

Parliamentary Forum at the 2023 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development

***The mid-point toward the SDGs: Taking stock of parliamentary action***

18 July 2023

Conference Room 2, United Nations, New York

**Summary report**

**Introduction**

1. The Parliamentary Forum at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) under the title ***The mid-point toward the SDGs: Taking stock of parliamentary action***.
2. The event included three panel discussions on parliaments' work to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with one discussion dedicated to SDG6 on clean water and sanitation. The final panel discussed how to move beyond using the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a primary measurement of progress. About 90 parliamentarians from 35 countries were in attendance.

**Opening session**

3. **Mr. Duarte Pacheco**, President of the IPU, welcomed the participants and said the world is at the mid-point of the SDGs, which were adopted in 2015 and expire in 2030. He echoed the comments previously made by the UN Secretary-General that the 17 SDGs are on life support, with only 12% of 169 targets in sight, and others stagnant or regressing. Parliamentarians have a critical role to play in promoting the SDGs and creating conditions for peace, respect for nature and well-being for everyone. Political will underlies everything and depends in large measure on the inclusion of more women, young people and minorities in decision-making. Unfettered economic growth that drives climate change is unsustainable; the needs of people and nature must be put ahead of profits.

**Parliaments and the SDGs: The institutional challenge**

4. While the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and other global crises have stalled progress on the SDGs, political will remains the biggest obstacle. Panelists stressed the need for more oversight and accountability, and the importance of having proper structures in place, such as parliamentary committees and caucuses dedicated to the SDGs.
5. **Recommendations for parliamentarians for tackling SDG implementation challenges:**
  - a. **Recognize that the SDGs are a domestic task.** While they are often placed under the auspices of foreign affairs departments, the SDGs must be streamlined across all departments, and implemented at municipal, regional and national levels.
  - b. **Create an extensive public participation process** to ensure the public is engaged.

- i. Indonesia has an online tool that allows the public to give feedback on SDG progress.
- ii. Romania has an online platform that includes 50 barometers for measuring the public's perception about the SDGs.
- c. **Use storytelling and narratives** to help people understand the importance of the SDGs.
- d. **Engage a wide range of stakeholders.** In addition to working across parliamentary and government structures, involve partners from civil society, NGOs, academia, the media and the private sector, for an all-of-society approach.
  - i. Romania has created a new occupational standard – sustainable development expert – which allows higher education institutions to create more classes on the topic and helps train individuals to serve as agents of change in their institutions.
- e. **Leave no one behind.** Proactively engage women, youth, minorities and other marginalized and vulnerable groups in decision-making from the start.
  - i. Jordan and Senegal are among the countries that have improved representation of women in parliament through parity and quota policies.
- f. **Participate in voluntary national reviews (VNRs)** and other progress reports to assess SDG progress, and facilitate knowledge-sharing between parliaments and countries.
  - i. Every municipality in Germany with more than 5,000 residents collects and publishes data on SDG progress.
- g. **Align the SDGs with national development plans and budgets.**
- h. **Commit to feminist policies.** Countries that put girls and women at the centre advance the SDGs, strengthen democracy and improve human rights. This is also critical for breaking deadlocked and outdated systems and structures.
- i. **Promote the SDGs** to help popularize them and educate constituents about their importance. As a member of parliament, you serve as a role model and thought leader.
- j. **Focus on oversight and accountability.**
  - i. Strengthen overall parliamentary capacity, which includes capacity-building for institutions and individual parliamentarians, staff members and advisors.
  - ii. Assign responsibility for the SDGs within parliaments. Be clear about which government entities are responsible for planning, implementation and oversight.
  - iii. Begin oversight early, starting with the planning stages.
  - iv. Treat oversight of the SDGs as part of a comprehensive ecosystem of accountability. The UN and other international institutions can become strategic partners.
  - v. Monitor the flow of money to ensure transparency, avoid waste of public resources and evaluate outcomes.
  - vi. Use existing data, tools and resources, such as the [IPU and UNDP's self-assessment toolkit on the SDGs](#).

## **SDG6: An illustration of parliamentary action**

- 6. SDG6, which focuses on water, hygiene and sanitation, is critical for the realization of all the SDGs, and is under review at this year's HLPF. The IPU dedicated its annual hearing in February 2023 to SDG6, which was followed by the UN Water Conference in March 2023. Participants discussed the urgent need to meet water-related goals, particularly in light of growing challenges posed by climate change. Representatives of Jordan and Chad said that the large influx of refugees had made water issues even more critical. Several representatives

from developing countries discussed the need for more international assistance in order to meet targets.

## 7. Recommendations to parliamentarians for advancing SDG6:

- a. **Engage in multilateralism.** Transboundary waters account for 60% of the world's freshwater flows; 153 countries have territory within at least 1 of the 286 transboundary river and lake basins and 592 transboundary aquifer systems.
- b. **Hold your government accountable** to ensure it delivers on its commitments. Exercise your parliamentary powers to ensure targets are met and budgets are properly funded.
- c. **Focus on messaging that is filled with hope, hopefulness and helpfulness.** Instead of painting the SDGs as negative and burdensome, show how they can improve people's lives, the environment and the planet.
- d. **Know that you can make a difference as an individual member of parliament.** Change often happens at the local level and can begin with one person and one bill.
- e. **Turn to local wisdom and traditions,** which can help with nature-based solutions and sound water management practices.
- f. **Embrace a whole-of society approach** to strengthen ownership and participation among all stakeholders.
- g. **Focus on women and girls,** who are disproportionality affected by inadequate water supplies. Efforts are underway to create water caucuses that would mainly be composed of women.
- h. **Engage youth.** Youth-led movements have led to positive change, but young people must be included from the start and not taken for granted.
- i. **Ensure you have proper structures and entities** working on water issues.
  - i. In Chad, parliamentarians pressured the government to set up a ministry that focuses on water.
  - ii. Canada recently announced the establishment of the Canada Water Agency.
- j. **Follow the recommendations and best practices that came out of the IPU's annual hearing** in February 2023 (Found here under "Final Report": <https://www.ipu.org/event/2023-annual-parliamentary-hearing-united-nations#event-sub-page-documents/>).

## Beyond GDP: Measuring and valuing what matters to people and the planet

8. The growth-based economic model that drives most policymaking has created unfettered exploitation of nature's limited resources, putting people, animals and the planet at grave risk. Inequality remains a core issue, as the most affluent societies account for only 25% of the population, but consume about 80% of the world's resources. Those who are least responsible for climate change bear the greatest loss and damage, but are often unable to invest in adaptation strategies. Developed countries must drastically reduce their consumption rates and carbon emissions, and assist developing countries in the climate emergency fight.
9. There is a need to rethink how to measure progress beyond the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which does not account for the well-being of individuals, the environment or the

planet. In fact, GDP can be misleading and counter-productive for sustainable development in that it considers all expenditures and investments as positives, even when they lead to negative outcomes. A good illustration of this paradox is given by fossil fuel companies, whose investments in oil and gas exploration drive up GDP while contributing to deadly heat waves, whose health and environmental costs are passed on to the State.

10. If countries only focus on economic output, people are more likely to invest their time and energy on that, often to the detriment of values such as health, education, equity, justice and the environment. Political commitment and a paradigm shift are needed to develop a conceptual framework that values factors that actually matter, such as human connection, care work, biodiversity and a healthy environment. The new measurement system must be rooted in justice, equity and fairness, and put people and the planet above profits. It must account for sectors such as unpaid care work, which disproportionately falls to women.
11. The SDGs use evidence-based metrics. Target 19 of SDG17 calls on governments to consider alternative measures of progress. The UN has been working on developing measurements beyond GDP metrics that meet criteria such as being country-owned and universally applicable, convey clear and strong messages, and are intuitive and dynamic. The UN published a policy brief on the topic, [Valuing What Counts: Framework to Progress Beyond Gross Domestic Product](#). Next steps include convening an independent expert group to develop a dashboard with 10-20 indicators, and strengthening countries' capacity to collect data.
12. **Recommendations for parliamentarians for moving beyond GDP:**
  - a. Help build **political will and create a paradigm shift** about the need to measure what actually matters.
  - b. **Prioritize the well-being of citizens and the sustainability** of the planet in all legislation and other parliamentary processes.
  - c. When establishing new indicators, make sure **the process is inclusive and rooted in fairness, justice and equality**.
  - d. **Include the public in the budget process, and ensure any indicators used are clear and easy-to-understand.**
    - i. Canada introduced several new indicators in its budget process; an indicator on whether greenhouse emissions went up or down served as a proxy for the health of the atmosphere.

## Closing session

13. **Mr. Martin Chungong**, Secretary General of the IPU, said progress on the SDGs is happening in many countries, but there is an urgent need for more action. In addition to having the right parliamentary structures in place – such as committees and caucuses – oversight is a key to success, and requires strengthening of parliaments' capacity. A holistic approach is needed to advance the SDGs, and every country must be aware that its actions can impact other countries and the planet as a whole. Mr. Chungong encouraged parliamentarians to ensure their government is participating in Voluntary National Reviews.

The IPU's new campaign, [Parliaments for the Planet](#), aims to mobilize parliaments and parliamentarians to urgently act against climate change. Parliamentarians should ensure their ministers are involved in the SDG Summit, to be held in September 2023, and that their views are represented at other major UN meetings, including the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

## **Appendix**

### **List of Speakers**

#### **Opening Session**

Mr. Duarte Pacheco, President of the IPU

#### **Session 1: Parliaments and the SDGs: The institutional challenge**

Ms. Susanne Menge, Member of Parliament, Bundestag, Germany

Mr. Emanuele Speranza, Regional Advisor for Inclusive Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNDP

Moderator: Ms. Paddy Torsney, Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations

#### **Session 2: SDG 6: An Illustration of parliamentary action**

Mr. David McGuinty, Member of Parliament, House of Commons, Canada

#### **Session 3: Beyond GDP: Measuring and valuing what matters to people and the planet**

Mr. Petros Kokkalis, Member of the European Parliament, Greece

Ms. Chantal Line Carpentier, Head, Trade, Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development, UNCTAD

Moderator: Mr. Alessandro Motter, Special Advisor, Economic and Social Affairs, IPU

#### **Closing session**

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU