



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU Statement

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Interregional Seminar on
Parliamentary Capacity Building and
the Further Implementation of the
SDGs

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Honorable Chairpersons,
Honorable Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I am honored to be with you today at this Fourth Interregional Seminar on Parliamentary Capacity Building and the Further Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) I would like to express my deep appreciation to the National People's Congress of China, in particular the Chairman, Mr. Li Zhanshu, and the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Zhongli Ding, and Secretary General of NPC Standing Committee, Mr. Yang Zhenwu, for the wonderful work done in organizing this meeting that brings together parliamentarians from four different continents: Africa, Asia, South America and Oceania.

We are extremely grateful for the contribution and financial support the National People's Congress is consistently providing to our Organization. We are thus able to organize regularly seminars such as the one opening today. We are also able to provide assistance and policy guidance to national parliaments on SDGs implementation. This seminar represents another important achievement of the solid partnership between the IPU and the NPC. Please allow me to take this opportunity also to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the staff of the NPC who have worked tirelessly for the success of this event.

This is the fourth time the NPC is hosting an interregional event for parliaments from different regions in order to discuss ways to implement the SDGs through South-South parliamentary cooperation. The outcome of previous meetings has been extremely positive. Parliamentarians had the precious opportunity to share successful experiences with counterparts from different countries and discuss specific actions for the achievement of the SDGs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These interregional seminars provide a unique opportunity for parliaments all over the world to work together to effectively engage with the SDGs. Regional and interregional parliamentary cooperation is crucial for the effective and comprehensive attainment of the SDGs at the global level. Your presence here sends a strong message about your commitment, and the commitment of your parliaments, to the SDGs. The IPU is proud to facilitate exchanges of good practices and experiences among parliamentarians at

all levels in order to inspire action and maximize the contribution of parliaments to the implementation of the goals.

Governments have endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but the realization of this groundbreaking global commitment by 2030 can only be achieved if all stakeholders are actively engaged in tackling poverty and improving living standards for all while protecting the environment. This ambition can only be fulfilled if proactive engagement combines with a strong political determination. This seminar is the perfect occasion for me to emphasize the crucial role played by parliaments in SDGs implementation. Parliamentarians are representatives of the people, and the SDGs are about people. Parliamentarians have an important advocacy mission in their communities. They are the bridge between the people and the government. By virtue of their constitutional powers, parliaments and parliamentarians can and must influence laws and policies to improve the wellbeing of their citizens and the planet.

Parliamentarians are instrumental in the realization of the SDGs through their ability to turn the voluntary commitment to the SDGs into enforceable laws, to hold their governments to account on development policy choices and strategies, and the adoption of national budgets. Parliaments have the obligation to oversee, identify problems and seek corrective measures that will ensure the attainment of the SDGs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

According to available data, no country is currently on track to achieve all of the SDGs. Extreme poverty is still rife, inequality is stuck at very high levels, hunger is on the rise, global climate is changing much faster than expected. We need to do things differently to make a difference, and political commitment and an inclusive approach are imperative in this regard.

In order to document the ways in which parliaments are organizing their work around the SDGs, understand the patterns and share good parliamentary practices, in June 2018 the IPU launched the global survey on "Institutionalization of the SDGs in the work of parliaments". The survey was sent to parliaments worldwide and was completed by 89 parliaments (50% of the IPU Members).

The first half of the survey focused on parliamentary activities on SDGs, and the second half on parliamentary mechanisms for the SDGs. We asked participants if the parliament had organized training sessions or awareness raising activities for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. 56% of respondents stated that parliaments have organized awareness-raising activities on the SDGs for parliamentarians. 38% had not. Fewer respondents (46%) have held training sessions or awareness-raising activities on the SDGs for parliamentary staff. The most common type of activities were seminars and workshops.

We also asked whether their parliament had taken action to ensure the SDGs are reflected in the national budget. The majority, 53%, said parliament had taken action to ensure the SDGs are reflected in the national budget. 30% know that no such action has been taken. 17% did not know. In the answers to this question we found that the way countries incorporate the SDGs into their budget varies. Some parliaments allocated the budget to only certain areas that are related to the SDGs (e.g. health and education). However other parliaments dedicate a portion of the budget for the SDGs specifically.

Finally, we asked parliaments if there are any parliamentary mechanisms specifically dedicated to the SDGs. 52% of respondents stated they have established at least one parliamentary mechanism. Examples of mechanisms included: informal group or network; a system of focal points; and parliamentary bodies dedicated to the SDGs. 15% of respondents noted that none of these mechanisms have been established 34% of respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

Overall, we can see that there is room for improvement when it comes to the level of engagement with the SDGs. At the IPU, we commend the development gains countries have made but at the same time we are convinced that stronger engagement and political will are required to ensure that the SDGs will be effectively achieved by 2030.

There is no single path to advance the implementation of the SDGs. Each parliament should integrate the SDGs in its key parliamentary functions, according to its specificities, needs and priorities. That is why it is crucial to take the time and assess the situation to ensure that the work that has been conducted in your Parliament so far looks holistically and synergistically at human development needs.

As you might be aware, the IPU has developed a series of tools and activities to assist parliaments in the SDGs implementation process. In 2016 we partnered with UNDP to develop an SDG Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments. This toolkit provides a great opportunity for MPs and parliamentary staff to review key processes and identify institutional gaps, and to help their parliaments establish the right mechanisms to take greater ownership of the SDGs through oversight as well as legislation, budgetary allocations and citizens' involvement.

The self-assessment toolkit is not prescriptive but is designed to enable parliaments to identify baselines, good practices, gaps, opportunities and lessons learned to effectively institutionalize the SDGs and mainstream the various goals into parliamentary processes. It has been designed to be relevant to all parliaments, whatever political system they adhere to and whatever their stage of development.

The toolkit can help parliaments start their own process of internal benchmarking, set priorities for reform in order to strengthen their response to the SDGs and ensure a harmonious coordination between the different parliamentary structures—for example, how to use the existing structures more effectively to address the SDGs and overcome silos. The ultimate objective is to have parliaments fit for purpose to play a full role in realizing the SDGs.

Assisting parliaments in using the SDGs Self-Assessment Toolkit and fostering action at the national level is one of IPU's priorities in 2019. Several parliaments like the parliaments of Fiji, Mali and Georgia, took part in an SDGs self-assessment exercise. I am very much pleased to see that the Parliament of Sierra Leone is going to undertake this exercise shortly. A self-assessment exercise with the parliaments of Argentina, Botswana, Namibia, Uganda – for instance- is also in the pipeline.

The performance of this exercise has already resulted in important parliamentary decisions and initiatives by parliaments to better deliver on the SDGs. As an example, thanks to the self-assessment exercise the Parliament of Fiji adopted an action plan that emphasized the importance of consistent engagement with government and civil society to ensure better access to data. The Fijian Parliament launched the idea of including the SDGs in induction courses for new MPs; of making it mandatory to conduct systematic SDGs assessment of draft bills; and of organizing more consultations on the SDGs with citizens and communities in rural/remote areas.

Recently it launched a guidance note to assist parliamentary committees in making SDGs central to the work of the Parliament and in engaging effectively with the SDGs in all areas of committee work.

In Mali, the exercise helped Parliament identify priorities for short- and medium-term operational SDGs strategies. Members of parliament defined actions and concrete goals in the areas of legislation, budget, oversight and representation. Recommendations included creating a parliamentary SDGs communications strategy, allocating a budget for their implementation, appointing a focal point for SDGs and carrying out capacity-building for relevant staff.

Thanks to this exercise, the Parliament of Georgia assessed how prepared it was for the implementation of the SDGs and drafted a model action plan to help institutionalize the Parliament's role in SDGs implementation, focusing on areas such as strengthening oversight mechanisms to monitor SDGs progress. These developments will have an important impact on SDGs implementation and on ensuring that no one is left behind.

It is my hope that as a result of this seminar, you will urge your parliament to do the SDGs self-assessment exercise in order to ensure that, through this process, your Parliament can outline a coherent, sustainable and effective strategy to mainstream the SDGs into its work. The IPU undoubtedly stands ready to provide assistance in the facilitation of this exercise and would also be pleased to provide further information if requested.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the course of the next three days you will address several important topics, such as the promotion of an efficient, sustainable, equitable, participatory, environmentally sound agricultural development process and the importance of creating jobs for rural youth, of promoting women empowerment and building more inclusive economies in developing countries. The IPU attaches great importance to these themes, as do I, being a member of the lead group of the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, as well as an International Gender Champion. I am proud to support these campaigns and am pleased to see that the governments of several parliamentary delegations that are present here today— Cambodia, Ghana, Lesotho, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe—are also committed members of the SUN Movement.

Food security and agriculture are crucial for the health and wellbeing of societies. Persistently high levels of hunger and malnutrition—in 2015 there were 793 million chronically hungry people in the world—present a major challenge for agriculture. According to FAO's data, to meet the growing food demand of the over 9 billion people who will exist by 2050, agriculture will need to produce 60 per cent more food globally in the same period. At the same time, roughly one-third of the food produced—1.3 billion tonnes per year—is lost or wasted globally throughout the supply chain, with enormous financial and environmental costs.

A striking link exists between agriculture and the eradication of hunger and poverty. The GDP growth generated by agriculture is on average at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth generated by other sectors. Agriculture also provides income, jobs, and other goods and services.

Studies show that the current trajectory of growth in agricultural production is unsustainable because of its negative impacts on natural resources and the environment. The main challenges being faced are the growing scarcity and fast

degradation of natural resources, at a time when the demand for food, is increasing rapidly.

It is important to be aware of a number of issues that can have an additional negative impact on agriculture. I am referring to the competition over natural resources, the expansion of agriculture at the expense of forests, climate change as well as the increasing movement of people and goods. Agriculture should be sustainable in order to meet the needs of society in the present, ensure environmental health and social and economic equity without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Agriculture is one of the mainstays of employment. Nowadays the global labour force is made up of only half of the women in the world and about 76 per cent of the men in the world. The gap widens based on ethnicity as well as for migrant women and mothers. Women are overrepresented in the informal economy, and in low-paid, low-skilled or unregulated jobs. They often face gender-based discrimination, violence and harassment in the workplace. Women also bear the burden of most unpaid care and domestic work and tend to earn less than men for work of the same value. Last but not least, women are the main victims of the unacceptable scourge of modern slavery.

Women's equal participation in all sectors of the society would not only be a question of justice. It could also have a multiplier effect for development. For instance, women's equal participation in the global labour force would add US\$ 12 trillion to the global economy. Women who are economically empowered are more likely to invest in nutrition, education and health, with great benefits for their children, families, communities and society as a whole.

Youth employment is also a timely issue. Today there are tens of millions of unemployed youth. If you put them all in one place, the country would be the twentieth most populous country in the world. By not sufficiently providing opportunities for these young people, we are not just accepting an environment where poverty and extremism can take root but we are also depriving ourselves of our most valuable resource for a brighter future.

As stated in the IPU resolution *Job creation and employment security in the era of globalization* adopted at the 116th IPU Assembly in 2007, parliaments should promulgate laws that favour employment growth and exert pressure on governments, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders to place job creation and decent work at the centre of national policy agendas and to pursue the creation of an environment conducive to the balanced development of both rural and urban areas.

Parliamentarians should be daily champions of the SDGs and urge governments and parliaments to combat discrimination based on sex, age, religion, ethnicity or health, including pregnancy, as well as all forms of exploitative work, such as bonded labour, forced labour, the worst forms of child labour, human trafficking and forced prostitution, and other slavery-like practice.

It is my hope that this interregional seminar will provide you with an opportunity to further reflect on possible parliamentary strategies to better promote a sustainable and equitable sustainable development process, and build more inclusive economies, strengthen your knowledge about the SDGs, exchange views with your peers and build stronger regional cooperation.