



Concept for the learning retreat on national oversight institutions / independent state institutions, 29th - 31st of August 2017 in Bern

June 19, 2017

1. Introduction and rationale

SDC has a track record of actively supporting the functioning of national oversight institutions / independent state Institutions such as Election Commissions, National human rights institutions, Anti-Corruption Commissions and is also engaged with Ombudsman offices and Offices of the Auditor General.

National oversight institutions / independent state Institutions can act as cornerstones of national accountability systems. They can contribute to trust-building between people and the state; they can act as complaint mechanisms and facilitate redress for those experiencing injustice; they can function as guarantors that legitimize political processes; they can be independent voices; and they can be crucial in advising governments on reforms.

And yet these institutions may not always successfully deliver on their mandates; they may be insufficiently independent or even subject to interference by governments (especially if too outspoken); they have limited powers and ability to correct wrongdoings; they may not be able to fulfill people's expectations; and they may revolve too much around single, strong personalities.

The learning retreat seeks to compile and reflect on SDC's experience of supporting such institutions. It will also refer to existing international standards and convey expertise and further examples from specialized centers.

2. Expected results

The learning retreat seeks to achieve the following **four results**:

- 2.1 Shared understanding about the roles and functions, ambitions and limitations of national oversight institutions / independent state institutions as part of national accountability systems.
- 2.2 Enhanced knowledge on good practices, challenges, and lessons learnt in supporting these institutions.
- 2.3 Digested personal learning and insights of participants and concrete ideas about the way forward in their operational work
- 2.4 Accessible network of peers and resources persons for participants, and clarified need for further support by the networks DDLG and C&HR

3. Specific learning objectives

- 3.1 Knowing the role and functions of these institutions, the global standards and review mechanisms, the international trends in translating these into practice and current practice of donor support
- 3.2 Understanding the strategic choices and action lines of these institutions in light of the particular contexts
- ✓ How did the frame conditions influence the strategy (e.g. government policy, institutional history and set up, accountability landscape, i.e. positioning vis-à-vis government, parliament, judiciary, or civil society, media etc.)
 - ✓ What were the critical problems, to be addressed; what were the perceptions and interests of different stakeholders vis-à-vis the range of problems and what strategic choices haven been made, and lines of action pursued
 - ✓ Ways of collaborative engagement and partnership with civil society organisations, private sector and ways to reach out to the citizens; what interaction with other oversight/independent institutions and links with the legal system
 - ✓ Equality and non-discrimination: role and ways of promoting gender equality and social inclusion, ways of addressing discrimination and exclusion - lessons
 - ✓ How to link the national level actions with subnational initiatives; experience in working with subnational branches
- 3.3 Awareness about major challenges, risks these institutions are facing and how they deal with this
- ✓ financial sustainability, adequate professional human resources
 - ✓ independence and impartiality (particularly in systems with patronage and corruption); credibility and legitimacy
 - ✓ political interference or pressure; influence and implications of political parties
 - ✓ navigating through the complexity of problems and (conflicting) interests
- 3.4 Understanding the role of donors
- ✓ what are our objectives, impact hypothesis for supporting these institutions and is there evidence of respective change
 - ✓ what are different options for supporting institutions in fulfilling their functions and in implementing global/national standards; what are major trends of donor support and adaptations over time
 - ✓ how to engage in institution building in fragile and transition contexts; is this still relevant, and how to do better
 - ✓ how to engage beyond a project approach and engage in policy change and work in partnership
 - ✓ what are major challenges and risks
 - ✓ advantages/disadvantages of different modalities of donor support (e.g. collaboration with UN, domestic partners)
 - ✓ do's and don'ts of donor support
- 3.5 Learning about factors of success, about strategies that work and learning from failures

4. Participants

The retreat is destined for SDC staff in Bern and in the foreign representations/country offices as well as for staff from SDC partner organizations. Moreover interested persons from SECO, DHS and the Swiss Parliamentary services are invited.

The working language will be English. Simultaneous translation will be available between English and French.

5. Resource persons from competence centres

Expert resource persons as well as representatives from national oversight institutions in our partner countries will be invited to share their experience and participate to the retreat.

Currently the following expert organizations are considered:

- For Introduction: Ximpulse
- For National Human Rights Institutions: Danish Institute for Human Rights
- For anti-corruption agencies: U4
- For Election Commission: International IDEA
- For the Supreme Audit Institutions: State Secretariat of Economic Affairs, Switzerland (SECO)
- For Ombudsperson: Dieter von Blarer (Innovabridge Foundation)
- For Parliament oversight: Representatives from Swiss Parliament Services

6. Case examples

The case examples are as follows:

- National Human Rights Institution: Afghanistan
- Election Management Body: Burkina Faso
- Anti-corruption Commissions: Bhutan
- Supreme Audit Institutions Serbia (input SDC)