AGENDA 2030 IMPLEMENTATION
POLICY **PAPER**

Delivering on the promise

In-country multi-stakeholder platforms to catalyse collaboration and partnerships for Agenda 2030

MAY 2016

POLICY**PAPER**

Contents

The Partnering Initiative is an international not-for-profit organisation dedicated to unleashing the power of collaboration for a prosperous and sustainable future.
www.partnerinit.org

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice.
www.wvi.org

Abbreviations and acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
HPPP	Humanitarian Private Sector Partnership Platform
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MNC	Multi-National Corporation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PMNCH	Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Executive summary

Over the past few years both World Vision and The Partnering Initiative have engaged in and contributed to the global dialogue and practice on multi-stakeholder platforms and partnerships – including as part of the post-2015 process. World Vision and The Partnering Initiative believe multi-stakeholder platforms, particularly at the national level, have an essential role in the delivery of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, not just for their ability to catalyse collaborative efforts, but also for their potential to address complex and 'wicked' problems.

As the implementation of Agenda 2030 gets under way, **this paper takes a view of the current status of platforms for partnership at the national level and makes concrete proposals on ways to accelerate their progress and contribution to Agenda 2030**. This work is based on recent semi-structured interviews with key informants across the stakeholder spectrum, including government, business, civil society and the United Nations.

National-level platforms are relatively new, and World Vision and The Partnering Initiative's research suggests that key questions with which practitioners and policymakers are currently wrestling are the following:

a) What is the most effective leadership structure for national platforms?

b) How can platforms maximise their contribution to integration across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (within a country's national development plan)?

c) How can platforms ensure that they deliver for the most vulnerable in-country?

d) How can overlaps and duplication of new platforms at the national level be avoided?

The paper explores the issues behind each of these four questions and offers recommendations for their resolution, including the following:

- **Platform leadership shared with a central role for government:** Given the multi-stakeholder nature of these platforms, the question of *who* should lead is not straightforward. The paper discusses the pros and cons of both single-sector leadership and leadership shared across stakeholder groups. It recommends a shared cross-sector leadership whilst reflecting a central role for government. Key advantages of the shared-leadership approach include the following: (a) it is a better model for managing sensitive multi-stakeholder processes, including the provision of a safe, open collaborative space which allows each sector to contribute in a spirit of trust and openness; (b) it is better able to deal with issues around politics and power within the platform, such as preventing and managing conflicts of interest; and (c) it provides greater

stability in the face of leading individuals and/or organisations 'moving on', perhaps as a result of electoral cycles, changing business climates or a changing funding environment for civil society.

- **Platforms (re)designed to maximise their contribution to integration:** Agenda 2030 emphasises that the SDGs are integrated and indivisible. From an integration perspective platforms do not exist as independent entities but rather as 'nodes' within the wider, complex web of interrelationships which compose a national 'Agenda 2030 system'. The paper discusses both vertical and horizontal integration in relation to platforms and makes specific recommendations regarding platform design (or redesign) with integration principles applied to both their own internal operation and their external linkages. The paper also notes that an issue-based platform can only understand and interact with *part* of the overall Agenda 2030 system, highlighting a clear need for an 'integrator' which operates over and across the national Agenda 2030 system, including national-level platforms.

- **Platforms include the most vulnerable:** Agenda 2030 insists that not only will no one be left behind but that all efforts will be made to reach first those left furthest behind. Two key recommendations emerged as initial steps to ensure that the most vulnerable are not missed by platforms that are working towards 'zero goals' as part of the SDGs. First, it is critical to ensure that the most vulnerable are included in the platform's goals. The critical need for data on most vulnerable groups is recognised in relation to this recommendation, as is the need for platforms to manage power asymmetries, including through investing in the capacity of participating organisations from *all* sectors such that they are 'fit to partner'. The second recommendation, related to this point, highlights the need to engage relevant citizen groups directly (rather than solely through an intermediary), including children as appropriate. The paper also emphasises the essential contributions that each stakeholder group – government, business, civil society and the United Nations – can make towards reaching the most vulnerable.

- **New platforms join existing structures wherever possible, adapt where necessary and build new only when essential to do so:** National platforms, in a variety of forms, are currently emerging from different stakeholder groups at the country level as well as from global initiatives seeking to strengthen their national-level implementation delivery systems. Before considering the establishment of a *new* national-level platform, the paper emphasises the importance of understanding the landscape of *existing* (or readily adaptable) partnering structures and systems in-country in order to build on these as far as possible.

An important underlying theme across each of these issues is systems thinking. World Vision and The Partnering Initiative suggest the concept of 'Agenda 2030 systems', which at national level comprise the multitude of SDG-focused entities in country and their complex web of interrelationships. They also recognise that each national Agenda 2030 system sits within a

wider international Agenda 2030 system – which it both influences and is influenced by. This systems dynamic has important implications for multi-stakeholder platforms, and these are referenced through the paper.

The paper concludes with a call for more 'champions' – from government, civil society and business – who can help drive forward this new vision. This is a critical time to maintain momentum. Many individuals and organisations are already acting as champions in this space, but more are needed, particularly at the national level.

1. Introduction

Implementing Agenda 2030
On 1 January 2016, *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* was launched, and the clock started ticking on the world's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs replace the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) as the guiding framework for international development and go much further than their predecessors, setting out an agenda and providing a critical opportunity to eliminate extreme poverty in all its forms.[1] They represent a major shift in approach, fully acknowledging the deep interconnectedness between planet, people and prosperity: 'We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.'[2]

Although Agenda 2030 is an agreement signed by UN Member States, it is clearly conceived as requiring a multi-stakeholder effort: 'All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan'.[3] The centrality of cross-sector partnerships to achieving its targets is captured under its Goal 17.[4] In parallel with the development of Agenda 2030, there has been a recognisable trend:

* from a national development approach which was traditionally largely government and donor driven and implemented

* through a more recent period of bilateral partnerships (between government, business, international non-governmental organisations [INGOs] and/or the United Nations) and multi-stakeholder dialogue

* up to the current-day emergence of multi-stakeholder platforms that can facilitate wide-ranging, strategic collaborations and more systematic and transformational approaches.

If the bold (and welcome) vision of Agenda 2030 is to be realised, multi-stakeholder collaborations, and the platforms that can catalyse them, need to expand more rapidly than at present. This paper provides recommendations on some of the key issues needing further attention if multi-stakeholder platforms at the national level are to progress at the rate needed. These recommendations are drawn from data collected from key informant interviews conducted specifically for this paper.

Partnerships
As noted elsewhere,[5] the term *partnership* has tended in the past to be used in Agenda 2030 discussions inconsistently and interchangeably to refer to a wide range of very different arrangements.[6] The partnerships referred to in this paper are cross-sector partnerships, which World Vision and The Partnering Initiative define as follows:

A **cross-sector partnership** involves organisations from different societal sectors working together, sharing risks, and combining their resources and competencies in ways that create maximum value, in order

to simultaneously achieve the partnership objectives and the individual partner objectives.

Cross-sector partnerships involve two or more actors from government, civil society, business, UN agencies and/or other non-state actors, including academia. These partners typically leverage their respective core knowledge, skills, resources and assets to create solutions that are more innovative, more transformational, more sustainable, more effective and/or more efficient than partners could achieve on their own. From bilateral business–NGO partnerships creating new mobile health applications to major alliances tackling the complexity of improving nutrition across a region, cross-sector partnerships are essential to the progress of Agenda 2030. A business-as-usual approach will not deliver the transformative levels of development gains that are essential to reaching 'zero targets' in areas such as preventable child deaths, hunger and violence against children.

Note: This paper does not cover regulated public–private partnerships in which businesses provide upfront investment to deliver public infrastructure or services and take their profit through long-term payments from government or end users.

Platforms

To achieve the ambitious targets of Agenda 2030 there will need to be far more, and more effective, cross-sector partnerships.[7] This is where multi-stakeholder *platforms* ('platforms' in the rest of this paper) to catalyse collaboration and partnerships have an essential role to play. They provide a systematic approach to getting partnerships to the necessary scale. World Vision and The Partnering Initiative define *partnership platforms* as follows:

> A **partnership platform** is an ongoing mechanism to catalyse collaboration for development in a systematic way. Platforms undertake activities to convene and align government, business, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), donors and other development actors around a particular issue or geography, facilitate innovative collaborative approaches and directly broker and support new partnering action.

In addition to direct partnering support,[8] there are various advantages[9] for organisations in participating in platforms. Generally speaking, for those governments that have encouraged national platforms, the platforms provide a structure for influencing a wide of array of stakeholders to align better with country development plans and initiatives. Businesses (small- and medium-sized enterprises, larger domestic companies and multi-national corporations typically participate to find partners to work with on sustainability initiatives, to access funding to lessen the risks involved in new investments, and to engage in meaningful dialogue with government including better understanding of government policy and development plans. For CSOs, platforms are key spaces from which they can both initiate collaborations and influence other stakeholders.

Partnership platforms
There are growing numbers of action-focused platforms around the world that go well beyond common 'public–private dialogue' mechanisms. They focus on a range of different areas covered by the SDGs: addressing specific social issues (such as nutrition, education or health), developing sustainable value chains, encouraging more inclusive business or tackling natural resource limitations such as water. What they have in common is the ability to engage proactively with stakeholders from across societal sectors – including business – as collaborative partners in development, and, thereby, to create more innovative and sustainable solutions.

To underpin their primary objective of catalysing partnerships, platforms may also undertake a range of activities to help build an 'enabling environment for collaboration', including promoting dialogue amongst government, business and civil society to set development priorities; raising awareness of the benefits of collaboration; providing training in partnering skills; creating space for innovation; developing access to finance; and carrying out collective analysis of sustainable development challenges.

The Partnering Initiative's Business Partnership Action[10] programme supports the development of national platforms in Zambia, Colombia and Kenya, amongst other places. Drawing from these experiences, The Partnering Initiative's report *Platforms for Partnership: Emerging Good Practice to Systematically Engage Business as a Partner in Development,*[11] provides extensive insight into national platforms, including a life-cycle concept which describes four key stages[12] of a platform's development and a model of the nine building blocks of high-performing platforms.[13,14]

Although the SDGs are a universal agenda, this paper is concerned primarily with developing-country contexts, where the vast majority of those in extreme poverty live. Its focus is *national* platforms and their contribution to delivering the SDGs – specifically their role in the development and implementation of a country's Agenda 2030–aligned development plan. Such platforms can further the priorities articulated by the 'Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation'[15] – ownership of development priorities by developing countries, focus on results, inclusive development partnerships, transparency and accountability to each other.[16] The MDGs era has seen considerably more investment in global issue-focused platforms (for example, Every Woman Every Child, the Global Fund and Sustainable Energy for All) than in national-level platforms. However, it is at the country level that implementation takes place. And it is at the national or subnational levels that there is sufficient 'specificity of interest' – that is, where issues and geography are sufficiently relevant to an organisation's goals – to support genuine collaborative action.

Platform building – World Vision and The Partnering Initiative
World Vision, with technical support from The Partnering Initiative, is currently playing a leading role in the establishment of two platforms:

1.**The Asia Pacific P3 Incubation Hub –** to be launched in July 2016 to support countries in Asia – is a cross-sector incubator of partnerships, innovations and inclusive business models for new solutions to development and humanitarian problems. Based in Singapore, the initial thematic focus of the platform will be water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The hub will create a safe space to share resources and strengths across public, private and civil society sectors; to encourage creative dialogue and solution development; to spark new collaborations; and to develop joint advocacy approaches for education and innovation.

2. **Humanitarian Private Sector Partnership Platform (HPPP)** – launched in March 2016 – will enable systematic long-term partnerships in the challenging humanitarian context in East Africa, with an initial focus in Kenya. The HPPP, the first of its kind in East Africa, brings together businesses, governments, NGOs and UN agencies to improve information sharing, communication and coordination in order to identify gaps and catalyse cross-sector partnerships in disaster management. The platform will facilitate networking, collaboration and other partnering opportunities to address humanitarian needs (beyond philanthropic and ad hoc engagements) through innovation and shared-value creation. The HPPP will improve information sharing, communication and coordination through an online information-management system.

Partnerships and platforms should not be seen as easy options. They are capable of having great impact, but they do require long-term stakeholder commitment, start-up investment, ongoing resourcing and consistency of personnel to help ensure their success. A critical advantage to multi-stakeholder platforms, however, is their potential to address complex and 'wicked' problems by operating within and contributing to a broader 'system'.[17]

 Agenda 2030 systems
The SDGs are very different from the MDGs. First, they require action from all sectors of society, not only as philanthropic funders of development, but also as development actors who are intrinsic parts of the solution. Second, the SDGs represent a complex, interdependent set of challenges and so require a correspondingly systemic and holistic implementation response. Implementation of Agenda 2030 will require a shift towards much more 'systems thinking'.[18]

Multi-stakeholder platforms provide an important structure from which multiple stakeholders can explore the *system* within which they interact and co-develop corresponding strategies. 'System leaders [need to] create the space where people living with a problem can come together . . . to think more deeply about what is really happening, explore options beyond popular thinking, and search for higher leverage changes.'[19] This task of exploration is critical both at the beginning of a platform's life and as a continuous process

that runs through its core (including recognising if the platform is no longer needed or needs to be significantly changed). All platforms need to guard against collapsing into 'talk shops', but a rush to action (and the 'linear' approach of most implementation planning) can also be problematic when dealing with complex systems. An 'Agenda 2030 system' will be changing all the time and not always in ways that are predictable from the observable activities of its different parts – a systems-thinking approach is needed if this dynamic of emergence is to be managed effectively.[20]

As different platforms continue to be built in-country, each covering a different issue or goal (or set of goals) within a national Agenda 2030 system, an essential task for national development planning will be to help identify the optimum boundaries and areas of overlap for these subsystems and the platforms that support them. These subsystem platforms will then need to connect with one another where their boundaries overlap. These issues are explored further in Section 3.

Moving forward
Whilst in the latter phase of the MDGs many multi-stakeholder structures emerged at the global level,[21] national-level platforms are relatively new (and in many countries not yet on the drawing board). Their importance has become clearer as the transition from MDGs to SDGs has taken effect. Hence, as stated earlier, the focus of this paper is *national* platforms in developing country contexts and their contribution to delivering Agenda 2030.

Over the past few years both World Vision and The Partnering Initiative have engaged in, and contributed to, the global dialogue and practice on multi-stakeholder platforms and partnerships and their potential contribution to Agenda 2030. Recognising their importance, but also their inherent challenges, World Vision and The Partnering Initiative wanted to get a sense from practitioners and other experts on the current status of platforms at the national level and possible ways forward in any areas that are proving challenging.

Research method
World Vision and The Partnering Initiative staff conducted 50 semi-structured interviews across the stakeholder spectrum, including interviews with internal colleagues working on platform and partnership initiatives and/or on the ground in-country. (See Appendix 2 for the full list of organisations that were interviewed.) Most of the interviews took place during January and February 2016 and were typically 45 minutes in length.

World Vision and The Partnering Initiative chose to conduct this research early in the Agenda 2030 process in order to identify and share learnings from early mover initiatives with those still working through design questions. We believe it is important not to lose momentum as the world moves from the lengthy process of SDG negotiation into implementation – being cognizant also of the slow start suffered by the MDGs.

This paper aims to provide both pragmatic and bigger-picture reflections and recommendations that will be of interest and help to practitioners and policymakers alike. Specifically, the paper explores the following issues that emerged from the research:

- What is the most effective leadership structure for platforms? (Section 2)

- How can platforms maximise their contribution to integration across the SDGs? (Section 3)

- How can platforms ensure that they deliver for the most vulnerable? (Section 4)

- How can overlaps and duplication of new platforms be avoided? (Section 5)

The paper concludes with a call for more 'champions' who can help drive forward this new vision. Many individuals and organisations are already acting as champions in this space, but more are needed, particularly at the national level.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, the recommendations made throughout this paper are those of World Vision and The Partnering Initiative and do not necessarily represent the views of the individuals or organisations interviewed for this study.

Children in Bangladesh play games, learn numbers, sing songs and listen to stories at World Vision's Child Friendly Space
© 2013 Jon Warren/World Vision

2. What is the most effective leadership structure for platforms?

Who should lead?

Where *new* platforms are needed, strong and visionary leadership is a prerequisite. The tasks include, amongst others, visioning, engaging and recruiting a wide range of stakeholders (including funders), and designing governance and operational structures that will underpin a platform's effectiveness. Some of the key issues around establishing new platforms are addressed in Section 5 below. Section 6 looks at the critical role of champions in this space.

This section looks at the leadership challenges of platforms. The responsibilities of platform leadership include setting goals and policies and ensuring that the necessary building blocks are in place for effective platform operations.[22] Organisationally, leadership roles might be structured in a variety of ways, for example, across an executive team, a board, or a steering committee. Given the multi-stakeholder nature of these platforms, the question of *who* should lead is not straightforward. Indeed, of all the topics discussed with interviewees, this one provoked the most energy and divergence; views included 'government must lead', 'any sector can lead – go with the energy' and 'it must be shared cross-sector leadership'.

Those voices in support of *single-sector leadership* of a platform (one of the stakeholder groups in the lead), cited a variety of benefits. For example, authority and mandate from government leadership, speed and innovation from private-sector leadership, a focus on those left behind from civil society leadership, and the influencing and convening power attached to UN leadership.[23] Others, however, suggested that single-sector leadership was inherently a flawed approach for a *multi-stakeholder* endeavour. The main concern raised was that the lead sector's view would dominate (intentionally or otherwise), which runs counter to the spirit of trust and openness that is needed to foster collaboration and innovation. A further identified risk of single-sector leadership was a potential lack of stability if leading individuals and/or organisations 'move on', perhaps as a result of electoral cycles, changing business climates, or a changing funding climate for civil society.

> 'We want to strengthen engagement to achieve national priorities because implementation of SDGs must be multi-stakeholder – all development actors need to be involved.'
>
> – Government of Uganda Representative

Shared leadership (from all the main stakeholder groups, for example, government, civil society, business, United Nations) not only tends to avoid these problems, but interviewees with experience also had found that shared leadership was a better model for managing sensitive multi-stakeholder processes. In particular, a shared-leadership model may be better able to deal with issues around politics and power within the platform, such as preventing and managing conflicts of interest.[24] Without recognition of these 'real world' dynamics, solutions generated by SDG platforms are likely to be suboptimal – and at worst reinforce the status quo that underpins some of the very problems they are trying to solve. It is recommended that all platforms seek to incorporate emerging good policy and practice in this area. For example, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement has invested in defining a process for the identification, management and monitoring of conflicts of interest.[25] On the other hand, there were also some concerns raised about shared leadership. These included the ability to come to agreement on issues on which stakeholder groups might be expected to take very different positions; the dilution of the dynamism and visionary nature of leadership; and the potential for a weakening of the authority and mandate of government.

Shared leadership with a central role for government
World Vision and The Partnering Initiative's organisational experiences with respect to platform leadership tend to ally with the latter view on the benefits of shared leadership, and our recommendation, therefore, is for platforms to have **shared cross-sector leadership, whilst reflecting a central role for government at their heart.** This approach is expanded in Table 1.

'When people see a picture of business rivals working together, seeking to solve the country's problems, it gives people a sense of hope.'

– Philippines Disaster Resilience Foundation Representative

Table 1. Shared leadership with a central role for government

	Shared leadership	**A central role for government**
Why?	• Shared leadership reflects the intent of Agenda 2030, which clearly states that 'implementation will require all countries and stakeholders to collaborate'.[26] • Whilst governments are accountable for delivery, they cannot do so on their own. Multi-stakeholder platforms can be critical 'bridges' to the necessary wider set of actors. • Shared leadership can more readily deliver the safe space needed for dialogue and identification of innovative, collaborative solutions. • This shared-leadership function is aligned with a systems leadership approach: 'Knowing that there are no easy answers to truly complex problems, system leaders cultivate the conditions wherein *collective wisdom* emerges over time through a ripening process that gradually brings about new ways of thinking, acting, and being' (emphasis added).[27]	• Governments, as signatories to Agenda2030, are accountable for achievement of the SDGs. • Governments, as primary duty bearers for their countries' development, have the authority and mandate to establish country development policy and plans,[28] albeit with multi-stakeholder consultation. • Governments need to oversee formal processes associated with coordination (such as framing the platform contributions within the country development plan) and integration. (This is explored in more detail in Section 3.) • Government leadership is (often) critical when it comes to 'getting to scale'.
What would it look like?	• The exact form and/or structure of this shared leadership will depend on many factors, including the maturity of existing in-country multi-stakeholder consultation and implementation and the specific focus area of the platform. • A shared-leadership function could, for example, be expressed in an executive leadership team composed of people from a range of stakeholder group backgrounds, a board with representatives of similar seniority from each stakeholder group, with the chair rotating through the main stakeholder groups and with the whole underpinned by balanced voting procedures.	• This 'central role for government' could be expressed by the seniority of government representation and/or the number of ministries on the platform's board. • Ongoing leadership presence is necessary rather than 'symbolic leadership', such as a one-off endorsement. • *Note:* Where government is unwilling to play a central role, civil society (perhaps with business) has a role to advocate for this to happen – including helping government understand how high-level engagement with platforms can help it reach its own development goals. Alternatively, where government is unable, through lack of capacity or resources, to take a central role, then outside support may be required.

Recommendations

For those establishing and/or leading national platforms

- Review the makeup and balance of platform leadership with a view to adopting or improving a shared-leadership approach together with a central role for government.

- Ensure that emerging good policy and practice regarding management approaches to conflicts of interest and power asymmetry are incorporated into the platform's policies and procedures.

For governments

- Within national policy and the national development planning process, if not already in place, (1) recognise business and civil society (as well as donors and multi-laterals) as partners in development and development planning; (2) include multi-stakeholder collaboration as a key means of implementation; and (3) trigger processes to explore the demand and need for national multi-stakeholder platforms to support SDG implementation.

- Review relationships with existing, new and in-the-pipeline platforms with a view to strengthening engagement and ensuring that government is able to fulfil its role within shared platform leadership.

For civil society and business

- Advocate for new platforms to adopt, and existing platforms to transition to, a shared-leadership approach with a central role for government.

For UN country teams

- Support governments in the adoption of multi-stakeholder processes and explore convening roles for themselves in establishing national-level platforms.

For all stakeholder groups

- Identify and support champions from all sectors to become ambassadors for multi-stakeholder platforms and partnerships.

- Invest in organisational capacity to be 'fit to partner' – including having the necessary capacity to mitigate power asymmetry.

3. How can platforms maximise their contribution to integration across the SDGs?

The integration imperative
Agenda 2030 emphasises that the SDGs are 'integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development (namely economic, social and environmental)'.[29] This integration imperative is not new. For many years it has been widely understood not only that integrated approaches[30] help address duplication of effort but also that sustainable solutions to development challenges will be possible *only* through integrated, system-based responses. (See Figure 1 below.)

As an example of an integrated approach, World Vision believes that child protection requires a set of coordinated formal and informal elements working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence against children.[31] This approach seeks to strengthen the key (formal and informal) actors responsible for child protection, including government, civil society (including faith communities), businesses, parents, caregivers, families and other community structures. The need for this integrated, multi-sectoral approach is reflected in the SDGs, which include targets related to ending violence against children under multiple goals: SDG 4 (education), SDG 5 (gender), SDG 8 (economic growth), SDG 11 (cities) and SDG 16 (peace).
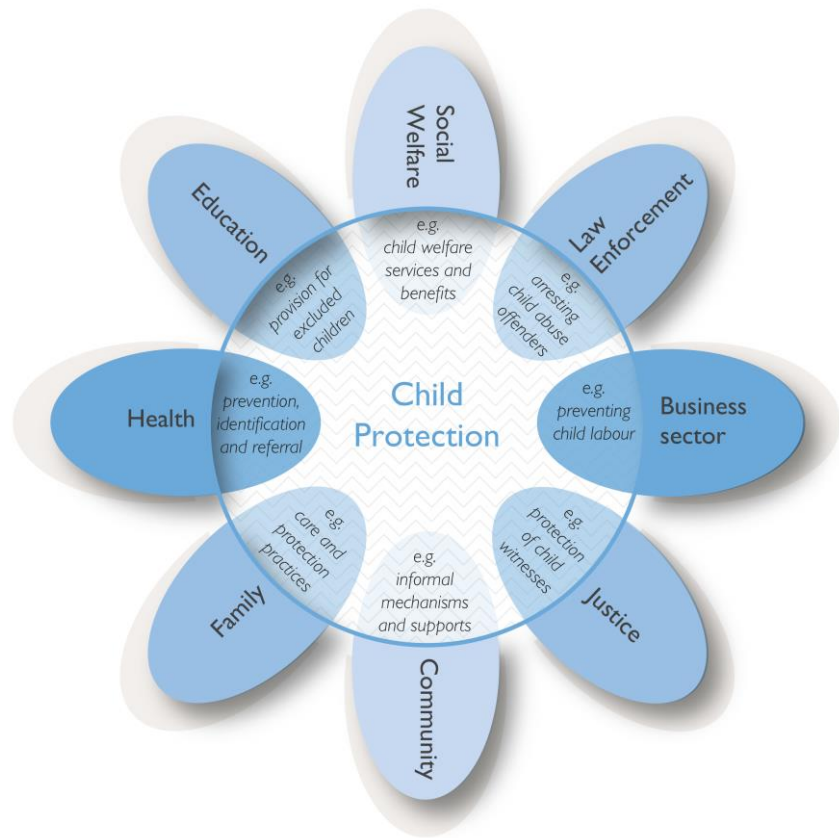

Figure 1. An integrated approach to child protection[32]

And yet, progress towards genuine integration has been slow.[33] 'One of the drawbacks of the MDGs [was that] 'silo' goals encouraged silo policies and did not make links and trade-offs across areas explicit.'[34] Many existing structures and systems are not designed in ways that intentionally foster integration. Agenda 2030's insistence on integration is therefore welcomed; the SDGs signal a new era and a new opportunity to address this shortcoming.

'What you need to do is make sure that a wide set of development actors understand how their investments fit into SDG priorities. It is critical that SDGs are embraced by non-state actors as a strategic framing.'

– UNDP Representative

The opportunity for integration at the national level

At the global level, partnership platforms tend to be single issue and all-too-often siloed; there is currently little integration across issues (although the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health [PMNCH], for example, is supporting the concept of an Alliance of Alliances[35] to explore what might be feasible). This is perhaps, in part, because the concept of horizontal integration is highly theoretical when not based in a real-world system. In contrast, at national and subnational levels organisations have rooted interests in specific issues in a specific geography, and this provides a level of clarity from which opportunities to integrate can emerge.

The integration imperative of Agenda 2030 is helping to shift focus from global, single-issue solutions to integrated solutions at the national and subnational levels. (See Figure 2.)
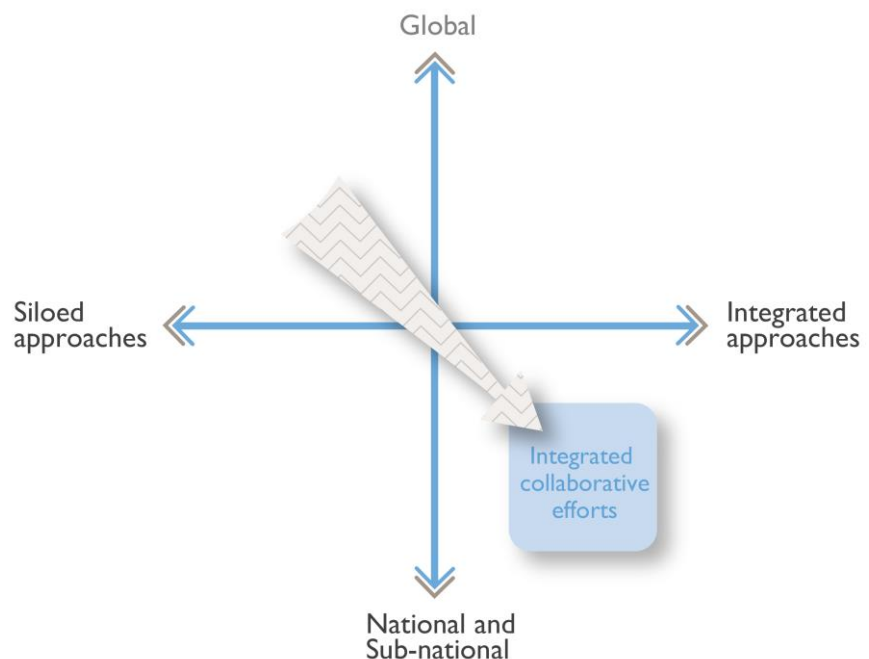

Figure 2. Integration – The opportunity offered at the national and subnational levels

The interviewees were very aware of these issues and sensitive to them. They also recognised that platforms do not exist as independent entities but as 'nodes' within the wider, complex web of interrelationships which make up a national 'Agenda 2030 system'. (See Figure 3.) Further, each national

Agenda 2030 system is also influenced by – and influences – the wider international system in which it resides. While a national platform may have a sphere of influence that is both horizontal (for example, to other national platforms) and vertical (for example, to partnerships catalysed by the platform, to a national SDG council – see Figure 3 and sub-section on page 18 – and/or to a global platform working on the same issues), realistically it can only understand and interact with *part* of the overall Agenda 2030 system.
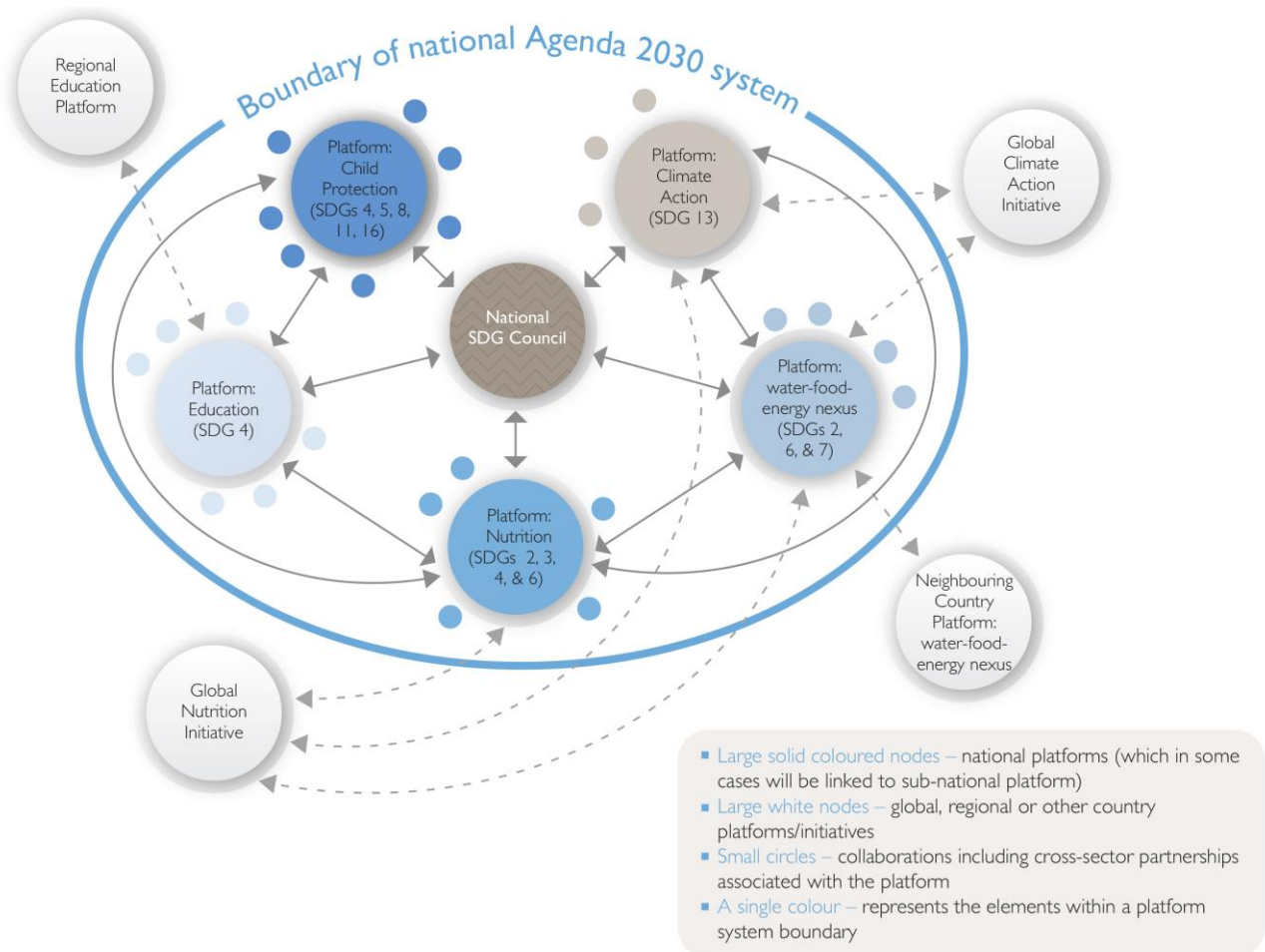

Figure 3. A simplified view of a national 'Agenda 2030 system'

Two main concerns emerged from the interviews: (1) SDG platforms themselves need to be designed (or redesigned) with integration at the very core of their operations and mindset; and (2) there is a clear need for an 'integrator' role in the national system to operate over and across all national-level platforms and related Agenda 2030 systems.

Designing or redesigning platforms for integration
The multi-stakeholder nature of the platforms discussed in this paper is one direct response to the need for integration. However, being multi-stakeholder is not sufficient in itself. Platforms need to apply integration

principles to both their external relationships and their own internal operations.

Internally, an integrated approach needs to be clearly reflected in a platform's core policies and strategies and also adopted as a principle into the partnerships it catalyses. Integration should also be a key criterion in deciding which organisations to seek out to participate in the platform. This also applies to *who* within stakeholder organisations should be engaged; for example, government participation in a platform will likely need to include representatives from several government ministries (see Section 2), and if leadership for the platform is housed *within* government, a ministry 'neutral' location (such as the president's or cabinet's office) may enable integration more effectively than a specific ministry taking the lead.[36]

This integration philosophy and intent should extend from the platform *outward*, for example, through a strategy that seeks to develop and maintain linkages with those other platforms and parts of the Agenda 2030 system which are critical to it – although always guarding against over-complication and the danger of associated paralysis. These 'weak ties' – looser, less formal arrangements – can be just as important to platform effectiveness as the 'strong ties' *within* a platform (the more formal relationships and collaborations). The form of such 'weak ties' will vary, but could, for example, lead to an informal clustering of platforms which have very strong inter-dependencies – such as those focused on the water-food-energy nexus[37] or those related to nutrition outcomes.[38] And in contexts with devolved governance arrangements (such as Kenya), linkages between national, regional and local levels will also be critical.

In all cases funding organisations should note that investment will be required to support both new and existing platforms as they build integration capability into their design and operations.[39]

BabyWASH: Integration at the national level
In 2015, World Vision began the process of forming a Global BabyWASH Coalition to bring together governments, civil society, academics, the private sector and UN agencies to address the need for better integration across sectors. This multi-sectoral approach will address the SDGs surrounding hunger (2); health and well-being (3); education (4); water, sanitation and hygiene (6); and partnerships (17). With a specific focus on integrating water, sanitation and hygiene; maternal, newborn and child health; nutrition; and early childhood development for better health outcomes during the first 1,000 days of life, the coalition will produce programme guidance for implementers and specific metrics for integration. The coalition will encourage the formation of national BabyWASH platforms to take the programme guidance and implement it on the national level. By getting key national stakeholders to talk across the sector divide for programme implementation in the first 1,000 days of a child's life, the national platforms will allow for continued integration in other areas and lead to a more holistic approach overall in national strategies.

A national SDG council as integrator

Notwithstanding the comments above on the importance of a platform's external linkages and the merits of 'weak ties' to other entities, individual platforms will be limited in their ability to see and understand the whole of the national Agenda 2030 system (which may itself sit within a broader country development plan). Correspondingly, in many interviews much emphasis was placed on the importance of an integrating, apex body to sit over the top of the national Agenda 2030 system. (See Figure 3.)

There was strong agreement amongst interviewees that the creation and leadership of such a body – a National SDG Council (or similar body) – are roles of government. Several countries have had national MDG councils, and it is encouraging to note that some governments are now considering establishing national SDG councils or commissions (the actual titles of these bodies will vary).[40] For example, the Government of the Republic of Zambia (which is seeking to embed an integration approach into its development strategy) has a multi-stakeholder technical committee which will report to an inter-ministerial steering committee to oversee its SDG implementation.

A national SDG council, with its privileged vantage point across the breadth of the SDG landscape, was seen by interviewees as being able to provide not only strategic oversight but also an ability to identify the need for linkages across the different parts of the overall system.[41] In addition, national SDG councils might tailor a shared measurement system for all SDG platforms: 'Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported.'[42]

It is recommended that these national SDG councils seek to operate primarily in an influencing mode – rather than attempting 'command and control' – in recognition that they will be operating in a complex system in which partnerships and platforms cannot be completely controlled or planned (both will emerge organically in different ways). 'Tackling complex, systemic challenges is a distributed, adaptive process. Top-down, controlled, linear approaches do not work, because no single individual or organization has sufficient knowledge, resources, or authority over others in the system. Instead, the answers emerge as many different individuals and organizations experiment, learn, and adapt within parameters that are always changing as a result of one another's efforts.'[43]

Recommendations

For those establishing and/or leading national platforms

- Include integration as a key approach and identify necessary linkages to other parts of the Agenda 2030 system (especially any national SDG council) in the design of new platforms – and redesign of existing platforms.

- Establish linkages to global initiatives that can support platform operations with learning, technical support and resources.

For governments

- Ensure that an integration approach is defined and articulated in national policy and embedded in national development planning processes.

- If not already in place, consider creating an (inter-ministerial) national SDG council and provisioning it to ensure that implementation of the SDGs takes an integrated approach.

- Ensure that government is represented within platforms by ministries that can deliver an integrated response to the platform's work.

For civil society and business

- Advocate for integration approaches to be adopted by government, including in mandates of national SDG councils.

- Advocate for integration approaches to be adopted by platforms and engage with platforms to build this imperative into platforms' internal policies and external linkages.

For funding organisations

- Provide funding to support the scoping of new platforms, including landscaping assessments and integration assessments.

A World Vision child protection billboard in Cambodia
© 2012 Jon Warren/World Vision

4. How can platforms ensure that they deliver for the most vulnerable?

Why the most vulnerable?
The focus of the MDGs on global aggregates and 'one size fits all' global targets allowed many nation-states to meet their MDG targets without addressing the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. The SDGs promise a focus on the most vulnerable; indeed, paragraph 4 of Agenda 2030 states, 'We pledge that no one will be left behind. . . . And we will endeavour to reach *the furthest behind* first' (emphasis added). (See text box 'The most vulnerable children'.) If the SDGs are to be achieved, then, the financial, political and technical resources of the international community will have to be extended to the most vulnerable and reach those places and people who are still missing the benefits of broad-based growth.

The most vulnerable children
World Vision believes that the group that suffers most from the stark inequities in the world is children[44]. The *most vulnerable children* are defined by World Vision as those whose quality of life and ability to fulfil their potential is most limited by extreme deprivation and violation of their rights. These children often live in catastrophic situations and relationships characterised by violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion and discrimination. The most at risk are defined not only by depth of economic poverty but also typically include those living in remote rural locations or urban slums; those in highly vulnerable groups such as refugees, trafficking victims, child labourers, child soldiers, orphans and child-headed households; and/or those discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, caste and sometimes religion, language or other characteristics like disability. World Vision believes that the world's most vulnerable children should be at the heart of the implementation of Agenda 2030 at all levels – global, regional, national and local.

What needs to happen?
The overall sense from the people interviewed was that this need to include the most vulnerable has yet to become manifest in the design of national multi-stakeholder platforms. Through discussion with the interviewees, two recommendations emerged as 'first steps' in ensuring that this issue is addressed and that the most vulnerable are not missed by platforms that are working towards 'zero goals' as part of the SDGs. Both recommendations are important to 'get right' from the very beginning of a SDG platform's operation and are, therefore, timely notes for this stage of the Agenda 2030 process.

1. *Ensure that the most vulnerable are included in the platform's goals*

    For those stakeholders who were engaged in the work of the MDGs, there may be a need for a shift in mindset to establish firmly the most vulnerable as part of those being affected by the platform's interventions.

There is also likely to be a need – for established as well for new development players – for education on the specific characteristics and needs of the most vulnerable in the platform's context. This may require upfront investment, as there is often a lack of data on most vulnerable populations; those people who have been 'left behind' are often invisible (children whose births and deaths are never registered and individuals and communities who have no voice). However, such data will be critical not only to strategy and target setting, but also for monitoring and evaluation.

If they are to be successful, platforms and partnerships need to recognise that significant power asymmetries, and indeed abuse of power, are at the root of why many in society continue to live in situations of extreme vulnerability. This is an issue on which civil society organisations and faith communities (with their deep community presence) can work with government, the private sector and other partners to scope and design sustainable solutions. Power asymmetries will also be a factor in the platform itself, and one way to counter this is to invest in the capacity of participating organisations from *all* sectors such that they are fit to partner. 'The well-intentioned actor with power will consciously manage how it projects its power in order to respect the necessity for 'equity' – a key principle in establishing genuine partnership. However, organisations vary in their awareness, understanding and capacity to manage their own or their partners' use of power, and major problems arise when power asymmetry is abused, whether intentionally or otherwise.'[45]

2. *Relevant citizen groups (including the most vulnerable) should be engaged directly from the beginning*

Ensuring representation of the most vulnerable in the activities of the platform is another way to counteract power asymmetry, and CSOs can help with the design and monitoring of this, for example, by tracking the participation of the most vulnerable and the extent to which their voices are influencing the decisions being made. There was a clear desire from interviewees that these citizen voices should be heard *directly* in the platform ('in the room') rather than solely through an intermediary.

Although, increasingly, technology may have a role to play here in allowing virtual and therefore cheaper ways of attendance (see the case of HPPP in text box on page 7), there is a clear need to allocate proper funding to ensure that members of relevant citizen groups, including children,[46] are able to participate meaningfully in platforms. Budget will be needed not only to allow physical presence, but also (and critically) to build the capacity of these actors to engage as equal partners. (Lack of such funding remains a barrier to successful citizen empowerment in many countries.) One model that could be adapted for use by platforms is that of Citizen Hearings – used recently in the health sector. (See text box, 'Citizens' Hearings'.)

Citizens' Hearings

Starting in 2015, in preparation for the World Health Assembly, World Vision, International Planned Parenthood Federation, Save the Children and White Ribbon Alliance have worked with local and national partners to organise Citizens' Hearings in villages, districts and capital cities across Africa and Asia. These Citizens' Hearings have engaged tens of thousands of citizens on questions around priority setting and progress on women's, children's and adolescents' health. The Citizens' Hearings have been unique in bringing together a diverse set of stakeholders and in breaking down the barriers between them.

Citizens and CSOs have joined with journalists, parliamentarians, health professionals, faith leaders, civil servants and administrators, local leaders, health ministers, education ministers, foreign ministers and prime ministers to work together through a collaborative and open process on the way forward for women's, children's and adolescents' health. The Citizens' Hearings are organised to facilitate evidence-based, solution-oriented discussions as part of an open and collaborative dialogue amongst different stakeholders and have proved to be an important space for citizens and decision makers to identify collectively health-related priorities for the SDGs. These voices were amplified at the global level with a Global Citizens' Dialogue event held at the 68th World Health Assembly in Geneva, with representation from citizens, journalists, local and national governments.[47]

The role of business

Another question from interviewees was how the business sector – and market-based approaches – could best be engaged in a collaborative effort to reach the most vulnerable. In a previous research study by World Vision, looking at the role of business in this area,[48] there was strong support for affirming the importance of cross-sector partnerships – including those with business amongst its partners – in reaching and positively affecting development outcomes for the most vulnerable.

It should be acknowledged, however, that in the short term, *market-based*[49] cross-sector partnerships may only be viable at the *very* 'bottom of the pyramid' (for the most vulnerable living in fragile contexts[50]) if there is an element of subsidy to offset market entry/development costs. It is recommended, therefore, that companies (MNCs and large national companies in particular) take a holistic, portfolio view of their investments that ensures that these are collectively aligned in a way that maximises the benefits to the most vulnerable. (See text box, 'Business, partnerships, and the most vulnerable'.)

Business, partnerships and the most vulnerable

In order to maximise the impact of their development activities on the most vulnerable, companies are encouraged to consider the following:

- Increasing their investments in inclusive, sustainable business models, within market-based cross-sector partnerships, for the upper levels of the base of the pyramid (and above), with a medium-term view to facilitating the release of more government and donor funds to serve those at the lowest levels of the base of the pyramid.

- Focusing any philanthropic spending on those of the world's most vulnerable who live in fragile contexts and ensuring alignment with national strategies and coordinating mechanisms (such as SDG councils – see Section 3) so as to support donor harmonisation and the capture of scale benefits.

- In fragile contexts and working within cross-sector partnerships (1) increasing their investment in infrastructure projects that benefit the poorest, (2) increasing investment in capacity-building interventions that strengthen civil society, local business and governments to meet the needs of the most vulnerable citizens, including children, and (3) using their influence to advocate for pro-poor government policies and practices – as well as acting as role models in their own behaviour.

In addition, all stakeholders should note that any failure to Do No Harm can be particularly damaging to the poorest and most disenfranchised in societies.[51]

Recommendations

For those establishing and/or leading national platforms

- Ensure that the most vulnerable are included in the platform's goals and that budget is allocated (if needed) for a data-rich analysis of the characteristics and needs of this group.

- Ensure that relevant citizen groups (including the most vulnerable) are engaged directly from the beginning of the platform process and that budget is allocated for this purpose.

- Ensure that the platform explores the variety (portfolio) of different ways that business can contribute to reaching the most vulnerable, even in fragile contexts.

For civil society

- Seek opportunities to join cross-sector partnerships that have the potential to serve the most vulnerable.

- Ensure the effective direct representation and participation of the most vulnerable in multi-stakeholder platforms.

For civil society and business

- Advocate for a focus on the most vulnerable to be adopted and built into platform policy.

For funding organisations

- Ensure that funding to platforms includes (1) provision for direct engagement of citizens and (2) effective representation from civil society.

Refugees from Syria arriving at the Croatian border
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5. How can overlaps and duplication of new platforms be avoided?

What's happening now?
After several years of global-level process and negotiations towards Agenda 2030, SDG implementation brings a welcome focus to the national level. This section reflects on discussions with interviewees on current trends in platform building at the national level and the context into which these new structures are being established. Such platforms, in a variety of forms, are currently emerging from different stakeholder groups as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Emerging platforms

Platforms emerging from . . .	Examples
Government	Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) is a country-led movement which continues to establish multi-stakeholder country platforms including civil society and increasingly the business sector.[52]
Business sector	The Partnering Initiative, through <u>Business Partnership Action</u>, is active in initiating 'hubs' to systematically catalyse partnership, for example, in Colombia[53] (see text box, 'Colombia platform – Landscaping process') and Zambia.[54]
Civil society	The Children Agenda Forum of Kenya[55] has emerged from civil society to focus on the achievement of the SDGs for children. It is increasingly engaging county and national government and the private sector on this focus.
United Nations	The UNDP, the Foundation Center and a Collaboration Committee guided and supported by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors is initiating 'philanthropy platforms' in Kenya, Colombia, Indonesia and Ghana with the intent to host multi-stakeholder policy dialogue and create systematic entry points for collaboration.[56]
Multi-stakeholder platforms	PMNCH, which comprises eight constituencies,[57] includes under its first strategic objective ('prioritise engagement in countries') to 'strengthen multi-stakeholder platform and processes'.[58]

Global platforms

Interviewees in the health area commented on the fact that several global initiatives are currently seeking to establish new country-level platforms. For example, Global Financing Facility and the PMNCH (amongst others) are initiating multi-stakeholder platforms at the national level.[59] Whilst this increased emphasis on the national level is welcome, it is recommended that (a) global initiatives, recognising they typically have considerable power and resources, ensure that they adhere to the Busan principle of 'country ownership', including locating their national platforms within a country's SDG plan, and (b) that governments, global initiatives and all relevant stakeholders work together at the beginning of planning for establishing national versions of existing global platforms. Collaborations between global health initiatives, such as the recent establishment of the Alliance of Alliances, may be a useful contribution to this task.

Establishing effective, two-way linkages between global and national levels is of critical importance for:

- enabling valuable insights and knowledge from national and subnational implementation to inform (and be informed by) regional and global frameworks, standard setting, policy and advocacy

- supporting practitioner learning through access to good practice, knowledge and experience of others

- enabling access to financial (whether donor funding or other forms of investment) and other resources, including technical support.

Currently, vertical integration is limited in many cases to a single issue (Figure 4a). Increasingly, however, these vertical integrating linkages need to reflect the more integrated and multi-sectoral nature of national platforms, as discussed in Section 3 above. (See also Figure 4b.)
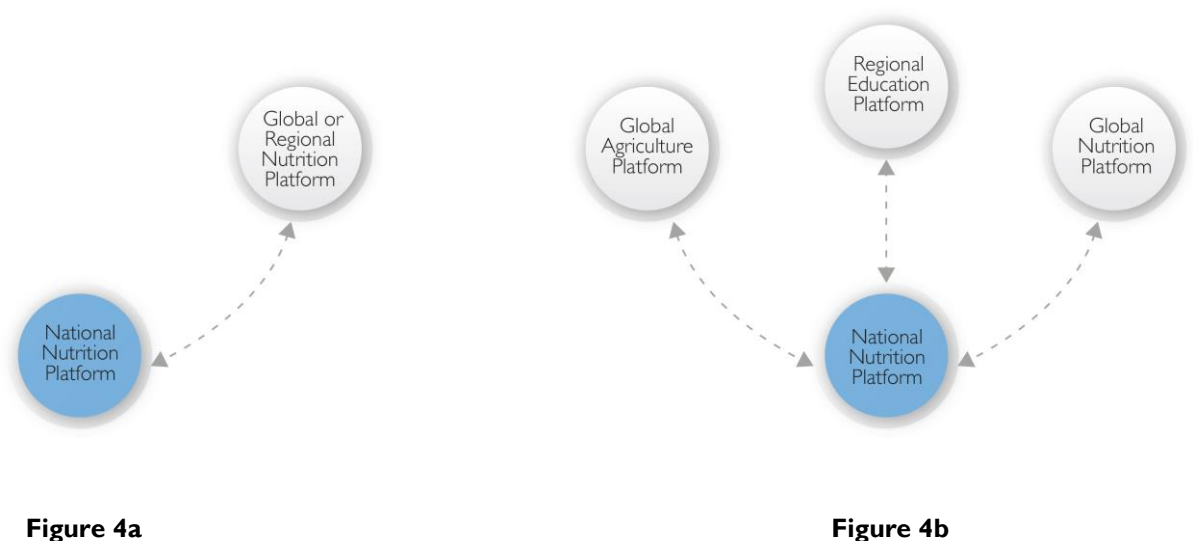

Figure 4a   **Figure 4b**

Figure 4a and 4b: Linkages between global and national platforms

New national platforms

When considering establishing a *new* national-level platform, it is important to understand the landscape of *existing* partnering structures and systems in-country. Interviewees believe it is imperative to avoid duplication of initiatives – with attendant delays and inefficient use of resources – but rather to build on existing structures and systems as far as possible.

Working with existing platforms is likely to reduce start-up costs, for example, by virtue of existing networks, established relationships and proven track record in delivering value. Of course, any existing infrastructure may not be ideal in design: it may not embody a multi-stakeholder perspective or be designed with an integration imperative in mind; it may or may not have strong national ownership; it may have been set up in a 'top-down' manner (from the global level); and/or it may lack engagement. These limitations do not necessarily mean, however, that there is always a need to start all over again from scratch. Significant overlaps and duplications will not serve anyone's interests, particularly if platforms end up competing to engage key stakeholders.

'I must tell you that if you create parallel structures to achieve a certain objective, either the structure will not be sustainable or it will not operate. We must strengthen existing structure rather than put in place new.'

– Government of Uganda Representative

'Join? adapt? build?'

It is recommended that those considering establishing a national platform ask themselves three sequential questions (illustrated in Figure 5 below): Should we join? Should we adapt? Should we build? The decision to *build* a new platform should not be taken before the options to 'join' and 'adapt' have been explored (recognising that joining or adapting existing platforms is dependent on the agreement of the incumbent leadership of those platforms). The global initiatives in the health sector, mentioned above, have stated their intention to build new platforms only if no existing platform can be adapted.

Figure 5: 'Join? Adapt? Build?' framework

In coming to a decision on the options of 'join, adapt, build', decision makers should map the current landscape with respect to partnerships and platforms around their issue focus. In addition, given the points raised by interviewees and explored in this paper, it is recommended that decision makers in relation to platforms establish criteria that assess any existing structures against the key themes of leadership, integration and focus on the most vulnerable. Furthermore, World Vision and The Partnering Initiative recommend that *existing* platforms review their design and operations along these same themes as well.

Colombia platform – Landscaping process

As part of the design process for Business Partnership Action's Colombia platform, a scoping exercise was performed in 2013 which included a stakeholder analysis of potential partners of the platform, partnering activity in-country, an exploration of the interests of key actors, and development of an operational plan and proposed governance structure. The scoping process provided key insights into a relatively complex partnering system in Colombia. For example, a rich array of cross-sector partnerships was identified as well as a significant number of related initiatives. However, low levels of trust amongst all sectors were reported, as was a lack of both connections between partnering initiatives and spaces for innovative collective action. As a result of these, and many other findings, the prospective platform's 'position' in relation to existing partnering-related structures was located and a key role identified: 'The diversity of initiatives and stakeholders involved confirm the need to provide an open and neutral dialogue space, where all actors can effectively get engaged and identify how best to collaborate around a specific issue, promoting scalability and avoiding inefficient replication of partnering efforts.'[60]

Recommendations

For those establishing and/or leading national platforms
- For new platform initiatives, ensure that a thorough mapping/landscape assessment of existing in-country structures and systems related to the platform's focus is performed so that the platform design builds on and/or leverages these connections effectively and informs 'join? adapt? build?' decision-making.

- For new platform initiatives, agree locally to a set of context-sensitive dimensions and associated criteria to guide 'join? adapt? build?' decision-making.

For governments
- Engage with global initiatives (and all relevant stakeholders) seeking to create country-level platforms at the start of the scoping stage in order to avoid overlaps and/or duplication with existing structures and take into account 'join? adapt? build?' decision-making.

For funding organisations

- Provide funding for new platforms to enable a thorough mapping of existing in-country structures and systems to inform 'join? adapt? build?' decision-making.

For global initiatives

- When considering creating a platform at the country level, (a) reflect the Busan principle of 'country ownership' in all aspects, including clearly locating the platform's contribution within a country's SDG plan; (b) engage with the national government, and all relevant stakeholders, at the beginning of the planning process and (c) engage with other (global or regional) initiatives that are also creating national structures in the same countries to avoid duplication and unnecessary overlaps.

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6. Making it happen: The call for champions

It is important to remember that this multi-stakeholder way of working is still relatively new. To make it happen at scale requires leadership; it was noted by many interviewees that both individuals and organisations are needed to act as champions for this new vision and to encourage others to come to the table.[61]

Systems thinking reminds us that simply adopting a top-down approach is unlikely to be either appropriate or effective, so these champions are needed at all levels – not just CEOs and government ministers – all operating within their own spheres of influence. For example, one theme emerging from the interviews was a challenge to civil society to increase its readiness to partner in addition to its readiness to call others to account; champions for change at all levels of civil society will be needed to persuade colleagues to move in this direction.

In the area of multi-stakeholder platforms for Agenda 2030, this is a critical time to maintain momentum. Many individuals and organisations are already acting as champions in this space, but more are needed, particularly at the national level. These are people who are able to take a big-picture, systems view of their environment, who want to work collaboratively with others outside of their immediate organisational community, and who see the potential for innovation in the collective contributions of different types of organisation and sectors. Typically, they will be people with effective personal networks who are willing to invest in engaging others for the common good (as well as for their own organisation's good) and who are able to inspire action in key stakeholders.

The platform approach is not yet embedded in Agenda 2030 systems. Champions, whether in a government ministry, a business organisation or a CSO, can be the ones to spot the need, develop the vision and engage interested others to drive a platform forward. This organic approach, where platforms emerge out of energy and coalescence, is what one might expect in system dynamics and may in fact prove to be a highly effective way to accelerate progress.

In relation to the recommendations in this paper, World Vision and The Partnering Initiative call for champions to take up the following (in particular):

- *On platform leadership:* to educate others on the importance of shared leadership, to hold any shared-leadership structures to account on balance of power issues, and to identify and engage champions in other stakeholder groups in this effort.

- *On the integration imperative:* to ensure that platforms are not siloed in their design or their thinking; to take the lead in establishing a systems view of a platform's environment; and to ensure that the necessary

external linkages are made to the rest of the system, including to other platforms.

- *On delivering for the most vulnerable:* to ensure that the most vulnerable are 'at the platform table' from the beginning and that they have the rights and resources needed to engage meaningfully in the platform; and to press for new and innovative thinking on how the needs of the most vulnerable can be met, including through the contribution of business.

- *On new platforms:* to encourage the use of the 'join? adapt? build?' decision-making process but drive for the establishment of new platforms where they are needed.

Are you a champion?
Business Partnership Action is creating a Platform Leadership Network to connect and support champions implementing national multi-stakeholder platforms in support of Agenda 2030. The Network will have both a learning and an advocacy agenda. First, it will enable the sharing of information and experiences, tackling challenges collectively and designing solutions to benefit the wider platform community. It will enable champions to share existing resources, develop joint new tools for specific purposes, develop case studies and define best practice for partnership platforms. Second, the Network will have an advocacy role, encouraging governments to support the concept of platforms more widely as a key mechanism for increasing the scale and effectiveness of development partnerships. By demonstrating the success of partnership platforms the Network will encourage further investment to support new platform initiatives.
http://thepartneringinitiative.org/global-impact/business-partnership-action/

7. Recommendations

In support of the implementation of Agenda 2030 at the country level, and in particular for the effective contribution of national platforms, the following is a collection of all the recommendations made by World Vision and The Partnering Initiative in the proceeding sections:

For those establishing and/or leading national platforms

- Include integration as a key approach and identify necessary linkages to other parts of the Agenda 2030 system (especially any national SDG council) in the design of new platforms – and redesign of existing platforms.

- Establish linkages to global initiatives that can support platform operations with learning, technical support and resources.

- Review the makeup and balance of platform leadership with a view to adopting or improving a shared-leadership approach together with a central role for government.

- Ensure that emerging good policy and practice regarding management approaches to conflicts of interest and power asymmetry are incorporated into the platform's policy and procedures.

- For new platform initiatives, ensure that a thorough mapping/landscape assessment of existing in-country structures and systems related to the platform's focus is performed so that the platform design builds on and/or leverages these connections effectively and informs 'join? adapt? build?' decision-making.

- For new platform initiatives, agree locally to a set of context-sensitive dimensions and associated criteria to guide 'join? adapt? build?' decision-making.

- Ensure that the most vulnerable are included in the platform's goals and that budget is allocated (if needed) for a data-rich analysis of the characteristics and needs of this group.

- Ensure that relevant citizen groups (including the most vulnerable) are engaged directly from the beginning of the platform process and that budget is allocated for this purpose.

- Ensure that the platform explores the variety (portfolio) of different ways that business can contribute to reaching the most vulnerable, even in fragile contexts.

For governments

- Within national policy and the national development planning process, if not already in place, (1) recognise business and civil society (as well as donors and multi-laterals) as partners in development and development planning; (2) include multi-stakeholder collaboration as a key means of implementation; and (3) trigger processes to explore the demand and

need for national multi-stakeholder platforms (to catalyse collaboration) to support SDG implementation.

- Review relationships with existing and new (and in-the-pipeline) platforms with a view to strengthening engagement and ensuring that government is able to fulfil its role within shared platform leadership.

- Ensure that an integration approach is defined and articulated in national policy and embedded in national development planning processes.

- If not already in place, consider creating an (inter-ministerial) national SDG council and provisioning it to ensure that implementation of the SDGs takes an integrated approach.

- Ensure that government is represented within platforms by the ministries that can deliver an integrated response to the platform's work.

- Engage with global initiatives (and all relevant stakeholders) seeking to create country-level platforms at the start of the scoping stage in order to avoid overlaps and/or duplication with existing structures and take into account 'join? adapt? build?' decision-making.

For civil society

- Seek opportunities to join cross-sector partnerships that have the potential to serve the most vulnerable.

- Ensure the effective direct representation and participation of the most vulnerable in multi-stakeholder platforms.

For civil society and business
- Advocate for new platforms to adopt, and existing platforms to transition to, a shared leadership approach with a central role for government.

- Advocate for integration approaches to be adopted by government, including in the mandates of national SDG councils.

- Advocate for integration approaches to be adopted by platforms, and engage with platforms to build this imperative into platforms' internal policies and external linkages.

- Advocate for a focus on the most vulnerable to be adopted and built into platform policy.

For funding organisations
- Provide funding to support the scoping of new platforms, including landscaping assessments and integration assessments.

- Provide funding for new platforms to enable a thorough mapping of existing in-country structures and systems to inform 'join? adapt? build?' decision-making.

- Ensure that funding to platforms includes (1) provision for direct engagement of citizens and (2) effective representation from civil society.

For the United Nations
- Support governments in the adoption of multi-stakeholder processes and explore convening roles for themselves in establishing national-level platforms.

For global initiatives
- When considering creating a platform at the country level, (a) reflect the Busan principle of 'country ownership' in all aspects, including clearly locating the platform's contribution within a country's SDG plan; (b) engage with the national government and all relevant stakeholders at the beginning of the planning process; and (c) engage with other (global or regional) initiatives that are also creating national structures in the same countries to avoid duplication and unnecessary overlaps.

For all stakeholder groups
- Identify and support champions from all sectors to become ambassadors for multi-stakeholder platforms and partnerships.

- Invest in organisational capacity to be 'fit to partner' – including having the necessary capacity to mitigate power asymmetry.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, the recommendations made throughout this paper are those of World Vision and The Partnership Initiative and do not necessarily represent the views of the individuals or organisations interviewed for this study.

Displaced children at a World Vision Child Friendly Space, Philippines
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Appendix 1: A summary of other recommendations from previous work by World Vision and The Partnering Initiative

The following are additional recommendations based on previous work by World Vision and The Partnering Initiative (not drawn directly from this study).

Recommendations for governments

- Raise awareness across ministries of the role of multi-stakeholder implementation and platforms; champion the importance of platforms and cross-sector partnerships.

- Make strong, public commitment to building a platform for partnership in line with the recommendations from the scoping stage; appoint an appropriate minister to be the government lead for the platform.

- In a participatory process, engage key stakeholders and obtain commitment on clear focus, vision and objectives for the platform that can be easily understood and have relevance to all sectors of society.

- Secure the funding required to build the platform and allocate sufficient support from government personnel with experience in cross-sector engagement, as well as the necessary political leadership.

Recommendations for businesses

- Advocate for the development of national policy and a multi-stakeholder development planning process as outlined under 'Recommendations for governments' in Section 7 and for transparent rules of engagement for multi-stakeholder dialogue, policy development and collaboration.

- Demonstrate a long-term commitment to contribute to national development priorities and advocate that other businesses do the same (for example, by demonstrating the benefits of investing in alignment with national development policies and with the SDGs more broadly).

- Ensure that the perspectives of small, medium-sized and national companies – in addition to those of MNCs – are represented throughout the scoping and building stages (for example, through business associations).

- Respect universal principles on labour, environment, anti-corruption and human rights as articulated in international agreements, including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Recommendations for civil society

- Advocate for the development of national policy and a multi-stakeholder development planning process as outlined under 'Recommendations for governments' in Section 7 and for transparent rules of engagement for multi-stakeholder dialogue, policy development and collaboration.

- Engage with the platform and promote it widely to generate visibility and drive demand for accountability and impact; explore being part of multi-stakeholder partnerships associated with the platform.

- Advocate for the platform to espouse and embody clear collaborative values (such as equity and transparency).

- Support the adoption of a common accountability framework which includes monitoring and evaluation of the platform itself, the partnerships it brokers or supports, and the overall contribution to development goals; leverage the use of social accountability tools to strengthen government-citizen accountability.

Recommendations for the United Nations

- Identify in-country roles which the United Nations is well placed to offer in support of the scoping stage, including convening/facilitation, provision of technical support, funding and enabling South-South cooperation.

- Facilitate and ensure support from global initiatives or other allied platforms in different geographies to provide expertise and access to resources, learning and international or regional advocacy opportunities.

- Actively explore roles for the United Nations, including external support of the platform, roles within the governance or management team and active roles for UN entities within partnerships which the platform supports and/or brokers.

Recommendations for funding organisations

- Provide core funding for the platform for two to four years in order to enable recruitment of high-calibre administrative and management functions to enable platform stability and sufficient time for value to be demonstrated to all parties.

- Provide technical support and/or enable South-South cooperation (for example, peer-to-peer learning) on a demand-led basis to build the capacity of in-country platforms.

- Provide funds to enable effective participation of CSOs (including representation processes) with platforms.

Appendix 2: List of governments, businesses, organisations and networks interviewed for this study

World Vision and The Partnering Initiative would like to thank the following for their generous and insightful inputs to this study.

Governments, businesses, organisations and networks:
Anglo American
Association of Southeast Asian Nations Secretariat
Beyond2015
Business Fights Poverty
Colombia Business in Development Facility
Deutsche *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*
Global Financing Facility
Government of Canada
Government of the Netherlands
Government of the Republic of Zambia
Government of the United Kingdom
Government of Uganda
Graça Machel Trust
International Chamber of Commerce
MDG Health Alliance
Natural Resources Defense Council
Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
Philippines Disaster Resilience Foundation
Philips
Scaling Up Nutrition Business Network
UN Foundation
United Nations Development Programme
United Nations Global Compact
World Business Council for Sustainable Development
World Economic Forum
Zambia Business in Development Facility

World Vision
In addition to interviews with technical leaders of sixteen functional areas across World Vision International, the following World Vision country offices were also interviewed: Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Georgia, Germany, Kenya, Mexico, Netherlands, Philippines, South Caucasus, Uganda, United Kingdom, and Zambia.

Endnotes

[1] United Nations (2015), *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E>

[2] United Nations, *Transforming Our World*, 2.

[3] United Nations, *Transforming Our World*, 3. See also United Nations Development Group (2015), *Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Interim Reference Guide to UN Country Teams* (7 October 2015), 22–30. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/sustainable-development-goals/mainstreaming-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development.html>

[4] It is interesting that the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit appears likely to emphasise the increasing need for multi-stakeholder approaches.

[5] World Vision International (2015), *Advancing the Debate: Cross-sector Partnerships, Business and the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, Post-2015 Agenda Policy Paper, 2–3. http://www.wvi.org/united-nations-and-global-engagement/publication/advancing-debate-cross-sector-partnerships-business. See also D. Prescott and D. T. Stibbe (2014), *Unleashing the Power of Business: A Practical Roadmap to Systematically Engage Business as a Partner in Development*, The Partnering Initiative, 16. <http://thepartneringinitiative.org/w/wp-content/uploads/201>

[6] We welcome the contribution to greater clarity provided recently by the UNGA Resolution 'Towards Global Partnerships: A Principle-Based Approach to Enhanced Cooperation between the United Nations and All Relevant Partners', A/RES/70/224 para. 15. < http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/224>

[7] D. Prescott and D. Stibbe (2016), 'Partnering for the SDGs: Building Up the System of Support to Help Mainstream Collaboration for Sustainable Development' (forthcoming).

[8] Building capacity to be fit to partner is a critical activity which will contribute to a increased quality and quantity of collaborative action. The Partnering Initiative has a long track record in providing high-quality resources and training. Within World Vision approximately 2,000 frontline staff members are working in a programme to build and strengthen their capacity for partnering and brokering collaborations.

[9] Platform participants typically benefit from 'backbone support' functions. FSG has written extensively about how critical backbone support is if multi-stakeholder partnering and collaboration are to be successful. FSG defines such backbone support as 'dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly'. J. Kania and M. Kramer (2011) 'Collective Impact' *Stanford Social Innovation Review* [SSIR] (Winter 2011). <http://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)>

[10] The Partnering Initiative's Business Partnership Action Programme (http://thepartneringinitiative.org/global-impact/business-partnership-action/) helps to build locally owned and run platforms for partnership while also drawing out good practice from a network of platforms worldwide to codify and mature platforms as an essential mechanism to support the SDGs.

[11] S. Reid, J. Hayes and D. Stibbe (2014), *Platforms for Partnership: Emerging Good Practice to Systematically Engage Business as a Partner In Development*, The Partnering Initiative. < http://www.thepartneringinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/PLATFORMStealcoverallpages.pdf>

[12] The life-cycle stages are scoping, building, implementing and consolidating.

[13] The nine building blocks are business model, governance, operational structure, communication strategy, value-added services, core competencies, membership engagement, monitoring and evaluation, and partnership culture.

[14] Prescott and Stibbe, *Unleashing the Power of Business*; World Vision International (2014), *Getting Intentional: Cross-Sector Partnerships, Business, and the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, Post-2015 Agenda Policy Paper. <http://www.wvi.org/united-nations-and-global-engagement/publication/getting-intentional-cross-sector-partnerships-0 4/05/Fullreport.pdf>

[15] OECD (2011), *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/49650173.pdf>

[16] For more on accountability on platforms and partnerships, see Appendix 1; See also World Vision (2015), *Getting Intentional*, 9–15; and World Vision (2015), *Advancing the Debate*, 14–16.

[17] See, for example, SustainAbility (2016), *Orchestrating Change: Catalyzing the Next Generation of Multi-Stakeholder: Collaboration for Sustainability*. <http://www.sustainability.com/library/orchestrating-change#.VvzaAHrcRH4>

[18] 'Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots . . . for seeing the "structures" that underlie complex situations, and for discerning high versus low leverage change' (Peter M. Senge (2010), *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, rev. and updated ed. [New York: Crown, 2010], 68 & 69). See also the following two papers published on the subject of systems leadership: J. Nelson and B. Jenkins (2016), *Tackling Global Challenges: Lessons in System Leadership from the World Economic Forum's New Vision for Agriculture Initiative* (Cambridge, MA: CSR Initiative, Harvard Kennedy School, 2016); and Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton, and John Kania (2015), 'The Dawn of System Leadership', *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

[19] Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton and John Kania (2015), 'The Dawn of System Leadership', *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

[20] P. Morgan (2005), 'The idea and practice of systems thinking and their relevance for capacity development, ECDPM, '. <http://ecdpm.org/publications/idea-practice-systems-thinking-relevance-capacity-development/>

[21] For example, Every Woman Every Child, Global Partnership for Education, Sustainable Energy for All.

[22] Reid, Hayes and Stibbe, *Platforms for Partnership*, 8–9.

[23] Business Fights Poverty and the Harvard Kennedy School CSRI (2015), *Business and the United Nations: Working together towards the sustainable development goals: a framework for Action*, 19. <http://www.sdgfund.org/sites/default/files/business-and-un/SDGF_BFP_HKSCSRI_Business_and_SDGs-Web_Version.pdf>

[24] The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement describes conflict of interest as arising 'when the pursuit of the private or secondary interests of the organization has the effect of compromising, interfering with, or taking precedence over the joint endeavour', *Engaging in the SUN Movement: Preventing and Managing Conflicts of Interest*, Executive Summary (Geneva: Global Social Observatory, January 2015), 2. <http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Executive-Summary-English.pdf>

25 Global Social Observatory (2015), Engaging in the SUN Movement: Preventing and Managing Conflicts of Interest – Reference Note and Toolkit. <http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Reference-Note-and-Toolkit-English.pdf>

26 United Nations, *Transforming Our World*, 1.

27 Senge, Hamilton and Kania, 'The Dawn of System Leadership'.

28 United Nations (2013), *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*, The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. <http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf>; UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (2014), 'Concept Note: Joint Event of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, "The Role of Partnerships in the Implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda"', 9–10 April. <http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/pdf/sts/Concept_Note_Role_of_Partnerships.pdf>; OECD (2014), *Effective Development Co-Operation: An Important Enabler in a Post-2015 Global Development Framework*, OECD Post-2015 Reflections, Element 10, Paper 1. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/FINAL%20POST-2015%20Effective%20Development%20Co-operation.pdf>

29 United Nations, *Transforming Our World*, 1.

30 In this paper *integrated* encompasses the ideas of multi-level (geographical levels and immediate 'ecology'), multi-dimensional (different types of influence and interdependency), multi-sectoral (covering more than one development sector – health, education, agriculture) and multi-stakeholder – the need to involve actors from different sectors of society (primarily government, civil, society, and the private sector) – which together map the development system of interest. See also: <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/pdfs/an_integrated_approach_to_rural_development.pdf>

31 World Vision (2011), *A Systems Approach to Child Protection*, Discussion Paper. <http://wvi.org/child-protection/publication/systems-approach-child-protection>

32 "Adapted from J. Reichnberg, Child Protection System presentation, UNICEF (2005)

33 United Nations Development Group, *Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 44–52.

34 David Le Blanc (2015), *Towards Integration at Last? The Sustainable Development Goals as a Network of Targets*, DESA Working Paper No. 141. <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/working-papers/working-papers-2015.html>

35 For more information, see http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/events/2015/unga/en/.

36 Scaling Up Nutrition (2014), 'Effectively Engaging Multiple Stakeholders', *Scaling Up Nutrition: In Practice* (February). <http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Sun-in-Practice-issue-1.pdf>

37 Stockholm Environment Institute (2014), *Cross-Sectoral Integration in the Sustainable Development Goals: A Nexus Approach*, Discussion Brief. <https://www.sei-international.org/mediamanager/documents/Publications/Air-land-water-resources/SEI-DB-2014-Nexus-SDGs-integration.pdf>

38 UNICEF (n.d.), *Multi-sectoral Approaches to Nutrition: Nutrition-Specific and Nutrition-Sensitive Interventions to Accelerate Progress*.<http://www.unicef.org/eu/files/101322_000_Unicef_Brief_NutritionOverview_A4_v1r15.pdf>

39 Embedding an integrated approach into how platforms and partnerships operate will require funding, for example, through 'systems grant-making' approaches. See Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and Management Assistance Group (2016), *Systems Grantmaking: Resource Guide*. <http://www.geofunders.org/resource-library/all/record/a066000000KkYmsAAF>

40 Beyond 2015 (2015), *A Commitment towards Implementation? A Review of Statements Delivered during the UN Sustainable Development Summit – 25–27 September 2015* (October 2015). <http://www.beyond2015.org/sites/default/files/Commitment%20to%20Implementation%20%20Review%20of%20Statements%20-%20UN%20Summit.pdf>

41 M. Beisheim and S. Nils (2016), 'Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Implementing the 2030 Agenda: Improving Accountability and Transparency', analytical paper for the 2016 ECOSOC Partnership Forum – 11 March 2016. <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/2016doc/partnership-forum-beisheim-simon.pdf>

42 J. Kania and M. Kramer, 'Collective Impact'.

43 Nelson and Jenkins, *Tackling Global Challenges*, 7.

44 World Vision International (2013), Post-2015 Policy Paper, *Reaching the Most Vulnerable Children through Addressing Inequalities*. <http://www.wvi.org/http%3A//wvi.org/beta.wvi.org/justiceforchildren/post2015policy3>

45 World Vision, *Advancing the Debate*, 8.

46 World Vision strongly supports children's right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. For more information, see World Vision (2014), *Children as Partners in Development*, The Post-2015 Agenda: Policy Brief #2. <http://wvi.org/sites/default/files/Post-2015%20Policy%20Brief%202_Child%20participation.pdf>

47 Richard Horton (2015), 'Offline: An Irreversible Change in Global Health Governance', *The Lancet* 385/9983 (30 May 2015). <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60997-7/fulltext?rss=yes>

48 World Vision International (2014), *Reaching the Unreached: Cross-Sector Partnerships, Business and the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, Post-2015 Agenda Policy Paper. <http://www.wvi.org/united-nations-andglobal-engagement/publication/reaching-unreached-cross-sector-partnerships>

49 Where 'market-based' is broadly understood as the ability to achieve profitability within approximately three years.

50 Fragile contexts are those where a government cannot or will not act on its responsibility to protect and fulfil the rights of the majority of the population, particularly the poor. These responsibilities include territorial control, security, public resource management, service delivery and livelihood support. Conflict, violence and disaster have severe effects on economic growth, and so the most affected fragile contexts have growing levels of extreme poverty, which is counter to the trend in most low-income countries.

51 These social responsibilities (of companies) include careful mitigation of the particular risks associated with interventions in fragile contexts; respecting universal human rights (regardless of country context), including those of the child; complying with both domestic legislation and international standards, such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the UN Global Compact's ten principles; taking responsibility for practice within their supply chains, including addressing child labour issues; committing to transparency and anti-corruption practices, including making full and proper payments of tax and not employing tax-avoidance measures; continuously earning their 'social licence to operate' (and not 'buying' it or 'taking' it); taking a 'sustainability' view of their operations and investments in a country, including proper reporting; and providing employment and skills development for the local workforce.

[52] Scaling Up Nutrition, 'Effectively Engaging Multiple Stakeholders'.

[53] Reid, Hayes and Stibbe, *Platforms for Partnership*, 17, 38.

[54] Reid, Hayes and Stibbe, *Platforms for Partnership*; For more information see also <http://zbidf.org/>

[55] For more information see: <http://childrenagendaforum.org/>

[56] For more information, see Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, 'SDG Philanthropy Platform'. <http://rockpa.org/about-us-sponsored-projects-post-2015-partnership-platform-for-philanthropy>

[57] PMNCH's eight constituencies are: health-care professional associations; academic, research and training institutions; donors and foundations; NGOs; private sector; multilateral agencies/international organisations; partner countries; and adolescents and youth.

[58] PMNCH (2015), *The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health in support of Every Woman Every Child: Strategic Plan, 2016-2020.* <http://www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/pmnch_strategic_plan_2016_2020.pdf?ua=1>

[59] PMNCH, *The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health in support of Every Woman Every Child;* 'Global Financing Facility in Support of Every Woman Every Child, Business Plan, June 2015'; Scaling Up Nutrition, 'Effectively Engaging Multiple Stakeholders'.

[60] The Partnering Initiative (2013), 'Creating the Business in Development Facility for Colombia: Scoping Mission Report for Stakeholder Analysis and Host Identification Process'.

[61] Nelson and Jenkins, *Tackling Global Challenges*; World Economic Forum (2016), *Building Partnerships for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security: A Guide to Country-Led Action*; Reid, Hayes and Stibbe, *Platforms for Partnership*.

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