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Report of the panel on *Translating the SDGs into action*

This panel was moderated by the President of the IPU and featured the Speakers of Parliament from Germany, El Salvador, Jordan, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania and Viet Nam, as well as the President of the Latin American Parliament and the Deputy Director of the UN Millennium Campaign.

The panel was organized in two parts each addressing a cluster of issues. The first part focused on the relationship between parliaments and citizens and how it can help build national ownership of the goals while the second considered the institutional mechanisms for parliaments to mainstream the goals and track progress.

The following salient points emerged from the discussion:

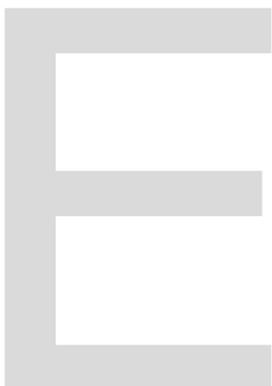
National ownership is key to implementation of the goals. It is a process that must involve all sectors of society at all levels, from local to national. In its deepest sense, national ownership comes from the people, not just from the institution of government. The extent to which people understand and believe in the goals will be key to national ownership.

It is important for people to see the goals as their own, and not as an agenda handed down to them from the government or the United Nations. Parliaments should not attempt “to teach” the goals to the people but rather help translate the language of the goals into people’s daily concerns. In their interaction with constituents, members of parliament should focus more on the principles and ideals that are embedded in the goals, all of which were designed from the start to be “people-centred”.

Parliaments have a key role to play in monitoring progress on the goals. Reliable data is critical to monitoring, particularly when it comes directly from citizens. Generally, citizens do not think of success in terms of percentages or other technical measurements. Their monitoring of the goals tends to be based on first-hand impressions of whether public services are improving, job opportunities are expanding, the environment is healthier, to name a few.

Parliaments should ensure that monitoring of progress captures both the quantitative and qualitative aspects. For example, more teachers do not necessarily lead to better education if the teachers are not well trained. What matters in implementation, as far as people are concerned, is the actual impact of public policy on their lives.

Another way in which citizens can help monitor the goals is by participating in the implementation of government-sponsored programmes. The practice of allowing citizens to participate in the delivery of government services is a promising one. Parliaments can support this practice through legislation that requires the government to include communities in the design, delivery and assessment of public services.



Each country will need a sustainable development plan to apply the global goals to the national context. In many countries, parliaments are not able to participate in the crafting of the national plan because of a lack of capacities or legal authority. As a result, the executive branch is often in control of the process. This need not be the case in all instances, however. Several parliaments around the world do have the authority to contribute to the national plan and to demand regular progress reports through one or more committees.

A major hurdle regarding the institutionalization of the SDGs in parliament is the high turnover of MPs. The current generation of MPs will likely be replaced more than once over the next 15 years. One way to address this problem is by training the permanent staff of parliaments as well as strengthening support structures, such as the Office of the Clerk that will preserve the institutional memory of the SDGs.

There are different ways for parliaments to mainstream the SDGs in their work. Constituting a dedicated committee or advisory council for the SDGs may support policy coherence between portfolio committees. Still, no single committee should be responsible for the entire SDGs framework. Each portfolio committee must be in the lead in advancing the one or two goals that may come under its purview.

Ultimately, what matters most to advancing the SDGs is that each goal is championed by a number of MPs. Parliaments can also institute a regular debate of the plenary to review progress on the basis of a report provided by the government. The budget process, common to all parliaments, provides another important opportunity for a comprehensive assessment of the SDGs.

Parliaments will have a key role to play in mobilizing sufficient resources for the SDGs. Among other things, they can impose tax increases and close tax loopholes. They can also adopt laws to induce private investments in key sectors of the economy or to forge innovative partnerships between public and private sectors.

In the final analysis, the implementation of the SDGs by parliaments will not be easy. There will be many successes as well as failures. What is certain is that the SDGs are here to stay and that governments are now accountable for the goals year after year. Parliaments must seize this opportunity to strengthen their legislative, oversight, and representative roles. The IPU, for its part, must continue to provide guidance to parliaments and facilitate an exchange of best practices among its members.