

Country: Fiji

IPU geopolitical group: Asia-Pacific Group

Parliament of Fiji

Focus area: The Fijian Parliament partnered with the Government to ensure a participatory process in the development of the national climate change commitments, fostering a wide range of participation from stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, civil society and youth organizations, private sector representatives and vulnerable communities.

Key highlights

- Broader SDG-related capacity development initiatives for members of parliament can pave the way for the formulation of specific laws and oversight measures at a target level.
- Systematic training of relevant parliamentary committee members on the SDG climate action targets and the national commitments under the Paris Agreement can enable a more focused review and assessment of the adequacy of proposed legislation on their implementation.
- Parliaments can ensure the engagement of indigenous peoples and communities particularly vulnerable to disasters caused by climate change in discussions on long-term climate strategies, the identification of legislative priorities and regarding mechanisms for monitoring and overseeing of progress in that area.

Summary

The Fijian Parliament does not see an immediate need to establish a dedicated committee, individual parliamentary group, or special network related to the implementation of the SDGs as Parliament is already wholly focused on mainstreaming the SDGs into the work of its six standing committees: (1) Social Affairs; (2) Natural Resources; (3) Justice, Law and Human Rights; (4) Foreign Affairs and Defence; (5) Economic Affairs; and (6) Public Accounts. Parliament shared the SDG responsibilities among the different committees taking into account their thematic areas of lawmaking and oversight functions. In 2019, Parliament prepared a guidance note entitled “Oversight of the Implementation of the SDGs” for the standing committees aimed at assisting members of parliament (MPs) in making the SDGs central to the work of Parliament and mainstreaming the SDGs more effectively in all areas of the committees’ work. The guidance note offers practical information to the committees when overseeing SDG implementation as they review legislation and oversee Government actions. Shortly after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Parliament of Fiji was among the first in the world to carry out a comprehensive self-assessment exercise on the SDGs to understand the level of existing knowledge and capacities to properly engage in the implementation of the goals and associated targets.

In parallel to mainstreaming the SDGs in parliamentary work, MPs have been specifically trained to address SDGs issues during their contributions at the plenary debates. For example, during a week-long budget debate, such training allowed MPs to raise questions on how proposed allocations and expenditures addressed the SDGs. The SDGs and the climate change commitments under the Paris Agreement have also been integrated in the Government’s 5-year and 20-year National Development

Plan (NDP). When reviewing proposed legislation and overseeing Government actions, MPs can assess if these initiatives meet the commitments in the NDP.

In addition, Parliament has two informal thematic based groups that support the achievement of two specific SDG targets: (1) the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Fiji Group focused on building the capacities of women parliamentarians to more effectively fulfil their roles; and (2) the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disability Fiji Network facilitating activities and programmes to champion and increase the representation of persons with disabilities in decision making. Parliament also established a systematic mechanism aimed at addressing SDG 5 through the adoption of Parliament's Standing Order 110(2) introducing a mandatory requirement for standing committees to undertake gender analyses.

Parliament has been particularly active in supporting the Government's budgetary and legislative efforts to address climate change which were further intensified following Fiji's Presidency of COP23. Changes were introduced to the taxation policies to ensure alignment with the Government's climate change commitments, and in particular Fiji's COP23 Environment Protection Initiatives. Some of these measures include:

- Plastic Bag Tax and progressive banning of single-use plastic bags.
- Environment and Climate Change Adaptation Levy tax to fund environmental protection and climate resilience programmes.
- Social Responsibility Tax, imposed on individuals with a chargeable income over FJ\$ 270,000; a percentage of the levy is directed to the Environment and Climate Change Adaptation Fund to increase the amount available for environmental protection and climate-related initiatives.
- Issuance of green bonds.
- Bio-fuel tax incentives.
- Higher customs tariffs on vehicles greater than 3,000 cc capacity, and lowering of tariffs on smaller, fuel-efficient vehicles.
- Tax incentives on electric vehicles and electric vehicles' charging stations.

Furthermore, specific legislation has been enacted and amended since the adoption of the Paris Agreement, including:

- Climate Change Act 2021.
- Climate Action Trust Fund Act 2017.
- Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund Act 2019.
- Amendments to the Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy Act 2015.
- Amendments to the Environment Management Act 2005.
- Amendments to the Customs Act 1986 and Customs Tariff Act 1986, and subsidiary legislation pertaining to customs tariffs.

The Climate Change Act 2021 institutionalizes Fiji's international obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement, and enables the implementation of Fiji's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The Act: provides a framework for coordinated action enabling Fiji to develop and implement coherent and long-term climate change measures and policies; establishes relevant institutional and governance structures; and sets up a

transparent system for monitoring, reporting and the verification of progress of the national climate targets.

Results and impact

During deliberations on the draft Climate Change Bill, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights undertook an in-depth review and issued a report on the Bill, including an impact analysis against the SDGs. After entry into force, this Committee, alongside other parliamentary committees, continued to make assessments and oversee the actions of relevant Government ministries and agencies responsible for the implementation of the Climate Change Act and related legislation. This work often involves overseeing the annual and audit reports of relevant ministries and statutory bodies by committee members.

The Government had organized public hearings and consultations with various stakeholders during the drafting process of the Bill, and had facilitated the provision of inputs by civil society organizations (CSOs) and affected communities. The Act incorporates in its provisions the requirement for public consultations with different sectors of society. For example, in Part 6 – “Development and evaluation of the National Climate Change Policy” (NCCP), it is stipulated that, when developing the NCCP, the Minister responsible for climate change, with the assistance of the National Climate Change Coordination Committee, shall: “conduct public consultations in a manner that encourages the participation of a diverse range of stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society organisations, youth organisations or representatives, and vulnerable and at-risk groups and communities.” Indeed, active participation is provided in most sections of the Act in regard to the development of policies and other actions that may impact stakeholders.

The Act also includes measures for appropriate financing by coordinating the efforts between “donors, climate funds, and sector recipients of climate finance to help support a collaborative approach to proposal design, funding alignment with priorities, and efficient implementation arrangements.” This complements Parliament’s regular progress reviews towards the national climate change commitments. Even though, the Act has only recently been adopted, it is envisaged to play an important role in reducing pollution, improving resource efficiency, increasing investments in sustainable technologies and green infrastructure projects, and generating co-benefits such as reducing inequalities and improving human health.

Prior to the adoption of the Climate Change Act, MPs were actively engaged in awareness raising and capacity development initiatives on the SDGs, including climate change issues. For example: a parliamentary delegation attended COP23 in Bonn; MPs attended international and national conferences on environmental and climate change matters; and MPs partnered with government agencies and various national stakeholders such as CSOs, local communities and the business sector to inform the preparation of the subsequent national climate change legal framework. All this enabled MPs to formulate specific questions and voice their concerns in regard to climate change laws and policies, which placed Fiji at the forefront of climate change action for small island countries in the Pacific region.

Challenges

One of the main challenges Parliament faces is ensuring that MPs are continuously empowered through capacity-building, awareness raising and information campaigns that favour the environment and the achievement of the SDGs. A good level of competency would allow MPs' effective participation and inputs into the formulation of climate change actions, and conduct of oversight inquiries. Enhancing MPs' expertise on a regular basis will strengthen Parliament's monitoring mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the climate change provisions in Fiji.

Sources and links

- Oversight of the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: Guidance Note for the Standing Committees of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji: <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/GuidanceNote-FijiParliamentStandingCommittees.pdf>
- The Parliament of Fiji and the Sustainable Development Goals (self-assessment): https://www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SDGs-Self-Assessment-Report-Draft_FINAL.pdf
- Climate Change Act 2021: <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Act-No.-43-Climate-Change.pdf>
- 5-year and 20-year National Development Plan - Transforming Fiji: <https://www.fiji.gov.fj/getattachment/15b0ba03-825e-47f7-bf69-094ad33004dd/5-Year-20-Year-NATIONAL-DEVELOPMENT-PLAN.aspx>
- Report on the Review of the Climate Change Bill 2021 (Bill No. 31 of 2021) by the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights: <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SC-JLHR-Report-on-the-Review-of-the-Climate-Change-Bill-2021.pdf>

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