



## Third Regional Seminar for the Asia-Pacific Region Parliaments on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Islamabad, Pakistan, 13-14 September 2022

### OUTCOME DOCUMENT

We, members of parliament from the Asia-Pacific region, have gathered, in person and remotely, for the Third Regional Seminar on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, taking place in Islamabad, Pakistan on 13 and 14 September 2022. Jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the National Assembly of Pakistan, this seminar is the third of its kind and was built on the conclusions of the previous seminars, hosted by the Parliament of Viet Nam in 2017 and the Parliament of Mongolia in 2018, as well as the IPU's virtual SDG events.

We greatly appreciate the strong commitment shown by the National Assembly of Pakistan in hosting this event despite the unprecedented challenges that the country is currently experiencing. The devastating floods that are hitting the country have left more than 1,100 dead and 1,600 injured. They have destroyed crops, infrastructure and buildings, and left millions homeless. We would like to express our deepest solidarity and sympathy to the Parliament and people of Pakistan, with the hope that the country will be able to recover soon. We also hope that, thanks to the sharing of knowledge and experience at this important event, together we will be able to identify effective solutions to fight climate change and implement the SDGs. Big carbon polluters should take more responsibility for climate change, meet their obligations and do their utmost to reduce carbon emissions, as many poor countries are disproportionately shouldering the burden of climate-related impacts. In this regard, we propose to include the flood crisis Pakistan is currently experiencing as a potential emergency item in the upcoming 145th IPU Assembly taking place in October 2022 in Rwanda.

Titled *Parliaments and the pandemic: SDGs in the time of COVID-19*, the Seminar provided a space for inter-parliamentary dialogue on how to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region despite the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises, including climate change. There is an urgent need to accelerate progress and address existing problems by adopting coherent strategies. Parliaments can drive significant change toward sustainable development. They can translate the SDGs into enforceable laws; they can monitor the implementation of these laws; they can ensure that government is accountable to the people for national progress on the SDGs; they can make sure that the needs of all of society, especially underrepresented, marginalized and/or vulnerable groups, are duly taken into consideration and addressed.

The Seminar provided parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with the opportunity to take stock of what has been done so far and reflect on concrete ways in which they can help to solve structural challenges and boost inclusive and sustainable development for all. Participants benefited from the rich contribution of parliamentarians, Government representatives, United Nations experts and the IPU. They proactively engaged in the event and drew up various strategies, actions and recommendations to advance parliamentary engagement with the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region. Participants were informed that, at the current pace, the region is not on track to achieve any of the

SDGs. Major gaps can be seen in areas related to SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 14 on life below water and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. Participants agreed that there is a need to strengthen interparliamentary cooperation and coordination, and they asked the IPU to promote further exchanges among parliaments to combine forces to accelerate action towards achieving the SDGs. Below is a summary of the key points and recommendations discussed during the event.

### **Envisioning inclusive development: Socio-economic challenges in Asia**

The Seminar's first session provided an overview of the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region. The presentations focused on how COVID-19 recovery can enhance economic resilience, adopt an inclusive approach, and ensure resources are not diverted from sustainable development. Particular emphasis was put on marginalized and vulnerable segments of the population. Examples of strategies and measures being undertaken by parliaments in the region to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic while promoting inclusive development for all were discussed, including:

- The importance of ensuring that the needs of those that have been particularly affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including refugees, are duly taken into consideration. Economic recovery plans that address structural problems related to these categories of people can in fact help contribute to the effective realization of the SDGs. Parliaments should play a crucial role in COVID-19 recovery plans and these should be developed on the basis of participatory and outcome-oriented governance.
- Promoting parliamentary actions to enhance the capacities of poor, marginalized and vulnerable segments of society to escape from poverty
- Monitoring the Government's work and ensuring that its development plans, policies and budget are aligned with the 2030 Agenda.
- Adopting national budgets that address the needs of all, especially marginalized and vulnerable groups, and ensuring that the Government is accountable on how the resources are spent and if they are in line with national and international commitments.
- Promoting laws and policies that protect the interests and concerns of constituents who may be more vulnerable, and ensuring that SDG-related legislation is gender-responsive and socially inclusive.
- There is a need to increase job opportunities, including in the agriculture and tourism sectors, and address youth employment challenges.
- The catastrophic floods that have hit the region have demonstrated that climate change is real. Countries need to work together to address this challenge in an appropriate manner.
- The Global Parliamentary Report 2022 on public engagement in the work of parliament is extensively aligned with the broader 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and provides useful recommendations that could help us enhance our work in this area.

### **Regional launch of the Global Parliamentary Report on public engagement in the work of parliament**

Following this session, a regional launch of the Global Parliamentary Report (GPR) was held. This GPR, the third produced by the IPU and the United Nations Development Programme, focuses on public engagement in the work of parliament. Key insights from the report were introduced and recommendations for strengthening public engagement for more inclusive and responsive parliaments in the region were highlighted.

Participants were invited to consider how to incorporate public engagement activities into parliamentary work on the SDGs. This could range from raising awareness about the SDGs and what parliament is doing to tackle them, to consultative exercises such as inviting submissions from the

public to committee inquiries linked to the SDGs, organizing public hearings in parliament or in the field, or gathering the views of people most directly affected by legislative measures in support of the SDGs. In keeping with the key SDG principle of “leave no-one behind”, parliaments are encouraged to make particular efforts to ensure that the voices of all sectors of society are heard and taken into account, including the most marginalized and vulnerable.

## **PARALLEL BREAKOUT SESSIONS: TACKLING INEQUALITIES**

After the launch of the Global Parliamentary Report, a series of parallel breakout sessions on tackling inequalities took place.

### **A) Ending hunger and malnutrition**

In this parallel session, the importance of addressing food insecurity and malnutrition through a multisectoral approach that includes health, agriculture, education, youth and gender equality, was stressed. The session highlighted the negative consequences of food insecurity for the most vulnerable groups, and the legislative and budgetary measures parliaments can take to ensure that governments prioritize nutrition and healthy diets in policies aimed at tackling food insecurity and the negative effects on food systems of the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergencies. Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff had the opportunity to discuss key challenges, and share promising practices, success stories and initiatives put in place in their respective countries to end hunger and malnutrition. Several actions that parliamentarians can take to address malnutrition and ending hunger were highlighted, including:

- Supporting laws that prioritize nutrition and food security, especially for the most vulnerable groups, including women, youth and children.
- Addressing the needs of the population in food security programmes (particularly of those whose livelihoods have been greatly affected by the pandemic and other emergencies, including people depending on farming and fishing activities).
- Allocating budgets to nutrition and healthy diet programmes, sustainable agriculture initiatives, and social protection allowances for those particularly affected by the pandemic and other emergencies.
- Promoting community mobilization, raising awareness and investing in capacity-building projects to end hunger and malnutrition.
- Promoting legislative cooperation on these subjects, including at the regional level.
- Enhancing parliamentary cooperation to end hunger, poverty and food crises.
- Promoting international policies regarding trade which assist in achieving SDG 2: Zero Hunger.

### **B) Promoting quality education and decent jobs for youth**

This session focused on the importance of ensuring quality, inclusive and equitable opportunities for all. Parliamentarians were called upon to enact laws that favour full and productive employment and decent work for all, especially youth. Opportunities to strengthen parliamentary action on this topic include:

- Prioritizing laws and regulations to ensure that high quality education is accessible to everyone – especially girls and young women – and adapted to the jobs of the future, as well as allocating funds for online education and the re-skilling and re-training of workers that are being displaced from their jobs by the green recovery.
- Enacting legislation or strengthening existing laws to guarantee decent work opportunities for all, including young people
- Promoting programmes that benefit young people new to the job market, including

entrepreneurship programmes, apprenticeships, loans and grants, including for start-ups. Representing the interests of vulnerable constituents, including women, youth, those in poverty, people with disabilities, minorities, migrants and indigenous communities, and protecting them from being excluded or discriminated against because of their gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, economic situation or any other status.

- Promoting policies and programmes to increase universal, non-discriminatory, equitable and affordable access to ICT in education for all, especially for young people, as they are key contributors to building inclusive societies and bridging the technological divide.
- Raising awareness on technical and vocational education as complements to formal education in providing a well-rounded and skills-based curriculum, equipping young people to meet the competing demands of work and personal life.

### **C) Ensuring equitable access to health**

Parliaments' commitment to universal health coverage is underpinned by the IPU resolution *Achieving universal health coverage by 2030: The role of parliaments in ensuring the right to health*. An IPU speaker presented the findings from the follow-up process on the implementation of this resolution. Other speakers in this session highlighted the impacts of financial constraints on the implementation of the global agenda and in particular on the achievement of SDG 3, arguing that inadequate financial allocations in the health care sector in developing countries result in an increase in poverty. Likewise, other parliamentarians emphasized the adverse effects of COVID-19 on their health care systems and economies across the globe, claiming that focus needs to be placed on all communicable diseases, along with COVID-19. Particular emphasis was put on marginalized groups and their uneven access to health services.

. They presented some actions that parliaments could take to improve access to health including:

- Advocating for investment in primary health care, and health care human capital in order to enable a better response to major public health events such as pandemics.
- Promoting the collection of accurate data to be able to take informed decisions in the health care sector.
- Encouraging progressive increases in the budgetary allocation for the health care sector, focusing in particular on human capital and health infrastructure.
- Strengthening health insurance and other social protection mechanisms for vulnerable and marginalized groups, who bear the heaviest brunt of health crises.
- Representing the needs of vulnerable constituents and ensuring participatory mechanisms in the design of health policies in order to include them in the legislative process and to ensure they are provided for under the law.
- Devising incentives and other mechanisms for local medical staff and ensuring they have optimal conditions in which to work.
- Putting in place a robust legal framework for universal health coverage to ensure that the right to health is guaranteed for all

### **Parliamentary mechanisms to institutionalize the SDGs**

This session focused on the importance of establishing mechanisms and/or procedures to mainstream the SDGs in parliaments' work in a comprehensive manner. The findings of the IPU's research on existing parliamentary practices to support the implementation of the SDG framework were presented. Likewise, parliamentarians talked about their direct experience and parliamentary mechanisms that have been put in place in their specific context to advance SDG implementation. Examples of parliamentary practices to mainstream the SDGs into parliamentary work include:

- Establishing a parliamentary body on SDGs (committee or subcommittee), an informal group or parliamentary network (cross-party group, caucus, task force), a system of focal points or any other parliamentary mechanism.
- Implementing specific procedures to mainstream the SDGs into the work of parliamentary committees and/or into parliamentary core functions (law-making, budget, oversight, representation).
- Assigning the responsibility for coordination of work on the SDGs to a specific parliamentary body or structure.

### **Women at the centre of the development agenda**

This session focused on understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and identified the root causes of discrimination that curtail women's rights. The National Assembly of Pakistan presented a case study on its cross-party Women's Parliamentary Caucus, which has become an international good practice, replicated in over a dozen other parliaments as well as in provincial and regional legislatures. The presentations focused on the positive linkages between the promotion of gender equality and the achievement of all the other SDGs. Parliamentarians were invited to mainstream Goal 5 into their national legislation and to identify effective approaches that ensure women's empowerment. Parliamentary efforts to achieve gender equality and empower all women that were identified include:

- Articulating in the legislative process the interests and concerns of women and girls, ensuring that COVID-19 recovery strategies are gender-inclusive, in particular by:
  - promoting gender parity in decision-making bodies and processes;
  - setting up dedicated gender equality mechanisms and bodies in parliament; and
  - consulting women and girls on the work of parliament.
- Ensuring that all SDG legislative provisions include a gender perspective and review legislation with a view to:
  - eliminating any provisions that discriminate against women; and
  - ensuring respect for women's economic, social, political and civil rights.
- Prioritizing budget allocations on women's empowerment activities and ensuring programmes and activities targeting the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in other SDG-related programmes are developed and well-resourced.

### **Building resilience to preserve our common future**

This session focused on the importance of reducing risk and building resilience to disasters and other shocks to safeguard development gains. Persistent environmental challenges that undermine the achievement of the SDGs in various countries in the Asia-Pacific region were highlighted. The linkages between habitat loss, environmental degradation and climate change, and the emergence of novel zoonotic diseases such as coronaviruses were discussed. Speakers highlighted the need for a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to help achieve environmental and sustainable development objectives. Parliamentarians reflected on national-level options for promoting a green recovery in their respective countries, including in relation to clean energy, biodiversity and waste management and circularity. The session also described the critical role of parliamentarians in reducing disaster risk, and presented key actions they can take to advance risk reduction at the national and local levels. Recommendations on how to build resilience and promote a green recovery include:

- Prioritizing laws and regulations that require public investment in conservation programmes, sustainable agriculture initiatives and urban green infrastructure, in order to reduce deforestation

and habitat loss, which are factors that could increase the risk of zoonotic diseases.

- Enacting legislation that supports sustainable consumption and production, circularity and sustainable waste management, including waste treatment and safe handling of healthcare and biochemical waste.
- Ensuring there are regulatory and risk governance frameworks and financial instruments to fund and incentivize long-term public and private disaster risk reduction initiatives including resilient infrastructure and nature-based solutions.
- Prioritizing citizen engagement in discussions on risk reduction to promote inclusive strategies that are responsive to the risks and needs of constituents.
- Developing and advancing legislation, regulation and policy to protect, promote and realize the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including safeguards for environmental rights and participation in environmental decision making, in particular for vulnerable groups.
- Articulating in the legislative process the interests and concerns of constituents who may be more vulnerable (such as women, persons with disabilities, minorities, migrants and indigenous communities), leaving no one behind, and ensuring that legislation is gender-responsive and socially inclusive, and that it calls for the engagement of vulnerable groups in its implementation.

In this Seminar, inter-parliamentary dialogue and the sharing of practices were seen as essential to build cooperation and enhance knowledge, and catalyse collective parliamentary action to support the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asia-Pacific region. The IPU stands ready to continue supporting parliaments in their efforts to address sustainable development challenges and is committed to providing parliaments with a platform for national, regional and global dialogue to facilitate stronger partnerships for action on the SDGs.

In order to inspire action on the SDGs, we will bring this Outcome Document to the attention of our parliamentary colleagues through all possible channels. We also undertake to bring it to the attention of other relevant stakeholders.

We request that the IPU and the National Assembly of Pakistan bring our conclusions and recommendations to the attention of the global parliamentary community at the 145th IPU Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda in October 2022. We urge the IPU to keep on promoting parliamentary engagement with the SDGs and to continue to work with the United Nations and other relevant partners towards the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.