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Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: synergy needed on the part of all stakeholders, from parliaments to local authorities

Report¹

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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Summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable development goals (SDGs) aim to achieve human rights for all, by eradicating poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity.

This report addresses how national parliaments can help achieve the SDGs, based on examples of good practice that could serve as sources of inspiration. It also identifies gaps that need to be addressed including, in particular, the lack of awareness among parliamentarians of the 2030 Agenda. As the successful implementation of the SDGs requires the involvement and support of all relevant stakeholders, the report also stresses the decisive role played by local and regional authorities, and the importance of the co-ordinating work carried out by regional and international parliamentary assemblies, including the Parliamentary Assembly.

With a view to ensuring that parliaments and local and regional authorities are able to play their role in achieving the SDGs to the full, the Assembly makes a number of recommendations, in particular in relation to parliaments' legislative, budgetary and oversight functions. It also recommends that member States involve members of parliament and local and regional authority representatives in steering/co-ordinating bodies implementing the SDGs, and in the High-level Political Forum held every year.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 14353](#), Reference 4317 of 13 October 2017.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. On 25 September 2015, 193 countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda sets out a vision for a future which is fairer, more equitable and more ecological, reconciling the three pillars (economic, social and environmental) of sustainable development. It seeks to achieve human rights for all, leaving no-one behind.
2. The implementation of SDGs is first and foremost the responsibility of governments. However, to be successful, it requires the mobilisation, involvement and support of all relevant stakeholders, including parliaments, local and regional authorities, citizens and civil society, in particular young people.
3. National parliaments, as holders of legislative power, representatives of the people and the body that scrutinises what governments do, have a key part to play in meeting the SDGs. While some countries have already put in place mechanisms to involve parliaments in the process of implementing and monitoring these goals, they are often limited to a passive consultation role. It is equally unfortunate that, in general, members of parliament are not familiar with the 2030 Agenda. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the major awareness-raising and capacity-building work for parliamentarians done by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.
4. Local and regional authorities play a decisive role in the success of the economic, social and environmental transformations needed to achieve the SDGs. Their closeness to the situation on the ground and to citizens, and their responsibility in terms of management of public investment, mean that they are in an ideal position to identify and address shortcomings in the area of sustainable development.
5. The Parliamentary Assembly notes with interest the holding every year of the High-level Political Forum to monitor progress in meeting the SDGs. It nevertheless regrets the fact that the voluntary national reviews submitted on that occasion are not subject to any scrutiny and that the other key stakeholders (parliaments, local and regional authorities and civil society) are not systematically involved, which risks weakening the exercise as a whole.
6. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to Resolution ... (2019) on strengthening co-operation with the United Nations in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in particular to paragraphs (10.2), [10.5] and [11] of that resolution.
7. In view of the above, the Assembly believes that there is an urgent need to strengthen the role of national parliaments in the implementation and monitoring of SDGs and calls on parliaments to become actively involved in this field. In particular, it invites them to:
 - 7.1. ask their governments to frame sustainable development strategies and, where appropriate, to align them with the SDGs, send them to parliament for examination and debate, and report regularly on the progress made in implementing them;
 - 7.2. gear legislative work towards the SDGs by:
 - 7.2.1. proposing the introduction of new legislation or changes to existing legislation so as to enact legislation suited to the requirements of the SDGs;
 - 7.2.2. ensuring the coherence of the legislation proposed by governments and opposing bills that would run counter to the SDGs, requiring that all bills be systematically accompanied by assessments of their impact on implementation of the SDGs and subject to public debate;
 - 7.2.3. identifying the international agreements essential to implementation of the SDGs and putting pressure on governments to ratify such agreements quickly;
 - 7.3. set up a specific body/committee to monitor SDG implementation;
 - 7.4. call for government budgetary proposals to be systematically justified with regard to the SDGs;
 - 7.5. make use of all parliamentary oversight mechanisms, such as question time, written questions to government, hearings of parliamentary committees and consultations, so as to hold governments to account on SDG implementation, while involving civil society, the private sector and the media wherever possible;
 - 7.6. raise public awareness of the SDGs through campaigns and educational activities and incorporate the issue of sustainable development in school curricula.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 19 March 2019.

8. With a view to strengthening the implementation of SDGs, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to:

8.1. involve members of parliament and local and regional authority representatives in the SDG implementation steering/co-ordinating bodies, so as to put forward the views of voters and offer institutional support;

8.2. involve members of parliament, local and regional authority representatives and civil society in the preparation of the voluntary national reviews and in the High-level Political Forum held every year.

9. The Assembly invites the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity of the Council of Europe (North-South Centre) to incorporate the SDGs into their work programme.

10. In conclusion, the Assembly welcomes the work done by its various committees with a view to achieving the SDGs, in particular in the areas of combating poverty (Goal 1), good health and well-being (Goal 3), quality education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5), reducing inequality (Goal 10), combating climate change (Goal 13) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16). It calls on members of the Assembly to refer to the Sustainable Development Goals in their reports and put forward specific recommendations concerning them whenever relevant.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Jennifer De Temmerman, rapporteur

1. Introduction

“45. 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. Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities ...”

Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Resolution A/RES/70/1 adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015

1.1. Procedure

1. On 27 June 2017, Ms Ingjerd Schou and 30 other members of the Parliamentary Assembly presented a motion for a resolution on “The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – how parliaments and member States of the Council of Europe can contribute”. This motion underlined the important role played by national parliaments in meeting the sustainable development goals (hereafter “SDGs”), as representatives of the people, and the body scrutinising what governments do. It concluded that parliaments must ensure that SDGs are included among the key priority areas in their countries and put pressure on their governments to honour their international commitments.

2. The motion was referred to the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development for report, and I was appointed rapporteur on 6 December 2017. On 18 September 2018, the committee considered an introductory memorandum which it agreed to declassify and held a public hearing with the participation of Mr José Luís Carneiro, Secretary of State of the Portuguese Communities; Ms Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on Violence against Children; and Ambassador José Rui Carço, Director of the Council of Europe’s European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre). On 4 December 2018, the committee held an exchange of views with the participation of Mr Martin Bortzmeyer, Head of the Delegation for Sustainable Development, Office of the General Commissioner for Sustainable Development, Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition, France; Ms Elisabeth Hege, Research Fellow, Governance and Financing of Sustainable Development, Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI); and Mr Benoît Simon, Chairman of Association 4D. At its meeting on 24 January 2019, the committee considered a preliminary draft report and agreed to change the title of the report to: “Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: synergy needed on the part of all stakeholders, from parliaments to local authorities.”

1.2. Aim and scope of the report

3. The motion at the origin of this report underlines the importance of examining how national parliaments and member States can contribute to achieving the SDGs. However, in view of the emphasis placed on the role of parliaments in the wording of the motion, I have chosen mainly to study in this report how national parliaments can help achieve the SDGs, knowing that the aim here is not to focus on a specific SDG but to consider the SDGs as a whole. In this context, the report identifies some good practices of parliaments in relation to the SDGs in different countries that could serve as a source of inspiration, as well as gaps that need to be addressed. Moreover, as SDG implementation can be successful only if all relevant stakeholders are properly involved, I will also look at the decisive role played in this context by local and regional authorities, which fall within our committee’s terms of reference.

4. The purpose of this report is to provide a contribution by the Assembly to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (like the many resolutions and recommendations which it has adopted in recent years, see chapter 4.1), with the ultimate objective of ensuring that parliaments and local and regional authorities are aware of their role in achieving the SDGs and are able to play it to the full. It complements the report prepared by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy on “Strengthening co-operation with the United Nations in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”³

3. A third report by the Assembly on “Ending violence against children: a Council of Europe contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals” is due to be debated at the June 2019 part-session.

2. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

5. Our Common Future, a report published in 1987 by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by the Norwegian, Gro Harlem Brundtland, which is more commonly known as the Brundtland report, first defined the concept of sustainable development: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs”.

6. On 25 September 2015, 193 countries adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, following on from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the SDGs cover a much broader area than the MDGs. There are 17 goals with 169 targets setting out a vision for our future, a future which is fairer, more equitable, peaceful and ecological, and which reconciles the three pillars of sustainable development, namely environmental, social and economic. The 2030 Agenda and its SDGs aim to eradicate poverty, to protect the planet and ensure prosperity and to achieve human rights for all, leaving no-one behind. This almost utopian vision, which places an essential emphasis on human and social development, will help to bring about and nurture a type of humanity that is “fulfilled and at peace with itself”.⁴

7. SDGs have a cross-sectoral, universal and indivisible dimension. Universal, because they are relevant to all countries of the world, including the industrialised countries, which still have a long way to go in terms of environmental or social progress and must ensure that their policies do not have a negative impact on the rest of the world.⁵ Cross-sectoral, in that they acknowledge the links between the three pillars of development. For example, environmental issues are found in targets relating to the fight against poverty, agriculture, health, education and growth. Conversely, environmental SDGs focus on accessibility issues, particularly for the most vulnerable people. And finally, indivisible, in that the effects of a sectoral policy put in place to achieve an SDG must take into account its potential effects on other sectors. The achievement of the SDGs must be viewed as a whole, and the public policies implemented in this context must be consistent and harmonised.⁶

8. SDG implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of governments. Political commitment at the highest level of the State is therefore crucial. However, the SDGs are not yet another agenda decided by politicians whose implementation depends solely on governments. In addition to the political support given to the processes, five other criteria are mentioned as the necessary prerequisites for a “virtuous circle” of SDG policy implementation: the creation of an institutional framework ensuring policy coherence (in order to avoid any negative impact of a sectoral policy on other sectors); gap analysis to identify shortfalls between goals and progress; the coherence and alignment of national strategies with the SDGs; the involvement of civil society and citizens; and the organisation of responsibility sharing between public stakeholders,⁷ including, in particular, the involvement of parliaments and local and regional authorities. It is this latter aspect that is of concern to us here.

3. What role can parliaments play in SDG implementation?

9. The main parliamentary functions, namely law making, budgeting, oversight of government action and representation of voters’ interests, are essential for an effective SDG implementation. While the enactment of legislation is rarely the entire policy response needed to achieve the SDGs, it is often a first step or a key component of the action taken. Moreover, if the SDGs are to be successful, their implementation must be properly funded.⁸ The oversight function is a means for parliament to hold the government to account on the effectiveness of the implementation of SDG-related commitments. Lastly, public policies for SDG implementation should be supported by citizens, failing which it will be impossible to achieve the SDGs. This is where parliament’s function of representing the interests of voters is of particular relevance.

4. Patrick Caron, Part 2, L’idéal d’une humanité épanouie, Introduction in Un défi pour la planète, Les Objectifs de développement durable, collected essays, ed. Patrick Caron and Jean-Marc Chataignier.

5. It is therefore a matter for countries to implement the SDGs not only on their territory but also in their external policies. IDDRI, *Policy brief*, “SDGs: A roadmap for France”, Damien Demailly, No. 11/17, October 2017.

6. Information report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in France, Hervé Maurey and Jérôme Bignon, Senators, Senate, No. 678.

7. IDDRI, Issue brief, “SDG Implementation: what are the countries doing? An assessment of the voluntary reviews submitted to the High-level Political Forum”, Laura Brimont, Damien Demailly, Julie Vaillé, No. 17/16, December 2016.

8. Engaging parliaments on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs: representation, accountability and implementation – a handbook for civil society, *Together/Ensemble* 2030, July 2018.

3.1. The drafting of laws

10. Parliaments examine draft laws and have the power to make amendments before they are passed or they can even reject them entirely. They also have the power to initiate new laws for debate. Given these powers, they should therefore guide legislative work in support of SDGs, in order to ensure that new laws necessary to achieve the national plan on SDGs and the 2030 Programme as a whole are initiated and passed. In this context, parliamentary inquiries can be very useful in terms of bringing about government action. For instance, in 2008, the United Kingdom Parliament's Home Affairs Committee launched a parliamentary inquiry into human trafficking, which led to the passage of the Modern Slavery Act in 2015.

11. Through their legislative work, parliaments should also ensure the coherence of the texts proposed by the government, in order to avoid a situation where a law aimed at achieving one SDG has a negative impact on another SDG. In this context, parliaments should, among other things, call for government and private member's bills to be accompanied by an assessment of their impact on SDG implementation. Germany, for example, requires all its draft legislation to be subject to impact studies on the various dimensions of sustainable development, via the app, *eNachhaltigkeitsprüfung*, available online (www.enap.bund.de/intro). If they are to have the desired outcome and ensure the consistency of the policies introduced, such studies should inform inter-ministerial co-operation⁹ and public debate through participatory processes that enable citizens, experts and civil society to express their views on the bills put forward.

12. Parliaments also have the power to ratify international agreements and should, where appropriate, put pressure on their governments so that relevant agreements, in particular human rights conventions, are tabled for ratification. This applies, for instance, to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) and the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201).

3.2. Budgeting¹⁰

13. Parliamentary voting on budgets is a structural feature of representative democracy, as it symbolises citizens' consent to taxation and decisions on the allocation of funds. In most representative democracies, the budgetary process involves three main players: the government, usually the Ministry of Finance, which submits the budget; parliament, which can modify and approve the budget, even though its scope differs from one country and political regime to another; and a Court of Auditors, which oversees the implementation of the budget and the management of public funds.

14. As the main political and economic expression of government policy, the budget would appear to be a natural starting point for the integration of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Indeed, among the 64 States that volunteered to submit a national review at the 2016 and 2017 sessions of the High-level Political Forum (see Chapter 6), 23 said that they had put in place measures to link the SDGs to the national budget or that they were planning to do so.

15. The integration of SDGs into the budget process is mainly used to make the government's commitment to the SDGs more transparent. This improvement in transparency provides an overview of current budgetary priorities in relation to the SDGs, but does not automatically lead to more consistent management or reflection on redirecting resources to better target the most difficult sustainable development issues. Nor does it automatically lead the stakeholders to use this greater transparency to hold governments accountable in terms of their commitments. This requires members of parliament, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to actually use the SDGs, for example to enhance the debate on the budget. Parliaments therefore have a key role to play in this context and, as is the case in Finland and Norway, they could, among other things, require governments to use the SDGs to justify their budgetary proposals.

16. In Finland, for instance, when the 2018 budget was being prepared, the Ministry of Finance asked each ministry to include a short paragraph under each main head of the proposed budget, in which the ministries provided information about how sustainable development would be reflected in their sectoral policies during the 2018 financial year. In Norway, each ministry is responsible for one or more SDGs. As in Finland, each ministry draws up a paragraph on its activities related to the goals for which it is responsible, both nationally and internationally, in order to demonstrate the link between its budget proposal and its contribution to the

9. In France, impact assessments are conducted under the responsibility of the ministry responsible for presenting the bill in parliament, i.e. without the involvement of other ministries.

10. The information in this chapter mainly comes from the study, *Integrating SDGs into national budgetary processes*, Study, Elisabeth Hege and Laura Brimont, No. 05/18, July 2018.

achievement of SDGs. These draft paragraphs are submitted to the other ministries for examination before the Ministry of Finance compiles the texts and includes them in a chapter on SDG implementation, which is added to the main budget bill that is then tabled in parliament.

3.3. Oversight

17. The parliament is the only stakeholder with a political mandate from the people to monitor the management of the State by the government.¹¹ In order to ensure effective implementation of the SDGs, parliaments should ask governments to frame sustainable development strategies/plans, and where appropriate, to align them with the SDGs and send them to parliament for examination and debate. Most countries choose to integrate the SDGs into their existing strategies, rather than create a new one. However, the rise of populism in Europe and protest movements such as the yellow vests in France could lead us to consider whether it would be a good idea to completely review national strategies and renew them in the light of the 2030 Agenda. According to the IDDRI, opting to integrate the SDGs in existing strategies is worthwhile on two conditions: the strategy must enjoy political support at the highest level and the alignment of the strategy with the SDGs must be relevant and not confined to environmental issues. In Germany, for example, the national sustainable development strategy is run by the Chancellor's Office, and all ministries work together through a high-level inter-ministerial committee. In addition, the strategy covers all economic, social and environmental issues.¹²

18. Parliaments should also ask governments to report regularly on progress in implementing the sustainable development strategy/plan. Parliamentary oversight mechanisms such as question time, written questions to government¹³ and hearings of parliamentary committees can also be very useful in identifying obstacles and assessing progress in the implementation of SDGs.¹⁴

19. Parliamentary oversight should also be used to ensure the coherence of policies for SDG implementation. In a 2016 report, the United Kingdom House of Commons International Development Committee explicitly requested the government to adopt an effective whole-of-government approach to ensure policy coherence in SDG implementation. To this end, it demanded that the government establish a formal mechanism to bring together all relevant Secretaries of State and Ministers on a regular basis to discuss the implementation of the SDGs at the highest level.¹⁵ In Norway, the SDGs are placed under the responsibility of the Prime Minister, but each minister in charge of an SDG must co-ordinate his or her action with the other ministers concerned by that SDG. The Norwegian Government presents a report to parliament concerning progress in terms of coherence of sustainable development policies.

20. Parliament's ability to carry out effective oversight often requires it to communicate government proposals to wider circles, which gives paramount importance to the nature of parliament's relations with a range of external stakeholders. Parliament needs the ideas and expertise of such external bodies to supplement and enrich its own oversight activities and conclusions.¹⁶ To this end, parliaments should organise annual evaluation sessions to coincide with the publication of a progress report and involve civil society and the media, thereby also providing an ideal opportunity to inform citizens of the role which their parliaments and governments play in achieving the SDGs.

3.4. Representation

21. As elected representatives of the people, members of parliament are required to engage with their constituents throughout their term of office, reflect their needs and their concerns and, in this way, provide a political bridge between citizens and all sectors of government. They are responsible for ensuring that SDG implementation benefits all citizens, in particular the most disadvantaged. By addressing citizens directly, members of parliament can identify gaps and weaknesses in SDG implementation that may not be taken into account in public policies. Sometimes, huge budgets are pumped into certain projects, with few tangible

11. Global Parliamentary Report 2017, Executive Summary, Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

12. See footnote 7 above.

13. See, for example, the interview with Ms Petra Bayr, member of the Austrian Parliament and chair of the Sub-Committee on Development and Co-operation, www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2018-11/parliaments-working-without-borders-global-goals.

14. Parliaments and the Sustainable Development Goals – A self-assessment toolkit, Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNDP.

15. Working together: integration, institutions and the Sustainable Development Goals, World Public Sector report 2018, United Nations.

16. See footnote 9 above.

results. One such example is energy transition, which requires not only urban planning and regeneration measures (for example reduction of the amount of space given over to vehicle traffic, construction of cycle tracks) but also and indeed principally, behavioural and lifestyle changes. Public policies should be geared to the realities of people's lives.

22. Consultations with civil society organisations, academic institutions and the private sector, among others, can help to identify the concerns of the various stakeholders.¹⁷ This type of partnership is mutually beneficial: on the one hand, parliaments have access to the expertise, input and support of civil society and other relevant players, and on the other, these stakeholders have the opportunity to influence government processes.

23. Members of parliament should also play a role in raising citizens' awareness and mobilising them, by explaining the SDGs to them, including through their actions, which would help to make the SDGs more meaningful to the population and to take ownership of them.¹⁸ In fact, the SDGs are still largely unknown to the general public, even though most are of considerable importance for everyone's lives, including the objectives of quality education, social protection, good health, and affordable and healthy energy. According to a recent survey conducted by the 4D Association, only 6% of French people are believed to be familiar with SDGs.

3.5. Institutional mechanisms

24. Like governments, parliaments tend to operate in a compartmentalised manner. Typically, for instance, health issues will be a matter for the health committee, while environmental issues are dealt with by the environment committee, and so on. There is often little co-ordination between the various committees. Yet the cross-cutting nature of the SDGs means that several parliamentary committees are usually concerned by different goals, hence the need to avoid their operating in isolation. Parliaments should therefore find a suitable means of working across the various structures. This could involve setting up a committee tasked specifically with monitoring SDG implementation. Such a committee could be made up of the chairs of all the committees concerned by the SDGs and perform the necessary co-ordination between them. To ensure proper representativeness, there would need to be multiparty co-operation in such a committee, that is to say all political tendencies would have to be included.

25. Parliaments could also assign responsibility for monitoring to an existing body/committee. This is the case in the German Parliament (*Bundestag*), where the role is performed by the parliamentary advisory council on sustainable development, set up in 2004. This body, which is made up of members from all parliamentary groups, keeps track of the federal government's sustainability policy as conducted by the various ministries. Its responsibilities include, among others, supporting and monitoring the federal government's national sustainable development strategy and monitoring and supporting, at European level, the (federal government's) sustainable development policy. The advisory council acts as a watchdog in parliament, speaking out whenever draft legislation fails to take account of the national sustainable development strategy. The hearings it holds and the position papers it adopts trigger debate about sustainable development issues.

26. Given that achieving the SDGs demands a joint approach and concerted efforts, members of different parties who share the same interests in the SDGs or in a particular SDG could also join forces and set up a group or a caucus or launch cross-party initiatives in support of the SDGs, along the lines of the "Accélérons" parliamentary grouping for ecological transition in France.¹⁹

27. Nevertheless, parliaments should not only take part in implementing and monitoring the SDGs, but should also pay particular attention to their own institutional development, in line with target 16.6 aimed at the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions, and target 16.7 requiring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. This means not only that there must be greater diversity in parliaments – and in this context reference should be made to [Resolution 2222 \(2018\)](#) "Promoting diversity and equality in politics", which the Assembly adopted on 1 June 2018 – but also that

17. See footnote 12 above.

18. In the Hanoi Declaration on "The Sustainable Development Goals: Turning Words into Action" adopted by the 132nd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on 1 April 2015, the parliamentarians committed themselves "to doing [their] utmost to strengthen national ownership of the goals, particularly by making them known to [their] constituents".

19. The aim of this parliamentary grouping is to produce laws and to initiate and support coalitions for innovative projects in the context of ecological transition.

parliaments must explore new working methods, including by aiming for greater transparency (for example by making committee meetings accessible to the public and making greater use of information technology (eParliament)).

4. The role of regional and international parliamentary assemblies

28. Regional and international parliamentary assemblies play a fundamental role in co-ordinating the work of national parliaments and ensuring effective co-operation between them. In the context of the SDGs, this work of co-ordination and co-operation is of particular relevance, bearing in mind that measures to implement the SDGs in one country should not have a negative impact on implementation measures in other countries. The co-ordination work can be done in various ways, including through debates and by adopting texts on issues of common interest relevant to the SDGs (as our Assembly does) and through capacity-building activities (as in the case of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)).

4.1. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

29. Human rights are central to SDGs. As a pan-European organisation that defends human rights, the Council of Europe therefore has a major part to play in achieving the SDGs. The Parliamentary Assembly is a key player in this context because, through its resolutions and recommendations, it calls for action on behalf of the 830 million Europeans it represents – and the member States of the Council of Europe are obliged to respond.

30. Since their adoption in 2015, our Assembly has thus contributed to the achievement of the SDGs with dozens of resolutions and recommendations – and is continuing to do so with dozens more under preparation – including, in particular, in the areas of combating poverty (Goal 1), good health and well-being (Goal 3), quality education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5), reducing inequality (Goal 10), combating climate change (Goal 13) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16). I will only give a few recent examples here: [Resolution 2197 \(2018\)](#) on the case for a basic citizenship income, [Resolution 2249 \(2018\)](#) on the provision of palliative care in Europe, [Resolution 2220 \(2018\)](#) on the integration, empowerment and protection of migrant children through compulsory education, [Resolution 2135 \(2016\)](#) on female genital mutilation in Europe, [Resolution 2159 \(2017\)](#) “Protecting refugee women and girls from gender-based violence”, [Resolution 2177 \(2017\)](#) “Putting an end to sexual violence and harassment of women in public space”, [Resolution 2210 \(2018\)](#) on climate change and implementation of the Paris Agreement, [Resolution 2262 \(2019\)](#) “Promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities”, [Resolution 2239 \(2018\)](#) “Private and family life: achieving equality regardless of sexual orientation”, [Resolution 2158 \(2017\)](#) “Fighting income inequality: a means of fostering social cohesion and economic development”, [Resolution 2141 \(2017\)](#) on attacks against journalists and media freedom in Europe” and [Resolution 2096 \(2016\)](#) “How can inappropriate restrictions on NGO activities in Europe be prevented?”.

31. In addition, the Assembly has contributed to Goals 5 and 16 through its Parliamentary Network Women Free From Violence and its Network of Contact Parliamentarians to stop sexual violence against children, including by playing a key part in the entry into force of the two relevant Council of Europe conventions, i.e. the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210) and the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. The No Hate Parliamentary Alliance, launched in 2015, also plays a part in combating discrimination and promoting inclusion.

32. A further activity directly linked with Goal 5 was the launch on 23 November 2018 of a new initiative to counter sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments, namely #NotInMyParliament. This initiative by the Assembly follows on from the recent publication of a joint regional study by the Parliamentary Assembly and the IPU, which revealed alarming levels of sexism, harassment and violence against women in national parliaments.

4.2. The Inter-Parliamentary Union

33. In order for parliaments to play an effective role in SDG implementation and monitoring, members of parliament must first and foremost take an interest in them. However, it would appear that, in general, members of parliament are not sufficiently interested in sustainable development issues and are not familiar with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. This is the situation in France, for example, and even within the Committee on Sustainable Development and Regional/Spatial Planning, MPs are very poorly informed about the SDGs. Although there is a working group in the Senate on these issues, there is currently no equivalent in

the National Assembly. All members of parliament should therefore be made more aware of the SDGs. Institutional memory should also be established within parliaments to ensure continuity, taking into account the fact that the composition of parliaments changes.

34. The IPU plays an important role in raising awareness and capacity-building among members of parliament. In 2017, as part of its objective entitled “Mobilise parliaments around the global development agenda”, the IPU organised several regional seminars on the SDGs for parliaments from various regions of the world, a summit of Speakers of Parliament (from South Asia) and an interregional seminar in China for Asian and African parliaments. In addition, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, it also developed an assessment toolkit entitled “Parliaments and the SDGs”, which is a guide to help parliaments to assess the action they must take in terms of implementing SDGs and monitoring progress. In this context, the toolkit makes it possible to answer key questions such as: Do we have the capacity to undertake this work? How well have we performed to date? What priorities need to be set in order to succeed?²⁰ In addition, the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs maintains an institutional link with the High-level Political Forum by holding special sessions on parliamentary monitoring of the SDGs at its spring meetings.

5. The decisive role of local and regional authorities²¹

35. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the participation of local and regional authorities is vital to the success of the economic, social and environmental transformations needed to achieve the SDGs. It is estimated that 65% of the 169 SDG targets will not be reached without proper engagement of, and co-ordination with, local and regional governments. In other words, more than half of the 169 SDG targets require subnational and local action.

36. Being close to citizens, local and regional governments are best placed to identify and address the gaps and needs in the area of sustainable development. Lessons from the MDGs²² show that using overall national figures as the only metric for reporting on progress misrepresents realities on the ground, as such data mask regional disparities and do not provide the authorities with the information they need to reach the poorest and most marginalised groups.

37. In addition, subnational authorities (towns/cities, regions and municipalities) are responsible for a large share of total public investment,²³ most of which is related to infrastructure for the delivery of basic services under their responsibility, which are closely linked to the SDGs. This is the case in education, health and social infrastructure, drinking water, sanitation, solid waste management, transport and housing, for example.

38. It is therefore necessary to raise subnational authorities' awareness of the SDGs,²⁴ and gear national SDG implementation strategies to local expectations, so as to ensure real ownership of the SDGs. In addition, towns/cities, regions and municipalities should be provided with the financial and logistical resources to take part in SDG implementation through local action. Lastly, it is necessary to establish mechanisms – or strengthen existing ones – in order to link and co-ordinate the efforts made at national, subnational and local level with a view to implementing the SDGs. In Germany, for example, the sustainable development strategy adopted in January 2017 established a mechanism for co-ordination between the federal government, the *Länder* and municipalities. At present, 13 of the 16 *Länder* have already prepared, or are in the process of preparing, their own sustainable development strategies.

20. Annual report 2017, IPU.

21. The information in this chapter mainly comes from the following document: Meeting of the members of the Council on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Paris, 14 March 2018, Key issues for discussion.

22. See [Resolution 1975 \(2014\)](#) “Stepping up action against global inequalities: Europe’s contribution to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) process”, adopted on the basis of a report by our committee.

23. Subnational governments were responsible for almost 40% of total public investment worldwide in 2015, and for 59% of this investment in the OECD area.

24. In the Netherlands, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) has launched a campaign, Municipalities4GlobalGoals (Gemeenten4GlobalGoals in Dutch), to raise municipalities' awareness of the SDGs and help them to contribute to the goals.

6. The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

39. The High-level Political Forum (HLPF), the United Nations' central platform for annually reviewing and following up Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, has been held at the United Nations headquarters in New York every year since 2015. It brings together business, political, civil society and government stakeholders to review progress in achieving the SDGs.

40. The HLPF replaces the former United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development set up in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit. The reason for this decision was both the lack of results, which was often criticised, and the question of the sovereignty of States, which some considered to have been undermined by this obligation to report on progress made in fulfilling their commitments. The Forum is more a process than a decision-making body and the problem is therefore avoided. In addition, the HLPF in its current form has broadened the debate to the highest levels, with heads of State, as well as to other categories of players, thereby enhancing its legitimacy. Moreover, this mode of governance is symbolic of a significant change in perspective. The MDGs amounted, with varying levels of success and diplomacy, to transposing a model deemed to be "developed", (i.e. that of the North) in the developing countries (those of the South). Today, however, there is no longer this North–South dichotomy, as the countries of the North have realised, to some extent, that they are responsible for and affected by the necessary changes, and that they also have "third worlds" (to use the old expression) within their territories. The forum has therefore become a meeting place for all stakeholders concerned, on an equal footing. The SDGs, by virtue of their universality, give new meaning to a multilateralism that has too often been challenged in recent years.

41. Each year, the monitoring provided for puts in place three types of reviews: thematic and cross-sectoral reviews covering several SDGs, statistical reviews, and voluntary national reviews. The latter are based on the World Trade Organisation's trade policy review mechanism and the United Nations Universal Periodic Review process in the field of human rights. These reviews provide an opportunity to share best practice between countries, and to strengthen political and institutional processes and enlist the support of the various stakeholders who work together to prepare the report. It is, however, regrettable that these reports are not verified by third parties. In fact, some non-governmental organisations that took part in the HLPF in 2015 and 2016 saw the Forum as a "public relations" exercise for the countries more than anything else.²⁵ It is important to remedy this lack of credibility by involving civil society and other relevant players, including parliaments, more closely and on a more systematic basis.

42. At least 80 ministers and deputy ministers and 2 500 non-State players took part in the official sessions and side events in 2018. Many speeches highlighted progress made since 2015. The ministerial declaration from the debate pledged, however, "to step up our efforts and take the bold actions needed to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda and build sustainable and resilient societies everywhere, reaching the furthest behind first and ensuring that no one is left behind".²⁶

43. In this context, the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres, welcomed the growing involvement of civil society, the private sector and the scientific community. The involvement of governments, and also of local and regional authorities, was noted.²⁷ However, only one event was held by the IPU, with participation by parliamentarians varying widely between countries. France took part with a large delegation, including five members of parliament (and five local and regional elected representatives). There are also improvements to be expected in terms of the involvement of MPs in the voluntary national reviews presented by governments at the HLPF. In 2017, 44 countries submitted voluntary national reviews: among the parliaments of these countries, 13 had been involved in the drafting of those reviews (to varying degrees, ranging from significant to superficial), while only three had had the opportunity to review and comment on the national review produced by the government before it was finalised.²⁸

44. In September 2019, as every four years, the HLPF will be held under the aegis of the United Nations General Assembly and will be attended by the heads of State (part of the HLPF will be held in July 2019 under the aegis of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)). On that occasion, it would be positive for there to be greater involvement of parliaments, especially from Council of Europe member States, in SDGs and for progress to have been made with SDGs in our States – or, at least for real plans to be in

25. IDDRI, Study, "NGO mobilisation around the SDGs", Elisabeth Hege and Damien Demailly, No. 01/18, January 2018.

26. Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council at its 2018 session, E/2018/L.20–E/HLPF/2018/L.2.

27. On the side-lines of the 2018 HLPF, a special "Local and Regional Governments' Forum" was held, along with a side-event, "Local 2030", in the form of a hub which brought UN agencies and local and regional authorities together to develop practical solutions for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

28. See footnote 15 above.

place to make progress with them in future. The functions of the representatives attending the HLPF, as well as the size and diversity of the national delegation, are good indicators of the importance attached to the 2030 Agenda by these States. The higher the level of political responsibility, the greater the political support can be considered to be.

7. Conclusions

45. The 2030 Agenda remains relatively recent and the revolution it contains may partly explain why its implementation is still in its infancy. We need to reinvent an institutional framework to ensure policy coherence. The interaction between each of the 17 SDGs means that focusing on one of them can have an impact on one or more others, sometimes positively, but occasionally negatively as well. It is therefore essential that governance be as co-ordinated as possible. In 2016, of the 22 countries that had submitted a progress report, 11 had placed the management of the SDGs under the direct responsibility of the Prime Minister or the President. Four countries had opted to entrust co-ordination to a single ministry, with all the disadvantages of compartmentalisation that this entailed.

46. SDGs constitute a broad and general framework which each country must adapt to its local circumstances, while at the same time identifying its own priorities, in order to steer the implementation of the Programme at national level. This involves drawing up or, if necessary, updating their own national development strategy/plan. Rather than operating in isolation, public policies should be integrated, making for more coherence and greater impact. They should also be more participatory so as to involve the various stakeholders, including civil society, NGOs, local and regional authorities and members of parliament, in their design and delivery. The role of young people must not be overlooked either, both because our young people are particularly alert to these issues, and also in the interests of transmission and continuity. Parliaments have a key role to play in this regard, by ensuring that national SDGs take into account the specific local needs and circumstances of particular groups.

47. Many countries have established a national working group – or similar body – on SDGs to co-ordinate and lead SDG implementation. Parliamentary and local representatives should be involved in these high-level bodies to put forward the views of their constituents and offer institutional support. France has set up an inter-ministerial SDG steering committee, responsible for preparing a roadmap on SDG implementation. This steering committee is an inclusive body comprising all public and private stakeholders, including NGOs and members of parliament, involved in SDG implementation.

48. The 2030 Programme and the SDGs, which recognise the responsibility of parliaments to monitor the fulfilment of the government's commitments to achieve the SDGs, provide an opportunity for parliaments and MPs to step up their commitment on issues that are crucial to sustainable development. For the time being, this commitment remains limited, even though many parliaments have taken significant steps to this effect, including organising debates on the 2030 Agenda (Estonia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal), dealing with the 2030 Agenda in the work of existing (sub-)committees (Czech Republic, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom) or setting up new cross-sectoral (sub-)committees focusing on SDGs (Denmark, Finland, Romania). There is therefore an urgent need to expand MPs' accountability role. They should systematically examine public policies for coherence and hold governments to account on SDG implementation. It is also important to include more members of parliament in the HLPF, which is held every year.

49. It is clear that our world is in crisis, not just an economic or financial crisis, but a societal crisis. The return of extreme ideologies which gave rise to humanity's darkest hours raises questions about the deep divisions in all countries throughout the world. Shouldn't the much-needed political renewal that citizens are calling for be accompanied by a paradigm shift?

50. The 2030 Agenda challenges our visions of society and the economy, which for a long time was the only benchmark for international policies, with each "camp" trying to impose its vision of what constitutes a successful economy. What the Agenda proposes is a more equitable and sustainable economy, a more egalitarian and at the same time more secure society, with more accessible and more transparent policies and institutions. The SDGs are an opportunity to rethink our societies, to create those of tomorrow, and I once again emphasise the importance of involving young people.

51. It is striking to note how these claims are emerging in France today in the "Yellow Vests" movement. The ability to provide an appropriate response to these demands will determine whether there is a shift towards extremism or democratic renewal. Public policies should be adapted to the daily lives of citizens. The 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs are an ideal narrative for this. In fact, many of the policies of Council of Europe member States already contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, but this is not sufficiently well

known. Wouldn't reviewing national strategies by formally aligning them with the Agenda be a way of uniting all citizens, by offering them a common vision for the future? The concept of "global public goods" encompasses the good intentions expressed in all quarters and the SDGs are the most appropriate way to put this into practice.