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EU Parliamentary Report

Assessing the South African Parliament: Using the assessment Criteria of the Indicators for Democratic Parliament

Target 4: Responsive Parliament

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PMG PARLIAMENTARY MONITORING GROUP

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1. Acronyms

AGSA	Auditor-General of South Africa
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation
IDP	Indicators For Democratic Parliaments
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MPS	Members Of Parliament
NA	National Assembly
NCOP	National Council of Provinces
NDPs	National Development Plans
OUTA	Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse
OVAC	Oversight and Accountability Model
PMG	Parliamentary Monitoring Group
SAFLII	South African Legal Information Institute
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SAIIA	South African Institute of International Affairs
SDGS	Sustainable Development Goals
SG	Secretary General
UN	United Nation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

2. Executive summary

This report provides a comprehensive assessment of the South African (SA) Parliament's performance in relation to Target 4 of the Indicators for Democratic Parliaments (IDPs), which measures the responsiveness of parliaments to public needs, concerns, and emerging policy issues. A responsive parliament actively engages with citizens, acts promptly on issues raised, and adapts effectively to evolving social, economic, and environmental challenges, while embedding the principles of inclusivity and sustainability enshrined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The assessment reveals that SA's parliament has established a solid institutional framework for public engagement, including petitions, public hearings, and committee consultations. These mechanisms demonstrate a formal commitment to participatory democracy and oversight. However, persistent challenges undermine their effectiveness. Limited public awareness, procedural complexity, uneven communication, and delays in feedback weaken public trust and reduce the tangible impact of citizen engagement.

The evaluation also identifies weaknesses in the agility of parliamentary responses to urgent and emerging policy issues. While procedures for urgent debates and executive oversight exist, they are often constrained by political considerations, limited parliamentary time, and delays in information sharing. Furthermore, Parliament's integration of the SDGs into legislative and oversight functions remains inconsistent, with opportunities to strengthen its role in national SDG reporting and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Key findings of the report include:

- Public participation mechanisms are in place but underutilised due to limited accessibility and awareness.
- Feedback loops between Parliament and the public are inconsistent, often lacking clarity, timeliness, and personalisation.
- Oversight of the executive's response to emerging issues is reactive rather than proactive, with gaps in transparency during crises.
- Communication with the public is fragmented in times of political or governance stress, limiting Parliament's ability to project a unified and accountable stance.
- SDG alignment in legislation and oversight is uneven, with no fully formalised role in national SDG monitoring and reporting.

The following recommendations aim to address these challenges:

- Intensify public awareness and outreach campaigns, targeting underrepresented communities and ensuring accessibility in all official languages.
- Simplify participation procedures and introduce user-friendly digital tools, including submission tracking systems and public dashboards.
- Streamline urgent debate procedures and safeguard them from politicisation.
- Provide structured, transparent, and personalised feedback to citizens, demonstrating how their input influences decisions.
- Formalise Parliament's role in SDG reporting, ensuring systematic integration of sustainability goals across all committee and legislative work.

By addressing these gaps, the SA parliament can enhance its responsiveness, strengthen public confidence, and better fulfil its democratic mandate.

3. Introduction

Parliamentary responsiveness is a foundation of representative democracy, ensuring that legislatures not only listen to citizens but also act on their concerns in a timely, transparent, and effective manner. In a society facing complex and fast-evolving challenges, responsiveness is essential for maintaining public trust, delivering just and fair policy outcomes, and safeguarding democratic rights.

This report evaluates the performance of the SA parliament under Target 4: Responsive Parliament of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Indicators for Democratic Parliaments (IDPs). The IDP framework, closely aligned with UN SDG targets 16.6 and 16.7, provides a structured methodology to assess how effectively parliaments uphold transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and participatory decision-making. Target 4 specifically examines a parliament's ability to: a) value and address public concerns, b) respond effectively to emerging policy issues, and c) embed the principle of "leaving no one behind" through alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The SA context offers a particularly rich and challenging environment for this assessment. Persistent socio-economic inequalities, service delivery challenges, governance crises, and urgent environmental concerns place sustained pressure on parliamentary processes. Parliament's ability to respond to these demands is a key factor of its legitimacy and relevance.

This assessment draws on document analysis, case studies, and benchmarking against both domestic practices and international parliamentary experiences. By evaluating institutional arrangements, procedural frameworks, and practical implementation, the report provides an evidence-based analysis of parliament's responsiveness and offers actionable recommendations to strengthen its democratic function.

This report applies the IDP framework to assess the SA parliament against Target 4: Responsive Parliament. Through this assessment, OUTA aims to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the SA parliament's current state and provide guidance for its continued development in line with IDPs and within the framework of the co-funded EU project on Enhancing Accountability and Transparency in SA.

4. Background to and methodology used for the assessment of the IDP framework

The IDP framework provides a tool to help national parliaments assess and enhance their effectiveness, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. This multi-partner initiative aims to align parliamentary practices with the UN SDGs, targets: 16.6 *[Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels]* and 16.7 *[Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels]*, which aim to develop transparent and accountable institutions and ensure inclusive, participatory decision-making.

The indicators cover various dimensions of parliamentary function, from autonomy and legislative procedures to oversight and public participation, supporting self-assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The framework is designed to assist parliaments, regardless of their political system or size, in fostering reforms that enhance democratic governance and strengthen public trust.

The framework not only serves as a self-assessment tool for parliaments but also helps guide them through processes of modifying, reform, and greater public accountability. By utilising this tool, parliaments can improve their responsiveness to public concerns, better serve their constituencies, and contribute meaningfully to achieving the broader SDGs of peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Grading	Rate 0-5	Description
	0	The object of the assessment criterion simply does not exist in parliament.
	1	The object of the assessment criterion exists but in a rudimentary form. It is not an established part of parliament's capacity and practice.
	2	The object of the assessment criterion exists in a basic form. It is part of parliament's capacity and practice but is not well-developed.
	3	The object of the assessment criterion is an established part of parliament's capacity and practice and is somewhat developed.

Very Good	4	The object of the assessment criterion is a well-established part of parliament's capacity and practice.
Excellent	5	The object of the assessment criterion is a highly developed part of parliament's capacity and practice, with little obvious room for improvement.

Table 1 Rating Criteria

There are three phases of the assessment**:**

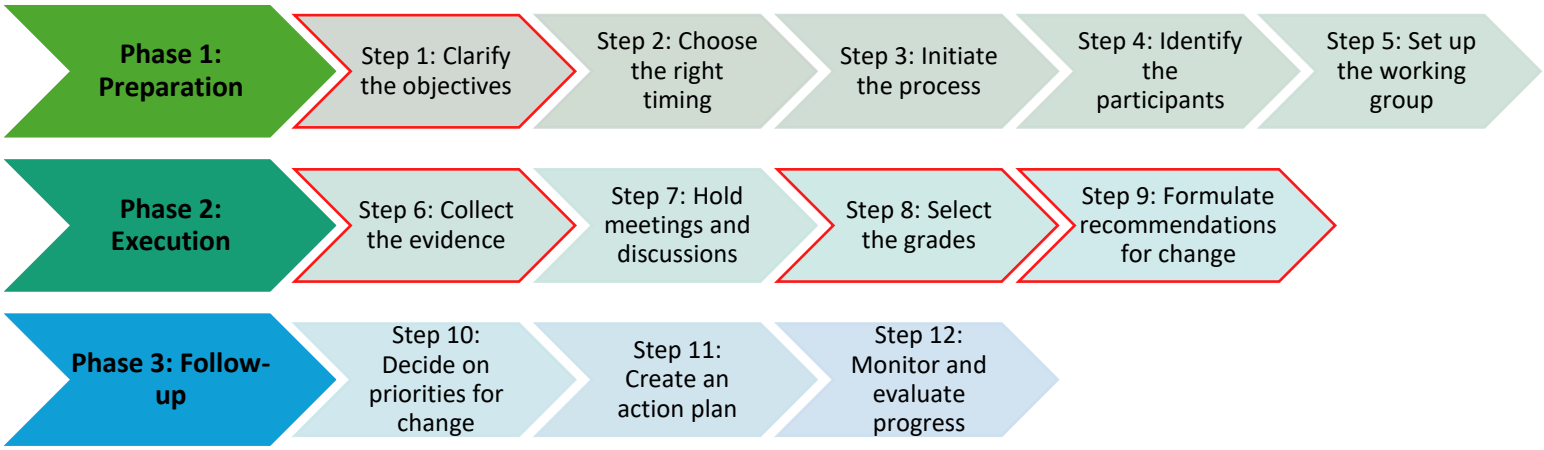

Figure 1 Phases and steps of assessment

Figure 1 indicates the phases of the assessment, and specifically in this report the following phases are covered: Step 1, 6, 8, and 9. It is recommended that the steps not initiated should be completed by parliament internally. The aim of this report is to provide recommendations on how to increase parliament's ratings based on the external assessment ratings we have assigned for each assessment criteria.

The IDPs provide an assessment checklist to guide parliaments through the preparation and execution of the assessment process. This checklist includes ten key items:

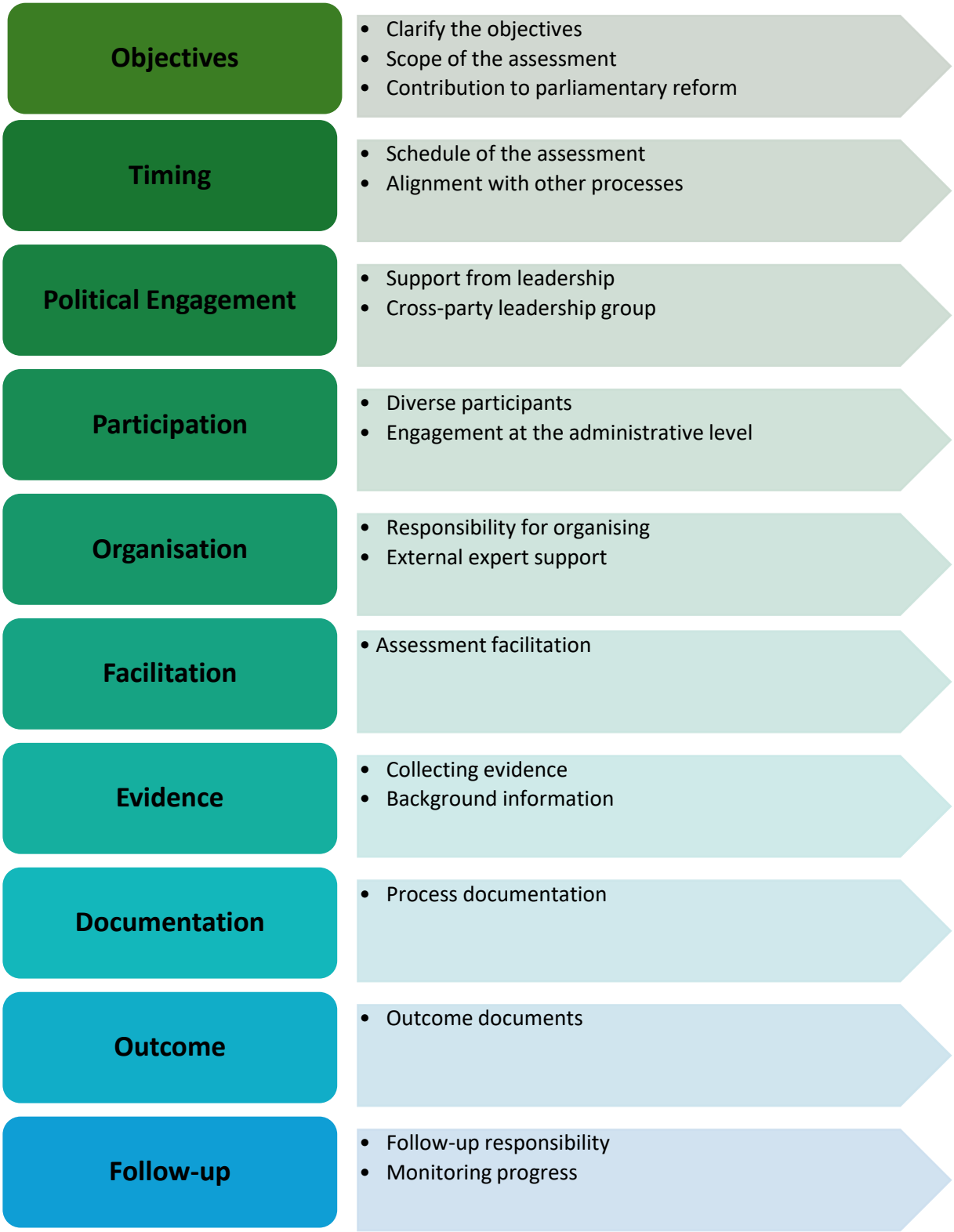

Figure 2 Assessment Checklist

Methodology used:

In order to conduct the assessment of target 4, three research methods have been implemented.

1. **Document Analysis:** This method was used to search, find and gather qualitative data on parliamentary procedures, laws, and practices. Thereafter a systematic review was conducted to search through and find material from various documents such as constitutional documents, legal manuals, public reports, parliamentary proceedings, budget and financial Reports, international and local civil society reports and IDP publications and articles.
2. **Case Studies:** This method was used to analyse existing material for both the local and international levels on the IDPs. Academic articles and journals were also searched through to examine what information related to IDPs, and the assessment criteria have been documented before**.**
3. **Benchmarking:** This technique was used to analyse what has already been done in SA as well as other countries, who have submitted their assessments to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Furthermore, this technique aided in the recommendations provided.

The sources used for this report include the following websites: SA parliament's website, Indicators for Democratic Parliaments website and case studies, South African Legal Information Institute's (SAFLII) website, reports and publications from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) International website and South African website, Auditor-General of South Africa's (AGSA) website, Public Protector South Africa's website, South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), National Treasury South Africa's website, and UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) publications. The portals include: the South African Government's portal, South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) and African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The CSO publications include various reports from: Corruption Watch South Africa's website, Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA), My Vote Counts, and Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG). The academic databases include: JSTOR, Sabinet, and Google Scholar for relevant and reliable international governance reports and articles[2].

By applying these three research methods to collect information, it enables one to thoroughly research and conduct an external assessment of Target 1 (and the subsequent targets). Thus, using a wide range of legal, procedural, financial, government, parliamentary, CSO publications and academic sources, the report provides a balanced and evidence-based evaluation of the application of this assessment criterion.

[2] These reports and articles can be found in the reference list.

5. Observations

Limited Access to Participation Mechanisms

- While SA's parliament has formal mechanisms such as public petitions, hearings, and committee engagements, many citizens, specifically in rural and marginalised communities struggle to access or navigate these processes. Language, digital divides, and low civic awareness limit meaningful participation.

Delays in Processing Public Input

- Parliamentary committees in SA do receive and process public inputs, but delays are common and there is limited public visibility on how submissions are handled. The absence of real-time tracking or public-facing updates reduces citizens' confidence in parliamentary responsiveness.

Weak Feedback to Citizens

- Although committee reports and debates reflect public input, individual citizens or CSOs rarely receive clear feedback on the outcome of their contributions. This is particularly evident in petition processes and public hearings in sectors such as health, housing, and local governance.

Political Barriers to Urgent Action

- SA parliamentary rules allow for urgent debates and motions, but their use is often subject to political contestation. This was evident in delayed responses to urgent issues such as water shortages in KwaZulu-Natal or the energy crisis, where opposition motions were blocked or deprioritised.

Inconsistent Executive Oversight

- Parliamentary committees have constitutional powers to oversee executive responses to emerging issues such as during Covid-19 or Eskom load shedding, however in practice, oversight is often delayed or diluted by party majorities and limited resourcing of committee support staff.

Ineffective Public Communication

- SA's parliament uses social media, a website, and parliamentary TV to share information, yet many citizens remain unaware of key legislative developments. Inadequate use of indigenous languages and limited outreach in informal settlements hinder Parliament's communication with broader society.

Partial Integration of SDGs

- While SA's parliament has participated in discussions on the NDPs and SDGs, not all legislation is consistently reviewed for alignment with the SDG framework. Committees often lack the tools and expertise to systematically apply sustainability assessments.

Parliament's Role in National SDG Reporting

- Parliament is part of national coordination mechanisms on SDGs but lacks a formalised role in shaping or reviewing national SDG reports submitted to the UN. Greater collaboration with CSOs and clearer accountability structures are needed to strengthen Parliament's impact on SA's development agenda.

Figure 3 Observations from analysis

6. Assessment of Target Four for the South African Parliament

For this section the Target, indicators and sub-indicators will be discussed.

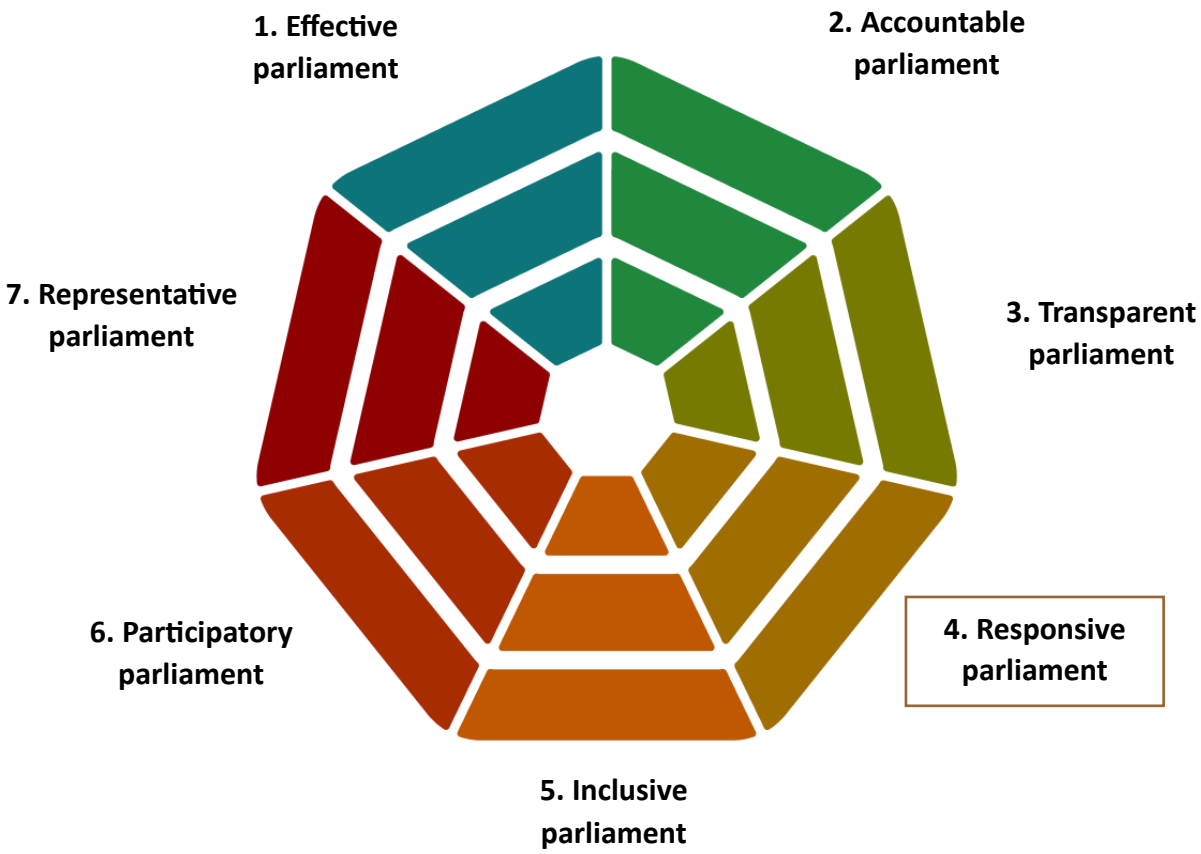

Figure 4 Indicators for Democratic Parliaments

Target 4[3] is a responsive parliament which listens to and acts upon the needs and concerns of the public. It ensures that its decisions reflect the interests of citizens, especially when addressing emerging issues or concerns. A responsive parliament adapts to the changing demands of society, actively engaging with the public and acting promptly to address issues raised by its electorate.

[3] Parliamentary Indicators. 2023. *Parliamentary Indicators*. [online] Available at: <https://www.parliamentaryindicators.org/> [Accessed 15 July 2024].

6.1. Indicator 4.1 Valuing public concerns

A responsive parliament listens to and acts upon the concerns of the public. This indicator evaluates how well parliament responds to the needs and issues raised by citizens, ensuring that public concerns are prioritised in the legislative and policy-making process. It also measures how effectively parliament addresses emerging policy issues and integrates the principles of inclusivity, such as leaving no one behind, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A responsive parliament is attentive to public demands and strives to represent the diverse needs of society.

6.1.1. Responding to public concerns

This dimension focuses on how parliament listens to and addresses the concerns raised by the public. It ensures that parliament has mechanisms in place to receive feedback from citizens and respond to their issues in a timely and effective manner. A parliament that responds to public concerns fosters trust and strengthens its connection with the electorate.

The assessment:

Criteria	Name	Description	SA Parliament	Grade	Recommendations
1	Mechanisms for the public to raise issues	Parliament's rules of procedure establish mechanisms for the public to raise issues of concern with parliament and set out how issues raised through these	SA's parliament has established several mechanisms for public participation, including public petitions, parliamentary committees, and public hearings. The rules of procedure outline how citizens can submit concerns, attend public consultations, and petition parliament on various issues. The mechanisms are in place to allow citizens to raise concerns	3	• Increase public awareness campaigns to ensure that citizens know how to raise issues with parliament, particularly targeting underrepresented or marginalised groups. • Simplify the process of submitting petitions and concerns to parliament, ensuring that it is easy for all citizens to engage.

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		mechanisms will be dealt with.	directly with parliament. Public hearings, particularly during the committee stages of legislation, offer a clear opportunity for public input. Petitions are also an effective way for citizens to engage with lawmakers on specific issues. Despite the availability of these mechanisms, there may be limited awareness about how to access them, especially in marginalised communities. Furthermore, some processes can be cumbersome or not fully accessible to people without formal education or legal expertise, limiting the effectiveness of public participation.		• Ensure that public participation mechanisms are clearly communicated on parliament's website and through
2	Processing issues raised by the public	The parliamentary administration processes issues raised by the public in a timely manner and makes information about this public input	SA's parliament processes public input through committees, official submissions, and petitions. Information raised by the public is typically shared with MPs in committee meetings, and MPs often use this input in the legislative process. The parliamentary	3	• Streamline the process for handling public input to ensure that concerns are addressed more meaningfully, quickly and efficiently. • Implement a tracking system for public submissions, allowing citizens to monitor

		available to MPs in appropriate formats.	administration is responsible for ensuring that public input is considered in a timely manner. Parliamentary committees often review petitions and public concerns, integrating them into discussions on policy or legislation. While the paper-based system exists, there are occasional delays in processing public input, particularly during busy legislative sessions. When issues are attended to, the meaningfulness and depth of responses may be questionable. Some citizens may not know whether their concerns are being addressed in a timely manner, leading to frustration or disengagement.		the status of their issues and ensuring timely responses. • Increase transparency by providing regular updates on the processing of public input and ensuring that information is made available in formats that MPs and the public can easily access.
3	Feedback to the public	Issues brought to the attention of parliament are given consideration and the person(s) who raised the issue	SA's parliament attempts to provide feedback to individuals or groups who raise issues, typically through responses to petitions or at public hearings. MPs or parliamentary committees often respond to public input during debates or	2	• Implement a more structured feedback system that ensures citizens are notified of the outcome of their concerns and how their input was considered. • Provide more personalised responses when feasible, showing that public input is

		receive(s)feedback on how it was handled.	meetings. There is a formal mechanism for providing feedback through committee reports and parliamentary debates. When public issues are raised in these settings, citizens ought to expect to hear how their concerns are being addressed. The feedback provided to the public is not always clear or timely, and citizens may not always know what the outcomes of their submissions are. Furthermore, the feedback process can sometimes be impersonal or lack follow-through, especially when the issue raised does not result in immediate legislative action.		taken seriously and addressing specific concerns raised by individuals. • Create a public-facing dashboard or report where citizens can see how their issues are being handled and whether their input has influenced parliamentary decisions.

SA parliament needs to improve communication and outreach efforts to ensure that all citizens, particularly those in marginalised communities, are aware of how to raise issues with parliament and how the process works. Streamline the processing of public concerns to ensure that responses are timely. Introduce tracking systems or dashboards to keep citizens informed about the status of their issues. Ensure that the feedback loop is robust, timely, and transparent. Parliament should aim to provide clear, actionable feedback to the public, demonstrating how their concerns have been addressed or incorporated into the legislative process. Expand opportunities for public participation, especially during the drafting and review stages of legislation, as well as general public education opportunities, and ensure that public input is not only heard but also acted upon in meaningful ways.

6.1.2 Responding to emerging policy issues

This dimension assesses parliament's ability to quickly and effectively respond to new and evolving policy challenges. It ensures that parliament can adapt to changing societal, economic, and environmental conditions, ensuring that legislation and oversight remain relevant and responsive to current issues. Effective response to emerging policy issues is critical for maintaining a parliament that addresses the needs and concerns of the public in real-time.

The assessment:

Criteria	Name	Description	SA Parliament	Grade	Recommendations
1	Rules of procedure	Parliament's rules of procedure establish mechanisms that allow for emerging policy issues to be addressed in parliament, such as through urgent debates or questions.	SA's parliamentary rules of procedure allow for urgent debates and questions to be raised by MPs in response to emerging policy issues. The rules facilitate debates and motions of urgency, allowing MPs to address critical issues promptly. Parliament has clear procedures for raising and addressing urgent matters, such as urgent questions to ministers and the possibility of emergency debates on pressing issues. These mechanisms ensure that the legislative process is flexible enough to respond to unforeseen events. While the rules provide mechanisms for addressing	2	• Streamline the process for initiating urgent debates or questions to ensure that emerging issues can be addressed more quickly and efficiently. • Ensure that the mechanisms for urgent debates are used appropriately and are not unduly politicised, so that real pressing issues can be prioritised. • Expand the opportunity for emergency debates when significant national issues arise, even beyond traditional parliamentary sessions.

			emerging issues, the process can be politicised, especially when urgency is disputed by the government or other parties. Furthermore, the time available for urgent debates can be limited, reducing the effectiveness of these discussions.		
2	Oversight of the executive's response	Parliament uses its oversight powers to oversee the executive's response to emerging policy issues and holds the executive to account.	SA's parliament has the constitutional mandate to oversee the executive's response to emerging issues, primarily through committees, oral questions, and debates. Parliamentary committees play a critical role in scrutinising executive actions, particularly when it comes to the implementation of policies and government responses to emerging challenges. Parliament exercises significant oversight over the executive, ensuring that government actions are scrutinised through committees and parliamentary questioning. This system holds the executive accountable for its	2	• Strengthen the capacity of parliamentary committees to respond more effectively and quickly to emerging policy issues, ensuring timely oversight. • Ensure that the executive is held accountable for its actions, particularly in fast-moving situations, by increasing transparency in the oversight process. • Improve the coordination between parliament and the executive to ensure that policy responses are evaluated and scrutinised quickly and efficiently.

			actions and policies, especially in the context of emerging issues. Despite the robust framework for oversight such as the Oversight and Accountability Model (OVAC), there may be limitations in the speed and effectiveness of parliament's responses, especially if the executive is resistant to scrutiny. Thereby, some executive actions, particularly in crisis situations, may not be thoroughly scrutinised due to time constraints or political considerations.		
3	Communication with the public	Parliament communicates effectively with the public about emerging policy issues, including by providing regular updates on actions and decisions taken.	SA's parliament has made significant strides in communicating with the public through various channels, including its website, social media, and public information campaigns. Updates on emerging issues and parliamentary decisions are regularly shared through these platforms, though the effectiveness of these communications can vary. Parliament uses multiple	3	• Improve the coordination of communication channels to ensure that the public receives consistent, clear, and timely updates on emerging issues. • Use a variety of communication formats (e.g., video, infographics, newsletters) to reach different audience segments, ensuring that all citizens are informed. • Provide more detailed explanations of how emerging policy issues are being

			communication tools, including live streams, press releases, and social media, to keep the public informed about emerging policy issues and parliamentary decisions. These channels provide citizens with up-to-date information about parliament's actions on critical issues. Despite these efforts, the communication could be more coordinated and consistent. In times of political crisis, the messaging can become fragmented or unclear, and the public may not always receive timely or detailed information about how parliament is addressing emerging issues. An example of this was between 2023 and 2024, during SA's electricity crisis there was a notable breakdown in communication and oversight by parliament. Government departments which included Energy, Public Enterprises, and the Presidency		addressed and give the public opportunities to engage with the process through feedback mechanisms or public consultations.

			constantly issued contradictory statements on responsibilities and timelines. Parliament also failed to present a solid response or clear oversight strategy. Committees such as the Portfolio Committee on Public Enterprises posed questions, however there was little public communication about outcomes or follow-through. The Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence also remained silent, despite its mandate over national infrastructure. Oversight visits to Eskom were conducted, but findings were delayed or not publicly released, thus leaving citizens to rely on the media for updates.		

Enhance the speed and effectiveness of parliamentary oversight, ensuring that the executive's response to emerging issues is scrutinised promptly. This could involve streamlining the process and enhancing the resources available for parliamentary committees. Parliament should increase the transparency of its responses to emerging issues by providing more frequent, consistent, and accessible updates to the public through various communication channels. Ensuring that the public is well-informed is key to promoting trust in the legislative process. Ensure that the mechanisms for raising and addressing urgent issues are utilised more effectively.

This includes allowing sufficient time for these debates and ensuring that real issues, particularly those affecting public welfare, are given priority. As part of its communication efforts, parliament should provide more opportunities for public engagement, such as consultations or forums, where citizens can actively participate in discussions on emerging issues.

6.1.3 Leaving no one behind and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

This dimension ensures that parliament's actions and decisions align with the principles of inclusivity and equality as outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It assesses parliament's commitment to leaving no one behind, ensuring that the needs of all social groups, particularly marginalised and vulnerable populations, are considered in legislative and policy processes. This dimension ensures that parliament works towards a fair and equitable society, contributing to SDGs.

The assessment:

Criteria	Name	Description	SA Parliament	Grade	Recommendations
1	Oversight of executive action	Parliament debates and scrutinises national development plans and government reports to ensure alignment with, and localisation of, the SDGs.	SA's parliament exercises its oversight function through regular debates and discussions on national development plans, including the National Development Plan (NDP), and government reports on progress toward the SDGs. Parliamentary committees often review these documents and hold the executive accountable for the effective implementation of SDG-related policies. Parliament's oversight role is	2	• Strengthen the accountability mechanisms for ensuring the implementation of SDGs, including regular reviews and follow-up on government reports. • Increase the transparency and accessibility of reports and data related to SDG progress to enable more effective parliamentary scrutiny. • Enhance parliamentary debates and discussions on the SDGs, ensuring that all

			crucial in ensuring that the government's actions align with the SDGs. Parliamentary committees, particularly those dealing with planning and development, assess how national plans and policies contribute to SDGs. Despite these efforts, there is room for improvement in ensuring that SDGs and NDP action items are adequately mainstreamed into all government policies and that regular, comprehensive assessments are made. Furthermore, the effectiveness of oversight is sometimes limited by the executive's responsiveness and the political dynamics of the country. However, parliament's current oversight practice shows limited organised engagement with both the SDGs or the NDP. While these frameworks are frequently referenced, follow-through in debates, committee work, and reporting processes has not been sufficiently robust to demonstrate that parliament is driving		sectors are adequately represented and that policy alignment is rigorously examined.

			measurable progress towards their achievement.		
2	Mainstreaming the SDGs in parliament	Mechanisms exist to support SDG mainstreaming in parliament. Parliamentary committees assess policy and legislation in their respective area of responsibility against SDG objectives.	SA's parliament has mechanisms in place to ensure that the SDGs and NDP action items are mainstreamed into legislative processes. Parliamentary committees tend to review policy and legislation to ensure that SDG objectives are integrated into national laws and programs. The National Planning Commission and other bodies also work to align policy with SDG priorities. SA parliamentary committees do not have a structured practice of thoroughly assessing proposed policies or legislation against the SDGs. However, from time to time, the SDGs and NDPs are mentioned in departmental briefings, annual performance plan reviews, or in members' interventions during debates. The SDGs are sometimes included in Budgetary Review and Recommendation	3	• Ensure that all parliamentary committees consistently assess proposed policies and legislation for their alignment with SDG targets and indicators. • Provide training for MPs and parliamentary staff on how to effectively evaluate policies against the SDG framework, especially in terms of long-term sustainability. • Establish a formal process to track the integration of SDGs in legislative reviews, ensuring that sustainability is prioritised in all sectors.

			Reports (BRRRs), but these tend to be superficial and not accompanied by substantive analysis or follow-through. As a result, parliament's contribution to localising and monitoring progress towards the SDGs remains limited and inconsistent. This approach ensures that legislation promotes sustainable development across sectors such as education, health, environment, and economic growth. Despite the commitment to mainstreaming SDGs, there are challenges in consistently applying SDG assessments to all legislation, especially when certain policies or programs may not fully integrate sustainability principles. The political landscape and resource constraints may also hinder the mainstreaming process.		
3	Participation in national SDG	Parliament participates in national SDG coordination	SA's parliament participates in national SDG coordination mechanisms, including the South African SDG Hub and the inter-	3	• Formalise parliament's role in the preparation of national SDG reports, ensuring that its input is consistently

	coordination mechanisms	mechanisms and is involved in the preparation of, and follow-up to, national reports on SDG progress to international bodies.	departmental coordination efforts led by the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME). Parliament is involved in preparing national reports on SDG progress and submits these to international bodies such as the United Nations. Parliament's involvement in SDG coordination ensures that the legislative branch contributes to monitoring and reporting on SDG progress. This integration into national coordination mechanisms allows parliament to provide input into national reports and ensures that progress on SDGs is tracked at multiple levels. While parliament is involved in SDG coordination, its role in the preparation of national SDG reports could be more formalised. The process could benefit from greater coordination between parliament, government agencies, and civil society organisations, ensuring that all stakeholders are actively engaged.		incorporated into government submissions to international bodies. • Increase the frequency and depth of engagement with civil society organisations and the private sector in SDG coordination efforts, ensuring broader input in the development of national reports. • Strengthen the collaboration between parliament, the executive, and other SDG-related stakeholders to ensure that SDG progress is comprehensively monitored and reported.

Parliament should strengthen its oversight mechanisms to ensure that the executive is held accountable for the implementation of SDG related policies and NDP action items. This includes making government reports more accessible and promoting regular, thorough assessments of SDG progress. Parliament should ensure that all proposed policies and legislation are systematically evaluated against the SDG framework. This would involve providing more resources and training to parliamentary committees to better integrate sustainability into legislative processes. Parliament should formalise its participation in national SDG coordination mechanisms, ensuring that it plays a central role in preparing and reviewing national reports on SDG progress. Regular, transparent communication between parliament, the executive, and civil society will improve the national response to the SDGs. Encourage greater public involvement in monitoring SDG progress by improving access to SDG data, holding public hearings, and providing platforms for public input on SDG reports and assessments.

7. Way forward & Conclusion

The assessment of the SA parliament's performance under Target 4 highlights both commendable efforts and notable gaps in responsiveness to public needs, policy agility, and alignment with the SDGs. While mechanisms for public engagement and oversight exist, their accessibility, meaningfulness, efficiency, and inclusiveness remain uneven across communities and policy areas.

To further understand and support continuous improvement in parliamentary responsiveness, several areas worth researching. These studies could help inform both internal parliamentary reform and broader democratic governance initiatives in SA.

- Future research should evaluate how well SA's public participation mechanisms such as petitions, public hearings, and committee engagements are understood, accessed, and utilised by citizens. Studies could focus on marginalised groups to assess equity in participation.
- As parliament adopts more digital tools, research is needed on how digital literacy, internet access, and platform design affect citizens' ability to engage. A study on the usability of parliament's website, mobile platforms, and feedback tools could highlight opportunities for technological improvement and inclusivity.
- Investigating how and when feedback is given to citizens after their concerns are raised in parliament can reveal gaps in communication and accountability. Future studies could examine what types of feedback (e.g., personalised or generic) improve trust and perceived responsiveness.
- Further study is required on how parliament partners with civil society, academia, and the private sector in SDG monitoring and reporting. This can inform better frameworks for inclusive and transparent national development reporting.

To enhance parliamentary responsiveness, a multi-pronged approach is required. Firstly, parliament should invest in simplifying public participation processes which includes petitions and public hearings and conduct targeted awareness campaigns that reach marginalised and underrepresented communities in all official languages. Secondly, implementing digital tracking tools (Such as ParliMeter) for public submissions and feedback would increase transparency and accountability, helping rebuild trust between citizens and legislators.

Parliament must also improve the consistency and speed of its oversight role, especially when responding to emerging issues such as service delivery failures, natural disasters, or governance crises. Empowering parliamentary committees with greater resources, autonomy, and access to real-time data will support faster and more effective oversight of the executive.

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Parliament has demonstrated a commitment to the SDGs and the NDP through its engagement in national mechanisms. However, it must work to mainstream both frameworks more systematically across legislation, committee work, and debates. This includes formalising Parliament's role in national SDG reporting, strengthening oversight of the NDP's implementation, and increasing collaboration with civil society organisations, academia, and the private sector.

The SA parliament has the opportunity to set a new standard for democratic responsiveness by ensuring that all voices are heard, concerns are addressed promptly, and national policies are truly inclusive. By acting on the recommendations in this report, parliament can strengthen its legitimacy, restore public confidence, and play a more decisive role in achieving a just, accountable, and sustainable society.

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9. Glossary

Constitutional Mandate: The legal authority granted to an institution or office by the Constitution.

Digital Participation Tools: Online platforms (e.g., petitions, submissions) that allow citizens to engage with parliamentary processes digitally.

Emergency Debate: A parliamentary session called at short notice to discuss an urgent or emerging issue.

Executive Oversight: Parliament's function of monitoring and scrutinising the activities and decisions of the executive branch.

Feedback Mechanism: A structured process through which parliament informs citizens about how their inputs were addressed.

Legislative Process: The steps through which laws are proposed, debated, amended, and enacted.

Marginalised Groups: Populations historically excluded from decision-making processes (e.g., rural residents, youth, persons with disabilities).

Parliamentary Administration: Staff and systems supporting the operations of parliament.

Policy Agility: The capacity of parliament to respond quickly and appropriately to changing policy environments.

Public Engagement: The process of involving citizens in parliamentary work through consultations, submissions, or hearings.

Public Hearing: An official meeting where citizens can express views on a matter before a parliamentary committee.

Public Participation:	Involvement of individuals and groups in the political and legislative processes.
Responsive Parliament:	A legislature that listens to, addresses, and acts upon public concerns, especially during crises.
Rules of Procedure:	Formal regulations governing how parliamentary business is conducted.
Sustainable Development Goals:	An UN-led global agenda comprising 17 goals aimed at ending poverty and ensuring sustainable development by 2030.
South African Human Rights Commission:	A constitutional body promoting and protecting human rights in South Africa.
Urgent Question:	A fast-tracked inquiry submitted by MPs requiring immediate executive response.
Valuing Public Concerns:	A parliamentary practice of listening to and acting on citizen input.
Website Accessibility:	The extent to which citizens can easily navigate and use parliament's digital platforms.
Youth Engagement:	Specific efforts by parliament to include young people in democratic processes.