

2021 ECOSOC PARTNERSHIP FORUM

"PARTNERSHIPS AS GAME CHANGER FOR A SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY FROM COVID-19"

MONDAY, 3 MAY 2021, VIRTUAL MEETING 9:00 – 11:00 AM (EST)

SUMMARY

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) convened the 2021 Partnership Forum on the theme of *"Partnerships as Game Changer for a Sustainable Recovery from COVID-19"* on 3 May 2021. The meeting brought together Member States and a wide range of non-state actors including the private sector and civil society organizations to explore concrete ways in which multi-stakeholder partnerships can help to facilitate sustainable development and recovery from COVID-19.

The discussion was premised on the understanding that while the main responsibility for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda lies with national governments, multi-stakeholder partnerships that harness the contribution of various actors have a critical role to play in supporting the recovery efforts from COVID-19, fast tracking the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and leaving no one behind within each community where they operate.

In his welcoming remarks, **H.E. Mr. Munir Akram, President of ECOSOC**, made a strong call for raising the ambition for global partnership and solidarity against the backdrop of worsening inequalities within and amongst countries as a result of the global pandemic. He highlighted the critical roles of partnerships in mobilizing investments in sustainable infrastructure, including from the private sector, as well as in closing the digital divide, strengthening social protection and reforming trade and tax systems.

Mr. Volker Turk, Assistant-Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, emphasized the pressing need for mobilizing ambitious, meaningful partnerships, with

"As we have seen this past year, partnerships and collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders are fundamental to effective multilateralism."

- Mr. Volker Türk, Assistant-Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General

a view to building capacities, localizing the SDGs and forging pathway towards an inclusive and sustainable recovery. He noted that the ECOSOC and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), as well as the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), have proven to be valuable vehicles in fostering impactful partnerships at all levels, expressing his hope to see them further enhanced including through current review process of ECOSOC and HLPF by the General Assembly.

Mr. Jens Wandel, Under Secretary-General of the United Nations, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on Reforms and Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General's Designate for the COVID-19 Recover Better Fund, in his keynote address, pointed to networked multilateralism as a critical element of the future vision of the United Nations and its collective ambitions. He stressed the need to mainstream the critical principles of leaving no one behind, gender equality, human rights and climate actions, among

others, in all recovery efforts and recommended the use of a Solutions Catalogue to pipeline well-defined bottom-up solutions and to identify needs within partnerships.

Closing the Forum, **Mr. Liu Zhenmin, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs**, summarized the discussion focusing on the roles of and ways forward for multi-stakeholder partnerships in the context of post-pandemic development landscape. He commended that the Forum had offered important insights on the critical contributions that multi-stakeholder partnerships can have in building better and fairer for all, including the most vulnerable populations.

Ms. Sanda Ojimabo, Executive Director of the United Nations Global Compact, noted in her closing remarks the need for the UN family to approach partnerships as a “coalition building” exercise bringing together a more diverse range of stakeholders to work together on global challenges at a scale and scope like never before. She urged corporate partners and the UN system to align with the Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact, to ensure all UN-business partnership agreements and initiatives are built on a strong and principled foundation.

The Forum generated a number of concrete policy messages, which are directed to the 2021 session of the HLPF and other key inter-governmental meetings throughout the year. Governments and non-state stakeholders from all regions recognized the continued need for the dedicated space provided by the ECOSOC Partnership Forum for advancing the policy dialogue around the issues related to partnerships.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are clearly making positive impacts on sustainable recovery and development and should be considered a key instrument for building back better, faster and fairer. Participants showcased how multi-stakeholder partnerships could contribute to building networked multilateralism. In response to various challenges compounded by the pandemic, multi-stakeholder approach in partnerships has been working effectively to engage and mobilize different stakeholders and means of implementation in a collaborative and complementary manner for optimal development results.

“We must go fast and we must go far. And so, in changing the game, let us go faster and farther – together.”

-- Ms. Sanda Ojiambo, Executive Director of the United Nations Global Compact

Key determinants for successful multi-stakeholder partnerships lie in the capability of partners to add value and to advance collective objectives. Participants noted that effective multi-stakeholder partnerships share a number of common characteristics, including successful alignment of the partners’ incentives; advancing common objectives while adding values; and utilizing viable policies and measures for mitigating the issues of self-interest, among others. This requires a thorough understanding of the realities and expectations of the stakeholders involved at all levels – ranging from international actors, to national legislatures, to local institutions, to family units – to ensure that the common commitments agreed upon are well aligned with their respective interests. The strategy for mitigating the forces of self-interest often benefits from establishing mechanisms ahead of time aimed at sustaining common objectives, discussing ideas openly and mapping available funds.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships should enhance accountability and transparency through effective data collection and management at all levels. Governments and non-state stakeholders, including citizens,

“It is our duty to work together to build a better world, one of solidarity and co-operation, where human rights can continue to be at the center of all United Nation’s plans and programs.”

- Delegate of the Government of Panama

need to collaborate more closely to strengthen the evidence base; to share reliable, aggregated and updated data; and to enhance the public access to data. Such multi-stakeholder data collaboration can be made possible including by standardizing data-collection and data-sharing measures including at the local level; safeguarding privacy and human rights; further closing digital gaps; encouraging social dialogues; and making the most of virtual knowledge

platforms.

In order to build data-driven and results-focused multi-stakeholder partnerships, partners should have in place mutually agreed monitoring and evaluation frameworks. In the case of public-private partnerships,

environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria remains as a popular benchmark system for private sector entities to advance their corporate agenda in support of sustainable recovery and development. For micro, small & medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) and start-ups, broader SDG targets are better suited in tracking and scaling up their sustainable development results.

“Our best opportunity to build back better and forward relies on our continued commitment to forge strong alliances that work at every level, that focus on results and evidence.”

- Philipp Schönrock, Executive Director, CEPEI

The United Nations has a critical role to play in facilitating the shift towards more measurable, comparable and transparent frameworks and means of ESG at the global level, in support of effective engagement of the private sector and sustainable public-private partnerships (PPPs). ESG has been playing an increasing role in the asset management industry in recent years as an important risk-management tool and especially after the COVID crisis. Professionalizing and further refining the global ESG frameworks could enable private sector entities to build necessary capacities, compete and comply more effectively and innovate alongside the 2030 Agenda or Sustainable Development.

As the alignment of interests among partners within PPPs is often challenging, as the interests of the public and private sectors may diverge between purpose and profit, all actors involved should agree upon concrete ways to share the risks and benefits of PPPs in a fair manner. While PPPs should build on the specific country and local contexts and existing institutional and technical capacities, having guiding principles for stakeholder engagement in place can help partners to manage different and evolving expectations.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships need to take inclusiveness to the next level. In order to meet the challenges facing the world today, multi-stakeholder partners should come together to invoke broader and more inclusive coalitions. A whole spectrum of options for social innovation, including in the area of public health, should be carefully examined and debated through inclusive, multi-stakeholder consultative processes and robust social dialogues at all levels to bring about stronger social contract and more people-centered multi-lateral global governance system.

“Partnerships are not just about finance, partnerships are about creating opportunities, removing barriers.”

- Mr. Jens Wandel, Under Secretary-General of the United Nations, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on Reforms, and Secretary-General’s Designate for the COVID19 Recover Better Fund

Participants stressed the critical role that multi-stakeholder partnerships can play in mobilizing not only finance, but also science, technology and innovation in support of sustainable recovery and development. Both the intended and unintended consequences of technological advancement need to

“To close the digital divide, we need meaningful global partnership to facilitate technology transfers and know-how to the least advanced countries.”

- Delegate of the Government of Bangladesh

be carefully assessed and addressed through a multi-stakeholder partnership approach. The design, development and monitoring processes of technological advancements should be inclusive of all actors including philanthropic organizations, academia and CSOs, and not limited to scientists, innovators and technology firms only. Through a multi-stakeholder approach, all actors should be brought together to elaborate more agile and integrated regulatory frameworks, in

order to make science, technology and innovation work for all.