



# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## Issue Briefs

### 3. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development

#### Introduction

Partnerships and voluntary commitments for sustainable development refer to initiatives voluntarily and collaboratively undertaken by various stakeholders to contribute to the implementation of sustainable development in line with relevant internationally agreed goals.

In today's world, the implementation of sustainable development is more and more characterized by the mixed collaboration among state and non-state partners, including international organizations, development banks, aid agencies, governments at all levels, businesses, philanthropic organizations, academia, think tanks, civil society organizations, among others.

The importance of engaging stakeholders at all levels is repeatedly recognized at recent international conferences as well as the ongoing global conversations on the post-2015 development agenda. The Rio+20 Conference for example, has shown enhanced inclusiveness in the deliberation at the United Nations with the presence of hundreds of thousands of participants from governments, the United Nations System, business, civil society groups, volunteer groups, universities, amongst others, as well as those virtually following the conference from afar. The Rio+20 Conference has highlighted the relevance of recognizing the constructive role of non-state actors in shaping and implementing the international agenda for a sustainable future. It has created unprecedented momentum in parallel to the intergovernmental process, which led to the announcements of more than 700 concrete partnerships and voluntary commitments for the implementation of sustainable development. The complementary nature of these voluntary initiatives was duly acknowledged by the intergovernmental process. Member States decided to establish a comprehensive online registry to compile these voluntary commitments, keeping it fully transparent, accessible to the public and periodically updated<sup>1</sup>.

The present note provides a brief overview of emerging challenges and opportunities for partnerships<sup>2</sup> and voluntary commitments since Rio +20 and concludes with practical suggestions for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) to further promote partnerships and voluntary commitments and enhance their accountability given its specific mandate and its unique institutional setup<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 283, A/RES/66/288.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to use the term *partnership* precisely and consistently, and in particular, to distinguish between *multi-stakeholder partnerships* as described above and the *global partnership for sustainable development* as part of the post-2015 development agenda, as a successor to millennium development goal 8.

<sup>3</sup> The High-level Political Forum replaces the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). It meets every four years at the level of

## Substantive policy perspectives

### *Key role of partnerships and voluntary commitments for sustainable development*

Partnerships are playing an increasingly important role in accelerating progress towards achieving internationally agreed development goals, such as the MDGs, The Future We Want, as well as the upcoming post-2015 development agenda with a set of SDGs at its core.

Partnerships are vital vehicles to bring various stakeholders together across public and private sectors, to ensure ownership and accountability, to bridge the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and triggering the mobilization of scarce resources for their efficient and effective use in the implementation of sustainable development.

Experience has shown a range of partnerships that work: from one-on-one partnerships between public and private entities to partnerships involving various combinations and permutations of public, private and multilateral actors. The post-2015 development agenda must draw on lessons learned and strive to achieve the full potential of the partnerships approach.

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Public-private partnerships will complement rather than substitute development assistance including ODA. Some 75 percent of global income is generated by business and industry, whose activities, resources and expertise could be further harnessed through public-private partnerships to ensure the sustainable future we want, where diverse economic, social and environmental interests can be reconciled.

Beyond philanthropy and corporate social responsibility, partnerships involving business and industry can also significantly contribute to the mainstreaming of sustainable development through promoting more sustainable consumption and production patterns and more integrated natural resource management, facilitating technology transfer and capacity building through supply chains, and ensuring social protection and decent working conditions for all.

To ensure accountability and better align public private interests in public-private partnerships, governments should strive to create an enabling institutional environment for business and industry to contribute to national development priorities, including through appropriate incentives and relevant reporting requirements to incorporate the environmental and social considerations into mainstream business practice.

### *Implementation of Rio+20 mandate: the SD in Action Registry*

The SD in Action Registry<sup>4</sup> was launched shortly after Rio+20 by the United Nations Secretariat as mandated by the Conference. It contains detailed descriptions of all commitments voluntarily entered into by multi-stakeholder partnerships since Rio+20 in various priority areas of sustainable development.

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*Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly and every year under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council -- for eight days, including a three-day ministerial segment. It adopts negotiated declarations. (A/RES/67/290)*

<sup>4</sup> The SD in Action Registry is available through the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform at <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdinaction>



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The Registry currently hosts some 1425 voluntary commitments and partnerships for sustainable development, grouped in several action networks that have catalyzed commitments around specific themes, such as sustainable energy, higher education and sustainable transport.

The Registry has been kept open for new voluntary commitments from various stakeholders. It is expected that the upcoming post 2015 development agenda, with a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) at its core, would encourage further strengthening of the existing action networks and inspire the creation of new ones. This in turn would encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships to align their deliverables to the sustainable development goals to bring about changes for a more sustainable future.

Looking forward, the post-2015 era needs a sustainable development architecture that accommodates the commitments and participation of all in order to enhance collaboration and strengthen collective action to deliver real impacts on the ground.

### *The importance of governance and accountability*

Partnerships for sustainable development should respect and align themselves with the intergovernmental charters, legislation and principles of partner organizations of the UN system as well as their programme priorities. Transparency and accountability is required of all partners, public and private.

Governments at both the national and global multilateral levels need to continue to provide policy frameworks and oversight and ensure monitoring, accountability and transparency of the post-2015 development agenda, as well as of public-private partnerships

At the national level, parliaments and civic institutions have an important role to play in ensuring the transparency, inclusiveness and accountability of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

The UN is in a unique position to provide and promote broad guidance to partnerships, as it has the convening mandates to gather stakeholders from all over the world and all corners of society and from multiple sectors and constituencies.

Meanwhile, partnerships should strive to build in robust and transparent monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability and inclusiveness. Combining a Commission on Information and Accountability and an Independent Expert Reviewing Group, the Secretary-General's Every Woman Every Child Initiative serves as an excellent example in this regard. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) represents another exemplary model.

While the SD in Action Registry will remain up-to-date, open, transparent and accessible to the public, its mandate<sup>5</sup> does not include a strong monitoring mechanism to ensure accountability. The annual progress report on voluntary commitments and partnerships for sustainable development prepared by the Rio+20 Secretariat in collaboration with Action Network partners serves as a basic reviewing mechanism. By encouraging independent third party reviews and making them available to the public, the SD in Action Registry introduces another possible accountability model which is less resource intense. The report for 2014 is expected to be launched in July 2014, in time for the second session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

### *The role of the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development*

The High Level Political Forum, within its intergovernmentally agreed mandate, should further clarify the modalities for oversight of multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development.

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5 As per paragraph 283 of the Rio+20 outcome the Future We Want: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1635>

Some have suggested that the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which has been mandated to “follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments”, could provide a platform for reviewing multi-stakeholder partnerships. It could play a key role by devoting sessions to discuss how to best create an enabling environment for the creation and realization of voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives, to share best practices, and to most effectively monitor progress.

Regardless of the format of its review of multi-stakeholder voluntary commitments and partnerships, the High-level political forum should strive to maintain the momentum initiated in Rio+20 to inspire more effective implementation of the SDGs through multi-stakeholder partnerships.

## *Questions to guide the interactive debate*

- How can we promote partnerships to achieve the post-2015 development agenda including the SDGs? What are incentives, and what can be disincentives?
- What makes a partnership successful, replicable, scalable, and sustainable? What can we learn from best practice, and what can we learn from failures? Which elements of successful partnerships can be considered universal, and which elements specific to countries, culture or other factors?
- How can meaningful participation of all partners be ensured, particularly of women, young people and marginalized and vulnerable groups?
- How can we promote inclusiveness, transparency and accountability in the context of multi-stakeholder partnerships? What should happen in case of substantial disagreements, or need for mediation?

