

**UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
Voluntary National Review 2016**

FINLAND

Executive Summary of the Report

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1. Long history of building ownership for sustainable development

Finland has a long tradition of promoting sustainable development both in domestic policies and in international development cooperation. Finland is committed to continuing these efforts also in the future.

Finland was among the first countries to establish a National Commission on Sustainable Development, only one year after the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro. From the very beginning, there was a broad consensus that the Commission should be led by the Prime Minister and have wide stakeholder membership. This has been the leading 'modus operandi' in Finland now for 23 years.

Finland has also implemented various programmes on sustainable development since mid-1990s which led to the adoption of a comprehensive National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2006 (*Towards Sustainable Choices. A Nationally and Globally Sustainable Finland*). The latest strategy for sustainable development (*The Finland we want 2050. Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development*) was adopted in December 2013 and updated in April 2016 to be in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030).

Poverty eradication in the wider context of sustainable development has been the principle objective of Finnish development policy during the past decades. The most recent development policy outlined in the Government Report on Development Policy (2016) is based on Agenda 2030.

The guiding principles for national policies and measures on sustainable development in Finland have been high-level political leadership, cross-ministerial guidance, policy coherence, long-term perspective, bottom-up planning, multi-stakeholder participation and continuous dialogue based on mutual learning and trust. In addition, a robust and timely follow-up and review mechanism, including the development and use of sustainable development indicators, has been an integral part of the Finnish model.

2. Integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development as a guiding principle

One of the fundamental objectives in Finland since the 1992 Rio Conference has been to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, aiming at linking economic prosperity, social justice and a good state of the environment in a mutually reinforcing way. This holistic approach has been facilitated by developing integrative concepts, tools and indicators, as well as by establishing comprehensive national strategies and inclusive multi-stakeholder forums. In the national sustainable development framework the social dimension has been the most challenging. All in all, the ultimate aim has been improved Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development in both national and international policies, including Finnish development policy.

In the most recent version (updated in April 2016) of the strategic policy document Society Commitment to Sustainable Development, the objective for sustainable development was summarised as follows: *"In 2050, every person in Finland will be an equal and valuable member of society. Finland will be a skilful welfare society capable of renewing itself in the face of global changes. Further development of the welfare society will be enabled by a sustainable economy and growth in employment opportunities. Together we will lay the foundation and provide necessary conditions for all people to live sustainably, and for*

communities and companies to operate sustainably. The carrying capacity of nature is not exceeded and natural resources are used in a sustainable manner. Finland will promote peace, equality, non-discrimination and justice nationally and internationally.”

3. Implementation of Agenda 2030 in Finland is well underway

The implementation of Agenda 2030 was launched at a kick-off seminar in November 2015 in Helsinki, with many participants from public administration, municipalities, companies, civil society organisations, interest groups, schools and other partners. Even though the new global agenda attracts positive interest in the Finnish society, raising awareness among the general public and engaging the society in action remains a huge challenge. Finland will respond to this challenge with a strengthened communications plan, to be designed together with civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

Implementing the 2030 Agenda in a coherent, integrated and participatory way is a priority for Finland. This entails developing ways of working that will involve broad-based multi-stakeholder participation that includes all of civil society, academia, the private sector and local government. A multi-stakeholder approach will be of key importance for ensuring Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development and promoting accountability both home and abroad.

a) National Plan to implement Agenda 2030 prepared by the end of 2016

Finland gets ready for the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in a comprehensive and inclusive manner. The Finnish Government has the primary responsibility for the work, but the civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders have an integral role in this endeavour. According to the Government Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä, a *National Implementation Plan for Agenda 2030* will be drawn up by the end of 2016.

This Plan will provide evidence-based information on the urgent need for action, and it will draw a baseline for Finnish action and identify Finland's strengths as well as major gaps and challenges to the implementation. Additionally, the national plan will define the key executors, determine tools for and approaches to implementing an integrated agenda and define the division of labour and partnerships between the public, private and civil society actors in the work on implementation. Further, the plan will outline the coordination, management, monitoring and review mechanisms. It will also offer a roadmap for the appropriate scheduling of activities and allocation of resources in Finland, both in domestic and in external action.

Many elements of the National Implementation Plan have already been set. For example, the Government has updated its development policy so that it takes Agenda 2030 as a starting point. The goal of Finnish development policy is to reduce poverty and inequality. The policy has four priorities: the rights of women and girls; reinforcing developing countries' economies to generate more jobs, improve livelihoods and enhance wellbeing; democratic and well-functioning societies, including taxation capacity; and food security, access to water and energy, and the sustainable use of natural resources.

However, as the Implementation Plan is to be completed only by the end of 2016, many processes and results still need to be finalized through political processes in the second half of the year. Therefore this summary provides only a preliminary overview of the Finnish plans and measures for implementing the Agenda 2030.

b) Inter-ministerial coordination for policy coherence in action

The Prime Minister's Office is in charge of coordinating the national implementation work and drawing up the national plan. The Office acts as the *Coordination Secretariat*, which includes representatives from the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Secretariat General of the National Commission on Sustainable Development. The Coordination Secretariat functions as an operational hub for Agenda 2030 coordination, and it works closely together with the Coordination Network, which comprises focal points from all government ministries and the Finnish Development Policy Committee.

The inter-ministerial *Coordination Network* guides and supports the work of the Coordination Secretariat and ensures that all dimensions and aspects of sustainable development are taken into consideration in the implementation. The ministries are also the key executors of Agenda 2030 through their sectoral programmes, strategies, legislation and implementation of international agreements and commitments.

c) Enabling multi-stakeholder engagement and partnerships

Government is responsible for designing the implementation plan and ensuring the timely realization of the Agenda 2030 in Finland. However, there are two major multi-stakeholder committees in Finland that have an integral role in the national coordination, implementation and follow-up system.

The *Finnish Development Policy Committee* is a parliamentary body whose mission is to follow the implementation of the global sustainable development agenda in Finland from the development policy perspective. It also monitors the implementation of the Government Programme and the Government's development policy guidelines.

The *National Commission on Sustainable Development* is a Prime Minister led partnership forum that has operated continuously in Finland for 23 years. Its aim is to integrate sustainable development into Finnish policies, measures and everyday practices. The two main tasks of the National Commission are to follow up and review the national implementation of Agenda 2030 and enhance the implementation of the Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development.

Both committees were re-mandated for a four-year period in 2016. Membership of the committees is broad; thereby, ensuring that the voices of civil society organisations, private sector actors, interest groups and other stakeholders are heard. To improve the policy coherence for sustainable development, the collaboration between the two committees is being intensified since the adoption of Agenda 2030, for example, through joint meetings, workshops and discussion papers.

In addition, an interdisciplinary *Sustainable Development Expert Panel*, comprising eight professors and senior academics challenges and advances the work of the National Commission on Sustainable Development and adds a critical voice to the sustainability debate, when needed.

The implementation of Agenda 2030 is also supported by the Finnish civil society, which has actively started to reorganise its internal cooperation structures to promote new kinds of partnerships in the holistic spirit of the global agenda.

Finland is committed to strengthening the existing means and finding innovative ways to increase the civic, public and private participation and build ownership. Reaching out to the local

communities, children and youth, people with disabilities and migrants is a special challenge in Finland. The new modes for participation will be considered as part of the process of designing the National Implementation Plan for Agenda 2030 in the course of 2016.

As part of Finland's presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016, the potentials of Nordic cooperation in Agenda2030 implementation will be mapped. The results will thereafter be used as input to the preparation of a Nordic Programme on Agenda2030 implementation

d) Addressing Agenda 2030 and its SDGs in a systematic way

To put Agenda 2030 into practice in Finland, integrated policies will be carried out and measures will be taken in various policy sectors as part of the implementation of national and EU legislation, national sectoral or thematic strategies and action plans, and international agreements and commitments.

To guide the preparation of the National Plan to implement Agenda 2030, the Prime Minister's Office of Finland asked all line Ministries to identify those existing policies, measures, activities and budgets covering 17 goals and 169 targets. The mapping also served as a means to make all line ministries familiar with the whole agenda and draw attention away from silos.

The results of the mapping are an important source of information for a more comprehensive *gap analysis* to be completed by July 2016. The gap analysis is being carried out jointly by the Finnish Environment Institute and Demos Helsinki, a think tank, and it aims to ensure the wide participation of various stakeholders in the consultation and stocktaking process. The analysis looks into Finland's readiness to implement the global 2030 Agenda. The objective is to draw a baseline for implementation and to point out goals and targets where Finland has to take the most actions to catch up. The analysis will also pinpoint those areas where Finland is performing well.

The intention of the gap analysis is to identify national focus areas based on a meta-analysis of existing international SDG benchmark studies and global SDG indicators. This work will also take into account the national consultative multi-stakeholder process and expert assessments. It will position Finland globally and in relation to Finland's peer-countries, especially the OECD countries. The analysis will also indicate the major challenges to the further development of the indicators.

According to the updated national strategy, Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development, Finland's challenges regarding sustainable development include the safeguarding of the welfare state while the population ages; the sustainability gap and changes in the economy; high carbon dioxide emissions relative to the size of the population; the protection of biodiversity; and the sustainable, fair and efficient use of natural resources. The challenge is to create a sustainable economy that generates welfare and contributes to the quality of life and that, at the same time, leads to a reduction in detrimental impacts on the environment. To be able to attain the objectives set for sustainable development in the international context, Finland needs to honour its commitments to financing development cooperation.

Various international studies on countries' readiness to implement the SDGs (for instance, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Sustainable Development Solutions Network and Stakeholder Forum) provide quite uniform findings as regards Finland's challenges. According to these studies, Finland's readiness to start implementing Agenda 2030 is good in general terms. Finland's main challenges, however, apply to environmental, economic and employment questions, and, to a

certain extent, to gender ones. Energy intensity, domestic materials consumption, production-based energy-related carbon dioxide emissions, terrestrial protected areas and the unemployment rate are among the indicators that lower Finland's performance in SDGs 7, 8, 12, 13 and 15. In terms of gender equality, Finland ranks high, but in regard to gender-based violence or the gender pay gap, there is still much to be done. Finland's status in more socially related goals, especially in poverty (SDG 1), health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4), is fairly good.

As part of the gap analysis process, Finnish experts, civil society organisations and other stakeholders were provided an opportunity to analyse the results of the international studies and give their views on the national strengths and weaknesses. The results of these interactive hearings strongly support the findings of the international studies. However, as regards Finland's relative strengths, especially concerning the SDGs on education, equality and poverty, the stakeholders emphasised the need to ensure that Finland does not take its good status for granted. Instead, Finland must safeguard the Nordic welfare society and ensure its high performance in these goals also in the future.

All in all, Finland considers Agenda 2030, its principles, goals and targets and means of implementation as a universal, integrated and indivisible whole: all 17 goals and 169 targets are to be implemented by all countries. The results of the gap-analysis will give guidance to Finland on which issues to focus on during the first years of implementation. National relevance and urgency will be the key drivers for early implementation in Finland. At the same time, Finland aims to ensure that the whole Agenda 2030 will be addressed in the next 15 years. By the end of 2016, a decision will be made through a participatory political process on how the goals and targets will be phased as part of the preparations for the National Plan to implement Agenda 2030.

e) Innovative tools to boost concrete action and results

In order to generate action, put sustainable development into practice and engage larger segments of the society in the work on sustainable development, a *Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development* was launched in 2013 by the National Commission on Sustainable Development. Society's Commitment offers a strategic framework and a multi-stakeholder operational tool for sustainable development. *"The Finland we want by 2050 – Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development"* is a new partnership model that aims at boosting ownership, concrete action, innovative solutions and impact throughout the society.

The vision of Society's Commitment is *"a prosperous and globally responsible Finland within the carrying capacity of nature"* and it can be achieved by implementing the eight shared objectives identified in this strategy for sustainable development. By April 2016, over 240 actors from companies to ministries, schools, municipalities and civil society organisations, as well as individuals have already joined Society's Commitment by launching their own operational commitments.

The Society's Commitment was updated in early 2016 to be better in line with Agenda 2030. The work on updating the Society's Commitment was done in close dialogue with members of the National Commission on Sustainable Development, encompassing approximately 90 civil society, industry, business, labour market and educational organisations, as well as representatives of the government, Parliament, ministries, local and regional organisations, the Evangelical Church of Finland, indigenous peoples Sami and other public, private and third sector stakeholders. Society's Commitment was strengthened especially as regards the global dimension, resilience and equality.

In early 2016, a Task Force, engaging members from the National Commission on Sustainable Development and the Finnish Development Policy Committee, was set up to develop new tools and governance models to enhance the implementation of Agenda 2030. The Task Force aims to address challenges related to, for example, strengthening the long-term perspective, enhancing policy coherence, building stakeholder ownership, mobilising resources, and building reflective processes to support implementation.

The contribution of the private sector in promoting sustainable development is significant both at home and abroad. It is important that the financial flows of the private sector support sustainable development in developing countries. By offering sustainable solutions across the world and ensuring, for its own part, that global production chains are sustainable, Finland and Finnish companies can make a major contribution to sustainable development.

f) Mechanisms for monitoring, accountability and review being developed

Finland is committed to providing a systematic, open, transparent, inclusive and participatory follow-up to and review of the implementation of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals and targets at all levels. To ensure accountability to citizens and the global community, the progress and achievements will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. The Finnish Development Policy Committee and the National Commission on Sustainable Development play a crucial role in the follow-up and review. The role of the National Parliament and all political parties is considered fundamental in this work and is currently under discussion.

According to an initial overview of the data availability of the global sustainable development indicators in Finland, approximately 40 per cent of the indicators are readily measurable and about the same percentage can be measured with extra resources.

The state of and trends in sustainable development in Finland are being monitored and reviewed with the use of 39 *national sustainable development indicators*. These indicators were identified in 2014 to measure the progress of the eight strategic objectives of Society's Commitment. They will be revised and updated to lend themselves to the follow-up of Agenda 2030 and thus complement the global sustainable development indicators. A specific *Indicator Network*, comprising experts from statistics, research, evaluation, policy and stakeholder groups, will be set up for this purpose in 2016. The work on the indicators will be part of the national monitoring and review scheme of the implementation of Agenda 2030.

Regarding Finnish development cooperation, a results-based management approach and evaluation criteria apply not only to the Finnish contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in developing countries, but to Finland itself, as a global partner in SDG 17.