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Quito (Ecuador), 22 – 27 March 2013  
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**MPs' views on democratic governance:  
Towards a stand-alone sustainable development goal**

**Report on a survey of parliamentarians conducted at the 128<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly  
22-27 March, 2013  
Quito, Ecuador**

United Nations Member States have agreed to develop a new set of universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will build on the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) when they expire in 2015. Recognizing the role of democratic governance as a key enabler of sustainable development, the IPU is advocating at the United Nations for democratic governance, with its three main dimensions - participation, transparency and accountability - to be included among the new SDGs as a stand-alone goal and as a dimension of other goals.

During its 128<sup>th</sup> Assembly, the IPU canvassed the views of MPs through a survey on the significance of democratic governance for sustainable development to further inform the Organization's advocacy approach. Over 240 parliamentarians completed the survey, about 80 per cent of which was conducted in an interview style. A deliberate effort was made to obtain a significant number of responses from both men and women, from all regions and from both developed and developing countries.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

1. Most MPs agree that democratic governance should be pursued as a stand-alone goal

The survey showed an overall consensus (99% of respondents) on the view that democratic governance is necessary for sustainable development. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of survey respondents (96%) felt that mainstreaming the main dimensions of democratic governance – participation, transparency and accountability – into other SDGs was desirable in order to achieve the SDGs as a whole.

A clear majority of respondents (80%) agreed that democratic governance should be pursued as a stand-alone goal by virtue of its cross-cutting nature. Few (17%) felt that democratic governance should not constitute a stand-alone goal as such a goal might detract from the three main constituent parts of sustainable development – the social, the economic and the environmental. For some MPs in this group, democratic governance was too multifaceted to be effectively pursued as a stand-alone goal. Respondents from developing countries were three times more likely (18%) than

those from developed countries (6%) to oppose the idea of having democratic governance as a stand-alone goal.<sup>1</sup>

2. Most MPs believe that democratic governance can improve policy-making for sustainable development

Acknowledging that democratic governance is likely to support many objectives, survey respondents were asked to identify the main objectives of pursuing democratic governance as a stand-alone goal. Two of the three most often-mentioned objectives were related to policy-making, i.e. to support coherence between social, economic and environmental policies and to promote national planning for sustainable development through participatory processes. The third most often-mentioned objective was to strengthen dialogue between citizens and political institutions.

With respect to the three main principles of democratic governance, issues related to transparency –in the workings of political institutions and public administration and curbing corruption in politics and public administration – appear to be predominant. There were no differences in responses between respondents from developed and developing countries.

3. National and regional differences should be taken into consideration in the monitoring and progress evaluation processes

One of the most difficult questions regarding the design of the SDGs will be ultimately how to measure progress. Most respondents (85%) agreed that national and regional differences should be taken into consideration in the monitoring and progress evaluation processes. Respondents from developing countries were more likely to fully support a more flexible approach (76%) than those from developed countries (56%). This appears to be in line with current thinking at the United Nations. Comments by survey respondents clearly illustrate that democratic governance targets should be universal but that the indicators for measuring the attainment of these targets should be adapted to the conditions of individual countries.

4. MPs are eager to press for a stand-alone goal

The survey revealed strong interest among parliamentarians to play a role in advocating for democratic governance as a stand-alone goal. Of the 197 respondents who supported democratic governance as a stand-alone goal, an overwhelming majority (94%) stated that they were willing to actively support such a goal. Approaches to advocating for a democratic governance goal included parliament-specific measures and ways to reach out to constituents. A small minority of respondents (6%) stated they would not actively pursue such a goal due to a lack of

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study, “developing countries” are those that have self-identified as such as Members of the Group of 77 and China. All other countries are categorized as “developed”.

resources. Some also felt that their constituents were focused on issues that affected them more directly, such as the national budget.

## SECONDARY FINDINGS

The survey further provided an opportunity for parliamentarians to identify weaknesses in democratic governance within their own parliaments and to suggest possible remedial actions. Respondents from both developed and developing countries provided many examples of this within each of the three pillars of democratic governance as follows:

Participation: Respondents identified shortfalls in electoral participation and other forms of political participation by total numbers and by specific sectors of society (rural population, women, youth, minorities, indigenous peoples, the elderly and the homeless). Several respondents pinpointed obstacles to effective participation. In particular, the issue was raised of how to ensure fair access by civil society to consultative processes organized by parliament.

Suggestions for increasing participation include: actively reaching out to the rural population to enhance awareness of parliament's functions; using social and traditional media to educate and solicit input from the general public at a time when they can still influence the debate; allowing persons without a stable home address to register to vote; developing mentoring programmes for future political leaders; and making greater use of referenda. Most importantly, parliament needs to implement mechanisms to ensure that people are not only aware and heard, but that their input is translated into action.

Transparency: Respondents underscored the need for a relationship based on reciprocity, whereby parliament opens up and reaches out to the general public and where the general public can actively seek answers from and provide input to parliament. Several respondents considered that transparency creates trust in parliament.

Proposals for strengthening dialogue between parliament and citizens include: ensuring independent media and freedom of the press and information; holding public hearings; using different channels of communication, including social media and e-consultations; providing live coverage of all parliamentary debates; publicizing parliamentary debates online; and presenting legislative tools in easily accessible language and translating them into local languages. Within parliament, transparency can be enhanced through: establishing clearer parliamentary procedures; regulating the funding of political parties by law; requiring parliamentarians to declare their assets; and using independent auditors.

Accountability: Respondents referred to both vertical (parliamentarians to citizens) and horizontal (among governmental institutions) forms of accountability. Most respondents felt that parliament's accountability to the people must be improved. Some of the weaknesses mentioned were related to lack of transparency as a basis for accountability.

A number of suggestions were made on how to enhance parliamentary accountability: introduction of evaluation systems of MPs' performance through surveys or score cards; presentation of an annual report by parliamentarians on their activities to their constituents;

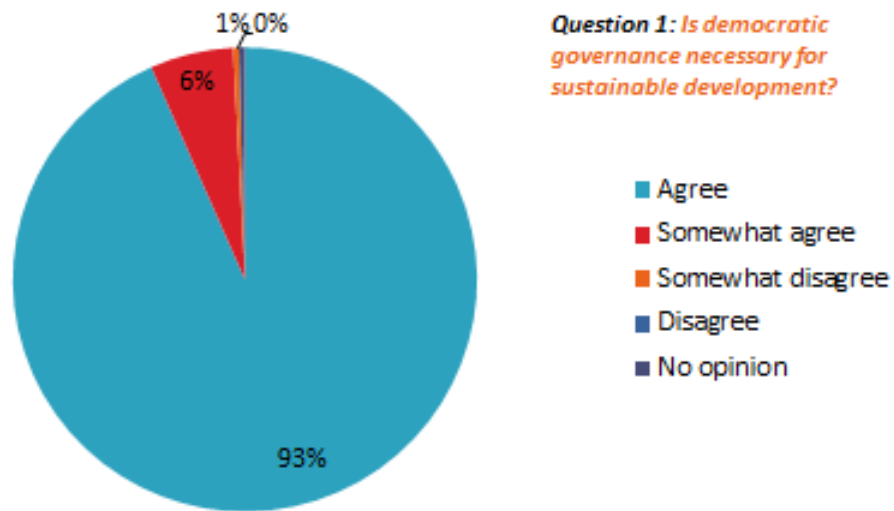
provision of objectively verifiable data; delivery of better training for parliamentarians; greater willingness by parliamentarians to readily debate their ideas and decisions with their constituents; non-imposition of term limits; subjecting all parliamentarians to the law equally and on a par with citizens; strengthening party discipline; and discouraging "floor-crossing".

A number of respondents argued that parliaments need to become more effective in holding the executive to account. Suggestions to this end include: strengthening the separation of powers between the legislative and executive branches; allowing the opposition to chair important committees; investing committees with the power to summon and question ministers; granting parliaments sufficient time to examine bills; ensuring that parliament has the right to make amendments to the budget bill; and encouraging citizens to monitor government programmes and inform their representative of any shortcomings.

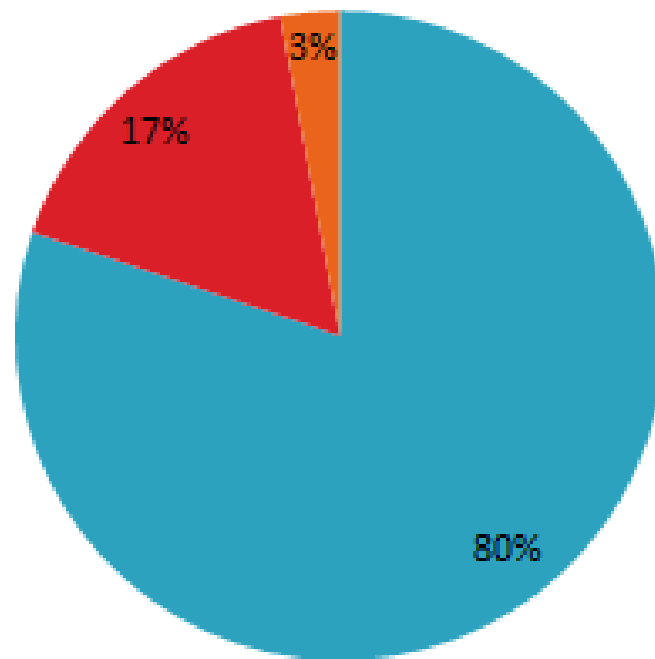
## SURVEY DATA

The following slides illustrate the findings of each survey question. The original questions are indicated in orange.

### Democratic governance is necessary for sustainable development



## Democratic governance should be a stand-alone goal

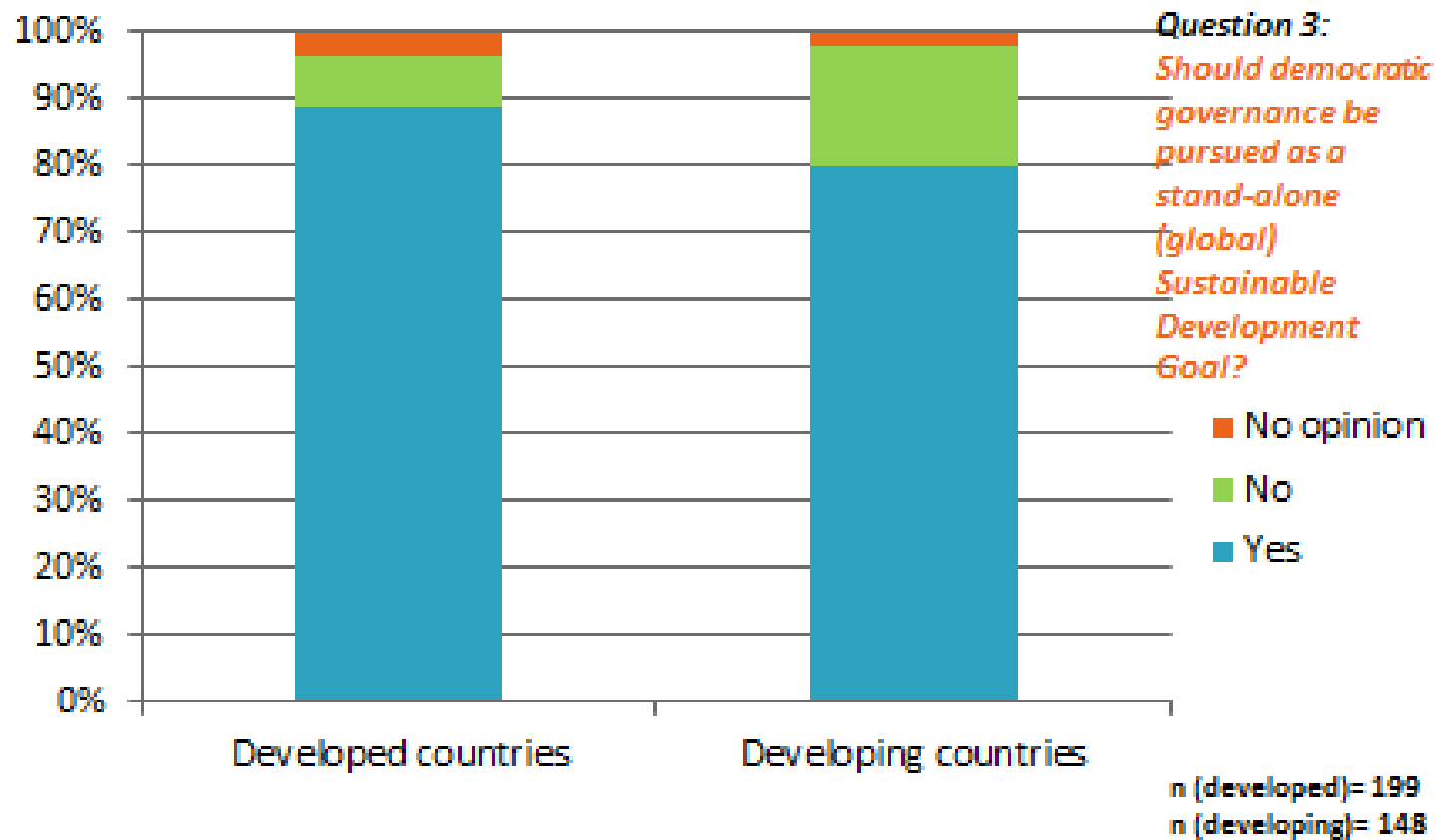


*Question 2: Should democratic governance be pursued as a stand-alone (global) Sustainable Development Goal?*

- Agree
- Disagree
- No opinion

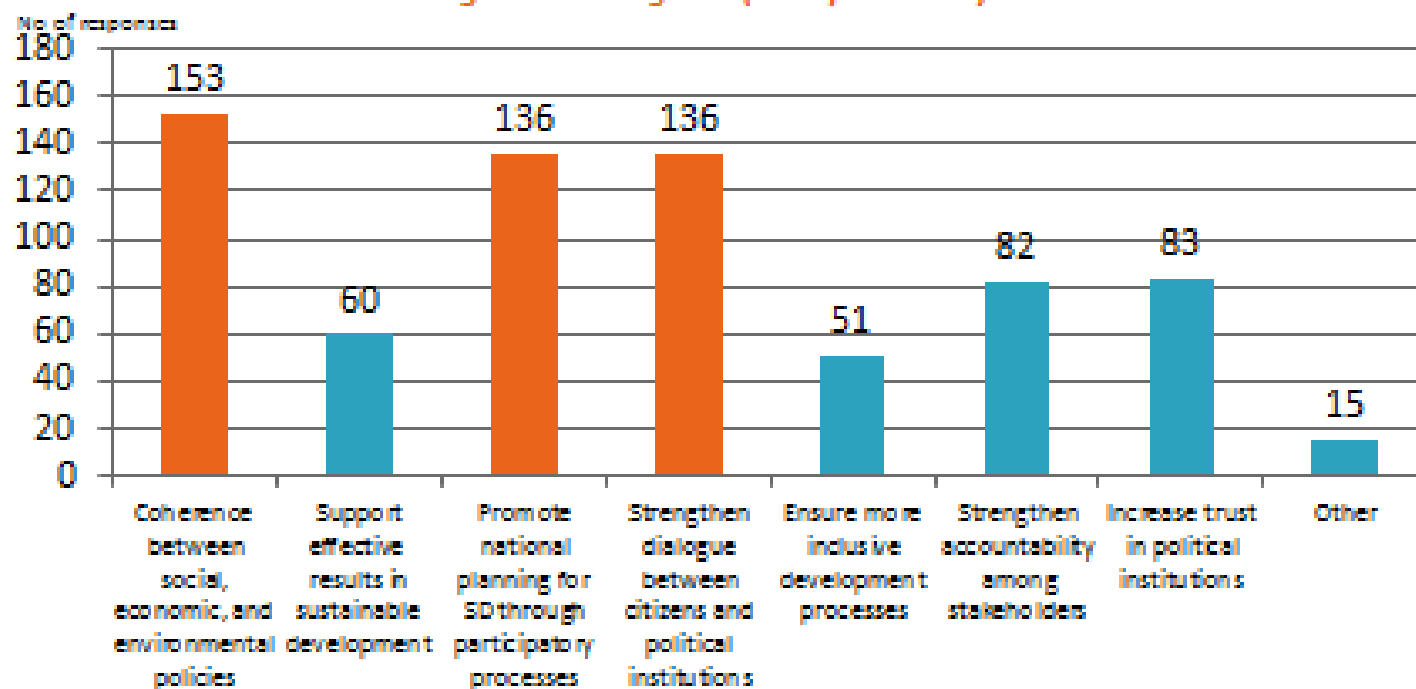
N=238

## No significant difference between developed and developing countries on a stand-alone goal



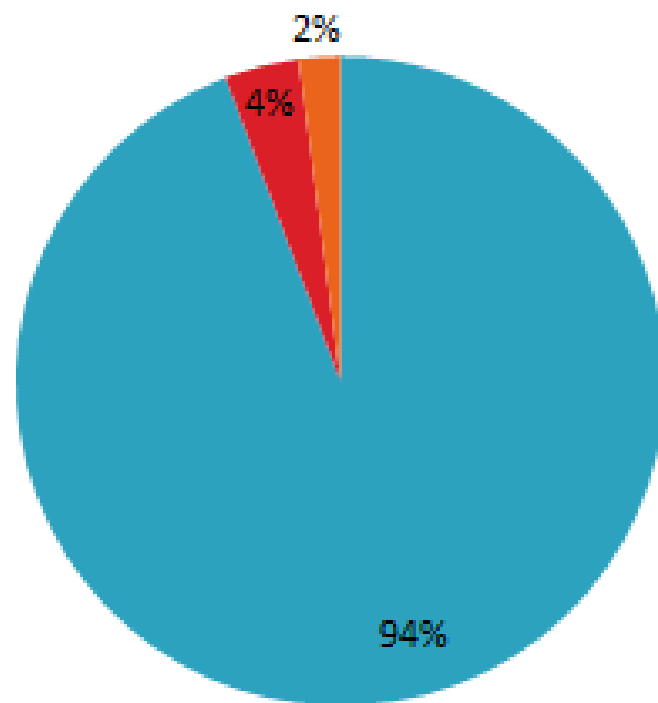
## Democratic governance has the potential to help strengthen sustainable development policies

*Question 4: What would be the most important objectives of a democratic governance goal? (multiple choice)*





## Participation, transparency and accountability should inform all other goals



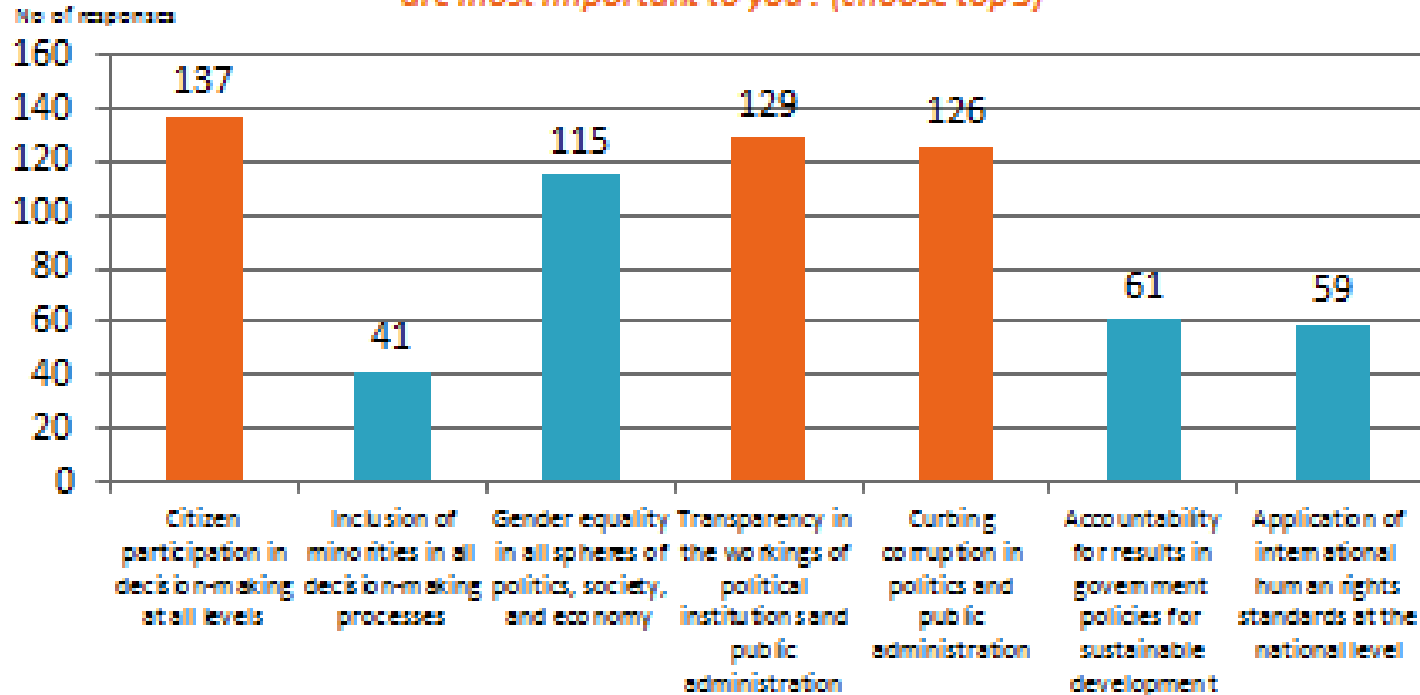
*Question 5: Should principles of democratic governance, such as participation, transparency and accountability, be incorporated in other SDGs?*

- Agree
- Disagree
- No opinion

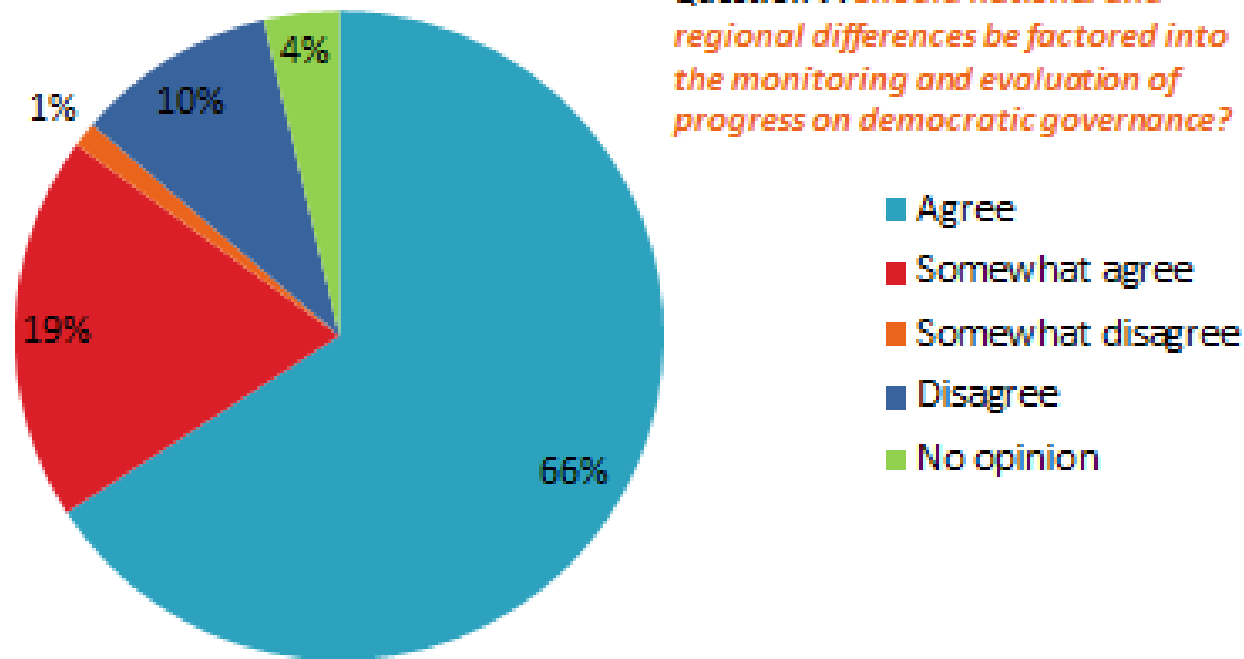
N=243

## MPs are mostly concerned with citizen participation and transparency issues

*Question 6: What aspects of participation, transparency and accountability are most important to you? (choose top 3)*

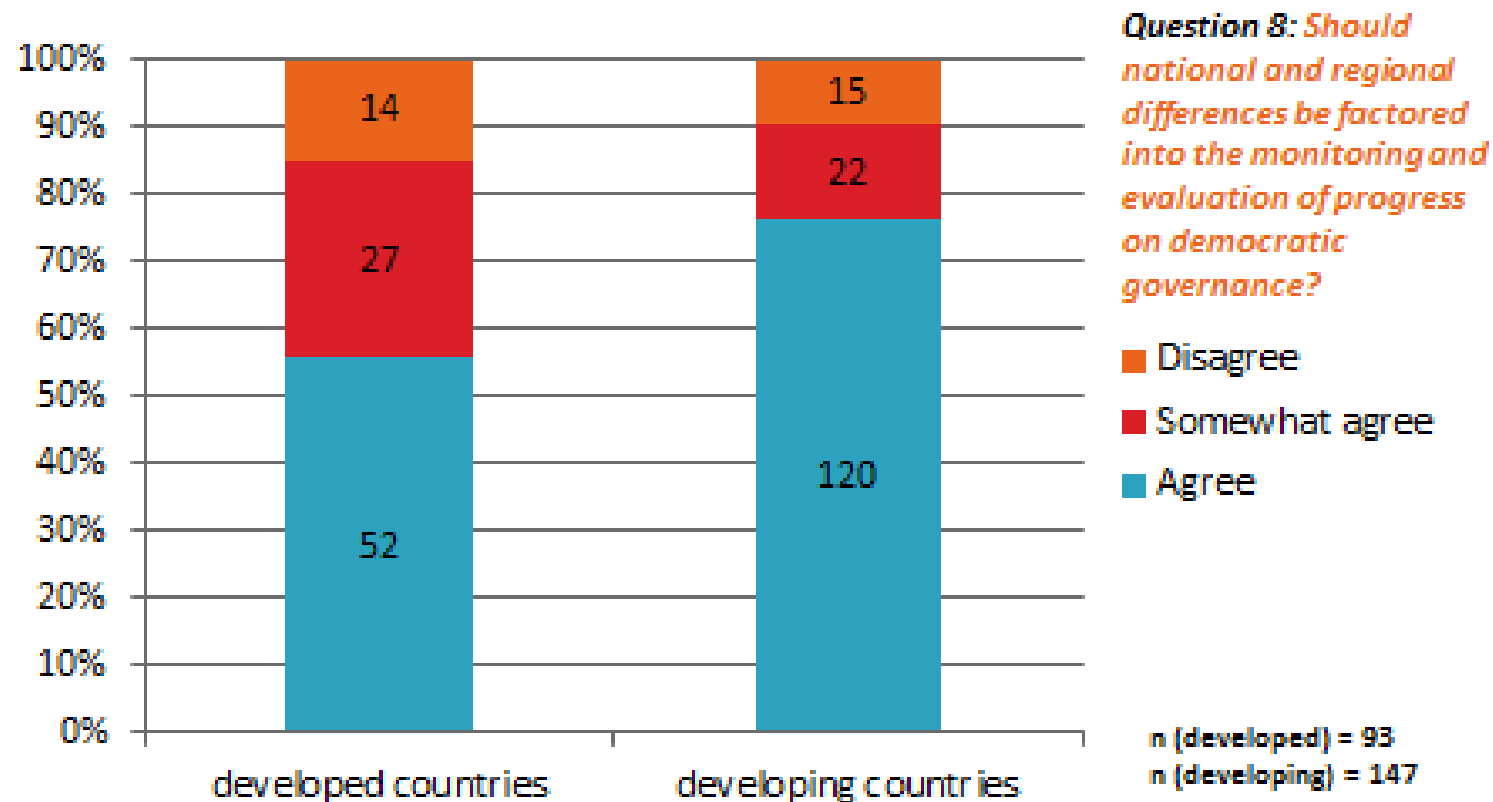


## National and regional differences should be considered in monitoring and evaluation

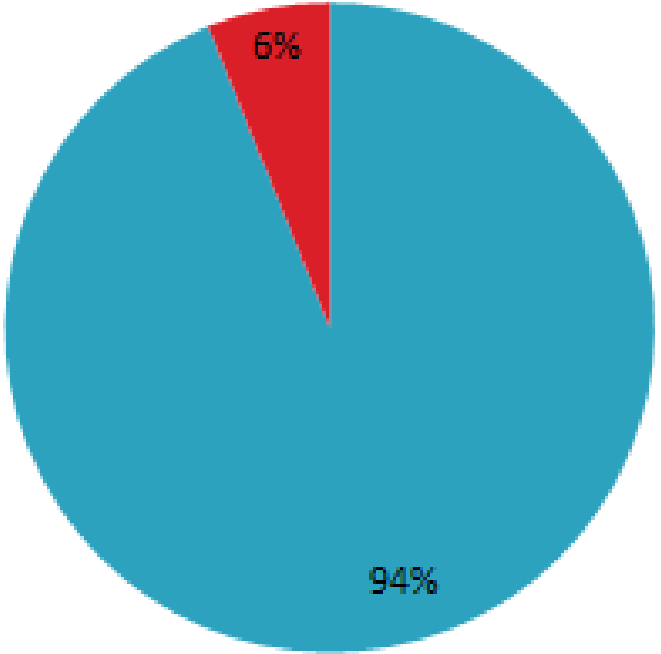


N=240

## MPs from developed countries are less flexible with regard to governance measurements



# MPs are eager to support a democratic governance goal

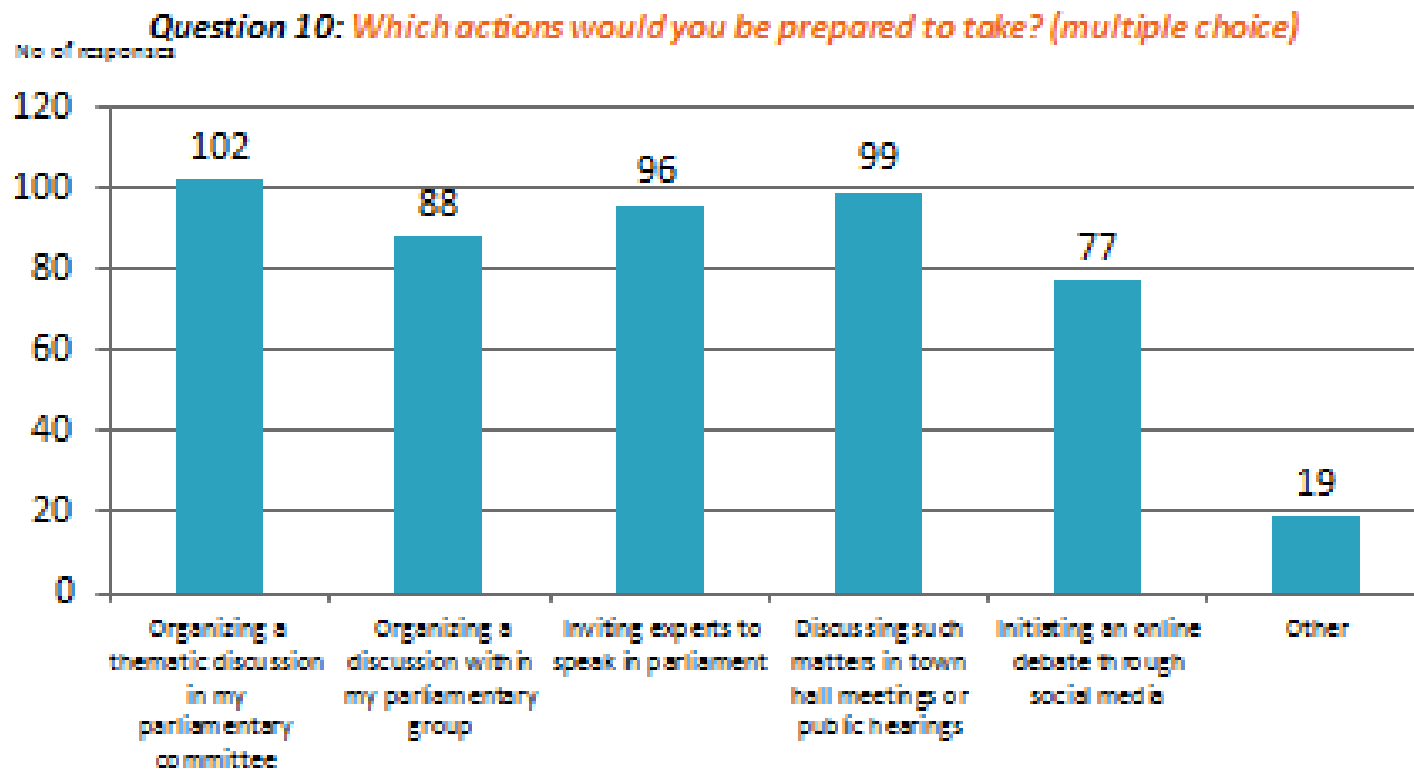


*Question 9: Would you be interested in actively supporting such a goal?*

■ Yes  
■ No

N = 197

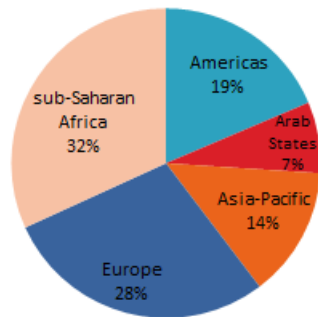
## MPs are willing to take multiple actions to support a democratic governance goal



## Breakdown of respondents

A total of 243 responses were received. Of these, approximately 80 per cent were conducted in an interview style. Ninety-three (38%) of the respondents were women.

### Respondents by region



### Respondents by gender

