Expert Group Meeting on SDG 17

"Harnessing Means of Implementation (MOIs) through Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships to Build Inclusive and Equitable Societies"

12 April 2019, Conference Room 11, UNHQ, New York

Informal Summary

A half-day Expert Group Meeting on *"Harnessing Means of Implementation through Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships to Build Inclusive and Equitable Societies"* was organized by DESA Division for Sustainable Development Goals on 12 April 2019. The meeting gathered around 15 experts from academia, civil society, private sector, international organizations and UN system entities as well as multi-stakeholder partnership practitioners working in support of the SDGs, particularly those under in-depth review at the July session of the High-level political forum on sustainable development, namely SDGs 4 (quality education), 8 (economic growth and decent jobs), 10 (inequalities), 13 (climate action), and 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies).

Through a moderated discussion under the Chatham House Rule, building on the ECOSOC Partnership Forum held on 11 April 2019, participating experts explored: (i) ways in which partnerships could effectively bring concrete contributions to enhance and harness MOIs in the implementation of the SDGs in focus; and (ii) some of the strategic, inter-linked areas to promote greater synergies and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Highlights from Moderated Roundtable Discussion

- The moderated discussion focused on two dimensions of partnership effectiveness: *internal effectiveness* (the ability of individual partnerships to deliver on their stated objectives, including by being adequately resourced, and well managed) and *external effectiveness* (the collective impact of the overall portfolio of multi-stakeholder partnerships relative to the transformation required to achieve the SDGs).

Internal effectiveness:

- Professional service: It was suggested that the actual process of partnering, or managing shared leadership, could be offered as a professional service to multi-stakeholder partnerships to strengthen their internal effectiveness. However, some participants cautioned against creating yet another profit-generating machine that could potentially be exploited.

- Incentives/Intentions: It was highlighted that partners often come together with different agendas, intentions, and motivated by different incentives. Participants stressed the importance of letting partners self-assemble, and the need to have a win-win strategy where all partners get what they need from a multi-stakeholder partnership.

- <u>Political nature and power relations:</u> Many agreed on the political nature of partnership-building, which involves creating dialogues between very different points of views and working with different power relations. It is important to ensure representation and avoid internal power imbalances. It was mentioned that professional teams, such as skilled negotiators, even psychologists, could help smooth out such power relations.

- <u>Common purpose, commitment from leadership at the highest level and dynamic coalitions around focused issues:</u> Several participants noted that having a common purpose or agreed core principles was crucial in making their partnerships effective. Authentic commitment from the highest levels of leadership could facilitate mobilizing engagement and deploying assets, both financial and intellectual. It also has the potential of making coalition-building around focused issues more effective. Having umbrella targets could also be a powerful tool to counter fragmentation.

- <u>Evidence-based implementation, demonstrating measurable change:</u> Participants shared success stories that combined strong issue-based advocacy, easy-to-understand solutions packaged for policy-makers that show what works, as well as the measurable changes/impacts that have been achieved.

- <u>Locally-led and context-driven:</u> Many participants underlined the need to engage the local level, working with local governments, local communities, partnering with local think-tanks, local academia, and utilizing local data, locally produced knowledge and evidence-based research. The role of national associations of cities and local governments should be given more visibility and the role of local networks, such as the local 2030 hubs could be strengthened.

- <u>Representation and diversity:</u> Inclusiveness and participation of different actors were identified as key for ensuring the effectiveness of partnerships. Participants shared examples where the diverse interests, expertise and resources of diverse partners had broken down boundaries and created cross-sectoral opportunities; where efforts had been made to engage vulnerable communities, guided by data and research; where a set of *unusual suspects* had been put together when creating umbrella platforms in order to bring together sectors that do not necessarily collaborate with each other.

- <u>Communicating with accessible language:</u> The importance of using accessible language and avoiding technical jargon was stressed, especially when communicating with the most marginalized communities. Some highlighted the use of tailored language catered to different types of audience in their outreach efforts.

- <u>Capacity-building</u>: Participants noted that capacity-building was key for ensuring that a partnership is successful, and that more attention should be given to capacity-building. For instance, while financing is central, often the availability of cash is the symptom and result of insufficient capacity and knowledge of how to access finance.

- Monitoring and evaluation: The importance but also burden of reporting was discussed. While having a framework and periodic progress reports is important to ensure accountability, it may also create a bureaucratic burden that can take away from internal effectiveness, especially for small bottom-up partnerships with limited resources. It is important to create opportunities for peer learning without over-burdening partnerships. Participants also underscored that monitoring and evaluation shouldn't be done in silos and should also show interlinkages across the SDGs, where applicable. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation should be locally-relevant.

- Lean structure: Some participants noted that having a lean or streamlined organizational structure could lead to more effective management of a partnership, for example not having a board may bring more efficiency.

External effectiveness:

- Three roles to play: It was argued that externally effective partnerships could play one of three potential roles - to initiate a transformation, to smooth a transformation or to scale up promising technologies in support of SDGs.

- Deliberation/Curation: It was argued that some sort of deliberative process would be necessary to bring coherence and external effectiveness to partnership-building. However, it is important to balance top-down with bottom-up dynamics. Top-down approaches are often met with resistance.

- Enabling environment: Participants noted the importance of an enabling environment at all levels. If governments do not create stability and enabling conditions, the private sector will not invest.

- The role of the UN: Participants saw the UN as a facilitator for partnerships. However, Member States often underestimate the work that is required to keep a partnership running, for example back-office functions. The UN is good at launching partnerships, but less good at keeping them dynamic. Moreover, it was mentioned that the UN could assist in collecting and analyzing data and providing policy recommendations including to Member States. It was noted that the UN had the convening power to launch joint programmes, to bring big actors together to build synergies, and to move from knowledge to action.