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Finnish Delegation at IDB Event: Collaborative Efforts for Education Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean

20.3.2024 — Anna-Maria Balk



In the picturesque setting of Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, from 6 to 10 March 2024, the Barceló Bávaro Convention Center played host to a significant gathering of minds focused on education reform in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Among the delegates were Sanna Ruhalahti and Virpi Heinonen from Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK), representing Finland alongside a delegation comprising authorities, companies, and education sector participants. Their presence marked Finland's commitment to collaborating with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and its affiliates to address pressing challenges in education across the region.

Keynote Insights: The keynote address, “Learning Can’t Wait: Lessons for Latin America and the Caribbean from PISA 2022,” set the tone for the discussions that followed.

Highlighting urgent priorities, it emphasized the need for immediate action to ensure all students acquire basic competencies in foundational skills, particularly in reading and math. Specific support for vulnerable student groups, investment in remedial learning, and the closure of gaps in access to digital resources were underscored as essential measures.

General Observations and Collaborative Efforts: Throughout the sessions, a myriad of topics surfaced, reflecting the diverse challenges faced by LAC countries. From food security to energy transition and gender diversity, the discussions underscored the multifaceted nature of development. However, a common thread wove through these conversations: the imperative to prioritize education as a catalyst for sustainable progress.

Bilateral Dialogues and Country-Specific Initiatives: In bilateral meetings, discussions delved into specific country contexts, identifying key areas for collaboration. Trinidad and Tobago's urgent need for education reform, Peru's focus on SME incubators, and Barbados' emphasis on TVET capacity enhancement exemplified the varied challenges and opportunities across the region. Each exchange paved the way for tailored interventions and partnerships aimed at driving tangible impact.

Partnerships for Progress: The IDB's collaboration with Finland holds promise for catalyzing meaningful change in LAC's education landscape. With Finland's renowned expertise in education and the IDB's extensive network and resources, the stage is set for innovative solutions to longstanding challenges. Initiatives such as the Amazon Forever project, spanning six countries and focusing on indigenous communities and education, exemplify the potential for impactful partnerships at scale.

Conclusion: As the Finnish delegation returns home, their participation in the IDB event signifies more than just a diplomatic engagement—it represents a shared commitment to fostering equitable and inclusive education systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. By leveraging expertise, resources, and collaborative spirit, Finland and the IDB are poised to make significant strides towards realizing the vision of quality education for all in the region.

In the journey ahead, as partnerships strengthen and initiatives take shape, the seeds sown in Punta Cana are poised to blossom into transformative change, shaping the future of education and opportunity for generations to come.

Text: Virpi Heinonen & Sanna Ruhalahti

Picture: Virpi Heinonen