

Developing Partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals in support of the reviews of the High-level Political Forum - Asia and Pacific

28 November 2016, United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) at UN-ESCAP

Summary

Introduction

- On 28 November 2016 at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand, the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), in collaboration with United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP) organized an Expert Group Meeting on “*Developing Partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals in support of the reviews of the High-level Political Forum - Asia and Pacific*”.
- The meeting, convened in the margins of the *ESCAP SDG Week*, examined various elements of partnerships for sustainable development, including innovative approaches of partnerships in tackling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), governance models of partnerships, accountability and stakeholder engagement, national enabling environments for fostering effective partnerships, and partnership engagement with the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review processes at national, regional and global level.
- The meeting brought together about 80 sustainable development partnerships practitioners, partnership experts, government officials from the Asia and Pacific region, various United Nations entities, and major groups and other stakeholders.
- The High-level Political Forum (HLPF), which is United Nations central platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the SDGs, will in 2017 review, in depth, SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14 and 17. On the occasion, DSD, in collaboration with the UNOP, will for the second year convenes a Partnership Exchange special event, which aims to review the role of partnerships in support of these select SDGs.
- The Expert Group Meeting also had a specific focus on these SDGs with the view to contribute to the Partnership Exchange event, as well to the 2017 HLPF Voluntary National Reviews by articulating the linkages of partnerships and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, both at the regional and national level.
- The full day meeting was built around four sessions addressing distinct but inter-related areas.

Opening session

Special keynote address by Her Excellency Ms. Dessima Williams, Special Adviser, Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, Office of the President of the General Assembly

- The meeting represented an important forum for learning, sharing knowledge and enhanced engagement through multi-stakeholder partnership initiatives in support of the SDGs. Gathering the best knowledge at hand is crucial in order to go out and forge new successful and

sustainable partnerships. The collective experience at this event helps to inform stakeholders all over the world in this endeavor.

- By adopting the bold 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, along with the historic Paris Climate Agreement on climate change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, leaders have sent a powerful message far and wide: we can open the way to a new future. To succeed, we need to mobilize all partners to work together in broader and deeper partnerships. These can foster social progress, protect the environment, drive economic growth and create a more just, stable and peaceful world.
- National leaders have been very ambitious – this is reflected in international agreements. Now the SDGs need to be nurtured in local communities so that these high ambitions can take root everywhere. Public support is essential to turn plans into reality – especially in this first year of the 2030 Agenda implementation. All stakeholders are urged to reach out far and wide to amplify the message of this golden opportunity, to ensure it is heard by everyone. We need help to amplify the voices of those leading in their own communities, and to create avenues for citizens to engage.
- We must be rigorous in monitoring and measuring the impact and performance of all partnership initiatives. In this regard, data, including qualitative feedback from beneficiaries are crucial – it is their views that matter the most.
- One of the pivotal conferences next year is the high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. At the so called “The Ocean Conference” - 5-9 June 2017, New York- partnerships will take a central role. As agreed by member states, the theme of the Conference will be “*Our oceans, our future: partnering for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14*” and its outcome will include a “*Call for Action*” - a concise, focused, intergovernmentally agreed declaration, containing the co-chairs’ summaries of seven multi-stakeholder and interactive partnership dialogues, and a list of voluntary commitments for the implementation of SDG 14. All stakeholders are invited to actively engage with The Ocean Conference, and to bring inspiring voluntary commitments partnerships and innovations to drive actions toward implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

Opening remarks by Mr. Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary for Sustainable Development, UN-ESCAP

- The ESCAP’s SDG Week is aimed to support member States in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable in an integrated manner, moving away from “*business as usual*”, and to more effectively address multi-sectoral challenges.
- Partnerships for sustainable development are crucial initiatives voluntarily undertaken by Governments, intergovernmental organizations, major groups and others stakeholders, whose efforts greatly contributes to the implementation of inter-governmentally agreed development goals and commitments. It is a cornerstone of realizing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.
- The purpose of the event is to look at existing sustainable development partnerships in the Asia and Pacific region, to see what makes one partnership succeed and another fall behind, which are the enabling national environments in the region that foster effective partnerships, what are the challenges, and how we can use this knowledge to go out and develop new and sustainable partnerships in order to best tackle the SDGs.

Session 1 - Innovative approaches of partnerships in tackling the SDGs

Guiding questions for panelists and audience

- What are some of the existing, and emerging, innovative approaches of partnerships in tackling the SDGs?
- How partnerships can leverage the use of science, technology, and information sharing tools, for driving the SDGs?

Panelists

- Satish Gautam, National Programme Manager, Alternative Energy Promotion Center, Nepal, presented the Rural Energy Development Programme (REDP), jointly launched by UNDP and the Government of Nepal
- Dr. Patrick Ho Chi Ping, Deputy Chairman and Secretary General, China Energy Fund Committee, presented the *Powering the Future We Want* initiative, a partnership between UN-DESA and the China Energy Fund Committee
- Tina Lee, Partnerships Director, NetHope
- Conrad Zellmann, Head of Access to Information, Development Initiatives, Leave No One Behind Partnership
- Alan Morgan, Founder and CEO, Global SDG Program Management, Collaboration & Knowledge Sharing Technology Platform

Highlights of the discussion

- Through its broad range of expertise and partner composition, multi-stakeholder partnerships embody the integrated approach needed for driving the Sustainable Development Goals. They offer the potential for intensive, innovative and sustained collaboration from all sectors on issues that are imperative for driving sustainable development both locally, nationally, and on a global level.
- Unlocking the vast knowledge and expertise that partnerships and their partners collaboratively possess, is the key to effectively support the implementation of the sustainable development goals. Science, technology, and innovation are key elements for developing, implementing and optimizing effective and sustainable partnerships. In the emergence of today's knowledge societies, sharing of information, availability of big data growing exponentially, expertise, technology, and financial resources has the potential to drive entrepreneurship, connect a geographically diverse range of stakeholders and communities in order to find the best solution for any given problem, and attract funding from multiple sources.
- Science, technology and big data need to be harnessed to facilitate monitoring and achievement of the SDGs through innovative partnerships. In particular better quality of disaggregated data surrounding people in poverty, or at risk of crisis, are needed.
- In designing innovative partnerships for leaving no one behind, priorities of beneficiaries must be considered. (Example, food security might be a more pressing issue than Wi-Fi connectivity, as an area of focus for vulnerable groups).
- Partnership brokers can play a conveyor role in connecting the dots between development actors and facilitating new partnerships.

- Partners need incentives to share lessons learned and intellectual property, including awards, grants and benefits to their branding.
- Drawing lessons learned for successful innovative partnerships is useful, but there are no standard models or universally applicable solutions: tailoring solutions should be the norm.
- Private sector should be leveraged as true partner, and not only as service provider.
- The voice of the beneficiaries of a partnership is the one that matters the most – without an active dialogue between partnerships practitioners and its beneficiaries, the partnership cannot become sustainable.
- Asymmetrical partnerships, e.g. between smaller implementing NGOs and larger IT corporations, can benefit from a third party conveyor to ensure on-time implementation. The example mentioned: internet provision to vulnerable populations in emergency situations.
- When it comes to partnerships focused on provision of utilities, negotiating with large service providers has brought positive results. The example mentioned was improvement of energy access in communities in Nepal. Partnerships often demand heavy investment regarding vetting and maintenance; with increased need for partnerships we need to employ techniques and methods to make these more agile and slick, especially when it comes to efficient sharing of successful implementation strategies.
- The emphasis on science and technology needs to be measured in order to include those with fewer resources: state intervention or incentives will always be needed to reach also those otherwise left behind.
- Engaging is a core principal of partnerships, meaning raising awareness of the SDGs and reaching out to people around the world.

Session 2 - Governance models, accountability and stakeholder engagement

Guiding questions for panelists and audience

- What are some of the processes, and tools, which ensure feedback and ownership from partnership stakeholders and beneficiaries?
- What are some of the existing, and successful governance, structures and models for accountability for multi-stakeholder partnerships, and how can these models be improved?
- How do partnerships engage various constituencies, including local communities, in shaping/planning its objectives and deliverables?

Panelists

- Joan Carling, Secretary-General, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact
- Emani Kumar, Deputy Secretary General and Executive Director, ICLEI- South Asia
- Aldi M. Alizar, Indonesia International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)
- Stella Pfisterer, Research Associate, Partnership Resource Center, presented XXX
- Sri Husnaini Sofjan, Senior Programme Administrator & Strategist, Huairou Commission

Highlights of the discussion

- Partnerships working in support of the SDGs, aiming at spurring economic growth, environmental sustainability and social equity, should be consistent with national laws, be fully

aligned with national development strategies and the priorities of countries where they are implemented.

- A partnership should aim to include a broad spectrum of stakeholders from various sectors into its own governance structures and community engagement efforts. This will not only ensure accountability and transparency to its beneficiaries, but also allow the partnership to benefit from the broader spectrum of expertise and solutions. Managing partnerships means building mutual understanding, fostering respect, focusing on solving a common challenge, and driving a productive relationship. In order for a partnership to have a lasting impact, it must prioritize a long-term stakeholder commitment, sustained funding, ongoing resourcing and consistency of personnel to help ensure its success.
- A multi-stakeholder approach to a governance structure could offer a model for preventing and managing conflict of interest, while a single-sector leadership of a partnership could lead to a dominating sector's view (intentionally or otherwise), which runs counter to the spirit of trust, and openness, which is required to foster collaboration and innovation.
- The 2030 Agenda holds out the hope of a new social contract with multiple stakeholders practicing polycentric governance, balancing a top-down and bottom-up approach.
- Partnerships with indigenous peoples, representing 5% of the world's population and 15% of the world's poor (2/3 of whom are in Asia and the Pacific) must involve them as full stakeholders, beyond lip service and superficial consultation.
- Inclusive governance mechanisms exist in some indigenous peoples' communities where all can express their views. Keys to effective participation include: 1) respect for right holders – the principle of free, prior and informed consent should be respected, 2) policy cohesion and balance across economic, social and environment dimensions - the economic dimension should not prevail, 2) a common understanding of root causes of marginalization - systemic discrimination against peoples' access to basic social services and financial resources should be recognized and addressed, 3) institutionalization of stakeholder engagement, and 4) follow up and review processes to make the role of people left behind visible.
- In many village-level government partnerships, stakeholder involvement is not yet deep and still suffers from tokenism. Successful partnerships rely on conveners and on partnership brokers, focusing on capacity building.
- Partnerships should leverage science and technology, as well as knowledge of local traditions, environment and challenges.
- Simple "engagement" is not sufficient - rather, true "partnerships" should be pursued. But there is a difference between working 'with' partners and working 'through' partners. The former should be pursued rather than the latter.
- Human rights should be in the center of partnerships. Policies need to be set up to include human rights, such as freedom of expression. Example mentioned: ICLEI, Local Governments for Sustainability, which began in 1990 with 40 mayors, has grown into a highly participative governance model for partnerships fully involving local governments in the organization's decision making.

Session 3 - National enabling environments for fostering effective partnerships

Guiding questions for panelists and audience

- What are some of the examples of existing inter-related institutional national conditions that foster effective multi-stakeholder partnerships?

Panelists

- Midhfa Naeem, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Maldives to the United Nations, presented the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Partnership Framework.
- Portia Domonatani Dugu, Forum Compact Research Officer, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, presented a Pacific SDGs Roadmap that the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat is undertaken in the Pacific region.
- Priyanka Dissanayake, previous Regional Program Coordinator, Global Water Partnership
- Kate Lappin, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
- Natasha Mayestha, Communication & Partnership Manager, Filantropi Indonesia

Highlights of the discussion

- In order for partnerships - in all their forms - to thrive, they should be consistent with national laws, be fully aligned with national development strategies and the priorities of countries where they are implemented, bearing in mind the relevant guidance provided by governments, as well aligned with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
Similarly, governments should strive to create an enabling environment – a set of interrelated local and national conditions that allow all stakeholders to fully engage with all sectors of society and in the national development processes in order to contribute to the national development priorities. Moreover, in carrying out their work, multi-stakeholder partnerships interact with various international, national, and local institutional frameworks. Therefore, national political and social context could in large determine their effectiveness, and by extension, their success.
- Mapping the governance architecture and the social and political context in which a multi-stakeholder partnership is situated is crucial to understanding the opportunities and challenges to its implementation. It increases the possibility for tailor-made solutions rather than a “one-size fits all” approach.
- The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Partnership Framework aims to encourage, monitor and ensure the full implementation of new, genuine and durable partnerships for the sustainable development of Small Island developing States. The elements of the SIDS Partnership Framework consist of a Steering Committee, organization of an annual Multi-stakeholder SIDS Partnership Dialogue, a partnership reporting template for collecting progress updates from all active partnerships providing for both monitoring and accountability; and a place for dialogue and experience sharing through the Partnership Dialogues.
- The Pacific SDGs Roadmap, undertaken by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in the Pacific region will provide a more strategic and integrated approach to the implementation of the SDGs at the national and regional level, foster south-south cooperation in necessary areas, and will determine whether existing mechanisms are sufficient to plan, budget, implement, monitor and report on the various SDGs. Its efforts will also help create an enabling environment for developing coherent and sustained approaches to establishing partnerships in the region.

Session 4 – Partnership engagement with 2030 Agenda follow-up and review processes

Guiding questions for panelists and audience

- How can the review process of partnerships - on local, national, regional and global level - be improved, to better support the engagement with the follow-up and review framework of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, which is centralized around the High-level Political Forum?

Panelists

- Thanavon Pamaranon, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations, highlighted Thailand's main mechanism in driving the SDGs, also Thailand's experience and vision on how to engage partnership at the national and regional/ sub-regional levels to support the HLPF and the challenges of developing partnerships, particularly in developing countries
- Reza Maknoon, Department of Environment, Islamic Republic of Iran
- Barbara Adams, Senior Policy Advisor, Global Policy Forum
- Ita Satyaningrum, SDG Philanthropy Platform in Indonesia
- Chikako Tikase, Promoting the International Partnership for Expanding Waste Management Services of Local Authorities (IPLA), United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)
- Netithorn (Mao) Praditsarn, Global Compact Network Thailand
- Shipra Narang Suri, Vice-President, ISOCARP/General Assembly of Partners (GAP) towards HABITAT III

Highlights of the discussion

- Reviews on a national level is voluntary, country led, and takes into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respect policy space and priorities.
- The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is United Nations' central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda on a global level. HLPF, under the auspices of ECOSOC, carries out national voluntary reviews of all countries. These reviews include relevant UN entities and other stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector. The reviews are state-led, involving ministerial and other relevant high-level participants, and provide a broad platform for partnerships, including the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.
- In 2016, 22 countries took part for the first time in the national voluntary reviews. In 2017, HLPF will conduct these reviews for the second time, with 30 countries planned to take part.
- The SIDS Partnerships Framework, with its Steering Committee, SIDS Partnerships Platform and traffic-light reporting, represent a landmark in intergovernmental governance of partnerships, based on a vision of genuine and durable partnerships.
- Enabling SIDS partnerships calls for national ownership, national leadership, alignment with national and global goals and broad engagement of societies.
- The necessity of protecting national sovereignty and security needs to be balanced with the rights of citizens to pursue and organize legitimate development purposes to enable partnerships in line with national development goals and the SDGs.
- The growth of partnerships should not serve to outsource solidarity from society and governments to private organizations.
- Many SDGs, such as Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities) and Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) are underserved by partnerships. It is important to foster partnerships enhancing economic and environmental development and strengthening governance.
- The indicator of success of partnerships should not be simply its economic revenue. There is a tradeoff between inclusiveness and efficiency of partnerships. Opportunity costs of partnerships should be considered.
- There is a need for partnerships addressing global issues, such as tax agreements.

- Too much is expected of civil society organizations in an increasingly restricted space for their engagement. CSOs also bear burden on accountability work.
- We should be aware that not all targets are amenable to partnerships.
- Philanthropy represents a promising source of funding for new partnerships, although philanthropists may cherry-pick particular aspects of the SDGs to the exclusion of others.
