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POLITICAL LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY: REPORT AND LEARNING FROM AN EXECUTIVE COURSE FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS

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Abstract: In February 2022, the Political Action Network for Sustainability (RAPS), the Sector Dialogues European Union and the Center for Public Management & Policy of Insper held an executive course on sustainability and climate change for political leaders of the National Congress affiliated with different parties, identified with different ideological lines and representatives from all regions of the country. Held at Insper over three consecutive days, the course aimed to enable participating parliamentarians to understand their role in implementing commitment solutions set out in the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, with the main objective of combating climate change in Brazil. The initiative was especially necessary given the social, political and environmental context we see in Brazil: the country is today the fifth largest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the world, and has been recording a 9.5% growth in emissions in recent years, being driven mainly by successive deforestation and burning practices. This context shows how Brazil is going against global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The country's transition to a low-carbon economy is urgent, and this change is impossible without the engagement and commitment of the National Congress. The National Congress has the important capacity to propose laws, measures, and actions that can worsen or mitigate this situation since environmental legislation requires a vote from parliamentarians. Given the subject's urgency and the target audience's diversity, we discussed and adopted a teaching and learning methodology that sought to equalise knowledge and promote constructive debates among parliamentarians in the classroom, as well as in interaction with international experts who conducted remote classes. Therefore, after completing the course, we jointly carried out a critical analysis of the positive results and opportunities for

improvement of the course, already published, which serves as the basis for this work, with the aim of contributing to other institutions and Government Schools that have audiences and challenges similar to ours.

Keywords: Executive Course, Sustainability, Climate Change.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2022, RAPS, Sector Dialogues European Union and Insper brought together twelve political leaders from the National Congress for three days at the Insper campus, in São Paulo, for an executive course on sustainability, climate change and future leaders. The participants were affiliated with different parties, identified with different ideological lines, and represented all regions of the country. The course aimed to enable participating parliamentarians to understand their role in implementing commitment solutions provided for in the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, with the main objective of combating climate change in Brazil.

The initiative was especially necessary given Brazil's social, political, and environmental context: the country is today the fifth largest global emitter of greenhouse gases (GHG) and has been recording a 9.5% growth in emissions in recent years, driven mainly by successive deforestation and burning practices.

This context shows how Brazil is resisting global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The country's transition to a low-carbon economy is urgent, and this change is not possible without the engagement and commitment of the National Congress.

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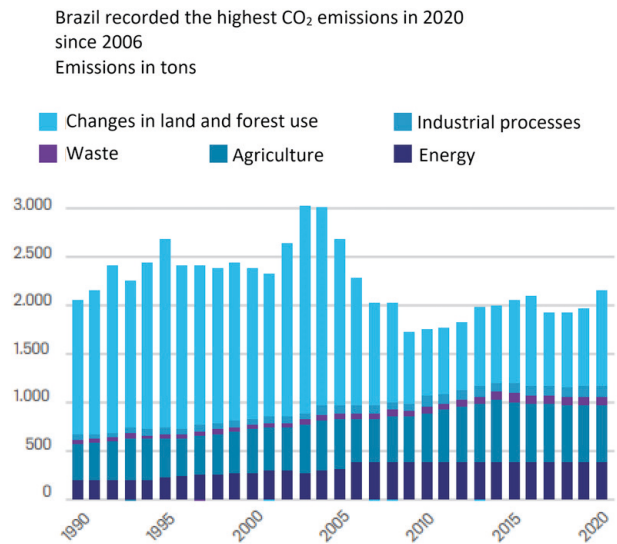
As Senator Fabiano Contarato (PT/ES) said during the course: "The federal constitution is

clear when it determines that we all have the right to an ecologically balanced environment. Hence the importance of the politician being permanently, regardless of party identity, imbued with the purpose of realising this essential and institutional human right”.

In addition to this strategic and determining role in the construction of a legislative framework that protects the environment and promotes actions for sustainable development, the need for training in sustainability and climate change proved to be more relevant given the results of the research “An agenda of weather in the National Congress”, conducted by RAPS in partnership with the “*Instituto Clima e Sociedade*” and “*Fundação Getúlio Vargas*”, between February and May 2021. The research interviewed 114 deputies, 17 senators and 27 advisors to understand parliamentarians’ understanding of the climate emergency. One of the main points concluded by the study is the revelation that there are important divergences between congressmen and the positions of their voters: congressmen believe that voters are not concerned with environmental issues. However, the research “Climate Change in the Perception of Brazilians” by ITS Rio, Yale and Ibope with different population segments shows that this is not true. The Brazilian population is, indeed, concerned about environmental issues, and this interest has grown over the last few years. 78% of the population in 2020, in fact, said that the topic is “very important”.

The survey also showed a clear gap between the actions that parliamentarians believe are most important and the real causes of greenhouse gas emissions in our country. This is because Brazil, unlike the vast majority of countries, does not have the majority of its emissions from energy sources but rather from land use, as shown in the graph below. Greenhouse gas emissions

generated from land use – the vast majority of which come from illegal deforestation – were also responsible for the 23% increase in the country’s emissions between 2019 and 2020.



Source: SEEG/Climate Observatory

However, contrary to this trend, the majority of parliamentarians (51%) who responded to the survey believe that investing in renewable energy is the best way to combat climate change in our country. This demonstrated that parliamentarians are unaware not only of the importance that the environmental and climate agenda represents for the population, but also of the best and most effective actions to be taken in the process of transition to a low-carbon economy. Based on this context of mismatch between the vision of parliamentarians and that of the Brazilian voter, RAPS invested in creating training for parliamentarians, the “Executive Course on Political Leadership for Sustainability”.

Representative Leandre (no party/PR), one of the course participants, spoke about this challenge: “Whenever we need to put on the agenda and discuss themes that are, to a certain extent, complex, that require intersectoral actions and that are within the domain of knowledge of few people, [it is

always a challenge for us] to make this reach as many people as possible”.

This statement demonstrates that a better understanding of the necessary public policies is essential for parliamentarians to be part of the solution and act in the right direction for a sustainable future in Brazil.

METHODOLOGY

A COURSE AS AN ADVOCACY AND MOBILIZATION TOOL

It is important to understand that advocacy is a strategy to influence decision-makers to change public policy (Pathfinder, 2011). In this segment, RAPS works to protect the environment and sustainable development, promote the Climate Agenda, and defend democracy as a public interest. It used the executive course as one of the tools to raise awareness among a group of parliamentarians selected according to themes related to sustainability, environment, and climate change.

Knowledge and dissemination of information are the basis for advancing any agenda, and mobilizing and promoting structural changes in public policies. After all, how can leaders understand the urgency of combating climate change if they do not even understand the problem and its causes in Brazil? How can they build complex technical solutions, such as establishing a carbon market and attracting investments for the green economy, if they do not understand the scope and tools of these arrangements? Furthermore, it is worth highlighting a very important point, which also served as inspiration for the creation of the course: the realisation that, in politics, it is not possible to advance the climate, environment and sustainability agenda without due dialogue between different fields. ideological and, mainly, without the permeability of understanding the urgency and relevance of the topic. Sustainability

needs to be achieved in all sectors of society and, therefore, requires dialogue between parliamentarians representing these sectors.

Therefore, the course was designed to promote the horizontal joint construction of knowledge between teachers and participants, stimulating dialogue and the search for collaborative solutions. This would minimize polarisation and encourage collaboration between parliamentarians, regardless of their parties, ideological fields, or the sectors of society in which they operate.

SELECTION OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

Deputies and Senators who are part of the RAPS leadership network were invited, with different levels of understanding and familiarity with the topic: (1) those who had a good level of knowledge, (2) those who would like to get closer and need technical support to learn, (3) and those who were furthest away from the issue of sustainability, but are strategic congressmen – that is, congressmen from an ideological camp that generally does not identify with the issue, or prominent parliamentarians with the ability to influence a large number of other congressmen.

RAPS observes the parliamentary performance of its leaders and other congressmen with a monitoring tool developed by the organization itself. This tool can express some indicators based on the information provided by the Chamber of Deputies' open data service. The matters selected by the tool are indicated for nominal and thematic voting linked to sustainability and improvement of democracy, areas dear to RAPS.

Based on the record of roll-call votes, parliamentarians were grouped as: a) those most active in the sustainability agenda; b) those who need to improve and improve their positions and understandings on the topics; c) those who are distant and removed

from the topic due to other agendas, but who need greater training on the subject. After identifying the profiles of parliamentarians, RAPS sought to create a composition of these three groups in the class selected for the Executive Course on Political Leadership for Sustainability.

Furthermore, the participants also reflected partisan, ideological and regional diversity, to bring different perspectives, enrich the dialogue and expand the learning obtained throughout the course. In total, 12 congressmen, from 10 different parties from across the ideological spectrum and from all regions of the country participated.

Finally, it was established as a condition for participation that guests remain in the activities throughout the three-day course period. This way, the active and complete participation of all participants was guaranteed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The course was designed to deepen the guest parliamentarians' knowledge of the sustainable agenda, contributing to political leadership development in the National Congress.

Furthermore, we sought to encourage willingness and openness to dialogue for concentrated action, even coming from the different ideological camps represented by the participants.

The course objectives are summarized as follows:

- 1) make Brazilian politicians aware of the risks of climate change for Brazil, highlighting the risks of social and economic impacts associated with its consequences;
- 2) demonstrate the paths that can be taken to combat climate change and mitigate its effects, technically qualifying Brazilian parliamentarians;

- 3) provide a reflection on the role of the Brazilian Congress in the search for solutions related to sustainable development, stimulating dialogue about practical solutions and, at the same time, reducing ideological polarization regarding the topic;

- 4) encourage experiences and exchange of best practices between Brazilian congressmen and the European Union, stimulating the development of public policies in Brazil.

From this, we translated the following as learning objectives that each student knew at the end of the program:

- 1) recognize problems and address planetary limits;
- 2) explain that economic development and environmental protection are not antagonistic – on the contrary, sustainable development has great possibilities of attracting investments.
- 3) work on communication on complex topics in times of high polarization, as well as other socio-emotional skills of adaptive leadership.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The Executive Course on Political Leadership for Sustainability was designed in partnership with Insper and the European Union Delegation in Brazil. It is customized, values the students' experience, and constantly stimulates debate.

We seek to strongly relate the course contents with the day-to-day life of the National Congress and themes linked to national and international debates—seeking to provide practical tools for parliamentarians in their work. The content also included experiences from initiatives carried out in the European Union, presented by invited experts, with the aim of inspiring actions for the Brazilian reality.

In addition to expository classes, parliamentarians were able to invest in the dialogue necessary for the topic to advance in Congress, forming relevant understandings to work together in the future. All students were together in person at Insper, in order to create informal spaces for exchanging experiences and networking between classes. The opportunities for debate and conversation among participants were a positive point highlighted by both participating parliamentarians and members of RAPS, organisers of the course.

It is also important to highlight that the course was taught in a hybrid manner. The participants were in person in São Paulo, on the Insper campus, but some of the classes were taught remotely and online. This was due to the partnership with the European Union, which allowed European teachers to teach classes remotely, disseminating content from successful experiences in the area of environment and sustainability in the EU.

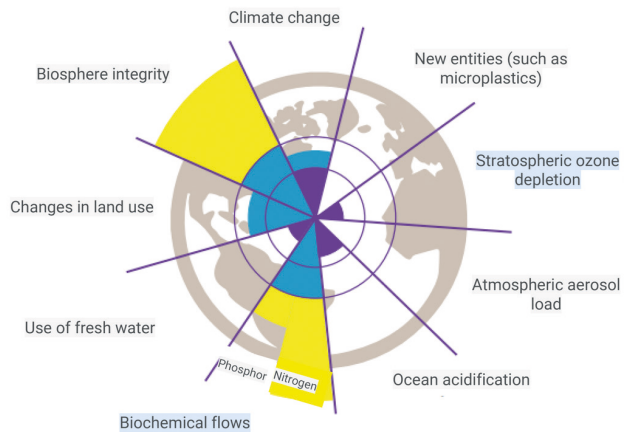
HOW WAS THE COURSE

The first day began with an introductory class on planetary limits, that is, the limits of the environment within which humanity can operate without compromising its safety. Literature considers that there are nine planetary limits that need to be taken into consideration, by human activities for the maintaining the earth's balance: climate change, new entities (such as microplastics and long-lived substances), stratospheric ozone depletion, atmospheric aerosol load, ocean acidification, biochemical fluxes, freshwater use, land use changes, and integrity of the biosphere.

Of these nine limits, three are at high risk, two are at increasing risk, and three were not quantified due to a lack of scientific evidence. Climate change is in increasing danger, and the integrity of the biosphere, which has had its

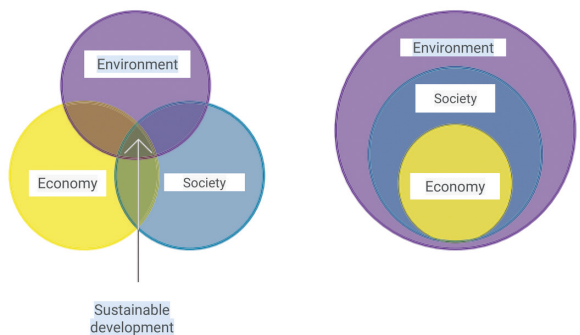
security framework exceeded, are considered structural limits due to their high interference capabilities in other dimensions.

Of the 9 limits of the earth, 4 have already been



Source: BBC -Stockholm Resistance Center

In addition to presenting the concept of Planetary Limits, the first module aimed to stimulate the systemic thinking necessary to understand sustainable development, discuss different stakeholders' views on the problem and talk about the pressures for change. The impacts on socioeconomic development caused by the extrapolation of planetary limits were also presented to raise awareness among parliamentarians about the importance of using evidence in the creation of public policies within the theme of sustainability.



Contrary to the traditional understanding of sustainable development, the contemporary view does not see it as an intersection between

the balance of the environment, economy and society. Sustainable development occurs when society and the economy grow considering planetary limits, that is, the importance of ecosystem balance has greater weight in decision-making.

In the second module, participants discussed “Private and collective interests in public sustainability policies” addressing the dilemmas and possible solutions for positive and negative externalities caused by the exploitation of natural resources.

This module explained that whenever an individual or entity’s action has negative or positive effects on third parties and they do not receive compensation for these effects, we consider that there is an externality.

When we talk about fundamental themes for climate mitigation and resilience, such as land use, energy transition, urban adaptation, etc., several externalities are at play that deserve attention. While there are beneficiaries, there are also those who lose from these processes and who, therefore, need to be rewarded.

In this class, cases of Brazilian public fiscal subsidy policies applied in two contexts were mainly discussed: in reducing negative externalities generated by environmental preservation policies in the Amazon, and in encouraging the use and production of biofuels. Participants discussed such public policies’ effectiveness, impacts, challenges and alternative paths.

Besides, on the first day, online classes were held about the so-called European Green New Deal. The module was taught by an expert invited by Sector Dialogues European Union, who sought to present to Brazilian parliamentarians one of the most complex and strategic public policies on sustainability in the world.

The Green New Deal—or European Ecological Pact—was born within the European Commission in 2019. It is an

agreement between the bloc’s countries to make Europe the first continent neutral in carbon emissions by 2050, based on the commitments of the UN Agenda 2030.

The agreement establishes guidelines and metrics for multisectoral action based on the following axes: climate, energy, agriculture, industry, environment and oceans, transport, finance and regional development, and research and innovation. Cross-cutting objectives were also defined across these axes, such as: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, generating jobs and economic growth, ending energy poverty, reducing foreign energy dependence, and improving the health and well-being of the population.

The proposals arising from the European Green Deal must be processed in the European Parliament so that the legislature can sanction and regulate the new policy. Among the more than 15 proposals presented to Parliament so far, Fit for 55 is the most talked about among them. This is a package of revisions to the bloc’s legislation that seeks to address issues such as taxation of GHG emissions from imported products, updates to the European Trading System, changes in land use, energy transition, etc.

The module promoted discussions about Parliament’s work and the challenges and opportunities for Brazilian exports to Europe. Such debates were important to stimulate understanding of the role of the federal legislature in the search for a more sustainable country and the risks related to if Brazil does not advance legislation to combat deforestation, reduce GHG emissions, etc.

Sources of financing and ESG (environmental, social and governance) investments – that is, investments that take into consideration, environmental, social concern and governance criteria were also topics covered. In this module, course participants were able to understand better

why the market is making efforts to promote sustainability and which tools are being used to do so. Instruments such as: green bonds, thematic funds, blended strategies, strategic philanthropy, among others, were presented and discussed.

The second day of the course began with a class focused on Brazilian agribusiness: land use, growth dynamics and international insertion, with highlights on factors such as productivity and competitiveness. The module began with a retrospective of the tropicalization movement of agribusiness in Brazil, paying attention to the investments in R&D necessary for the cultivation of soy and livestock in the tropical climate, as well as the environmental impacts generated by the expansion of these activities. The professor also outlined a historical overview of the impacts of agribusiness on Brazil's economic growth, highlighting the importance of the sector to the country.

The aim of the module was to present the three faces of agribusiness when it comes to sustainability and climate change: villain, victim and solution. At the same time that agriculture is responsible for 98.8% of deforestation in the Cerrado (MapBiomass, 2021) and 27% of GHG emissions (Observatório do Clima, 2021), the sector is also one of the most impacted by climate change due to changes in temperature, rainfall patterns, increased incidence of pests and diseases, soil degradation, among others. To break this paradigm, it is necessary for agribusiness to implement sustainable innovations connected to the commitments of the 2030 Agenda, such as: integrated crop-livestock-forest systems (ILPF), recovery of degraded areas, adoption of a clean energy matrix, among others.

Still on the second day, another intensely discussed topic was the Carbon Market, whose modules were taught remotely by a

guest expert from Diálogos União União, with extensive knowledge of the European and Chinese markets. It is important to highlight that this topic, during the period in which the course took place, was under extensive discussion in the Chamber of Deputies, which, given the opportunity for mobilization, makes it even more relevant to add it to the class schedule, since, even though it is complex, is fundamental for transition actions towards a low-carbon economy, including in light of the commitments adopted by Brazil and other countries at the UN Conference of the Parties (COP 26).

The concept of the Carbon Market, formally known as the Emissions Reduction Market, emerged at ECO-92, in Rio de Janeiro, and was deepened with the Kyoto Protocol, in 1997. The idea of the system is to regulate and stimulate the purchase and sale of carbon credits, that is, the right to reduce or remove one ton of carbon by different industries. Currently, the voluntary market is in force in Brazil, which means that there is no maximum GHG emission limit allowed by state regulation and that, therefore, emissions reduction is based on a spontaneous deliberation by industries.

On the other hand, several regulated Carbon Market systems have already been implemented worldwide, such as in Europe, China, California, Australia and New Zealand.

This course module sought to discuss in depth the experience and learning of the European Union in implementing the European Trading System, and China in implementing its recent regulated market; challenges and opportunities for the Brazilian Emissions Reduction Market; discussions and commitments made at COP 26; and opportunities generated by the Paris Agreement. The classes sought to mix broad discussions with the technical presentation of tools and concepts specific to Carbon Markets.

On the second day, two modules related

to leadership development were also offered: communication for complex topics and leadership for implementation. Both classes sought to qualify participants regarding the means necessary to implement public policies and legislation linked to sustainability, and strengthen the agenda with the electorate. Finally, the closing was made with a summary of what had been discussed on the day and debate on the theme of the Conference of the Parties 26 (COP 26).

On the third and final day we discussed the main learnings of the course. A reflection was carried out in order to identify knowledge gaps on environmental and sustainability topics, asking parliamentarians the following question: “what more do we need to know?”. Finally, the congress participants were also encouraged to propose an applied project or action plan, and to express individually how they would use the content learned in the course.

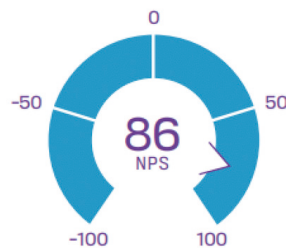
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EVALUATION FORM

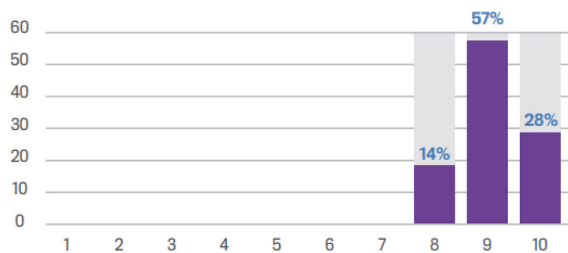
Feedback was collected from participants in the course organization and also from parliamentarians. At the end of the last module, participants were invited to fill out an evaluation form.

For the question “How likely are you to recommend this course to a friend or colleague?”, the vast majority of delegates gave a score of 9 to 10 on a scale of 0 to 10, that is: 85% of participants would recommend the course with great certainty. course to friends and colleagues.

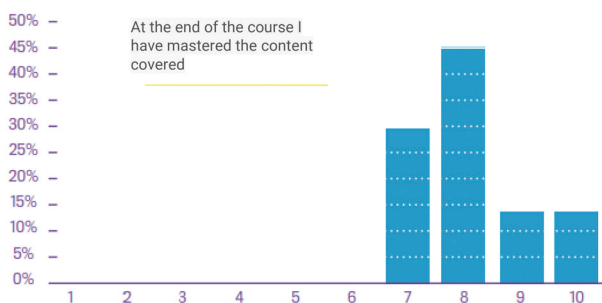
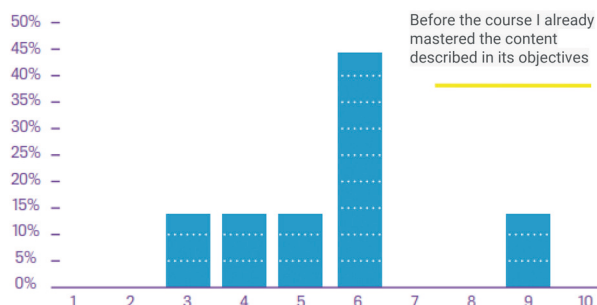
The indicator was +86 on the Net Promoter Score (NPS) scale, which goes from -100 to +100.



The overall course grade given by the responding participants was also considerably high, as the average grade was 9.14, with the responding participants varying mainly between grades 8, 9 and 10.



Participants also expressed a high perception of learning. Before the course, on a scale of 0 to 10, the declared average knowledge of the subjects covered was 5.57. After the course, this evaluation rose to 8.14, thus making a huge leap in the level of knowledge.



On the other hand, it is important to highlight that there were signs of some points of improvement, the main one being the already mentioned fact that online classes made it difficult for the class to engage, hindering the enjoyment of the subject in question despite the quality of the class taught in person by the teacher.

This was demonstrated in the grades given to online subjects, whose evaluation by participants was lower than that given to face-to-face subjects.

DISCUSSION AT THE END OF CLASS

As mentioned, in the closing class, parliamentarians were given the opportunity to debate what they had learned throughout the classes and other future topics.

The experience of the course was praised, mainly in the sense that it would be important for the mandates in the coming years - going further, that the experience made parliamentarians more capable of arriving at Congress better informed and with greater background to defend their positions at favor of the environment. Furthermore: parliamentarians who were less involved with the network of RAPS members spoke out in order to encourage more active participation in the future, making themselves available to support in any way possible and expressing the desire to follow up in an engaged manner the debates on the topic.

Another important suggestion given by a congressman was to create a study group with more information to assist and support the proposals of deputies and senators. Thus, when a specific topic was discussed, there would already be a basis for further discussions.

COORDINATION ASSESSMENT

After the two-and-a-half-day course, and through evaluations, collection of feedback and observations, RAPS was able to observe the following results:

- 1) Participating congressmen who are more informed about climate change, the best actions to combat it, specifically in the Brazilian case, and the best institutional instruments for this. Besides, more informed about financing the transition to a low-carbon economy and ESG investment trends. This result is expected to advance the debate in Congress regarding climate change mitigation measures and make it more qualified and technical.
- 2) Fostering dialogue between parliamentarians from distant ideological spectrums, but who debated in a neutral and depolarized technical environment. It is hoped that the debates raised within the scope of the Executive Course on Political Leadership for Sustainability can continue in the sphere of the National Congress, contributing to the joint search for solutions and the transversality of the environmental and climate agenda across all ideological spectrums.
- 3) Presence of parliamentarians throughout the course training period. Despite extremely busy schedules, at a time of year when political commitments take over congressmen's agendas, it was possible to guarantee the presence of participants throughout the class period. This demonstrated commitment to the agenda and the course, resulting in much more qualified closing discussions.

- 4) Mostly positive evaluations from participants. Despite different levels of knowledge among participants, the evaluation of the course was predominantly positive, with the vast majority of grades assigned to the course between 9 and 10, on a scale of 0 to 10; Classes also received equally positive reviews, with some exceptions for those taught virtually.
- 5) Parliamentarians are more involved and committed to RAPS and the agenda in general. At the end of the course, some of the parliamentarians commented that they would start to work more closely with RAPS, as well as the environmental agenda as a whole.
- 6) As an indirect result, it is also important to highlight the digital mobilization and engagement generated by the content posted on parliamentarians' networks, which has high potential reach. The digital mobilization carried out by parliamentarians who demonstrate the importance of the agenda is essential to demonstrate to other parliamentarians and the general public, especially in an election year, that the environment and climate issues must be highlighted in Brazilian politics.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is not common in Brazil to promote courses as advocacy and mobilization tools. In fact, the format of the Executive Course on Political Leadership for Sustainability and its nonpartisan organization allowed for a less traditional initiative to mobilize leaders.

Several organizations have been carrying out extremely important work monitoring parliamentarians and government, digital mobilization of society, and more direct pressure on decision makers, both to advance

the environmental agenda and to prevent setbacks on topics ranging from combating deforestation to the institution of the carbon market, including subsidies and incentives for clean energy.

These efforts are worthy and necessary. However, promoting courses and disseminating knowledge are fundamental, as it is impossible to foster true dialogue without knowledge. Pressure on parliamentarians will always be less effective if they do not truly understand the urgency we face regarding the environment and sustainability.

In principle, a course may generate less engagement than meetings with experts and parliamentarians, technical notes, or manifestos, but it is important that parliamentarians and government officials understand at least the topics for which they are being charged, the reason why these topics are dear to the population, and what is the role of parliament in these areas and why we have urgency.

The Executive Course on Political Leadership for Sustainability was a success, especially in terms of the participation of deputies and senators, considering the evaluation given by them to the course.

The objective of RAPS is that, due to the success and positive results of this first edition of the course, it will be repeated annually and expanded to include more and more parliamentarians and systematically increase its impact and reach.

Furthermore, in a future program, the possibilities suggested by the participants would be studied, of making field visits, with trips to places within Brazil, such as the Amazon and the Central-West to understand, in loco, innovations, policies to combat deforestation, etc. It is important to highlight that many parliamentarians have never visited the northern region of the country, for example, and it is essential to know in person what they

are trying to protect, as well as understanding the functioning of public policies in the locality is essential for the proper fulfillment of the role of representatives of congressmen.

This way, parliamentarians trained as Political Leaders for Sustainability will know how to move the agenda forward, having technical knowledge, communication tools and also knowledge of local realities.

The fight for a sustainably developed country, for protecting the environment and combating climate change is complex, difficult and requires the commitment of different sectors of society. With the results of the Executive Course on Political Leadership for Sustainability, it is clear that this fight involves training leaders to truly understand the extent

of the problem, its consequences and how to combat it. As Deputy Professor Israel argued:

“We need to generate awareness (...) [of] members of parliament about the need to address the global climate emergency and other environmental problems that are very serious, and that need a closer look with all urgency”.

And we go further: we need to ensure that these leaders are also spokespeople for dialogue and information on the topic. Only by raising awareness and strengthening more and more leaders committed to the agenda we will really be able to move forward and make Brazil the sustainable power that the country can be.

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