

CSD-18 / Straight Talk

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What will it take to translate global decisions into action at local level?

The Rio Conference in 1992: National Commissions on Sustainable Development

Finland was among the first countries to establish a National Commission on Sustainable Development in 1993. It has operated ever since, surviving several changes of government.

Over the years, our national commission has been led by various ministers. In addition to representatives from government, local administration and Parliament, the Commission comprises members from a wide-range of civil society. The bottom-up participatory approach has been very successful in building up national integrity, ownership and policy transparency for sustainable development.

The commission has brought many important themes of sustainable development into the limelight of national debate. It has been interpreting the interlinkages between the national and international sustainable development trends and facilitated mainstreaming of sustainable development into sectoral policies. Needless to say, the Commission has had a key role in preparing the Sustainable Development Strategy of Finland and its evaluation.

Because of the positive experiences from our national Commission, we are discouraged to learn from the Secretary General's report for the Rio + 20 preparations that national Commissions in many countries have ceased to function. The report also tells us that national sustainable development strategies are rarely viewed as principal vehicles for policy coordination.

We think that revitalizing National Commissions on Sustainable development and the processes leading to National Strategies for Sustainable development strengthen countries' capacities to respond to both national and global challenges. Furthermore, integrating policies on sustainable consumption and production more explicitly into National SD strategies could strengthen their role in national planning.