



Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs



**PARTNERSHIP  
ACCELERATOR  
2030 AGENDA**  
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



# Partnership support platforms for the SDGs

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## LEARNING FROM PRACTICE

Dave Prescott and Darian Stibbe

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**The Partnering Initiative**

106-108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JE, United Kingdom  
England and Wales Charity no: 1154259  
UK-registered Company no: 08528402

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As part of an earlier project exploring the 'ecosystem of support' for partnerships, TPI undertook a mapping of organisations that are undertaking work to conceptualise and guide the development of similar structures to in-country partnership platforms. We acknowledge the complementary and innovative work done by organisations including UNDP, the World Economic Forum, Collective Leadership Institute, Wasafiri, 4SD, Network Impact, Centre for Development Innovation (Wageningen University) and Global Development Incubator, as well as Harvard CSRI and FSG's work on systems leadership.

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# Introduction

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## About this report

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The 2030 Agenda is built on a fundamental shift in approach to international development: engaging the unique roles and resources of all sectors of society and requiring extensive collaboration across sectors to achieve its ambitious goals. 'Partnership platforms' are important mechanisms to convene stakeholders around key development or business sustainability issues, and to systematically catalyse partnerships for the SDGs.

This report has been produced for decision-makers and their advisors within governments and the UN system who are looking to more systematically drive partnerships for the SDGs, potentially through national-level, multi-stakeholder partnership platforms for the SDGs. Secretariats of global multi-stakeholder partnerships which have an aspiration of country-level action and engagement may also find the report useful in thinking through what is needed to support in-country platforms. The report may also be of interest to those who are leading, coordinating and managing these platforms.

National multi-stakeholder 'partnership platforms' are being developed around the world, and appear to have great potential to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. However, the term is used in a wide variety of ways to reflect a range of forms, structures and mechanisms. And despite the large overall number of such entities, there is a relatively small number of platforms that have been operating over a sufficient period of time, with sufficient evidence of impact, to be able to draw out lessons about what makes them effective. This makes it hard to learn from the hard-won experience of those few pioneers that have achieved breakthrough impacts.

This report attempts to respond to these challenges in the following ways:

- Presenting a basic partnership platform **typology**, to help provide a shared basis for knowledge and experience exchange;
- Providing a **brief review** of experience of different types of platforms using existing public evaluations, toolkits and reviews; also drawing on TPI's own direct experience of supporting the development of these platforms; and
- Presenting a set of **characteristics** of a transformative partnership platform, based on examples drawn from existing practice.

## The Partnership Accelerator for the 2030 Agenda

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The Partnership Accelerator is a collaborative programme of the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and The Partnering Initiative, in collaboration with United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD), United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP), UN Global Compact, UN Development Coordination Office. Its aim is to support the development of a thriving eco-system that will accelerate and scale up effective partnerships in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The objectives of the Partnership Accelerator include:

- Supporting effective country-driven partnership platforms for SDGs: Research on good practice, and direct support of multi-stakeholder partnership platforms and mechanisms for engaging business and other stakeholders, and catalyzing partnerships for the SDGs at national level. The Accelerator will develop guidance and tools, as well as to assist governments and the UN system to create new platforms..
- Building partnership skills and competencies: Building the capacity of relevant stakeholders to develop and implement partnerships for the SDGs, and to support organizations to develop their institutional competency to partners: their policy and strategy, systems and processes, legal agreements, staff skills and support and culture to develop effective collaboration.

## About UN DESA

UN DESA is a vital interface between global policies and national action in the economic, social and environmental spheres. Rooted in the United Nations Charter and guided by the universal and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other global agreements, UN DESA responds to the needs and priorities of the global community.

The Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of UN DESA act as the Secretariat for SDGs, focusing on providing substantive support and capacity building to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their related thematic issues, including water, energy, climate, ocean, urbanization, transport, science and technology, the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), partnerships and SIDS.

The United Nations Office on Sustainable Development (UNOSD), a part of Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of UN DESA, supports UN Member States in planning and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, through knowledge sharing, research and advisory services, capacity building and partnerships.

## The Partnering Initiative and platforms for partnership

Founded in 2003, TPI is a global pioneer in the theory and practice of multi-stakeholder partnerships for development. Its mission is to unleash the power of business, and of multi-stakeholder partnerships, to deliver sustainable development at unprecedented scale.



TPI's theory of change is based on an integrated, system approach, supporting the development of five key elements that must be in place for partnerships to thrive, from supportive international policy through to the professional partnering skills and competencies of individuals.

One key element is the need for mechanisms that can convene business, government, civil society, the UN around specific development or business sustainability issues, understand overlaps of interests, and catalyse value-creating partnerships.

As shown in the summary table on the next page, The Partnering Initiative (TPI) has been directly supporting, and drawing out the theory and practice in the domain of partnership platforms for a number of years.

## The evolving field of platforms for partnership

### Selected International Events

- Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) convenes High-Level Meeting (HLM) in Mexico (with TPI co-representing the Private Sector on the steering committee)



2014

- The SDGs are launched! 195 governments commit to Agenda 2030
- 'Dawn of Systems Leadership' article published in SSRI



2015

- Governments start to create SDG committees
- SDG Philanthropy Platform launched in Kenya, later expanding to include all stakeholders
- GPEDC convenes HLM2 in Kenya (TPI convening business participation)



2016

- Business Commission for Sustainable Development publishes 'Better business, better world', highlighting \$12tr investment opportunity offered by SDGs



2017

- UNDP releases strategic plan 2018-2021, one of two pillars is 'the development of country support platforms for SDGs'



2018

- UN Global Compact strengthens linkages with UN resident coordinators
- Harvard CSRI, WEF and 4SD co-publish 'Systems leadership for sustainable development', drawing on direct experience of multiple complex change initiatives



2019

- TPI convenes six platforms for partnership on side lines of HLM to draw out good practice principles
- TPI launches seminal report: "Unleashing the Power of Business: A practical Roadmap to systematically engage business as a partner in development"

- TPI supports the development of in-country platforms for partnership in Zambia and Colombia through its 'Business in Development Facility'
- TPI supports the development of the 'LINK' facility in Mozambique, designed to develop inclusive business partnerships

- TPI publishes first guidance on 'platforms for partnership', creating foundational definitions and describing platform building blocks
- TPI supports the creation of the East Africa Humanitarian Private Sector Partnership Platform, led by World Vision and UN OCHA

- TPI publishes report exploring 'ecosystem of support' for SDGs
- World Vision and TPI launch 'Delivering on the promise' report on in-country platforms for partnership at the HLPF
- TPI supports the development of the Asia P3 Hub in Singapore, led by World Vision

- TPI participates in independent mid-term review of Scaling Up Nutrition Movement
- TPI engages in Rockefeller-funded study of impact of agricultural platforms
- TPI participates in HLPF event with DESA, launching 'Maximising value through partnership' guidebook

- 'Partnership Accelerator for Agenda 2030' launched with UNDESA and TPI in order to scale up platforms and other partnership support mechanisms

### TPI Platform Activities

# The context for partnership platforms

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## Part 1



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## The radical vision of the 2030 Agenda

*“All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.”*

*“This is an Agenda of **unprecedented scope and significance**. It is accepted by **all countries** and is applicable to all, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. These are **universal goals and targets** which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike. They are **integrated and indivisible** and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development.”*

### *Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda*

The 2030 Agenda was created through a process of intergovernmental negotiation between nearly 200 of the world's nation states, and included input from a wide variety of non-traditional stakeholders. It is written in remarkably powerful and aspirational language, especially when compared to many intergovernmental agreements. It calls for boldness and transformation, and an end to poverty, and it states that this will be achieved through 'collaborative partnership'.

As such, the spirit and approach of the 2030 Agenda marks a step-change in the framing of sustainable development that is so radical and so far-reaching from the previous global plan for development<sup>1</sup> that many large institutions, organisations and companies are only now starting to develop ways of working in response. The changes are so radical because many of our institutions, systems and structures are created, and operated, in ways that reinforce boundaries, separation and competition rather than incentivising the deep collaboration and connectivity that is called for by the 2030 Agenda.

## Defining partnership

The 2030 Agenda calls for collaborative partnership, and this approach is reflected in the intended 'means of implementation':

*‘intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all the Goals and targets, bringing together Governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilizing all available resources.’*

In other words, partnerships across sectors and stakeholders represent a critical means of implementation for this agenda. 'Global partnership' is not just SDG 17, or a separate goal to address alongside others, but absolutely core to the delivery of the whole Agenda.

Despite this significant, long-standing field of professional practice around partnership, the term is used very loosely to cover a wide range of modalities and forms. For the purposes of this report, we use the following definition developed by the UN:

*“Partnerships for sustainable development are multi-stakeholder initiatives **voluntarily** undertaken by governments, intergovernmental organizations, major groups and other stakeholders, which efforts are contributing to the implementation of inter-governmentally, agreed development goals and commitments.”<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs.

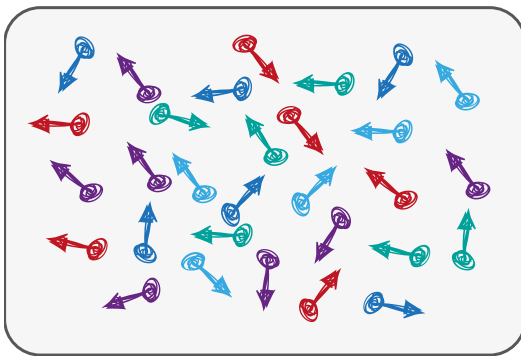
<sup>2</sup> This definition is quoted in: 'Maximising the impact of partnerships for the SDGs: A practical guide to partnership value creation' (TPI and UNDESA, 2018). We emphasise the word 'voluntary' here. We are not referring to highly regulated, formalised, public-private partnerships which are often seen in the field of infrastructure development.

**Traditional partnerships** bring together the unique resources, influence and capacities of multiple actors to collectively create added value (e.g. greater innovation, scale, critical mass) and so deliver far greater impact than the partners could achieve on their own.

**Transformational partnerships for the SDGs** deliver system shifts to move from an unsustainable (either economically, socially or environmentally) system, to a sustainable system. For example, transforming a cocoa supply chain from an unsustainable situation (degrading soil leading to lower yields, farmers making insufficient money and quitting to move to the city), to a sustainable approach in which farming practice, and financial reward, are changed in ways that preserve soil integrity and increase farmer incomes sufficiently to remain attractive.

## Systems coherence and systems leadership

Government ministries, UN agencies and INGOs are usually organised along ‘sectoral’ lines: education, health, energy and so on. Societies have, in general, separated out their constituents – public sector, private sector, civil society, academia etc. This way of thinking has been helpful in the past but tends to reinforce separation, stereotypes and silos, rather than encouraging connections or responding to the complexity of how societies operate. The 2030 agenda calls for us to think in systems rather than within sectors.

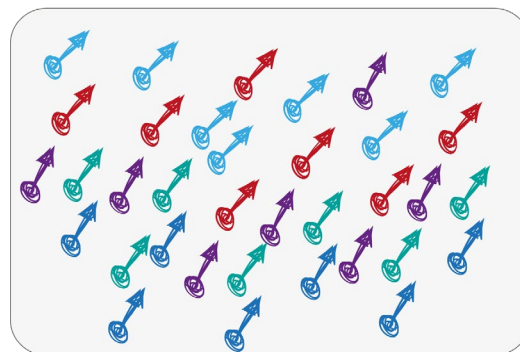


A key potential role played by partnerships platforms is to increase ‘system coherence’. TPI defines a coherent ‘system’ (for example, health systems, food systems, energy systems) as one which is ‘optimised to deliver the greatest value towards an overarching goal or goals, from the input resources available’.

Most social systems are not coherent, in the sense that the individuals, companies, institutions and organisations within those systems are either unaware or suspicious of one another, competing with each other, duplicating effort, or

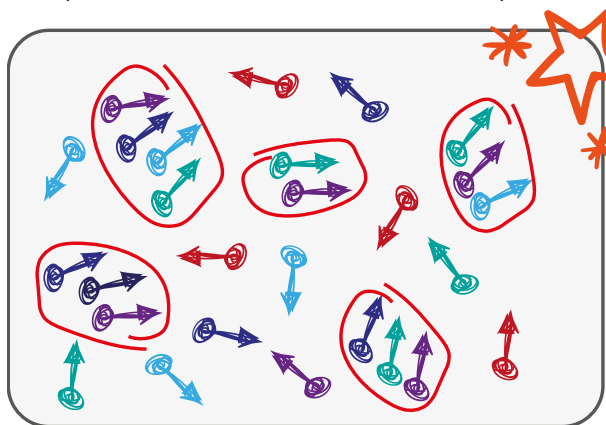
generally not pulling in the same direction of the 2030 Agenda vision: prosperous economy, thriving society and health environment. This is a very ineffective use of resources. A typical ‘incoherent system’ is shown in the diagram to the left.

A perfectly coherent system might resemble the diagram on the right, where everyone is pulling in exactly the same direction. However attractive it might be in theory, it could never exist in the real world. Indeed, such a system would require such a level of power and control to force all actors in the system to point in the same direction (i.e. the magnet is so strong), as to be profoundly undemocratic.



What *is* achievable is a greater degree of systems coherence, as demonstrated in the diagram below. In this situation, a ‘polar star’ (a common vision agreed by as much of a society as possible) can influence the actors (or a subset thereof) from all societal sectors to pull together in the same direction – collaborating wherever additional value can be created. The ‘polar stars’ are the SDGs (or the specific national or local goals agreed as priorities within the sub-section of a society). At their best, partnership platforms can be a mechanism both for stakeholders to collectively agree

those priority polar stars, and to create a collaborative ecosystem, and provide direct support, that can catalyse the collaborative action necessary to deliver towards those polar stars.



Generally, prevailing cultural and economic models tend to encourage separation, difference and silo thinking, rather than connection, comparability and alignment. For example, school subjects are divided into different topic areas; medicine is split up into ever-narrower specialisation, government departments are managed separately, and so on. The work of creating coherent systems is profoundly counter-cultural, and does not come naturally to individuals or organisations. However, the mindset and skillset required to creating systems coherence can be cultivated.

In a 2015 article for *Stanford Social Innovation Review*<sup>3</sup>, a group of leading thinkers developed the term 'systems leadership' based on the following realisation:

*'the deep changes necessary to accelerate progress against society's most intractable problems require a unique type of leader—the system leader, a person who catalyzes collective leadership'.*

The term was further developed by Harvard CSRI in its research into two leading global initiatives which are seeking to catalyse in-country partnerships: the global water partnership **2030WRG**, and the World Economic Forum's **New Vision for Agriculture**. System leadership is one essential element to help drive an effective, all-of-society response to delivering a sustainable planet.

System leadership has been defined in a variety of ways. One of the most accessible definitions is *'the ability to think, lead and act beyond organizational boundaries'*<sup>4</sup>. System leadership skills are needed when working in partnership, and when developing platforms for partnership. This idea is explored further in part 2 of the report.

<sup>3</sup> *The Dawn of System Leadership*, Peter Senge, Hal Hania and John Kania, (SSIR, Winter 2015)

<sup>4</sup> A definition from John Atkinson, Heart of the Art.

# A typology of partnership platforms

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## Part 2



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## Typology of stakeholder engagement platforms

Within the multi-stakeholder ecosystem around the SDGs, there are a range of platforms that engage stakeholders in various ways. In order to distinguish platforms for transformative partnerships from other multi-stakeholder mechanisms, we present the following typology of such platforms.



Sources: TPI partnership typology; Building multi-stakeholder platforms with private sector and philanthropy for the sustainable development goals, IICSD and UNDP (2017); Comparative Studies of Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (Biekart and Fowler, 2016, p. 15)

The location of different platforms in this typology does not constitute a value judgement. Dialogue platforms, for example, can play an essential role in building trust between previously mistrustful stakeholders. Dialogue platforms can also have a profound influence on the policy and regulatory environment. However, there is a hierarchy of function in the above typology: each category includes and builds on the previous category. A 'knowledge exchange' platform, for example, will have some element of dialogue as well; and a standard-setting platform will contain both knowledge exchange and dialogue functions.

One of the central hypotheses of this report is that many national multi-stakeholder platforms already exist; most of these can be located in the three categories along the left hand side of the above typology; very few, if any, can be said to be truly 'transformative' – i.e. they directly deliver transformative partnerships for the SDGs.

### 1. Multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms

*Avoid equating multi-stakeholder dialogues with collaboration: the commitments are different. (Biekart and Fowler, 2016)*

Multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms, particularly those bringing together the public and private sectors, have a long and rich history. One World Bank-hosted platform<sup>5</sup> provides a vast range of guidance for how 'governments, businesses, civil society and donors can use public private dialogue (PPD) to promote private sector development, open governance and poverty reduction'. Generally speaking, such platforms provide an opportunity for a government, sometimes with the facilitation of an international institution such as the World Bank or a UN agency, to convene multiple stakeholders around a complex national policy issue. They can operate at either global or national levels.

Similar platforms are also led by the private sector, particularly large companies engaging in stakeholder engagement exercises to consult on significant investment decisions. Alternatively, business representative organisations may seek to shape emerging agendas of particular interest to specific industry sectors. An

<sup>5</sup> See <http://ppd.cipe.org/>

example of this type of approach comes from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, which has identified six core programme areas<sup>6</sup>. WBCSD engages in multiple forms of dialogue with governments, international institutions, NGOs and others across these six programme areas, via showcasing good practice, consultation exercises, multi-stakeholder workshops and many more<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. Multi-stakeholder knowledge exchange platforms

Dialogue platforms often develop an ongoing knowledge exchange function. This helps dialogue partners to continue and deepen their relationships beyond one-off events and convenings. Trust between stakeholders starts to build. Knowledge exchange platforms are often characterised by ‘communities of practice’, which may meet in person but increasingly meet online. Such platforms tend to be thematically-organised, though they are often still global in nature.

The Sustainable Sanitation and Water Alliance (SUSANA) is an example of a longstanding knowledge exchange platform at global level<sup>8</sup>. Established in 2007 and convened by GIZ, it brings together an estimated 350 partner organisations from across sectors. SUSANA is characterised by a commitment to knowledge sharing and exchange and its activities take place mostly online, though it also maintains a calendar of in-person meetings. While it encourages coordination and collaboration between stakeholders, there is no dedicated structure within the platform to catalyse partnerships.

## 3. Multi-stakeholder reporting and standard-setting platforms

The next category in this typology refers to platforms that seek to build on dialogue and knowledge exchange in order to create new norms and standards via multi-stakeholder processes. Such platforms help their members demonstrate progress against a shared agenda for all stakeholders. As part of this shared agenda, platform participants are often required to adhere to certain principles and commit to reporting on action against these principles.

This type of platform may have elements of a global infrastructure in place, but the focus of the work tends to be within specific national contexts. The UN Global Compact is a good example here, with a global coordinating function supporting the work of over 70 national chapters. Global Compact members adhere to ten fundamental principles and report annually on their progress against these principles. The Global Compact is a unique collaboration between the UN system and the private sector, though it often engages stakeholders more broadly including government, academia and civil society. Similarly, various global partnerships are seeking to focus their activities increasingly at national level, in line with both the Busan Principles on Aid Effectiveness and The 2030 Agenda. Examples of national multi-stakeholder coordination structures include:

- **Nutrition:** for example, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement
- **Resource governance:** for example, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, EITI
- **Water:** for example, the Sanitation and Water for All partnership, or 2030WRG
- **Agriculture:** for example, the New Vision for Agriculture

There appears to be a relatively large number of this type of platform in the food and agriculture sector (or it may be that this type of platform has received a relatively large degree of attention). A recent exercise involving TPI mapped 38 different platforms in the agrifood sector<sup>9</sup>, which seek to bring together multiple stakeholders in order to raise standards across entire value chains.

Another example of this type of platform is the large number of multi-stakeholder national SDG committees that have emerged to coordinate national responses to the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR), which are the

<sup>6</sup> These are the circular economy; cities and mobility; climate and energy; food and nature; redefining value; and ‘people’. See [www.wbcsd.org](http://www.wbcsd.org)

<sup>7</sup> WBCSD’s activities go well beyond dialogue: the example here is purely given to illustrate an example of private sector-led multi-stakeholder dialogue.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.susana.org/en/>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://msplatforms.org/>

main mechanism being used by countries to report progress on the 2030 Agenda. To date, 142 countries prepared reviews, with a number having presented twice. While the VNRs culminate in a presentation at the HLPF on lessons learned and progress achieved, experience suggests the process of preparing the review brings a number of benefits. The reviews bring to the fore key issues such as data and monitoring, stakeholder integration, and the means of implementation, including partnerships. In their VNR reports<sup>10</sup> countries frequently reference partnerships, including with the private sector, although they recognize the lack of experience in effective engagement with this societal actor. Countries also refer in their VNR reports to priority areas for partnerships—for instance, Guyana, in its 2019 specifies education quality, in providing critical health care services and sanitation, and eco-tourism.

One promising example is emerging in Colombia where the UNDP-convened initiative Business Call to Action<sup>11</sup> has developed a framework for companies to report on SDG performance (BCTA has undertaken similar work in Kenya and The Philippines). The government used this business data in their VNR reports, providing a more complete picture of national progress against the SDGs. New connections between the UN system, the government and the private sector have emerged as a result<sup>12</sup>.

The VNR process has potential to link with partnership platform in a number of ways. While the VNR process culminates with a short presentation at the UN High Level Political Forum, this presentation is outcome of year-round preparatory work involving broad consultations with multiple stakeholders, different ministries, academia and others. This year-round engagement process represents a significant opportunity to develop ongoing multi-stakeholder partnering support infrastructure.

*“The voluntary national reviews (VNRs) aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.” (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform)*

### **VNRs and the UN reform process**

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda is tracked at a global level via the annual ‘high-level political forum’ (HLPF). At the HLPF, countries voluntarily report on their national-level progress against the SDGs via ‘voluntary national reviews’ (VNRs). Many countries have established national SDG committees, to coordinate implementation of the 2030 Agenda, conduct awareness-raising, and provide input for VNRs. These are often multi-stakeholder in nature, led by the government but linked to the UN and including civil society, the private sector and other actors. These national SDG committees have some of the characteristics in place to potentially act as platforms for partnership, which could hugely increase their effectiveness, but they currently do not perform this partnership creation and support function.

At the same time, the UN is undergoing a significant reform process in which agencies are encouraged to act as ‘one UN’ system, particularly at country level, rather than a series of separate agencies with overlapping mandates. This reform process is a significant driver towards working in partnership, and creates another set of opportunities for the creation of partnership platforms. One specific example comes with the UN Global Compact, which is encouraging its local chapters to work much more closely with offices of UN resident coordinators. As with the VNR committees, this new nexus of multi-stakeholder relationships is fertile ground for the development of partnership platforms.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.businesscalltoaction.org/>

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Maria Blanco-Iturbe, UNDP Colombia

## 4. Transformative partnership platforms

While there are hundreds of examples across the three categories of platform identified above, there are a relatively small number of ongoing transformative partnership platforms<sup>13</sup>. The critical distinction between this type, and the three previous types, is that partnership platforms for the SDGs go well beyond dialogue and knowledge exchange and instead focus on supporting the catalysis and implementation of partnerships.

We use the term ‘transformative partnership platform’ to refer to in-country support structures which aim to catalyse and support partnerships for the SDGs. Partnership platforms are:

*“An ongoing mechanism to systematically drive the creation of bi-lateral or multi-stakeholder partnerships for development. Platforms undertake activities to convene and align government, business, NGOs, donors and other development actors around a particular issue or geography, facilitate innovative collaborative approaches and directly broker and support new partnership action. Platforms may additionally undertake activities to build a more conducive enabling environment for partnering.”*

UNDP’s Istanbul International Centre for the Private Sector in Development believes that:

*“...multi-stakeholder platforms can accelerate the realisation of the Global Goals by providing the necessary space to discuss and implement innovative solutions as well as catalysing a better enabling environment for private sector engagement. As countries adopt roadmaps for the SDG implementation, [platforms are a mechanism] to bring all society together to align efforts.”*<sup>14</sup>

Typically, partnership platforms will deliver one, or more usually, several of the following:

- **Convening and dialogue:** the platform brings together key stakeholders from across the sectors around issues of common interest;
- **Partnership brokering:** the platform actively brokers partnerships between stakeholders;
- **SDG-aligned investments:** the platform provides a mechanism to align aid, foreign direct investment, philanthropy, domestic financing and other forms of capital in ways that contribute to the SDGs;
- **Building an enabling environment:** the platform advocates, nationally and globally, for a common agenda across societal sectors, as well as strengthening the enabling environment for collaborative working through capacity building (building partnering skills and competencies), trust-building etc.’
- **Coordinated commitment to action:** the platform enables stakeholders to commit to a common plan, which they hold themselves and each other responsible for delivering.<sup>15</sup>

### Levels of focus of platforms

Platforms may vary from generic platforms to support any kind of SDG partnership based on demand, to those with a very specific mission, objectives and theory of change, which proactively develop a portfolio of partnerships to deliver along their theories of change.

The Zambia Business in Development Facility for example, was set up with the support of TPI to build awareness of partnerships for the SDGs, and to catalyse partnerships wherever there was sufficient demand – in the diagram below it is an example of an ‘objective-specific platform’. The SUN Movement, on the other hand, has developed in-country multi-stakeholder platforms with specific objectives in relation to reducing malnutrition in all its forms. These are examples of ‘SDG-themed platforms’. There are also platforms that cut across all SDGs (in the diagram below, these are ‘SDG 17 Partnership support platforms’) and do not focus on specific goals.

<sup>13</sup> We use the term ‘platform’ to describe these structures, but they are sometimes referred to as networks, hubs or backbone organisations.

<sup>14</sup> IICSD and UNDP.

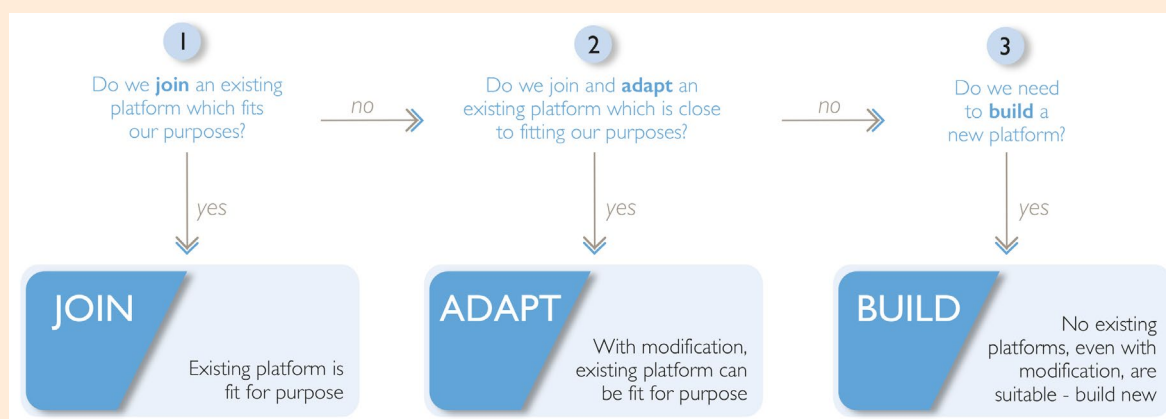
<sup>15</sup> This list is adapted from a number of sources including previous TPI guidance; *Delivering on the promise: In-country multi-stakeholder platforms to catalyse collaboration and partnerships for Agenda 2030* (TPI and World Vision, 2016); and *Building Multi-Stakeholder Platforms with the Private Sector and Philanthropy for the Sustainable Development Goals* (IICSD and UNDP, June 2017)

	SDG 17 partnership support platform	SDG-themed platform	Objective-specific platform
Mission	Platform promotes and supports partnerships that deliver SDG impact. Issue agnostic.	Platform supports partnerships towards a specific SDG (or multiple SDGs).	Platform itself has specific mission / objectives, facilitates a portfolio of partnerships, each with their own sub-goals, that together deliver towards the mission.
Specificity of ultimate impact desired	Low	Medium	High
Level of reactivity/proactivity	Reactive to needs; supports partnerships wherever there is sufficient engagement	May be more or less reactive / or proactive, depending on context	Proactive: curates specific partnerships to deliver its theory of change
Key roles	Awareness-raising; wide engagement of stakeholders; building trust and partnering competencies; brokering partnerships	Awareness-raising; engagement of key stakeholders; building trust and partnering competencies; brokering partnerships	As others, PLUS the role of a backbone organisation to coordinate and programme manage across the partnerships

Figure: Range of platforms for partnership, from generic to specific objectives

### Starting point

One starting point is to check that a new partnership platform is definitely an appropriate course of action, and is being created in response to a clearly-defined need. The decision tree below shows that the preference should always be to join some existing infrastructure; the next best option is to adapt existing infrastructure; and only if either of these options is not suitable, create a new platform from scratch.



Source: Delivering on the promise: In-country multi-stakeholder platforms (TPI and World Vision, 2016)

Likely places to look for platform-type activity are as follows:

- In-country multi-stakeholder platforms that are linked to **global partnerships**, such as the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement; 2030WRG; and EITI.
- **Innovation labs**, which seek to combine existing resources in new ways; although they tend to be private sector-focused, they contain many of the attributes of a partnership platform.
- **Business networks**, such as the Global Compact, play many of the roles of facilitating connections and sometimes brokering partnerships.
- The **United Nations system** is bringing an increased focus on partnering in its work. It has developed some dedicated partnership platforms; many offices of its Resident Coordinators have appointed partnership specialists; and certain agencies such as UNDP have developed a lot of in-house partnering support experience, built up over many years.
- Existing **public-private dialogue mechanisms** that can be built on to support collaborative action.

## Platform profiles

### 1. SDG Partnership Platform, Kenya



#### What is the vision / mission / objectives of the platform, and what does it do?

The SDG Partnership Platform seeks to *'take leadership on overarching facilitation, coordination and demonstration of how public private collaboration can effectively translate the SDGs into action on the ground and thereby guide and accelerate innovations, impact, maximize investments and optimize resource utilization in support of the realization of Kenya's Vision2030 and the "Big Four".'*

The platform has four strategic objectives: 1) joint advocacy and policy dialogue to create an enabling environment where partnership thrives; 2) partnering at scale for impact: support to identify large-scale public-private partnerships and collaborations; 3) maximizing innovative finance; and 4) facilitating data management, learning and research to inform progressive policy and practice for SDG partnerships.

The Platform is creating diverse SDG accelerator (thematic) windows of which a window for Primary Healthcare (PHC) contributing to attaining the SDG 3 has been the first. Subsequently, the Platform will open additional windows to support thematic SDG clusters in support of Kenya's "Big Four" agenda, as for example on Food Security and Nutrition, Affordable Housing and Manufacturing.

#### Context: What was the need the platform is addressing?

The platform was created in response to a number of contextual factors. First was the need for a mechanism through which to systematically engage multiple stakeholders in support of Governments Development priorities. Second was the need for a mechanism to provide ongoing support for and optimize synergies between the multiple partnerships already underway in Kenya. Third was the need for the UN to support Kenya in advancing innovative and blended financing instruments for the sustainable financing of the SDGs as Kenya is climbing the Middle Income ladder and Overseas Development Aid is shrinking. Fourth was the need to strengthen coordination between UN agencies in Kenya as part of the ongoing UN reform process.

#### Process: How was the platform initiated / developed?

The Platform was established under the leadership of the Government of Kenya, and with the support of the UN Resident Coordinator and wider UN system in Kenya, development partners, and partners from private sector and philanthropy.

After two years of building momentum, mobilizing partners, and an elaborate design process, the Government of Kenya announced in 2017 at the UN General Assembly the establishment of the SDG Partnership Platform (SDGPP).<sup>16</sup>

The Platform builds on the successes and lessons learned from the Private Sector Health Partnership Kenya initiative as well as the SDG Philanthropy Forum.

#### Ownership and championship: Role of government, of UN, other stakeholders

The SDGPP convenes and connects leadership from Government, development partners, private sector, philanthropy, civil society, and academia to create SDG accelerator windows to catalyze SDG Partnerships, Financing and Innovations in alignment with Government development priorities.

Primary Healthcare (PHC) has been the first window established with as goal to be a key driver towards attainment of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in line with Kenya's SDG3 framework, and the Big Four.

<sup>16</sup> [https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/72/ke\\_en.pdf](https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/72/ke_en.pdf)

Under the leadership of the SDGPP co-chairs, the Cabinet Secretary for Ministry of Health in Kenya, the Chair of the Council of Governors Health Committee, and the UN Resident Coordinator to Kenya, the PHC Window has established a Steering Committee which meets quarterly with its membership including the Co-Chairs, a Representative of the Kenya Healthcare Federation (local private sector), UNH6 leadership, as well as all PHC Window investors (e.g. Netherlands, USAID, World Bank, Sweden, Switzerland, Hilton C Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Philip, AstraZeneca, Huawei, and Merck for Mothers) to jointly discuss and offer strategic guidance for the implementation of the Window's 5-year strategic plan.

Implementation of the PHC Window strategic plan is coordinated by the Platforms Secretariat and implemented through partners with comparative advantage to lead on specific strategic support areas.

### **What are its measures of success and how does it track them?**

The platform has developed a clear Theory of Change for its healthcare investment window, leading ultimately to a contribution towards Universal Healthcare Coverage in Kenya. This Theory of Change is used to track activities, which include the creation of an evidence base for new financing and business models; institutional capacity building for government health agencies; and the development of innovative financing mechanisms.

### **How is the platform hosted?**

The Platform Secretariat is housed within the UN Resident Coordinator's Office. The National Coordinator of the platform and other staff are carefully selected based on the extent of their experience and networks. This has built institutional memory by tapping into networks and relationships including Every Woman Every Child, Global Financing Facility, World Economic Forum, and wide networks of corporations, foundations, venture philanthropists and impact investors.

### **How is it funded?**

The Secretariat coordinates the mobilization of necessary talent, expertise, and financial support from the SDGPP membership to collectively resource the implementation of its strategic plan. So far, partners contributed between September 2017 – December 2019 approximately \$7,055,000 funding and in-kind support to the PHC Window for the implementation of its 5-year strategic plan. A SDGPP Multi-Partner-Trust-Fund has been setup and is managed by the Secretariat as key instrument to pool funding from both private sector, philanthropies and development partners.

### **What are some of its major achievements?**

In line with the PHC Window's strategic plan, key milestones have been reached over the last 2 years in Kenya, including:

- Enhanced trust and understanding between public and private sector to partner for the financing and delivery of UHC through the facilitation of over 20 public private dialogues engaging national government, over 25 Counties and key stakeholders from private sector, civil society and academia
- Enhanced government capacities to advance public private collaboration for the financing and delivery of PHC through for example the development of Kenya's Health PPP strategy and toolkit
- PHC investment pipeline catalyzed of approximately \$120 million
- SDG Accelerator Lab launched to bridge the talent, drive, resources and capabilities from Silicon Valley with those in the Silicon Savanna in Kenya.
- As a result of all - The SDGPP has become a flagship initiative under Kenya's UNDAF 2018-2022<sup>17</sup> and received global recognition from UNDCO and the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation as a best practice to accelerate SDG financing.<sup>18</sup>

### **Challenges: What are the major challenges the platform faces?**

The SDG Partnership Platform has a team working full time to ensure data collection and management, including monitoring and evaluation, which contributes towards attaining nationally prioritized SDG targets.

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<sup>17</sup>[https://www.undp.org/content/dam/kenya/docs/unct/UNITED%20NATIONS%20DEVELOPMENT%20ASSISTANCE%20FRAMEWORK%20\(UNDAF\)%20B5%20web.pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/kenya/docs/unct/UNITED%20NATIONS%20DEVELOPMENT%20ASSISTANCE%20FRAMEWORK%20(UNDAF)%20B5%20web.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <http://daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/UNDG-CountryStudy-Kenya.pdf>

One challenge is catering to the demand from the private sector to collect data relevant to their business practices, and disseminating this information in way that it is easily understood by leadership and technical analysts in the sector.

Another challenge is to secure enough internal resources and seed money so the UNCT can make contributions to the joint initiatives it plans to establish. This requires more flexibility within the United Nations system for risk-taking and innovation so the UNCT can balance the demand for concrete results with experimentation, trial and error. One main impediment is that legal and administrative restrictions and obstacles slow internal processes. This may stem from the fact that current operational and financial frameworks were set up at a time when overseas development assistance was the norm and they have not been fully adapted to newer financing models.

Sources: *Unlocking SDG financing: Findings from early adopters* (UNDG and Dag Hammerskjold Foundation, 2018); *SDG Partnership Platform brochure* (undated); *conversations with platform managers*

## 2. Asia P3 Hub



### What is the vision / mission / objectives of the platform, and what does it do?

Vision: *“An ecosystem where all sectors contribute collectively, believing they can build healthy, prosperous and hopeful communities”*

Mission: *“We tackle effects of poverty by enabling multi-sector partnerships to create solutions which multiply resources, break poverty cycles and benefit families, communities and societies.”*

Strategy statement: *“We are building a sustainable hub business model (that engages next stage funders) through a portfolio of successful multi-sector projects that spurs investment in emerging markets.*

The purpose of the Asia P3 Hub was<sup>19</sup> to create a safe space for combinatorial innovation between traditional and non-traditional partners, facilitating partnerships that created shared value for all, and produced measurable, impactful actions that benefit development and humanitarian opportunities. It provided a multi-sector platform for businesses of all sizes to collaborate with other actors to expand strategic services in meaningful, relevant ways in the “base of the pyramid”. Solutions were designed and executed through a co-creation approach where risks and benefits were shared.

The Hub had 4 main functions: 1) Sourcing effective partnering solutions for national needs (Matchmaking); 2) Co-creating scalable solutions across the Asia Pacific region (Co-Creating); 3) Leveraging on World Vision’s existing assets and capabilities to grow resources (Leveraging); Cultivating partnering ecosystems through networking, keynote events, co-creation conversations (Cultivating)

### Context: What was the need the platform is addressing?

Asia P3 Hub, which operated from 2016 to 2019, aimed to transform lives across Asia Pacific by building multi-sector partnerships to deliver human impact, access to products and services, and economic opportunities, with a focus on water. The hub recognised that that new multi-sector models for collaboration are necessary to address the challenges of our increasingly complex world and to innovate and co-create solutions.

*“Why water? Water crises are one of the top global risks. 630 million people in Asia do not have access to clean water. Why Singapore? Singapore is a world class hydrohub of*

<sup>19</sup> Although the Asia P3 Hub closed in 2019, we include it as an example as it showed great promise with a , and its experience was captured in a valuable resource: the ‘hub-in-a-box toolkit’, freely available at [www.asiap3hub.org](http://www.asiap3hub.org)

*expert water resources management and R&D Why World Vision? WV is a leading NGO provider of clean water, 60+ years of working with communities”*

### Process: How was the platform initiated / developed?

The Hub was founded in 2016 and incubated by World Vision International’s Asia Pacific regional office. The Public Utility Board (PUB), Singapore’s water agency, endorsed the Asia P3 Hub and hosted a co-creation workshop in the early design phase of the Hub development to develop the business model. The Singapore Management University (SMU) was a valuable knowledge partner and provided academic counsel, access and introductions to new stakeholders and networks, partnering on workshops and co-hosted events.

A scoping report, in collaboration with Crazy About Water and The Partnering Initiative, identified strategic priorities in terms of geographic focus, technical water sectors, and services / operating model. It identified two groups of countries for the pilot phase.

### Ownership and championship: Role of government, of UN, other stakeholders etc.

**WV International** Asia & Pacific regional office acted as host and largest stakeholder with significant co-funding, and support from HR and finance functions. WV global HQ corporate engagement team and innovation teams provided ongoing inputs, support and dialogue. WV country offices were resource partners and implementation partners.

**The government of Singapore** invested in the Asia P3 Hub as part of its ongoing strategy to support innovative hubs and portals which include some element of human capital building.

**PUB** endorsed the Asia P3 Hub and hosted co-creation workshop early on; **SMU** was a knowledge partner and academic counsel, and partner on events; **Various champions** supported the platform.

### What are its measures of success and how does it track them?

**Inputs and activities:** The hub tracked numbers of: Partnership Projects Signed; Events Organised (Internal, External); Bootcamp training sessions delivered; Intellectual Properties developed (e.g. Hub-in-a-box); Internal processes implemented (e.g. adoption of project management tool, adoption of platform to host Asia P3 Hub emails, interns hired, volunteers engaged)

**Output:** This was tracked along 3 dimensions: **Impact:** How many lives were impacted as a result of multi-sector initiatives; **Income:** The dollar value amount/equivalent of shared value partnerships; **Influence:** How many organisations attended events, network effect of event content, size/growth of community list, and the reach of our published articles. **Communications** and marketing metrics tracked social media and newsletter followers / click through rates.

### How is the platform hosted?

WV International Asia & Pacific regional office hosted the hub from 2016 to 2019, and was the largest stakeholder with significant co-funding.

### How is it funded?

Asia P3 Hub had seed funding from two stakeholders, covering the basics and headcount for 3 years. This provided a 3-year cover for 4 full-time team members and basic operating expenses. The hub also entered into creative ‘shared-value agreements’ where they exchanged mutually beneficial services and products, but no money exchanged hands.

### What are some of its major achievements?

- Asia P3 Hub facilitated a partnership between World Vision and Finland-based Solar Water Solutions (SWS) to help mitigate water shortage impacts in Asia. A partnership between SWS and local businesses in Sri Lanka and Indonesia was established which potentially will impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of rural remote communities in the long term.
- A multi-country initiative by the World Vision and Kohler Asia Pacific partnership improved access to safe drinking water, sanitation and good hygiene practices in schools in Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, impacting 3,000 students and teachers.

- The World Vision Social Innovation Challenge was an open innovation platform that packaged real life challenges from WV communities as impact challenges for global solution designers to co-create solutions with community members. It resulted in more than 60 teams engaged across US, Canada and Philippines in 2019, with winning teams implementing their solutions in 2020. The SIC will also be launched in Ethiopia in 2020.

### Challenges: What are the major challenges the platform faces?

Challenges identified by the scoping report in 2016 were: lack of local capacity or capabilities; lack of sufficient knowledge to enter / expand the business; context complexity; lack of partnering knowledge and brokering capability across all stakeholder groups - business, civil society and government.

## 3. SUN Business Network, Mozambique



### What is the vision / mission / objectives of the platform?

The SUN Business Network Mozambique (SBN Moz) aims to be the Focal Point for the involvement of the private sector in the promotion of nutrition in Mozambique, and its vision is to strengthen the contribution of the private sector in improving nutrition in the country, by increasing the supply and marketing of nutritious and safe food products.

The platform has four main strategic objectives: 1) Develop a strong affiliation (Empowerment and sustainability); 2) Contribute to improving the nutritional policies and regulations (Advocacy); 3) Contribute to improving the nutritional sensitivity along food systems (Investments); and 4) Contribute to increase the knowledge and the demand for nutritional and safe products (Market). Within this strategic framework, the platform has been working closely with another GAIN initiative to develop guidance and support to implement a Workforce Nutrition Program (WNP).

To facilitate companies' advancement of food safety and business development around nutrition, the platform offers round table discussions and conferences on key nutrition issues; community of practice sessions, training and technical assistance to SMEs in the six provinces where it operates; and communications and information sharing among members.

### Context: What need is the platform is addressing?

Mozambique ranks 181 on the Human Development index out of 188 countries, and according to the Food and Agriculture Organization is classed as a low-income food-deficit country, with modest progress against global nutrition targets. Poorly diversified diets lie at the root of persistently high malnutrition, along with high rates of infectious diseases; 24% of the population suffers from food insecurity, and stunting affects almost half of the children under 5 years old (43%). The platform seeks to harness the role of the private sector in addressing these nutrition challenges, working closely with the government of Mozambique and other stakeholders.

*"Nutrition has only recently come to the attention of the private sector, although the government (in particular the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security), donors and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) have been raising awareness around nutrition and have been advocating for scaling up actions to address the high stunting rate for years."* (SBN Evaluation Case Study)

### Process: How was the platform initiated / developed?

Mozambique has been part of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement since 2010. The process of establishing and facilitating the SBN platform has been led by GAIN, and in February 2018 the SUN Business

Network launched in Mozambique by DFID's Minister Hurd. In December 2016 the DFID Grant for SBN Mozambique was approved, with 21 members enrolled. The First Annual SBN Mozambique Conference took place in 2017, and in December 2018, the network's Advisory Group was established.

### **Ownership and championship: Role of government, of UN, other stakeholders etc.**

The Ministry of Agriculture's Technical Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security (SETSAN) serves as the Focal Point of SUN in Mozambique, with more recent coordination with CONSAN, the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security, established and presided by the Prime Minister, in 2017. GAIN is responsible for hosting and funding (through a DfID grant) the Business Network, which is co-convened with the UN's World Food Programme (WFP).

The Chair of the Confederation of Economic Associations, which has supported public private dialogues on nutrition and fortification, is a Nutrition Champion for the SBN.

### **What are its measures of success and how does it track them?**

- Members are required to share financial and company data so SBNMoz can track progress of nutrition impact for GAIN, SBN Global, and the government, and thus prove the business case.
- Pre-and-post tests are used for all the training offered by SBNMoz to monitor how training events have contributed to knowledge and skills acquisition.
- Annual meetings have been convened by SBN Mozambique to assess progress.
- Detailed KPIs for each strategic objective of the SBN Mozambique are listed under the Strategic Plan 2018-2020.

### **How is the platform hosted and structured?**

The Business Network is co-convened by GAIN and WFP. GAIN hosts the SBN Mozambique offices. The SBN Mozambique Manager is the only full-time employee though the platform receives part-time support from GAIN staff, especially communications, event logistics and coordination. The platform is also supported by a global SBN secretariat and a local advisory board provides strategic guidance to the network.

### **How is it funded?**

GAIN funds the Business Network under a larger United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) grant. This funding period runs until December 2020.

### **What are some of its major achievements?**

According to the SBN Evaluation report conducted in 2019, "The process of identifying a nutrition champion, had the unexpected effect of attracting interest from the Chairman of CTA. The engagement with CTA may be a path towards sustainability. Many stakeholders interviewed noted this partnership as a substantial achievement that can strengthen the impact of SBN Mozambique".

The Linking Agribusiness and Nutrition in Mozambique Project, run by CTA and the platform, started in October 2013 and will continue through to March 2021. Through the partnership with CTA, the platform is able to leverage their resources and networks in the six key provinces where SBN Mozambique is supporting Community of Practice programs.

As of June 2019, the platform had 99 official members. Initial companies were directly related to the food industry, but the network has successfully expanded to include many service, finance, media, technology and other manufacturing companies that have an interest in nutrition.

### **What are the major challenges the platform faces?**

The platform enjoys strong relationships with GAIN in-country and globally, and has secured significant and diversified membership, particularly among SMEs. Its main challenges, as identified in the recent evaluation, are around the reliance on its (highly capable) coordinator, who is the only full-time staff member; and the challenge of what longer-term sustainability looks like in terms of hosting arrangements – whether, for example a local private sector network might act as the host.

Sources: [SBN Mozambique Evaluation case study \(2019\)](#); [SBN Mozambique Strategic Plan 2018-2020](#)

### **An emerging platform: Samoa Partnership Platform for Immunization**

Since 2017, a global resurgence of measles cases has been affecting all regions of the world. In global immunization surveys, coverage for the second dose of measles-containing vaccine (MCV2) was 69%, with significant variability between regions. In the Asia Pacific region, outbreaks and clusters of measles cases are being reported from countries where measles has been eliminated, including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea. The country most affected in the Pacific region is Samoa with over 4000 measles cases, including more than 60 deaths. The outbreak in Samoa is caused by the D8 strain (genotype) of measles virus.

The impact of this national health emergency is far-reaching and every aspect of life is affected by this outbreak. It is imperative to strengthen the culture of acceptance of vaccination, in order to create “herd immunity”. It is also important to strengthen health services, who have been working heroically to save lives – often with limited resources and supplies.

In response to this crisis, a *Samoa Measles Appeal*<sup>20</sup> were launched on 6 December 2019 by the Government of Samoa to receive financial assistance from partners to support national efforts to contain the outbreak, to effectively treat people who contracted measles, and to achieve herd immunity for long term protection of the population. Another important aspect is preventing regional migration, meaning that if the outbreak spreads, the disease has the potential to impact surrounding countries.

In response to the Appeal, the development of the **Samoa Partnership Platform for Immunization (P4I)** is being explored, in order to generate the necessary funds and operations with the involvement of all relevant UN entities and stakeholders in the region. Samoa’s UN Resident Coordinator has requested support from the Partnership Accelerator to help design the platform. The support will include convening relevant stakeholders and developing the strategic, financial, governance, management and operational structure for the platform.

<sup>20</sup> [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Samoa-National%20Measles%20Response%20and%20Recovery%20Appeal%2006\\_12\\_2019%20w%20BA.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Samoa-National%20Measles%20Response%20and%20Recovery%20Appeal%2006_12_2019%20w%20BA.pdf)

# Transformative partnership platforms in practice

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## Part 3



**PARTNERSHIP  
ACCELERATOR**  
**2030 AGENDA**  
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## Key characteristics of effective partnership platforms

The remainder of this report sets out eight emerging characteristics of effective partnership platforms for the SDGs:

1. A dynamic leader
2. Strong champions
3. Entrepreneurial management
4. Risk-tolerant hosts
5. Adaptable business model
6. Flexible support systems
7. Strong connectivity
8. Investment in enabling environment

These areas are important to consider from the outset, and also on an ongoing basis. All of the characteristics are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

### 1. A dynamic leader

**Key point:** platforms succeed or fail based on the platform leader's entrepreneurship, dynamism and commitment to the public good; in other words, their 'system leadership'.

Some success indicators:

- Platform leader (or coordinator / manager) can think, lead and act across organizational boundaries
- The platform leader is likely to have been involved in founding and scoping the platform
- The platform leader is likely to be an authoritative and compelling public voice

#### Why it's important

Platforms do not succeed without tenacious, multi-skilled individual<sup>21</sup> willing to go the extra mile to make them work. They must balance the day-to-day work of running a mechanism that has all of the funding, management, planning and operational demands of a start-up enterprise, within the deeply political environment of competing stakeholder needs and perspectives, and operational cultures of large institutions.

Of particular note is that platforms for partnership have much less in common with conventional time-limited development projects, and much more in common with start-up businesses or social enterprises.

These individuals have to be creative and pragmatic in finding resources, not least in finding people who are willing to give time and expertise to help get platforms off the ground. These multi-disciplinary individuals demonstrate an unusual blend of cross-sector professional experience, entrepreneurial and political skill, and a passion for sustainable development or commitment to the public good.

#### Examples

The founder and visionary who conceptualised the **Asia P3 Hub** was experienced in both business and development sectors; and in partnership management. She had a Masters in Tri-Sector Collaboration from Singapore Management University and had seen multiple examples of the power of partnership.

In the case of **SAGCOT**, collaborative entrepreneurial champions helped to support the platform. These were key individuals with passion and commitment who dedicated significant voluntary time to the platform; used their convening power to bring together diverse players with interdependent interests, built alignment around the platform's vision; embodied collaborative and entrepreneurial style, inspiring others.

<sup>21</sup> TPI has developed a set of 'MUST-have' partnering competencies, which are also relevant for platform leaders.

## 2. Strong champions

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**Key point:** platforms need senior-level champions, within host organisations and in public office, who will create the space need for the platform to develop.

**Success indicators:**

- Multiple champions from across stakeholder groups advocate for the platform
- At least one senior leader within a host organization should take personal responsibility for ensuring the platform's success
- The platform champion has a close ongoing relationship with the platform leader

**Why it's important**

Establishing a partnership platform is a risky endeavor. Its chances of success increase enormously if senior influential individuals within host organisations and from the government provide the shelter and 'licence to operate' necessary for the platform to become established. They should personally invest in the success of the platform, acting as advocate and champion even, or especially, where there is skepticism about what the platform is trying to achieve. Perhaps most importantly, particularly during the early phase, the platform champion(s) should enable the platform to grow, experiment and if necessary, fail.

Too often in the field of sustainable development, an approach is tried, it does not go to plan, an attempt is made (due to donor or other pressure) to minimise the perception of 'failure', learning is minimised, and similar mistakes are repeated in the future. If a platform is to achieve transformational results, it must be championed by people who give it the space to develop, experiment and where necessary fail - as long as the platform can demonstrate that it is learning from experience.

**Examples**

Initiated by seven private companies in Indonesia, **PISAgro** is a collaborative platform between the Indonesian government, public, and the private sector, one of most advanced under Grow Asia umbrella. PISAgro was founded in June 2011 at the World Economic Forum on East Asia in Jakarta. Its stated purpose is to support the Government of Indonesia's ambition to increase agriculture productivity sustainably as part of the country's effort to develop food security.

The **SDG Partnership Platform** has evolved in close conjunction with the government of Kenya with support by the UN system in Kenya. The UN Resident Coordinator has played an important role as platform champion, creating the 'space' for the platform to develop within the UN system in Kenya, and leading by example through his commitment to action on universal healthcare.

In Tanzania, **SAGCOT** enjoyed the support of presidential and CEO level championship including the government of Tanzania; CEOs of Unilever, Yara and Syngenta; and senior leadership within WEF. The presence of these champions helped to attract others, provided incentives for engaging, enabled ministers and managers to think longer term and accept higher risk.

In the case of the **South Africa Water Partners Network (SWPN)** a senior business representative from SABMiller acted as a vocal champion for the platform. He played a significant role in promoting SWPN among senior business leaders from other reputable and water-engaged companies. He helped these companies recognize the reputational value of public leadership on issues like water that are close to business operations and to focus on a shared national interest. He helped to build shared vision and business involvement.

## 3. Entrepreneurial management

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**Key point:** Partnership platforms tend to be very lean structures, with an estimated 3-6 specialist staff required in addition to the platform leader, in order to manage the workload effectively

Some success indicators:

- Staff have first-hand experience in partnering and / or working in multiple contexts
- Strategy and workplans aligned to SDGs

- Serious about leaving no one behind
- Learning linked to M&E
- Logic model / Theory of Change used to maintain strategic focus

### Why it's important

Managing a partnership platform requires an unusual mix of project management skills, partnering experience, entrepreneurship and opportunism. Of these, partnering experience – or at least the experience of working in multiple contexts and with multiple stakeholder types - is perhaps the most important. In a survey of platform success factors, which asked respondents to identify recommendations for the success of a platform, many identified the importance of building a partnering mindset among key staff. Specific skills include the ability to share knowledge between partners, to build new relations between diverse stakeholders, and to demonstrate perseverance and commitment working collaboratively.

The platform should be providing useful services, for example in the area of supporting partnership development, but without being fully market-led or demand-led. In order to achieve this fine balance, effective platforms have a clear Theory of Change which they use to maintain progress towards their vision.

### Examples

The **Asia P3 Hub** developed its partnership prototyping approach as 'combinatorial innovation', described as follows:

*“From the beginning, we saw the grant funding differently than the usual ‘grant to fund a specific project’ perspective. In the non-profit world, the traditional approach is that a grant funds a project, and when it is completed, there is an evaluation and the work is ‘done’. Instead, we took a social enterprise-inspired approach: we saw our grant as an investment in a new model that could produce exponential returns over time. This meant that our budget needed to stretch further to cover things like brand design, communications and marketing, and professional services/advisory. Combinatorial innovation and partnerships are not just the core ‘business’ of the Hub. They became a powerful vehicle by which we got things done. We found that people and organisations are open to bartering! We value different things, and we entered into many creative ‘shared-value agreements’ where we exchanged services and products that were mutually beneficial, but no money exchanged hands”.*

Both the **SUN Business Network** and the **SDG Partnership Platform in Kenya** have sought to match up supply and demand in specific issue areas, bringing together multiple stakeholders with an investment ecosystem, in nutrition and health respectively. Both platforms have sought to build 'investment pipelines' of opportunities, aligning the significant and growing but often unfocused flows of financial capital, with the sustainable development requirements in their particular context. The SDG Partnership Platform describes the aim of this work as *“support to raise required investments for the large-scale partnership initiatives through optimizing blended financing instruments and redirection of capital flows towards SDG implementation.”*

Through its healthcare investment window so far multiple partnership building processes have been initiated by the **SDG Partnership Platform** and stakeholders are receiving a variety of types of transaction support with potential to unlock close to \$120 million private capital for primary healthcare within the coming years, whilst improving delivery of care and consequently health and well-being impacts.

## 4. Risk-tolerant hosts

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**Key point:** platforms should be hosted by risk-tolerant, supportive organisations, with clout and credibility.

**Some success indicators:**

- Host organisations provide a range of support functions including those related to fundraising or legal issues

- Hosts act as ‘enablers’ of the platform more than ‘overseers’, providing the space and time for the platform to develop

### Why it’s important

Most partnership platforms benefit from the presence of a larger host organization which can give the platform space to develop and ongoing support where needed. Some platforms are supported in a light-touch way by large institutions such as the World Economic Forum, World Vision, UNDP or the International Finance Corporation. These institutions lend credibility to the platform in its start-up phase, perhaps also offering convening power, and key staff capacity building and mentoring.

Beyond this start-up support, their role might best be described in terms of ‘listening and learning’, and making connections elsewhere within their organisations<sup>22</sup>. While the work of the platform should be fully aligned with the strategic objective of the host organisation, there should be limited direction-setting, control and management beyond this. Good hosts play a facilitating, enabling and support roles. Where host organisations become over-controlling in direction setting or management, experience suggests that platforms are less likely to succeed.

Some partnership platforms – notably **ALIARSE** in Costa Rica - have managed to develop as independent entities, without the support structure provided by a larger organizational hosts, though these independent entities tend to be the exception rather than the rule. It is perfectly possible to go down an independent route, drawing on the skills and assets of large organisations in a much more light-touch way. However, taking this independent route, without a support structure in place, requires a very heavy lift from the key staff. The resulting entity is likely to be something much closer to a market-led social enterprise than a neutral convening platform that responds to national priorities.

### Examples

The global support team of the **SUN Business Network** is hosted by GAIN, which provides some dynamic hosting arrangements. A recent evaluation<sup>23</sup>, found that

*“[GAIN provides] a range of support including senior leadership buy-in, human resources and legal support, access to other private-sector programme leads and access to fundraising support.”*

The **SDG Partnership Platform** in Kenya benefits from the relatively high appetite for risk demonstrated by its host, the UN resident coordinator’s office. This has provided the platform with sufficient freedom to experiment in its activities, including its innovative funding model which has brought in more than \$7m to support its operations, largely from non-UN sources.

## 5. Adaptable business model

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**Key point:** the platform’s business model changes over time, depending on its stage of maturity

Some success indicators:

- Multiple, diverse funding sources
- Commitment of core funding for at least three years to provide space to grow
- Platform hosts help to secure platform funding
- Funders provide other support as well as money
- Reporting requirements are realistic and fit for purpose (ie initially more geared towards a small start-up enterprise than a large development project)
- Platform itself provides seed funding for others

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<sup>22</sup> The role played by platform hosts varies, according to their institutional capacity to partner. TPI has developed a framework called ‘Fit for Partnering’ which describes the characteristics of organisations with strong institutional capacity to partner.

<sup>23</sup> See *SUN Business Network Evaluation 2019* (Mokoro Ltd and TPI).

## Why it's important

Platforms for partnership cannot be sustained without a flexible and adaptable business model. The most successful platforms report that securing ongoing funding is not normally the most significant challenge. This is not to say that funding is not essential, but to note that implementation and contextual issues tend to be the most difficult ones to address.

### *Catalytic donor funding*

Many platforms are supported, at least in initial phases, by bilateral donors. As well as funding platform set-up costs, landscape assessments and initial running costs, such support can also include 'catalytic' funding which is disbursed by the platform, to support partnerships. Experience suggests that such catalytic funding should be integrated into the platform design from the outset, since 'bolting it on' separately after the platform has been established can be difficult to manage.

The nature of donor support can change over time: international donors may be best placed to support a highly innovative platform during its start-up phase, while over time it may be appropriate to phase-in the support of local donors instead. A very significant 'local donor' may be a government, especially if a platform is based in-country (as with Singapore, in the case of Asia P3 Hub).

Ongoing support from a single donor provides significant security for a platform but may mean that it is more supply-led than demand led, can create dependency and, potentially, distortion of mission. Blended funding, referenced earlier in the paper, is more difficult to establish, but carries less risk.

### *In-kind resources*

Non-monetary contributions might include office space and furniture, IT equipment, meeting rooms and facilities, seconded staff, hosting events and meetings, time from senior leadership and other supplies. These typically come from local government, private sector and/or NGOs. Such resources can be extremely useful, particularly in the early days of the development of a platform, though care must be taken to ensure that the donor does not expect too much in return for the in-kind resource on offer, leading to dependency.

### *Fee-for-service*

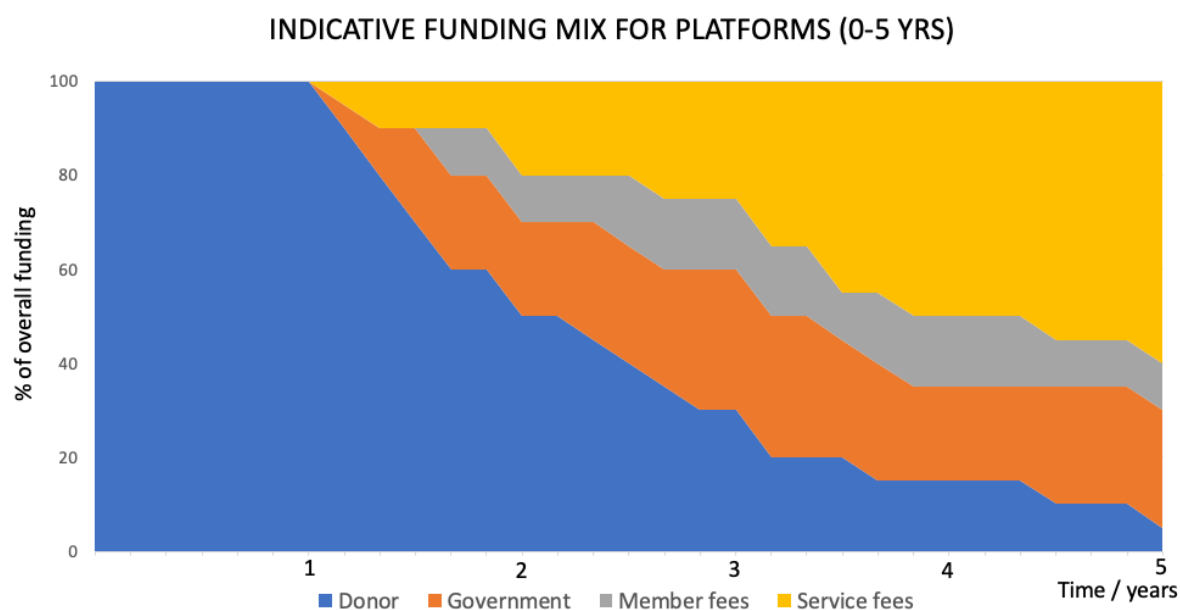
This demand-led model relates to the provision of bespoke services along the lines of conventional consultancy. Depending on the focus of the platform, clients may include governments, companies, NGOs or large institutions. This model suits highly entrepreneurial platforms but limits their ability to spend time on areas that do not generate income but which might still be important (such as responding to the needs of the most vulnerable, for example, or engaging in public policy advocacy).

### *Membership fees*

Annual fees paid in return for membership services rendered through the platform. Tiered membership fee models may exist to meet different company needs or based on the type of organisation. Any type of organisation can be a fee-paying member, but they tend to be from the private sector. Membership-based organisations have been successfully developed in the past but they are becoming more difficult to operate since 'members' are more likely to want to receive bespoke support in return for their financial contributions, rather than simply supporting the running costs of a platform.

### *An evolving model*

A sustainable business model – which as the image below shows, evolves over time – requires a balanced mixture of funding, including long-term support (potentially from donors) for core functions such as administration, research, business development and non-income generating activities such as public policy advocacy; supplemented by income-generation activities to pay staff and cover organisational overheads.



Sources: Platforms for partnership (TPI, 2016); New Vision for Agriculture Country Partnership Guide Toolkit: Secretariat Structures (World Economic Forum, 2016); Sustainable business models for partnership platforms: Discussion paper to inform international peer learning (TPI, 2018). Graphic: Darian Stibbe

**Asia P3 Hub** secured seed funding from two stakeholders, covering the basics (and most importantly headcount) for three years. This provided security for at least four full-time team members and for basic operating expenses.

In the case of **SAGCOT** there were multiple and diverse funding sources, with 14 different organisations providing seed funding, including business, government and the World Bank. Three organisations provided implementation funding; and four undertook direct investment through SAGCOT.

## 6. Flexible support systems

**Key point:** platforms work well when there is a diversity of expertise and ‘critical friends’ to draw on

Some indicators of success:

- Light-touch advisory or governance body provides ongoing support
- Platform receives critique and review, drawn from diverse informal sources
- Platform staff have their own support system (coaches, mentors, advisers)

### Why it’s important

Since platforms are a pioneering mechanism, they benefit from regular input from a diversity of external sources to ensure that they are delivering value. Leading platforms demonstrate significant openness to critique and appetite to learn from external sources. They also benefit from a range of different forms of support structure. These range from more formalized advisory groups which provide a measure of oversight, through to highly informal arrangements whereby individuals and organisations act as ‘critical friends’ to the platform.

### Examples

In the words of one platform manager, the existence of a flexible support system ‘has been a real game changer’. The **SDG Partnership Platform in Kenya**, for example, draws on pro-bono support from McKinsey and Stanford University, among others.

## 7. Strong connectivity

**Key point:** the stronger the connections between the partnership platform and local and international structures and institutions, the higher the chance of success.

**Success indicators:**

- Multiple, diverse, strong relationships at all levels
- Platform is built on existing structures, with minimal new infrastructure
- Vertical links (to international institutions) and horizontal links (to other platforms)
- Sense of ‘ownership’ of platform by its stakeholders / members and hosts
- Understanding of when, where, how, why and with whom to connect

**Why it’s important**

Platforms for partnership are more likely to be effective when they are strongly rooted in a local context, and also when they drawing in international knowledge and experience as needed. They are less likely to be effective when they are seen as invented elsewhere, bolted onto rather than emerging from an existing landscape of players, with minimal ownership from local stakeholders. This is why a high degree of connection is a significant measure of success.

**Examples**

The **SDG Partnership Platform** benefits from strong links to multiple UN agencies, both in-country and internationally. It is also co-located with other partnerships and alliances such as the Frontier Counties Development Council which enables knowledge exchange and strengthening of connections.

The global water resources partnership **2030WRG** learns from the in-country platform **SWPN** (in addition to its other in-country platforms) and incorporates the South African experiences into its own methodology and approach, particularly in relation to questions around scale.

**A simple three-step framework for connecting platforms**

How does a partnership platform identify where best to connect to others? The following simple three-step framework captures most of what is required:

**Awareness:** the first step is simply to be aware of other entities doing similar work and start to build relationships with like-minded people. This might be due to thematic proximity, or geographical overlap, or similarity of structure, or just through strong pre-existing relationships between staff. A platform’s stakeholders, particularly large ones, are likely engaged in multiple relevant partnerships and initiatives in a wide range of sectors and can identify these potential synergies.

**Alignment:** if in-principle connections have been identified – in the form of an innovative idea, basic concept note, or a line of enquiry - the next step simply involves finding opportunities to explore the connection in more detail. This might involve attending one another’s gatherings; participation in internal coordination and update calls; sharing speaking platforms; joint country missions and learning exchanges; and so on. This exploration can help sharpen the focus of the potential connection; equally it may reveal that a promising idea is not in fact feasible - in which case the idea can be dropped.

**Action:** not all exploration will lead to action, but where there is real potential to create joint impact by joining forces – which may ultimately require a judgement call on the part of platform leaders - all efforts should be made to turn potential into action, using whatever combination of agreements, MOUs or contracting arrangements are appropriate. Still, the initial groundwork may not succeed the first time round, but it may sow the seeds for future connections.

**8. Investment in enabling environment**

**Key point:** partnership platforms are uniquely positioned to strengthen and normalise multi-stakeholder approaches within their contexts.

**Success indicators:**

- Evidence of strong dialogue and trusted relationship across stakeholders, eg safe spaces to experiment with new regulation
- Commitment to build institutional capacity to partner among stakeholders

- Commitment to strengthen policy and regulatory environment for partnering and multi-stakeholder approaches

### Why it's important

Working across stakeholder groups remains counter-cultural in most contexts and this trend is unlikely to shift without dedicated effort. Few initiatives or organisations are better placed than partnership platforms to demonstrate the value of multi-stakeholder approaches, to ensure that working collaboratively becomes the 'new normal' for sustainable development. At the same time, work to strengthen the enabling environment for partnering is complex, and context-specific, and the return on any effort invested is likely to be long-term and indirect at best. And so,

### Examples

In multiple contexts, national platforms under the umbrella of the **SUN Movement** work to strengthen the enabling environment for multi-stakeholder approaches to nutrition to be the standard approach. This approach varies widely from country to country but might include advocating for the role of small enterprises as a partner in improving nutrition; or engaging senior national leaders as champions of multi-stakeholder approaches.

In Kenya, the **SDG Partnership Platform** has created a series of 'safe spaces' where different stakeholder groups can engage in dialogue in territory where no clear norms and standards exist, such as digital opportunities or fintech. New forms of regulation and policy can be experimented with, and both public and private sectors accept and embrace a degree of risk, in ways that would be impossible under normal conditions due to the lack of dedicated opportunities for this kind of dialogue.

## Keeping it real

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An in-country partnership platform should always have strong government involvement from the outset, unless there are compelling reasons why this should not or cannot happen. Ideally, a platform can seek to combine the authority and mandate from the government, with the speed and innovation from the private sector, a focus on those left behind from civil society, and the influencing and convening power attached to the UN system. In practice, it may not be possible to have buy-in from all stakeholders right from the outset, but the greater the multi-stakeholder involvement from the outset, the better.

Multi-stakeholder involvement from the outset of the creation of multi-stakeholder platforms reflects the spirit of the 2030 Agenda. The presence of multiple stakeholders also helps to create the safe space for dialogue and innovation, while the leading presence of the government ensures alignment with national priorities.

If there are no other entities that are delivering required functions in a specific context, and a group of organisations has come together in a government-led (or at least government-endorsed) process with the intention of building a platform, it is worth reviewing the list of common challenges before taking further action. A comparison between partnership platforms and start-up enterprises can be instructive. Start-ups typically have failure rates anywhere from 50% to 90% depending on context. Principal among the challenges for platforms is access to consistent and adequate funding. Few donors and foundations can be persuaded to fund the 'support infrastructure' for partnerships: the causal chain from activities through to impact on people's lives is often simply too complex to justify the investment.

Other problems may include the persistent challenge of establishing effective multi-stakeholder dialogue and sharing knowledge. Developing trust between diverse institutions is a common challenge as is the need to identify and demonstrate the added value that the platform could offer to participants. Some platforms have found themselves working in relatively new or weak markets where there may be inadequate institutional structure or local problems of government bureaucracy or even corruption. In other words, there are problems in the timing of a platform initiative and the readiness of the target market for an innovative network of this kind.

None of this is to say that partnership platforms are not an essential piece of the SDG implementation infrastructure. But their operation requires a series of ongoing balancing acts:

“Shooting for the moon”... 	 ...while “keeping it real”
Being entrepreneurial, opportunistic, responding to urgency of agenda	Taking time out to reflect, course-correct, maintain strategic focus
Operating at the leading edge of current practice	Not overlooking the basics
Driving forward, innovating as you go, in order to leave no one behind	Not getting too far ahead; bringing more cautious colleagues and stakeholders along on the journey
Learning by doing, avoiding ‘analysis paralysis’	Documenting what works to enable evaluation
Being visionary & ambitious, telling a compelling story	Not overclaiming, managing expectations
Genuine commitment to operating in an open and collaborative way	Pragmatic acceptance of sense of territorialism and competition between stakeholders
Being entrepreneurial, opportunistic, responding to urgency of agenda	Taking time out to reflect, course-correct, maintain strategic focus

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