Partnership Platforms – national mechanisms for advancing SDG implementation

Summary of webinar

Background

The 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator is an initiative that has been set up by UN DESA, the Partnering Initiative, the UN Office for Partnerships, UN Global Compact and the UN Development coordination office.

The recently launched report on Partnership Platforms for the SDGs served as an input for the second webinar of the Partnership Accelerator webinar series. The report draws good practices from several in-country partnership platforms that are evolving around the world, seemingly having a great impact and potential for accelerating progress of the SDGs.

The aim of the webinar was to demonstrate how partnership platforms are key national mechanisms for generating and brokering new partnerships and catalyzing new multi-stakeholder partnerships for supporting SDG implementation. It provided an opportunity to gain insights from existing platforms, and hear the perspectives of different stakeholders (government, UN, CSO) in how we can create an enabling environment that fosters more effective platforms nationally.

Opening

Ms. Lotta Tähtinen (Chief, Outreach and Partnerships, Division for SDGs, UN DESA) opened the webinar and stressed that as the world is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, enhancing global collaboration and effective partnerships is essential to ensure we 'build back better' sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies. Ms. Tähtinen referred to the UN Secretary-Generals Decade of Action on three levels: global, local and people action, and stimulated all actors and stakeholders to forge inclusive and effective partnership on all three levels.

The Partnership Platforms for the SDGs Report

Mr. Dave Prescott, Creative Director, The Partnering Initiative emphasized why partnerships platforms are needed and categorized the typology of stakeholder engagement platforms from dialogue, knowledge exchange, reporting and standard-setting to transformative action.

Currently, transformative partnerships examples are still the hardest to find. Mr. Prescott highlighted the key characteristics of effective partnership platforms.

Characteristics of effective partnership platforms

1. A dynamic leader
2. Strong champions
3. Entrepreneurial management
4. Risk-tolerant hosts
5. Adaptable business model
6. Flexible support systems
7. Strong connectivity
8. Investment in enabling environment

A dynamic platform leader can play a huge role for a platform to succeed or fail. In addition, as the SDGs are so interconnected, strong connectivity is essential and it is proven that platforms function better in countries where there is a strong enabling environment.

In addition, Mr. Prescott provided a 'balancing' act that successful partnership platforms have to perform. Partnership platforms should be ambitious and tell a great story, while at the same time it is fundamental to manage expectations.

Panel discussion

Ms. Christy Davis (Executive Director Lien Centre for Social Innovation, Singapore Management University) moderated the panel discussion and started off by giving all panelists the floor for a short presentation about their national partnership platform.

Ms. Regina Macari Ponce (2030 Agenda Coordinator, Government of Yucatán, Mexico) highlighted that partnerships are interlinked to the State Council for the 2030 Agenda. This council serves as a monitoring and decision-making body for the follow up of the SDGs, and is a place where multi-stakeholder dialogue and knowledge come together. All relevant stakeholders are gathered and represented in this Council, varying from municipal governments to business chambers. The multi-stakeholder committees, annual work plans, and monitoring and accounting processes play a huge role in the success of the State Council for the 2030 Agenda.

Ms. Hannah Janetschek (German Council for Sustainable Development) stressed that the complex challenges of sustainable development can only effectively be addressed through interlinked action. Ms. Janetschek highlighted that a multi-stakeholder council as the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) can provide a very supportive platform and compass to navigate through this complex decision making and pathways for transformation. As long-term changes require many stakeholders to change, RNE is of added value by providing recommendations to the German government on transitional topics. In addition, RNE creates concrete actions and innovative programs for sustainable development implementation, and makes sustainable development a public issue of vital importance.

Mr. Arif Neky (Senior Advisor UN Strategic Partnerships Coordinator, UN RC Office Kenya) highlighted the work of the Kenya SDG Partnership Platform. This platform is modeled around the primary health care, food and nutrition, and manufacturing and skills SDG clusters. The transition from SDG funding to financing, and the issue of convergence is very important. As SDG 17 pledges are made in almost every conference, it is critical to build a concrete ecosystem that brings together multiple stakeholders and go beyond short-term political cycles. The Kenya Partnership SDG Platform has been able to fill this gap and particularly in creating associated platforms and networks with the private sector. In addition, the SDG Accelerator Lab provides room for scalable innovation.

Mr. Uchita de Zoysa (Executive Director Centre for Environment & Development (CED), Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDG Platform) indicated that the Sri Lanka VNR process was not inclusive enough. The Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDG Platform was designed on the objectives of inclusive transformation, and independent monitoring evaluation and review mechanism. In Sri Lanka the localizing, financing and transformative context needs to be recalibrated. In order to do this successfully, partnerships should be multi-stakeholder and multi-dimensional. In addition, Mr. de Zoysa mentioned the Sri Lanka Voluntary People Review and expressed the need for leadership by the younger generation.

Ms. Christy Davis asked the panelists for the greatest challenge within their partnership platform. **Ms. Regina Macari Ponce** answered that trust in the government is the greatest challenge in Yucatán. **Mr. Arif Neky** called inertia and culture change a very big challenge, especially the movement from competing interest to enlightened self-interest. **Mr. Uchita de Zoysa** stimulated to step out of your comfort zone and bring together key players from all stakeholders. **Ms. Hannah Janetschek** described that moving from monitoring to action, and local SDG implementation are the hardest challenges for RNE.

Poll questions

The first poll question was about the importance of "systems leadership", which was described in [the report on Partnership Platforms for the SDGs](#) as people who catalyze collective leadership. **Ms. Christy Davis** asked the audience and panelists who these catalysts are in their own country, and how they persevere and thrive to foster and spark collective action and social innovation.

The audience voted with 69% for community-based organizations/NGOs, followed by the private sector (39%), national government officials (34%), local government officials (28%), and chambers of commerce (20%). Multiple answers could be selected from this limited poll, and more important stakeholders were shared in the chat by participants.

Mr. Uchita de Zoysa highlighted that the usual guardians of sustainable development in Sri Lanka have been the civil society, and that local governments are increasingly championing. **Ms. Regina Macari Ponce** stressed the importance of local level sustainable development. **Ms. Hannah Janetschek** emphasized the champion role of CSOs, academia and local communities. In addition, all panelists stressed that at the moment champions are scattered and leaders are definitely not coming from solely one sector.

The second poll question tackled the question of "What gives you hope for the future"? The audience answered that the "next gen" of leaders (youth) are stepping up with entrepreneurial energy and fresh ideas (56%), followed by increasing multi-stakeholder cooperation (55%), creativity of "doing more with less" (37%), growing investments in enabling partnership platforms (36%), a more inclusive society (35%) and less bureaucracy (23%).

Ms. Christy Davis stressed that we are living in the midst of a global pandemic and asked the panelists whether their perspective on multi-stakeholder partnership had changed as a result of the pandemic. **Mr. Arif Neky** noted that Kenya was fortunate to have created a multi-stakeholder architecture on the ground before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Kenya, and mentioned a greater appetite to work and co-create together as the silver lining. **Mr. Uchita de Zoysa** noted that the landscape of integration and integration is changing, with an important role for the private sector that is gaining more understanding of the SDGs. **Ms. Regina Macari Ponce** presented that the fact that during such a hard year, Yucatán found a way to connect and collaborate with the business sector is the greatest thing the pandemic has left us. **Ms. Hannah Janetschek** noted that while the impact of the pandemic has to be observed in the coming years, the pandemic did create momentum for sustainable development to build back forward.

In conclusion, **Mr. Ola Goransson**, project coordinator of the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator, Division for SDGs, UN DESA, thanked the panel and participants for an interesting exchange of ideas and views, urging all to stay connected and tuned for upcoming events and webinars of the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator.

Participants' Survey

Before the webinar took place, all registered participants were asked to fill out a short survey. Interesting findings were that a majority found that multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms and multi-stakeholder knowledge exchange platforms drive best national SDG implementation. The biggest success factors of platforms to drive SDG implementation nationally were seen as national advocates for a common agenda across societal sectors, as well as strengthening the enabling environment for collaboration. Support to building

capacity of stakeholders on partnership effectiveness, building a culture of collaboration and a whole-of-society approach were chosen by participants as the most powerful way to foster more effective partnerships and partnership platforms.