



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Parliaments and the Sustainable Development Goals

**A self-
assessment
toolkit**

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Introduction

We acknowledge also the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments. ... “We the peoples” are the celebrated opening words of the Charter of the United Nations. It is “we the peoples” who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community – and all people.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
New York, 25 September 2015

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* is a ground-breaking global commitment to end poverty and set the world on a sustainable path to inclusive development. It was endorsed by government leaders at a United Nations summit in September 2015. A set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 actionable targets lies at the core of this ambitious agenda.

The SDGs are intended to focus and coordinate national policies towards a common vision for humanity. The SDGs build on past efforts to implement the poverty reduction agenda known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They aspire to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They include the three pillars of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments have assumed a moral commitment to implement them to the best of their capacities and in accordance with national priorities.

The 2030 Agenda and its SDGs are the outcome of an extended consultation and negotiation over several years. IPU, UNDP, national parliaments and hundreds of parliamentarians played a very active role throughout the process and advocated strongly for the inclusion of goals related to democratic governance.

The purpose of this self-assessment toolkit is to assist parliaments and their members to:

- assess their preparedness to engage with the SDGs;
- identify additional strategies, mechanisms and partnerships to support implementation of the SDGs more effectively.

The toolkit is designed to enable parliamentarians to identify good practices, gaps, opportunities and lessons learned. That will equip parliamentarians to effectively institutionalize the new agenda and mainstream the various goals into the legislative process. The toolkit is not prescriptive. It has been designed to be relevant to all parliaments, whatever their political system and stage of development.

Self-assessment is a method that parliaments can use to start their own process of internal benchmarking and to assess their state of preparedness for engagement with the SDGs. The conclusions of the self-assessment should allow parliaments to set priorities for reform in order to strengthen their response to the SDGs. The ultimate objective is to ensure that parliaments are fit for purpose to play a full role in realizing the 2030 Agenda.

What are the SDGs?

We welcome the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that has emerged with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Poverty eradication is the overarching objective of this new agenda, alongside the promotion of economic, social and environmental development. ... We applaud the ambition of this agenda to be transformative and leave no one behind, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. Indeed, to be successful, sustainable development has to place human beings at the centre of decisions. It has to aim at achieving their well-being with full respect for environmental limitations. It needs to be owned by the people and it requires their full participation. People are individuals endowed with rights and responsibilities towards each other and towards the environment. We must all invest in them as our most important resource.

Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development:
Building the world the people want Declaration of the Fourth World Conference
of Speakers of Parliament
2 September 2015

The 17 SDGs and their 169 targets were designed to encapsulate all three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. They have a comprehensive policy framework, which applies to both developed and developing countries. The goals range from eradicating absolute poverty to reversing climate change, and from achieving gender equality to changing consumption and production patterns (see graphic). A number of global indicators have been designed to help track progress towards the goals.

The 2030 Agenda places people at the centre of the development process. It calls on governments, parliaments and other stakeholders to design and deliver laws and programmes that meet the needs of the people, break down policy silos, uphold human rights, and leave no one behind.



A new framework for action

Not only do the SDGs identify sectoral priorities and set ambitious new targets; they also break new ground. It is the first time that an international compact has recognized the centrality of effective, inclusive and accountable institutions in the development process.

Goal 16, also known as the governance goal, reflects IPU's and UNDP's long-held view that democratic governance is not only an end in itself, but also a means to sustainable development, peace and justice. As important legislative, oversight and representative institutions, parliaments have a direct interest in this goal (see box, page 7).

Goal 10 is another important SDG breakthrough. It recognizes that growing inequalities are a threat to the economy and social fabric, and so aims to reduce inequality within and among countries. Goal 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) complements the SDGs' vision of a discrimination-free society. It emphasises empowerment and a life without violence. Goal 5 in particular coincides with one of the IPU's and UNDP's core priorities.

Development of our societies and economies hinges on the enjoyment, by women and men, girls and boys, of full and equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. We must rededicate ourselves to the full realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2030.¹

¹ Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development: Building the world the people want. Declaration of the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, 2 September 2015.

Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions – an overview

Building on lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs include a specific goal to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

Two targets within this goal refer to the role of parliaments:

- Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
- Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

Other targets refer to key principles of democratic governance such as the rule of law, justice, access to information and fundamental freedoms.

Parliaments need to engage in the implementation and oversight of the entire SDG framework. But they also need to pay special attention to their own institutional development in line with Targets 16.6 and 16.7. For example, parliaments can work with their national statistics authority to develop indicators that reflect their own priorities in support of targets 16.6 and 16.7.

The 2030 Agenda reflects a shift in the focus of development thinking from satisfying basic needs to upholding human rights. The 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development sets out most clearly that the rights-based approach puts people at the centre of the development process. It designates States as primary duty-holders and requires them to contribute to realizing all human rights. The Declaration on the Right to Development defines people's right to development “as an inalienable human 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”.²

Translating this global framework into actionable national policies will require a concerted effort. The whole of society will need to take part, beginning with the people themselves. A core element of the 2030 Agenda is that people must be included at every stage, from initial policy design to implementation and monitoring. National and subnational parliaments must work to facilitate this.

2 Declaration on the Right to Development: www.un.org/documents/ga/res/41/a41r128.htm

Complementing the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda sets out a global vision for sustainable development. It is also complemented by three additional international agreements on financing for development, climate change and disaster risk reduction. Read together, they provide an overarching framework that drives sustainable development forward:

- **Addis Ababa Action Agenda,**³ This is the outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (July 2015). It provides a global framework for mobilizing resources estimated to be worth trillions of dollars to finance sustainable development. That can be done through development cooperation, international taxation, trade, and a host of regulations and institutional reforms. The Agenda dovetails with SDG 17 (strengthen means of implementation).
- **Paris Agreement on Climate Change,**⁴ Governments adopted this agreement in December 2015. It aims to limit the global average temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels. A larger rise may lead to catastrophic and irreversible consequences for human development. The Agreement requires all countries to take effective and verifiable action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the main culprit in global warming. It also expands on SDG 13 (combat climate change).
- **Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction,**⁵ Leaders endorsed this agreement in March 2015. It reflects the experiences gained through regional and national efforts to address disaster risk reduction. It recognizes that disasters are a setback to development work, that risks must be reduced and mitigated, and that reconstruction must follow the *build back better* principle. The Framework specifically recognizes a role for parliamentarians in ensuring accountability and oversight.⁶

3 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/frameworks/addisababaactionagenda>

4 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/frameworks/parisagreement>

5 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/frameworks/sendaiframework>

6 Ibid, **27(e)**: “[t]o... promote public scrutiny and encourage institutional debates, including by parliamentarians and other relevant officials, on progress reports of local and national plans for disaster risk reduction”;

27(i): “to encourage parliamentarians to support the implementation of disaster risk reduction by developing new or amending relevant legislation and setting budget allocations”;

48(h): “to continue supporting and advocating disaster risk reduction and the strengthening of national legal frameworks”.

Localizing the SDGs

The SDGs were designed within a broad, overarching framework. They are intended to help focus and coordinate national policies (including existing ones) towards a common vision for humanity. Each State therefore needs to identify its own priorities, and localize targets and indicators to guide its national implementation.

To localize the SDGs, each country should develop or update its own national development plan. Country-specific goals and targets should be supported by locally relevant indicators of progress in order to record results on the ground. Citizens must be closely involved in this process. Parliaments have a key role in that regard to ensure that national SDGs reflect specific local needs and the circumstances of specific groups.

Policies to implement the SDGs should look holistically and synergistically at human development needs, which may be social, economic, cultural or environmental. For example, policies to combat poverty (SDG 1) cannot be narrowly reduced to raising income, important though that is. Instead, anti-poverty policies should address all dimensions of the problem, such as lack of education, poor health and hunger. Such comprehensive policies will also need to be tailored to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Those groups may be lagging behind national averages on measures such as per capita GDP, life expectancy, educational achievement and political participation. A holistic and synergistic approach is the essence of the principle of *leaving no one behind that informs the entire 2030 Agenda*.

The 2030 Agenda includes guiding principles and milestones for regularly reviewing progress. Global progress on the SDGs will be assessed against a set of agreed indicators.⁷ It is understood that States can adopt locally appropriate indicators to track their national progress.

The importance of data

In order to ensure laws, budgets and programmes are effectively targeted at those most in need, parliamentarians must be able to access disaggregated data on a range of key issues. This is usually done through national statistics offices. Parliaments can use their budget approval powers to ensure that statistics offices are adequately resourced for effective data collection and analysis. Parliamentarians can also support statisticians' efforts to collect and validate data through their own understanding of the demographics and needs of their constituents.

⁷ See the SDGs indicators website of the United Nations Statistics Commission at <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>

Parliamentary engagement with the SDGs

As parliamentarians, we must support efforts to reach the new goals in ways that respect each country's national specificities. Our responsibility is clear: to hold governments accountable for the goals they have subscribed to, and to make sure that enabling laws are passed and budgets adopted. ... We will seek to overcome the silo mentality within our own parliaments and national administrations to reflect the intersectoral nature of the goals. To this end, we will do our utmost to institutionalize the goals in every parliament, with sufficient time for discussion and monitoring.

Hanoi Declaration – The Sustainable Development Goals: Turning words into action
132nd IPU Assembly, Hanoi, 1 April 2015

The SDGs are an opportunity for parliamentarians to demonstrate their commitment to improving people's lives and the health of the planet on which all human existence depends. More immediately, the SDGs are a robust framework around which parliaments can base their strategic plans and pursue their own oversight and accountability work.

An inclusive process

In many countries, a national SDG working group or similar body will be established to coordinate and guide SDG implementation. Parliamentary representatives should be included in any such high-level body, so that they can contribute their constituents' views and provide institutional support. Parliaments should demand that the governments draw up or update a national SDG plan (or other relevant sectorial plans). This will ensure that national policies and plans will be developed or reviewed so that their part in achieving the SDGs becomes more effective. Parliaments should be able to contribute to this plan through a wide-ranging, public consultation process. Parliament should formally adopt the national SDG plan after a comprehensive review and formal debate. Finally, parliaments should ask governments for a regular progress report on the implementation of the national plan.⁸

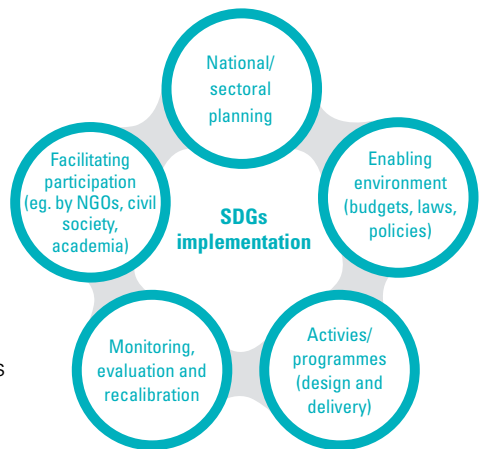
⁸ The role of parliaments in national progress reviews is specifically mentioned in paragraph 79 of the 2030 Agenda, which states: *We also encourage member states to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels which are country-led and country-driven. ... National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes.*

Parliaments' participation in global progress monitoring

National governments are in the driving seat for implementing the SDGs. But the process is also supported internationally through information-sharing and monitoring mechanisms. One of the most important is the United Nations High Level Political Forum. Each July, national leaders gather at the Forum to take stock of progress and recalibrate global efforts. A number of countries undergo voluntary national reviews every year. The reviews should be a participatory process that is open to all stakeholders, including parliaments. To facilitate parliamentary engagement, IPU holds a special session of its Committee on United Nations Affairs at the first IPU Assembly of each year.

The core parliamentary roles of law-making, budgeting, oversight and representation of constituency interests are all critical to the full implementation of the SDGs.

- **Law-making,** To implement the SDGs, it is crucial to ensure a pro-poor, gender sensitive, human rights-based enabling environment. Ensuring national ownership of the SDGs also requires legislation that promotes public accountability, participatory decision-making and inclusiveness. To that end, parliamentarians must review legislation proposed by their government to ensure that it reflects human rights principles and contributes to achieving both the national SDG plan and the wider 2030 Agenda.
- **Budgeting,** Successfully implementing the SDGs means maximizing all available domestic resources to achieve the best possible results. During the budget approval process, parliaments must engage on how government funds are being allocated to their nationally defined SDGs, including whether sufficient funds are reaching the most vulnerable and excluded. On the revenue side, parliaments must ensure that fiscal and other economic policies set through the budget process are aligned to the



national SDG plan. Parliamentary oversight of budget expenditure is also crucial. It is the moment when parliaments can analyse the effectiveness of government expenditure on SDG achievement.

- **Oversight,** Monitoring results is a critical element of SDG implementation. **Parliaments must make sure that implementation is on track and can be recalibrated in light of evidence and public feedback.** Parliamentary oversight mechanisms such as Question Time, written questions to government, and parliamentary committee hearings can be very effective in identifying obstacles or assessing progress. **Parliamentary committees should have the power to call on government officials to provide information on the impact of government policies and programmes. Committees should also be able to call public hearings to garner citizens' views on SDG implementation.** The knowledge collected can be fed back into government planning and delivery mechanisms through a national SDG working group or equivalent body in which parliamentarians participate.
- **Representation,** **To ensure meaningful national ownership of the SDGs, all citizens and stakeholders should be involved in setting policies and priorities.** As elected representatives of the people, parliamentarians have an obligation to reach out to their constituents throughout their term of office, not just at election time. **By going directly to the people, parliamentarians can identify gaps and weaknesses in SDG implementation that may not be caught in general government reports or national statistics.** Parliamentarians should be aware of their constituents' wider concerns: consultations with civil society organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, and others can help to identify those concerns.

Assessing parliamentary preparedness – where to begin?

Self-assessment is by definition a **voluntary practice**. It works best when parliament, especially its highest authorities, sees it as a way of strengthening itself as an institution. Self-assessment, as opposed to an external expert evaluation, helps ensure that parliament assumes ownership of the exercise's findings. Self-assessments are not and should not be used to rank parliaments. Instead, they provide useful information to help improve the performance of key parliamentary functions, including legislation, to representation and oversight. The aim is to agree a shared vision of the current situation, priorities for future action and recommendations on how best to move forward.

When should you run an SDG self-assessment?

The SDGs came into effect on 1 January 2016 and implementation is already under way. It would be useful therefore **to assess your institutional processes and capacities to deliver on the SDGs** as soon as possible. That will ensure that parliament is at the forefront of efforts to implement the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda and SDG framework must be realized in a relatively short period of 15 years. Regular self-assessments of capacities and needs will enable parliamentarians to ensure that their parliaments actively contribute to SDG implementation processes on an ongoing basis. An initial self-assessment as soon as possible would establish a baseline. Future self-assessments could be run every three to five years. They could focus on what had been achieved and what was still to be done, as well as good practices and lessons learned.

Who is involved in a self-assessment?

Doing a self-assessment brings together different actors to discuss preparedness and capacity. Parliamentarians are the principal stakeholders and assessors of their own preparedness.

Experience shows that parliamentary self-assessments are most useful when **run by a group under the leadership of the speaker, a committee chair or other senior parliamentary authority**. High-level leadership of the process and the inclusion of a cross-section of

parliamentarians increase the likelihood of the outcomes being broadly owned by the entire parliament.

A self-assessment is not a check-box exercise. It is specifically meant to bring together parliamentarians with different perspectives and competences so that they can reflect on a parliament's preparedness to engage with the SDGs. **Bringing together a mixed group increases the legitimacy of the self-assessment process as an institutional exercise.** The group should ideally represent the diversity of the national parliament and the country. It should include male and female parliamentarians from the government and opposition, as well as members from under-represented groups, such as young parliamentarians, minorities and people from a balance of geographical areas. If the group includes a variety of views from parliament, including parliamentary staff, it will be able to usefully reflect on internal processes and preparedness, which is essential to achieving a constructive outcome.

Parliaments may also want to invite other stakeholders to participate in the self-assessment, such as civil society or women's groups, youth representatives, trade unions, academics or the media. Each is likely to bring different data and feedback from their own constituencies which can often help inform and enrich the process. Each parliament will choose for itself whether to include external participants and how to interact with them.

How is a self-assessment organized?

The SDGs cover a wide range of development issues and involve a complex range of implementation approaches. It is therefore highly recommended that **any self-assessment exercise is preceded by an SDG information seminar.** The seminar should walk parliamentarians through the key elements of the 2030 Agenda, the 17 SDGs and the accompanying frameworks. Ideally, **the seminar could be jointly organized with the government** (for example, through a national SDGs unit or working group, if one exists). **This could enable parliamentarians to begin building partnerships, including with government officials with whom they will work as SDG implementation moves forward.**

An SDG information seminar could also be used to launch the self-assessment process. It could serve to introduce parliamentarians to the process and start the period of reflection that is critical to the success of any self-assessment. A seminar is also a good chance to identify parliamentarians who would be interested in organizing or participating in the exercise.

Where there is a bicameral parliament, both houses can run a self-assessment, either separately or together. The choice will depend on the level of cooperation and collaboration between the two houses, and their level of shared resources. A joint self-assessment will allow a bicameral parliament to identify common strategies and complementary actions. That said, in some countries, one or both houses may not be composed or organized along party lines (such as those that represent traditional leaders or appointed elders). Different approaches might therefore be required to ensure inclusive representation of different community perspectives.

Preparing for a parliamentary self-assessment exercise

Support from leadership	Has the presiding officer and/or parliamentary leadership group endorsed the self-assessment?
	Who will initiate and organize the exercise?
	Is there a cross-party leadership group to provide strategic guidance?
Organization/ logistics	In a non-partisan parliament, is there an inclusive leadership group that can provide strategic guidance?
	Is there a group within the secretariat that can organize logistics?
	Are there sufficient resources to conduct the self-assessment exercise?
Objectives	What are the objectives of the exercise?
	How is a common understanding to be developed amongst parliamentarians and other participants on the usefulness and objectives of the exercise?
	Who will participate in the exercise? How will parliamentarians be chosen to participate? Will all interested parliamentarians be invited, or only a smaller representative group?
Participation	Will non-parliamentarians participate, either as active contributors or as subject-matter experts?
	How will those people be chosen?

	How will the exercise be facilitated? Will there be a single facilitator for the overall exercise?
Facilitators	How will the facilitator be identified and agreed upon? What kind of support will they need?
	Will funding be required for a facilitator, or can a partner organization be identified that could contribute a good facilitator?
Data sources	What data are available to inform the self-assessment? Are there existing government reports that can be used? Are there existing parliamentary reports, including from sectoral committees? Are there relevant reports from international or regional bodies (including human rights treaty bodies)?
	Who will be responsible for collecting and collating information that the parliamentarians use?
Assessment outcome	What are the expected outcomes of the exercise? A report? A Plan of Action for Parliament? Both? A new/stronger network of stakeholders focused on SDG implementation (e.g.: parliamentarians, NGOs, independent institutions)? Identification of key stakeholders? Development of partnerships?
	Who will be responsible for producing these outcomes (e.g.: parliamentary secretariat, committees)?
Follow-up	What follow-up is expected? By when?
	Who will be responsible for following up?
	How will follow-up be monitored?

Self-assessment questions

A self-assessment process should start with a **set of questions** that can be used to systematically consider the different issues that need to be discussed. This tends to help parliamentarians most effectively to reflect on preparedness and identify their priorities for future action. However, there is no one solution or one set of questions that will fit all national contexts.

The questions proposed below are therefore indicative. They are based on self-assessment exercises that parliaments have already conducted. Questions in Part A are mainly intended to elicit factual information and to provide background for the discussions in Part B, where the questions are more subjective and should lead participants to identify priorities for further action.

Parliaments may wish to tailor some of the questions below to their own national context. They need not discuss all the proposed questions and can also add questions of their own.

Questions 1: Building understanding of the SDGs in parliament

Each parliament should consider organizing information seminars and capacity development activities. This will ensure that all parliamentarians have the same baseline understanding of the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and their supporting targets. For the longer term, some parliaments have found it useful to develop strong partnerships with government ministries and expert bodies (such as civil society organizations, international development partners or academics). Those partnerships enable parliamentarians to access technical advice, wider sources of information and training opportunities.

Part A: identifying your baseline

- Is information about the SDGs included in briefing materials and induction programmes for new parliamentarians after elections have been held?
- Do parliamentarians receive updates on national and international SDG implementation issues? How systematic are these updates?
- Have parliamentarians taken part in international and regional events on SDGs aimed at building understanding?

In the past 12 months:

- Have parliamentarians received any training sessions on the SDGs? If so how many sessions have been run and for how many parliamentarians (men and women)?
- Have training sessions or awareness-raising activities for parliamentary staff been organized? If so, how many and for how many staff (men and women)? Which departments were they from?

Part B: reflecting on the impact of your efforts

- **Do parliamentarians have access to national and international information about SDG implementation?**
 - How effective is the parliamentary library at providing parliamentarians with briefings and analysis on SDG issues?
 - Would parliamentarians be open to receiving briefings from civil society organizations, think tanks, academic institutions, development partners or other SDG experts?
 - Has parliament reached out to the national focal point for sustainable development (e.g.: a national sustainable development council) or any other government body to provide a briefing or training session to parliamentarians on the SDGs?
- **Are there any mechanisms or structures in place to enable parliamentarians to discuss SDG issues (e.g.: a parliamentary working group, caucus or task force on the SDGs)? How effective are they?**
- **Have any evaluations been undertaken of strengths and weaknesses of previous efforts to implement the MDGs (or more general poverty-reduction programmes)? Could parliament use these to identify good practice and lessons learned?**
 - Have any evaluations been done of parliamentary mechanisms used to engage with the MDGs, and of their effectiveness?

Questions 2: Bringing the SDGs from the global to the local level

The 2030 Agenda and SDGs have been endorsed as a global framework. But **their implementation will need to be tailored to national priorities, and to build on existing national plans and efforts.** Not all SDGs will be of equal importance in every country or region of a country. There are 8–10 “targets” that support each SDG. The targets provide more detail on the key issues that should be addressed if the Goal is to be achieved nationally. Likewise, these targets may not all be accorded the same priority for implementation. To localize the SDGs, national planning agencies will need to review and revise existing national and sectoral development plans. Countries may also need to develop new SDG implementation plans. Parliamentarians should be involved in these processes, including by feeding in their knowledge of their constituents’ priorities.

Part A: identifying your baseline

- **Is there a national plan for the implementation of the SDGs?**
If so, have links been drawn between that plan and existing sectoral plans (climate, education, health, etc.)?
- **Has parliament formally endorsed the national plan?**
- **Has parliament organized any debates (either in plenary or in relevant sectoral committees) on SDG implementation within the country in order to discuss national priorities?**

In the past 12 months, has the government:

- submitted reports to parliament about the implementation of the SDGs?
- made ministerial statements to parliament about SDG implementation?
- provided data on progress towards the targets and indicators for the SDGs? Are the data disaggregated by sex, age, geographical distribution and other relevant characteristics?

Part B: reflecting on the impact of your efforts

- **To what extent has parliament been involved in the preparation of the national plan for the SDGs?**
 - If there is no national SDG plan, are there any ongoing or future SDG or sectoral planning processes, in which parliament should seek to be involved?

- What support and information will parliamentarians need in order to effectively engage in any such planning processes?
- **How effectively are parliament and the government working together on the SDGs?**
 - Is there a government body (a ministry, task force, working group, unit or other) responsible for SDG coordination or planning, with which parliament is working?
 - To what extent does the government seek to engage parliament in implementing the SDGs?
 - Are there any precedents for parliament engaging in government task forces on sustainable development issues from which parliament can learn lessons?

Questions 3: Mainstreaming the SDGs within parliamentary mechanisms

The SDGs are a multisectoral, comprehensive sustainable development framework. The breadth of the 2030 Agenda, which the SDGs serve to realize, will require parliamentarians to take action on a range of policy issues across sectors, and to overcome institutional silos. These silos often exist within government and tend to be replicated when parliament oversees the government. Individual parliamentary committees are sometimes given sole responsibility for oversight of SDG issues, rather than mainstreaming SDG implementation and oversight across the entirety of parliament's processes and mechanisms. It is useful to systematically review parliament's existing mechanisms. This enables parliamentarians to identify whether those mechanisms can be used to support SDG implementation and oversight, and then to consider whether there would be value in creating any new processes or mechanisms.⁹

Part A: identifying your baseline

- **Has parliament formally endorsed the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs (perhaps through a motion or resolution)?¹⁰**
- **Does parliament have an institutional plan that adequately identifies its priorities in relation to supporting SDG implementation and monitoring?**
- **Has parliament clearly assigned responsibility for the SDGs within its own structures?**
 - Has parliament given responsibility to an already existing parliamentary body or structure for coordinating work on the SDGs? If so, which one?
 - Have the SDGs been included in the formal mandate of one or more committees? If so, which ones?
 - Has parliament created a committee dedicated to the SDGs?
 - Are there informal cross-party mechanisms that focus on the SDGs (e.g.: caucuses, interest groups)?

⁹ Examples of such mechanisms include creating an SDG (sub-)committee; mainstreaming the SDGs in all committees; creating a working group of all committee chairs to ensure that SDG issues are mainstreamed within and across committees; creating a more informal mechanism to facilitate regular information exchange on SDG implementation between the committees; and running committee hearings for experts.

¹⁰ A model resolution, adopted by the IPU Executive Committee at the 133rd IPU Assembly, can be found at http://www.ipu.org/un-e/model_SDG.pdf

In the past 12 months:

- How many plenary debates has parliament held on the SDGs?
- Which committees have discussed the SDGs?
- How many committee reports have been published on the SDGs?

Part B: reflecting upon the impact of your efforts

- **Have parliamentary committees of each house discussed how to effectively engage with implementing the SDGs?¹¹**
 - Has each parliamentary committee had a discussion on the SDGs under its purview?¹²
 - Has each parliamentary committee identified which Goals and targets they should engage with and how? If so, what needs to be done to empower that committee(s) to take on an SDG oversight role?
 - Have the different committees in both houses discussed whether and how they can work together on SDG oversight?
 - Do committees have a work plan which reflects SDG activities?
- **How effectively are parliamentary committees engaging the government about implementing the SDGs?**
 - Do parliamentary committees ask the relevant minister(s) to attend committee hearings and to provide updates on the progress of the national SDG strategy or plan?
 - Can parliamentary committees initiate any inquiries into how successfully the Goals are being achieved?
- **How effectively do parliamentary committees engage with civil society organizations, academia, international development partners or other key stakeholders in support of SDG implementation?**
 - Do parliamentary committees invite these groups to participate in public hearings and/or to give evidence about their involvement in SDG implementation?
 - Do parliamentary committees and/or their staff draw on such groups to provide committees with briefings and/or technical advice on SDG issues?

11 This should include consideration of whether and how parliamentary committees can oversee the implementation of any national sustainable development plan and relevant sectoral plans.

12 For example, many parliaments have a social welfare committee which could be used to oversee implementation of the SDGs related to health, education and poverty reduction; or a law and justice committee which could be used to track progress against SDG 16 on inclusive institutions, peace and access to justice.

- **To what extent have the SDGs been successfully mainstreamed in parliament? What adjustments, if any, are necessary to parliament's structures and working methods to enable it to work more effectively on the SDGs?**
- **Is the parliamentary secretariat adequately staffed and resourced to provide support services to parliamentarians and committees in relation to their SDG activities?**

Questions 4: Making laws in support of the SDGs

Parliament will play a key role in supporting the implementation of the SDGs by building a legal framework that enables the goals to be achieved. This will mean enacting pro-poor, gender-sensitive, human rights-based legislation. It is crucial that parliament reviews all proposed legislation through a human rights-based and sustainable development lens. It will then be able to identify whether and how a law promotes, or can be amended to promote, more effective SDG implementation. In so doing, parliament should be proactive in facilitating public participation in the law-making process. The public's input should include holding public hearings on draft laws and inviting civil society and members of the public to make submissions.

Part A: identifying your baseline

- **Has any review been undertaken to identify the legislative reforms required to support the SDGs?**
 - Is draft legislation accompanied by an assessment of the impact that it would have on implementing the SDGs?
 - Are laws tabled with an explanatory memorandum that sets out the impact of the proposed law on relevant SDGs? Does the ministerial speech introducing a law usually explain whether and how the proposed law will progress the SDGs?

In the past 12 months:

- How many laws have contained a specific reference to the SDGs?
- How many proposed amendments have contained a specific reference to the SDGs? How many of these amendments have been adopted?

Part B: reflecting on the impact of your efforts

- **How effectively do committees review draft laws through participatory and open committee processes in order to ensure that they support SDG implementation?**
 - Do parliamentary committees engage the public to make use of their feedback on real-life SDG implementation issues?
 - Do parliamentary committees invite submissions from outside experts on SDGs implementation (including what is and is not working)?

- **To what extent can committees or similar bodies perform an “impact assessment”¹³ of draft laws from an SDG standpoint?**
 - Is there a process to undertake a gender impact assessment of proposed laws?
 - Is there a process for assessing the human rights impact of proposed laws and ensuring their conformity with both ratified human rights conventions and relevant recommendations made by United Nations human rights mechanisms?
- **How effective is support provided to parliament?**
 - Can current staffing levels provide parliamentarians and committees with the legislative research, SDG impact analysis and other support that they need?
 - What tools or information would parliament need to be able to take the SDGs into account more effectively when legislating?

13 A socioeconomic impact assessment tool is designed to enable a parliament to assess the social, cultural, gender, environmental, human rights, poverty and economic impact of a proposed law. It is usually undertaken by parliamentary secretariat staff, who then share it with parliamentarians as an information paper for consideration.

Questions 5: Financing the SDGs

Parliament adopts national budgets and oversees expenditure to ensure public funds have been used properly and effectively. In this role, parliaments can use their law-making and oversight powers to focus the government on establishing pro-poor, gender-sensitive, human rights-based budgets that support SDG implementation.

Part A: identifying your baseline

- **Did the most recent budget proposal describe how it takes the SDGs into account? Does parliament require the government to do so?**
- **Does the budget allocate specific funds for the implementation of the SDGs? If so, what percentage of the budget is allocated, and for what purpose?**
- **Does the country receive or provide international development funding to support the SDGs?**
- **Do the terms of reference of budget and finance committees require them to consider SDG implementation as part of their oversight activities?**
- **Is there a budget office or unit in the parliamentary secretariat with the capacity to support parliamentary committees to assess proposed and actual budget expenditure against the SDGs?**

In the past 12 months:

- How many reports on the SDGs has the country's supreme audit institution or similar body submitted to parliament?
- How many reports from the relevant committee have contained specific reference to allocating funds or expenditure related to the SDGs?

Part B: reflecting on the impact of your efforts

- **To what extent does parliament consider the SDGs when discussing and adopting the budget?**
 - Does parliament have effective powers to recommend amendments to the government or to directly amend the budget in light of its conclusions?

- **How effectively can parliament scrutinize budget expenditure and assess how this has served to advance SDG implementation?**
 - In the event of poor budget support for SDGs, does parliament or its committees have the power to act or demand government action to correct the situation?
- **How effectively is parliament engaged in overseeing international development financing in support of the SDGs?**
 - Is foreign aid from both public and private sources (NGOs, foundations, etc.) properly accounted for in the national budget? How is oversight of these funds exercised?
 - Is there a national development cooperation plan (also commonly referred to as an “aid policy”)? Does the government report to parliament on the plan’s implementation?
 - Do international loans or agreements with international development partners require approval by parliament or tabling in the house?
- **Does the budget office or parliamentary secretariat have the capacity to produce a gender audit of the budget or an analysis of the budget from a human rights perspective?**
 - If not, what additional support is needed to enable the production of such audits or analyses?
 - Are there any civil society organizations with which parliament can partner to produce those audits or analyses?

Questions 6: Monitoring SDG implementation

The SDGs will need to be carefully monitored both nationally and globally. Regular reports will be submitted at the global level to track progress across countries. Nationally, monitoring will be linked to accountability for the implementation of national policies and programmes aligned to the SDG framework. The adoption of a rights-based approach in the SDGs has led to a greater emphasis on quality outcomes and distributional issues. Monitoring challenges related to those new measures should therefore be addressed as a priority. Data collection and analysis will be critical. It will require strong national capacities for data collection and disaggregation, including by gender, age, minority group and health status.

Part A: identifying your baseline

- **Has the country prepared a national report on its progress in the implementation of the SDGs?**
- **Has the country taken part in the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) review mechanisms and received international recommendations about further action on implementing the SDGs?**

In the past 12 months:

- How many committee hearings have been devoted to the SDGs?
- How many parliamentary questions have contained a specific reference to the SDGs?
- How many inquiries have been carried out related to the SDGs?

Part B: reflecting on the impact of your efforts

- **To what extent does parliament review, debate and take action on progress reports or other relevant documents produced by the government about the implementation of the SDGs and/or national sustainable development plans?**
 - Did parliament participate in the preparation of any progress reports?
 - Are these reports referred to a parliamentary committee for more discussion?
 - How are parliamentary recommendations on sustainable development and/or SDG-related issues fed back into government policy processes?

- **To what extent is parliament able to ensure follow-up on recommendations about SDG implementation from global bodies, namely the High-level Political Forum?**¹⁴
 - Are reports to international monitoring mechanisms tabled and debated in plenary sessions of parliament?
 - Are these reports referred to a parliamentary committee for more detailed consideration (e.g.: the foreign affairs or relevant sectoral committee)?
 - When international bodies make recommendations to government on SDG implementation, are they tabled in parliament for review, debate and/or action?
- **To what extent can parliament initiate and run its own inquiries into issues related to SDG implementation?**
 - Is the authority to initiate inquiries actually used to examine issues around the government's implementation of SDG-related programmes or policies?
 - Do such parliamentary inquiries engage openly with the public or outside experts to make use of their feedback on real-life SDG implementation issues?
 - Are official reports produced when such inquiries conclude? If so, is there a requirement to make the reports public? Are the reports made public in reality (e.g.: in the parliamentary library or on the parliamentary website)?
 - How effectively is parliament able to pressure the government and/or SDG focal points to take account of these inquiries' recommendations?
- **How effective is parliamentary monitoring of the government's development policy, whether as a "donor" or "recipient" of overseas development assistance?**
 - Are annual reports on disbursements or receipts of overseas development assistance submitted to parliament for consideration in plenary or in committee?
- **How effective is parliamentary monitoring of the government's interactions with international development partners (i.e.: bilateral donors, regional bodies and multilateral organizations)?**
 - Is the government required to table information in parliament on programmes, projects and activities supported by international development partners?
 - Are international development partners invited to brief parliament or its committees on SDG-related issues?

¹⁴ Governments will be required to report regularly to the United Nations High-level Political Forum of ECOSOC, which is responsible for overall SDG implementation oversight. See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

Questions 7: Engaging with the public

Making the SDGs people-centred means that people from all walks of life should have a say in the legal and policy processes that affect them. It also means that they should be able to demand corrective action from decision-makers in both government and parliament. The exponential growth of information technologies is leading to new ways for people to participate in development planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring processes. At the same time, there is still considerable scope for strengthening conventional methods of including citizens' contributions in parliamentary processes. It is important for parliament to proactively engage with the public both to find out the public's SDG priorities and to assess SDG implementation on the ground.

Part A: identifying your baseline

- **Is there a nationwide public campaign on the SDGs? Is parliament part of it?**
- **Does parliament hold regular public consultations on the SDGs? Does it have an open-access online platform to engage with the public on the SDGs?**

In the past 12 months:

- How many public events on SDGs have been organized in parliament or by parliament?
- How many outreach or constituency visits have focused on the SDGs?

Part B: reflecting on the impact of your efforts

- **How effectively does parliament communicate to the public about its work in support of SDG implementation?**
 - Does parliament have a communications strategy that includes efforts to reach out to the public on SDG issues?
 - Is parliament's website designed to easily identify the legislature's SDG-related activities?
 - Does parliament use social media to communicate about its SDG-related work?

- **To what extent does parliament meet with citizens, civil society organizations and academia to discuss the SDGs or development issues?**
 - If parliamentarians would like to meet with the public to discuss SDG issues, what support should the parliamentary secretariat provide to make that happen?
 - Could such an approach be systematized across parliament? If so, how?
 - Are specific efforts made to reach out to younger generations?

- **To what extent do parliamentary committees conduct field visits to oversee SDG implementation and the impact of SDG-related programmes on regions and communities?**
 - Do parliamentary committees have sufficient powers and/or resources to run field visits?
 - If/when parliamentary committees run field visits, are specific efforts made to meet with marginalized or vulnerable communities (e.g.: women, young people or poor people)?

Questions 8: Ensuring the SDGs serve the most vulnerable

The 2030 Agenda specifically states that “no one will be left behind”. Goal 5 explicitly targets gender inequality and Goal 10 calls for governments to reduce inequality more broadly. The 2030 Agenda makes it very clear that to achieve those aims, countries need to directly tackle gender inequality and make every effort to engage marginalized and vulnerable groups. This will require tailored approaches according to geography (e.g.: some rural communities may have less access to services), demographics (e.g.: special efforts may be needed to support young people’s access to justice systems) or other population indicators. Parliament can actively use its powers to ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups are taken into account.

Part A: identifying your baseline

- **Have marginalized and vulnerable groups clearly been identified by your country?**
 - If so, how many marginalized/vulnerable groups are there?
What proportion of the total population do they represent?
What criteria were used to identify them?
- **Do national targets and indicators take account of underrepresented, marginalized and vulnerable groups?**
 - Are disaggregated data about the impact of the SDGs on these groups available to parliament?
- **How are these groups represented in parliament (e.g.: women, young people, indigenous people, people with disabilities, ethnic or cultural minorities)?**
- **Has there been any analysis of the special legal, policy or programme needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups when the national SDG implementation priorities were being identified?**
- **Does parliament make any special efforts to include underrepresented and marginalized groups in consultations on SDG-related issues (e.g.: through parliamentary committees or during field visits)?**

In the past 12 months:

- How many parliamentary debates focused on the rights and needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups?

- How many hearings were held with representatives of vulnerable or marginalized groups?

Part B: reflecting on the impact of your efforts

- **What steps has parliament taken to ensure that “no one is left behind” in the implementation of the SDGs?**
 - To what extent do parliamentarians have access to information on the economic and social conditions of vulnerable groups compared with the rest of the population; the main claims and demands of vulnerable groups in the country; and the main challenges preventing the rights of vulnerable groups from being fully realized (e.g.: political, economic, cultural)?
 - To what extent do parliamentarians make use of this information when developing legislation, adopting budgets and reviewing implementation of the SDGs?
- **What strategies, if any, has parliament introduced to promote diversity in parliament? Which parliamentary mechanisms¹⁵ have been successful in promoting diversity and why? What factors can encourage people from diverse backgrounds to work in parliament, or discourage them from doing so?**
 - Does parliament monitor representation of underrepresented and marginalized groups within its own membership, including the numbers of people from such groups who hold parliamentary positions of responsibility or decision-making posts?
- **What other approaches could be implemented to bring the voices and perspectives of underrepresented or marginalized groups into parliamentary processes regarding SDG issues (e.g.: appointing non-parliamentarians to parliamentary committees, and recruiting members of marginalized groups as committee advisors)?**

¹⁵ For example, rules or procedures within parliament, rules of political parties, specific parliamentary committees dedicated to the rights of vulnerable groups, and training sessions for parliamentarians on human rights and/or the rights of specific marginalized groups.

Resources

Understanding the SDGs

- A/RES/70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E
- A/RES/69/313. Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/313&Lang=E
- United Nations Development Group (2015). Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Interim reference guide to UN Country Teams. <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/Post2015-SDG/UNDP-SDG-UNDG-Reference-Guide-UNCTs-2015.pdf>
- Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2015). Getting started with the Sustainable Development Goals, A guide for stakeholders. <http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/151211-getting-started-guide-FINAL-PDF.pdf>

Parliaments and the SDGs

- Hanoi Declaration. The Sustainable Development Goals: Turning words into action. Adopted by the 132nd IPU Assembly, Hanoi, 1 April 2015. <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/132/rpt-gendebate.htm>
- Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development: Building the world the people want. Declaration adopted at the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, New York, 2 September 2015. <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/speakers15/declaration.pdf>

Useful SDG-related websites

- United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Portal. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/frameworks>
- High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>
- Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html>
- United Nations Global Compact SDGs Briefs. <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/1401>
- WorldWeWant. <https://www.worldwewant2030.org/>

Useful parliaments and SDGs websites

- Inter-Parliamentary Union.
www.ipu.org
- Agora Parliamentary Portal SDGs pages.
<http://www.agora-parl.org/resources/aoe/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-post-2015-agenda>

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