pacific States and New Zealand). Work to develop benchmarks for Southern Africa by the SADC Parliamentary Forum is ongoing. In 2009, the Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie (APF) also developed benchmarks that were adopted by its members at their general assembly.

How do these Standards contribute to Parliamentary Development?

Once benchmarks have been developed by an inter-parliamentary organization at the global or regional levels, the goal is to use them to support the capacity development needs of national and sub-national parliaments. Either as part of a self-assessment process, a gap analysis or a full strategic development plan, the benchmarks will assist parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and, where appropriate, parliamentary development partners to understand the priorities for reform and development, based on what is acceptable and recognized as a best practice within the region.

UNDP, WBI, NDI and other inter-parliamentary organizations will continue to cooperate to ensure parliaments not only endorse these standards and benchmarks but use them to enhance their own capacity. By working together and with donors, all parties can ensure the work done in support of parliaments and with parliaments is based on a common set of goals for democratic, open and accountable parliaments. ■

To explore AGORA's knowledge module on Standards for Democratic Parliaments, please [click here](#)

Follow-up to the International Conference on Benchmarking and Self-Assessment for Democratic Parliaments

By Lisa von Trapp

The International Conference on Benchmarking and Self-Assessment for Democratic Parliaments (organized by the World Bank Institute, UNDP, and six partners in Paris on March 2-4, 2010) gathered over 100 MPs, parliamentary development practitioners, and donors to take stock of and assess progress on reaching consensus on internationally agreed standards and assessment frameworks for democratic parliaments. The conference provided a forum to discuss the different approaches for evaluation of parliament, and to share lessons learned around the potential results and impact of such evaluations.

Since the conference, participating organizations have continued to take this work forward in different ways. The following, while not exhaustive, highlights some of the recent initiatives.

Dr. Karl T. Kurtz, Director of the Trust for Representative



Lisa von Trapp is the European Representative for the World Bank Institute's Parliamentary Strengthening Program. As a parliamentary development consultant she has worked to develop parliamentary programming with a variety of organizations, including UNDP, the World Bank, Sida, and Parliamentarians for Global Action among others. In September 2010 she will join the OECD's Budgeting and Public Expenditures division.

Democracy at the **US National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)** posted two pieces of analysis entitled "*Do American Legislatures Meet International Standards for Democratic Legislatures?*" and "*What can American Legislative Practice Contribute to International Standards for Democratic Legislatures?*" NCSL has hosted a panel on standards entitled "*How Good is Your Legislature*" during their Legislative Summit in Louisville, Kentucky on July 25-28, 2010.

During the International Conference, the floor deliberated on and adopted a conference Participants' Statement (available in English and French) recognizing "emerging consensus on the core values of a democratic parliament", an institution "that is representative of the political will and social diversity of the population, and is effective in its legislative, oversight and representation functions, at the sub-national, national and international levels." They noted that "current assessment frameworks have the potential to be immensely powerful tools for change" and that "the effectiveness of such assessments should be judged against the outcomes that emerge, not only in terms of parliament becoming more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective, but also in terms of improved economic and social development."

The Statement identifies areas of consensus between the various tools, in areas such as procedural fairness, democratic legitimacy and representation, parliamentary organization, and core legislative and oversight functions, as well as areas that remain challenging, such as political financing, parliamentary values and ethical issues, criteria around specific innovations or "emerging" practices, and criteria that are highly dependent on the size of jurisdictions or the availability of resources. It concludes with a set of recommendations for parliaments, parliamentary strengthening organizations, inter-parliamentary organizations, donors, and other actors.



SADC Parliamentary Forum's Committee on Democracy and Governance met during SADC PF's 27th Plenary Assembly Meeting in Livingstone, Zambia on May 27 - June 5, 2010 to discuss their draft benchmarks and outline plans for a benchmarks workshop for their non-Anglophone members tentatively scheduled to take place in Angola in September 2010.

The Confederation of Parliaments of the Americas' (COPA) Committee on Democracy and Peace has drafted a first set of benchmarks using the CPA and APF benchmarks as a starting point while incorporating feedback from its Latin American and other members. The draft document (soon to be translated into English and Spanish) is entitled "*La contribution parlementaire à la démocratie: ébauche de critères pour les parlements des Amériques*" and was discussed during a session at their special General Assembly in Querétaro, Mexico on July 20-25, 2010.

Andreas Gross (Switzerland, SOC), Rapporteur for the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE)** Committee on Rules of Procedures, Immunities and Institutional Affairs prepared a questionnaire concerning practical examples of strengths of parliaments and (possibly) weaknesses to be avoided which was sent to member parliaments. To date the Committee has received responses from the parliaments of Sweden, Azerbaijan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Lithuania, the United Kingdom, and Germany. A preliminary report entitled "*Self-evaluation by Europe's national parliaments: procedural guidelines*" has

been prepared and was discussed for the first time by the Committee on June 23, 2010.

The European Parliament Office for the Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD) is organized a workshop on the 23th and 24th of September, with a select group of interested EU and ACP parliaments, practitioners, and donors, to discuss benchmarks and essential ingredients for needs assessments within the broader context of facilitating capacity support for new and emerging parliamentary democracies.



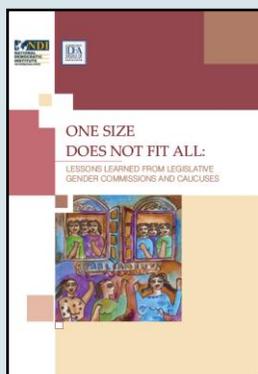
WBI is planning a book on the benchmarks and self-assessment process to be published in the second quarter of 2011. The book will be organized along the lines of the conference agenda and include a series of case studies. The book will also provide an opportunity to expand on certain points such as the areas of consensus identified in the conference and newer work on parliamentary monitoring organizations. WBI will also be partnering with the IPSA's Research Committee of Legislative Specialists to host a session on Benchmarks and Self Assessment for Democratic Parliaments during the Southern Political Science Associations' (SPSA) Annual Meeting in New Orleans on January 6-8, 2011. ■

For more information, please visit AGORA.



European Commission – “Engaging and Supporting Parliaments Worldwide. Strategies and Methodologies for EC action in support to Parliaments”

This Reference Document, which is about to be published, is a practical tool for use in planning European Commission (EC) parliamentary strengthening programmes and to a lesser extent in engaging with parliaments in development cooperation in partner countries. It is geared to use by European Union (EU) Delegation staff, both political and operations staff, but is also of use to other actors (donors, practitioners) as well as parliamentarians and parliamentary staff involved in parliamentary strengthening. It should be seen as a practical contribution to increasing efforts to work with parliaments and aims to strengthen the quality of the work of the European Commission in this area. This document has been prepared in response to the EU’s development policy framework, which requires the European Commission to engage with parliaments in partner countries on development policy and support dialogue, and which recommends parliaments to be supported as part of a larger democratic governance agenda. It will be published in the Autumn of 2010.



NDI and International IDEA - "One Size Does Not Fit All: Lessons Learned from Gender Commissions and Caucuses"

This report highlights the importance of political participation by all citizens, male and female, in order to ensure a democratic system is inclusive and representative. It offers insight on gender commissions and caucuses while also serving as a tool to help legislators implement well-rounded practices for organization and joint initiatives in order to promote gender equality. The report is based on the results of the regional conference of congresswomen, “Women Working Together: Promoting Gender Mainstreaming in the Legislature,” as well as, NDI and IDEA prior work with congresswomen from different countries. The goal is to provide information and ideas about initiatives in which legislators are able to promote gender equality in their respective parliaments. [Click here](#)



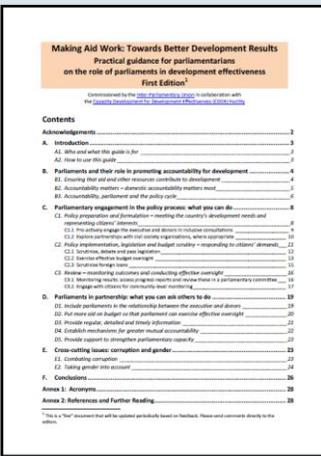
UNICEF and IPU – “Handbook on Child Participation in Parliamentary Processes”

This handbook offers parliamentarians and other actors working with parliament guidance on how to better include the voices and interests of children in parliamentary processes. Enhanced child participation improves parliament by making it more inclusive, more representative, and more democratic. In addition, the integration of children’s perspectives leads to better outcomes – from improved laws and oversight of the executive to more equitable and effective budget allocations. The handbook focuses on why parliaments should involve children, describes various global commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that mandate child participation, and identifies the multiple ways parliamentarians can interact with children. The handbook will be interspersed with country-specific examples. The handbook will be a joint UNICEF-IPU publication and will be published early 2011.



Preventing Corruption: An UNCAC Toolkit for Parliamentarians

This toolkit for parliamentarians was developed to (1) to facilitate a more active parliamentary involvement in the implementation, oversight and monitoring of UNCAC; (2) highlight the important role of parliamentarians in preventing corruption and track parliamentary performance as well as emerging trends and developments; (3) identify gaps where parliamentary strengthening may be needed; and, (4) bolster inter-institutional dialogue on anti-corruption reforms. The purpose of this self-assessment tool is to pose specific question on past and present initiatives as well as future opportunities on the prevention of corruption and the role of parliamentarians. [Click here to read more](#)



IPU and UNDP – “Making aid work: toward better development results”

Parliaments and parliamentarians have a crucial role to play in ensuring that governments are accountable for the decisions that they make about how resources – including aid – are spent. The scope parliaments actually have to play this role varies widely. Some parliaments benefit from large resources and a legal framework that back them in playing their oversight and legislative role. Many other parliaments, especially in developing countries, lack resources or power to play an effective role in promoting development or the more effective use of aid. This Guidance Note addresses some of these challenges and seeks to provide parliamentarians and those who work with them with a common understanding and clear guidance on what they can do to promote more effective and accountable use of aid in particular and of development resources in general. It is especially relevant for countries in which aid forms a significant share of total development resources, and where parliaments and parliamentarians must be involved in the discussion of aid resources and their appropriation as part of their role in promoting good governance and accountability. [Click here to read more](#)

UNDP and Millennium Development Goals Campaign – “Parliamentary Development with the Millennium Development Goals”

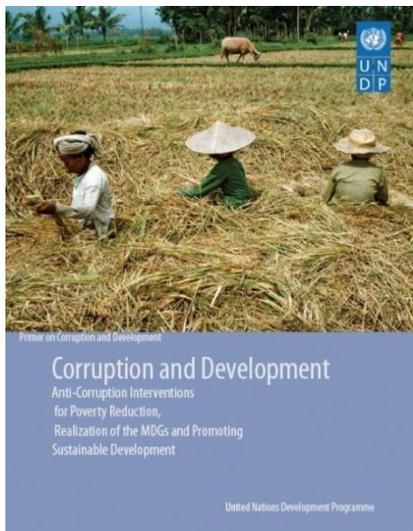


The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent the agenda for reducing poverty agreed to by world governments in the year 2000. This manual for Parliamentarians and Parliamentary staff emphasizes the national importance of effective Parliamentary engagement with the MDGs. The manual outlines mechanisms that can be used in Parliaments to increase and improve engagement with the MDGs, highlights examples of best practice in the way that different Parliaments have made the MDGs a central part of their work and provides practical advice on how to effectively implement some legislative mechanisms to utilize the MDGs in Parliaments around the world. Parliaments and Parliamentarians have a clear and important role to play in ensuring that progress is made in achieving the MDG targets. Effective Parliamentary engagement can be a catalyst for accelerating progress towards the achievement of the MDGs and improving the lives of citizens in every country. It is the aim of this handbook to assist Parliaments in making the MDGs central to the work of the Parliament and in engaging effectively with the MDGs in all areas of Parliamentary work. [Click here to read more](#)

Parliamentary Development: Tackling Corruption

By Niall Johnston

Corruption is a clear threat to development, democracy and to international security. It distorts economic development and subverts political decision-making, stunting growth and creating political instability. Corruption is closely linked to failing public institutions and failed policies, undermining the legitimacy of governments. It drains national finances, acting as a major disincentive to serious foreign investment as well as destroying the work ethic of citizens. Corruption can have a profound negative impact on patriotism and commitment to the national goals and ideals. But, above all, it deepens poverty. These factors combined show why combating corruption is an issue for parliaments and parliamentarians worldwide.



Corruption is not an issue solely for the developing world – in many developed countries it has taken a long time for their system of government and parliament to become relatively free and clean. There are examples of both political and financial

corruption in mature democracies: a judicial inquiry in Canada on a scheme to promote federalism in Quebec exposed corrupt mismanagement which resulted in the minority government losing a confidence vote in the House of Commons and a election on 23 January, 2006. However it is fair to conclude that good governance and leadership in

developing countries is increasingly being judged by efforts to tackle corruption.

A plethora of important international anti-corruption conventions have been agreed in the last few years including the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions and The

African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption. For global initiatives to work, however, there needs to be implementation and scrutiny at home. Parliamentarians need to hold their governments to account by urging ratification of these international conventions. Transparency, accountability, and good governance are the principles in the campaign for effective democratic – and ethical – government.

Corruption is a parliamentary issue on two levels – first parliamentarians everywhere must set an example and uphold high standards of propriety. Public coffers are not Members' or the government's personal funds to finance irresponsible spending. Lawmakers must be beyond reproach: "We can't demand standards of others that we are not prepared to live up to ourselves. Without "clean hands" what



Niall Johnston is Asia Regional Coordinator for the World Bank Institute's Parliamentary Strengthening Program. A specialist in financial oversight, legislative benchmarking and parliamentary independence, he has over 15 years experience working in and with legislatures in more than 50 countries with particular focus on South Asia, the Pacific and Africa.

right do we have to question the actions of others? And what credibility do we have to pursue issues our electors care about?" Respect for politicians and for political institutions is ultimately dependent on the collective ethical behaviour of individual Members.

Second, Members are elected to improve the lives of the people who elected them. Of course Parliaments often lack the experienced Members and the financial and human resources necessary for them to do what they were elected to do and the work and initiatives of NGOs and multilateral organizations such as Transparency International, the World Bank and the OECD as well as parliamentary organizations such as the CPA and GOPAC are of great importance. One lesson learned from the World Bank Institute's work with parliamentarians is the importance of networks in developing capacity and improving effectiveness of parliaments and parliamentarians in developing countries. By helping to establish, or working within, broad anti-corruption coalitions parliamentarians can aid their own professional development and increase mutual understanding.

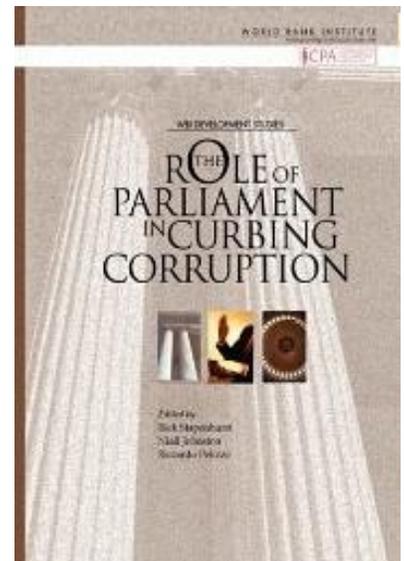
Parliaments can play an indispensable role across many aspects of an anti-corruption strategy. Naturally, there has to be political commitment at the highest level and without doubt malpractice at the highest level will undermine trust in the political system as a whole. However, leadership is a necessary but not sufficient condition for controlling corruption if for no other reason than that tackling corruption can unleash opposition to reform.

A robust system of checks and balances and strong political institutions is therefore critical not only to combat corruption and promote good governance, but also to restoring trust and confidence in democratic politics. In the past anti-corruption efforts have tended to focus on the executive branch or on the oversight role of the legislative branch, but parliaments can play an indispensable role across many aspects of an anti-corruption strategy.

It is essential to build a sound social and political foundation for reform targeting the institutions of the state, the private

sector, civil society, the political system, and public administration. In short any strategy to tackle corruption needs to be holistic, focusing on preventative measures as well as enforcement. Parliaments can play an indispensable role across many aspects of an anti-corruption strategy through their legislative, oversight, financial and representative functions. There are a wide variety of tools that may be considered – some of which may be more effective in one parliament than another. While no one step will be able to effectively eliminate corruption, a combination of measures can guard against corruption in government. Above all, there must be acceptance that any democratic system needs to recognise the three broad principles of openness, accountability and integrity.

In practice, however, Parliament's ability to curb corruption will depend to a large extent on how independent they are from direct government control. For example governments in many countries are reluctant to relinquish their Ministerial control of both the finances of



the parliament and its administration. In other countries the parliament is simply used as a rubber stamp for the government programme, and is only called to sit at the whim of Ministerial authority. In short, too often it is the government which controls parliament and not the other way around. In these countries Parliament must be strengthened to ensure it acts as the principle institution of democracy, holding governments to account and ensuring resources are not diverted away from the millions of people in poverty. This is the challenge facing all stakeholders working towards good governance and development. ■

Parliaments in Practice offers a snapshot of recent developments in parliamentary strengthening.



**Yemen Parliament
Watch to monitor
MP Performance in
Yemen - 29 April 2010**



**Speaker of the
Ghanian Parliament
inaugurates
Parliamentary
Platform - 26 May 2010**



**Medvedev admits
losing Anti-
corruption War
15 July 2010**

YEMEN: Yemeni civil society organizations, journalists, expatriates and the general public now have a tool to scrutinize performance of members of parliament through a new initiative, the Yemen Parliament Watch, launched by the Yemeni Polling Center (YPC). [Click here to read more](#)

GHANA: The Ghanaian Parliament inaugurated a newly established Parliamentary Platform on Multi Donor Budget Support (MDBS) to bring the Legislature closer to development partners and create a forum for constant engagement on policy related issues. [Click here ...](#)

RUSSIA: President Dmitry Medvedev acknowledged that the campaign against corruption has yielded no palpable results and urged lawmakers to start conducting parliamentary investigations to fight the problem. [Click here ...](#)



**Parliament Takes another
Step toward Being a True
Arm of Government
14 May 2010**



**Nigeria Parliament
Approves
Constitution
Amendments
07 June 2010**



**Politicians pitted
against Journalists
in New Battle over
Media Freedom 28
August 2010**

CANADA: The accord on releasing Afghan detainee documents is more than just an eminently sensible solution to a difficult problem – though it is emphatically that. It also marks the rise of Parliament as a genuine power within government. [Click here...](#)

NIGERIA: Nigeria's parliament approved a constitutional amendment on transferring presidential powers, aimed at avoiding a repeat of a crisis when the late President Umaru Yar'Adua fell seriously ill last year. [Click here ...](#)

SOUTH AFRICA: At the heart of the current debate are two significant developments: a new piece of legislature before parliament titled the Protection of Information Bill; and the disclosure by the ANC that a media tribunal, a system of state regulation is back on the agenda. While the purpose of the bill is to replace apartheid-era secrets act with a democratic framework of information protection, a range of submissions warning of its nature has raised serious concerns. [Click here...](#)



**Kyrgyz voters back New
Constitution
27 June 2010**

KYRGYZSTAN: Voters in Kyrgyzstan have overwhelmingly approved a new constitution to create a parliamentary democracy, according to preliminary results from a referendum held on Sunday. [Click here...](#)

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10-19 September 2010: 56th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Plenary Conference

The CPA Kenya Branch will host the 56th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Plenary Conference scheduled to take place between **10th and 19th September, 2010 in Nairobi, Kenya**. The CPA, which Kenya National Assembly is an active member of, promotes the advancement of Parliamentary democracy by enriching knowledge and understanding of democratic governance.



15 September 2010: International Day of Democracy

On **15 September 2010**, the IPU and parliaments around the world will be celebrating the third International Day of Democracy, declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007. The theme of the 2010 International Day of Democracy is Political accountability: Strengthening links between parliaments and citizens. The accountability of office-holders is nowadays seen as a basic requirement for all public life in a democracy. Parliament's standing depends on the trust of the people and being accountable to them. To be effective, parliament needs to be accessible and well understood, so that the public are regularly and actively involved in its work.



23-24 September 2010: European Commission – Workshop/Training on Parliamentary Support

The European Commission will organize its first pilot workshop/training on Parliamentary Support to be held in **Brussels at the European Parliament on 23-24 September 2010**. The workshop will be prepared and facilitated by the International IDEA. The objective of the training/workshop is to provide participants with an overview of the EC's parliamentary support framework and to explore the application of the framework to different contexts. Resource persons from relevant parliamentary development organizations will be making contributions and the training will be built around practical cases and use of the developed tools.



30 September – 08 October 2010: OSCE Review Conference

The first segment of a three-part Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Review Conference will be held in **Warsaw from 30 September to 8 October**. The event will focus on the OSCE's human dimension and, as the largest conference on human rights and democracy in Europe, provides a unique forum for discussion on the implementation of the OSCE's commitments in the areas of human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, and civil society and democratic institutions, including the rule of law and parliamentary development. The Conference will be attended by national delegations as well as international organizations and NGOs.

As one of a series of side-events to the main conference, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), together with the UNDP, will offer an introduction to the Agora website, along with other online repositories related to the human dimension. More details on the event, including information on transport and accommodation, can be found at: http://www.osce.org/conferences/revcon_1_2010.html

The Conference is unique in being open to relevant international organizations and NGOs, who are invited to comment on the OSCE presentations and present their own projects. A registration form can be found at:

http://www.osce.org/documents/osce/2010/09/45938_en.pdf

**World e-Parliament
Conference 2010**
21-22 October 2010: World e-Parliament Conference

The World e-Parliament Conference is the international forum of the community of parliaments addressing, from both the political and technical perspectives, how the use of information and communication technology can help improve representation, transparency, accountability, openness, and effectiveness in the complex parliamentary environment. The World e-Parliament Conference 2010 will take place on **21 and 22 October 2010 at the Pan-African Parliament in Midrand, Johannesburg, South Africa**. The event is co-organized by the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Parliament of South Africa, the Pan-African Parliament and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament.


31 October – 03 November 2010: International Parliamentary Conference on “Parliaments, minorities and indigenous peoples: Effective participation in politics”

The conference will give an opportunity for members of parliament to review the findings of the survey on the participation of minorities and indigenous communities, together with experts and representatives of minorities and indigenous peoples. The discussions should lead to the adoption of a plan of action to improve the participation of minorities and indigenous communities in politics. Jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Mexican Congress of the Union and the Government of the State of Chiapas, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme; the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues; and the Minority Rights Group International. The conference will take place between **31 October and 03 November 2010 in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas in Mexico**.


03 - 04 November 2010: Regional Seminar: *Strengthening the Role of Parliaments in Crisis Prevention and Recovery in the Arab States region*

UNDP will organize a regional seminar on *strengthening the Role of Parliaments in Crisis Prevention and Recovery in the Arab region*, on **3 and 4 November 2010 in Amman (Jordan)** with the support of UNDP Iraq and Jordan office. Participants will include MPs and parliamentary staff from national parliaments, AIPU representatives, and national and international partners. The regional seminar will provide an opportunity for parliamentarians to share experiences/best practices related to crisis prevention and recovery, provide feedback on key activities implemented by partners in the Arab States region, and make recommendations on how regional partners can further support the work of parliamentarians. Draft research papers will be presented to allow participants to discuss challenges lying ahead in terms of political and armed violence, crisis prevention and recovery.


02-04 December 2010: Annual Conference of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank

At this year's Annual Conference of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank, the Network will celebrate its 10th anniversary. The Annual Conference is PNoWB's flagship event, bringing together over 200 network members, leaders from civil society and partner organizations, and top officials from a number of International Financial Institutions including the World Bank, IMF and regional development banks. The agenda – which runs over two to three days – is packed with stimulating and informative sessions as well as many opportunities for discussion. The conference will take place in **Brussels, Belgium between 02 and 04 December 2010**.