

Parliamentary Forum at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Governance deficits and climate disasters: The case for parliamentary action

16 July 2024

Conference Room 2

United Nations, New York

Summary report

I. Introduction

1. The Parliamentary Forum at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) engaged parliamentarians in assessing progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The forum, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), focused on two SDGs under review at the HLPF – SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, and SDG 13 on climate change. A session with experts on each of these SDGs was held, along with opening and closing remarks from the IPU leadership.

Opening session

2. **Dr. T. Ackson**, President of the IPU, welcomed the participants and said there was critical work to be done because most SDGs would not be achieved by the official timeline of 2030. Unless the trajectory changed, political and economic divides would widen; gender equality would leave more women and girls behind; competition for natural resources would become fiercer; the human, environmental, and economic costs of climate change would become unsustainable; and violence and conflict would keep spreading.
3. Parliamentarians must translate global goals into national objectives, and ensure budgets and laws aligned appropriately, Dr. Ackson said. While most countries had a plan on the SDGs, only 40% had integrated them into their national budgets. Most parliaments were not engaged in national progress reviews on the SDGs. Parliamentarians must look beyond the election cycle and institutionalize the SDGs through committee systems, parliamentary budget offices, audit institutions and other structures so that they become a part of the political culture and administrative landscape.
4. While all SDGs were important and inter-dependent, SDG 16 was key because it enabled all other SDGs to succeed. The world needed robust parliaments and parliamentarians who worked towards more inclusive, transparent and accountable institutions, and a political environment focused on achieving greater good for all through consensus and cooperation.

II. Common challenges for SDG implementation

The participants identified the following challenges:

- a) Regression of democratic norms and principles have led to extremism and populism, and a decline in the public's trust in the government and its institutions.
- b) Violence, conflict, war and organized crime have resulted in immense losses of human life and property, and inflicted costs that could be used to fight existential threats such as climate change.
 - Organized crime and corruption remain a major obstacle in many places. Last year, 500,000 intentional homicides took place worldwide.
 - Wars have become more deadly; last year saw a 72% increase in civilian deaths in conflict.
- c) Lack of transparency and oversight of national budgets.
 - International Budget Partnership's 2023 survey found that parliamentarians' role in budget oversight is declining. About one-half of the 125 countries surveyed did not analyze budget implementation needs, and one-fifth of parliaments did not approve budgets or did so late.
- d) Lack of capacity among parliamentarians, parliaments and other public institutions to better carry out their functions.

Recommendations for parliamentarians for achieving the SDGs:

- a) Make governments more inclusive, representative and participatory.
 - Include women, youth, indigenous people and other marginalized groups in all decision-making.
 - Prioritize gender parity in all entities; without it, girls and women will continue to be left behind.
 - Eliminate gender discrimination in public finance institutions, where only 11% of heads of ministries of finance or central banks are women, as a way of reversing chronic underspending in sectors that most affect women and girls, such as water and sanitation, agriculture and climate change.
 - Encourage public participation in all levels of government.
- b) Hold all line ministries to account; not just the executive branch.
- c) Strengthen relationships with supreme audit institutions (SAIs).
- d) Take steps to fight corruption.
 - For example, Chad created an independent authority tasked with fighting corruption and the office of a national ombudsperson.
- e) Build frameworks that are multilevel (global, regional, national and municipal) as well as multisectoral (industry, the private sector and local communities, and women, youth and indigenous groups).

- f) Engage in collective thinking and share information and best practices, as well as scientific and technological tools, with other parliamentarians and partners.
 - Turn to the IPU, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Budget Partnership, the World Bank Group, and other multilateral and civil society organizations for support and expertise.
 - Insist on more training and capacity-building for parliamentarians and government officials to improve understanding of budgets and public finance, including the view that budgets reflect a country's values and priorities.
- g) Help modernize parliaments and government institutions by integrating new technologies.
- h) Raise awareness and help educate the public about the importance of SDGs for all people and the planet.
- i) Embody the role of people's representatives by listening to constituents and voicing their needs and hopes in national and international forums.
- j) Invest in and advocate for peacebuilding, multilateralism and international cooperation.
- k) Understand the linkages between SDGs 13 and 16. Climate action is important not only to meet climate goals, but to improve governance systems.

III. SDG 16: Investing in parliaments as key institutions of governance

- 5. SDG 16 is a key enabler of other SDGs and yet it is the second to last among the 17 SDGs in terms of progress. States are regressing on their human rights obligations; conflict and violence are pervasive; and corrupt and unresponsive governments are weakening social contracts and making justice elusive for the most marginalized.
- 6. SDG 16 underscores the need for effective public administration and institutions, including ministries, parliaments and courts. It is critical for creating strong and sustainable societies. Urgent action is needed to strengthen governmental institutions and ensure they are inclusive, transparent and participatory.

Recommendations for parliamentarians for accelerating progress towards SDG 16:

- a) Focus on the State's original duty to ensure security for all citizens; without safety and security, people will not have trust in institutions.
- b) Design programmes that are inclusive and participatory otherwise structures and policies will not reflect the people's needs.
- c) Create subcommissions within parliaments to better analyze budgets and ensure they are transparent and equitable.
- d) Build relationships with citizens and civil society by ensuring government hearings allow for deep and meaningful participation.
- e) Track expenditures over time to assess their impacts on vulnerable groups; chronic underspending is often concentrated in sectors that most affect women and girls.

- f) Address deep-seeded causes of inequality.

IV. SDG 13: Scaling up adaptation and climate finance for a sustainable and resilient world

- 7. Collective action is urgently needed to address climate change, which is one of the most serious threats facing humankind. 2023 was the hottest year on record, and no country has been spared from the effects of the climate crisis, including extreme temperatures, rising sea levels, more frequent and intense storms, floods, droughts, and loss of biodiversity and animal life.
- 8. More adequate and accessible climate finance is needed to meet targets, as the world is off track for implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change. This requires a mix of funding, including from public and private sectors, as well as blended finance, and philanthropic and innovative finance sources. Developed countries must assist developing countries, which are least responsible for climate change but face the most consequences.

Recommendations for parliamentarians for accelerating progress towards SDG 13:

- a) Promote robust climate science and climate risk assessment.
- b) Place stronger emphasis on climate adaptation in national development plans, and ensure governments set and meet ambitious climate commitments, such as those set in the Paris Agreement.
- c) To increase climate investments, work to mobilize all possible sources of finance, public and private.
- d) Consider innovative sources of funding, including a global aviation tax; emissions trading programmes; incentives for clean energy and agriculture programmes; and green bonds.
 - o Advocate for repurposing over US\$ 1 trillion in annual subsidies for environmentally harmful practices.
 - o Consider supporting a tax on excessive profits by gas and oil producers.
- e) Employ sound research and analytics.
 - o For example, the World Bank Group's Country Climate and Development Reports help prioritize climate adaptation strategies based on each nation's unique needs.
- f) Include women in decision-making for climate adaptation policies.
- g) Work with other ministries of finance through groups such as the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action, which includes more than 90 countries.
- h) Enforce existing environmental laws. While more than 150 countries recognize the right to a healthy environment, more oversight and enforcement of existing laws and policies is needed.

- i) Build capacity of institutions – especially in small island developing States and the least developed states – so they can receive money and spend it responsibly and efficiently. Help ensure they have an environment that is attractive for climate investments and actions.
- j) Work with the private sector to understand barriers and obstacles to investment.
- k) Look for ways to de-risk private money with public funding.
 - For example, in Ireland’s Low Cost Retrofit Loan Scheme, public money drives down interest rates to make the programme more attractive and less risky.
- l) Help simplify climate finance to make it more accessible.
- m) Work with community-based organizations to implement climate adaptation programmes locally, which produces better results at lower costs.
- n) Share information, expertise and resources with less developed nations.
 - For example, Ireland has been sharing information with small island developing States on building grid infrastructure that integrates renewables.
- o) Prioritize climate justice. Developed countries are the biggest polluters, but the least developed nations bear the biggest brunt of climate change.

V. Closing session

9. **Mr. M. Chungong**, Secretary General of the IPU, said there was growing interest in the IPU’s forums and great commitment from parliamentarians to engage in collective action around the SDGs. Despite challenges such as regression in democratic practices and declining trust in institutions, parliamentarians are ready to step up and make parliaments more robust through oversight, budget allocation and representation. Parliamentarians can use a range of tools to make governments more transparent, inclusive and accountable. They should be more closely engaged in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on the SDGs and push for adequate funding and full implementation of development plans. Capacity-building, inter-parliamentary cooperation and coordination remain as important as ever to achieve common goals for all people and for the planet.

Appendix

List of speakers

Opening session

Dr. Tulia Ackson, President of the IPU

Session 1: SDG 16: Investing in parliaments as key institutions of governance

Moderator: Ms. Petra Bayr, Member of Parliament, National Council of Austria

Mr. José García Ruminot, Speaker of the Chilean Senate

Mr. Arvinn Gadgil, Director, Policy Center for Governance, UNDP

Ms. Ana Patricia Muñoz, Executive Director, International Budget Partnership

Session 2: SDG 13: Scaling up adaptation and climate finance for a sustainable and resilient world

Moderator: Mr. David McGuinty, Member of Parliament, House of Commons of Canada, President of the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

Ms. Ligia Noronha, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of UNEP New York Office

Mr. Marc Ó Cathasaigh, TD, Oireachtas of Ireland

Ms. Jennifer Sara, Global Director, Climate Change Group, World Bank Group

Closing session

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU