

HLPF side event: One Year after the Voluntary National Review – How Did Colombia and Finland Keep the Momentum in Boosting Action for Sustainable Development

Friday 14 July 2017 13:15 - 14:30
Conference Room 6, UN Conference Building

SUMMARY OF THE EVENT

Finland and Colombia co-hosted a side event at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York on Friday 14 July. The event of these two very different countries served as a reminder on the importance of sharing experience and knowledge in order to boost good practices and overcome challenges, in promotion of the achievement of the sustainable development goals. Finland and Colombia were among the first voluntary countries that reported to the HLPF in 2016. They have been cooperating at the political and expert levels since 2015 in order to share good practices and facilitate mutual learning on the national implementation of 2030 Agenda.

It was emphasized that the VNR was an important milestone in both countries to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda, integrate sustainable development at the heart of the Government policies and create ownership and action throughout the society. Similarly, the HLPF in 2017 served as a perfect spot to look back and review what was accomplished after the VNR and what kind of policies and measures were triggered by the global reporting process.

In the side-event, it was considered important to also look to the future: how long-term and coherent implementation, follow-up and review are being ensured in Finland and Colombia. The side-event aimed also at supporting the new VNR countries in showcasing two examples on how the momentum of the HLPF VNR is being maintained and developed to boost action and commitment.

The event was opened by H.E. Permanent Representative of Colombia, Ms. **María Emma Mejía** and Ms. **Satu Santala**, Director General of the Department for Development Policy at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. In their remarks, both emphasized the power of international cooperation and persistent work at the national level to ensure achieving the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Both countries reported that much has happened in one year time, after the VNR in 2016. The special focus was laid to follow-up and review procedures. **Claudia Vásquez Marazzani**, Director of Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia explained that **Colombia** has taken big steps in monitoring progress: 15 workshops have been organized with government entities to define and prioritize national indicators to include in Colombia's monitoring mechanism, and undertook a prioritization exercise to focus on results-based on evidence. She also noted preparation of a work plan to improve or define methodologies for the SDG indicators and the development of a National Statistical Plan. Transparency and participation have been **Finland's** priorities in setting the monitoring scheme. Ms. **Annika Lindblom**, Secretary General of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development reported that the revision of national indicators for sustainable development has been completed. The new set will be published on the kestavakehitys.fi/en website in fall, providing an opportunity for anyone interested to look at and comment on the results. The two country experts agreed that it is important to go beyond the data and statistics and to use the indicators to allow proper discussion on the results and impact of implementing the 2030 Agenda.

In **Colombia**, the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs have been incorporated in the local and regional development programmes of the country: local governments in Colombia have a direct impact on the implementation of 110 out of the of the 169 SDG targets. Ms. Vásquez mentioned that her country is in the final stage of designing a long-term policy framework document for the adoption of the highest national development Council (CONPES).. It will include information, guidelines and orientations on monitoring and reporting, statistics, strategies to support local authorities on implementation, and stakeholder participation. Vasquez identified the participation of all

stakeholders in SDG implementation as one of Colombia's biggest challenge. In the **Finnish** model, the national strategy for sustainable development 'Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development' has been updated to align itself with the 2030 Agenda vision, principles, goals and targets. Additionally, the Government has adopted its own Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda with focus areas, principles and follow-up and review mechanism which are meant to extend beyond the government terms. Finland's success in engaging the national Parliament to the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda raised plenty of interest from the audience. According to the Government Plan, the government reports to the Parliament annually, and the Parliament gives recommendations to the government and Ministries. Finland will report every four years to the HLPF, with the next VNR scheduled for 2020. Ms. Lindblom stressed the importance of communication for SDG implementation and maintaining momentum. She said that, according to the Eurobarometer, 73% of the Finnish population has some knowledge of sustainable development, including on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

The moderators of the side-event, Ms. **Ilmi Salminen**, UN Youth Delegate of Finland, and Mr. **Sajith Wijesuriya**, youth representative to the HLPF from Sri Lanka hosted a successful dialogue after the country presentations. Ms. Salminen, who belongs to the 2030 Agenda youth group recently established in Finland, underlined the importance of cooperation that is based on young people's expertise instead of focusing merely on their roles as being "the youth". In addition to children and youth, the role of civil society, companies and indigenous peoples was emphasized in the discussion. Finland's Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development, which is based on partnerships between the Government and the stakeholders created much enthusiasm among the audience seeking new means of participation. The participants were also intrigued by topics such as institutional fragmentation, policy coherence in governments and limited financial and capacity resources for implementation.

Ms. **Satu Santala** wrapped up the discussions by emphasizing that the Voluntary National Reviews function as teasers and triggers for countries in launching their national plans and roadmaps for the implementation of the global 2030 Agenda. The 2030 Agenda has helped countries to improve political coherence and engage in long-term policy work, and to deliver concrete actions and outcomes. It is important to complement the "whole-of-government approach" with the "whole-of-society approach" by engaging national parliaments, local and regional actors, private sector, civil society, academia and citizens. Governments can provide tools, platforms and partnerships to that end.