

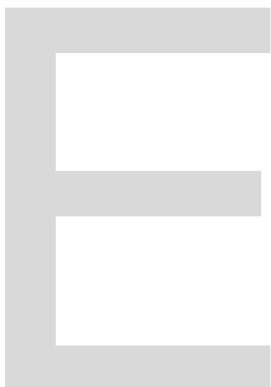
Revised version

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Conference Report

Decade of action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

1. The adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development signaled an increasingly coherent international vision of sustainable development. Together they seek to move away from the siloed approaches and individual sector goals that characterized the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era to a more integrated and mutually interdependent landscape. Having created this new international framework, the next challenge is to implement these agreements in a coherent way at the national and local levels. In September 2019, the UN Secretary-General called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action to achieve the SDGs.
2. The 2030 Agenda was adopted in September 2015 as the most important UN declaration on the world's many economic, social and environmental challenges. At its core lie 17 SDGs, articulated in 169 targets, designed to eradicate extreme poverty and drastically reduce other forms of deprivation and inequality while setting the planet on a sustainable course.
3. The SDGs constitute an integrated framework in which progress on each goal is dependent on the advancement of all the other goals. The framework applies to all countries, developed and developing alike, requiring intentional action in their own domestic jurisdictions as well as collective action through international cooperation. The SDGs reflect a solid human rights perspective and a common vision of the future that all countries can aspire to.
4. The IPU participated actively in the negotiations for the SDGs through parliamentary consultations followed by advocacy before the relevant UN committees and other forums. As a result, paragraph 45 of the 2030 Agenda acknowledges specifically the role of parliaments in supporting the implementation of the goals through legislation and government oversight. As part of the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development group at the United Nations, the IPU helped secure a strong commitment to "effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels", which includes parliaments, as part of Goal 16.
5. Endorsed by all UN Member States, the SDGs are globally owned, and expectations from their implementation are high. The goals will not come to fruition without strong political will, tailored strategy, and citizen action. Parliaments and parliamentarians should be at the forefront of this effort. Despite limited resources, the IPU is doing all it can, in partnership with its Members and the United Nations, to support the implementation of the SDGs through the world's parliaments.



IPU work on the SDGs

6. Having embraced the 2030 Agenda and attendant SDGs from the very beginning, the IPU has since worked to integrate the SDGs in its 2017–2021 Strategy, ensuring that all work is consistent with or directly supportive of the SDGs.

7. The IPU Strategy takes a two-pronged approach: it seeks to help parliaments institutionalize the SDGs as an indivisible framework; at the same time, it pursues specific actions to support those goals that are most relevant to the work of the IPU or where the IPU has a comparative advantage, such as SDG 3 on health, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 13 on climate change, SDG 16 on governance, and SDG 17 on means of implementation (development cooperation). The IPU's work also focuses on some of the other key issues, such as hunger and poverty.

8. The action line on institutionalization aims ultimately at making parliaments "fit for purpose", that is ensuring that parliaments have the right institutional, legal, technical and policymaking tools to perform their legislative, oversight and representative roles with regard to the SDGs. This is done through self-assessment and with the help of a dedicated IPU-UNDP toolkit. This approach has helped a number of parliaments (for example, Fiji, Georgia, Mali, Serbia) come up with a multi-year parliamentary action plan on the SDGs. The self-assessment approach to the SDGs is consistent with the IPU's overarching democracy-building mission.

9. As the under-representation of women and youth in decision-making and economic opportunity continues to be one of the main stumbling blocks to progress on sustainable development and peace, much of the IPU's work on the SDGs today incorporates a gender and youth perspective. This includes mainstreaming gender equality, women's rights and youth needs and interests in project work by spotlighting their specific needs and advocating for corresponding policy reforms.

10. The underlying objective of the IPU's work on the SDGs is to empower parliaments so that they:

- have the appropriate internal structures and processes to identify and support the SDG policies that are right for their respective countries
- ensure that a national SDG plan domesticating the global goals is in place and that all government policies are commensurate with the country's sustainable development challenges
- legislate to implement the global development agenda to improve citizens' lives and protect the planet
- provide for adequate budgetary allocations and other means of implementation that are needed to advance the national SDG plan
- actively engage with all citizens, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable, to promote the SDGs and garner feedback on the implementation of the national SDG plan.

11. At the operational level, the IPU's work on the SDGs takes different forms, from the organization of national, interregional and regional events, and the publication of guidance notes and toolkits, to the adoption of SDG-related resolutions and the organization of specialized panel discussions at the IPU Assemblies. More than 140 parliaments have been involved in the IPU's SDG activities around the world thus far. Overall, these activities help build appreciation among members of parliament that the SDGs are aligned with the national development objectives of both developed and developing countries and not an abstract agenda detached from their everyday reality. The activities also focus on bridging theory and practice starting with field visits to projects promoting sustainability and prosperity.

12. Since, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to hold in-person meetings, in 2020 the IPU started organizing regional webinars and virtual capacity-development activities for national parliaments. By working on cross-cutting SDGs, such as health, focus is being maintained on key development priorities and on how these priorities help advance the SDG agenda during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the IPU's growing portfolio of work on climate change highlights the interlinkages between the environment and SDGs achievement, such as, for example, the contribution of green COVID-19 recovery strategies to sustainable development.

13. In addition, the IPU works to connect parliaments to United Nations processes designed to monitor progress toward the SDGs at national and global levels, and to maintain political momentum for the 2030 Agenda. Key among these processes is the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development that meets annually at the ministerial level and every four years at the

Heads of State level. The IPU organizes a dedicated parliamentary event at each HLPF and contributes to relevant UN documents and resolutions. In addition to reviewing a number of UN reports on the SDGs and discussing challenges and future course corrections, the HLPF hosts a number of voluntary national reviews (VNRs). Countries participating in VNRs are expected to review their own progress in consultation with parliaments, civil society organizations and other stakeholders, and to present their findings to the HLPF.

14. The IPU conducted a parliamentary survey globally entitled *Institutionalization of the Sustainable Development Goals in the work of parliaments* to gather information on and publicize how parliaments organized their SDG-related work. The results showed that the role of parliaments in implementing the SDGs varied. Over half of the parliaments surveyed had established mechanisms specifically dedicated to the SDGs but only in a quarter of parliaments was this work coordinated with other parliamentary bodies. In over half of the cases, governments had reported to parliament on SDG progress.

15. Among the many IPU actions aimed at keeping the spotlight on the SDGs, the following should be highlighted:

- Every April session of the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs is dedicated to a review of parliamentary actions for the SDGs and to a discussion of the main theme of that year's forthcoming HLPF session.
- In preparation for the VNRs for the HLPF session, the IPU notifies the relevant parliaments of the process and asks them (by way of a questionnaire) to report back on their involvement throughout the relevant period. Some of the reports to the HLPF have been jointly presented by representatives of the government and parliament.
- A parliamentary event is held at each HLPF to highlight the main points of the session and encourage further parliamentary engagement going forward.
- Once every year, the IPU Standing Committee on Sustainable Development proposes a draft resolution on a theme relating to its field of action to be adopted at the IPU Assembly. These resolutions, which are adopted by the IPU Member Parliaments, provide a framework for future parliamentary action at national, regional and international levels. A number of SDG-related resolutions prepared by the Committee have been adopted.
- The parliamentary self-assessment toolkit prepared with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), serves as a basis for the IPU in assisting national parliaments to improve their own legislative, oversight and representative capacities for the SDGs. Parliaments as diverse as those of Chad, Fiji, Sri Lanka and Serbia have made use of this toolkit to date. Some parliaments, such as the National Assembly of Viet Nam and the House of Representatives of Indonesia, and international parliamentary organizations, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, have translated the toolkit into local languages. The toolkit is currently available in 13 languages and is the most translated IPU publication.
- The IPU Member Parliaments prioritize regional interaction as a means to engage in SDG implementation, access the latest data and expertise, and learn from the experiences of other parliaments. Twenty-two regional and interregional seminars organized so far by the IPU have brought together more than 1,200 parliamentarians from all regions of the world. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IPU has been organizing a series of IPU regional webinars on SDG implementation in a time of pandemic to provide parliaments with the opportunity to acquire up-to-date information, discuss common challenges as well as opportunities to advance the realization of the SDGs.

Scorecard and lessons learned

16. The SDG scorecard prepared annually by the United Nations and associated research organizations, show that although scores vary, overall, progress is slow. Currently, every country is facing some degree of difficulty to stay on track to fully achieve all the SDGs. While many countries are making significant progress on some SDGs, other countries are backsliding or stagnating on more than one of the SDGs.

17. Globally, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme poverty was trending down even though inequality was at a very high level, hunger was on the rise, biodiversity and basic ecosystems were losing their regenerating capacity, the global climate was changing much faster than expected, and

key institutions of democracy were under severe threat, resulting in growing social unrest and conflict. There were also, however, encouraging signs of improved health and education; there was more access to electricity and less unemployment. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences will no doubt not only exacerbate the situation in the already vulnerable areas but also lead to regression in areas that were advancing. It will increase inequalities and open new vulnerabilities. In addition to dealing with this immediate post-COVID recovery challenge, one of the most urgent areas for action is climate change which remains at the top of the global agenda. We therefore need to redouble our efforts, to work individually and collectively, to reach the set goal within the scheduled time frame. A comprehensive picture of progress and setbacks globally and by country is provided in the UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019 (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/sustainable/sdg-progress-reports-2019.html>) and the 2019 SDG Index and Dashboards of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (<https://www.sdgindex.org/reports/sustainable-development-report-2019/>).

18. By definition, developed countries have the advantage and some are not far from achieving most of the SDGs. However, the headline SDG score of many developed countries may be lower when their "spillover effects" into developing countries are factored in. These effects (for example, the impact of CO₂ emissions on developing countries or of lax tax laws that allow for tax evasion) end up impacting developing countries by retarding their development.

19. Generally speaking, developing countries are facing greater challenges in delivering actual results, although their political commitment to the SDGs may be relatively stronger than in developed countries. The main reasons for the slower progress of developing countries boil down to lack of resources, low implementation capacities (including data collection and analysis), weaker governance, a higher incidence of internal or external conflict and, most recently, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the paradox of achieving the SDGs is that the capacity to intensify SDG implementation in developing countries is significantly impacted by the very challenges that the SDGs seek to address. There is a strong need for continued and strengthened international development cooperation, with north–south cooperation as the main channel, supplemented by south–south cooperation.

20. From the IPU's direct experience with the SDGs and parliaments the following key lessons can be drawn:

- Generally, it can be said that the political will in parliaments to engage on the SDGs needs to be strengthened. Parliaments are nevertheless much more aware of and demonstrate greater ownership of the SDGs than they did of the SDGs predecessors – the MDGs. This is owing to the wide-ranging consultations on SDG content and the subsequent work of the IPU and other organizations to raise awareness of the goals in parliaments. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, this work needs to be further strengthened as the pandemic is having far-reaching social and economic consequences, leading countries to reconsider policy priorities and investments, the risk being that resources, as well as attention, will be diverted away from SDG implementation. Despite the challenges emerging from the pandemic, it is also an opportunity for parliaments to ensure that their countries align their recovery strategies with sustainable development objectives and advocate for greater investment in the SDGs. This would ensure that COVID-19 recovery plans are sustainable and resilient in the long-term which would help realize the SDGs within this decade.
- There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to the institutionalization of the SDGs in parliaments. Some parliaments have set up dedicated SDG committees or informal caucuses whereas others have assigned specific SDGs to existing portfolio committees. Most parliaments have yet to consider how to go about making sure that all of the SDGs have a clear locus in their committee structure. Overcoming siloes and working across goals is a key requirement for successful SDG mainstreaming and implementation.
- The results of the IPU surveys show that the role of parliaments in implementing the SDGs varies. While examples of good practices have emerged, it appears that SDG implementation remains a process primarily led by governments. Work done on the VNRs confirmed this finding: only about one third of the parliaments from countries that presented reports to the HLPF had been consulted in some way. This suggests that a lot remains to be done to ensure parliaments are fully enabled to exercise their oversight role when it comes to SDG policies and related monitoring processes. The lack of inclusion of parliaments in the governance frameworks for SDG implementation also diminishes the value of public involvement through their elected representatives in this regard.

- Regional and interregional parliamentary cooperation is very important. Virtually all the regional seminars that the IPU has organized over the last six years have shown that the benefits of parliaments at roughly similar levels of development coming together to exchange best practices were a strengthened parliamentary dialogue and the general support they offered each other.
- Climate change is one of the greatest threats to global prosperity and development. IPU activities have shown that there is strong political will in parliaments to learn about and engage on climate change issues. At the same time, serious deficiencies were revealed, such as lack of knowledge and capacity to coordinate activities with the government and effectively contribute to ongoing national processes to translate the Paris Agreement into national legislation and encourage action at the national and sub-national levels. Our parliaments bear significant responsibility to monitor the progress of their respective governments in addressing climate change.
- Access to quality data disaggregated by gender, minority status, age, regional area and other such categories is needed to help parliaments make informed policy decisions. Many parliaments lack access to reliable and independent data which can help them hold their governments to account.

Decade of action

21. In September 2019, the UN Secretary-General called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action to achieve the SDGs. He called for action on three levels: global action to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions; local action embedding the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities; and people action, including action by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations.

22. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharper focus the vulnerability of all humanity, irrespective of sovereignty, ideology or religion. It has highlighted the uneven impact of such global threats on all economies regardless of the varying levels of development. The COVID-19 pandemic has unavoidably led to serious setbacks in the work to attain the SDGs. We must therefore do our utmost to minimize its adverse effects. The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic also illustrates the strength and value of human ingenuity and resourcefulness. The SDGs are geared towards strengthening the resilience of people, country and planet, and parliaments must assume their central role in ensuring successful SDG achievement.

23. With 2020 marking the start of the SDG Decade of Action and the entry into effect of the Paris Agreement, parliaments must take action, now more than ever, to set the planet on a sustainable path. Many parliaments will need further assistance to deliver on a range of challenging issues, including ending poverty, ensuring gender equality, delivering better health coverage, and taking decisive climate action. Special emphasis will need to be paid to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inequalities it unearths, particularly in the area of gender, health, employment and climate change. Parliaments will need to take and support measures to re-stimulate the economy in a sustainable way, to deliver for the people while preserving the environment.

24. The IPU and its Member Parliaments will need to step up their efforts to rally political will and promote parliamentary engagement with the 2030 Agenda, including through action plans tailored to the needs of individual countries. Parliamentarians should encourage an open, public, free and inclusive debate in society about the importance of the SDGs across all sectors in order to enhance awareness of the challenges at stake and increase pressure for political solutions. Focus needs to be put on practical ways to turn the goals into reality, such as finding solutions to key areas through legislation and financing so that the SDGs are reflected in national budgets. In the spirit of multilateralism, Member Parliaments must utilize parliamentary diplomacy to push forward the 2030 Agenda in regional and sub-regional inter-parliamentary forums. This is at the core of the IPU's mandate. It is up to us all to make this vision a reality for the betterment of humanity.