Informal Summary
2016 ECOSOC Partnership Forum
"From commitments to results: Leveraging partnerships for the 2030 Agenda"

31 March 2016

The annual ECOSOC Partnerships Forum was held in New York on 31 March 2016. Leaders from the business sector, philanthropy, civil society and academia engaged in a dialogue with Member States on how to leverage partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The event featured a keynote address by Her Royal Highness Princess Haya Al Hussein, UN Messenger of Peace and Chairperson of International Humanitarian City.

Just six months after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2016 ECOSOC Partnerships Forum focused its attention on how multi-stakeholder partnerships could be more cross-sectoral and better integrated to contribute to achieving the SDGs. In addition to discussing the opportunities and challenges associated with such partnerships, the Forum also focused on measures for ensuring transparency and accountability of partnerships, especially those involving the UN.

The 2016 ECOSOC Partnerships Forum built on the work of the Council as it continues to support more transformational partnerships among development actors, and facilitate discussion of how partnerships can be scaled up and strengthened for implementing the new Agenda.

Opening

H.E. Mr. Oh Joon, President of the UN Economic and Social Council opened the 2016 ECOSOC Partnerships Forum. He stressed that all development stakeholders must be willing to break down traditional policy and sectoral "silos" for improved, integrated decision-making and solutions in response to sustainable development challenges. To support the 2030 Agenda, partnerships must leverage the interlinkages between the SDGs and targets to enhance their effectiveness and impact. He further stated that multi-stakeholder partnerships that complement national efforts and the work of the United Nations system are needed. Moreover, the partnerships, especially those led by the United Nations, must be transparent and accountable, and respect the values, mandates and principles of the international organization. He concluded by underlining the mandate of the Economic and Social Council to serve as the platform to review global partnerships and provide guidance on partnership initiatives or commitments to support the implementation of UN mandates.

During his opening remarks, **H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the UN General Assembly** stated that multi-stakeholder partnerships were widely recognized as an important, value-added means to delivering results for the 2030 Agenda. He encouraged the Forum to focus on answering "how" to enhance the effectiveness of partnerships, rather than "why", since they have already demonstrated their worth as part of the MDG experience. Some of the key outstanding questions he posed for consideration by Member States and Forum participants included: How could coalitions of partners from all parts of society be aligned with the mission of the United Nations and in particular the Sustainable Development Goals – including climate action? How could the speed and scale of SDG implementation be increased by involving private sector and civil society across borders? How could partnerships support the universal mandate of Agenda 2030 while also providing additional support to Least Developed countries (LDCs)?

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his remarks delivered by **Dr. David Nabarro, Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Climate Change**, emphasized that strong, inclusive and integrated partnerships at all levels are needed to swiftly move from SDG commitments to action. They should embrace diverse perspectives and employ wide range of expertise, and need to be flexible and nimble in order to mobilize resources and capacities. He reminded participants that in promoting effective partnerships in support of the 2030 Agenda, we must be guided by the principles of transparency and accountability as well as the values of the United Nations. Governments will have a critical role to play in the governance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, including through ECOSOC and the High-level Political Forum for sustainable development. He also stressed that the partnerships that work best are those with a clear vision, effective internal governance structures, commitment by all partners and trust among all involved. The United Nations system will assist with articulating principles for partnerships and putting them into practice. He further stated that the United Nations system will act as a catalyst and facilitator of partnerships, supporting the initiation of efforts, including multi-stakeholder platforms, forums for review, and monitoring and impact measurement.

These opening remarks were followed by an inspiring keynote address by **Her Royal Highness Princess Haya Al Hussein**, UN Messenger of Peace and Chairperson of International Humanitarian City. She made a powerful plea for peace and called for ending the mistrust that exists throughout the world. She reminded the international community of the importance of a people-centered approach to development, which takes into consideration how the impact of policies on the lives of people they serve. By sharing her personal experience, she demonstrated the importance of leaving no one behind in the implementation of the Agenda. During her address, she emphasized that more effective partnerships are a first step toward progress but not nearly enough; the holistic implementation of the entire SDG Agenda will be necessary for success.

Dialogue 1: Breaking the Silos: Cross-sectoral partnerships for advancing the SDGs

The objective of the first dialogue of the 2016 ECOSOC Partnership Forum was to examine the types of integrated cross-sectoral solutions which multi-stakeholder partnerships can adopt to help advance the achievement of the SDGs. It also looked at ways to encourage the wider use of cross-sectoral approaches by existing and new multi-stakeholder partnerships with a view to achieving synergetic outcomes and make progress on multiple fronts simultaneously. The following key messages and recommendations emerged from the discussions:

❖ **Partnerships need to be galvanized in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and should be based on an integrated, cross-sectoral approach**

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are a key means for implementing the 2030 Agenda, and a critical priority area for their work will be leveraging the inter-linkages across the SDGs to enhance implementation and delivery of results.   The SDGs are the "glue" that brings the partners together to work towards a shared vision.   It will be imperative that partnerships are inclusive and are cognizant of leaving no one—and no Goal—behind.

Since problems do not occur in silos, solutions will need to be built across silos. Public institutions, Ministries and sectors and systems within countries need to communicate with each other and work together. Breaking down silos is difficult and can take a long time, but it is possible and necessary for the achievement of sustainable development. Cross-sectoral partnerships could be promoted at national, regional and international levels simultaneously. The Global Partnership for Sustainable Transport, the "Roll Back Malaria" initiative as well as UN Secretary General's Every Woman Every Child initiative were mentioned as examples of successful cross-sectoral partnerships.

Other critical challenges related to cross-sectoral partnerships include funding, coordination and structures. Overcoming these will require innovation and flexibility, and therefore there should be no one-size-fits-all approaches in the promotion of cross-sectoral partnerships.

❖ **Clarity on objectives and respective roles among actors is key**

A common understanding about the overall objectives and respective roles of actors is essential to making multi-stakeholder partnerships work. It was underscored repeatedly by participants

that Governments should play a lead role in partnership initiatives, in particular by convening partners and setting standards. Civil society will also play a key role in helping to hold multi-stakeholder partnerships accountable. The engagement, resources, knowledge and expertise of the private sector are critical for achieving the SDGs and for partnerships to be sustainable, business involvement will have to go beyond philanthropy.

❖ **Understanding local contexts will ensure sustainability and success**

It is important for multi-stakeholder partnerships initiatives to understand local context and the reality "on the ground" in order to achieve sustainable results. Within the realm of partnerships, international partners need to be cognizant of the environments in which they work. For example, private sector actors working in new contexts should do so in a holistic manner, shifting from a limited "corporate social responsibility" model to one that is more concerned with social well-being and sustainable development. One-off philanthropic actions or projects will not be sufficient contribution to the partnership needs in the post-2015 context – for example, partnerships in the realms of job creation, infrastructure development and investment, etc.

We should avoid creating new, duplicative arrangements for partnerships and instead take into consideration existing partnerships or potential partnerships at the national and regional levels. For instance, from the perspective of African countries, partnership priorities and arrangements should take into consideration the relevance of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and its first ten-year implementation plan in the context of the wider implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships including the UN/AU partnership. The strong role played by UN ECLAC in the Latin American and Caribbean region was also highlighted as an important entity of the UN system with a network of relationships and partners that could be taken into consideration for scaling up partnerships in the region.

❖ **Successful partnerships are transparent partnerships**

To ensure transparency of partnerships, participants highlighted the importance of making information around the objective, practices and identities of all partners transparent. For partnerships involving the UN, it was emphasized that information on contributions, matching funds and projects should be made transparent, including for those operating at the country level. Participants also underscored the need to strengthen systematic reporting on such partnerships to the relevant Executive Boards.

As part of encouraging transparency, the importance of learning from failures of multi-stakeholder partnerships was stressed. As one positive example in this regard, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation was cited as a good model for exchange

among partners and the creation of a knowledge base on contributing factors and challenges to successful development cooperation. In terms of assessment, monitoring and reporting processes should provide accurate, actionable information on partnerships' performance so that gaps in delivery or achievement can be addressed.

❖ **Maintain respect for and adherence to agreed, shared principles**

Multi-stakeholder partnerships, in the context of the 2030 Agenda should serve the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations and such initiatives must be undertaken in a manner that maintains and promotes the integrity, impartiality and independence of the UN. There is a need to strengthen principles to be applied for UN partnerships, with the precautionary principle and principle of "do no harm" should guide these efforts.

❖ **Partnerships work in complement to other means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda**

As we embark on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it is critical to take into account the lessons learned from the failed implementation of MDG8 and looking ahead at the means of implementation for the SDGs. The unfinished business of the MDGs commitments under the global partnership for development as well as meeting the target commitments of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) as Official Development Assistance (ODA) including 0.15% to 0.20% for least developed countries should not be forgotten. The implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which complements and supports the 2030 Agenda cannot be over-emphasized.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships should complement national efforts and the work of the UN system. They should build upon and complement North-South cooperation which remains the main channel needed to assist LDCs, especially in the areas of finance and capacity building. In addition, partnerships can complement South-South cooperation in pursuit of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Long-term commitment among partners is essential and will help to ensure that calculated risks can be taken without undermining long-term achievement.

In the light of recent funding trends within the UN development system, some participants emphasised that such partnerships should not contribute to any potential imbalance between core and non-core resources.

Resources to catalyze cross-sectoral partnerships for the SDGs

The second part of the first dialogue focused on resources to catalyse cross-sectoral partnerships for the SDGs. It highlighted the Global Compact's UN-Business Action Hub which provides a platform for the UN and business to advance concrete projects to advance the SDGs, including through a cross-sectoral and integrated approach. The following key messages and recommendations emerged from the discussions:

❖ **Improve the enabling environment for multi-stakeholder partnerships to flourish**

Multi-stakeholder partnerships will not be effective in the absence of an enabling environment which can unlock resources for cross-sectoral, innovative approaches to common development challenges. There are many contributors to the overall enabling environment, and no precise formula exists for facilitating partnerships. That said, there are some common features of the broader policy and institutional context which can help to encourage their development. Such features include, but are not limited to, the strength of science-based regulatory systems, dependable intellectual property protections, predictable and engaged financing resources, solid infrastructure and a history of cooperation between different stakeholders from Government, academia, private sector and civil society.

❖ **Adopt key elements/principles of successful partnerships, as appropriate**

Across most successful partnerships, there were key principles or resources that helped to ensure success. Genuine partnerships require involvement of all stakeholders within societies, ideally drawing on participation from both high, political and grassroots levels. At its base, an effective partnership is built on accountability—supported by transparency, building trust and thinking and acting locally. Collaborative values models have the potential to provide for different tools to address a problem. Understanding partners' respective motives will ensure clarity of action and facilitate innovative solutions for overcoming challenges.

Strong civil society engagement and participation in partnerships is essential for success. Importantly, civil society organizations can be most effective when they are engaged in the partnership processes early on and throughout the partnership cycle. Civil society organizations are especially well placed to ensure accountability, integrity, and monitoring. Furthermore, they can help to identify problems that might be overlooked by other actors from the public and private sectors and can mobilize wide support to take action and providing data.

Adequate and predictable resources are needed for any multi-stakeholder partnership to be successful. Cross-sectoral approaches are important and could be complemented by sector wide initiatives. Successful partnerships should build in the prospect of failure by assessing risks and planning for contingencies. That said, investing energies and resources in the long-term will allow lessons to be learned and failures to be absorbed on the path to achievement.

One example of a successful partnership that was highlighted as being "fit for purpose" was Italy's Joint Committee, which began as a partnership between Italy and Pacific Island States and has since expanded. In place since 2007, this partnership successfully funded and implemented projects in the 12 participating SIDS. It has grown to include several donors and expanded its focus from clean energy to cross-sectoral emphasis on many sustainable development priorities. It is oriented around the need of the SIDS and not those of implementing agency. It is based on mutual trust, respect, and accountability. This partnership has been effective in overcoming the challenge of access to finance that has hampered development objectives of these states.

❖ **Renew the commitment to win-win partnerships**

Partnerships are often pitched as being "win-win" in nature, and the understanding of this needs to be expanded to ensure the priorities of beneficiaries are included. UN guidelines for cooperation with the business sector have recently taken this into consideration. It will be important to look at how partnerships benefit system-wide, because currently there can be a contradiction among partnership outputs. The win-win concept needs to be expanded to the UN system as a whole. Systemic lenses should be used when looking at win-win approaches to ensure they really produces expected results.

❖ **Build on and strengthen the wide range of resources the UN already has in place**

The Global Compact SDG Compass, Industry Matrix, SDG campus, and local networks are useful tools to catalyse cross-sectoral partnerships for the SDGs. The Global Compact's UN-Business Action Hub can share partnerships and project initiatives at local levels. All partnerships interests could be shared through that hub. In addition, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights provide guidelines for partnerships involving States and companies to prevent, address and remedy human rights abuses.

Dialogue 2: Promoting accountability and transparency of multi-stakeholder partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Operative paragraph 15 of General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/224, adopted on 22 December 2015 entitled "Towards Global Partnerships: a principle-based approach to enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners", requested the Economic and Social Council "to hold, during its partnership forum in 2016, a discussion on the best practices and ways to improve inter alia, transparency, accountability and the sharing of experiences of multi-stakeholder partnerships and on the review and monitoring of these partnerships, including the role of Member States in the review and monitoring process".

In accordance with this mandate, ECOSOC, during its 2016 Partnership Forum held on 31 March 2016, included a dialogue on "Promoting accountability and transparency of multi-stakeholder partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A special presentation was made on multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) by Dr. Nils Simon of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. In his presentation, multi-stakeholder partnerships were presented as flexible and innovative means for enhancing sustainable development. They can create win-win situations across sectors and enhance synergies by pooling resources. There is a need to differentiate between UN-led MSPs and those without UN involvement. But data shows that failure is widespread among MSPs. Most MSPs operate in OECD countries and emerging economies rather than developing countries and LDCs. MSPs are often of ad hoc nature and rarely transformative and focused on the long-term. Some of these weaknesses and problems may be alleviated by enhancing accountability in MSPs. The following key messages and recommendations emerged from the discussions:

❖ **Strengthen the role of the United Nations system in support of partnerships**

The UN system has proven its ability to convene disparate partners towards common cause on complex challenges, and it could continue to do so in support to partnerships for the 2030 Agenda. The UN can also draw on its wide network of expertise in support of partnerships and help build capacities in countries for them. At the same time, the UN should be at the center of global efforts in pursuit of the new Agenda, while recognizing the need for intensive global engagement and the mobilization of all resources, public and private, domestic and international. The UN should ensure that principles for MSPs established at the global levels are respected at national levels.

The UN should play a catalytic role in facilitating partnerships and setting norms and standards, without being overly prescriptive on what should be done at the national level. A mapping of partnerships could help identify which SDGs are being promoted through MSPs and help to identify gaps. The capacity of the UN to monitor and review UN-associated partnerships needs to be strengthened. Coordination and due diligence within the UN system would need to be enhanced for coherence. More reflection was needed on the role of the UN in managing partnerships not involving the UN.

A proposal was made for the United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP) to build and maintain a network of MSP focal points within UN agencies and programs. This would need to be well aligned with the work done by the Global Compact's private sector focal points network. The Global Compact office could also align its annual communication on progress reports by businesses with the SDGs. An impartial third entity could be tasked to propose integrity measures and make impact assessments. IT was also proposed that use should be made of existing inter-agency bodies to mainstream principles and guidelines throughout the UN system.

❖ **There is a need to encourage learning and knowledge sharing among MSPs as a central driver of transparency and accountability**

Multi-stakeholder partnerships should ideally have a platform, such as the Partnerships Forum, for gathering and exchanging lessons and knowledge on progress and associated trends and challenges. Such meetings should be kept open and informal in order to guarantee a "safe space" for transparent exchange among stakeholders and experts. Furthermore, participants could discuss lessons learned and evaluate the effectiveness of guidelines and policy frameworks.

Making information available regarding partners, their contributions and matching funds and projects for all partnerships with the UN, including at the country level would help ensure transparency of partnerships. Systematic reporting on such partnerships to the relevant Executive Boards could be strengthened.

❖ **Principles, guidelines and rules for implementing partnerships could be developed, including for due diligence**

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the importance and role of multi-stakeholder partnerships has gained renewed commitment and significance. There is now a need to build on existing principles and guidelines such as the Bali Guiding Principles, the Guidelines on a Principle-based Approach to the Cooperation between the United Nations and the Business Sector and others. Appropriate guiding principles for the review of MSPs could be discussed during the ECOSOC Partnership Forum, and Member States could decide

on these principles in ECOSOC or the General Assembly. For UN-led MSPs, Member States could decide on concrete guidelines and a coherent process for implementation, and for the implementation of effective due diligence procedures that go beyond the broad guidelines currently in place. For all other MSPs in the "Partnerships for SDGs" online database, a lighter framework with appropriate guidelines could be set up. The "Do no harm" and "the precautionary principle" should be part of the partnership principles.

❖ **Create synergies between knowledge-sharing and the follow-up and review processes for multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)**

The UN's High-level Political Forum (HLPF) has a mandate to review the contributions of MSPs to the 2030 Agenda. The challenge now lies in translating this mandate into reality, ensuring that such follow-up and review builds effectively on existing structures, processes, and mandates. One proposal made was for the "Partnerships for SDGs" Platform to collect progress reports on MSPs --especially those with UN involvement—and submit them to the ECOSOC Partnership Forum for consideration and discussion, the outcome of which could, in turn, inform the proceedings of the HLPF. Some participants suggested that independent reviews of MSPs by civil society actors, including the private sector, could inform the follow-up and review in a complementary way. Within the context of the HLPF, such a review could discuss contributions of MSPs as part of the review of overall progress at the global and national levels and with respect to the focus of thematic reviews.

❖ **Monitoring partnerships**

Clear and measureable targets are crucial for assessing progress and ensuring effectiveness, as well as for tracking progress of initiatives. Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential for ensuring results. Tools for monitoring and evaluation need to be an integral part of partnerships from the start.

Overall, the view was that monitoring standards and frameworks for evaluation of multi-stakeholder partnerships need further development. Member States expressed their interest in keeping such requirements flexible so Governments can use them according to national and local contexts and based on changing needs. Emphasis was also given on the need for monitoring to be done by all partners involved in MSPs. All of this will require a fine balance "between nurturing and monitoring" partnerships with full transparency and accountability embedded into their work. It was equally important for all partners to have freedom to innovate and work flexibly.

❖ **Refine the reporting requirements for MSPs and work with existing reporting mechanisms, where available**

There were different proposals regarding reporting requirements for MSPs. Under one option, there could be mandatory reporting of UN-led MSPs through ECOSOC, to either the General Assembly (GA), or the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). Alternatively, a selected intergovernmental body could take note of existing third-party reports by civil society organizations as an alternative. Another option included the possibility of self-reporting for all registered MSPs (on at least a biennial basis) which could be established through submission of short reports to an online platform. Lastly, it was suggested that an independent expert panel could prepare a synthesis report to inform the ECOSOC Partnership Forum and the HLPF.

❖ **Put information online and enhance clarity around any potential registry of partnerships in support of 2030 Agenda**

With respect to utilizing on-line platforms for reporting purposes, flagging or delisting of non-reporting MSPs could be implemented. It will be important to carefully reflect on how partnerships could be included on the UN DESA online platform without being considered as officially endorsed by the UN. In this connection, the criteria applied for inclusion in the on-line platform should be stronger and clearer. A suggestion was made that UN DESA could solicit UN agencies and programs involved in multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) to register them with the "Partnerships for SDGs" platform. In order to enhance the registry and database, a link could be provided with information received from private sector focal points or others stakeholders.

❖ **Build capacities for promoting transparency and accountability through open data and other innovative approaches to data collection and analysis**

Transparency and accountability in how data are collected and used is critical to ensuring high-quality analysis and building trust among different actors. It is important to distinguish between official, public data and private data which are used in connection to multi-stakeholder partnerships. There were various good practices on data highlighted by participants including established principles around open data, the contributions of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Data and the under-utilized potential of citizen-driven data. In relation to data on the effectiveness of partnerships themselves, one of the lessons learnt from the MDGs experience has shown that clear and quantified targets are crucial to measure progress. Therefore, it is recommended that indicators be developed and further refined to measure success of MSPs.

❖ **A Strengthened intergovernmental role in the review of MSPs**

The General Assembly, ECOSOC and High-level Political Forum
The General Assembly, ECOSOC and the High Level Political Forum, within their respective mandates, should complement each other in follow-up and review of multi-stakeholder partnerships. The GA should continue to have broad oversight over partnerships linked to the United Nations through its agenda item on "Towards Global Partnerships", while ECOSOC could be the organ for the monitoring and review of MSPs. The HLPF could report on partnerships including at the national level and link reporting to the theme of the Partnership Forum.

ECOSOC Partnerships Forum
The ECOSOC Partnership Forum could discuss lessons learned and evaluate the effectiveness of guidelines and policy frameworks for MSPs, especially those that apply to the entities of the UN system. It could take stock of trends, innovations, and financing of MSPs. The basis for the review could include a synthesis report on all partnerships in the Partnerships for SDGs online platform, reports from civil society and business, or other third party reports.

❖ **Strengthen engagement of the private sector and the role of civil society**

Strong civil society engagement and participation is essential for success. It can play a role in ensuring accountability, integrity and monitoring of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Civil society organizations can be most effective when they are engaged in the partnership processes early on and throughout the partnership cycle.

It should be borne in mind that private sector and government approaches to reporting can be quite different. There is therefore a need for some common language that is understandable to both.

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