

Second Regional Seminar for African Parliaments on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Djibouti, 5–7 December 2022

SUMMARY REPORT

Over 50 participants from 10 countries of the African region gathered in Djibouti, from 5 to 7 December 2022, for the Second Regional Seminar on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The welcoming remarks were delivered by Mr. Mohamed Ali Houmed, President of the National Assembly of Djibouti, and Mr. Duarte Pacheco, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Jointly organized by the IPU and the National Assembly of Djibouti, the seminar was the second of its kind. It built on the conclusions of the [previous seminar hosted by the Parliament of Uganda in 2017](#), as well as the IPU's [virtual SDG event](#) organized for the region in 2020.

The seminar provided parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with the opportunity to take stock of what has been done so far and to reflect on concrete ways in which they can help to solve structural challenges and boost inclusive and sustainable development for all (see the [programme](#) appended to this summary report). Participants heard insightful contributions from experts from the IPU, the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), as well as from academics and parliamentarians from various countries. Together, they outlined actions and recommendations to advance implementation of the SDGs in Africa.

The National Assembly of Djibouti arranged an interesting field visit to raise participants' awareness of environmental issues affecting the region and to highlight the country's efforts to examine and address climate change. Participants visited Lake Assal, which is the lowest point on land in Africa, and the Regional Research Observatory on the Environment and Climate (RROEC), which gathers key data to inform climate adaptation and resilience policymaking for Djibouti and, potentially, for the entire East Africa region.



Regional Research Observatory on the Environment and Climate (RROEC), Djibouti



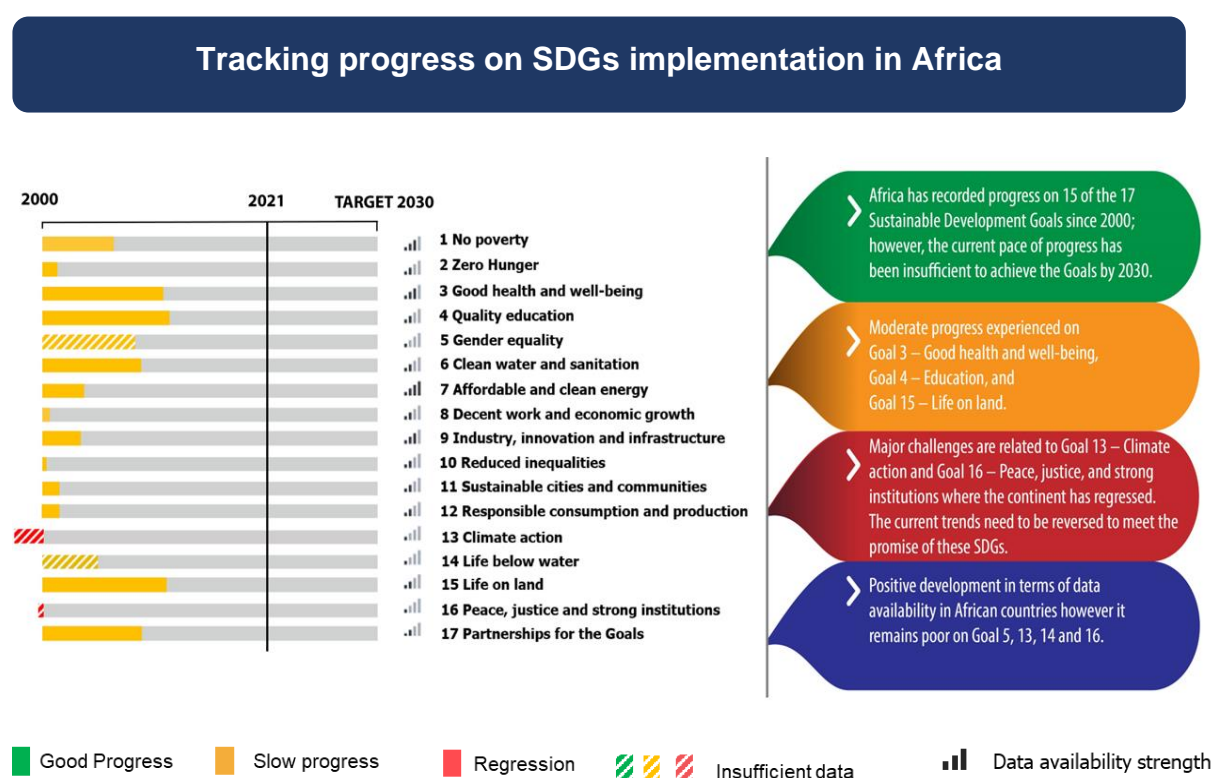
Lake Assal, Djibouti

Below is a summary of the key points and recommendations discussed during the event.

Setting the scene

Data from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) show that African countries have advanced on 15 of the 17 SDGs since 2000. However, the current pace of progress is insufficient and it will not be possible to achieve all of the Goals in Africa by 2030 without urgent and intense efforts.

The table below summarizes the current status of SDG implementation in Africa (source: slide show presented by ECA experts during the seminar, 5 December 2022):



Parliaments have a crucial role to play in enabling effective progress towards the SDGs and in addressing the root causes of existing challenges. An IPU study, conducted in 2021–2022, examined the work being done by parliaments in 70 countries to contribute to this process. At least half of the institutions included in the study have adopted appropriate tools or mechanisms to mainstream the SDGs into their parliamentary functions. Many parliaments have established dedicated structures to coordinate work on the Goals, such as SDG-focused joint parliamentary committees (in bicameral legislatures), multi-stakeholder working groups, special committees, forums and parliamentary caucuses. Others have updated the mandate of existing standing committees to include responsibility for monitoring SDG implementation.

Common challenges reported by parliaments include gaps in SDG-related technical capacities and expertise, problems adopting an approach that takes account of SDG interlinkages, a shortage of resources (financial, human and technological) to support SDG implementation, difficulties in employing innovative new tools and methods to accelerate progress towards the SDGs and, last but not least, issues with accessing data and statistics from reliable sources to monitor national SDG implementation. The experts and participants discussed the following proposals as ways to ensure that parliaments can play a decisive role in fostering sustainable development, nationally and regionally:

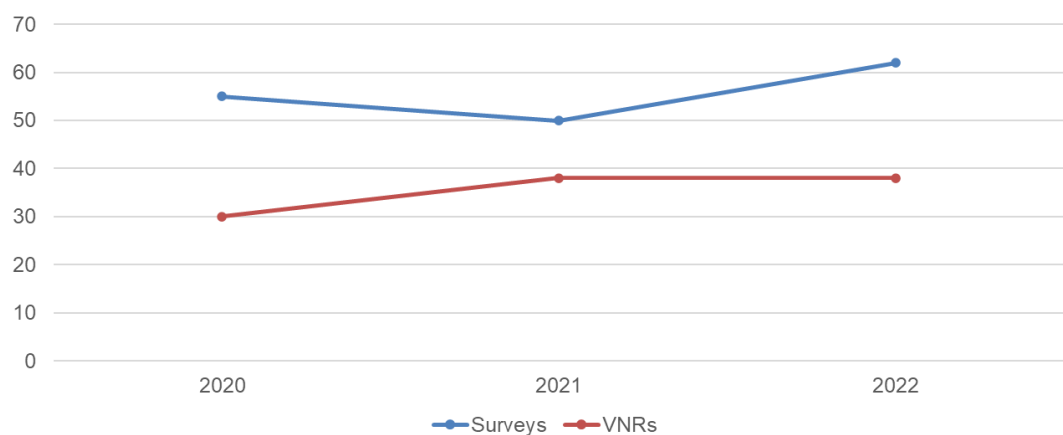
- Mainstreaming the SDGs into key parliamentary functions (legislation, budgeting,

oversight and representation) to ensure full and effective national implementation of the Goals.

- Advocating for building the financial and other capacities of national statistical offices, so they are able to collect, analyse and share data and statistics on SDG implementation.
- Strengthening collaboration and dialogue between parliaments, national statistical offices/independent oversight bodies, civil society (including universities), non-governmental organizations and citizens in order to better understand the situation on the ground and to determine whether national development plans are delivering the expected improvements to the lives of all and the environment in general.
- Urging the government to allow full parliamentary participation in the [voluntary national review \(VNR\)](#) process, through which countries assess and present national progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including achieving its 17 SDGs and the pledge to leave no one behind. There is broad scope for parliaments to contribute more effectively to this process, by enlisting more input from across the institution, by proactively contributing to the VNR report prepared by the executive and by engaging in closer dialogue with constituents.
- Monitoring the work of the government, including through the VNR process, and ensuring that development plans, policies and the national budget are fully aligned with the SDGs and implemented consistently and effectively. According to IPU data, participation by parliamentarians in the VNR process has almost doubled since 2016 – indicating greater recognition of the importance of parliamentary participation to the success of the process – but remains low. Parliaments should and must play an active and constructive role in this process.

Parliamentary input since 2020

(Source: slide show presented by the IPU expert during the seminar, 5 December 2022)



- Collecting and/or advocating for the collection of disaggregated data in order to better understand the specific issues that may affect certain subgroups (such as gender and age groups, urban and rural communities, persons from particular socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, and speakers of different languages). As well as helping to identify vulnerable and marginalized groups, disaggregated data can also be useful for determining the scale of a problem and adapting the response to ensure that no one is left behind in the national development process.
- Identifying especially vulnerable and/or marginalized groups and advocating for strategies and action plans that adequately address their needs, rights and distinctive characteristics.
- Adopting national budgets that address the needs of all, ensuring that the government is accountable for how the resources are spent and determining whether or not they are in line with national and international commitments.

Promoting stability and democratic governance for development – The role of parliaments

This session explored the IPU's work on conflict and instability, which remain a great threat to sustainable development. According to United Nations data, the situation of peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) has deteriorated since 2000 and represents the biggest challenge in Africa. Parliaments have a crucial role to play in addressing these challenges and, in doing so, helping to secure stability, peace and sustainable development for all. It is essential to establish democratic political systems and participatory decision-making processes at all levels, and to communicate widely, to listen and to engage with citizens on SDG-related issues. There are several avenues that parliaments can follow in order to foster stability and democratic governance. These include:

- Fully exercising oversight powers and promoting transparency and political accountability.
- [Assessing the effectiveness, accountability, transparency, inclusivity and decision-making representativeness of national democratic institutions](#) through [the IPU's indicators for democratic parliaments](#).
- Advocating for the implementation or strengthening of participatory governance mechanisms and inclusive, gender-sensitive institutions that give due consideration to the material, social, cultural and political difficulties that some population groups face in communicating their specific needs and priorities to institutions. The [third Global Parliamentary Report](#), published by the IPU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), contains information and recommendations to help parliaments become more participatory, inclusive and responsive institutions fit for the modern age.
- Promoting democratic values, respect for free and fair elections, the participation of women and men in institutions, and respect for freedom of expression and equal opportunities for all parliamentarians, including those representing opposition parties.
- Encouraging budgetary allocations for the creation of mechanisms for democratic accountability.
- Promoting public engagement in the political process as a whole, not solely during elections, and strengthening ties between parliamentarians and the public, so that parliamentarians fully play their role in conveying information between citizens and the government and help to shape policies that directly address the concerns expressed by the people they represent.

Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for inclusive sustainable development

This session reviewed the progress made towards SDG 5 ("Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"), examined priority actions on this front, and looked at the latest efforts of the parliamentary community in addressing gender equality and promoting gender-sensitive parliaments. The [10 actions](#) agreed upon by MPs from around the world at the 145th Assembly of the IPU in Kigali to make many more parliaments gender-sensitive over the next 10 years were described.

Parliamentarians were invited to accelerate progress towards gender equality, including by addressing gender-based discrimination and violence, being gender-sensitive institutions, ensuring that gender mainstreaming and budgeting guide parliament's work and engaging men MPs to act as allies for gender equality.

Parliamentary efforts to achieve SDG 5 that were identified include:

- Removing barriers to women's participation and monitoring the government's work on this front.
- Assessing the level of gender sensitivity of parliaments periodically to ensure progress towards SDG 5.

- Enacting laws that prioritize the participation in politics of underrepresented groups such as young women, indigenous women and women with disabilities.
- Representing the interests of women and girls in the work of parliaments.
- Ensuring that all SDG legislative provisions include a gender perspective and review legislation with a view to:
 - eliminating any provisions that discriminate against women, and
 - ensuring respect for women's economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights.
- Prioritizing budget allocations on women's empowerment activities and ensuring that programmes and activities targeting the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in other SDG-related programmes are developed and well-resourced.

Climate change – An existential threat

Africa accounts for less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions but suffers disproportionately from climate change. Natural hazards, disrupted livelihoods and climate-induced migration are increasingly threatening African countries and their populations, with significant social and economic implications, including at the cultural level. Refugees and displaced persons are on the frontlines of the climate emergency, which is leaving many population groups facing worsening poverty and forced displacement. The complexity of this situation can present significant challenges in terms of the humanitarian response, as well as undermining peace and stability. The session focused on the particular situation of refugees and on the challenges facing certain African countries, which are especially vulnerable to climate change and yet have the least resources to cope. Participants discussed the measures that parliaments should take to address climate change, reduce emissions and support adaptation, including strengthening climate legislation and protecting affected population groups.

The session reviewed lessons learned from the IPU's learning journey on SDG-compliant legislation, which is designed to help parliamentarians mainstream the SDGs into the law-making process – including climate legislation – in order to shape a comprehensive and coherent legal framework. The impacts of climate change on Small Island Developing States were also discussed. In 2023, the IPU will launch a campaign to mobilize parliaments to act on the climate emergency.

Recommendations on how to advance climate action to meet the goals of international climate agreements included:

- Mainstreaming climate considerations and targets into national development plans and ensuring that they are aligned with countries' international commitments under the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Holding governments accountable – through question time sessions, written questions, public hearings and other avenues – for progress towards their climate targets.
- Strengthening protections for refugees and other displaced persons against the threats posed by natural hazards and climate change.
- Encouraging discussions on the situation of refugees and other displaced persons, and ensuring that their needs and rights are duly considered.
- Advocating for and reviewing the alignment of climate legislation with other SDGs, and ensuring that these laws are drafted in a way that fosters comprehensive, coherent sustainable development without unintentionally causing adverse consequences in other areas and/or for particular population groups.
- Prioritizing laws that require public investments in low-carbon activities, clean energy, and clean technology research and development, and eliminating fossil fuel subsidies.
- Approving appropriate budgets to fund and incentivize long-term public disaster risk reduction initiatives and climate-resilient infrastructure.
- Ensuring that the interests and concerns of population groups who may be more vulnerable to climate shocks – such as women, children, persons with disabilities, minorities, migrants, and rural and indigenous communities – are addressed in the legislative processes for both adaptation and mitigation, and that social protection and livelihood support are provided, including for displaced persons.

Advancing sustainable development through human rights

This session explored how, by promoting human rights, parliamentarians are also working to achieve the SDGs, and vice versa. The 2030 Agenda is firmly grounded in international human rights standards and in the principles of equality and non-discrimination. For instance, SDG 1 (“End poverty in all its forms everywhere”) is closely related to the right to an adequate standard of living as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The IPU and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) will shortly publish *Parliaments and human rights: A self-assessment toolkit*, which will guide parliaments in identifying interlinkages between human rights and the SDGs.

By adopting the SDGs, all countries have pledged to implement these principles and to ensure that no one is left behind, especially the most vulnerable. The session provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the tools parliaments can use to measure their performance on human rights and the SDGs, including through the universal periodic review (UPR), the mechanism by which States examine the measures they have taken to improve the human rights situation on the ground and to remove barriers to the realization of these rights.

Proposed measures to strengthen parliamentary action on this topic include:

- Ensuring that the rights of all persons, especially those belonging to vulnerable and/or marginalized groups, are respected and protected.
- Calling for the establishment or strengthening of independent mechanisms and instruments to monitor the implementation of national human rights and sustainable development obligations in a comprehensive, cross-cutting manner.
- Deepening collaboration and cooperation between parliament and national human rights and sustainable development institutions.
- Participating in the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council and of other human rights-focused mechanisms and procedures (including the UPR process), and joining national delegations in an observer capacity, in order to monitor the government’s international actions.
- Establishing a dedicated human rights committee or building the capacities of an existing human rights committee so it can effectively support SDG implementation through its work.
- Holding regular human rights-focused debates and discussions with civil society and other stakeholders.
- Raising awareness about the importance of using indicators, including parliamentary self-assessment indicators, to assess the human rights context in the country.

Strengthening the role of parliaments in health emergency preparedness

This session addressed how parliaments can strengthen engagement in health security. The joint IPU and World Health Organization (WHO) guide [*Strengthening health security preparedness: The International Health Regulations \(2005\)*](#) was presented. Participants also heard that WHO and the IPU stand ready to provide technical assistance in this area to parliaments that require it.

COVID-19 was not the first pandemic or health emergency to make headline news: the Ebola virus disease, Zika virus disease and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreaks, among others, were also widely covered. Nor, regrettably, will it be the last such emergency the global community faces. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the importance of an appropriate parliamentary response to health emergencies into sharper focus than ever.

Practical measures discussed during the session for strengthening health security preparedness include:

- Advocating for the implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005, an instrument of international law that frames the public health response to pandemic and public health risks.
- Enacting laws in all relevant sectors to ensure that the IHR and other relevant public health measures are implemented and enforced in practice.
- Increasing emergency preparedness and national capacities to detect and respond to

health emergencies, including health systems governance, multisectoral coordination, risk management and protection of human rights.

- Allocating appropriate budgets for the implementation of health emergency plans and related legal frameworks, striking a balance between the need for timely action and the need for proper parliamentary oversight.
- Approving budgets and allocations that guarantee access to quality health services, food and drinking water in health emergencies, in rural areas and among nomadic populations.
- Strengthening channels of communication and location systems for nomadic populations and sedentary populations in rural areas.
- Examining how previous health emergencies were handled and incorporating lessons learned into emergency preparedness strategies.
- Leading by example during emergencies and maximizing opportunities to engage communities and identify needs and concerns, especially those of vulnerable and marginalized groups requiring specific support.
- Advocating for including health security in regional agendas and enhancing regional cooperation.

Strengthening parliaments and parliamentarians' role in SDG financing and monitoring

This session addressed the importance of allocating proper funding for SDG implementation and monitoring. Aside from their duty to incorporate the SDGs into legislation and to monitor their implementation, parliamentarians are also responsible for adopting national budgets, making sure that they address the needs of men, women and the most vulnerable members of society, and ensuring that governments are held accountable for how resources are spent and for their alignment with national and international commitments.

The IPU's [Guidelines for parliamentarians on budgeting for the SDGs](#), which are designed to support parliaments in this work, were presented. The experts and participants set out the following recommendations to strengthen parliamentary action on this topic:

- Advocating for full and coherent mainstreaming of the SDGs into national budgets and parliamentary budget processes. Ensuring that national development plans are SDG-compliant and, where this is not the case, advocating for mainstreaming of the SDGs, including into legislation and the national budget, in a comprehensive and cross-cutting manner.
- Promoting tax policy frameworks that support sustainable, fair and inclusive development, and ensuring that the revenue streams are reinvested in SDG implementation for all, leaving no one behind.
- Using the SDGs as a monitoring tool by expanding budgetary discussions to include SDG-related outcomes and performance.
- Exercising oversight powers over economic recovery and national development plans to ensure that funds are not diverted from SDG implementation.
- Prioritizing the allocation of funds for SDG implementation in national budgets.

To advance engagement with the SDGs, parliamentarians and parliamentary staff are encouraged to bring this summary report to the attention of their colleagues, as a way to strengthen discussion, action and coordination.

The conclusions and recommendations will also be shared with parliamentarians from all over the world at the 146th Assembly of the IPU in Manama, Bahrain.

In keeping with its 2022–2026 Strategy, the IPU stands ready to support parliaments, in conjunction with its partners, by providing technical capacity-building to help mainstream the SDGs into key parliamentary functions (legislation, budgeting, oversight and representation), and by fostering collective parliamentary action and dialogue to achieve sustainable development for all.