



# **Re-thinking sustainable development: The quest for a "transformational" global agenda in 2015**



*Annual Parliamentary Hearing*

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## **Summary Points of the Parliamentary Hearing for the President of the IPU**

### **Session I: A new economic model for sustainable development**

If we want to really achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions, the overall thrust of the SDGs will need to aim at human well-being and not growth per se. We are not advocating de-growth but simply a redesign of policies and institutions based on a new economic model driven by fundamentally different principles. We must change the very meaning and purpose of "enterprise", "investment" and "money" – the pillars of any economy – as assets to support communities and the environment, and not *merely* as assets to maximize private gains.

Green solutions will only take us so far, especially considering population growth. We need to de-materialize our economies and move more towards a service economy that does not depend so much on artificially propped-up consumption. What matters most to well-being are outcomes such as education, health and leisure, and this is what policies must aim at most directly. The pursuit of these outcomes will require a more proactive role for governments and parliaments, but also a new mind-set and a new awareness for people at large to free themselves of the status quo. A key step in this direction would come from adopting entirely new indicators of well-being and making those the direct aim of public policy. If we do this, growth will take care of itself.

Ultimately, the reforms we need will not be possible unless we democratize policy-making so that the economy works for the people and with more emphasis on real production for real human needs than on speculation. There are signs of change on the horizon, and also reasons for hope, as we can see in the growth of responsible enterprises and community-based economic models. At the end of the day, it is for us politicians to help change the discourse along these lines, and to promote laws and regulations that, step by step, will put us on a new course.

### **Session II: Gender equality**

Broad agreement was reached on the importance of having a stand-alone goal on gender equality. This would mean not only completing the unfinished business of the MDGs, some of which are far from being achieved, but also displaying the political will to remove structural barriers to gender equality. Agreement was also reached on mainstreaming gender throughout all other development goals.

Formulating a specific gender goal must be premised on an approach that gives recognition to rights. Violence against women is a problem that affects all countries and should be reflected in this specific goal. Women's participation in decision-making and the management of economic resources must also be taken into consideration, as must the rights to sexual and reproductive health.

The post-2015 development agenda must also be based on commitments made under the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The new goals should complement and promote the honouring of these previous commitments.

Translating international commitments into on-the-ground reality remains a major challenge. Efforts must target the root causes of inequality and cultural barriers to progress as well as change the mind-set. Parliaments have the competence and power to accelerate this process of change through their legislative work. It is essential to involve men in these efforts.

### **Session III: Democratic governance**

Consensus was also reached on the importance of having a specific goal on "governance", with which the term "democratic governance" is sometimes used interchangeably. In essence, governance begs two inherent questions:

- Who decides what we do? and
- How is the decision on what we do taken?

It seems clear to us that greater transparency, participation and accountability can only enhance executive decisions on sustainable development, be they in the areas of education, health or the economy. They are the best guarantees that the choices made will be in the interest of the greater good.

Democratic governance is also premised on citizens' trust in their institutions and their government. A democratic governance goal should aim to strengthen these institutions, including parliament. Based on the notion that the quality of elections is the point of departure, we should work towards increasing citizens' participation in elections and dispel the distrust that citizens feel towards institutions. We have thus provided a few leads for improving democratic governance. Allow me to cite a few examples:

- Public funding of election campaigns as a means of enhancing transparency and diminishing the influence of money in politics;
- Placing public data in the public domain, which will enable citizens to monitor government action and hold the government to account; and
- Citizens' involvement in drawing up the budget to ensure that local priorities are effectively taken into account.

We have heard that as part of the United Nations-led process to define the Sustainable Development Goals, some States are convinced of the importance of framing a governance goal. Others, however, are reticent on the grounds of loss of sovereignty and the obligation to be held to account in a very visible way. I consider that no government should fear the scrutiny of its citizens. One proposal we heard today to help advance this goal would be for each parliament to adopt a resolution calling for the adoption of a democratic governance goal. For my part, I pledge that the IPU will continue to bring pressure to bear on governments to take our request into consideration.

### **Session IV: The post-2015 agenda**

There is a general sentiment that parliaments have a major role to play in taking ownership of national development strategies. It is therefore important to build partnerships with these institutions to ensure national compliance with the post-2015 development agenda once it is fleshed

out. At that point, parliament must monitor closely its implementation and ensure that the appropriate budget allocations are made to this end. Where better than in parliament should accountability be displayed?

Above and beyond the purely institutional aspects, parliaments can, and much better than many other institutions, mobilize both public opinion and government around global goals and the importance of development assistance, whose budgets are often at risk in times of crisis. Each parliamentarian can make a personal contribution to achieving this in his/her own constituency and in the various bodies set up in parliament to deal with the post-2015 agenda.

The debate also brought to the fore the specific role of parliaments in incorporating the three dimensions of sustainable development – the economic, the social and the environmental. Through their action of overseeing government action, parliaments have a tool to promote such incorporation, which can be quite valuable, as this is a prerequisite for successful sustainable development at the national and international levels.

Lastly, UN bodies, such as the Economic and Social Council, increasingly involve different “stakeholders” in their work, namely: civil society, the private sector and parliamentarians. Auditing agencies, often themselves the object of parliamentary scrutiny, are also called upon to play a bigger role in the work of the United Nations. The post-2015 agenda, therefore, should provide an opportunity to deepen this interaction and make a quantum leap in relations between the United Nations and parliaments.