PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT:

A self-assessment toolkit

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FOREWORD

I.   SCENARIO FOR CHANGE

The Global Parliamentary Report (GPR) 2017 is a joint initiative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Entitled *Parliamentary oversight: Parliament's power to hold government to account*, this flagship publication provides a global perspective on how oversight is practiced by parliaments. It emphasizes the fact that effective parliamentary oversight acts as a check and balance on executive power and is an important safeguard in the democratic process.

The 2017 GPR makes 28 recommendations primarily for parliaments, parliamentarians and political parties, but they are also relevant to governments, civil society and other actors with a stake in effective oversight. The recommendations amount to a scenario for change in favour of stronger oversight and accountability. They focus on securing parliament's strong mandate for oversight, strengthening parliament's committee systems, building its research and analysis capacity, developing a strong network of partnerships with audit institutions and civil society, and increasing the space available to MPs to play an oversight role.
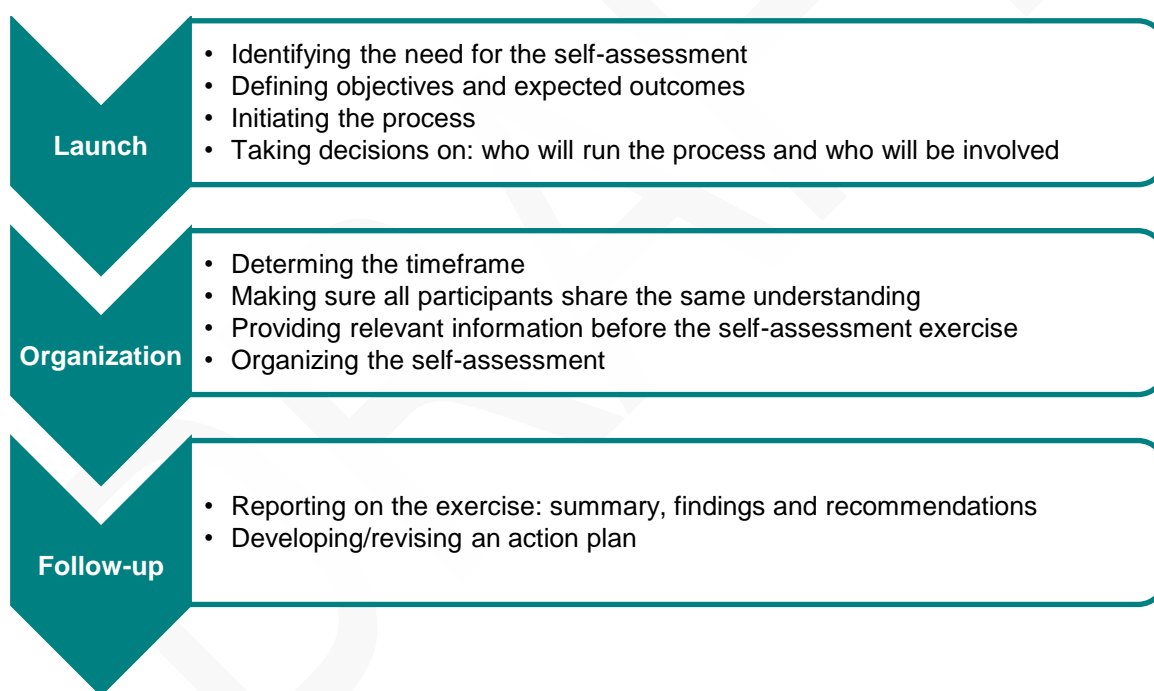
Objectives: This self-assessment tool draws directly from the recommendations of the 2017 GPR. The tool seeks to enable parliaments to assess their oversight capacity and develop a clear understanding of areas of strength and weakness. It will enable parliaments to make pragmatic decisions about where to apply resources so as to improve their ability to effectively exercise their oversight mandate.

Application: The tool may be used either as a stand-alone resource or in conjunction with other IPU toolkits, such as *Evaluating parliament: A self-assessment toolkit for parliaments, Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit,* and *Parliaments and the Sustainable Development Goals: A self-assessment toolkit.*

Usage   The tool is intended to be a resource for parliaments, parliamentary leadership and their administrations for the purpose of assessing their oversight capacity. The self-assessment exercise would ideally be undertaken at the beginning of a parliamentary reform process. The tool could also be used at any other opportune moment, on the initiative of one MP, a group of MPs, parliamentary committees, senior parliamentary officers, or any other such group charged with the responsibility of assessing parliamentary oversight capacity. It is envisaged that when using this self-assessment toolkit, parliaments will tailor it to their own unique context.

The tool comprises several sets of questions that follow the GPR recommendations. Each section contains two types of questions. **The first** group (denoted by italics) are questions of a factual or objective nature designed to establish the current situation in parliament, or the baseline, as it were. The **second** group of questions seeks to draw out the opinion of the user and set the basis for discussion on specific issues.

This exercise would ideally be supported by an expert facilitator to ensure that all participants share a common understanding of the exercise, as well as widespread participation, which is of particular importance in an environment that might be politically polarized.

Outcomes: The expected outcome following this oversight self-assessment would be, in the first instance, a shared understanding of the state of oversight in parliament. Second, the process would reveal gaps that parliament could decide to address.

II.   PREPARING FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this self-assessment toolkit is to assist parliaments in assessing their overall capacity for effective oversight as a basis for further action in strengthening their oversight role and their power to hold government to account.

The toolkit is intended for all parliaments and their members, as well as for parliamentary administrations.[1] Parliaments vary a lot according to their oversight function. Some parliaments are still struggling to secure basic legal oversight powers, while others are constantly enhancing their oversight impact. There are, of course, significant differences between parliaments depending on the political system which has an additional impact on parliament's oversight mandate and political will for oversight. Finally, there are a number of other factors, inside and outside parliament, that can affect parliamentary oversight performance and parliament's capability to reach standards and recommendations set by the Global Parliamentary Report 2017[2]. Nevertheless, whatever their level of oversight and whatever factors influence it, there is always room for improvement and we hope that this toolkit can be useful to all parliaments striving to carry out effective oversight.

Stages of the self-assessment process

Launch
- Identifying the need for the self-assessment
- Defining objectives and expected outcomes
- Initiating the process
- Taking decisions on: who will run the process and who will be involved

Organization
- Determing the timeframe
- Making sure all participants share the same understanding
- Providing relevant information before the self-assessment exercise
- Organizing the self-assessment

Follow-up
- Reporting on the exercise: summary, findings and recommendations
- Developing/revising an action plan

Prior to undertaking the self-assessment exercise, there are several issues that should be considered and defined, such as: what are the objectives of such a process, who will initiate it and who will be involved, how and when will it be organized, does the parliament need external expert and/or financial support and how to document the entire process so as to ensure the expected outcomes.

What follows are guidelines on how to better prepare for the self-assessment in order to achieve the best results, leading to the vision of priorities for strengthening parliamentary oversight and the

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[1] Alternatively: parliamentary service, secretariat.
[2] The Global Parliamentary Report 2017 can be downloaded from the IPU website:
https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2017-10/global-parliamentary-report-2017-parliamentary-oversight-parliaments-power-hold-government-account

recommendation of measures to address those priorities. This should ensure a solid basis for both short-term and long-term planning of actions to enhance parliament's oversight capacity and performance, as well as for monitoring future advancements in parliamentary oversight.

Initiating the self-assessment

When?

Launching the self-assessment at the beginning of a reform process can be particularly favourable for a parliament. Self-assessment may also be very effective at the beginning of the new legislature,[3] as this can give it enough time to take action, to monitor results and support sustainability and continuity, as well as to encourage new members to use oversight opportunities. Other advantageous occasions are those when preparing or reviewing the parliamentary strategic plan, planning to modernize parliamentary work or enhance parliament's budgetary role. The aim of self-assessment can be to identify needs and priorities in preparation for external technical support projects. Self-assessment can also be organized at any other time in the life of parliament to help it exercise its oversight role more effectively.

Who?

The self-assessment process can be initiated by any stakeholder in parliament, including parliamentary leadership, committees, an individual MP or group of MPs, or the parliamentary administration. Stakeholders outside parliament, such as civil society organizations, can also initiate the process. However, experience shows that fruitful and successful self-assessments are usually the highest when the self-assessment initiative comes from the president and/or from the parliamentary leadership. It is also a signal to other MPs and the parliamentary administration, as well as to the public, that parliament is committed to holding the government to account. However, regardless of who initiates the self-assessment, strong political support from parliament's high-level political leadership is of crucial importance, not only for the success of the exercise *per se* but for actions following the exercise.

Expected outcomes of the assessment

The results expected from the self-assessment should be clearly set before the exercise. When initiating the self-assessment process, the self-assessment objectives and expected outcomes can be communicated to the entire parliament, in plenary and/or through other channels. Sharing it not only with the participants of the exercise but also with the entire parliament can contribute to parliamentary awareness and ownership of the process, as well as to a better understanding and wider acceptance of changes that might follow the exercise. In this respect, it can also be beneficial to present the outcome document in plenary.

Assessment outcomes may vary depending on parliament's political goals and capacity. The self-assessment exercise is only the first step towards change or, at least, gives parliament an opportunity to reveal its strengths and weaknesses and reaffirm the significance of parliamentary oversight.

The self-assessment exercise is often followed by the drafting of a report which includes an evaluation of the process itself, a summary of the discussions, findings, and recommendations for action. In order to help report on the self-assessment outcomes, a template is provided (see annex for the recording of the main points and conclusions from the discussion).

The report should indicate the main constraints in strengthening a parliament's oversight role, provide recommendations for short-term actions feasible within those constraints, and recommendations on how to eliminate or mitigate identified constraints in the long-term perspective. As a follow-up on the

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[3] Alternatively: New legislative term, new convocation, new parliament

report, parliament should be able to develop or revise a roadmap for reform, a strategic plan or plan of action, with concrete objectives, indicators, and deadlines. One segment of that parliamentary planning document can be dedicated to strengthening the administrative capacity to support oversight, or a separate planning document can be developed only for the parliamentary administration.

In the follow-up process, parliament can consider soliciting external expert support in translating the results of the self-assessment into sustainable planning documents and establishing mechanisms for further monitoring. Some useful examples of good practice from parliaments can be found in the Global Parliamentary Report 2017. Consulting other IPU publications, particularly guidebooks and toolkits, can also be helpful in addressing different issues of parliamentary oversight development.

Participants

Before starting the self-assessment, parliament needs to decide who will be involved in the exercise. Parliamentarians are, of course, the main participants and it is vital that those chosen for the exercise represent well the entire parliament, in terms of political party membership, gender, age and other under-represented groups or features that might be particularly relevant for the given parliament.

Experience has shown that parliamentary self-assessment is more likely to be useful and effective when it is run by a group chaired by the parliament's president, a committee chair or other senior parliamentary authority. Possible options are to establish an ad-hoc committee or a steering group to conduct the self-assessment or, if applicable, to use an already existing parliamentary structure, such as a committee in charge of parliamentary development or modernization. It is up to parliament to decide on the structure that will carry out the self-assessment and on the most appropriate participants bearing in mind that the broadest possible array of perspectives is represented. An inclusive group of participants increases the legitimacy of the self-assessment process and the likelihood of the outcomes of the assessment being broadly accepted by parliament as a whole.

In addition to MPs, it can be very beneficial to involve senior parliamentary staff, who can bring a different or supplementary perspective to examining some issues during the exercise. This toolkit offers some additional questions for the separate self-assessment of administrative capacity, which is one of the crucial segments of overall parliamentary oversight capacity. Parliament has to decide how staff will be involved, based on the given parliamentary context.

A parliament can decide to invite external stakeholders to participate in the self-assessment process, depending on parliament's evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the stakeholders' direct involvement. Since a number of GPR 2017 recommendations relate to the cooperation with other oversight actors and to communication with the public, parliament can ask for written feedback from the most relevant organizations (e.g. supreme audit institution, ombudsperson, NGOs, media). A short questionnaire can be prepared, with questions designed to elicit their views and comments on cooperation with parliament, as well as their suggestions on improving their mutual cooperation. Such a questionnaire should be sent well before the self-assessment exercise so that the parliamentary administration has time to prepare a summary information based on the received responses to be circulated to all participants in the self-assessment exercise. Another option is to organize a meeting with the most important external stakeholders in order to get their feedback on possible shortages and opportunities regarding mutual cooperation.

Organization

There are several organizational issues to be considered well in advance to ensure the self-assessment exercise is conducted smoothly and effectively.

<u>Timeframe</u>

One of the things to be carefully planned at the beginning of the process is the dates for the exercise. To ensure the presence of parliamentarians, the exercise should be scheduled in line with the parliamentary agenda, during a period when parliamentarians might be relatively less engaged, rather than during parliamentary sittings. . The time needed for the exercise also has to be determined beforehand so that realistic timeframes and appropriate logistics for the exercise can be planned on time. The timeframe can vary, depending on the parliamentary context and number of participants. If a parliament wants a larger group of participants for the self-assessment, one option is to divide them into two or more groups to respond to different sets of questions. Self-assessment is a complex process and a time-bound exercise. Parliament should consider each set of questions at its own pace and reserve adequate time for it. In IPU's experience, the exercise would require not less than two sessions.

Bicameral parliaments, depending on the parliamentary context and the level of cooperation between the two houses, can decide whether to organize the self-assessment together or separately.

To obtain best self-assessment results, it is of crucial importance to facilitate the exercise smoothly and efficiently. The participation of an external facilitator may help to ensure that all participants share a common understanding of the exercise objectives and to channel the discussion, especially in case of a politically sensitive parliamentary environment. An external facilitator might also bring expertise and assist by explaining some issues and providing good practice examples. External facilitation can be organized by the IPU or another partner organization.

<u>Information before the self-assessment</u>

As a quality preparation for the exercise, an introductory information seminar can be organized prior to launching the self-assessment process. The seminar should ensure there is a good, common understanding of the exercise, its objectives, and its related concepts, and thus contribute to the self-assessment outcomes and informed decision-making. It can be an opportunity to provide more information to participants about the Global Parliamentary Report 2017 and its recommendations, as well as generally about parliamentary oversight, its significance, aspects, and mechanisms, while presenting some good practice examples. The parliament might consider organizing the seminar with the support of some partner organization.

Whether organizing an introductory seminar or not, it is recommended that an information kit for participants be prepared. The information package can include any information that could be useful to participants and that could prompt a constructive debate based on evidence, such as:
- excerpts from the constitution, rules of procedure[4] and other relevant legal sources concerning parliamentary oversight and cooperation with external actors;
- a summary of available statistical and other data on oversight activities of parliament and on related issues encompassed by the self-assessment questions,[5]
- relevant parliamentary reports, records and other publications;
- reports or publications that assess parliamentary performance, produced by parliament or other organizations;
- links to the relevant publications and other sources dealing with oversight issues, etc.

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[4] Alternatively: standing orders, internal rules.
[5] For example, number of MPs' questions to prime minister and government, with percentage of received responses; percentage of total plenary time devoted to oversight; number of committee meetings and other activities devoted to oversight; number of debates on budgetary issues; number of reports received by individual audit institutions; number and percentage of submissions/initiatives from citizens and civil society discussed in the parliament; etc.

If appropriate, the research service can be tasked to produce, for example, a research paper on comparative oversight practices and mechanisms in the specific region, with good practice examples, or to collect and summarize examples already published in the GPR and other relevant publications. These are just a few ideas for consideration, but parliamentary administrations are encouraged to design their own information kit relying on their understanding of what would best match the needs of MPs in the given parliament.

Documenting the process
Among the organizational issues to be considered is that of documenting the process. It is recommended that a brief written summary be provided at the end of each section of questions to be circulated among participants. The wrap-up boxes are offered in the toolkit to help sum up the main findings and conclusions derived from the exercise section. However, it can be expected that the discussion will generate more ideas and suggestions that should also be recorded. Therefore, a written summary of each session is advisable, as well as audio or video recordings.

Publicity
Parliament may wish to give publicity to the self-assessment process and inform the media. It can publicize the findings of the self-assessment and announce further actions to be undertaken with a view to strengthening oversight. If appropriately communicated, a parliament's initiative to assess itself against the recommendations set by the Global Parliamentary Report could have a positive impact on the public perception of parliament.

Consulting the IPU
In case of any questions or a need for additional consultation regarding the self-assessment, the IPU can be contacted and we will gladly offer assistance. Any comments, suggestions or recommendations will also be welcomed.

Check-list before beginning

Political engagement	Is there political support for the self-assessment from the parliamentary leadership and from MPs? Is there a cross-party leadership group to lead the process?
Initiating the self-assessment	Who will initiate the self-assessment, and when?
Objectives	What are the objectives of the exercise? Does everyone involved share the same understanding? What are the expected results? How does the self-assessment contribute to parliamentary reform and development?
Organization	Is responsibility for organizing the self-assessment clearly assigned? Is there strong engagement at the administrative level in the organization of the self-assessment? Will an introductory seminar be organized? Is there a need for external expert support? Is it available?
Participation	Who will participate in the self-assessment? Is the diversity of participants ensured?
Facilitation	How will the exercise be facilitated? Which partner organization can provide expert support in facilitating the exercise?
Timeframe	When will the self-assessment take place? How long will it last (number of days and sessions)?
Data sources	What kind of useful data/information can be provided to participants? Who will be responsible for preparing such data?
Documenting the process	How and who will document the process?
Outcome	What outcome document(s) will be produced (e.g. report, plan of action)? Who will be responsible for producing these documents?
Follow-up	What will be done with the outcome documents? Who will be responsible for follow-up? How will follow-up be monitored?

III.   SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

The self-assessment questions are grouped into six sections, or sets of questions, structured in a way that follows the recommendations of the Global Parliamentary Report 2017.

Questions in all sections are intended equally for all participants—parliamentary and committee leadership, MPs' groups, individual MPs and parliamentary administration. However, the last section on identifying and using oversight opportunities addresses specifically individual parliamentarians.

Each of the six sections is composed of two parts, with different types of questions. The first one, Part A, contains questions of a factual or objective nature. These questions are quite detailed but can usually be easily answered and should not require special examining of data. Most of them can be answered just with "Yes" or "No", followed by a sentence or two providing confirmation and/or explanation. Answers to this part draw mainly from legal and parliamentary records and are usually not expected to be debated. Their aim is to determine various aspects and factors that can affect parliamentary oversight performance. Questions contained in Part A are designed to establish the current situation in parliament (the baseline).

The second type of questions, offered in Part B, are framed in language that asks "to what extent", "how successfully", "how effectively", etc. Having in mind that personal evaluation of parliamentary oversight is subjective, our approach was not to offer any scale with responses to be chosen, but rather to provoke discussion and an exchange of views. Thus, participants are invited to make judgements and express their opinions, enabling also a comparison with responses from the first part. Serious and open discussion among members of parliament and other participants on particular issues should, ideally, result in identifying areas for improvements and some concrete ideas for future action.

In order to make the exercise more focused and time-efficient, the parliamentary administration is advised to prepare written answers to Part A questions and share them with all participants in advance. The answers should be concise and fact-based, with extracts from legislative acts and other information when needed. This could provide an objective ground for general acceptance of an established baseline, while enabling this part of the exercise to be completed faster and more efficiently, leaving space for thorough discussion of the Part B questions.

	Part A questions and answers	Part B questions and answers
Purpose	- to determine current situation based on facts and establish the baseline	- to identify restraints and areas for improvement, both short-term and long-term, and propose specific measures for action
Advantages	- easier to answer - based on facts - possibility to prepare written answers in advance - easier to reach consensus - less time-consuming - easier to analyse - more control over the process flow	- allows participants to express their opinions and views openly - provokes discussion - can produce rich, in-depth insight - the process is an opportunity to clarify certain issues, if needed - can result in concrete ideas and solutions for change

The self-assessment questions are indicative. As there is no single oversight model that would fit all parliaments, there is no selection of assessment questions that would be equally relevant and applicable in every parliamentary environment. Therefore, parliaments—and facilitators—are encouraged to adjust, reformulate or even skip some of the questions offered and tailor them to their

context, depending on the given parliament and political and other factors that influence its oversight mandate and performance.

Depending on the purpose of the exercise, parliament might decide to conduct a self-assessment following only one set of questions which is of its particular concern and which it deems to be the most relevant to its needs and situation. Of course, there should be a rational argument for doing so. This could be especially effective if parliament had assessed itself earlier following all sets of questions and wants to monitor improvements in its performance in a specific oversight area after a period of time.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the assessment exercise, a brief summarizing is recommended at the end of every section of questions. The offered wrap-up box may help to sum up the main findings and conclusions derived from the exercise regarding the biggest recent improvement, areas recognized as priorities for further improvement, possible actions to be undertaken and possible obstacles to be overcome.

In addition to the six sets of questions that draw directly from the GPR recommendations, a separate set of questions is offered, intended exclusively for the self-assessment of the parliamentary administration. Their purpose is to examine not only the current administrative capacity to provide expertise and technical support to MPs but also the readiness of administration to think a few steps ahead. The parliamentary administration should be able to envisage parliamentary development and challenges to be addressed and to get prepared in advance—by modernizing its internal organization and procedures, improving expert knowledge and skills of staff, introducing new services to MPs, enhancing communication with the public, etc. Such an administration could be an inspiring factor in parliamentary efforts to reinforce its oversight role.

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">1.</td><td>Recommendations from the Global Parliamentary Report 2017:</td></tr>
<tr><td>**Establish oversight as a top priority for parliament**</td></tr>
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	Recommendations from the Global Parliamentary Report 2017: **Establish oversight as a top priority for parliament**
1.	Signal that parliament is committed to its oversight function.
2.	Bring together all stakeholders to define and commit to a constructive oversight process.
3.	Assess parliament's strengths and weaknesses regarding its oversight function.
4.	Commit to regularly review and report on how parliament performs its oversight role.

As emphasized in the Global Parliamentary Report 2017, "effective oversight, places the people—their needs, their interests, and their experiences—at the heart of politics. It improves government performance in all policy areas." When oversight is established as a parliamentary priority, open to contributions by stakeholders, parliament is sending a message to government, the media and citizens that it is committed to holding government to account.

The first set of questions in this self-assessment toolkit is intended to evaluate whether a parliament has a strategic approach and how much attention it pays to strengthening its oversight performance, as a baseline for further assessment and eventual reforms.

1.   Establish oversight as a top priority for parliament
Part A – Self-assessment questions

1. *Has parliament formulated any strategic objectives regarding the strengthening of its oversight role?*
2. *Are there any planning documents that include oversight activities, at the level of parliament or its committees? If yes, does parliament regularly report on their implementation?*
3. *In the last five years, has parliament amended the legislative oversight framework[6] and/or introduced any innovations in practice aimed at increasing its oversight performance?*
4. *Does parliament have mechanisms to evaluate its oversight capacity and monitor its oversight performance?*
5. *Does parliament have a well-established and functional mechanism(s) to enable stakeholders, both inside and outside parliament, to provide a constructive contribution to the parliamentary oversight performance?*

1.   Establish oversight as a top priority for parliament
Part B – Self-assessment questions

1. To what extent does parliament prioritize its oversight role?
2. To what extent are parliamentarians—both from government and opposition parties—aware of the need and impact of a systematic, continuous and evidence-based oversight?
3. What steps has parliament taken to improve the oversight culture?
4. Has parliament reviewed its oversight role and performance (strengths, weaknesses, gaps) in the last five years? If yes, what were the findings and follow-up action?
5. To what extent is the public aware of parliament's oversight role and its possible benefits to the public good?

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[6] Such as the Constitution, Rules of Procedures, relevant laws and bylaws.

Wrap-up: First set of recommendations

What has been the biggest recent improvement made in the above?

What gaps and constraints have been identified?

What areas have been recognized as priority goals for further oversight improvement?

What actions/measures should be undertaken in pursuing the identified goals?

What are the possible obstacles and how to overcome them?

Notes:

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<table>
<tr><td>**2.**</td><td>Recommendations from the Global Parliamentary Report 2017:
Strengthen the mandate and capacity for oversight</td></tr>
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5. Ensure that formal powers to oversee government are clearly established in law and parliamentary rules.
6. Ensure the financial and administrative autonomy of parliament and a dedicated professional staff.
7. Allocate time in plenary for oversight.
8. Ensure that committee rules and practices support oversight.
9. Ensure clear mandate, procedures and capacity for budget oversight.
10. Mainstream gender and human rights into all oversight activities.
11. Develop specific research capacity to support oversight.
12. Build oversight skills and limit the impact of turnover at elections.
13. Solicit outside help.

Parliamentary oversight is grounded in a mandate that legally defines both parliamentary powers and governmental responsibilities. For effective oversight, a parliament needs the legal power and capability to develop oversight mechanisms and to ensure resources—a sustainable budget and well-trained professional staff.

The set of recommendations to strengthen the mandate and capacity for oversight is related to different forms and aspects of parliamentary powers that affect parliamentary oversight. The questions here, although intertwined, are conditionally divided into three categories: (a) formal powers and oversight mandate, (b) autonomy, and (c) oversight capacity.

The purpose of this second set of questions is to identify:
- legal and political constraints for stronger parliamentary oversight;
- constraints in resources with particular regards to budget, staff numbers, and expertise;
- areas for improvements in the overall oversight capacity that are achievable within identified constraints;
- feasible reforms/changes to eliminate or diminish identified constraints in the long-term.

2(a) Formal powers and oversight mandate

This group of questions deals with the legal authority of a parliament and of parliamentarians that can either provide or limit parliament's ability to control and oversee the policies, actions and spending of the executive branch. These powers and mandates mainly derive from the constitution, while the mechanisms for exercising them are usually defined by other legislative sources, such as parliamentary rules of procedure. The scope of oversight authority largely depends on a national political system, which significantly influences the political will and extent of parliamentary oversight. Therefore, a parliament can decide to adjust, reformulate or skip some of the following questions, depending on the political environment and whether it belongs to a parliamentary, presidential or hybrid political system.

2(a) Formal powers and oversight mandate
Part A – Self-assessment questions

1. *Does parliament have the power to approve and/or dismiss executive appointments (entire government, head of government and/or individual executive officials)?*
2. *Are parliamentary committees able to summon ministers and other executive officials to committee meetings and ask them questions?*
3. *Are parliamentary committees able to ask and obtain documents and other information they need from government?*
4. *Are parliament's oversight mandate and procedures precisely legally defined?*
5. *Are the details of oversight processes specified in the parliamentary rules of procedure?*
6. *What is the system or practice of allocating time for oversight in the plenary agenda?*
7. *Do clear mandates and procedures exist for overseeing the budget, the government's international policy and security sector?*

2(a) Formal powers and oversight mandate
Part B – Self-assessment questions

1. To what extent is there a general awareness about parliamentary oversight powers, within and outside parliament?
2. To what extent do current legal oversight powers and mandate allow MPs to perform effective oversight?
3. Are there barriers that limit the opposition's ability to conduct oversight?
4. How satisfactory is the system of establishing committees and appointing their chairs and members?
5. To what extent do committees' structure, rules and practices support oversight, including effective monitoring of ministries?
6. Do ministers regularly follow invitations to committees' meetings and deliver documents required by committees, in a complete and timely manner?
7. To what extent does the legal framework support parliamentary reviews of legislation implementation?
8. To what extent are gender and human rights mainstreamed in oversight activities?

2(b) Autonomy of parliament

In general, the stronger parliamentary autonomy, the more opportunities for a parliament to effectively exercise its oversight role, and vice versa. Parliamentary autonomy is usually understood as financial and administrative—as a parliament's autonomy to decide on its budget and its staff recruitment. However, there are various layers and aspects within and outside these two common expressions of parliamentary independence from the executive branch. These aspects can all have significant direct or indirect implications on the scope and effectiveness of parliamentary oversight, especially in a politically polarized environment.

The following set of questions points out several aspects of a parliament's autonomy and aims to identify possible barriers to oversight as a first step in the process of improving the oversight environment. In order to ensure a thorough self-assessment of a parliament's autonomy, some additional sub-questions are offered to facilitator(s) (external or internal), which can be used according to a specific parliamentary milieu and to answers provided in this part of the assessment exercise.

2(b) Autonomy of Parliament
Part A – Self-assessment questions

1. *Does parliament enjoy institutional autonomy (Speaker's appointment, no-confidence vote in government or its members, immunity to dissolution by the executive, etc.)?*
2. *Do members of parliament enjoy immunity with respect to their freedom of expression?*
3. *Is parliament involved in all stages of state and parliamentary budgetary cycle (from preparation to adoption)?*
4. *Does parliament have its own security services, or are these services provided to parliament by the police/executive?*
5. *Does parliament have organizational autonomy, such as control over its parliamentary timetable, and organization of its business and internal structures?*
6. *Does parliament control the recruitment of its staff?*

2(b) Autonomy of Parliament
Part B – Self-assessment questions

1. To what extent is parliament autonomous in practice from the executive?
2. How well is parliament able to scrutinize draft budgets tabled by government and to control budget execution?
3. To what extent does parliament have control over its own budget, in all stages of the budget cycle?
4. Which segments regarding parliamentary autonomy are particularly significant for parliamentary effectiveness and overall oversight performance?

Additional questions

- *Does parliament possess legal personality attributes[7] (e.g. can it acquire property, agree contracts in law)?*
- *Does parliament need any kind of approval from the executive regarding parliamentary expenses, if in line with the budget? Does parliament have its own account?*
- *Does the executive have the power to impound parliament's funds (e.g. to suspend or delay parliamentary payment orders)? If yes, does it happen in practice?*
- *Do MPs enjoy the guaranteed social protection and remuneration?*
- *Does parliament own and maintain the property it occupies, such as premises, etc., or is this property owned and maintained by the executive?*
- *Is the security at the entry and inside parliament's premises ensured by services answerable to parliament?*
- *Do police need parliament's permission to enter the parliament's premises?*
- *Is a court of law[8] authorized to control administrative parliamentary acts?*
- *Are the status, pay scales and recruitment of parliamentary staff regulated by parliament, separately from public servants in the government?*

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[7] See: *The administrative and financial autonomy of parliamentary assemblies*, Association of the Secretaries General of Parliaments, 1998;
https://www.asgp.co/sites/default/files/documents//OMQJLYHYSWWZWJFVQGFGIIDSANRDGW.pdf
[8] Special court instance that ensures constitutionality and legality; constitutional court.

2(c). Oversight capacity

In addition to its legal powers and mandate, a parliament needs strong internal structures, mechanisms and technical capacities—financial, human and organizational—to support the parliamentary oversight function. Strengthening parliamentary oversight requires constant changes, even restructuring, within the institution to answer to the growing demands of civil society and, consequently, the growing information and expertise demands placed on MPs.

The mechanisms that grant (or do not grant) opportunities to opposition parties to exercise oversight are probably the most obvious indicators of parliamentary commitment to and the political will for oversight. As parliamentary opposition has a crucial role in oversight—among other by scrutinizing policies and actions of the executive, many parliaments have begun introducing the practice of guaranteeing the opposition parties' right to table items on the parliamentary agenda or to reserve the right to chair certain committees. Building parliamentary capacity for oversight includes strengthening its administrative capacity, through improvements in its organization, management and human resources.

The questions proposed within this segment are intended to shed light on a parliament's internal oversight capacity by examining efforts that the parliament has been investing to strengthen its capacity, and to provoke discussion about the scope and directions of changes that could be undertaken, both short-term and long-term.

2(c) Oversight capacity
Part A – Self-assessment questions

1. *Are any committees (or other parliamentary bodies) chaired by the opposition?*
2. *Do parliamentary rules and practice enable any special treatment of the legislative and oversight initiatives coming from the opposition regarding committees' and/or plenary agenda?*
3. *Does parliament have a dedicated research unit/staff? If yes, do all members of parliament have equal access to the research services?*
4. *In the past 12 months, how many trainings have been held related to oversight? How many people have attended? MPs only, or staff included?*
5. *Is there an orientation/induction programme for MPs at the beginning of a new legislature?*
6. *In the past 12 months, has parliament been a beneficiary of any development/technical support project (or activity) related to oversight issues?*

2(c) Oversight capacity
Part B – Self-assessment questions

1. With regard to increasing its oversight capacity, how effective have parliament's efforts been?
2. To what extent is the opposition able to carry out oversight of the executive?
3. How effective are the parliamentary research services in supporting oversight, including technical capacity and expertise in budgetary issues?
4. To what extent is parliament able to influence and scrutinize the national budget through all its stages?
5. Regarding expertise, independence and reliability, to what extent does the parliamentary administration provide good quality services to MPs?
6. What gaps and opportunities need to be addressed to strengthen parliament's oversight capacity?

Wrap-up: Second set of recommendations

What has been the biggest recent improvement made in the above?

What gaps and constraints have been identified?

What areas have been recognized as priority goals for further oversight improvement?

What actions/measures should be undertaken in pursuing the identified goals?

What are the possible obstacles and how to overcome them?

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3.	Recommendations from the Global Parliamentary Report 2017: **Co-produce oversight with partners**

14. Recognize that effective parliamentary oversight is co- produced by the efforts of MPs, civil society and other oversight institutions, with the support of the general public.
15. Take evidence in committee from a wide range of sources.
16. Strengthen relations with supreme audit institutions and other oversight institutions

For effective oversight, particularly on financial matters, MPs need time, resources, knowledge and skills that are not always available. The role of the modern parliament in holding government to account is changing and becoming more and more demanding. However, parliaments now have the opportunity to work closely with external oversight actors, to use their expertise and, most importantly, to obtain information that does not come from the executive. These actors include civil society organizations and citizens who can provide valuable information to parliamentary committees in the oversight process.

Establishing good cooperation, based on a two-way communication, with state oversight institutions, primarily supreme audit institutions, national human rights institutions and ombudspersons, is of crucial importance. As these institutions are usually set up by parliament and report directly to parliament, MPs have the power and it is in their interest to ensure that these complementary oversight bodies are strong, well-resourced and independent from the executive.

The self-assessment questions related to co-producing oversight with partners are focused on reviewing parliament's current mechanisms and practices when working with other oversight actors, detecting possible deficiencies, and identifying areas for improvement.

3. Co-produce oversight with partners
Part A – Self-assessment questions

1. *Has parliament established working relationships with oversight institutions and other non-parliamentary actors?*
2. *Does parliament have clear rules about public participation (civil society organizations—CSOs, academia, individual experts) in its oversight activities?*
3. *Is there a user-friendly procedure for individuals and groups to make submissions to parliamentary committees or commissions of inquiry? If yes, is it functional?*
4. *Does parliament have an e-petitions system or other online engagement tools available to the public?*
5. *Does parliament receive audit reports from the supreme audit institution? (Please explain the procedure/usual practice for debates on audit reports and follow-up parliamentary practice)*

3. Co-produce oversight with partners
Part B – Self-assessment questions

1. To what extent does parliament have regular and beneficial cooperation with oversight actors, such as supreme audit institutions, human rights protectors, ombudspersons and others?
2. How effectively does parliament make use of reports of the supreme audit institution?
3. Do committees obtain information and take evidence from a wide range of sources in a systematic and effective manner?
4. What are good practices or lessons learned from cooperation with external oversight factors?
5. How can relations with external actors be strengthened?

Wrap-up: Third set of recommendations

What has been the biggest recent improvement made in the above?

What gaps and constraints have been identified?

What areas have been recognized as priority goals for further oversight improvement?

What actions/measures should be undertaken in pursuing the identified goals?

What are the possible obstacles and how to overcome them?

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4.	Recommendations from the Global Parliamentary Report 2017: **Make good use of parliament's oversight powers**

17. Make oversight consequential by keeping track.
18. Consider ways to achieve government compliance with oversight requirements.

Most parliaments today have some oversight mechanisms, if nothing else then at least questions to the prime minister and/or ministers, committees' hearings, etc. The essential difference that determines the impact of oversight activities is in their follow-up: how systematically does parliament keep track of government's commitments and compliance with parliamentary oversight requirements.

Answers to the following questions should provide a clear indication whether parliament has a system in place for monitoring government's responsiveness to parliamentary requirements and recommendations, or is it mainly left to individual MPs to pursue. This part of the exercise can contribute to a better understanding of the significance and impact of keeping track and ensuring government's compliance with parliamentary oversight requirements, as a baseline for developing effective procedures for oversight follow-up.

4. Make good use of parliament's oversight powers
Part A – Self-assessment questions

1. *Are parliamentary conclusions and/or recommendations to the executive and other state bodies public? Are they published in the national official gazette?*
2. *Do committees systematically keep track of the recommendations they make and of government's responses to these recommendations?*
3. *Do committees regularly examine executive compliance with their recommendations?*
4. *Is there an obligation by government to provide regular reports to parliament on the implementation of legislation?*
5. *What mechanisms are available to parliament to monitor government commitments and ensure government's compliance with oversight requirements?*

4. Make good use of parliament's oversight powers
Part B – Self-assessment questions

1. To what extent does parliament track commitments made by government?
2. How appropriate and timely are government's responses, if any, to parliament's requirements and recommendations?
3. How rigorously does parliament ensure government's compliance with oversight requirements?
4. How effective are the means used by parliament to "sanction" government or ministers for not complying with parliamentary requests?
5. How systematically does parliament use "public exposure" as a tool to influence government's accountability?
6. How regular and effective is the collaboration between parliament and government, including formal and informal collaboration between parliamentary committees and ministries (and other government agencies)?

Wrap-up: Fourth set of recommendations

What has been the biggest recent improvement made in the above?

What gaps and constraints have been identified?

What areas have been recognized as priority goals for further oversight improvement?

What actions/measures should be undertaken in pursuing the identified goals?

What are the possible obstacles and how to overcome them?

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5.	Recommendations from the Global Parliamentary Report 2017: **Build public support for oversight**

19. Adopt ethics rules and practices to promote parliamentary legitimacy.
20. Establish communication strategies to publicize parliament's oversight work.
21. Consider how best to use the media in oversight activities.
22. Make parliamentary records publicly available.
23. Position parliament as a leader on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The public's perception of parliament's integrity significantly determines the level of support that can be expected from the public in conducting parliamentary oversight, including the monitoring of SDGs implementation. It is, therefore, important for parliament to promote among the general public and specific target groups an understanding and benefits of effective oversight. At the same time, parliament should show, through regular parliamentary business, its commitment to fostering its legitimacy, integrity and accountability. This includes adhering to well-established and functional codes of conduct, transparency of parliamentary spending, compliance with legal requirements and good practice standards regarding conflict of interest, public procurement, employment, etc.

The following set of questions focuses on aspects of the work (and behaviour) of parliament and parliamentarians that may affect the public perception of the legislature, and on parliamentary communication with the media. Identifying gaps and obstacles to public support for oversight may be the first step in defining which parliamentary actions are needed to address them in the process of creating an environment of collaboration with society and the media.

5. Build public support for oversight
Part A – Self-assessment questions

1. *Has parliament adopted its own code of conduct? If yes, is there a well-established procedure for dealing with complaints on breaches of the code?*
2. *Do political parties (and candidates, if applicable) provide regular reports on their funding? Are those reports publicly available?*
3. *Is there an enforceable system of control and accountability of parliamentarians for asset declaration, conflicts-of-interest disclosure and lobbying?*
4. *Are parliamentary records and proceedings publicly accessible? Are reports of committees publicly available?*
5. *Does parliament have a strategy, mechanisms and channels to effectively communicate its oversight work with the public? Has it regularly reported on its oversight activities?*
6. *Are parliament's premises and website accessible to persons with disabilities?*
7. *How is parliament involved in monitoring, implementing and promoting SDGs (for example, debates on national progress reports, committee hearings, parliamentary questions, etc.)?*

5. Build public support for oversight
Part B – Self-assessment questions

1. How effectively does parliament deal with complaints on breaches of code of conduct?
2. Is parliament perceived in public as an institution that fully respects free access to information, and competitive public procurement and employment procedures?
3. How does the public perception of parliament influence oversight?
4. How effectively does parliament promote its oversight work?
5. How transparent and comprehensible are parliamentary information on budgetary issues?
6. To what extent do parliamentarians use social media in fostering their oversight activities?
7. To what extent does parliament review, debate and take action on progress reports or other relevant documents produced by government on the implementation of the SDGs and/or national sustainable development plans?

Wrap-up: Fifth set of recommendations

What has been the biggest recent improvement made in the above?

What gaps and constraints have been identified?

What areas have been recognized as priority goals for further oversight improvement?

What actions/measures should be undertaken in pursuing the identified goals?

What are the possible obstacles and how to overcome them?

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6.	Recommendations from the Global Parliamentary Report 2017: **Seize the opportunities available to MPs to shape the oversight environment**

24. Make better use of existing opportunities.
25. Take advantage of windows of opportunity.
26. Create and join reform coalitions.
27. Participate in alternative and cross-party working groups.
28. Elect and support parliamentary leaders who favour oversight,

Even in parliamentary environments that are not supportive to oversight, there will be some tools available to MPs. To make better use of existing opportunities, the Global Parliamentary Report 2017, recommends: "Start small". Identifying common points of interest and finding allies among other MPs, building productive relationships with CSOs and think tanks, talking with constituents, listening to the public and communicating with people — these are some of the activities that can open to MPs advantageous windows of opportunity for oversight.

This last set of questions is intended for individual MPs, particularly from opposition parties, to assess the opportunities for oversight that can be used, inside and outside parliament, and to self-assess their personal attitude towards oversight, professional potential and possible impact on achieving political and personal goals.

6. Seize the opportunities available to MPs to shape the oversight environment
Part A – Self-assessment questions

1. *Are there any cross-party groups and collaboration in parliament?*
2. *Is there a practice of establishing sub-committees for specific issues?*
3. *Do political parties nurture the specialization of their members in specific fields?*
4. *Are there specific rules regarding the oversight role and opportunities of MPs from government and opposition parties?*

6. Seize the opportunities available to MPs to shape the oversight environment
Part B – Self-assessment questions

1. To what extent are parliamentarians using already available oversight opportunities?
2. How effectively are MPs using events on which public attention is focused as subjects for oversight initiatives?
3. How important is the attitude of the parliamentary leadership (including party leadership) towards oversight?
4. How satisfactory are the opportunities for cross-party collaboration on oversight?
5. How could an MP advocate for parliament to safeguard effective oversight? How satisfactory are the opportunities available to individual MPs to achieve a meaningful oversight outcome?
6. To what extent are MPs able to link parliamentary oversight activities with the needs of their constituencies?
7. Within the framework of the rules of procedure, what are the possibilities for initiating oversight activities, such as joint committees' meetings, roundtable meetings, public debates, committee meetings outside parliament, etc.?
8. What means are at the disposal of women, young and minority MPs to articulate their specific interests through oversight?

Wrap-up: Sixth set of recommendations

What has been the biggest recent improvement made in the above?

What gaps and constraints have been identified?

What areas have been recognized as priority goals for further oversight improvement?

What actions/measures should be undertaken in pursuing the identified goals?

What are the possible obstacles and how to overcome them?

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Questions for assessing the capacity of the parliamentary administration for oversight

The recommendations for change set by the Global Parliamentary Report 2017, as well as the preceding sets of self-assessment questions, indirectly refer to the capacity of parliamentary administrations as a factor that can significantly influence parliament's overall oversight capacity. One of the recommendations relates directly to developing specific research capacities to support oversight. Nevertheless, we decide to offer some additional self-assessment questions dealing only with administrative capacity that can be useful in a parliament's effort to change and improve its oversight performance. Also, parliamentary administrations have to change, even before parliament as a whole changes, and be a few steps ahead of it. Such administrations can be a motivating and facilitating force in parliament's determination to reinforce its oversight role.

As in the preceding sections, there are two different types of questions, grouped as Part A and Part B. Part A is composed of questions of a factual or objective nature. These questions can usually be answered only with "Yes" or "No", and are designed to establish the current situation in parliament, or the baseline. Questions in Part B are open; they are intended to elicit participants' opinions and judgement. . Compared to the preceding six sections, there are more questions here on the self-assessment of administrative capacity to enable parliaments to choose and to focus on the most relevant questions in their respective contexts. Facilitators and participants are free to adjust the following questions, or to add new ones, in order to identify and analyse issues regarding parliamentary administrations that might hinder or support and stimulate improvements in parliamentary oversight. The exercise should result in identifying the segments of administrative capacity where improvements are necessary and in recommendations on how this should be done.

It is desirable that members of parliament also participate in this part of the self-assessment exercise, as MPs' feedback on the scope and quality of support services provided by the parliamentary administration is very important input for improving administrative capacity.

Administrative capacity
Part A – Self-assessment questions

1. *Is there any strategy for human resources development, short-term or long-term?*
2. *Does parliament plan and ensure regular training for staff, including senior management?*
3. *Does parliament have a sufficient number of skilled staff to support oversight, particularly in the area of research?*
4. *Is there a separate research unit, or are research services provided by another unit?*
5. *Are there precisely defined rules on submitting requests for research, time frames, types of research papers, etc.?*
6. *Is there a practice on preparing information for MPs (e.g. summaries, reports, analyses) about committee agenda items?*
7. *Is there a well-established system within the administration of tracking parliamentary recommendations and government compliance with parliamentary oversight requirements?*
8. *Is there a system (or practice) within the administration to follow-up and monitor legislation implementation?*
9. *Is there a system for getting feedback from MPs on the quality of services provided by the administration?*
10. *What new services or products have been introduced by the parliamentary administration in the last few years?*
11. *Is there a regular internal reporting practice within the parliamentary administration?*
12. *Does parliament carry out staff evaluations regularly?*
13. *Is there a strategy for communication with the public?*

Administrative capacity
Part B – Self-assessment questions

1. Regarding expertise, independence and reliability, to what extent does administration provide good quality services to MPs?
2. To what extent is legislative and research staff able to provide quality support to MPs with regard to budget issues and other specific policy areas?
3. To what extent are the current organization, management and corporate culture of the parliamentary administration inspiring for further oversight improvements?
4. How satisfactory is the parliamentary administration's communication with the general public and specific target groups?
5. To what extent does the parliamentary website provide complete, accurate, updated and user-friendly information?
6. How strategic is the parliamentary administration's approach to its organization, staff recruitment and training?
7. How efficient and in line with modern technology are internal communication procedures and mechanisms?
8. How adequate is the remuneration of parliamentary staff, compared with other state institutions? Are performance-based incentives applied?

Wrap-up: Assessment of administrative capacity

What has been the biggest recent improvement made in the above?

What gaps and constraints have been identified?

What areas have been recognized as priority goals for further oversight improvement?

What actions/measures should be undertaken in pursuing the identified goals?

What are the possible obstacles and how to overcome them?

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Other issues

Please describe any issues of concern that have not been addressed by the self-assessment questions

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Report template

Recommendations for change	Most important recent improvements	Priority areas for improvements	Actions to be undertaken	Possible obstacles
1. Establish oversight as a top priority for parliament (Recommendations 1 – 4)				

Recommendations for change	Most important recent improvements	Priority areas for improvements	Actions to be undertaken	Possible obstacles
2. Strengthen the mandate and capacity for oversight (Recommendations 5 – 13)				
2(a) Formal powers and oversight mandate				
2(b) Autonomy				
2(c). Oversight capacity				

Recommendations for change	Most important recent improvements	Priority areas for improvements	Actions to be undertaken	Possible obstacles
3. Co-produce oversight with partners (Recommendations 14-16)				
4. Make good use of parliament's oversight powers (Recommendations 17-18)				

Parliamentary oversight: A self-assessment toolkit

Recommendations for change	Most important recent improvements	Priority areas for improvements	Actions to be undertaken	Possible obstacles
5. Build public support for oversight (Recommendations 19-23)				
6. Seize the opportunities available to MPs to shape the oversight environment (Recommendations 24-28)				

Recommendations for change	Most important recent improvements	Priority areas for improvements	Actions to be undertaken	Possible obstacles
Administrative capacity				