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The Pivotal Role of Parliamentarians in Ensuring the Effectiveness of SDGs Implementation

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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an ambitious global agenda which covers 17 goals and 169 targets, is ground breaking in its vision for a more inclusive, prosperous and equal world. By committing to the “*leave no one behind,*” all stakeholders are expected to take part in implementing the SDGs at the local, national, and international levels. This includes Parliamentarians, which are obviously at the forefront of those imperatives.

As the elected representatives of their people, Parliamentarians have a crucial role to play in driving forward people-centered development that is reflective of and responsive to the needs of their constituents. Through their constitutional mandates in making laws, scrutinizing the government budget, overseeing government policies and programs, as well as representing the views of their constituents; Parliamentarians are valuable partners in ensuring accountable, inclusive, participatory and transparent sustainable development for all.

I'd like to start by elaborating the successful role of Parliamentarians thus far, in achieving some good strides and pushing forth the SDGs. The *First* one is by helping to shape the overall 2030 Agenda. Through regional and global groupings such as Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Parliamentarians around the world were actively involved in assessing gaps, opportunities and priorities for action (GOPAC, UNDP, & IsDB, 2017). Their inputs were later fed back into the formal UN consultation which produced and designed the final SDGs document.

As a result, we can see now that the pivotal role of Parliament is explicitly recognized in the *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, declared at the UN Summit in 2015 (United Nations, 2015). This shows many progress has been achieved since the previous MDGs, where Parliamentarians were arguably brought relatively late into the whole implementation process.

The *Second* role of Parliamentarians thus far is the inclusion of SDGs into the parliamentary agenda. This has been done nationally up to this point by establishing the special SDGs Task Force, Working Group, or Caucus in their respective Parliaments.

Although parliamentarian engagement is quite varied globally, we can see some countries have been started, such as: Indonesian Parliament with the SDGs Working Committee, Pakistan National Assembly with the SDGs Task Force, Trinidad and Tobago Parliament with Joint Committee on the SDGs, and Zambian Parliament with SDGs Caucus (GOPAC, UNDP, & IsDB, 2017). These cross-party groups are important not only to discuss the promotion of legislation that reflect those interests, but also to promote debates, engage, and increase awareness of MPs on the issues of SDGs.

Regardless those valuable role and progress that have been achieved to date, we have to admit that there are still challenges ahead. The most significant ones are the lack of awareness, weak institutional capacities, and not all Parliaments have the equal capacity to take on the heavy demands of SDGs framework.

Concerning the challenges and recognizing their role, Parliaments must continue to be strategically empowered, actively engaged and sufficiently equipped to help mobilize domestic resources on achieving the SDGs targets. Here, I'd like to outline several points on what more can be done by Parliaments to promote, deliver, and monitor the SDGs agenda further.

First, it can be done by maximizing and strengthening Parliament's constitutional mandate. Let's take a brief look at the main mechanisms in which Parliaments can assure the implementation of the SDGs through their basic functions:

- *Law-Making and Law Reform*

Parliaments need to use this ability to facilitate the SDGs implementation not only by adopting the global agenda into national action, but also to review the existing legislative framework. This should be done to identify gaps and opportunities for reform, as well as to support the enactment of legislation which accommodate SDGs values; such as laws to promote gender equality and the inclusion of marginalized groups.

- *Representation*

More than almost any other state official, Parliamentarians have a direct relationship to the public, since they are the elected representatives. This provides an invaluable opportunity to promote domestic accountability for SDGs achievement that is "people-centered," meaningfully addresses the diverse needs of the public and benefits all. Thus, they should engage and facilitate public participation, so that every citizen is empowered to demand action and provide feedback on SDGs implementation.

- *Policy Oversight*

Parliaments should also reflect upon their existing oversight mechanisms, to ensure that they have sufficient power and tools needed to assure that national resources and development aid are managed effectively and with integrity. In this regard, Parliaments play a critical role as one of the most powerful domestic accountability mechanisms in a country.

- *Budgeting*

The fourth and most important constitutional role is Parliament's responsibility to adopt the national budget. In this regard, Parliaments must review the existing parliamentary budget mechanisms to ensure that they have the power and capacities to effectively engage with budget development, approval and oversight processes. This has to be done in order to promote effective, efficient, transparent and accountable SDGs implementation. Moreover, Parliaments can also use innovative budget monitoring tools to track SDGs expenditures and impacts.

Besides maximizing on their four constitutional roles, the *Second* way that need to be done by Parliaments to support SDGs implementation is coordinating efforts with other relevant stakeholders. They must be partnering closely with the Executive branch to engage in national SDGs policy processes. This includes, for example, through mechanisms such as the National SDGs Task Force. Parliaments should also foster cooperation with independent accountability institutions; such as National Human Rights Body, Anti-Corruption Commission and Supreme Audit Institution. They also need to work closely with the media and civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as the international and regional institutions to develop comprehensive partnership.

It's also important to urge governments and related multilateral organizations; such as the UN and IPU, to initiate a broad national consultative process involving Parliament before submission of national review and reports to the global SDGs processes. In sum, Parliament should ensure that there is a coherent, coordinated, and all-inclusive participatory approach to the effective implementation of SDGs.

The *Third* improvement that should be made by Parliaments is to support localizing the SDGs and monitoring at the sub-national level. SDGs are very good globally, but it's also important to prioritize the local need and how it could actually affect people's life. Parliaments are very close to their constituents, so they could engage from the early stages of the process to ensure the context that is specific to the local area are reflected and properly represented.

The limited decentralization mechanism in executing SDGs could result in a low level of inclusiveness and contributes to the persistence of social and regional disparities. Therefore, an effective two-way communication mechanism should be established between the national parliament and local assemblies, to ensure a regular dialogue on key development issues. Especially in some countries where the executive haven't done much, Parliament should be able to provide adequate support to sub-national elected bodies (provincial, regional, or district) in monitoring the local implementation of SDGs.

Lastly, these all should be done in an open, accountable, and transparent framework as the *Fourth* process that should be carried out by the Parliaments. They have to support the development of tools and mechanism to strengthen parliamentary inclusiveness, access to information, accountability and transparency in order to encourage increased public and civil society engagement in the whole SDGs implementation.

Besides all those roles and improvements that should be done by the Parliaments, we should also recognize the importance of Parliament to deal with corruption in implementing the SDGs and development assistance at large. Likewise, the SDGs itself, particularly on the Goal 16 (Target 16.5) calls on countries to “*substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms,*” with the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) providing a guiding framework for implementing this target. Significantly, a key element of UNCAC and the broader effort to tackle corruption is by enhancing institutional capacity and ensuring legislative reform. Therefore, it is also important to strengthen Parliament’s role in eliminating corruption of development programs, in order to maximize its benefit for all people.

Let us work to help break the culture of corruption and impunity, and help ensure that Parliament and other public institutions are accountable and trustworthy. I truly believe that when Parliament and Parliamentarians are fully aware to the SDGs and when corruptors stop looting the states, then sustainable development will be a reality.