Concept note
2017 ECOSOC Partnership Forum
“Partnerships for promoting opportunities, increased prosperity and sustainable development for all”

Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has provided governments as well as other stakeholders with a vision for achieving sustainable development for all by the year 2030. It is based on the premise that only an inclusive, transparent and effective multilateral system can best address the global development challenges we are now facing in today’s world. Collective action is needed more than ever before. This multilateral consensus for the future requires a stronger global partnership to achieve sustainable development, and is based on the implicit premise that interdependence and multilateral cooperation offer the best pathway to a safer, more prosperous and secure world.

Partnerships are defined as “voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and, as mutually agreed, to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits”.¹ To date many partnerships, including in particular with business, have focussed on sectors in which short-term assistance is urgently needed, such as in the areas of education, health, water and sanitation. However, the diversity of partnerships between the United Nations and non-state actors have significantly increased within the last decade to include those that focus on core business and value chain partnerships; social investment and philanthropy; advocacy and public policy engagement, and multi-stakeholder issue networks. The recent increase in traditional forms of partnership and the emergence of new forms of partnership increased the contribution of non-State actors on the United Nation’s development agenda.

Partnerships in support of the 2030 Agenda, which places emphasis more on an inclusive and holistic approach to sustainable development, should now focus more on the longer-term achievement of those goals, including job creation, protection of the environment and inclusive economic growth. This shift would also coincide with the changing business environment, where businesses see greater shared value and potential returns in helping societies become more prosperous through supporting longer-term developmental efforts than by simply relying on short-term profits. Moreover, ecological sustainability is also critical for business.

The world continues to face weak economic growth, with estimates of just 2.4 per cent in 2016². The sharp fall in commodity prices continues to put pressure on political stability and

¹ See General Assembly resolution 62/211, operative paragraph 2.
economic activity in developing economies across Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. The group of least developed countries (LDCs) is experiencing a modest slowdown of their economies, with growth rates falling from 5.1 per cent in 2014 to an estimated 4.5 per cent in 2015, and growth in small island developing states (SIDS) has stalled. Weaker export demand from emerging economies, lower commodity prices, net capital outflows, and weak investment growth and, in some cases, military conflicts, natural disasters and adverse weather conditions, exerted downward pressure on growth. This is particularly true in Sub-Saharan Africa where the World Bank growth forecast for 2016 is only 1.6 per cent. The current cycle of weak aggregate demand, under-investment, low productivity and below-potential global growth poses a huge challenge for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will be critical to stimulate inclusive growth in the near term and foster long-term sustainable development which protects the environment and leaves no one behind.

The global infrastructure gap is a significant challenge and must be prioritized to create the conditions conducive for such an inclusive growth. Infrastructure is not only a prerequisite for industrialization and inclusive growth, but provides the means to achieve the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Infrastructure is needed for public service delivery, including health, education, water and sanitation. It increases people’s mobility, connects markets, and helps reduce women’s unpaid work burden. Innovation in these critical areas is needed if we are to successfully overcome these challenges. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) calls for enhanced support, including financial support and capacity-building, especially for those countries in need. Both the AAAA and SDG17 highlight the importance of partnerships for delivering on sustainable development objectives. In particular, public-private partnerships (PPPs) have gained importance in infrastructure development, given the complex financing, construction and operation requirements of infrastructure projects. In addition to much-needed investment, innovative policy tools and frameworks are needed to promote resilient infrastructure and green industrialization.

Building on the thematic discussion on infrastructure for all during the Council’s 2016 High-Level segment last July, the 2017 ECOSOC Partnership Forum will provide a platform to address partnerships aimed at promoting infrastructure development, particularly in Africa, the least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS), which face the largest infrastructure gaps. Indeed, infrastructure is a priority element for realizing the vision of action plans such as Africa’s Agenda 2063, the SIDS Action Platform as contained in the Samoa Pathway, and the 2014 Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries.

The value and effectiveness of both multistakeholder and public-private partnerships can be best judged against principles and guidelines that govern them. While there is consensus that partnerships are instrumental in helping the United Nations achieve its development objectives as reflected in the outcomes of UN Conferences and Summits, there is no intergovernmentally agreed set of principles and guidelines governing the relationship between the United Nations system and non-governmental actors. As a follow-up to General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/224, the Forum will continue the discussion on accountability and transparency and the role of Member States by focussing on the importance of principles and guidelines for multistakeholder and other partnerships that can help achieve development goals of the United Nations Conferences and Summits.

Objectives

The 2017 Partnership Forum will:

- Explore ways to promote transformative partnerships in line with the transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda;
• Discuss how partnerships can help to promote innovation for capacity-building and a more resilient infrastructure;

• Identify ways in which recent commitments on infrastructure made by various partners can deliver transformational change with strong results for Africa and other countries in special situations;

• Keeping existing principles and guidelines in mind, how can the UN better ensure uniformity in its approach to partnerships - including at the field level - and that UN partnerships conform to UN values?

Participants

In attendance will be representatives of Member States, international, regional and other organizations, senior officials from the United Nations, and leaders from the private sector, philanthropy as well as representatives from civil society and academia.

Outcome

A President’s Summary will be prepared capturing the key messages from the day’s discussions. A more extensive summary of the event’s deliberations will be prepared which will serve as a basis for ECOSOC’s contribution to the HLPF and the high-level segment of the Council.