



Partnerships Implementing the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Executive brief: Partnerships with and within the private sector that allow for pooling resources, sharing risks and overcoming systemic challenges will be a key to the successful implementation of a new set of sustainable development goals. As the vast majority of partnerships play out nationally or locally, there is a need for capacity at the local level to lead dialogues and to broker multi-stakeholder partnerships for meeting national and global development objectives.

Strategy for supporting global transformation via numerous partnerships at all levels

Businesses are welcomed by the United Nations General Assembly in a series of biennial resolutions “to engage as reliable and consistent partners in the development process” in not only economic and financial but also developmental, social, human rights, gender and environmental undertakings,¹ and the outcome of the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development states that implementation of sustainable development depends on “the active engagement of both the public and private sectors”.²

Partnerships should not be thought of simply as global single-issue funds or campaigns. They can be, and in existing practice often are, creative interplays between business, local or national government, NGOs, academia or think tanks, etc., that take on jobs that are very specific – building a highway that connects farmers with markets or links neighboring companies via trade and travel – or very broad and complex – principles on doing business in conflict zones, or management of cross-border water basins. Virtually all United Nations funds, programmes and agencies have engaged in these kinds of common efforts in areas ranging from food and agriculture to water, women’s advancement, health, refugees and building productive capacity.

More frequently, partnerships are crossing sector lines to involve governments, businesses, and civil society organizations, in various combinations. Within multi-sector partnerships, partners will typically leverage their respective core knowledge, skills, resources and assets to arrive at solutions that could not have been obtained singly. For example, governments might provide technical, policy and regulatory expertise; businesses their product and/or service development, delivery competencies, and value chains; and civil society organizations (CSOs) their understanding of, relationship with and last-mile access to local communities.

On a global level, the GAVI Alliance (formerly known as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization) is an example of a partnership that leverages both capital markets and economies of scale through interactions with pharmaceutical, CSOs and multilateral agencies. GAVI has mobilized \$4.5 billion and to reduce costs for disease prevention. The Alliance co-chair stressed the value of this diversity of actors, including corporations and investors, at the first working meeting the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2014, adding that Alliance oversight is provided by a mixed corporate- and political-style board.

¹ A/RES/68/234

² *The Future We Want*, A/RES/66/288

The business role, however, should not be thought of strictly in terms of multi-national corporations. There are at least three levels to be considered, each with its own dynamics –large-scale private and state companies; small and medium sized enterprises; and smallholder farmers and people selling services or products via the informal sector. Each level has its particular potential and limitations, and is best approached on its own terms and in an impactful way.

Bringing about the quantity and intensity of partnership efforts to fulfill the terms of the post-2015 development agenda will require creativity and perseverance. Complex development priorities often benefit from multi-sector partnerships that connect funding and expertise with local resources, implementation capacities and ownership, and also must take into account public opinion and long-term interest.

Communication is essential. Dialogue between the private and public sectors and civil society is needed to build collaboration, create investment synergies, identify mechanisms to channel and mobilize resources, and improve institutional capacities in the host country. Stakeholders and the public should understand what the partnership is trying to do and why. Moreover partnerships involve players from differing backgrounds of private, public and civil society sectors, and often straddle ethnic, religious, cultural or national fault lines.

Moving from one-to-one partnerships to multi-participant, multi-sector “issue platforms” can help to produce the rapid scaling up of results that will be necessary to achieve the transformative potential of the post-2015 agenda.

An example of a mechanism to support the transition from partnership dialogue to meaningfully orchestrated action and impact is a Business Partnership Hub being developed at the UN Global Compact. This is an online matchmaking platform to support the Post-2015 development agenda by forging partnerships around specific international priorities in various geographies around the globe. An opportunity to directly connect with other potential partners- including multinationals, SMEs, UN agencies, CSOs, governments, social entrepreneurs and impact investors- is provided via a secure, internal messaging system. The Hub currently supports existing issue platforms on water and sanitation, energy and climate, social enterprises and anti-corruption. There is also room for businesses and trade associations to engage in dialogue and results analysis, for instance via channeled use of social media.

Accountability, transparency and trust

Chief among obstacles to effective partnerships identified by engaged enterprises is a lack of trust between sectors. Transparency in terms of partnership arrangements and willingness to demonstrate accountability are two prerequisites for building confidence. Strong management and reporting mechanisms should be built into the partnership’s operating model.

Due to the multiplicity of partnership formats and their various sizes and arenas of operation (global, regional, national, etc.), centralized oversight and detailed monitoring may prove to be difficult and even self-defeating. An important step forward may be to develop guidelines for public interest partnerships, especially those involving the United Nations and UN agencies, which can serve as a window on the integrity and long-term efficacy of initiatives. It would be useful to develop a relatively simple set of indicators that could be used to evaluate a wide range of initiatives.

One aspect of such guidelines could be caveats that government funds should be earmarked for partnerships with business and/or CSOs only in cases where they are more effective than public investment per se. Performance in meeting the promised targets is evaluated and monitored periodically, with lack of compliance giving cause for withdrawal of fiscal support.

Definition and typology

Partnerships cut a wide swathe through commercial activity in general, taking place in areas ranging from marketing to research, production, service delivery and investment, with a greater or lesser intention to forward sustainable development. In an era when more enterprises are identifying pathways to long-term success, and reduction of risk, with the overall success of the societies within which they operate, and the availability of natural resources and stability of natural environment, partnerships are often organized specifically to fulfill a company's sustainability objectives.

A broad definition given by the General Assembly for principle-based partnerships building cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners in A/RES/68/234 is that they are *voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task, and to share risks, responsibilities, resources and benefits.*

The *Architecture of Business Engagement with the post-2015 Development Agenda*, drawn up by the UN Global Compact following broad consultations with businesses in all regions in 2013, calls on companies to collaborate and co-invest with other businesses and stakeholders, and identifies different types of partnership models platforms that can play an important role in bringing corporate sustainability to scale.

Some of these formats include:

- global implementation partnerships (initiatives comprised of representatives from relevant sectors to take actions that address global challenges, e.g. climate);
- local implementation partnerships (execute projects in particular areas or regions);
- corporate responsibility initiatives (e.g., 8,000 firms participating in UN Global Compact by pledging to respect and promote key universally agreed UN principles);
- country-based councils of engaged and responsible businesses (e.g., Global Compact Local Networks in 102 nations);
- advocacy campaigns;
- innovation (leverage expertise to develop new mutually beneficial products/services); and
- mobilization of resources (e.g., company provides logistics for disaster response).

South-South cooperation

New cross-regional partnership formats are emerging from the developing world.

To drive economic and industrial growth as a means to address poverty and sustainable development priorities, developing economies are identifying new forms of partnerships with domestic and foreign companies to enhance technology transfer and linkages. These types of South-South and triangular cooperation are also supporting innovation and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises with the view to build up domestic production capabilities and foster diversification.

Applying the principles of respect for sovereignty, non-attachment of political strings, and equity and reciprocity, South-South cooperation has been able to create favorable conditions for discussions and implementation of cooperation projects.

Private flows from the Global South continue to hold the potential to significantly leverage the development impact of partnerships. Such alternative approaches play a central role in increasing sources of development resources, both in terms of expertise and funding.