

Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption

GOPAC National Chapter Formation and Oversight – Some Steps to Consider Based on Zimbabwe Experience

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Global Task Force on Parliamentary Oversight Meeting, Paraguay July 2010
July 22, 2010

Each GOPAC national Chapter is unique but some of the following points may be helpful to those Parliamentarians that are just starting. If you have comments or would like to suggest changes please direct these to the GOPAC Secretariat.¹

STEPS

1. Establish a Steering Committee or an Interim Executive Committee: The responsibility of the contact person or persons in a Parliament is to come up with a Chapter of GOPAC that will be responsible for communicating the reasons for the creation of the Chapter and its objectives. It will be the responsibility of the Chapter to mobilise members and establish a Secretariat that will ensure continuity.

2. Inform Speaker(s): Where appropriate inform the Speaker or Speakers where there is a bicameral legislature. It is essential at the initial stages that the Speaker appreciates the gravity of corruption and the concerns of the members thereto. An important early message is that GOPAC Chapters do not go after individuals who are corrupt in Parliament and the Executive. The focus of the work is on preventing corruption through improved governance, transparency and oversight. The support of the Speaker will always be valuable to the GOPAC programmes and activities. Therefore, informing the Speaker may not be optional after all.

3. Inform Political Parties: The message here is that GOPAC is non-partisan. Furthermore Parliamentary oversight works best in non-partisan approaches where the focus is on good results for citizens, not party politics. The political buy in is crucial for GOPAC members to navigate the treacherous pitfalls of political machinations and mudslinging. What has always prohibited members to effectively execute their oversight role let alone the fight against corruption is the whipping system.

4. Develop a Code of Conduct: The English adage that “you send a thief to catch a thief” does not apply to the fight against corruption. The consequence of fighting corruption and being exposed are too great for corrupt individuals to be involved. The ideal situation is where morally upright members of Parliament join GOPAC. In view of the foregoing, a code of conduct to which members will subscribe should be put in place as quickly as possible. The underpinning principles of GOPAC are: selflessness, integrity, transparency, honest, accountability leadership and objectivity.²

¹ Comments may be addressed to the Secretary of the GOPAC Global Task Force on Parliamentary Oversight - Nola Juraitis at nolajur@sympatico.ca who will ensure that lessons learned are shared broadly.

² There is a GOPAC handbook for Parliamentarians on ethics and conduct that was done in partnership between GTF-PEC and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. A link will be inserted as soon as this is available on the internet.

5. Membership: To quote Senator Ricardo Garcia Cervantes of Mexico, GOPAC is open to all but not all will be asked to join. Members should be invited to ensure that they are not corrupt and have leadership abilities. In APNAC only current Parliamentarians can be members of the Chapter. In other countries both current and former Parliamentarians are invited – this is a regional or national Chapter decision to be made. Also in some countries members pay fees and in others they do not, again a Chapter decision. However, a token fee may be required to ensure that members have a sense of belonging and have a common vision in the growth and survival of the Chapter.

In terms of membership Senator Cervantes, based on a [UK document](#), outlined the following qualities in our meeting in Paraguay:

- **Selflessness** - Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends. GOPAC is a not for profit organization. Therefore, no payment for any services rendered should be expected.
- **Integrity** - Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties. Members of GOPAC are not an exception.
- **Objectivity** - In carrying out the oversight role, including overseeing public appointments by the Executive, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.
- **Accountability** - Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.
- **Openness** - Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.
- **Honesty** - Holders of public office including GOPAC members, have a duty to declare their assets and any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.
- **Leadership** - Holders of public office should promote and support these principles through leadership by example.

6. Engage civil society organizations. In some cases civil society organizations have acted or continue to do so as the Secretariat for the National Chapter. If donor funds are to be received, there needs to be a legal entity involved. In some cases however, the civil society organizations may not have the same views as the Chapter members and although there may also be other sensitivities it is still important to engage likeminded groups and work together where possible.

On a broader basis, the GOPAC Secretariat suggests that each Chapter develop a **Partnership Strategy**, not only for funding purposes but also for technical expertise to support the Chapter work. The range of options is illustrated in the [Declaration](#) from the Forum of Parliamentarians in Doha November 2009 where the theme was ‘working with others’.

7. Inform the Media. It is very important that the media understand the GOPAC approach (preventing corruption, non-partisan and the other messages provided above). In some countries such as the Arab region, the media play an important role as a driver of anti-corruption. In other societies, such as African

ones, the civil societies may be a very important factor in creating political demand for UN Convention Against Corruption as a way of life.

8. Develop Program. The [GOPAC policy positions from Kuwait 2008](#) are now contained in a Toolkit for Parliamentarians that was developed jointly by UNDP Oslo and GOPAC Secretariat. There are [short](#) and [long](#) versions of this Toolkit which can be used as a framework for initial discussions, engaging media and civil society and developing a more precise work plan for the Chapter. The UNCAC can be used as a very important driver or ‘political wedge’ where governments have ratified this convention. That is, the government has accepted the UNCAC as a policy position and therefore oversight can be exercised by Parliamentarians on whether the Convention is actually being implemented and if progress is being made.

These documents can help members understand what is expected and help in identifying where documents and information for the members, as well as events are needed.

The most important point however is that the program is used to **develop political coalitions**. And to quote the founder of GOPAC, the Honourable John Williams “the one with the biggest political coalition wins.” GOPAC is a network of like Parliamentarians who can build these coalitions and create forward motion for change.

What has made some Chapters grow faster than others is the level of activities within and outside Parliament. It is the responsibility of the Chapter leadership to continuously come up with long and short term programmes. This keeps cohesion and a sense of purpose among members. At any given time, a Chapter must have a theme that becomes the rallying point.

9. Building capacity. Corrupt activities in a country’s economic, political and social phase have gone unnoticed due to the level of capacity of members of Parliament. GOPAC members must have the capacity so that they can understand the different types of corruption. Workshops and conferences can be used to develop this capacity. Every member must be aware of available tools to fight corruption. The available legislation mend to fight corruption must be understood by the members of GOPAC. Each member can play an important role in bringing information back to the Chapter deliberations. For example, members could attend various committee meetings and be the ‘eyes and ears’ of the Chapter to identify corruption issues that need to be addressed. Networking of members of GOPAC is essential and must be used to develop the same.

10. Report. It is important that Chapters document their achievements, identify strengths and weaknesses of Parliamentary performance in their country (there is a separate process to assess the government’s performance – the Review Mechanism for States Parties for the UNCAC). The reporting framework for GOPAC Chapters is the Toolkit, either the short or long version depending on the Chapter capacity. Each national Chapter is now expected to produce this monitoring report as was approved by members in the Kuwait Conference. The Toolkit was formally accepted by the GOPAC Executive Committee in June 2010 in Ottawa as the formal mechanism for GOPAC reporting.

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Note from GOPAC Secretariat: As noted earlier in this paper, this document is a starting point for engaging other Parliamentarians to share their experiences and we look forward to hearing from you so that the lessons learned can continue to be documented and shared. In particular, we would like to get a better understanding of the different models that are being used for national Chapter Secretariats and what is working and what is not.

A second area of discussion is how are Chapters funding their work? To what extent are national Chapters finding the support they need for technical assistance and events? How can Chapters ensure their financial and membership sustainability?