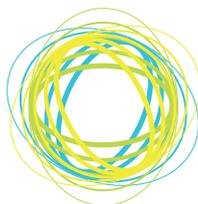
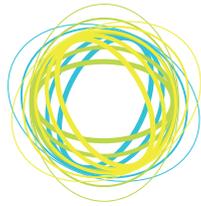


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PARTNERSHIPS FOR TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS – RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COLLABORATION BETWEEN FINLAND AND AFRICA, ASIA, AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN FOR THE SDGs





FinCEAL+

UniPID and FinCEAL have played an important role as support hubs by providing the necessary communication and financial bridges to facilitate interactions between different stakeholders. These interactions include not only the creation of spaces for transformative dialogue within Finland, but also supporting Finnish experts and institutions in joining the international discussion on sustainable pathways, and in applying for external funding.

SUMMARY

As highlighted in the PATH2030 – An Evaluation of Finland’s Sustainable Development Policy¹, Finland has made significant progress towards achieving the SDGs nationally – though not without its own weaknesses and challenges. However, for the country to become a global leader in addressing the SDGs, greater emphasis must be placed on policy coherence, resourcing, and utilizing research data for decision-making.

During a public seminar titled **Sustainable Development Goals and Partnerships for Transformation** with more than 40 stakeholders from academia, government, civil society and the private sector, three issues were identified as key for turning national experiences on SDGs into a transformative force abroad

Policy coherence

In the short-term, support for existing knowledge brokers influencing policymaking should be strengthened. This should be followed by an increase and diversification of resources for research related to the SDGs, particularly in collaboration with international partners.

Improving the use of existing resources

In the long-term, we recommend the establishment of an independent institution with a national mandate to support the establishment and development of international research partnerships, with emphasis on those addressing the SDGs. This institution will also support the use and uptake of evidence for policymaking and societal change which will work beyond the changing priorities of political coalitions.

Expanding funding opportunities

LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE **STINT** MODEL IN SWEDEN TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

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1. PURPOSE

This document aims to reflect on and support the recommendations of the PATH2030 – An Evaluation of Finland’s Sustainable Development Policy report (Berg et al., 2019), specifically when addressing the role Finland can play internationally in support of the SDGs. Strategic coherence (targeting both policies and funding) and the active participation of the academic community in support of policymaking processes, are fundamental for the development of transformative partnerships within Finland and abroad. The document also aims to support the recommendations of the Forum for International Policies in Higher Education and Research (KV-foorum) and the Government’s RDI Roadmap.

¹Berg, A., Lähteenoja, S., Ylönen, M., Korhonen-Kurki, K., Linko, T., Lonkila, K-M., Lyytimäki, J., Salmivaara, A., Salo, H., Schönach, P., Suutarinen, I., (2019) PATH2030 – An Evaluation of Finland’s Sustainable Development Policy, Valtioneuvoston kansia, Publications of the Government’s analysis, assessment and research activities 2019:23

²The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (<https://www.stint.se/>)

This document brings forward a call to action for transformative partnerships in support of sustainable pathways. The recommended actions are based on the outcomes of a public seminar, the feedback of key stakeholders consulted during the preparation of the document, and the experiences accumulated by the FinCEAL Initiative³. **These actions should become the BRIDGE to transform global social engagement into societal change.**

2. BRIDGING THE GAPS FOR SUPPORTING SDGS

This section responds to the results from the stakeholder workshop organized by the FinCEAL Plus BRIDGES project and the consultation process mentioned in section 1. The workshop aimed to discuss how to mobilise Finland's expertise in research and innovation in support of global partnerships (involving academia, government, civil society, and the private sector) towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The outcomes from the workshop can be found from the UniPID website⁴ and will not be described in detail in this paper. Rather, this section highlights key issues arising from the workshop, and poses potential solutions for addressing these and for future consideration in the development and implementation of Finland's sustainable development policies.

The issues

POLICY COHERENCE AND STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

Global environmental change is happening at an ever-increasing pace, under the current financial and time constraints policy coherence is indispensable for addressing the main challenges ahead. Political coherence requires the alignment of policies, financial allocations, implementation methods as well as monitoring, reporting and verification tools. Unfortunately, policy coherence is often hindered by changes in political agendas, unexpected crises, inadequate tools to assess impact, and weak feedback mechanisms to sort out successful from unsuccessful interventions.

The PATH2030 evaluation makes numerous recommendations for supporting policy coherence and strategy alignment in Finland. These recommendations are critical, but there remains a need to better engage research and innovation with third sector actors in order to achieve both flexibility and coherence. The existing ecosystem currently lacks both a strong mediator to link science and policy actors and an efficient coordinator of inputs and recommendations from the scientific community.

Key supporting actions

Promote science, technology, and innovation as it plays a central role in the development and implementation of coherent policies. STI supports societal change, which is driven by current environmental challenges, availability of social services, and new knowledge on sustainable living. These and other factors affect people's political choices and the agendas of elected governments. STI helps also to identify key megatrends affecting the viability of regional or global systems, while simultaneously supporting the definition of priorities as part of the global agenda.

³ The FinCEAL Initiative is a 7-year programme to support the internationalization of Finnish science, particularly with partners from Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The Initiative is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and implemented by the UniPID network.

⁴ <https://www.unipid.fi/news/finceal-bridges-seminar-sustainable-development-goals-and-partnerships-for-transformation/>

Promoting partnerships between the public, private, and civil society sectors is one way to accelerate the development of science-based and commercial transformations. Initiatives supporting international partnerships with the Global South will provide mutual benefits as Finland can share know-how and experiences on bridging public and private expectations and gain by creating market opportunities for innovations supporting sustainable development abroad.

Increased and systematic engagements to support policymaking so that it can respond to new evidence while maintaining alignment with strategic goals. An important set of players in the promotion of policy coherence are knowledge-brokers. These brokers play a role in sharing timely information related to the sustainability of policies, popularising scientific outcomes or creating spaces for information sharing. Effective communication and the possibility to interact with other stakeholders will empower society at large, allow for fact-based discussions, and create ownership over issues and evidence-based solutions.

The issues

IMPROVE USE OF LIMITED RESOURCES

Consolidating funding opportunities is a long-term process. In the short-term, special attention should be given to improving the use of the existing resources. Ensuring the efficient use of limited resources requires the monitoring and evaluation of ongoing activities, the results of previously planned interventions, and the assessment of alternative policy strategies. Unfortunately, inadequate tools to assess impacts and weak feedback mechanisms for lessons-learning remains an issue at the state level. Similarly, there is a great challenge in ensuring the translation, transfer, and utilisation of research-based evidence, outcomes, and results to policymakers.

Key supporting actions

One of the best ways to improve the use of existing resources is to ensure that these **resources are invested in good evidence-based policies, rooted in knowledge on sustainability theory** (how and when human societies manage resources sustainably). Researchers and practitioners should evaluate the sustainability of ongoing governmental programmes while simultaneously promoting evidence-based solutions and alternatives. They should develop the tools and methods to monitor and evaluate the sustainability of alternative policy interventions, including support for state entities to internalise the lessons learnt (impact assessments).

Improving the use of networks and dedicated platforms to both influence policymakers and create new partnerships, will optimise the use of existing resources. In order to promote transformative policies, it is important to identify and understand the pressure points (particularly the entry points for comments) influencing the policymaking process. Coordinating with other stakeholders the promotion of a transformative agenda could simplify the dialogue with policymakers.

In a direct reference to achieving the SDGs, the **government needs to restore and expand funding aiming to support projects combining research and development projects**. Similarly, other relevant sectors need to create conditions to combine research and development activities while introducing sustainability within production systems.

The issues

EXPAND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Although there is a clear need for more regular and comprehensive interaction between research and policy, there is still a lack of resources for doing so. Funding for research is highly competitive and the ability

to procure external funding, especially from prestigious funding programmes, such as Horizon 2020, is increasingly necessary. Despite important improvements in the capacity of Finnish HEIs and research centres, the need to improve existing capacities is a recurrent topic when discussing opportunities to attract international funding for new partnerships. Several HEIs still lack a flexible administrative system to support international projects; support for researchers is also needed to build the capacities to navigate the landscape of funding opportunities, to negotiate and build strong consortiums, and to write competitive applications.

Key supporting actions

At the national and institutional level, it is important to **review what the most successful countries and institutions are doing** to support their staff in attaining strong partnerships and diversification of financial resources. National partnerships (including PPPs) will present a more unified and coherent front when approaching potential partners or while being screened by consortiums looking for collaborators.

Beyond traditional research funding, the development of partnerships with actors from different sectors, with new kinds of funding models, can be a means for finding new ways to support innovation around the SDGs. Moreover, working with actors at different levels – from the local all the way to international – should be further explored to better connect research outcomes to action. The government goal to increase RDI investment to 4% of GDP by 2030 is only possible with private sector investment and the flexible model for PPPs proposed in the government’s RDI Roadmap is a step in the right direction.

There is a need for **engagement with policymakers and institutional leadership in support of additional funding**. This should go hand-in-hand with the promotion of STI and a transformative agenda based on scientific evidence and facts. As a point of concern, the promotion of sustainable pathways in cross-sectoral foreign policy is currently underfunded (Berg et al., 2019).

3. CALL FOR ACTION

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development has found that “To create transformative change, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has to address the root causes of inequitable and unsustainable outcomes. This means implementing policies and reforms that fundamentally change social institutions and relations to make them more inclusive and equitable, and that redistribute power and economic resources.” (UNRISD, 2017).

International research and science partnerships can provide meaningful contributions to the global efforts to address the SDGs by providing new insights, linking global and local actors, and influencing policymaking. Finland’s scientific community has the potential to play a critical role in achieving this transformative global change. The previous section highlighted some specific challenges that are preventing Finland from having a transformative impact on the SDGs. This section suggests a number of actions Finland could take in order to overcome these challenges.

3.1. TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

Transformative actions are radical proposals, aiming to identify ways to “address the root causes of inequitable and unsustainable outcomes”. These actions are part of a long-term strategy to address the issues of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

CREATE AN INDEPENDENT INSTITUTION WITH A NATIONAL MANDATE TO SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS, WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THOSE ADDRESSING THE SDGS.

As seen in the previous sections, the need for funding, capacity, knowledge brokerage and management is critical for addressing the key challenges in achieving policy coherence, improving the use of limited resources and supporting research. Greater engagement and exchange are needed between different scientific fields and disciplines, between scientists from different countries, and between the science community and policymakers to better support evidence-based policymaking.

Independent funding, brokerage, and coordination would support the development of transformative partnerships – international, multidisciplinary, and multi-sector – and the use and uptake of evidence for policymaking broadly and beyond the changing priorities of political coalitions. Through direct funding for supporting the development and deepening of research partnerships, this independent institution could provide reliable, low-threshold support for transformative partnerships. Moreover, this institution could play a critical role in helping to translate science for policy, communicate research outcomes with government actors, and support cross-ministerial learning and coordination.

3.2. MID-TERM ACTION

Mid-term actions are proposals for activities implemented to support long-term policy aims.

INCREASE THE RESOURCES FOR UNDERTAKING RESEARCH RELATED TO THE SDGS, PARTICULARLY IN COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS.

The need for scientific evidence and information on the issues related to the SDGs is clear. In particular, international cooperation is needed to provide evidence with a global impact, which can affect national policymaking. Increased resources are needed to undertake such research, and particularly to do it in cooperation with partners from around the globe. Increasing funding allocated to the Academy of Finland and BusinessFinland for supporting research and innovation activities with international partners is one essential action. In addition, increasing government support to HEIs for actions supporting global responsibility and the SDGs is essential for a more widespread, comprehensive, and long-term impact.

3.3. SHORT-TERM ACTION

Short-term actions are immediate actions that can be taken, which address urgent needs. These are not strategic aims in themselves, nor should they be seen as long-term solutions, but rather as actions that can provide immediate relief to critical needs.

SUPPORT THE WORK OF NICHE KNOWLEDGE BROKERS.

As mentioned earlier, a number of knowledge brokers are already undertaking the work of coordinating and supporting policy-research exchange in niche areas. UniPID and the FinCEAL Initiative, the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, and the VN-TEAS programme are good examples of such actors. These actors are important for the promotion and encouragement of exchange and evidence-based policymaking. Until there is a more coordinated agency, with a strong mandate for such activities, support for these actors should be maintained and used as the base for transformative actions. Establishing or clearing lines of communication, supporting forums for engagement, and actively seeking policy advice with these actors can provide immediate support to government actors. Knowledge brokers often act as representatives for larger groups and can serve to collate and clarify messages that may be lost in more individual interactions.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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