

FINLAND

Integrating the 2030 Agenda into Finland's Domestic Policy

Framework

Editor: Anna-Stiina Lundqvist
Kepa

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The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be achieved only in co-operation with all stakeholders including civil society, the private sector, scientific institutions and the media. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda is also broadly supported by Finnish civil society, which is currently in the process of building a systematic internal co-operation structure to create new kinds of partnerships in line with the universal spirit of the SDGs.

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Genuine political commitment is a prerequisite for implementing the 2030 Agenda broadly and coherently throughout the public administration. Different stakeholders have to be engaged and also take responsibility for implementing the goals. Implementation has to be monitored not only globally

but also regionally. This requires sufficient planning, coordination and allocation of resources, which in turn requires political commitment to implementing the universal goals but also prioritizing policy actions in order to get a serious and efficient start. Committing to the goals means that attaining them is mainstreamed into all decision-making, and not just considered in a separate action plan. It is important to understand the 2030 Agenda in a holistic way, so that for example gender equality is not only a separate goal but also a cross-cutting theme.

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It is also necessary to increase public understanding about the reasons why the SDGs matter to everybody.

Another challenge to implementing the SDGs is the inconsistency of policies in Finland. Particularly in the area of development policies and cooperation, there is a need to find a more consolidated and long-term vision for Finland in order to avoid constant changes in policy and implementation. Rising income inequality is no longer just an ethical issue - it has also economic costs and restrains a broad-based and sustainable economic recovery. Increases in household income inequality have also been driven by changes in the

distribution of wages and salaries, which account for 75 percent of household incomes among working-age adults. An example of the shifts in development cooperation policy is that development aid was cut,¹ despite the current refugee situation in Europe. Also, in terms of domestic policy, decisions have been made to cut social security payments, including unemployment benefits and medical expense reimbursements. This is worrying because, for example, the Gini index for Finland has shown that since the 1990s the differences between the richest and the poorest income households is increasing--albeit not yet at an alarming pace if looked at it in the context of all OECD countries.

Substantial cuts to education and study grants is also affecting the implementation of SDG4, on access to quality education. The equity between generations is in danger: the generation that soon enters work life will be less educated and have less earnings than the previous one. In addition, we should think more about the condition in which we are leaving this planet for future generations. The economy of Finland cannot forever be based on primary and secondary production, that is, the exploitation of natural resources. Therefore, instead of cutting public spending, the country should be investing in science and education. The Government should also phase out environmentally harmful fuel subsidies and increase subsidies for sustainable renewable energy sources, especially for its research and development and innovation (R&D&I).

Main obstacles to achieving the SDGs

One of the main obstacles to achieving the SDGs is that Finland sees its role in implementing the goals primarily as that of a “development aid donor”. It is necessary to integrate the sustainable development perspective into other political arenas and safeguard the resources for development also in other ways than solely via development aid. Moreover, Finland should not close its eyes from challenges that are hidden in its own society,

such as human trafficking and corruption.

It is important to be prepared for extraordinary and unanticipated situations like the recent changes in immigration and refugee patterns, which in turn have led to the tightening of refugee policies in the European Union. Global economic trends and potential related crises also have an effect on achieving the goals.

Workers’ rights are hard to defend in a world in which the integration of national economies into global markets and expansion of global supply chains intensifies competition and causes leading firms to cut their labour costs through restructuring, outsourcing and off-shoring. The model of global supply chains is based on low wages, insecure, temporary and sometimes also unsafe work. SDG 8 on decent work has to be realized also in Finland.

International labour standards help to achieve social justice and a more equitable form of globalization. Social dialogue, freedom of association and collective bargaining serve as cornerstones for reducing inequality. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to recognize in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda that the decent work agenda will not be fulfilled unless all dimensions are realized, including social dialogue.

Currently Finland has challenges in advancing gender equality both on the national and the local level. Finland has to invest especially in Targets 5.2 (Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation) and Target 5.5 (Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life). Regarding violence against women it is urgent to allocate enough resources and implement systematically the Istanbul Convention on violence against women and domestic violence, which Finland has already ratified.² Increasing women’s leadership will require several changes, for example in ending educational and occupational segregation, in

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<http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=335771&contentlan=2&culture=e> and <http://www.euractiv.com/section/development-policy/opinion/finland-s-aid-cut-and-the-eu-s-credibility-crisis/>

2 <http://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home>

recruitment and work life practices, in general attitudes, and in the gender division of parental leave. Target 5.4 (Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate) has to be fundamentally kept in mind when undertaking and implementing policy reforms concerning health care, social welfare and with regard to the autonomous regions. Some of the Government's recent actions, such as the demarcation of the subjective right to day care and cuts in funding to early childhood education, are against the spirit of Target 5.4. Gender equality has to be taken into account in the implementation of all of the SDGs.

When it comes to SDG 17, Means of Implementation, the lack of political commitment is the biggest obstacle in the implementation of policy coherence for sustainable development. Transnational spill-over effects affecting SDG 17 are, for example, imbalanced power relations in the multilateral system and the current development paradigm that is pervasively focusing on economic growth.

Target 4.3 (By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university) is not going to progress because, due to tuition fees³ higher education is threatened by commercialization. Replacing the scholarship system should not be a development policy mechanism, but it should be funded some other way. Cuts to study grants⁴ are an obstacle to accessibility of education.

Finland's transnational spill-over effects and policy coherence

Fossil fuels, cheap imports of goods, transitory production chains and insufficient development funding are all undermining the implementation of SDGs. The Government of Finland is cutting substantially from development co-operation. In 2015, development aid was

slashed by 43 percent, which was felt especially by the world's poorest people.

Women's and girls' rights, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights have long been in the official focus of Finland's development co-operation. The cuts in development aid, as well as in support to women's organizations, affect this work dramatically. Political opposition against sexual rights, such as the right to abortion and the right to contraceptives, can hinder the implementation of these targets in several countries. In order to be a credible international actor, Finland has to invest in equality both nationally and in development co-operation. Finland has to act in the international arenas as a defender of sexual rights together with other like-minded countries.

Implementing tuition fees weakens everyone's right to move and access quality education. Especially access to Finnish higher education for women of developing countries may become more difficult, if nobody is willing to invest in their education. Through development aid, international co-operation and combating climate change, Finland can support achieving the SDGs in other countries. Respectively, unsustainable production chains and inconsiderate consumption, for example, can hinder other countries' possibilities to reach the SDGs.

Finland has a Development Policy Committee, an expert body serving the Parliament, which has policy coherence in its mandate. This means that this body will monitor how Finland's different policies interact with the way in which the targets are being achieved in other countries. Finland also has various cross-cutting administrative coalitions, which monitor policy coherence in respect of different themes, food security being one of the examples.

The role of the private sector

Harnessing private sector resources for achieving the SDGs will be important for the success of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore the private sector needs to play its part in a responsible way both in Finland and in developing countries. The relationship between the economy and social welfare is not consistent, however.

³ <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Tiedotteet/2015/10/ETA.html?lang=en>

⁴ <http://samok.fi/en/2016/03/01/samok-ja-syl-opintotukileikkaukset-katkovat-tulevaisuudelta-siivet/>

Investments need to be seen as part of a broader and very dynamic picture. For example, the work of civil society organizations (CSOs) should be understood as an economic resource.

It is important that the private sector takes part in the implementation of the SDGs. There are still concerns around making sure the existing structures support meaningful participation of the private sector making the full Agenda a reality. It might be easier for the private sector to play a part in achieving the goals around environmental and economic development. However, the private businesses also have to take into consideration the social development of the societies they operate in, including the well-being of those in the most vulnerable situations. Companies might have difficulties in seeing their role as promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, for example. This is why recognizing the different and complementary roles and responsibilities of different actors will be key to success. Forging practical cooperation between the private sector and CSOs, including an operational structure for these partnerships, should be part of the multi-stakeholder approach.

While private businesses can be part of the development efforts on the ground, it is even more important in such cases to look at the companies' activities and ways of working. Environmental and social impacts should be considered as a part of the business model of Finnish companies. Until now, there has been more focus on communicating about sustainability than on actually integrating sustainability into the companies' operations. If there is will to do so, the private sector can have a central role in implementing the SDGs, including especially SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 8 on decent work. It can encourage more flexible and equal recruitment and working habits, it can promote the progressive upgrading of women's careers, it can ease the harmonization between family and work, and it can secure equal pay. It is essential in this regard also that Finnish companies promote sustainable development also when operating abroad. Especially those actors who receive development funding, have to encourage the implementation of human rights, peace and democracy through their activities. Companies partly or fully owned

by the state or other public entities have the responsibility to act as frontrunners in social, environmental and fiscal responsibility. Currently, this cannot be said to be the case.

When the goal is quality education and opportunity to learn, it is essential to empower the local actors instead of enhancing the scope of action for Finnish companies. On the other hand, the private sector can develop innovations which, when shared, can help achieve the goal. One example is distance learning with the help of technology.

Current policy approaches – part of the solution or part of the challenges?

So far Finland's actions have been inadequate and in part even contrary to the implementation of the SDGs. Cutting from the education and development co-operation budgets as well as policies that further gender inequality are harming the fulfilment of the SDGs. On the positive side, Finland is still an example for many other countries when it comes to for example social security and protecting the environment. Finland has political action plans, which could be used to overcome the challenges and obstacles that the implementation of the SDGs present. The way they are used depends on the degree of political commitment.

It is very important that the Government is not leading the process only in a top-down manner. The co-operation between the Government and civil society has been exemplary, for example, in terms of drafting the action plan for sustainable development.⁵ This participatory working method should be continued and disseminated as a good practice.

It is also important to pay special attention to local ownership. In Finland, young people should be recognized as a special group whose status and participation has to be guaranteed. This to insure intergenerational equity and to give ownership of the goals to young people through youth participation.

⁵ http://www.ym.fi/en-US/The_environment/Sustainable_development/Societys_commitment_to_sustainability

If the implementation of political action plans is financed from development co-operation funds, it is clear that cutting aid will impede achieving the SDGs in many areas.

Currently we live in a transitional period in Finland as many of the achievements, as for example regarding gender equality, are being set back because of fiscal austerity and its effects on different groups. This is a new turn in the history of Finland.

Policy changes needed to achieve the SDGs

Attaining sustainable development requires sufficient resources and universal participation. Finland must promote policy coherence, monitoring and evaluation of sustainable development. For the goals to be reached, diverse actors must cooperate and build partnerships. Finland must allocate 0.7 percent of its GNI to development cooperation according to its international commitments. Finland must promote aligning of the global economy and all financial flows towards supporting sustainable development.

There are a number of actions which have to be taken in order to make progress towards achieving the SDGs. For example, **resources for development have to be guaranteed** via both development co-operation and through action on other fronts, such as production and value chains, taxation, debt, trade and responsible investments. Ending extreme poverty remains a challenge to Finland's development cooperation contributions due to the 43 percent cut in ODA. Finnish development cooperation should target the poorest and most marginalized so that 0.2 percent of GNI is allocated to least developed countries (LDCs). Eradicating extreme poverty and realizing human rights should be the main aims of Finnish development policy and guide all of its decision-making. Finland should also support inclusive poverty eradication policies and social security systems in developing countries.

Halving poverty in Finland by the year 2030 will also require strong efforts as 17 percent⁶ of the population is

6 http://www.stat.fi/til/tjt/2014/04/tjt_2014_04_2016-05-25_tie_001_en.html

considered at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Other areas of challenge lie in SDG 10 on inequalities as inequality in income has doubled in the last 10 years.

Target 10.7 (Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies) aims to find safe and legal routes to immigrants. However, Finland is tightening family reunification rules, thus making it more difficult for those getting international protection to bring their families to Finland safely. Instead of tightening family reunification qualifications, they should be made easier: when the reunion has not materialized, people are then taking the dangerous journey as asylum seekers. It is important that **the rights of migrants are also on Finland's agenda**.

Gender equality has to be accepted as an objective to be reached, not as realized. The Government must accept that reaching gender equality means taking new policy measures, not just later assessment of already finalized decisions. The gender perspective and gender equality have to be mainstreamed in all of the SDGs and all politics. Finland has all the premises to enhance gender equality, but it requires political determination, respect for research, and a desire to use it as a foundation for decision-making, following the international contracts and financial support. Gender impact assessment as a commitment has to be taken seriously, and it should finally be used well and widely.

Sustainable development and its coherent implementation should be written into the law. An example could be taken from article 208 of the Lisbon Treaty, which establishes the principle of policy coherence for development.⁷ Finland has to recognize Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development as a critical means for implementation in the 2030 Agenda, and remain committed to explore new ways to ensure

7 <http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/the-lisbon-treaty/treaty-on-the-functioning-of-the-european-union-and-comments/part-5-external-action-by-the-union/title-3-cooperation-with-third-countries-and-humanitarian-aid/chapter-1-development-cooperation/496-article-208.html>

it.

Finland has to use its know-how in energy technology

both domestically and abroad. Finland should promote just access to affordable clean energy, which supports the education, livelihoods, health and equality of the poorest. Tackling climate change must be mainstreamed into everything that Finland does. Finland must bear its climate responsibility through providing climate finance from public funds which is new and additional to development finance.

The engagement of the private sector to **ensure that private sector financial flows support sustainable development** is also an area that requires further efforts in the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Finland.

Raising the awareness of the general public is crucial in order to implement the 2030 Agenda throughout Finnish society. This requires a structured communication strategy. Finland has to communicate to the public about the new sustainable development agenda and its goals in cooperation with civil society. Education should support participation and global citizen skills that promote sustainable development.

According to the multi-stakeholder spirit of the 2030 Agenda, **civil society still has to be taken along in the process**. The well-being of future generations must be paramount when decisions about financing education and development co-operation are made.

Kepa is an NGO platform and an expert on global development. It represents more than 300 Finnish non-governmental organizations and promotes actions that will help to build a just world. This text was created with the help of an online questionnaire targeted to experts from Finnish organizations.