



# **2<sup>ND</sup> ESDN PEER LEARNING PLATFORM AND PEER LEARNING VISIT**

## **Voluntary National Reviews at the UN High Level Political Forum: Experience Exchange and Learning**

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**Platform and Visit**

**Report**

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## Introduction

The 2<sup>nd</sup> ESDN **Peer Learning Platform** on 20 April brought together policymakers, who have already completed their Voluntary Nation Reviews (VNRs) for the **High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2016**, to share, in greater depth, their experiences in drafting their VNRs for the HLPF with policymakers from countries currently preparing their own **VNRs for the HLPF 2017 and all future HLPFs**. The Platform was held over three sessions, called “Spaces for Exchange”, which featured the VNR 2016 countries in “Space for Exchange 1”, the VNR 2017 countries in “Space for Exchange 2”, and “Space for Exchange 3”, in which participants were able to freely choose topics for a smaller roundtable discussion in smaller groups.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> **ESDN Peer Learning Visit** on 21 April focused on learning from the sustainable development governance practices in Finland, as Finland was the host country of both events. The Visit covered the topics of “Institutionalizing Sustainable Development in Finland: Horizontal integration and policy mainstreaming for the 2030 Agenda implementation”, and the second topic, “Involving stakeholders and experts in the Finnish Sustainable Development Model: Practical examples and experiences”.

The main objective of both Peer Learning events was to have a very informal exchange and interaction between policymakers who are responsible for preparing their country’s VNR for the HLPF, or are responsible for the development of strategies/policies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs. In total, 50 participants from 18 countries took part in both events.

Keeping within the tradition of the 1<sup>st</sup> ESDN Peer Learning Platform, the 2<sup>nd</sup> ESDN Peer Learning Platform and Visit operated under the Chatham House Rule. Therefore, there will be no names or personal observations or opinions of specific participants included in this Report.

## Peer Learning Platform

### Welcome and Orientation Session

A **representative of the ESDN Steering Group** opened up the ESDN Peer Platform and welcomed the participants. The representative briefly described the 1<sup>st</sup> ESDN Peer Learning Platform that occurred in Belgium in October, 2016, stating that the Peer Learning Platform was developed and adopted by the ESDN to support ministries and civil servants in dealing with, and addressing, the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The ESDN Steering Group representative then thanked the Finnish hosts for allowing the ESDN to continue the peer learning process.

The ESDN representative also shared with participants that the ESDN is preparing a side-event for the HLPF 2017, where the focus would be on explaining the ESDN's approach to peer learning and the experiences made so far.

The **Finnish hosts** then shared a few opening remarks and words of welcome with participants. The Finnish hosts pointed out that Finland is often used as a good practice example and model for Sustainable Development Governance in many conferences in many places, and because of this, it is good that participants were able to join in the Platform and Visit, because they will also be able to learn how Finland is able to accomplish things with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Finland has a history of policy coherence when it comes to sustainable development. Since having presented a VNR at the HLPF 2016, a lot has happened in Finland: The main achievement is that the Government has adopted the 2030 Agenda Implementation Plan, based on the national sustainable development strategy, and the Parliament has been integrated heavily into this process. With this political commitment and a strategy now in place, Finland's focus of further work has shifted to national indicators and determining how they can be used to measure progress towards the implementation of the SDGs.

## **Space for Exchange 1: Experiences from the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2016**

“Space for Exchange 1” focused on the experiences of the VNR 2016 countries in writing their VNR reports, as well as their experiences in presenting them at the HLPF 2016. In order to prepare the VNR 2016 countries for the Platform, the ESDN Office drafted 3 questions for them to present on:

- 1) What were the main learning points from preparing and presenting your VNR?;**
- 2) How did the VNR 2016 help in the 2030 Agenda/SDGs implementation process?; and**
- 3) What advice would you give to the VNR 2017 countries?**

After each country presented and addressed these questions, the floor was then opened up to the participants to ask questions to the country representatives.

The section below describes some important issues that emerged from the presentations and discussion with the participants.

### **Question 1: What were the main learning points from preparing and presenting your VNR?**

Some countries stated that one of the main learning points for them was that **stakeholder involvement is very important** to have from the very beginning, which includes the development of national sustainable development strategies (NSDS), as well as the VNRs for the HLPF. Also of importance to many VNR 2016 countries was the **involvement of the subnational level**. Many countries wanted to involve them, but they simply did not have enough time to incorporate them adequately into their VNRs.

Some countries learned that the process of **writing the VNRs is just as important as the product**, meaning all the time and effort spent in **contacting different stakeholder groups and sectoral ministries is vital for future cooperation** and being able to realize the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Having existing governance structures, therefore, is a very important prerequisite for being able to expand the outreach and cooperation between, and amongst, stakeholders and other ministries.

Other presenting countries learned that it is important to have **high-level political support for the SDGs**, but that the SDGs should not become a bargaining chip for specific political party agendas.

### **Question 2: How did the VNR 2016 help in the 2030 Agenda/SDGs implementation process?**

For many countries, the **VNR and the HLPF served as a platform for them to raise awareness and political attention for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**, allowing them to foster momentum for the SDGs during the preparatory process, as well as after the HLPF, within their home country.

A few countries were able to **use the VNR to further strengthen their mechanisms for policy coherence and policy coordination**. Some countries were also able to use their VNRs to put **pressure on ministries that were not forthcoming**, for example with information relating to what they were doing to address the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, or were not being very ambitious in setting goals and targets. Contacting all the sectoral

ministries to provide input for the VNRs also served as a wake-up call to these ministries that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs were happening and that they need to start taking them seriously.

For other VNR 2016 countries, the preparation of the **VNR coincided with their updates to their National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)**, and proved to be a huge benefit, as these two processes could happen at the same time, allowing both documents to inform and update the other one, which many countries mentioned was deliberately done.

Some presenting countries found that the fervour surrounding the SDGs and the VNRs were also able to **excite Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and get them involved more closely**, which helped in being able to portray different viewpoints within the VNR and the NSDS. Many countries were able to use the momentum generated by the VNRs to kick-start and speed up many issues that needed to be addressed within society.

While some countries used the VNRs to help supplement and embellish their NSDS, other countries used the **VNRs as a gap-analysis**, in order to discern where they needed to begin making changes, as well as identify where their pressing challenges are.

### **Question 3: What advice would you give to the VNR 2017 countries?**

All of the VNR 2016 countries advised that when it comes to **involving stakeholders** and the **subnational level** in the VNRs, **start to involve them from the beginning** in the preparation of the VNRs, because there is not a lot of time with which to prepare the reports.

Along that same vein, **all ministries should be involved** as soon as possible, as the information that they can provide regarding the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda will be needed in the VNRs. Since some ministries are not so willing to divulge such information, it can take a long time to make any headway with them. At the same time, however, one ministry should not be insisting or demanding that other ministries take action, but rather **inspire them to take action regarding the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda**, and lead by example.

Some countries thought attending **UNECE meetings** were very helpful in the VNR and HLPF processes.

Many VNR 2016 countries counselled that the VNRs should not be overloaded with information about institutional set up. Rather, **VNRs should be short, simple, and understandable**, as the VNRs should strive to appeal to a wide audience. As countries only have 15 minutes to present their VNRs, it is a challenge to use the time in an informative, but innovative, way that attracts attention in the audience. Some countries recommended that the **VNR presenter could share the presentation timeslot with other stakeholders from the country, use short and creative videos**, place humor in the presentation, and focus on clear and succinct communication.

A very important piece of advice that the VNR 2016 countries imparted was that **presenting countries should definitely be self-critical and honest**, meaning that countries should not only report on what is going well for them, but also on those things that are challenging. Presenting countries could also try and use practical examples to demonstrate what is happening within their country. Some countries used indicators and statistics to demonstrate the areas in which they were good, as well as those areas where work still needs to be done.

All countries advised future presenting VNR countries to **use the HLPF and the VNRs to raise awareness for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at home and abroad**, suggesting that if countries could receive high level backing within their countries, then that can help in raising awareness for the SDGs also globally.

Reporting countries should also **think strategically about what they want to present in the VNR**, because it does take a lot of work to prepare one. Because of all the work, time and effort put into it, the VNR should really have a good reason for being done: make the VNR and its domestic impact worth all the work.

Use the **executive summary of the VNR to really bring out and highlight the main points of the report**, as many people will only have time to read the executive summary, especially given that some of the VNRs can be over 100 pages long.

## Question and Answer Session

During the Question and Answer Session, many participants asked **if countries had prioritized certain SDGs over others**, and if they focused on these prioritizations in their VNRs. Some VNR 2016 countries shared that their decision to include certain SDGs over others was due to SDG prioritization, or pre-existing prioritizations, such as those laid out in NSDS. Other countries took a more systematic approach and looked at what their countries were doing in relation to all 17 SDGs, and used the VNRs as a mapping exercise in discovering strengths and weaknesses.

Another overarching question that participants asked of the presenting countries pertained to **future VNRs and HLPFs and which factors were influencing their scheduling of future reports**. Many countries answered that it is linked to their budget cycles or government cycles. Once one of these changes occur, then the following year is normally when the VNR would be conducted, in order to take stock of the present situation, and be able to re-evaluate the country's progress.

The last major question that many participants asked of individual countries was **how they integrated stakeholders in the preparation of the VNRs, as well as how they integrated them at the HLPF during their VNR presentations**. Many presenting countries confessed that it was difficult to involve many stakeholders in the VNR process due to very tight time restraints in preparing the reports. In some countries, the opinions of stakeholders only came to light after the VNRs had already been submitted. Since time was an issue, many countries were only able to map what the government was doing with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In the future, the countries stated that they would like to do more to incorporate other non-governmental stakeholders in the preparation of the VNR. However, for some countries that were able to integrate the non-governmental side into their VNRs, they faced criticisms from these actors for not having enough time to debate issues. Some countries recommended to take stakeholders to the national HLPF delegation and organize side-events with them in the UN Headquarters and/or in the UN Missions.

## **Space for Exchange 2: Preparation of the VNRs for the HLPF 2017**

“Space for Exchange 2” focused on the experiences of the VNR 2017 countries in preparing their VNRs. In order to prepare their presentations for the Platform, the forthcoming Reporters were requested to cover 3 questions in their presentation:

- 1) What is the current status of your country in its preparation of the VNR 2017?;**
- 2) What has been going well and what has your country been struggling with?; and**
- 3) What pieces of advice would your country need for their VNR 2017?**

After each country presented and addressed these questions, the floor was then opened up to the participants to ask questions of the presenting countries.

### **Question 1: What is the current status of your country in its preparation of the VNR 2017?**

All of the VNR 2017 **countries are well on their way in the preparation of their reports**. The VNR 2017 countries are using the VNRs as a mapping and stocktaking procedure, in order to take stock of the current situation within their countries regarding the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Many countries will also be using the information and knowledge gained from completing their VNRs to enhance their NSDS.

Many of the countries shared that they would not only be focusing on **what their respective countries can do really well**, but would **also discuss about some of the challenges** they are facing with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Some countries have been able to work with **indicators** for measuring the SDGs, in which 3-4 indicators have been developed or identified for each SDG. Along this line, some countries have discovered trends within the different ministries that can be useful for developing and measuring indicators, as well as government priorities. Based on these trends and the identification of priorities, many countries are basing their VNRs on the SDGs that align with those priorities.

### **Question 2: What has been going well and what has your country been struggling with?**

#### **Things that have been going well for VNR 2017 countries:**

Through writing the VNRs, some countries found that it has been an **overall positive experience**, because the process enriches everyone: those collecting information for the VNR, as well as those being sought out to provide the information, such as other ministries and stakeholders. Doing the VNR also helps in **creating awareness** for the 2030 Agenda and creates **a sense of ownership** within the country.

In some countries, the **participatory process** has been going well, in which they are attempting to involve as many stakeholders and CSOs as possible.

#### **Things that VNR 2017 countries are struggling with:**

Some countries find the **structure of the reports challenging**, especially when it comes to **collecting all the information that is necessary** to conduct a thorough VNR. Many countries do not have enough time to collect information and data, make multiple drafts of the VNR to send out to different ministries and stakeholders, and subsequently await their feedback, and have the ability to consult with them further. Many countries find that there is not enough time to be able to do that well.

The **time challenge** for many countries is further compounded by the amounts of data and information they receive from ministries and stakeholders, which they subsequently have to sift through, synthesize and condense into the VNR report. This synthesis process and condensing the information down into a single report presents challenges in being able to equally represent multiple viewpoints and interests. Additionally, the VNR needs to remain coherent, which is challenging when the different viewpoints need to be balanced.

Some countries also mentioned that they are **still struggling with silo thinking**, where certain ministries are responsible for certain mandates, which prohibits an open exchange. Given that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are comprehensive and interrelated, silo thinking presents a very real challenge that needs to be overcome if the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are to be realized.

Other countries are finding it **difficult to agree on indicators and targets**, as the different ministries are unable to agree. This is further complicated by the fact that the governments of some countries do not have direct funding schemes in place for their NSDS, which impacts on how ministries can then address targets that have been set out in such strategies.

### **Question 3: What pieces of advice would your country need for their VNR 2017?**

Regarding advice that the VNR 2017 countries would need in order to make the most out of their VNR process would be **how to use the VNR after the HLPF**.

Some countries wanted advice on how to deal with ministries that are not so ambitious when it comes to the 2030 Agenda or the SDGs, as it can be very difficult to get information from them.

Other countries wanted advice on **how they can involve stakeholders and civil society** at the HLPF.

Again, other countries wanted to know about the experiences of other countries in **coordinating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level**, as well as how sustainability issues are being integrated in all policy areas.

Also an important need that some countries identified was how the **implementation and integration of the 2030 Agenda into NSDS** should be financed.

Some countries also wanted to know by which **guidelines** they should structure their VNRs.

### **Question and Answer Session**

Many of the questions posed to the VNR 2017 countries revolved around **indicators** and how they countries are developing them. To which many of the countries stated that they are using a set of national indicators, as well as indicators that were developed by the OECD.

Also in this thread of indicator questions, some participants asked countries about the **SDGs they would be focusing on in their VNRs**. Many of the VNR 2017 countries will not focus on all of the SDGs in their VNR reports, but will most likely focus on those that are national priorities, or they will prioritize the current theme of the HLPF 2017.

Other questions asked centred around **how the 2017 countries were going to make their VNRs special**. Many of the countries, however, are already taking the advice that the VNR 2016 countries gave regarding not focusing only on the positive areas, but also being open and honest about the challenges that the individual countries are facing.

## **Space for Exchange 3: Space for Exchange 3: Main challenges in the VNR 2017 preparation – exchange and learning**

In 'Space for Exchange 3', participants were able to volunteer topics for 6 roundtable discussions. Some topics were collected prior to the Visit, as well as during in an Open Space inspired format. Below are the summaries of the discussions for each of the six topics that were chosen by the participants: **1) Stakeholder involvement, 2) Institutional set up/governance/integrative approach for policy coherence; 3) SDG indicator framework; 4) 17 SDGs/pre-selected focus areas/ or country priorities/mapping and gap analysis; 5) VNRs at the HLPF address challenges and peer learning; and 6) Communication plans.**

### **1) Stakeholder involvement:**

This group talked about which type of delegates they should bring to the HLPF. They thought that business representatives, youth delegates, NGOs and parliamentarians should be included and brought to the HLPF. Finland's experience last year was very positive and they had many stakeholders present during their presentation.

A question was posed to this group about how they plan to deal with critical stakeholders: Does one bring them, or only bring along the more amenable stakeholders?

The spokesperson for this group acknowledged that it is always difficult to bring someone along who may not be of the same opinion as that of the government's plan, but it is nevertheless important to listen to them and cooperate with them. If one listens to the critical voices and works with them, then they will not be working against one in the future, which is a big win.

### **2) Institutional set-up/governance/integrative approach for policy coherence:**

This group discussed about the difficulties in integrating the SDGs into policies. They brought up the point that many people assume that integration is a positive thing, but raised the question about over-integration?

One participant thought that it was probably better to over-integrate, as there are not many ministries that have really integrated everything regarding the SDGs or the 2030 Agenda.

### **3) SDG indicator framework:**

This group found out that the approaches to the indicator frameworks are different and the methodologies are different for each country. The solution currently is that many countries rely on the OECD or Eurostat. However, at the same time, the national indicators also need to be considered, or are currently in the process of being developed.

### **4) 17 SDGs/pre-selected focus areas/ or country priorities/mapping and gap analysis:**

This group focused on discussing how one goes about selecting the SDGs to focus on for the VNR. One could select all of the SDGs, as they are integrated and interrelated. Other approaches are to target whatever one's country is currently prioritizing.

The group also discussed about mapping and gap analysis, in which some of the group members shared that their respective country took a more quantitative approach, whereas others took a more qualitative approach. The challenge is to figure out how to use this to address national priorities.

#### **5) VNRs at the HLPF address challenges and peer learning:**

This group started debating on the challenges of the written VNR reports, as they tend to be a bit like window dressing, good examples being presented, for many countries. There is a political risk, depending on the country, and the political situation to portray anything negative.

Maybe the UN could provide some support and platforms for exchange and emphasize that there are merits in being honest about progress. The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network may be able to help in this.

It was also mentioned that it is hard to interact at the HLPF, as the time is so short. This time would need to be expanded, as well as the time for side events, in order to make the HLPF more useful, in which participants would be able to learn more from one another. The ESDN Side Event at this year's HLPF is going to present the ESDN Peer Learning approach and may well propose to foresee a structured approach in forthcoming HLPFs to systematically address and use peer learning at HLPFs in the future.

#### **6) Communication plans:**

This group talked about the UN SDG Action Campaign, which will put together a one-pager on how the campaign can support individual countries on their communication challenges.

The group also talked about involving parliaments more in the SDG and Agenda 2030 process, because if one wants to receive attention, the parliamentarians would need to be involved.

## Peer Learning Visit:

### Introduction

The 2<sup>nd</sup> ESDN Peer Learning Visit was designed to allow policymakers to experience first-hand how policy coherence and inter-ministerial cooperation works in Finland and, in the second part, how to deal with sustainable development in the context of stakeholder cooperation.

### Welcome Addresses

To open the Visit, the Finnish Minister of the Environment and Vice-Chair of the National Commission on Sustainable Development gave a speech about how Finland has used the momentum after the HLPF VNR in 2016 to boost ownership, commitment, and action for sustainable development and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Following the Minister's speech, a representative from the Finnish Prime Minister's Office also gave a short speech on the governance structures that Finland has for sustainable development, the important role of the inter-ministerial network secretariat and how that structure fosters cooperation between different Ministries and stakeholders.

The **Finnish Minister of the Environment** acknowledged that Finland has a long tradition of broad based stakeholder engagement when it comes to sustainable development and has created an atmosphere of cooperation, which has been built from the bottom-up and is based upon trust. This trust is important for all participatory processes, in order for them to be successful.

The Minister then transitioned to discussing how Finland has used this long tradition to help with regards to the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Finland has adopted an implementation plan, which expresses the government's commitment to sustainable development, Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. The government wants to focus on two themes: carbon-neutrality and resource-wisdom; and non-discrimination, equality and competence, which cover almost all of the SDGs in an integrated way. As part of the Government Implementation Plan, a follow-up and review mechanism has been established, which strengthens the governance mechanisms of the entire process, as well as improves the accountability, as the Finnish Parliament is involved.

Finland also has an Expert Panel on sustainable development, consisting of 8 professors from different disciplines, that follows up and challenges the work of the National Commission on Sustainable Development.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is a dynamic process. The current implementation plan is based on *Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development*, which has been prepared by the Finnish Commission for Sustainable Development in cooperation with stakeholders. Finland firmly believes that the government alone cannot implement the 2030 Agenda. *Society's Commitment* will continue to serve as a strategic framework document in building on Finland's sustainable future. Anyone can participate in *Society's Commitment*, whereby most of the stakeholders that are participating come from companies, municipalities, and schools. As *Society's Commitment* gains more traction, Finland expects to see greater impacts and systemic change to society.

Following the Minister's welcoming speech, the **representative from the Prime Minister's Office** elaborated further on the Minister's presentation by giving a wide overview of how policymakers and stakeholders actually work in Finland, and focused on the inter-ministerial coordination mechanism.

The inter-ministerial Coordination Network serves as a very important coordination and commitment tool for Finland. The Coordination Network has existed for about 20 years and it fosters the close cooperation with different governmental ministries, as well as stakeholders, such as the Development Policy Committee (DPC). The Network consists of Ministries' Focal Points for sustainable development and it prepares the meetings and materials of the National Commission on Sustainable Development.

The Network convenes approximately once per month. However, when there are peak efforts, it may be more than once a month, such as in the preparation of future VNRs or government reports. This Network mainstreams sustainable development into government policies and coordinates every ministry's sustainability efforts. The Coordination Network also supports the sustainable development work of the Prime Minister's Office.

Following the opening session, there were **two distinct panel groups** that went more in-depth about how Finland is able to use its governance structures to maximize stakeholder cooperation. The first group of panellists were representatives from different Finnish ministries. The second group of panellists consisted of representatives from stakeholder groups that are members of the National Commission on Sustainable Development.

In order to prepare for the panel discussions, the different panellist groups were given preparatory questions in advance, and the panel was then conducted in an interview style setting, in which the Visit moderator asked a question and allowed every panellist to answer it before moving on to other questions. After the questions were asked, the floor was then opened up to questions from participants.

# Institutionalizing Sustainable Development in Finland: Horizontal integration and policy mainstreaming for the 2030 Agenda implementation

## Panel of Finnish Ministry Representatives:

During this session the Visit moderator posed the panellists, all representatives from different sectoral ministries, a series of questions relating to how the panellists' respective ministries approach sustainable development and cooperation with other ministries and stakeholders. The panel also included a representative from the General Secretariat of the Development Policy Committee.

### **Responsibilities of ministries to sustainable development**

Economic growth and employment is how some ministries help to contribute to sustainable development. They try to encourage companies to use, for instance, energy sustainably, and be innovative, as well as work on integrating immigrants into society and the labour market. Businesses need competency development in sustainable development, or else it becomes difficult for the ministries to interact with them about sustainable development.

Sustainable Development is an integral part of most ministries. The strategic goals of the environment fit well. However, ministries should try to have new initiatives addressing sustainable development. Ministries, therefore, would need to do that together with each other. This type of thinking, and dealing with sustainable development, is beginning to sneak into the ministries'.

Other ministries focus on more environmental aspects of sustainable development, such as cutting down on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

One panellist stated that no one could do anything without the cooperation with ministries and other stakeholders in society. Some ministries have even given their public commitment to do their best to forward the message of sustainable development, so that all actors in their branch, the NGOs they support, as well as universities, receive it.

Another panellist underlined the importance of having the minister backing sustainable development. Some ministries are luckier than others in that respect.

### **Challenges with ministry coordinators for sustainable development**

One panellist shared that the activeness of some ministry coordinator for sustainable development depends on the personalities and personal engagement of the people who fill this position, because they have to be interested in the position to be able to do it effectively. The different ministries have more or less succeeded in appointing interested people to these positions, and the different ministry sustainable development coordinators are in contact with one another several times a year.

### **Cooperation of the Development Policy Committee (DPC) with other ministries**

The DPC is a sister organization to the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development and especially focuses on the external and development policy dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. It meets monthly, where the core members are represented. There are also working groups that the DPC has formed. When reports are drafted, each representative is able to comment and provide input. In the DPC there are debates in which common decisions are taken. The DPC is not responsible for implementing any policy, but the input that it can provide to the Ministries is key. The DPC provides the government with feedback on what went well and what went wrong, thereby serving as a monitoring function.

## **Question and Answer Session**

### **Expression of the social dimension of sustainable development in ministries and policy-making**

The businesses hire people and create new jobs. Ministries, for their part, support research to help businesses develop innovations. Although many people in ministries think sustainable development is about the environment, the 2030 Agenda stresses employment and employing young people. Sustainable development, therefore, is being strengthened in the eyes of the businesses. Businesses do not really know much about the 2030 Agenda, which means there is a lot of work to do to inform them. However, many ministries are working on making this connection and improving communication and dialogue.

### **Who is responsible for the SDGs?**

For Finland, the SDGs are seen as issues that have to be solved. In order to solve these issues, the ministries make use of the many committees that exist, especially the National Commission on Sustainable Development and the Development Policy Committee, in which interested actors can meet and discuss.

At the political level there are sometimes power struggles. Normally, the ministries find joint solutions and pathways quite smoothly, which are based on dialogue and mediation. Sometimes there is, however, a power struggle between Ministries and Ministers in terms of who is responsible for what. As the 2030 Agenda is an integrated agenda, the responsibilities for the SDGs are often shared, which makes solution finding more challenging.

### **Communication with, and structure of, the Prime Minister's Office**

Since the beginning of 2016, the Prime Minister's Office of Finland has been in charge of the coordination of the implementation, follow-up, and review of the 2030 Agenda.

### **Dealing with public sentiment regarding the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**

Sometimes it is necessary to start with an easy agenda to gain the support of different stakeholders and ministries. One has to be able to understand other people's agendas and needs. The common task that everyone has is to try and make the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs as appealing as possible to as many stakeholders as possible.

## Involving stakeholders and experts in the Finnish Sustainable Development Model: Practical examples and experiences

After the question and answer session of the first panel, a **representative from the General Secretariat of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development** opened up the next discussion panel by linking the work of the Finnish Commission for Sustainable Development with that of the Development Policy Committee. The FCSD has 50 members and meets twice a year. In addition, the FCSD has meetings, workshops, celebrations and seminars throughout the year, many time in cooperation with the Development Policy Committee.

The FCSD follows up and reviews the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission members have interpreted the SDGs by updating Finland's national SD strategy, and, recently, have then been in a process to determine the national indicators. Another task of the FCSD is to integrate sustainable development into society through its networks, which foster a whole of society approach to sustainable development.

The institutional architecture of the Finnish Sustainable Development Governance was introduced, explaining how different bodies are connected to each other.

This was followed by a presentation from a representative of the **Finnish Expert Panel on Sustainable Development (FEPSSD)**. This is a financially independent think tank for science and research and includes 8 members from the scientific community. It is a multi-disciplinary group that tries to create an integrated view on sustainable development that focuses on bringing knowledge from different sectors together for sustainable development.

The activities are support for national sustainable development processes, raise societal dialogues on sustainable development, as well as aid in cooperation and networking. The Panel was established as an experiment. It has been found out to be a good link to the policy process, but will still remain independent. The 8 person panel may need to be amended by more scientists, in order to foster science-policy interface and integrate science and this multi-disciplinary approach to decision-making for the benefit of sustainable development.

The following **panel session** had the same format as the previous one. This time, panellists were members of the Finnish Commission for Sustainable Development, and included representatives from Allianssi (a Finnish Youth Group), the Finnish NGO Platform, the Finnish Forest Federation, Organization for Education and Professional Development, trade organizations, and WWF Finland.

### **How stakeholder groups see the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs?**

What is very clearly understood from the stakeholder representatives' answers to this question, is that the different stakeholder groups have different priorities and viewpoints when it comes to how they interact and view their role in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Some of the stakeholder groups rely on education and capacity building, in order to foster a deeper understanding of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs among their members, which is achieved by holding workshops and meetings, as well as allowing members to participate in discussions that revolve around the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Other stakeholder groups see their role more as a supporting one, in which they seek to look more at the current structures that are in place that support sustainable development and the SDGs at the UN, EU, and national level, as well as hold governments and other actors to account, making sure they take responsibility for the SDGs.

Some of the stakeholder representatives prioritize some SDGs over others, such as sustainable economic growth. This concept is then communicated to businesses and business leaders, where these stakeholder groups try to convince companies to take SDGs into account. This then also extends to the individual worker level, in which awareness is being raised about the SDGs and trainings are being developed that seek to make the SDGs applicable and relatable to workers, who can then learn about them on their own.

## **Question and Answer Session**

### **Merging the Finnish Commission for Sustainable Development and the Development Policy Committee**

Many of the panellists felt that both the FCSD and the DPC are needed at the moment, as there would be a risk of no one doing anything if the two were merged. The role of the DPC is to focus on the external dimension of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and policy coherence for development, whereas the FCSD provides a broader view to implementation and policy coherence, keeping the focus in national issues. Both go hand-in-hand and need to be coherent with one another.

### **Integrative outcomes from the Finnish Expert Scientific Panel**

At the beginning, scientific experts began talking in silos, and silo thinking prevailed. However, now the panel has learned to work, discuss, and find solutions together. It helps to have someone there that is good at bringing people together, and where discussions happen in a free format. The Panel chooses topics that it wants to discuss, whereas a joint consensus or point of view is not mandatory.

### **European approach to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**

Some panellists believe that Europe is losing out when it comes to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, because there is no EU strategy that is being developed to streamline Europe's goals and targets. The EU needs to make a gap analysis regarding the SDGs. The EU needs to do more than take what is already being done by the Member States. The EU needs to find solutions to the SDGs.

### **Funding for the Finnish Commission for Sustainable Development and the Development Policy Committee**

The national coordination of the 2030 Agenda work gets about 100,000 Euros yearly. In addition, some research and development funding is available. The in-kind support of the PMO and the MoE, in particular, but also the other participating Ministries, is crucial. The representatives of the FCSD are taking care of their travelling and other costs; the secretariat is only providing the venue of the meetings and workshops, as well as hospitality. The 2030 Agenda coordination secretariat is very small and reliant on the contributions of the Ministerial Focal Points and other mechanisms created to support the Finnish SD model.