



**PARTNERSHIP  
ACCELERATOR  
2030 AGENDA**  
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

# Is your organization equipped to partner effectively for the Sustainable Development Goals?

## Summary of webinar

### **Background**

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The first webinar of the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator series explored the challenges - and successes - in being institutionally fit for purpose to partner effectively to implement the SDGs, from the perspective of diverse stakeholders and sectors (governments, UN entities, civil society and business). It builds upon the work of the Partnership Accelerator of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 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.

Actors in different sectors often struggle with the same obstacles and challenges that can derail successful partnering efforts. These include institutional dimensions and challenges, such as rigid procurement processes, lack of strategic vision and leadership for developing effective ways of partnering, amongst others.

Participants were able to learn about key aspects for organizations to be equipped for developing partnerships and build recognition and appreciation of the institutional capacities required for effective collaboration.

This webinar was organized by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), The Partnering Initiative and World Vision.

### **Opening**

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**Ms. Lotta Tähtinen**, Chief of the Outreach and Partnerships Division for Sustainable Development Goals at UN DESA, welcomed the participants to the workshop, and highlighted the importance of boosting and scaling up effective multi-stakeholder partnerships in support of the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator facilitates

this by supporting effective country driven platforms for the SDGs with research and direct support and by training relevant partnership skills and competences to all relevant stakeholders.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of working together and fostering effective partnerships among all sectors and stakeholders. This will help us all to build back better, together.

Institutions should be set up to be fit for partnering, a key element for making partnerships at scale happen. In the lead-up to some major UN events next year, including the Ocean Conference, the High-level Dialogue on Energy, the second Sustainable Transport Conference and the Food Systems Summit, more webinars and discussions will be organized to mobilize multi-stakeholder partnerships progress.

## **Introduction to institutionally fit for partnering**

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**Dr. Darian Stibbe**, Director of the Partnering Initiative, introduced the concept of ‘fit for partnering’. This relates to the degree to which any institution or organization is institutionally set up to be able to partner effectively and deliver greater impact through collaboration.

Although the theory of partnering is becoming fairly well known the challenge remains as so often internal issues in organizations are holding back effective collaboration. To become institutionally fit for partnering, a framework of four pillars is set up:

- Leadership & Strategy
- Systems & Processes.
- Staff & Skills
- Culture



These four pillars can help in building an eco-system of partnerships. Leadership at the executive and board level with strategic objectives on their mind is vital. Very often partnerships take long and as a result momentum is lost, constructive systems and processes could help this. Moreover, professional competences to deliver partnerships, such as understanding other societal actors and human relationship skills have to be

trained. Lastly, a culture of outward looking and desire to create value by collaborating with other organizations is highly needed.

## Case study global to local

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**Mr. Ian de Villiers**, partnering advisor of World Vision International, showcased World Visions' journey to become institutionally fit for partnering. Even as a relatively large NGO, World Vision realized it must work with partners from different sectors to fulfill its mission. The Fit for Partnering framework made this realistic. It enabled them to address the complication of partnering, and work well together with local and national actors in transparent, equitable and beneficial ways.

Listening to partners and creating a safe space for feedback, both positive and negative, is very important. **Mr. Ian de Villiers** highlighted a workshop they organized across all functions in the office with different people with different perspectives to give input. As a top tip, he would suggest to have a champion who holds responsibility within the organization to be the vocal point during this hard process. Moreover, flexibility and a cultural intend to create and innovate valuable partnerships are of fundamental importance.

**Ms. Irene Marbun**, operations director at Wahana Visi Indonesia, explained the process Wahana Visi has gone through in partnering. Partnering used to be identified in a transactional way, meaning activity based. A strategy was lacking. The Partner of Choice framework provided guidelines, tools and skills to implement better partnering. The culture in partnering shifted from a transactional to a transformative relationship. **Ms. Irene Marbun** also emphasized the need to have a champion who can influence the change within the organization.

Wahana Visi  
INDONESIA

### **Leadership & Strategy**



Besides participatory planning and monitoring with partners, the Partnership Performance & Health Check tool is used to review systems and processes. This functions as a reflection moment for all partners. In addition, Wahana Visi is developing a finance system for partnering and educating partnering training and anti-fraud awareness training. The goal of Wahana Visi is to build much more innovative value-creating and transformative partnerships that will scale up its mission. **Ms. Irene Marbun** identified

listening to partners as the biggest change she has seen in Wahana Visi's transformative partnerships over the past years.

After the presentations of case studies by World Vision International and Wahana Visi Indonesia, **Dr. Darian Stibbe** asked the audience to answer the following question:

*To what extent do you feel YOUR organization is Fit for Partnering in each of area?*



Both **Leadership and strategy** and **Systems and processes** scored 3/5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). **Staff skills and guidance** scored 2/5. **Pro-partnering culture** scored 5/5, meaning that the audience thought this was very much in place in their organization.

**To what extent do you feel YOUR organisation is Fit for Partnering in each of these areas?**



## Panel

**H.E. María del Pilar Garrido Gonzalo**, Minister of Planning and Economic Policy, Republic of Costa Rica, stressed that the only way to achieve the SDGs is if we do it together, in the form of partnerships. Since 2016, Costa Rica has set up executive decrees and protocols to put the PPPs into a clear framework. Education and youth and culture are key areas. Costa Rica has managed to reduce the time that agreements take to set up significantly, which contributed greatly to the goals in strategic planning of quality education. Furthermore, Costa Rica takes conservancy and the balance of nature very seriously. A strategy for alliances, in line with SDG 17, within the national protected areas system has been set up. This framework established communication and action plans for

monitoring and evaluating alliances and PPP development. By trying to establish short term benefits, there's a high spirit of building mutual trust, which is key to effective partnerships.

Through the decree for public-private partnerships, the private sector, civil society and the government have committed themselves to engage together. **H.E. María del Pilar Garrido Gonzalo**, stressed that it is critical that all stakeholders should invest in this crucial process, while staying persevere and patient. Partnering is not always an easy road, but a shared vision of PPPs, mutual collaboration and co-creating value together is the right way to go. Setting up an ecosystem of institutions that are committed to this is fundamental.

**Ms. Marion Birnstill**, Senior Manager Global Community Impact EMEA at Johnson & Johnson Foundation, pointed out the shift of focus towards transformational development and partnership strategy the Foundation has gone through. This began by rethinking the way of partnering and monitoring how much of the funding is targeted towards real implementation. By bringing stakeholders together and building bridges between various stakeholder groups, the Foundation can contribute to an ecosystem of change. The Johnson & Johnson Foundation narrowed down its focus to capacity building of front-line health workers, and strengthening the link between community health and primary care.

A lot of learning has been that partners have a certain budget expectation from the private sector. The Johnson & Johnson Foundation first wants to set out clearly which goals want to be achieved before a budget is announced. While there have been many successes, learning along the way is part of the process. The most difficult part has been strategically refocusing the thematic space, while at the same time sharpening the partnering approach. As a result, the Johnson & Johnson Foundation refuses to go into bilateral agreements, and only works within the mentioned ecosystem of change as the right way forward.

**Mr. Chikezie Anyanwu**, Chief of the Partnerships Section at the UN Development Coordination Office, stressed out that following the adoption of the SDGs it became very clear to the UN that there is no way that the 2030 Agenda could be delivered by the United Nations itself. The importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships became a key issue from the level of the Secretary General. The question of how to bring together all the rich knowledge from different UN entities together as one UN family, in order to deliver better for the 2030 Agenda has been critical. Capacity building at global and national level is a key challenge.

An important role has been given to UN Resident Coordinators, who are leading UN country teams. Across the whole globe, these vocal persons are responsible for partnering and financing at a national level with not only UN entities but also other stakeholders as the private sector, civil society, academia and beyond. This has been a huge shift.

Internally, there is also a key challenge for the UN to bring all of the UN entities' partnerships processes over the past 75 years together into one coordinated and harmonized system. Flexibility is crucial. One of the essential results so far have been an UN standard for due diligence and transforming systems for engagement. In sum, there is

a sort of double challenge for the UN to bring UN entities together while also creating partnerships beyond the United Nations.

## Discussion

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**Dr. Darian Stibbe** asked the panelists how to shift the culture within organizations to a more outward looking approach.

**Ms. Marion Birnstill**, acknowledges that foundations used to be the one with money and power. She mentioned that such ego should be dropped. This can be done by allowing partners with whom we work to hold space for complexity. It's not just a transaction 'Money for A, if you deliver B'. Root causes from the ground up should be addressed. Moreover, building trust at a local level and finding the right framework for collective action and impact is needed. Flexibility will help in letting go of propriety aspects, meaning finding the right balance to being able to pinpoint an outcome vs. enabling an ecosystem to come to the right answer is. It's not about claiming, but contributing. In order to comprehend such complexities better tools and methodologies are required.

In response, **Dr. Darian Stibbe** concluded that there is a need for long term approaches. He asked **H.E. María del Pilar Garrido Gonzalo**, what the challenges are for governments having to put in place measures of which the outcomes are paying off in the long-term. **H.E. María del Pilar Garrido Gonzalo**, answered that routines have to be set up to move cultural change within institutions. This is not only related to the people who govern the institutions, it has to be embedded within the institution itself by for instance training public servants. So, it's not necessarily about governments becoming fit for partnering, but the institutions.

For **Ms. Irene Marbun** the Partnership Performance & Health Check tool showcased that Wahana Visi is more open as a result of listening to partners. The culture of listening to others contributed to more effective partnership. **Dr. Darian Stibbe** called it a 'virtuous circle', when you make the effort to deliberately change behavior than partners react well and this reflects back in better partnerships. **Ms. Irene Marbun** stressed that one has to set the right example first and afterwards other partners will join.

Leadership is needed to set the tone. This has happened at the top of the UN. But how does this filter down to the country or agency level? **Mr. Chikezie Anyanwu** emphasized that there is a need to have clearly set out processes to ensure that what you are strategically saying at HQ level, can be adapted at country level. The Resident Coordinators are held responsible to deliver partnerships and help shift the culture and capacity building. However, it is one thing to have a strategy but it is even more key to monitor it. There are now systems developed in the UN to hold RC's and the entire UN accountable to how much it is doing and delivering on partnerships. Common due diligence processes that look at the entire UN entities and offices have been established.

**Mr. Ian de Villiers** sees building partnering capacity as ‘talking the walk’. There are a range of capacity building approaches. There is the internal capability of individuals but with partners we are growing our own collaboration capability together. This will set speed limits on where to go. Simple online tools and resources, such as the example of the Partnership Performance & Health Check, which are low tech and easy to use in addition to face to face training are critical. By negotiating, trust and partnering competences can be built. In the end, everyone is looking for the win-win situation.

Lastly, the audience was asked the following question:

*What actions might you take to build your organization to be Fit for Partnering?*

A variety of answers were discussed. From the importance of connecting with the UN Resident Coordinators and staff capacity building to creating a space for feedback with partners and enabling access to information.

When **Dr. Darian Stibbe** asked for the top tip in making your organization fit for partnering, the following answers were given by the panelists:

- Understanding value proposition and your organization’s attractiveness (**Ms. Irene Marbun**)
- Systematic partnering framework (**Mr. Ian de Villiers**)
- Strengthening capacity of colleagues across the board, by involving all stakeholders at every stage of the process (**Mr. Chikezie Anyanwu**)
- Don’t underestimate your convening power and don’t hesitate to challenge funders. This could be bringing fundamental change (**Ms. Marion Birnstill**)
- Openness and transformation (**H.E. María del Pilar Garrido Gonzalo**)

## **Closing remarks**

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In closing, **Mr. Ola Göransson**, Sustainable Development Officer at the Division for Sustainable Development Goals at UN DESA stressed that it is crucial to devote time to creating space for complex discussions and don’t settle for the simple solutions. Listening to partners, while being patient and persevere are vital. A solid partnership framework and cultural collaboration from the inside could make this happen.

More webinars of the Partnership Accelerator series will be held the next year. Suggestions for webinar themes are welcome. Online material around different aspects of partnerships are being developed and can be found on the Partnership Accelerator website. Signing up for the mailing list with future events is also possible. Please see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/PartnershipAccelerator>.

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