



gLOCAL Evaluation Week 2021

Virtual Roundtable

Date: 2nd June 2021

Time: 10:30am – 12:00 GMT

Topic: African Parliaments, Enhanced Oversight and the Fight against Corruption – Lessons from strengthening compliance programs.

Oversight is a primary function of a parliament. Parliamentary oversight aims to promote people's freedoms and well-being, and to improve accountability and transparency in government. Oversight processes assess the impact of government action on society; help ensure that appropriate resources are provided to implement government programmes; identify unintended or negative effects of government policy and actions; and, monitor the meeting of national and international commitments.¹ Parliamentary oversight, to this end, is used by parliamentarians to monitor, review and supervise government's action and activities as well as policies, budgets and legislations. Oversight, as a central parliamentarians' role, thus, reinforces tools and mechanisms within parliament for holding government accountable.

According to the IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union), any effective system of oversight must be anchored on three fundamental pillars: i) a strong mandate with clearly defined powers to hold government accountable; ii) committed and willing actors who are prepared to use the powers available to them to hold government to account; and, iii) sufficient capacity in parliament to give teeth to these powers including independent sources of research and analysis and a sliding scale of possible sanctions.

Corruption without doubt is detrimental to the effectiveness of government programs and, ultimately, to development. It is a key means via which funds are diverted from the purpose intended and can result in the unequal or ineffective application of one or more laws. Corruption hampers the improvement in the living conditions of the population pursued by the government, and national funds are channeled and used by a few, leaving others in poverty. Looking at corruption, it is a multi-faceted and complex subject and vice which most countries find difficult to eradicate since in many instances, it is pervasive across society.

¹ IPU (2017). *Global Parliamentary Report 2017—Parliamentary oversight: Parliament's power to hold government to account.*

Ensuring effective oversight to ensure that resources are used appropriately has, however, not always been easy. Often, the very nature of the political process exposes parliaments and parliamentarians to the same corrupt forces that need to be combatted, and African parliaments are no exception.

Studies suggest that knowing how many oversight tools are available to a legislature, provides an indication of that legislature's oversight potential² or capacity. However, this information per se, does not provide any indicator as to whether, how much, how frequently, and how effectively those tools are utilized³. This notwithstanding, and coupled with how daunting it is to eradicate corruption, parliaments are expected to do their best to reduce or weaken opportunities for corruption.

Suggestions to enhance and advance oversight abound. Among the many suggestions are the need for parliaments to strengthen their own internal processes, capacity, and ethical codes; invest in financial oversight capabilities and improved public financial management; invest in more effective oversight mechanisms, including public inquiries and post-legislative scrutiny; invest in parliamentary budget offices (PBOs), stronger budget committees, and public accounts committees (or equivalents) to undertake more ex ante and ex post financial oversight, etc., to mention a few. There have also been calls to strengthen compliance programs such as strategic policies, laws and procedures. Similarly, effective oversight can be achieved through effective participation in the budgetary process, anticorruption commissions, cooperation with supreme audit institutions, and promoting a media-friendly environment.

By holding the government to account for its actions and policies and its budget and expenditures, parliaments are the cornerstone of any system of accountability; can shape the national tone; and, drive anticorruption efforts through its legislation and effective oversight efforts. The objective would be for parliamentarians to prevent and discourage corruptive actions by preventing opportunities from arising, raising the risk for perpetrators to be discovered and increasing the possibilities of punishment. This will deter the prevalence of corruption practices and improve good governance. Parliaments can further establish for examples codes of conduct and ethics to guide their members on their conduct, to explain the appropriate legislative behavior and to establish sanctions for breaches of the code.

Taking its cue from the above, this roundtable will seek to address the issue of parliamentary oversight in the fight against corruption and the role of parliamentarians to hold government accountable. Speakers will draw on their nuanced knowledge and experience of the parliamentary landscape in Africa to explain how the continent is doing about combatting corruption using parliamentary compliance programs. Discussions will also address the threats, opportunities and possibilities faced in this 'fight', lessons learned, best practices, and what they deem as the best way forward in the fight against corruption and associated ills such as illicit financial transfers.

² See Pelizzo & Stapenhurst (2004) *Parliamentary Oversight Tools: A Comparative Analysis*; and Sartori (1987) *Elementi di teoria politica*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

³ Draman, R. (2017) *Parliamentary Oversight and Corruption in Ghana*. Accra: ACEPA.

Moderator:

- **Ms. Karen Rot-Munstermann**, Ag. Evaluator General, AfDB, Cote d'Ivoire.

Speakers:

- **Hon. Faustin Boukoubi**, Speaker of National Assembly of Gabon
- **Hon. Adv. Jacob Francis Mudenda**, Speaker of National Assembly of Zimbabwe

Guiding Questions for discussion

- According to Transparency International's 2020 Corruptions Perception Index (CPI), sub Saharan Africa with an average CPI score of 32, is the lowest performing region and shows little change from previous years. What actions should parliaments take to bask this trend, and improve efforts toward good governance?
- What are the compliance tools and programs that are currently available for a better oversight across African Parliaments? Moreover, how are African legislators doing with regard to leveraging and strengthening such tools / programs to ensure effective parliamentary oversight and to fight corruption?
- The fight against corruption is not just an African issue, and efforts at combatting it have been going on for quite some time. In your opinion, which countries are winning the fight against corruption due to good policies and laws and their implementation, and what can others learn from them?
- Usually, during debates, an argument often put forth is that the inability to fight against corruption is not due to the lack of laws and policies, but that the problem is one of a lack of capacity to implement and enforce compliance. What is your view on this; and relatedly, what prevent parliaments from effectively implementing and enforcing compliance regulations and policies?
- The IPU submits that any effective system of oversight must be anchored on three fundamental pillars, notably a strong mandate with clearly defined powers to hold government accountable; committed and willing actors who are prepared to use the powers available to them to hold government to account; and finally, ample capacity in parliament to give teeth to these powers. Drawing on your experience, which of these three is most difficult to achieve and why?
- APNODE is now in its 6th year of existence, and continuing to urge MPS to demand and utilize evaluation for effective oversight. How can APNODE better leverage its 5 years' experience to better support national parliaments in the fight against corruption?
- Africa today faces new and emerging issues including but not limited to climate change, rise of militants/extremist insurgencies, the fourth industrial revolution and digitalization – all of which impact on parliamentary oversight, corruption and governance. In your opinion, what key steps are needed to ensure good/transformational governance hold sway?