



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

132nd IPU Assembly

Hanoi (Viet Nam), 28 March - 1 April 2015



Governing Council
Item 7

CL/196/7(c)-R.1
24 February 2015

Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

(c) Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations

Ensuring a people-centred approach to the new SDGs: A shared responsibility

Summary Report

The 2014 Parliamentary Hearing was held at United Nations Headquarters on 19 and 20 November. It was jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the President of the General Assembly, and brought together some 200 parliamentarians and ambassadors from a diverse set of countries under the theme *Ensuring a people-centred approach to the new SDGs: A shared responsibility*.

The President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the President of IPU addressed the Hearing. Their statements acknowledged the central role of parliaments through their legislative, oversight and budgetary functions. They emphasized the need for parliamentary involvement in the formulation and implementation of the SDGs to ensure they are people-centred. The full statements can be found on the IPU website at <http://ipu.org/Splz-e/unga14.htm>.

A. Introduction

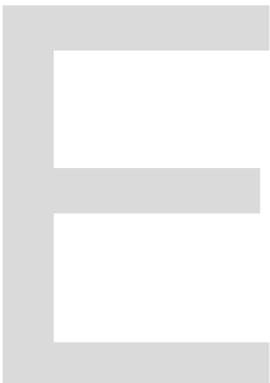
As a pillar of democracy and good governance, parliaments can play an instrumental role in shaping a people-centred approach to the new agenda.

H.E. Sam Kutesa, President of the General Assembly

A people-centred approach to development embodies fundamental principles of social justice, human rights, solidarity and equality and the common good as preconditions to human development and well-being. It rests on the realization that economic growth alone does not lead to human development and instead calls for a transformative approach through changes in political, social, and environmental values and practices. A people-centred approach cannot be decided on within the walls of the United Nations: it requires that people are part of the entire process, that their voices are heard, and that their input is turned into actions. For the SDGs to succeed, they will need to be fully owned by the people.

If we reduce progress to mere economic growth, we risk leaving behind human beings in all of their dimensions, including the intellectual and emotional. We are much more than what we have, more than “consumers” or “taxpayers” and certainly much more than “productive assets.”

Mr. Saber Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union



With this in mind, the SDGs must reflect the new development thinking that has evolved over the past few decades from a focus on satisfying basic needs to a rights-based approach. A rights-based approach requires States to protect economic, social and cultural rights while, simultaneously, requiring them to respect civil and political rights. These rights are set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international human rights treaties, and are further reflected in the Declaration on the Right to Development, which defines people's right to development as "an inalienable right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized."

The power of the non-binding agenda resides in its moral legitimacy, on the inclusion of all peoples and on its capacity to mobilize and persuade. It will also be crucial to have a framework for mutual accountability among Member States and all actors, rooted in international human rights norms and standards.

Ms. Amina Mohammed, Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning

The 2014 Parliamentary Hearing provided a unique opportunity for parliamentarians to exchange views with UN officials and experts from academia and civil society on the significance of these internationally agreed rights permeating the SDGs and the opportunities and challenges of a people-centred approach in the implementation phase. The discussion focused on the obligation of States to respect and protect these rights in the negotiation of the SDGs as well as in their implementation. It also highlighted the role that parliaments must play in order to ensure that the implementation of the SDGs is in line with their States' human rights commitments. What emerged most clearly was the need to mainstream human rights principles throughout the SDGs as well as the need for a strong goal on ending inequalities at all levels by tackling discrimination through legal and regulatory measures.

The Hearing served as a reminder that parliamentary involvement is required at every stage of the process to ensure that people's voices are heard and turned into action. A close triangular cooperation between the United Nations, the IPU and national parliaments will ensure that parliaments, as the most representative political body, are informed of the negotiations, have a voice in the SDGs formulation, and are ready for the implementation phase when the SDGs come into effect on 1 January 2016.

Parliamentarians are the bridge between the local, national and international. You have your finger on the pulse of people's concerns.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations

B. Making the SDGs people-centred: Development as a right for all

Development that is people-centred, sustainable and equitable must be closely aligned with internationally agreed rights standards. The right to development, agreed by Member States in 1986, encompasses all human rights and entails not only the obligations of States towards their own populations, but also a range of important commitments and obligations to advance international cooperation. In fact, the SDGs that have been proposed by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development incorporate human rights principles related to issues such as gender and equality, and explicitly mention human rights in Goal 4 on education and life-long learning opportunities.

The proposed SDGs represent a vast improvement on the MDGs with regard to integrating internationally agreed rights. The draft recognizes a need not only for focusing on the provision of basic services, but also on the quality of services and, at the same time, on the need for eradicating inequalities and discriminatory practices. It acknowledges, for example, that making primary education universal is not sufficient by itself. Education also needs to be of high quality so that everyone has an opportunity to learn – which is ensured only if education is considered a public good and in line with human rights, protected and respected by the State. The SDGs also incorporate civil and political rights through issues such as political participation, personal security and access to justice, which were largely neglected by the MDGs.

Despite these advancements, the draft SDGs still leave room for improvement in order to ensure that the development process will take a rights-based approach. First, the draft could be strengthened by grounding the various goals in the corresponding human rights more explicitly. Human rights refer to a set of obligations that every government has accepted by ratifying the various human rights-related treaties, and they have precise concepts which cannot be adjusted, adapted, or manipulated.

Because the SDGs are a political agreement that is not legally binding, ensuring the political will to implement the goals will be critical. A more explicit mention of human rights in the SDGs would introduce an obligation for States to act, while also giving the people leverage to demand effective implementation of the goals. This would make of the SDGs not just an aspirational commitment but rather something more akin to an enforceable legal agreement. Although human rights are an entitlement that people have even if they are not explicitly stated in the final document, the reference to these rights would clearly strengthen people's standing at the implementation stage.

At the regional and global levels, peer reviews will be most effective towards ensuring the accountability of a commitment – the SDGs - that is not legally binding. Aligning the SDGs with the human rights framework will make it possible for the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council to become an accountability tool for the SDGs at the global level. Another tool may be the peer-review mechanism that will be instituted as part of the new High Level Political Forum (HLPF) of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

There is a huge difference between saying “I want all girls to go to school” and saying “Even though you are not a male, you have a right to education”. That right to education is empowering to the girls, to their families, and to the communities that can say to their governments that the failure to provide this right is a political failure. The SDGs will be a big disappointment for those living in poverty, unless they realize that there is a human right to ending poverty.
Prof. Philip G. Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty

A second shortcoming of the current draft is that it limits the principle of universality with regard to aspects of gender equality. Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls states that two targets – on the recognition and valuing of unpaid care and domestic work and on undertaking reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources – are subject to what is “nationally appropriate” and “in accordance with national laws”, respectively. Yet, Member States have already agreed to these rights through a number of instruments, notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), so the SDGs should not be used to weaken the application of these rights.

Human rights are an entitlement. It is not something that is given to people by a document.
Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights

Third, the SDGs should offer States an opportunity to recognize new rights such as water and sanitation. Similarly, while the final document should attempt to explicitly reference all vulnerable and marginalized groups, not only as beneficiaries of the SDGs, but also as participants in the process, it should leave room for the SDGs to apply to groups that are not yet specifically referenced.

Recommendations:

- The SDGs should *explicitly* reference human rights and avoid loopholes that might allow governments to fall short of their human rights obligations;
- The language in the SDGs document should not weaken rights that Member States have already agreed to through other international agreements.
- The SDGs should go beyond quantitative targets to make sure that all the qualitative dimensions that help define human rights are adequately captured.

C. Levelling the playing field: The importance of equality and non-discrimination at all levels

The Hearing echoed unequivocal support for Goal 10 in the current draft on reducing economic disparities and inequality of human development outcomes by actively working to dismantle discrimination in all its forms. Policies that lead to vastly different outcomes for specific groups in society are often in violation of human rights principles. There is overwhelming evidence that discriminatory practices inhibit economic and human development. The impact of gender inequality on economic development serves as a good example: women who are uneducated are less productive, do more unpaid care work, and their children are less healthy and less educated. It is, therefore, essential for sustainable development that action is taken to eliminate discriminatory practices; proactive measures must secure rights for all, including the most vulnerable sectors of society.

Governments have a legal obligation to protect rights but also to fulfill rights.

Prof. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Vice-Chair of United Nations Committee on Development Policy

Despite the fact that equality and non-discrimination are enshrined in legally binding human rights agreements and do not require instrumental justifications, inequalities have increased in most countries in every region of the world. There are manifold reasons for the increase in inequality within countries. The success stories of many countries only look at poverty reduction in the aggregate and do not adequately highlight the gap between those who have benefitted and those who have been left behind. Although the financial crisis has led to greater economic insecurities for most people, the rich have fared a lot better than the less well off. Austerity policies have perpetuated inequalities while allowing the rich to reap most of the benefits of the economic recovery. Governments find it easier to cut back in those areas of recurrent expenditure that are most important for human development, disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable sectors of society, such as the disabled or women and, especially, single mothers.

It is disheartening that the 85 richest people in the world have as much wealth as the 3.5 billion poorest, according to some reports. Such disparities in income and human development are perpetuated by limitations of access to political decision-making. This is particularly the case for the poor, people in rural areas, minority ethnic groups, indigenous peoples, the disabled, youth, and most pervasively, women. At the same time, inequalities lead to political capture by the interests of the privileged, most effectively through lobbies, which inevitably leads to unfair and inefficient policies.

It is, therefore, necessary that decision-making bodies are representative of the entire make-up of society and of all income levels. Several Hearing participants emphasized the important role of special measures, such as quota systems, to increase the number of people representing vulnerable sectors of society in political offices. In addition to special measures to increase the actual number, the overall culture of parliament as an institution needs to provide incentives and enablers for representatives of under-represented groups to participate in the political sphere. For example, the New Zealand Parliament takes school holidays into account when preparing its schedule to allow for women parliamentarians to participate.

Greater participation of vulnerable sectors of society cannot necessarily be achieved through top-down measures. A discussion during the Hearing on youth participation in the political sphere illustrates a two-way barrier to participation in national decision-making structures. Several participants argued that there are undue obstacles to youth participation, such as a higher age requirement to run for office than to vote. At the same time, young people's interest in public service seems to have decreased as they look for fulfilment in the private sector instead. This may be a result of a lack of role models among public officials and increasing media coverage of corruption and mismanagement in the public sector.

Who do constitutional requirements such as minimum age for holding public office really protect?

Mr. Vytautas Gapsys, MP, Lithuania

At the same time, all sectors of society must be allowed to effectively mobilize to have their interests heard and, ultimately, to sensitize society at large to their needs. All too often, discriminatory rules and practices are entrenched in cultural norms, values and traditions with deep roots in the social fabric of a country. Where this is the case, laws are often ineffective. Violence against women, for example, is tolerated by many societies even when it has been formally outlawed. The best solution to this “cultural exception” to human rights is to allow women’s voices to be heard. Empirical evidence shows that a country’s advancement toward gender equality is most often a function of the size, strength and autonomy of the women’s movement. Around the world, collective action by all lower-income groups is shrinking due to constraining laws as well as limited resources, including time available for people to organize effectively. Through mobilization, vulnerable sectors of society can bring their concerns onto the agenda and secure support among the general population. Laws alone are not enough – for laws to be effectively implemented, there needs to be buy-in from society at large.

When you hear such arguments like “we don’t want to change certain aspects of how women are treated in our country”, ask them: “What do women say about that? Do women have genuine conditions to organize and to express their views without fear of backlash?”

Prof. Anne Marie Goetz, Center for Global Affairs, New York University

Inequalities between countries remain high and are often directly linked to inequalities within countries. Several participants attributed this to the unequal power structures within the international system played out in international organizations such as the United Nations, the international financial institutions (IFIs), and through regional ones such as the European Union. The international trade regime is another major source of distortions and economic imbalances. Participants emphasized in particular the negative impact of protective measures imposed by developed countries, which undermines the competitiveness of developing countries.

A recurring example of this power imbalance was the impact of unequal treatment of countries with regard to agricultural subsidies. While the richer regions of the world continue to assert their right to subsidize their agriculture, poorer countries, whose economies depend largely on the agricultural sector, are prevented from providing similar support to their farmers because of existing trade agreements. Other institutional measures for allowing market access to small-scale farmers, such as the creation of marketing boards, have been discouraged by the international community as instances of excessive regulation that undermine the free market. These pressures to neglect the agricultural sector, in turn, perpetuate the rural-urban divide within countries.

Other factors that explain the widening gap between countries include the competitive advantage of developed countries in technological capacities and skills. In this regard, an increasingly important factor is the monopolization of information, since large sets of data are produced and used by only a few governments as well as, increasingly, by large corporations. Yet there are strong ethical and economic arguments for data to be made more widely accessible through pro-active laws and regulations. As the Secretary-General’s Expert Group on the Data Revolution estimated, the economic benefit of more open data is in the range of trillions of dollars. Closing the information gap will require more than more open data: People need to be trained and capacities within countries need to be increased in order to ensure that data can be used effectively.

Recommendations:

- The rise in inequalities everywhere, within and between countries, runs counter to human rights and undermines sustainable development. The SDGs should therefore include a stand-alone goal on inequality, which could build on the proposed Goal 10.
- All political, social and economic policies must be in line with human rights obligations and must be designed so that costs and benefits are fairly distributed across all sectors of society. Parliaments must eliminate discriminatory laws and make laws that protect the most vulnerable sectors of society. Through their oversight function, parliaments must ensure that laws are implemented and enforced.
- All sectors of society, especially the most vulnerable ones, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, and the disabled, must have access to decision-making positions. Special measures, such as quota systems, can be effective towards increasing the number of representatives of vulnerable groups. At the same time, barriers to participation should be removed.

- Barriers to social mobilization and grassroots organizing must be eliminated. All sectors in society must be able to claim their rights without fear of persecution. States may have to take proactive measures to eliminate barriers due to time or resource constraints.
- The international regime of trade, finance and technology transfers needs to be reformed so that it stops discriminating against developing countries, creating an equal playing field for all.

D. Protecting the rights of people: The need for fiscal reforms, market regulation, and institutional capacities

Investment in human development through the provision of a social protection floor and other innovative measures are necessary to level the playing field for the most vulnerable sectors of society. Hearing participants pointed to a number of policy approaches, including microcredit schemes and labour reforms to create more employment opportunities in the formal sector, minimum wage legislation tied to GDP growth, cash transfer programmes, access to credit through specialized banks, and price controls on food products.

In designing policies that address inequalities, policymakers need to distinguish between causes and effects, as well as between temporary and systemic factors. Appropriate solutions are those that get to the underlying, systemic causes of the problem.

Smart economic policy promotes growth together with equality, social progress, the realization of economic and social rights, as well as democracy.

Prof. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Vice-Chair of United Nations Committee on Development Policy

Progressive fiscal policy is the most important tool that governments have to protect the most vulnerable, not only as a response to economic crisis, but also as a way of ensuring that all sectors of society have equal opportunities and access to services. Progressive fiscal policy entails an increasingly higher tax rate for higher-income brackets, while resources are spent with human development and the well-being of all people in mind. Providing a social protection floor is possible in all countries, both developed and developing. As the ILO's *World Social Protection Report 2014-15* illustrates, even the poorest countries in the world can afford to provide a minimal social protection floor if state revenues are invested appropriately.

Countries should compete on human development and well-being, and not on low tax levels, which will lead to a race to the bottom.

H.E. Fernando Carrera Castor, Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the United Nations

The discussions made it clear that changes in social outlook underlie such policy measures and that the general population may need to be reassured that the protection of the most vulnerable is in the interest of society overall. Hearing participants provided several examples of the challenges to achieving change, including: opening the labour market to the young may require concessions from older workers; achieving gender equality necessitates changes in school curricula; and increasing aid to developing countries will depend on convincing taxpayers in donor countries of the merits of such investments.

A particular difficulty in implementing the SDGs is that they may require the pursuit of policies that people do not consider priorities in their own lives and that may even be politically unpopular. The "My World" platform, which asks citizens around the world to express their policy priorities based on a list of issues that are likely to be covered by the SDGs, found that people are least concerned about issues related to climate change and environmental protection. Generally speaking, people tend to be driven by their immediate individual interests rather than a concern with long-term issues such as climate change. This makes designing an effective policy response to sustainable development issues particularly difficult. Since parliamentarians have a close relationship with their constituents, they are well-placed to promote the long-term measures that need to be taken for the SDGs to succeed.

Realizing the transformative aspirations of the SDGs will depend on action at the national level bolstered by enhanced international cooperation. Parliaments therefore will play a central role in translating and adapting the global agenda into real change on the ground through legislation, fiscal reforms, robust citizen participation, and effective oversight, evaluation and accountability.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations

D.1. Regulating the markets

In addition to fiscal policy, proactive market regulation is an important tool that governments can use to advance the SDGs from a human rights perspective. While governments have no obligation to provide for all their people *directly*, governments must be the guarantors of the final outcome. The market system is an engine of economic activity and has contributed greatly to the development of nations. However, going forward, there needs to be more effective ways of ensuring that market mechanisms better support human well-being and, at a minimum, do not cause harm.

Left to their own devices, private sector actors who are mostly driven by a profit-seeking logic, will not necessarily work towards people-centred SDGs. As illustrated by the economic and financial crisis of the past few years, it is clear that markets are not self-regulating and that proactive government policies are needed to maintain stable conditions, prevent market failures, and make sure that downturns do not worsen conditions for the poor and the most vulnerable. This will require strong and transparent public institutions that can withstand capture by private interests and that are open to public participation and oversight. Restoring people's trust in the market mechanism as an engine of development will depend to a large extent on reforming the institutions of government, and of politics in general, consistent with democratic principles of accountability, transparency and participation.

Stressing corporate social and environmental responsibility can be an effective tool for establishing norms for the private sector in a similar manner to making violations public with the help of civil society and the media. However, it is the responsibility of governments to ensure that the private sector acts in line with key commitments such as the SDGs. More proactive regulation of the private sector will be required to prevent a race to the bottom as a result of wage, social or environmental dumping and corresponding human rights violations.

Markets are not self-regulating. Balance comes through fiscal policy, which requires public authority. If we do not move forward, populism will win out.

Mr. Serge Janquin, MP, France

A most important sector in need of regulation is the financial industry, where the aim should be to ensure fair and equitable distribution of resources in support of the real (productive) economy. Most people have no access to capital, which prevents entrepreneurship and leaves people, especially in the agricultural sector, unprotected in times of crisis. Banks that are specialized in specific industrial sectors, such as agriculture and rural development, are better equipped and more likely to provide necessary capital. The financial sector needs to be brought on board as a partner for sustainable development. To that end, it needs to support progressive industries, such as renewable energy, which may not produce profits in the short term but will eventually pay large dividends both in terms of return to investors and social and environmental benefits.

Parliamentarians can help create and strengthen partnerships with the private sector, regional and local banks, and other financial institutions in order to effectively distribute resources in a fair and equitable manner.

H.E. Sam Kutesa, President of the General Assembly

A major hurdle is the fact that IFIs, which lend to central banks or other national institutions, do not require borrowing governments to account for their policies on human rights and the environment. Negotiations between IFIs and national governments rarely touch on human rights questions since such negotiations typically involve only the finance ministries and not those ministries (e.g., foreign affairs and justice) with direct responsibility for human rights.

Imposing government regulations on the private sector will remain an upward battle for as long as international financial institutions (IFIs) encourage investment in countries with weak regulation. For example, the World Bank's *Doing Business* report ranks countries by the number of procedures and the time it takes to start a business, but pays little attention to labour rights and environmental conditions, which may encourage countries to lower regulation in order to lure foreign investors. Such investments, however, do not necessarily produce trickle-down effects for the whole society and, with low levels of regulation, may leave people more vulnerable to market forces.

We have seen a loss of faith as a result of the financial crisis. The financial industry has become too big a portion in national industries. Financiers should be rewarded in proportion to the capital that they produce rather than in the proportion of the debt that they produce.

Mr. Radek Sikorski, Speaker of Parliament, Poland

Another pro-active approach is to design strong competition policies to prevent monopolies and price-rigging. This will protect consumers and facilitate entry into the market place by new players, which in turn will help expand the tax base to support social programmes, infrastructure development and the like.

D.2. Financing the SDGs

Ultimately, the implementation of the SDGs will require a stronger revenue base. While foreign aid remains important to help developing countries, the lion's share of financing for the SDGs needs to be generated within countries in order to ensure sustainability. State budgets are under pressures almost everywhere for a number of often interlinked causes, national and global.

At the national level, governments in both developed and developing countries are under pressure to negotiate a lax tax regime for businesses and multinational corporations which ends up reducing state revenues. Developing countries especially lack sufficient expertise and resources to negotiate fair deals with multinational corporations and guarantee that their investments will benefit the country overall. While studies show that higher tax rates do not necessarily lead to capital flight, providing a tax advantage to foreign companies for a defined period of time and within a strong regulatory framework may help bring more investments to developing countries that often lack the capacities and skills to build home-grown industries.

The burden of debt servicing also limits the resources of many developing countries. Several participants stressed that sovereign debt prevents their governments from investing in human development as a precondition for sustainable development. The management of sovereign debts should be considered a global public good requiring an international mechanism for debt restructuring that is fair to all parties. Countries need to agree to a global institution to arrange for orderly debt workouts to prevent defaults and other disruptions to the international financial markets.

At the international level, lack of regulation provides opportunities for corporations and individuals to channel their money into so-called tax havens, which allow for international tax avoidance and evasion. The OECD has recently proposed measures to curb tax havens, but support from governments around the world remains weak. This is partially because the countries to which capital is flowing benefit from this practice.

A solid revenue base, of course, cannot rely entirely on income from national and multinational corporations. Measures need to be taken to subject the informal sector to more stringent regulation and tax collection. Solidarity derives not only from ensuring that government reaches out to all sectors of society, but also from all sectors of society contributing to building a strong State.

In addition to the question of sovereign debt, the whole international regime that governs market access, property rights, technology transfer and other so-called means of implementation for the SDGs will need to be reformed to create a level playing field for all countries. This also includes giving developing countries more say at the World Bank, the IMF and other bodies of global economic governance.

Main recommendations:

- Government regulations must be in place to protect citizens from unchecked market forces that may result in human rights violations as well as negative social and environmental impacts.
- Independent regulatory bodies and other public institutions, subject to oversight and impervious to particular interests, need to be strengthened or established.
- The international community needs to take decisive action to strengthen the tax regime and overall market conditions to allow countries policy space and sufficient authority to raise their own revenue. An international debt workout mechanism will also need to be established.

UN action for development: How does it work?

A special segment of the Hearing provided a comprehensive overview of UN development work at both the political and operational levels.

Ambassador Martin Sajdik, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations and President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), described the role of ECOSOC as a central decision-making body. Ms. Suki Beavers, an Adviser for the UNDP Inclusive Political Processes Team, discussed the work of the UN Development Group (UNDG) and the UN system at the country level. Ms. Jane Stewart, Special Representative and Director of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) office in New York, presented the work of the ILO as a unique tripartite organization (drawing together representatives from government, business and labour) among the 15 autonomous specialized agencies of the United Nations.

All three presentations highlighted how parliaments have been able to work closely with the United Nations at both the national and global levels, and how this cooperation may be strengthened to help carry forward the post-2015 development agenda.

Main points:

- Parliaments have a key role to play in building national ownership of the SDGs and in advancing their implementation at the country level. Closer in-country cooperation between the parliament and the UN team can support these objectives. As seen in several countries already, UN outreach to the parliament has helped facilitate parliamentary input into the design and monitoring of the national development plan. This practice, however, needs to be formalized and extended to more countries around the world. Similarly, parliaments should become more involved in the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) - the UN system work plan to advance the national development strategy. Ideally, the UNDAF should be properly aligned with the development vision established by the government in concert with the parliament.
- As the case of the ILO illustrates, interaction between the United Nations and parliaments can grow beyond the United Nations proper to involve the various specialized agencies. The ILO and the IPU are already bound together by a cooperation agreement which is meant to mobilize parliamentary support for the core principles of the ILO, particularly those entrenched in the various labour conventions. Parliamentarians should seek to join their national delegations to ILO assemblies where questions of employment generation and decent work are discussed. In coordination with the IPU, it may also be possible for MPs to participate in ILO workshops and other specialized events that can help strengthen the capacities of policymakers.
- At the global level, recent ECOSOC reforms will present MPs with a greater opportunity to participate in debates. Parliamentarians' active involvement in ECOSOC would strengthen the latter's policy-making role and, simultaneously, ensure that key policy ideas generated at the global level are implemented at the national level.

More specifically, MPs should contribute to monitoring the implementation of the SDGs by participating in the work of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), a major innovation whose mandate includes reviewing national progress reports on a regular basis. Parliamentarians are already actively engaged in ECOSOC's Development Cooperation Forum (DCF), where they are contributing with other stakeholders to a major rethink of development cooperation.

The new integration segment of ECOSOC, designed to look at specific policy issues from a sustainable development perspective (economic, social and environmental), provides yet another opportunity for parliamentarians from different policy backgrounds to make a contribution to the work of this important body.

E. Monitoring and accountability: The role of parliaments and the need for citizen participation

Like the MDGs, the implementation of the SDGs will have to be monitored on the global, regional, national, and local levels. Monitoring efforts on the international level provides opportunities for sharing experiences and recommendations. Global monitoring should not be limited to inter-governmental processes but should also apply to other stakeholders. All partners in the development process have to be held accountable, including the private sector and civil society.

On the national level, monitoring is tied to questions of accountability. Parliaments, as the most representative political body, play a key role at all levels: they have a legal mandate to be the overseer of government actions at home and abroad, as well as a mandate to reach out to constituents and ensure that all sectors of society are heard. In order to fulfil their oversight functions, parliaments need to better integrate the SDGs into their own processes and strengthen their oversight mechanisms. This includes instituting multi-party and multi-portfolio committees in order to help advance all the various goals in a cross-cutting way. Institutional mechanisms are needed to lock in place a long-term perspective in policy-making, which would help overcome the short-term approach inherent to the electoral cycle.

Words are fine, policies are great – but they mean nothing if they are not implemented. Let’s think very hard about how we can ensure that an active process of communication with citizens is still part of the implementation process.

Ms. Corinne Woods, Director, United Nations Millennium Campaign

National governments will have to invest in the collection and analysis of reliable and timely data in order to identify policy priorities and gauge progress. This will require setting aside funds for ensuring infrastructure that can generate data and also secure data from corporations, which are becoming increasingly strong players in data generation. Special attention will need to be paid to ensure that data is not used for unintended negative purposes, notably political persecution.

In addition, data has to be disaggregated in order to identify sectors of society that are excluded and, ultimately, to help formulate a policy response that targets the root causes of inequality. The “My World” platform, through which 7 million people from around the world have expressed their development priorities, illustrates the potential impact of dissecting a data set based on demographics such as locality, gender, age and ethnicity. Applying policies that should benefit everyone, such as universal primary education, will help identify groups that are excluded from development for structural reasons. States can then target policies to ensure that services reach those groups effectively.

Disaggregated data will be essential for the implementation phase. While aggregated data can help governments establish priorities for their societies overall, disaggregated data is necessary to help eradicate discriminatory practices through government regulations and changes to legal frameworks. Ultimately, sustainable development requires that all sectors of society feel that they are part of the process and that all can benefit from the outcome.

Parliamentarians play an essential role in the collection of data in a way that ensures that all voices are heard. For example, if every parliamentarian in the world reached out to just 1,000 of their constituents, some 43.5 million more people could become aware of the SDGs. Still, data collection cannot rely exclusively on online sources but must also include offline efforts. While new technology opens up immense opportunities for data collection and analysis, the gap in access to online services is such that relying solely on such services would provide a distorted picture of citizens’ views. The need for incorporating offline approaches to data collection is effectively illustrated by the “My World” experience, which collected 75 per cent of all votes through paper ballots.

Aggregate numbers are not sufficient to obtain a reliable picture. Data collection efforts need to ensure that all sectors of society are covered. Parliamentarians, with their unique access to constituents, can help ensure that all voices are heard. Many sectors in society need to be approached directly and encouraged to participate in surveys. As the “My World” survey has shown, online voting tends to attract responses from men whereas paper ballots allow interviewers to approach women and other sectors of society that might otherwise be excluded.

Efforts by parliaments and parliamentarians to collect data enable them to also inform their constituents about the SDGs and involve them in the process. Some parliaments already have mechanisms in place which allow for ongoing communication between individual parliamentarians and their constituents on this issue. One example is Uganda’s free SMS-based system “UReport”, which allows young Ugandans to communicate directly with their parliamentary representatives about important issues in their communities. Parliaments would benefit from peer review processes to exchange lessons learned and best practices.

If it were not for the IPU, I personally would not know about the SDGs. People are not aware of UN processes, especially when they require a long-term perspective.

Ms. Dionysia Theodora Avgerinopoulou, Member of Parliament, Greece, President of the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

Parliaments and UN agencies need to work in a more integrated manner with each other in order to increase the information flow to parliaments and, ultimately, to strengthen parliaments' capacities.

Recommendations:

- The availability of disaggregated data will be critical to enable strong parliamentary oversight of the SDGs. Parliaments need to allocate funds for data collection and analysis through government institutions as well as independent providers.
- Parliaments and parliamentarians should also play an active role in the generation of data, allowing for more opportunity to inform constituents of the SDGs and involve them in the process.
- Parliaments need to better integrate the SDGs into their own processes and strengthen their oversight mechanisms. This includes instituting multi-party and multi-portfolio committees in order to help advance all goals in a cross-cutting way.
- The IPU should increase efforts to support more integrated cooperation between UN agencies and national parliaments, including by inviting UN officials to interact more regularly with relevant parliamentary committees.
- Parliaments should report on their progress with regard to implementation of the SDGs at IPU Assemblies.

F. The way forward: The parliamentary contribution to the UN process

The SDGs provide a common vision which the global community has, which cannot be reached without parliaments. This is a promise by the leaders of the world to their citizens. And you as parliamentarians are at the interface of this relationship.

Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, DESA

The day the SDGs come into effect, 1 January 2016, countries will need to be ready at the starting line knowing what needs to be done to begin the difficult task of implementation. The closing session of the Hearing focused on the central role of parliaments leading up to the adoption of the SDGs at the UN Summit that will be held in September 2015. It also afforded participants an opportunity to review the key steps that the IPU and the United Nations are planning in the lead-up to the UN Summit (see chart in [Annex](#)).

Close cooperation between the United Nations, the IPU and national governments can ensure that parliaments are informed of the negotiations at the United Nations and can provide input to government negotiators directly as well as through the IPU.

Parliaments need to be involved throughout the negotiation process starting in January 2015, in order to start discussing what laws need to be changed, what oversight mechanisms will be needed and how funds need to be reallocated. Parliamentarians are encouraged to join their national delegations to New York in order to be part of the negotiations. To facilitate discussions within national parliaments, the IPU will provide regular updates on the negotiations.

Parliaments, in turn, will be asked to report on their internal discussions and progress during upcoming IPU meetings. The theme of the General Debate of the 132nd IPU Assembly, to be held from 28 March to 1 April 2015, in Hanoi, Viet Nam, is *The Sustainable Development Goals: Turning Words into Action*. This will be the first opportunity for parliamentarians to report on how they are helping channel citizens' views into the process while also getting ready for implementation. A second opportunity will come with the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, which will be held at United Nations Headquarters from 31 August to 2 September.

Parliamentarians must not be left behind. We need to be plugged into the process so that the SDGs really become a people-focused development process.

Mr. Saber Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

LIST OF PANELLISTS AND MODERATORS

The 2014 Parliamentary Hearing was conducted in an interview style. Each panel composed of high-level representatives (UN Official, UN Ambassador and Policy Expert) and parliamentarians, was moderated by a renowned broadcast journalist. Following the initial interview (30-40 minutes long), the floor was opened for questions or comments from participants. One keynote speech was given prior to the first session. On the second day, a presentation was given on the “My World” platform prior to the panel on data.

19 November 2014

The morning session, entitled ***Putting people first: The right to development for all***, examined the underlying concepts, opportunities and challenges of a rights-based approach. Ms. Amina Mohammed, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, delivered a keynote speech and then joined a panel that included Mr. Roberto León Ramírez, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile and President of the IPU Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade, Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, and Professor Philip G. Alston, New York University and UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. Ms. Julia Taylor-Kennedy, broadcast journalist, Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs moderated the discussion.

A special segment entitled ***UN action for development: how does it work?*** followed to familiarize MPs with the development work of the UN at both the political and operational levels and to offer them ideas for engaging their constituents on the SDGs. The panel included H.E. Mr. Martin Sajdik, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations and President of the Economic and Social Council, Ms. Suki Beavers, Adviser, Inclusive Political Processes Team, UNDP, and Ms. Jane Stewart, Special Representative and Director of the International Labour Organization’s office in New York. The discussion was moderated by Ms. Paddy Torsney, Head, Office of the Permanent Observer of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The afternoon session, ***Making markets work for the people: Regulations and safeguards***, examined the role of governments in ensuring that markets do no harm and aid the achievement of the SDGs, saw Ms. Taylor-Kennedy moderate a panel that included Senator Laura Rojas from Mexico, H.E. Mr. Fernando Carrera Castro, Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the United Nations, Ms. Eva Jespersen, Deputy Director, UNDP Human Development Report Office, and Ms. Jessica Evans, senior researcher and advocate working on international financial institutions, Human Rights Watch.

20 November 2014

The morning session entitled ***Inequality and Discrimination: The development impacts and ways to reverse the tide*** focused on ways to strengthen the SDGs and examined policy initiatives. The panel included Ms. Rebecca Kadaga, Speaker of Uganda’s Parliament, Senator Farooq Hamid Naek from Pakistan, H.E. Mr. Juan Carlos Mendoza-García, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations, Dr. Anne Marie Goetz, Clinical Professor at the Center for Global Affairs and Chief Adviser on Peace and Security, UN Women, and Professor Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, New School, and Vice-Chair of the UN Committee on Development Policy. This session was moderated by Ms. Nermeen Shaikh, broadcast journalist at Democracy Now!

Preceding the afternoon session ***Monitoring and Accountability for the SDGs: Empowering people and institutions*** Ms. Corinne Woods, Director of the UN Millennium Campaign presented “The My World platform: A dynamic tool for MPs-constituents interaction.” Immediately following her presentation, Ms. Woods joined a panel which included Ms. Dionysia Theodora Avgerinopoulou, Member of Greece’s Parliament and President of the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, H.E. Ms. María Cristina Perceval, Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations, and Ms. Claire Melamed, Director of the Growth, Poverty and Inequality Programme at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Head of Secretariat of the Secretary-General’s Independent Expert Group on the “Data Revolution for Sustainable Development.” Ms. Nermeen Shaikh, broadcast journalist, moderated the session.

Closing the Hearing was a session entitled ***The way forward***, which set forth the next steps in the negotiations on the SDGs and the ways in which parliaments can engage in the process. Mr. Saber Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr. Ranko Krivokapić, Speaker of Montenegro’s Parliament, and Mr. Thomas Gass, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, DESA, addressed the audience, with Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, moderating the session.

THE WAY FORWARD

2014	2015								
December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September
UN SG Synthesis Report	Intergovernmental negotiations								
			IPU 132 nd Assembly: main debate on SDGs <i>First reporting back from members</i>		PrepCom 4 th Conference of Speakers <i>Second reporting back from members</i>			4 th World Conference of Speakers	
	Monthly IPU updates on negotiations to members								
Adoption of Negotiation Modalities		PGA Debate: Means of Implementation	PGA Debate: Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women	PGA debate: Peaceful Settlements of Disputes and Strengthening Cooperation between the UN and Regional Organizations DCF Symposium, Korea (April)	PGA High-level Event: Combating Climate Change	Conference on Financing for Development (Ethiopia)			Post2015 Summit (Sept. 21-23)
				Hearing with civil society (2 days)					
Regional meetings by IPU members and Parliamentary/IPU campaign continues									