The Importance of Country-Level Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in a Changing Development Landscape

Side Event at the 2017 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
New York, 11 July 2017

Summary Report

Meeting the challenge of achieving sustainable development for everyone, everywhere, for all countries and all groups, calls for strong partnerships and new ways of working together. The universality of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development promotes mutually reinforcing partnerships for development to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are met for all people, and for all member states to endeavour to first reach those furthest behind.

To this end, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) held a side-event entitled, "The Importance of Country-Level Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in a Changing Development Landscape" on 11 July in the margins of the 2017 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (10-19 July 2017, New York). Hosted by the governments of Bangladesh and Canada, the side-event attracted over 120 participants from governments, multilateral organisations, civil society, the business sector and academia, among others, to reflect on the critical importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to development for realising the SDGs.

Drawing on the experience of countries in establishing and operationalising country-level, multi-stakeholder partnership platforms, the event encouraged dialogue around the opportunities and challenges of a multi-stakeholder approach at both the global and country level. The distinguished panel of speakers included:
Mr. Kazi Shofiqul Azam, Permanent Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh;
Mr. Monowar Ahmed, Additional Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh;
Amb. Michael Grant, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations;
Ms. Tara Nathan, Executive Vice President of Public-Private Partnerships at MasterCard;
Mr. Joshua Mugodo, Director, Economic Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Kenya;
Ms. Patricia Blankson Akakpo, Programme Manager, NETRIGHT Ghana and Co-Chair of the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness; and
Mr. Michael O'Neill, Assistant Secretary General and Director, UNDP Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy (moderator).

Panellists made short opening remarks, which were followed by an interactive discussion with audience members. The following themes emerged:

**Achieving the SDGs requires a change in the way we work together and a recommitment to inclusive partnerships**

Delivering on the ambitious 2030 Agenda will require mobilising all available financing, knowledge, skills and technology. Thus partnerships are essential for leveraging the experiences and comparative advantages of all actors to accelerate development progress and increase accountability between development stakeholders. To make this possible, it is essential to build inclusive and dynamic partnerships that can create synergies and capitalise on the diverse and complementary contributions of all stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and philanthropy, among others. This, in turn, requires an enabling policy and regulatory environment; effective partnership frameworks; and robust mechanisms for mutual accountability and transparency, as well as a change in the way that many development partners (traditional, emerging and development partners from the Global South) work together at the country level.

**Multi-stakeholder partnerships are increasingly being established at the country-level, but more work is needed to make them truly effective and inclusive**

Inclusiveness is essential for effective development partnerships. A whole-of-society approach is needed to mobilise support and resources from all development partners; strengthen co-ordination and collaboration; create synergies and reduce duplication of efforts; and capitalise on the diverse and complementary contributions of all stakeholders.

Panelists from Bangladesh and Kenya shared experiences from establishing their own multi-stakeholder platforms for increasing the effectiveness of development co-operation, and Canada presented its new Feminist Development Policy aimed at leaving no-one behind. Likewise, the High-Level Political Forum’s Voluntary National Reviews demonstrate that many countries have already created multi-stakeholder institutional frameworks or dialogue platforms to strengthen development co-operation and / or guide the implementation of the SDGs at the country level. However, many countries from the Global South struggle with unstructured, informal multi-stakeholder partnership platforms and the quality of engagement with non-state actors is often poor, even when such infrastructure is in place. Strengthening and institutionalising
mechanisms for engagement is critical to solidify relationships with civil society and the business community, and to ensure synergy and accountability among all stakeholders.

Sharing best practices is critical to scaling-up multi-stakeholder approaches to deliver on the SDGs

There is broad agreement that all sectors of society should effectively contribute to and appropriately benefit from national development, yet the mechanisms through which the private sector and civil society engage at the country-level vary widely. Because there is no universal blueprint for how to best support a multi-stakeholder approach to development at the country-level, knowledge of effective practices identified in one country may serve to accelerate progress in another. As such, it is critical to share lessons learned across countries and regions to increase the effectiveness of development partnerships. Because of its country-led, multi-stakeholder nature, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation is well placed to facilitate knowledge exchange around successful approaches and broker inclusive partnerships. Panelists also emphasised the importance of knowledge transmission from such fora back into development stakeholders’ own practices and working cultures.

There is a need to translate the 2030 Agenda into the “language” of the business community

Successful, public-private interactions must address topics of mutual benefit for both the private sector and governments. The business community has vast resources to invest in the sustainable development agenda, but we should not disregard the profit motive as a key incentive for their involvement, nor consider this aim as unscrupulous. Rather, the development community should recognise profit as a normal dimension of private sector investment. However, due attention should be given to assuring fair levels of taxation are applied and respected, and that the burden of profit does not fall on the poorest segments of society. The international development agenda should also consider the private sector’s beyond-financial contributions and comparative advantage, including its ability to innovate and create solutions for governments and civil society.

Watch the recording of this event or view photos.

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