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Perspectives into topical issues in society and ways to support political decision making.

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Assessing the implementation of the Agenda2030 in Finland

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In order to achieve the goals of sustainable development by 2030, the implementation of the Agenda2030 should be fostered in Finland. Ecological, social and economic sustainability should be systematically integrated into the government guidance and direction.

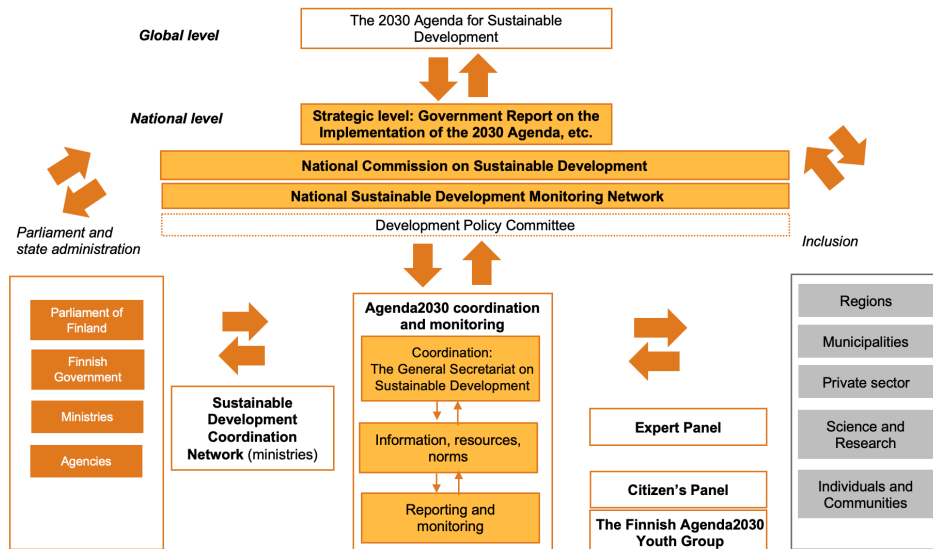
Towards the global goals of the Agenda2030

The Agenda2030 for Sustainable Development was launched by the UN in 2015. This global plan of action contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals that countries should jointly achieve by 2030. Finland is strongly committed to the implementation of Agenda2030 and to the monitoring and regular evaluation of the implementation.

The aims of the evaluation have been to analyse 1) the progress made in the implementation of Agenda2030 after the previous evaluation published in 2019, as well as 2) the extent of central government guidance and direction supporting the achievement of Agenda2030's goals. The ultimate goal of the evaluation has been to promote Finland in achieving the UN's sustainable development goals by 2030.

The evaluation assessed the actions of the central government to guide the implementation in Finland and in its foreign relations. Especially the evaluation focused on the government's guidance and steering system, including for example strategic guidance, budget processes, performance management, regulation and performance agreements.

The context and key actors of the national implementation of the Agenda2030 in Finland are presented in the following picture.



The evaluation was based primarily on qualitative methods such as document analysis, interviews, surveys and benchmark analysis. As part of the evaluation, a total of 45 experts from the central government, ministries, agencies and other stakeholders were interviewed. Respectively, a total of 40 persons participated in the workshops. The number of survey respondents was 119. The benchmark analysis covered three reference countries (the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany).

Results and conclusions

Based on the evaluation, Finland has difficulties in achieving the goals of sustainable development by 2030, even though Finland is one of the leading countries in promoting sustainable development. Finland's challenges are especially related to ecological sustainability and global responsibility and, furthermore, spill-over effects.

Overall, the implementation of Agenda2030 has become clearer than previously and the systemic approach in the implementation has been strengthened. The goals of Agenda2030 are visible in the strategies and results management of different administrative branches, although there is a variation in practices. The strength of central government guidance and direction in Finland is its long-term and wide-ranging commitment to promoting sustainable development.

However, the evaluation concludes that there are still important bottlenecks in the current governance model. The following six key challenges were identified in the evaluation:

1. The organisation of the national implementation of Agenda is complex: there are (too) many actors and sustainable development networks whose work are partly overlapping.
2. The role of the National Commission on Sustainable Development in the implementation. In achieving the goals of Agenda2030, it is important that the activities are long-term, transcending government periods and cross-sectoral. Especially, the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development could operate more effectively as a 'transition arena'.
3. There are multiple parallel strategies and the strategic guidance is fragmented. Operationalization of strategies and goals has been difficult and the resources insufficient to implement all strategies and goals.
4. The current governance system is not perfectly suited for the large cross-administrative phenomena. The silos in the central government are obstacles for coherent guidance and direction. In addition, there is inconsistency in performance management, and the connection between reporting and strategic goals is lacking. The goals of Agenda2030 are currently not sufficiently taken into account in regulation and budgetary control.
5. Research and monitoring data is not utilized in decision-making efficiently enough. Monitoring information is incomplete and lags behind. In addition, the monitoring data does not provide enough relevant information for effective implementation of Agenda2030.
6. Awareness and expertise on sustainable development is fragmented in the central government and/or it is too tied to individual persons.

Recommendations

The evaluation presents eight recommendations for further development of the Agenda2030 implementation.

1. Finland's determined and long-term work to achieve the goals of Agenda2030 should be continued and supported. This requires the active development of the implementation of Agenda2030 in the central government.
2. A sufficient level of ambition and concreteness must be ensured in the implementation of Agenda2030, as well as continuity beyond government periods.

The next step should be a transition from strategies to more concrete measures at the operational level, utilizing the means of financial steering and regulation.

3. Implementation must be integrated even more strongly into the central government guidance and direction practices. The division of labor among actors must be clarified by developing the existing structures. In addition the role of the Sustainable Development Coordination Network should be clarified.
4. The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development should act as a 'transition arena' in supporting the implementation of the Agenda2030. There should be a stronger discussion in the committee about the emphasis of sustainable policy and its development. The connection between the committee's discussion and the Government's decision-making should be strengthened.
5. The strategic direction of sustainable development should be streamlined with the strategy of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development as the main starting point.
6. The development of phenomenon-based budgeting, results management and reporting practices must be continued with determination. For example, in government performance management, sustainable development goals should be taken into account more concretely and systematically than it is done currently, and related incentives or sanctions could be increased.
7. Research and monitoring data as well as forecasts should be utilized more effectively to support governmental decision-making. The data should be regularly updated and available for all stakeholders.
8. Expertise in sustainability and sustainable development must be strengthened in the long term by various means. Sustainable development should be included in every employee's orientation activities and personal development plans in the state administration. Similarly, competence related to sustainable development indicators and impact assessment should be strengthened in the central government.

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Government's analysis, assessment and research activities

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