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United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Webinar for parliaments in Africa

The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation in Africa:

What role for parliaments?

13 November 2020

Introduction

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) jointly organized on 13 November 2020 an online event for parliaments in Africa entitled “The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation in Africa: What role for Parliaments?”. The webinar was part of a series of IPU regional webinars on SDG implementation in a time of pandemic and its aim was to provide parliaments with a platform to:

- Share up-to-date information on the status of SDG implementation in Africa by taking stock of the progress made and of challenges which must be addressed.
- Exchange national experiences on SDG implementation and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Discuss future prospects in terms of building back better and leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The webinar was attended by close to 60 participants from about 20 African countries, including parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, members of regional inter-parliamentary bodies, UN and IPU representatives.

Opening remarks by the co-organizers

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union

Mr. Chungong stated that, in order to contain the spread of the pandemic and alleviate its effects, it was crucial that countries implemented well-directed and well-resourced responses that were inclusive and aligned with the SDGs. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic would unfortunately be long-lasting which was why structural responses based on the SDGs framework were badly needed. Parliaments had a central role to play in that effort. In particular, they must monitor policy implementation, hold governments accountable on how resources, including aid, were spent. To assist parliaments in that endeavor, the IPU had recently published guidelines to promote parliamentary engagement in effective development cooperation. Parliaments must also ensure that the needs of the whole of society were given due consideration, with no one left behind.

Mr. Bartholomew Armah, Acting Director of the Macroeconomics and Governance Division, UN Economic Commission for Africa

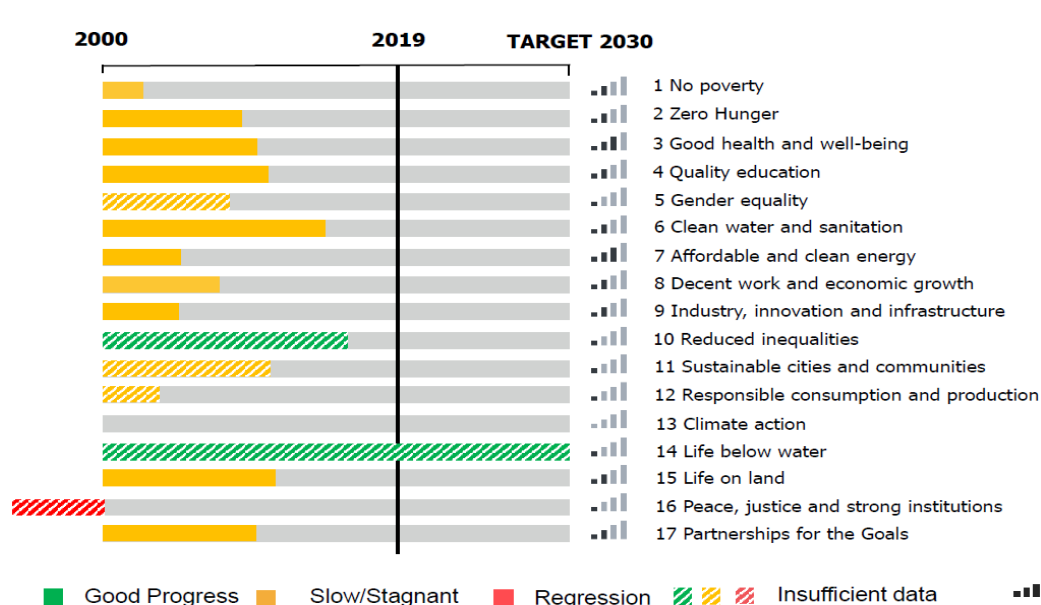
Speaking on behalf of ECA Executive Secretary, Mr. Armah said that the COVID-19 pandemic had reversed the development gains in Africa and had potentially devastating socio-economic impacts which would be felt for years to come if not managed effectively. Parliaments must ensure that the COVID-19 stimulus packages were people-centred. By ratifying international agreements, translating

the SDGs into action-oriented national programmes, monitoring SDGs implementation, and ensuring government was accountable to the people for national progress on the SDGs, parliaments could drive the change that was needed.

Expert presentations on the regional status of SDG implementation

Mr. Tinfissi J. Ilboudo, Chief of the Statistical Development Section, ECA

Mr. Ilboudo said that Africa could not achieve any of the SDGs by 2030 at the current pace. So far only SDG 14 (life below water) was on track. The continent had made relatively good progress on Goal 10. However, progress was very slow or stagnant on other goals. Regarding Goal 16, the region was not even moving in the right direction. Overall data availability was poor for many goals. Data collection had been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially at the sub-regional level where data was available for only 40 per cent of the SDGs targets. There was an urgent need to revisit statistics acts and legislation to modernize the statistical systems. Parliamentarians were called on to provide support in that area.



Exchange of national experiences on SDG implementation in light of the COVID-19 pandemic

Mr. Issa Mardo Djabir, Chair of the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, National Assembly of Chad

Mr. Djabir said that, as part of the response to the health crisis, the National Assembly of Chad oversaw the implementation of the state of emergency and assessed the pandemic's economic, social, and environmental impact by regularly calling on the government to account and provide information to parliamentarians and the public on the efforts put in place to address COVID-19. Currently people were more concerned about the pandemic but they should not forget about the planet and environmental challenges due to climate change. The National Assembly of Chad, through its Standing Committee on SDGs, was monitoring the implementation of SDG targets in the field, in particular SDG 3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and SDG 6 (ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all).

**Ms. Veronica Tsitsi Muzenda, Senator, Parliament of Zimbabwe, President of the IPU
Committee on Sustainable Development**

Ms. Muzenda indicated that the Committees and individual members of parliament of Zimbabwe had been active in tackling the pandemic and bringing forth critical SDG related issues, like for example: reviewing and passing more than 30 statutory instruments on COVID 19 management, including relief regulations to protect citizens from degenerating into poverty (e.g. rentals exemption); engaging the public on a petition seeking to “leave no one behind” by removing age restriction to sexual and reproductive health services access; posing searching questions to ministers in the plenary on health, education, economy, clean water availability, etc. She stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic would in all probability accelerate the adoption of technologies and the transition to a digital economy. Global and inter-country and non-governmental partner collaboration in trade and disaster preparedness would also have been enhanced during the pandemic.

Expert presentations on prospects for the future and building back better

David Luke, Coordinator of the African Trade Policy Centre, ECA

Mr. Luke stated that the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was key in addressing trade and governance issues and was part of the process to build back better. As Africa’s stimulus vehicle, the agreement could generate around 5.6 million jobs. If AfCFTA were fully implemented, intra-African exports would increase, especially of industrial and chemical products, but also of products from other sectors such as agriculture and energy, and of materials such as metals, food, wood, and textile. AfCFTA would gain from reducing tariffs on goods but also from addressing longstanding trade facilitation challenges and discipline in the non-tariff barriers, the cost of transportation, logistics, etc. He concluded by stressing that boosting trade was a way to help building back better in the event of inability to have stimulus packages.

Mr. Frank Rutabingwa, Senior Natural Resources Expert, ECA

Mr. Rutabingwa stated that the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change were major factors of Africa’s vulnerability, and the responses to both needed to be integrated into Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063. He emphasized that African countries had limited capacity to respond but that the way they channelled their stimulus would shape the quality of the recovery. By prioritizing a green economy/Blue Economy pathway, resilient energy and infrastructure, climate smart food production, and nature-based solutions, Africa could respond quickly and build long-term resilience. Timely disbursement of stimulus packages, linked to SDGs indicators, was crucial to ensure protection and maximize impact. Additionally, priority should be given to concessional financing as stimulus and the strengthening of governance frameworks regarding disbursements.

Impacts of Climate Change on GDP

Long-Run Impacts of Climate Change on the Africa's DP (%Change/Year) (4 Scenarios)

| Sub-regions* | GDP (% Change/Year) | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| | 1 °C | 2 °C | 3 °C | 4 °C |
| Northern (n = 7) | -0.76 ± 0.16 | -1.63 ± 0.36 | -2.72 ± 0.61 | -4.11 ± 0.97 |
| Western (n = 15) | -4.46 ± 0.63 | -9.79 ± 1.35 | -15.62 ± 2.08 | -22.09 ± 2.78 |
| Central (n = 9) | -1.17 ± 0.45 | -2.82 ± 1.10 | -5.53 ± 1.56 | -9.13 ± 2.16 |
| Eastern (n = 14) | -2.01 ± 0.20 | -4.51 ± 0.34 | -7.55 ± 0.63 | -11.16 ± 0.85 |
| Southern (n = 10) | -1.18 ± 0.64 | -2.68 ± 1.54 | -4.40 ± 2.56 | -6.49 ± 3.75 |
| Africa (n = 55) | -2.25 ± 1.52 | -5.01 ± 3.30 | -8.28 ± 5.12 | -12.12 ± 7.04 |

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Recommendations

- Reinforce the commitment of parliaments to deliver on SDGs.
- For Africa to be able to respond quickly and build long-term resilience, prioritize a green recovery pathway; resilient energy and infrastructure; climate smart food production; nature-based solutions and green value chains.
- Allocate budget not only for the COVID-19 pandemic but also for other sectors to ensure a boost in the economy.
- Strengthen international cooperation to effectively combat the pandemic and realize the SDGs by 2030.
- Enhance parliamentarians' knowledge on SDGs and strengthen their capacities to better oversee SDGs implementation on the ground.
- Urge parliamentarians to monitor closely AfCFTA projections, especially those of trade committees, to make sure that their countries can benefit from the opportunities created by AfCFTA.
- In strategies for building back better, emphasize the need to address climate change which, like the COVID-19 pandemic, affects every sector of Africa's economy.
- Call on parliamentarians to help ensure that National Statistical Systems, particularly National Statistics Offices, are adequately funded so that they can be modernized and use new technologies to be able to provide data and statistics to support sustainable development in Africa.
- Organize webinars to promote exchanges among parliamentarians on the crucial issues linked to sustainable development.