



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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## IPU's input to the 2019 HLPF: Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality

Parliaments play a key role in eradicating poverty and advancing sustainable development according to the vision of the 2030 Agenda and attendant SDGs. Members of parliament can ensure that sustainable development plans are commensurate to the global goals and adequately financed, are informed by citizens' priorities, and address the particular needs of the poor and vulnerable groups. Most important, parliaments can ensure national ownership of development policies and programs as well as demand accountability for results.

This approach is reflected in the 2017-2021 IPU Strategy. Objective 7 of the Strategy - to build parliamentary support for international development goals - focuses on ensuring that parliaments have the capacity and awareness to take effective action on the SDGs and mainstream them in their work.

As an organization devoted to building democracy, the IPU is particularly invested in SDG 16 because of its focus on building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. Working through its 178 member parliaments, the IPU is putting emphasis on strengthening their representative, legislative and accountability role. Evidence thus far suggests that while many parliaments are retooling for the SDGs, bringing to bear the voices of the people and ensuring that policies leave no one behind, many more face challenges in carrying out their representative, legislative and oversight role in this area.

### **Promoting inclusive and representative parliaments and decision-making processes: leading IPU initiatives**

Parliamentary surveys: In 2018, the IPU carried out a first ever global survey to assess parliaments' engagement with the SDGs. Eighty-nine national parliaments responded. The survey was designed to map out parliamentary *activities* on the SDGs as well as *mechanisms* to institutionalize the SDGs in the work of parliaments. The results show that parliaments engage with the SDGs in a variety of ways and to varying degrees. For most questions, the results were almost equally split. For example, 50% of respondents stated they had held plenary debates in parliament about the SDGs. In contrast, 49% of respondents had no such debates, suggesting very weak institutional engagement in the SDGs. Monitoring the activities of parliaments is important because it highlights areas where improvements to the parliamentary process can be made.

The IPU also promotes parliamentary engagement in the national voluntary reviews to ensure parliaments get to input into the process and get to review the final national report before it is presented to the HLPF. Through an annual survey of the parliaments of the countries presenting reports, the IPU tracks the extent to which parliaments are engaged in the process. The results from the first three years of the VNRs show that few parliaments are able to make a robust contribution to the process, suggesting low capacities to oversee the implementation of the SDGs. In 2018, 31% of respondents stated their parliament was involved in some way or another with the VNR but no more than half of that number can be said to have been involved in a significant way.

IPU-UNDP self-assessment toolkit: In order to assist parliaments in engaging with the SDGs and contributing to their implementation, the IPU partnered with UNDP to publish a [self-assessment toolkit](#). The self-assessment is designed to enable parliaments to identify good practices, gaps, opportunities and lessons learned to effectively institutionalize the SDGs and mainstream the various goals in the legislative process. The toolkit enables the IPU to actively support parliaments in assessing their capacity to work on the SDGs and taking steps to improve their performance and institutional arrangements in this regard. Its use in parliaments was coupled with an information seminar in order to increase awareness and understanding of MPs and staff about the SDGs and their relevance to their country.

The SDG Self-Assessment Toolkit proved to be extremely useful for parliaments wishing to take stock of their situation and identify concrete strategies to advance the integration of the SDGs into their work. As an example, the Parliament of Fiji decided to include the SDGs in induction courses for new MPs and make it mandatory for the committees to conduct systematic SDGs assessment of draft bills. In Serbia, MPs committed to intensifying outreach to young people and marginalized groups and to holding a public hearing on the draft voluntary national review to the 2019 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. These developments will have an important impact on SDG implementation and on ensuring that no one is left behind.

National and regional parliamentary seminars: Since the inception of the SDGs the IPU saw the need for sharing experience and knowledge among parliaments at a regional level. It therefore designed a series of regional seminars on the SDGs that helped facilitate faster learning for parliaments by exposing them to the positive and negative experiences of their peers. The regional seminars have been organized on several occasions in all regions – Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. In this way the IPU has been able to reach to more than 100 parliaments and mobilize more than 1,000 parliamentarians around the SDGs.

Model parliamentary resolution on the SDGs: At the global level, the IPU developed a model parliamentary resolution on the SDGs as a means to help parliaments take the first step in engaging with the SDGs. The resolution outlines the key steps that parliaments need to undertake to strengthen ownership and accountability for the SDGs, such as the need for a national plan for the SDGs in consultation with the parliament, a regular government report to parliament on the implementation of the plan and others. The parliaments of Chile, Japan, Mali, Romania, Chad, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and Zambia adopted their own resolutions building on the IPU model.

Promoting the inclusion of youth in parliaments: The IPU's contribution to making parliaments more representative, empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality, includes promoting youth in politics. The IPU has acts as a *global observatory* of youth participation in national parliaments. Based on survey responses from over 200 parliamentary chambers from 150 countries, the IPU has amassed a wealth of data which is compiled and presented in a biennial report on Youth Participation in National Parliaments ([the most recent edition was published in December 2018](#)).

IPU's research shows that young men and women are disproportionately under-represented in national parliaments, with young people under 30 years of age comprising only approximately 2% of world MPs. Based on this research as well as discussions with young MPs themselves through the IPU's Forum of Young Parliamentarians (which meets twice a year), and yearly Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, key recommendations to address this include: (i) promoting measures to increase youth representation in parliaments (such as youth quotas); (ii)

lowering the age of eligibility to run for office; and (iii) increasing engagement with youth organizations and the public so that youth views can be integrated more systematically in parliamentary processes.

Promoting the inclusion of women in parliaments: Making parliaments more representative and inclusive, as per SDG 16, requires that more women are able to enter office. This is also consistent with one of the targets of SDG 5 that calls for women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. To help track the involvement of women in politics, the IPU, in partnership with UN Women, publishes a biennial 'Women in Politics' map. The most recent edition was published in [March 2019](#). It showed that as of 1 January 2019, the world average of women in parliament was 24.3%. This is a 2% increase since 2015, when the global average was 22.3%. Whilst it is positive that the rate of participation of women is growing, this growth must be accelerated to meet the targets of SDG 5.

Data for SDG indicators: The IPU is the custodian for two SDG indicators - 5.5.1 "Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments" and 16.7.1(a) "Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in national legislatures compared to national distributions". Data is collected from national parliaments and made publicly available through the IPU's New Parline open-data platform.

Supporting parliamentary action on climate change: With their core legislative, oversight, budgetary and representation functions, parliaments are key to ensuring the implementation of the climate change commitments contained in the Paris Agreement and SDG 13, and to transforming societies to meet the challenges ahead. In cooperation with UN Environment, in 2019 the IPU launched a project to build the capacity of parliamentarians to help accelerate implementation of these commitments. Four parliaments were selected to benefit from this support in 2019 with the first activity taking place in the Parliament of Zimbabwe in March 2019.

Making parliaments more effective, accountable and transparent: Strong, democratic parliaments are at the core of the IPU's strategic goals. The IPU's historical mission – to support parliaments in becoming ever more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective – corresponds very closely to the objectives of SDG targets 16.6 and 16.7. The IPU's ongoing work to develop standards and guidelines for democratic parliaments, and to work with parliaments to build capacity through technical cooperation activities, contributes directly to the achievement of these targets.

The new Centre for Innovation in Parliament provides a framework for parliaments to share good practices in using digital tools to support the modernization of the institution. Regional hubs for Latin America, the Caribbean, Southern Africa, Eastern Africa, and thematic hubs on IT Governance and Open Data have been established by parliaments and represent a new form of inter-parliamentary cooperation.

### **Challenges, lessons learned, way forward**

In a general sense, parliaments are much more aware of the SDGs than they were of the MDGs. The IPU observed growing political interest in the SDGs but not enough will or capacities to translate that interest into concerted action to carry forward the SDGs as an integrated framework.

Parliaments find regional cooperation around the SDGs welcome and necessary. Through the regional seminars organized with parliaments, the IPU observed a lot of political will to establish dialogue, to set aside tensions that can exist between countries, and to use the SDGs as a platform for cooperation. Countries see the SDGs as an opportunity to foster inter-parliamentary dialogue and cooperation on concrete issues ranging from the economy, health to resource management.

On the negative side, parliamentary ownership of the SDGs remains a challenge. At the governmental level, many countries are revising their national development plans or producing specific SDG plans. Yet parliaments seem to be only weakly associated with these processes. In many countries, there are still questions about whether parliament should be represented on the government's SDG coordination body (when one exists) or whether its role should be to monitor the work of these bodies and hold them to account.

One of the most important lessons learned is that often parliaments are willing to institutionalize the SDGs but may be unsure about how to go about it. Some parliaments have moved to establish SDG committees, but they have quickly realized that the SDG agenda is too broad to be covered by one committee alone, and that the SDGs cut across many existing committees. The IPU's self-assessment methodology proved very useful as it helps parliaments determine for themselves on a case-by-case basis how to adapt their existing structures to take account of the SDG agenda.

There is a pressing need to continue to raise awareness about the SDGs among parliaments at the national, regional and global levels. With its wide membership, the IPU is able to provide a platform to help parliaments increase their knowledge, take action, and exchange experiences and good practices; to translate the goals into national plans and strategies; and to make their objectives a reality for all. These efforts need to continue and expand.