

Achieving the SDGs and empowering youth through well-being

Sixth IPU Global Conference
 of Young Parliamentarians
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Outcome Document

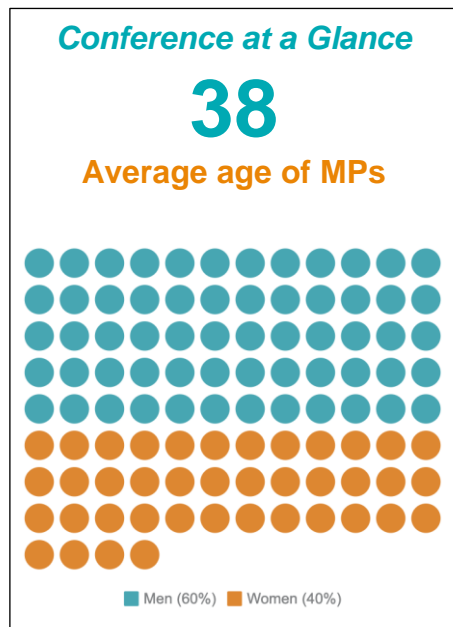
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If you had to pick one objective in life, would it be wealth? Power? Or happiness? The answer is clearly the latter. If happiness is our priority in our personal lives, it should also be our priority in public policy.

We, approximately 100 young parliamentarians from 40 countries, attended the Sixth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in Asunción, Paraguay. Our average age was 38 years and 40% of us were women MPs. We were joined by representatives from international organizations, youth organizations and parliaments, academia and the private sector.

We acknowledged that the pursuit of happiness and well-being is a universal objective that should be explicitly stated as our ultimate goal in public policies. We called for a change: it is time to stop aiming only for rapid economic growth without adequately considering well-being, equality and happiness. Otherwise, we threaten not only the well-being of future generations, but the very planet we live on. With only 10 years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we are way off the mark in meeting our targets. We don't have another planet if we get it wrong.

What we measure to gauge success matters. Gross domestic product (GDP) measures the economic value of what a country produces, but it does not measure this production's impact on well-being, whether it creates or diminishes inequality, and whether it is sustainable in the long term. As Robert Kennedy stated, GDP measures everything except that which makes life worthwhile. If well-being is multi-dimensional, so must be our tools to measure it. Well-being is not produced through unrestrained material production and consumption. Education, health, culture, leisure time, the enjoyment of all human rights, emotional fulfilment, as well as a sense of belonging to a community, are all valuable pieces of the well-being puzzle. GDP still has a place, as does economic



growth. But it should not hold a monopoly on how we measure the health of a country. It is time we move beyond GDP to more holistic and forward-thinking methods of measurement that account for all demographic groups, especially youth.

In Asunción, we shared practices and experiences of how countries, organizations and the private sector are defining and measuring well-being and happiness. Although many factors feed into a person's well-being – such as health, education, work/life balance, and fulfillment of human rights, to name a few – much can be learned just from asking the simple question of how happy one feels. Applying a well-being lens in our countries also help us identify demographic or geographic inequalities. This is especially important for young people, who are at risk of being left behind in public policy. Doing so also helps our countries set priorities to address the areas of greatest need.

Given the subjectivity of well-being, we acknowledge the importance of citizen engagement in each of our countries to ensure the adoption of methodologies that are adapted to national and local needs. As young MPs, we encourage the inclusion of the public, civil society, academia, youth groups and other stakeholders in the process of establishing well-being definitions and indicators. Subjective measures of well-being – such as surveys of people's life satisfaction – should be coupled with objective ones, such as life expectancy and levels of education and economic inequality. Given the importance of securing the sustainability of our planet for future generations, we also call for well-being policies that consider future resources.

Measurement matters, but it alone does not guarantee concrete results. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to not only support the adoption of well-being measures in our countries, but also ensure that they are effectively applied to the policy cycle to deliver the results we want. Laying the foundations of a well-being approach in our countries is one step, but young parliamentarians have a role to play at several other points in the policy cycle, from inception and implementation, to monitoring, evaluation and adaptation. As young MPs, closest to our country's young people, we commit to involving youth throughout this process. We can advance this effort by:

- Adopting a well-being approach when contributing to the budget process, including through well-being checks in budget allocation as well as well-being, youth, and gender impact assessments. Funding for research and tools to help MPs better assess well-being is also key.
- Establishing or strengthening institutional structures to assess and promote well-being in a cross-cutting manner across State institutions. This includes parliamentary committees on well-being, commissioners and ministries.
- Enhancing our parliamentary oversight functions to better assess and monitor government performance in delivering well-being to the people. Strengthening accountability for government performance is one way we can contribute to stronger outcomes for the people.

To contribute to all stages of the policy cycle, we demand transparency, open parliament and access to public information. This would not only ensure that information is available for evidence-based decisions, but would also serve as an antidote to the poison of corruption.

In addition to discussing parliamentary tools to promote a well-being approach, we also took a sober look at the many urgent issues that put well-being far out of reach of many people.

In Asunción, we, young MPs, agreed that well-being cannot be achieved without developing our "human capital", including through:

- Greater urgent action to address inequality within and between our countries. Economic growth is too often rigged in favour of the rich. It is not just wealth which should be distributed equally, but also happiness. Everyone deserves an equal opportunity to lead a happy and prosperous life.
- Greater focus on issues of particular importance to youth, such as employment, political participation, and mental and reproductive health. Above all, education is of particular importance

for youth. We call for universal access to quality education, so that young people can attain the jobs of the future and the soft skills needed to excel in the modern world.

- Bold efforts to create jobs for youth. Other economic opportunities, such as access to credit – especially for young women – and entrepreneurship programmes, are needed to allow youth creativity to flourish for the good of people of all ages.
- Redoubled efforts for gender equality. In 2019, it is unacceptable for women to face a gender pay gap, to be underrepresented in politics, or to face gender-based violence.
- Increased funding for sports for youth. Each dollar invested in sports saves many more on possible future health costs. It also has knock-on effects on getting young people off the street and away from illegal drugs and crime.
- Nurturing of social and community relationships. Volunteerism is one way that this can be strengthened.

In all these efforts, we welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with all stakeholders that share our commitment to building happier and healthier communities, including civil society organizations, academia and the private sector.

We are at a crossroads and time is of the essence. By orienting our public policy objectives around well-being and taking these steps, we will by extension be working to achieve the SDGs. Well-being may very well be the fresh approach needed to take us there. We, young women and men, are able and have the political will to answer this call.

But no country is an island, and we cannot do this alone. Cooperation between our countries and parliaments is indispensable. The challenges we face, from climate change to adapting to new technologies, have no borders, and we must act together accordingly.

Reiterating the SDG motto of leaving no one behind, an inclusive well-being approach will also strengthen our capacity to ensure that all cohorts of young people are included in our efforts. This includes racial, religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, and rural and LGBTQ2 communities.

To do this together, we certainly need more of us young MPs at the table. But numbers alone are not enough. Although we face many obstacles to be elected to parliament, we also face them once we are elected. As young MPs, we need to be empowered to lead this change. In Asunción, we worked on enhancing our leadership and communications skills as well as sharing mentorship experiences. At this Sixth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, we took the first step towards a new branch of IPU activities for national and global youth empowerment.

To continue this work, we call on the IPU to continue to provide practical skills-building for young parliamentarians at the international and national levels.

In the five years since the First Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in 2014, we have made tremendous strides in mobilizing parliamentary action to promote youth. It is time we take the next step together. It is fitting to make this call in Asunción, "the mother of cities". For it is here that we commit to giving birth to the next incarnation of our youth movement. No matter which country we are from, or what political party we belong to, we are in this together. We pledge to continue this youth movement in solidarity. If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

We are up to the challenge.