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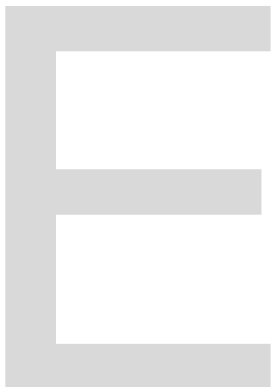
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Conference Report

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 level. 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 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 (e.g. Fiji, Georgia, Mali, Serbia, etc.) 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 particular 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
- 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 and regional seminars, and the publication of guidance notes and toolkits, to the adoption of SDG-related resolutions and the organization of specialized panel discussions at IPU Assemblies. More than 134 parliaments have been involved in the IPU's SDG activities around the world thus far. Overall, these activities help build appreciation amongst MPs 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 with field visits to projects promoting sustainability and prosperity.

12. In addition, the IPU works to connect parliaments to UN processes designed to monitor progress toward the SDGs at national and global levels and to maintain the 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 Head-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.

13. A global IPU survey, *Institutionalization of the Sustainable Development Goals in the work of parliaments*, was conducted among all parliaments to help the IPU document and publicize how parliaments organize 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. Also, in over half of the cases, the government had reported to parliament on SDG progress.

14. Among the many actions of the IPU to keep 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 to report back (by way of a questionnaire) on their involvement throughout the relevant period. Some of the reports to the HLPF have been jointly presented by representatives of 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.
- On the basis of a parliamentary self-assessment toolkit prepared with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the IPU helps national parliaments to improve their own legislative and oversight capacities for the SDGs (parliaments as diverse as those of Djibouti, Fiji, and Serbia have made use of this toolkit to date). Some parliaments, like the National Assembly of Viet Nam and the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States, have translated the toolkit into local languages.
- 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-one regional and interregional seminars organized so far by the IPU have brought together more than 1,000 parliamentarians from 134 parliaments from all regions of the world.

Scorecard and lessons learned

15. The SDG scorecard that the United Nations and associated research organizations prepare each year presents a mixed view indicating slow progress overall. Currently, every country is facing some degree of difficulties being on track to fully achieve all the SDGs. While many countries are making significant progress on several SDGs, at the same time, other countries are backsliding or stagnating on more than one of the SDGs.

16. Globally, while extreme poverty is trending down, inequality is stuck at very high levels, hunger is on the rise, biodiversity and basic ecosystems are losing their regenerating capacity, the global climate is changing much faster than expected, and key institutions of democracy are under severe threat, resulting in growing social unrest and conflict. On a more positive note, there are encouraging signs of improved health and education, more access to electricity, and less unemployment.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences would no doubt lead to regression in these and other areas. In addition to this immediate challenge, one of the most urgent areas for action is climate change which remains at the top of global agenda. This illustrated the need to redouble our efforts to work individually and collectively to reach the goal in 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/>).

17. By definition, developed countries have the advantage, and several of them 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 (e.g. the impact of CO₂ emissions on developing countries or of lax tax laws that allow for tax evasion) end up impacting developing countries that retard their own development.

18. 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 come down to lack of resources, low implementation capacities (including for data collection and analysis), weaker governance, and a higher incidence of internal or external conflict. 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.

19. 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 of their predecessor – 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.
- 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.
- 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 four years have shown the benefit of parliaments at roughly similar levels of development coming together to exchange best practices and generally support 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 action. Our parliaments bear significant responsibility to monitor the progress of our respective governments.
- 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

20. 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 by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations.

21. 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 reach 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 their successful achievement.

22. 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 of them 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, 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.

23. 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 and free debate in society about the importance of the SDGs across all sectors in order to enhance the 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 in the key areas of legislation and financing so that the SDGs are reflected in national budgets. In the spirit of multilateralism, Member Parliaments shall utilize parliamentary diplomacy to push forward the 2030 Agenda in regional and sub-regional inter-Parliamentary forums. This is at the core of IPU's mandate. It is up to us all to make this vision a reality for the betterment of mankind.