

15 July 2016: Representatives of national and local governments and stakeholders discussed concrete challenges, opportunities and efforts at the local level for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The event, titled 'How can national-level strategic planning ensure that no one is left behind,' took place on the sidelines of the 2016 session of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). It was organized by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), the Independent Research Forum and the Government of Sweden.

Oskar Thorslund, Office of the Prime Minister of Sweden, said Sweden's delegation on SDGs is independent from the Government, and its constituency will be decided each year at the ministerial level. The delegation is comprised of representatives of stakeholders who will map Sweden's SDG implementation process, identify achievements and gaps, and come up with an action plan.

On the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, he said the work is being done in cooperation between ministries, each of which has assigned a representative for the SDGs who will analyze the ministry's activities relevant to the SDGs and targets, and propose further actions. The Government will also create an inter-departmental working group, including representatives from the ministries of finance, environment, health, industry and social affairs. Thorslund recommended a clear division of responsibilities and to encourage ministries to start implementation from their own perspective, to ensure ownership of the process at all levels.

George Varughese, Development Alternatives, India, said India is in an intensive process of transition and realignment, triggered by both external causes - the Paris Agreement on climate change and the 2030 Agenda - and internal causes. He noted that the Government led by Narendra Modi dissolved the Planning Commission and replaced it with the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), a think tank that was asked to coordinate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He explained that India is at the end of its 12th five-year plan, which will be the last, as the new Government adopted a longer-term perspective to development and launched many new initiatives (e.g. Startup India, Skill India, Clean India, or Saving the Girl-Child). It also asked state governments to prepare 15-year strategies to transform the country. Varughese called the process of designing the 15-year strategies a "fantastic window of opportunity" for all stakeholders to get involved and ensure alignment with the 2030 Agenda. He added that Indian big businesses have already started to align themselves with the SDGs globally, but are waiting for signals from the Government to do the alignment also nationally. Varughese said extensive communication campaigns will be needed, as all these governance changes came "top-down" from the Prime Minister's office, and both media and the ministries face challenges in keeping the pace and assisting with SDGs "buy-in and localization."

Masego Madzwamuse, Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa, stressed the need for: community monitoring tools at the local level, such as platforms through which citizens can give authorities feedback on services they receive; addressing limitations in parliaments' capacity to monitor the SDGs implementation, such as their limited

research and data collection capacities or the lack of information on the SDG process; and effective decentralization, including the decentralization of authority for funding and policies. Highlighting the role of social protests and student movements, she said development planning will become more participatory and social justice will grow as a result of pressure "from below." Madzwamuse also noted the potential for media to help people reclaim participatory space. She observed that Botswana has a very bottom-up development process, with participatory platforms at the village level for citizens, which feed into the regional and national processes.

Representatives of the Municipality of Gothenberg, Sweden, spoke about its efforts to transition to sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns, including by: framing the issue around desired lifestyles; working with fair trade companies through public procurement to increase the use of fair-trade products; working with restaurants and stores to promote merchandising and consumption of fair-trade products; and organizing thematic festivals and sustainable fashion shows.

Summarizing the discussion, Varughese noted that participants underscored the need for SDGs' contextualization, localization and local ownership; otherwise the SDGs will remain "fit" only for New York and Geneva. [IISD RS Sources]

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