



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

United Nations Headquarters, New York
31 August to 2 September 2015



Conference
Item 2

CONF-2015/2(b)-R.1
16 June 2015

Presentation of Conference Reports

(b) Parliamentary involvement in the shaping and implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals

The 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) established that a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would need to replace the Millennium Development Goals when the latter expire at the end of 2015.

Whereas 15 years ago the UN consultations on the MDGs were very limited in scope and did not involve major stakeholders such as national parliaments, the global talks on the new SDGs have been much more inclusive. This paper examines parliamentary involvement in the shaping and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and its accompanying SDGs.

As the centerpiece of the so-called post-2015 development agenda, the SDGs will be universal in scope, applying to both developed and developing countries, and will unite the two main threads of international development – poverty eradication and sustainable development – into a single coherent and “transformative” framework.

In order to ensure buy-in by governments and all stakeholders, the United Nations began consultations on the SDGs in 2013. The IPU immediately joined the process, to help inject a parliamentary perspective into the new framework and to prepare the ground for implementation by parliaments afterwards. The IPU consulted widely with its own membership on at least four occasions: the 128th Assembly in Quito (March 2013), which concluded with the Quito Communique; the 2013 and 2014 Parliamentary Hearings at the United Nations; and the 132nd Assembly in Hanoi (April 2015), which adopted the Hanoi Declaration.

The first three of these parliamentary consultations focused on the “what” of the SDGs, i.e. issues that parliamentarians felt the SDGs should address. In contrast, the consultation in Hanoi marked the beginning of a discussion at the IPU on the “how” of the SDGs, i.e. how parliaments can help implement the new goals on their own as well as in partnership with the United Nations.

The “what” of the SDGs: campaigning for specific goals and for an IPU role

Three key messages emerged from the parliamentary consultations, and they came to form the official IPU position in the negotiations of the SDGs.



The first message is that, in order to achieve the transformative agenda that the SDGs promise, a whole new economic model is needed to break the dependence on growth as the main engine of human progress. In a finite planet, prosperity can no longer be centred on the indefinite expansion of material production and consumption; the focus must instead be on growing levels of human well-being and happiness. Consumption levels in developed and developing countries will need to converge toward the middle ground of a globally sustainable lifestyle. The economy will have to be "greened" to produce more with less input, but that will not suffice to decouple it *absolutely* from the environment unless overall global consumption levels are kept in check. The fact that the world's population is due to expand by two billion in the next two or three decades lends added urgency to this task.

The second message has to do with the key role of democratic governance as both a means and an end of development. The IPU defines democratic governance as a set of institutions and processes (public and private) that are representative, accountable, transparent and effective at exercising their mandate, so that all people will benefit fairly. Governance has long been recognized by the United Nations (including in the Millennium Declaration) as an enabler of development, but rarely as an end, that is, as the manifestation of an inherent right. For the IPU, governance is an end because participation in public affairs is an entitlement and a key dimension of well-being.

The third message is that the SDGs must be people-centred, in recognition that the fulfilment and realization of all human rights will constitute the litmus test of the SDGs' successful implementation 15 years from now. Parliamentarians have endorsed a goal on inequality as one of the main challenges, next to the eradication of poverty in all its forms, to this people-centred vision of sustainable development. They have also called for a stand-alone goal on gender equality and for women's issues to be mainstreamed throughout the entire SDG framework.

On the strength of this, the IPU and its Members have been campaigning at the United Nations, in their home parliaments and around the world for a stand-alone goal on democratic governance. At the United Nations, the IPU has closely followed the deliberations of the special Working Group of the General Assembly on the SDGs and spoken in that forum on behalf of parliaments. At the same time, it has asked parliaments to hold debates and engage with government negotiators at the United Nations.

At the conclusion of difficult deliberations in 2014, the Working Group had recommended to the General Assembly a set of 17 goals and 169 targets for further negotiation by all UN member States in 2015. However, realizing that the proposed goals were probably the best compromise possible, when negotiations resumed in January 2015 member States agreed not to reopen them. This effectively means that the so-called "governance goal" (number 16) has been secured. Among other things, this goal would commit countries to "develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels" and to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels".

Although some "technical proofing" of the proposed 169 targets may still be required, the main issues up for negotiation relate to the UN Declaration accompanying the SDGs, the means of implementation (finance, trade, debt relief, aid, etc.), and finally, the monitoring mechanism for assessing progress, including through a set of global indicators.

The IPU President wrote to all IPU Members at the start of 2015 to inform them of these developments and to encourage parliaments to follow this process closely. Monthly updates on the negotiations were sent to all Members by the IPU Secretary General. The IPU Office in New York contacted UN missions, proposing that the UN Declaration contain strong language on the role of parliaments. The IPU President himself met with the process facilitators in New York.

The "how" of the SDGs: mobilizing parliaments for implementation

The Hanoi Declaration reaffirms a vision of sustainable development that is people-centred and firmly anchored in the international human rights framework. It expresses strong support for the 17 SDGs the United Nations has proposed and acknowledges that the issues on which IPU Members have engaged in advocacy – health, gender, inequality and governance – have been captured by specific goals. It also welcomes the fact that climate change, a fundamental threat to people and the planet, is fully integrated into the framework.

The Hanoi Declaration commits parliaments to translating the goals into enforceable laws and regulations at the national level, including, critically, through the budget process. This will require institutionalizing the goals in parliaments so that they can be mainstreamed in all deliberative processes and over the entire 15-year implementation period. The Hanoi Declaration further calls on parliamentarians to build national ownership of the SDGs by proactively engaging their constituents and by working to tailor the global goals to their countries' specific circumstances, including through the process for drawing up the national sustainable development plan.

In the lead-up to the 132nd Assembly in Hanoi, all 166 Member Parliaments were invited to respond to a questionnaire on how they saw the SDGs and were preparing to implement them. Fifty-seven parliaments responded. Encouragingly, 39 out of 57 parliaments were aware of their government's position in the SDG negotiations; 46 parliaments knew who was leading those negotiations; and 34 parliaments planned to obtain regular briefings from the government on developments in the negotiations before a final agreement was reached. On the flip side, less than half of all respondents were taking any initiative: only 18 parliaments had held a debate in the previous six months to review the Government's position in the negotiations; only 21 parliaments were planning to hold hearings with constituents and civil society to obtain their views on the SDGs; and only 16 parliaments were reviewing the committee system to help mainstream the goals. These results suggest the need for further efforts to spur parliaments into preparing for the SDGs.

Another parliamentary contribution to the SDG process, one that touches on one of the most important "how" questions, was channelled into a separate UN process, on financing for development. This process is intended to follow up on two UN conferences, in Monterrey (2002) and Doha (2008), and is expected to conclude with a major new agreement on financing for development at a third international conference to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015. The Addis Ababa Accord, as that agreement will be called, will provide much of the substance for the means of implementation corresponding to Goal 17 of the proposed SDGs. Given that the Hanoi Declaration also refers to SDG-related financing needs, the IPU has been campaigning for language on parliaments to be reflected in the Addis Ababa Accord.

At the technical level, the IPU has joined a number of partners in a UN-led exercise to provide input on the selection of indicators for governance (Goal 16) and gender equality (Goal 5). It is important to select strong indicators that effectively gauge progress on these issues, including with respect to the role of parliaments. In another initiative, the IPU joined a consultative group led by UNDP on the updated design of *MyWorld*, the citizen-led global survey on the SDGs in which some seven million people have participated. The new *MyWorld* survey is meant to become a tool that parliamentarians and other policymakers (ministers, UN officials, etc.) at the country level can use to garner citizens' feedback on the implementation of the SDGs on the ground.

Within the IPU Secretariat, staff consultations have begun to flesh out possible operational approaches to assist parliaments in the implementation of the SDGs beginning in 2016, when a new five-year strategic plan will need to be crafted.

To do this effectively, the IPU itself will need to mainstream the SDGs in all its operations to avoid compartmentalization and maximize synergies between activities. With regard to parliaments, the IPU may need to retool in order to pursue two parallel approaches: one to help parliaments institutionalize the SDGs in all of their deliberative processes (beginning with the committee system), the other to help them advance specific goals in respect of which the IPU may have a specific comparative advantage or expertise, such as gender equality, health or climate change. All of this will require strengthening the IPU with additional resources and political support from Member Parliaments.

IPU WORK ON THE MDGS

Like most other institutions, the IPU and parliaments in general took some time to take stock of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after their adoption in 2000. In close cooperation with the United Nations, the MDG agenda eventually came to inform the work of the IPU both politically and at the operational level.

It was clear from the start that the IPU could not pursue the entire agenda at once. Operationally, in terms of projects and activities to support the implementation of the MDGs through parliaments, choices had to be made as to what to focus on, and partnerships had to be established to support the work. Limited and diminishing resources (due to budget cuts) meant that much of the MDG work of the IPU had to rely on unpredictable voluntary funding.

The IPU's project work pursued two tracks: one was meant to look at the parliamentary structures that, institutionally, could help mainstream the MDGs throughout the entire policy process; the other focused on supporting a limited number of MDGs (more precisely, some of the targets within those goals), namely MDG 3 (gender equality and women's empowerment), MDG 4 (child mortality), MDG 5 (maternal health), MDG 6 (HIV/AIDS, but excluding malaria and other targets) and MDG 8 (mainly foreign aid and trade targets). Almost all of this work depended on partnerships with UN agencies or programmes such as UNDP and its Millennium Campaign, UN Women, the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, as well as the World Trade Organization (technically not part of the UN system).

The work on parliamentary structures – consisting mainly of case studies – is particularly illustrative of how parliaments have approached the MDG agenda. Overall, it showed considerable unevenness in terms of focus areas and a general lack of capacity to institutionalize the MDGs. Where specialized MDG caucuses, committees or networks have been established, there is often little evidence of their effectiveness. Many parliaments also lack the capacity and often the legal authority to participate in key processes, such as the crafting of the national sustainable development plan or the budget bill. All of these considerations will come into play again when it is time to implement the SDGs.

Looking at the goal-specific work of the IPU, a broad assessment may be that the gender goal has received the most attention, followed by HIV/AIDS and the other health-related goals. This is partly a function of the priorities of donors on which the IPU depends, and partly a result of consultations with Member Parliaments within the IPU's executive structures. Some work areas, like that of trade and development cooperation (MDG 8), remain focused on engaging parliaments in international negotiations or dialogues and have yet to mature into actual parliamentary strengthening projects owing to a lack of resources from Members or donors. Clearly, given the intrinsic differences between the MDGs and the SDGs, the IPU will need to re-evaluate its goal-specific work going forward. Goal 16 of the SDGs, the so-called “governance goal” (which was not part of the MDG framework) will be one of the main areas of focus for the Organization.

On the political front, the IPU has helped raise awareness of the MDGs among parliaments through a number of resolutions on topics such as HIV/AIDS (2001, 2005), maternal and child health (2012), trade, debt and development finance (2000, 2004, 2005, 2013), foreign aid (2008), and biodiversity and environmental sustainability (2002, 2004, 2006). In addition, at a number of parliamentary debates organized over the years at the United Nations in New York or at the regional level, the MDGs have been either the main subject or have occupied part of the agenda. It is expected that future IPU resolutions will address various aspects of the SDGs over the next 15 years.