



# ECOSOC

United Nations Economic and Social Council

TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

## Summary

### 2017 ECOSOC Partnership Forum

*“Partnerships for promoting opportunities, increased prosperity  
and sustainable development for all”*

5 April 2017





## Introduction

The annual ECOSOC Partnership Forum, held in New York on 5 April 2017, brought together leaders from the private sector, philanthropy, civil society and academia, to engage in an interactive dialogue with governments on the role of partnerships for promoting opportunities, increased prosperity and sustainable development for all. The event featured a keynote address by Her Excellency Mrs. Mary Robinson, President of the Mary Robinson Foundation, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and current member of The Elders.

The Partnership Forum explored ways to promote partnerships for solutions to global challenges as well as new avenues to make them more effective in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It consisted of a roundtable dialogue on innovative partnerships for resilient infrastructure, including in countries in special situations. In addition, the Forum discussed the need for principles and guidelines for UN-associated partnerships.

The 2017 ECOSOC Partnership Forum reiterated the need for full contribution of public and private stakeholders, as well as Governments, to realizing the 2030 Agenda. This contribution can be very effective if these actors are committed to transparency, accountability, monitoring and oversight mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda.

## Opening

**H.E. Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** opened the 2017 ECOSOC Partnership Forum by calling on all development stakeholders to join forces in the fight for a world with no poverty, no hunger and no disease; for better lives for all men, women and children and for a healthier planet. He stressed the importance of infrastructure development and industrialization, and noted the vital role that infrastructure plays in the economic and social development of cities, regions and nations. The President of ECOSOC also underlined the significance of public-private initiatives in developing resilient infrastructure. ECOSOC, with its multi-stakeholder approach, is an important platform for dialogue among partners and the promotion of partnerships. He further stressed that transparency and accountability in partnerships will be important in achieving sustainable development.





During his opening remarks, **H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly** stressed that strategic and innovative partnerships are essential to driving smart, innovative and integrated action to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In that context, he highlighted a few examples, among them, the importance of partnerships to help: ensure universal access of safe drinking water by 2030; deliver universal access to electricity; complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education for girls and boys; mobilize the estimated US\$5-7 trillion in annual investments needed to achieve the SDGs; harness the power of technology to solve SDG implementation challenges; and develop economic opportunities for women, girls and the youth.



The President of the United Nations General Assembly further stressed that Governments have a pivotal role to play in developing partnerships to allow SDG action in the areas of greatest need. This includes establishing policy and regulatory frameworks that create an enabling environment for investment. In this regard, he emphasized that capacity-building and technical assistance through partnerships and investments must be provided to developing countries, particularly those in special situation, including LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and Africa. He called the international community to “let go of old grievances and skepticism” and to develop “new and inclusive ways of thinking, partnering, financing, and delivering on the ground.” The UN has a fundamental role to play in considering ways to map existing SDG partnerships, and identify gaps where new partnerships are needed to help bring SDG implementation to scale. He asked all stakeholders to forge new and innovative partnerships for Ocean action, and to register voluntary commitments for the UN Ocean Conference (5-9 June 2017).

In a video message, **Ms. Amina Mohamed, United Nations Deputy-Secretary-General**, called for the promotion of effective partnerships that emphasize innovation, impact, transparency, coherence, accountability and sustainability. She stated that partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries are indispensable to its success. She called for the strengthening of local, national, regional and global partnerships between the public and the private sectors. Data and technologies need to be leveraged at the service of people. Young women and men have to be brought in and





empowered to be agents of peace and development in their countries and communities. In the context of leaving no one behind, she asked for special attention to reducing vulnerability and building resilience in countries with the greatest needs. She stressed that promoting effective partnerships would entail greater emphasis on innovation, impact, transparency, coherence, accountability and sustainability.

The opening remarks were followed by a keynote address by **Mrs. Mary Robinson, President of the Mary Robinson Foundation, a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and a current member of The Elders.** She stressed that ECOSOC has a critical role to play in nurturing a new vision of partnership and international cooperation based on a shared sense of mutual interdependence. On the challenges posed by climate change, she spoke about



the importance of a new paradigm of collaboration to remove the silos between governments, civil society and the private sector. She cautioned that a little over a year since the historic accords of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the collaborative spirit in which these accords were concluded seemed to be under attack from rising waves of populism and myopic decision-making.

In that context, Ms. Robinson stressed that a new vision for global partnership needed to weave together the interlinked challenges of advancing sustainable development and stabilizing the climate system. She underlined that climate justice could provide the basis for this approach, recognizing that taking climate action and ensuring a safer world for future generations was about a just transition. It also entailed the elimination of fossil fuel emissions while ensuring that people everywhere had their rights upheld and could share the benefits of sustainable development.

She stated that the private sector should be an active contributor to sustainable development, including through respect for human and labour rights, and upholding environmental and governance standards in their global operations and supply chains. She also stressed that by strengthening each country's commitment to implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and developing substantive National Action Plans on the implementation of these principles, the public and private sectors could develop partnerships that further economic growth and development, eradicate poverty and inequality, and realize the SDGs.



## Roundtable Discussion I: Innovative Partnerships for resilient infrastructure, including in countries in special situations

The focus of this roundtable was on how partnerships could effectively leverage comparative advantages of different partners, break down silos between sectors and development actors and mobilize adequate financial resources needed for resilient infrastructure in vulnerable countries, especially LDCs, LLDCs and the SIDS. It also considered ways of meaningfully incorporating gender perspectives in public-private partnerships (PPPs) related to infrastructure.

### What makes for successful PPP initiatives?

While Governments have the main responsibility to deliver resilient infrastructure, they can enter into PPPs to increase the availability, quality, and resilience of infrastructure and public services, while sharing the risk with the private sector. Speakers highlighted key, evidence-based factors and conditions that had a direct impact on the way PPPs are conceived, developed, implemented, managed and evaluated. For this framework to work and meaningfully deliver, it was imperative that partnerships are genuine and built on trust. All the voices needed to be heard from the start of the project. Each participating agent needed, by necessity, to be adequately informed and apprised of their responsibilities and expectations prior to making binding commitments. In this context, it was critical for both the State and private entity to act openly and transparently.

The complex arrangements required to fund and implement large infrastructure projects exposed the chronic **weak institutional and technical capacities** of the developing countries. Furthermore, the limited capacity of countries to adequately prepare and market bankable pipeline projects continued to undermine progress in this area. This was certainly the case for the African continent which failed to secure funding for 433 projects due to poor preparation. The complex negotiation processes based on a range of competencies and expertise, such as analytical, legal, technical, economic, financial, institutional, gender, environmental, was identified as yet another challenge that needed greater attention.

PPPs have been successful in large infrastructure projects, where there were a steady flow of revenue, fair sharing of risks and benefits among the partners, rule of law and set of skills not only in the design, but also in building, operating and maintaining the infrastructure. It is critical that all parties **map out and share risk and rewards in a balanced and fair manner.**



Risks were identified not only as financial risks but also related to extreme weather conditions and cyber security. The need to clearly distinguish “perceived” from “real” risk was highlighted, especially for the case of Africa. This session pointed out that while Africa was often perceived as being too risky for some external investors; its project-specific risk assessments were comparable to other regions, including Europe. Speakers broached the issue of de-risking of PPP projects by identifying some important actions that governments could undertake to improve the risk assessment of their countries. Trust and confidence building measures, such as working with private credit rating agencies and upholding good governance and the rule of law were essential. Furthermore, it was important for governments to undertake progressive policy, institutional and regulatory reforms.

Speakers stressed the **role of development cooperation in supporting developing countries** to adequately strengthen their capacities. A critical area where such assistance was needed involved supporting countries to develop systems that were imperative to the generation of data and information used to inform investment decisions.

### **Gender Mainstreaming In PPPs**

This meeting stressed the importance of incorporating gender perspectives in PPPs and highlighted a number of concrete actions in this area. The African Development Bank (AfDB) has established a capacity building fund that supported the deployment of technical advisers to all eight regional economic communities. The role of these advisors was to train and support imbedding gender perspective in projects throughout their lifecycles. The World Energy Council (WEC) had an active gender training and mentorship programme that promoted the participation of women in project development, implementation, management and evaluation. On its part, the World Bank placed gender at the core of its project consideration. The Bank also supported analytical work on violence against women and girls.

### **Initiatives that promote PPP arrangements**

The roundtable highlighted national, regional and global efforts being undertaken by various actors to promote PPP arrangements. **The Global Infrastructure Forum**, established following the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, sought to bridge the infrastructure gap. The Forum, convened by the Multilateral Development Banks, is a space for countries and development partners to work together by building on existing multilateral collaboration mechanisms, and to improve alignment and coordination among established and new infrastructure initiatives, multilateral and national development banks, UN agencies, national institutions, development partners, and the private sector.



The **Global Infrastructure Hub**, an initiative of the G20 that was established in 2014, was mandated to grow the global pipeline of quality, bankable infrastructure projects. The Hub facilitated knowledge sharing, reform opportunities and connects public and private sectors in attempts to increase the flow and quality of private and public infrastructure investment opportunities.

The World Bank has developed the **Global Infrastructure Facility (GIF)** as a global open platform that facilitates the preparation and structuring of complex infrastructure public-private partnerships (PPPs) to enable mobilization of private sector and institutional investor capital. The GIF platform coordinated and integrated the efforts of Multilateral Development Banks, private sector investors and financiers, and governments interested in infrastructure investment in Emerging Markets and Developing Economies—fostering collective action on complex projects that no single institution could achieve alone.

The **G20 Africa Partnership** was created to help improve conditions for sustainable private sector investment, investment in infrastructure, economic participation, and employment in African countries. A key pillar of the G20 Africa Partnership was the **Compact with Africa**, an initiative within the G20's finance track and coordinated by the German Federal Ministry of Finance. While the Compact with Africa was open to all African countries, five have committed to pioneering this new approach: Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal, and Tunisia. The International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA) - a non-governmental organisation that represents about 40,000 forwarding and logistics firms worldwide, developed and was implementing a capacity building initiative in developing countries known as "**Train the Trainer**" programme.

The African Union's **Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA)** aimed at establishing a common agenda for mobilizing resources for the effective expansion and maintenance of infrastructure in Africa. It provided a readymade list of priorities that address physical infrastructure needs and the soft infrastructure issues. The African Union aimed to fund its PIDA projects through a variety of sources: public, private, PPPs as well as from domestic and development partner resources.

The World Economic Forum, together with the OECD, launched the **Sustainable Development Investment Partnership (SDIP)** at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in 2015 to mobilize US\$100 billion in private financing for infrastructure projects in developing countries over five years. Regional hubs were considered critical in creating an infrastructure-investment marketplace and foster local ownership by multiple partners.



Several countries highlighted their contribution in promoting the development of resilient infrastructure. Japan stated that the 6<sup>th</sup> conference of the **Tokyo International Conference of Africa's Development (TICAD)** which took place 2016 in Nairobi, Kenya, focused on the delivery of capacity building programmes. At this Conference, the Government of Japan committed approximately US\$ 30 billion under public-private partnership for the implementation of measures necessary for quality infrastructure, resilient health systems and peace and stability. China highlighted its “**One Belt, One Road**” initiative conceived within the international cooperation framework which seeks to connect Eurasian and some African economies through infrastructure, trade and investment. The UAE underscored the catalytic role of its modest US\$ 50 million **UAE-Pacific Partnership Fund (UAE-PPF)** initiative that is instrumental in delivering grant-funded renewable energy projects to eleven Pacific Island nations.

## Roundtable Discussion II: Principles and guidelines governing UN-associated partnerships

The roundtable discussion on “Principles and guidelines governing UN-associated partnerships” addressed the need for more effective partnerships that were aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the values and principles of the United Nations.

### 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and partnerships

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can only be successfully implemented with the mobilization of all constituencies and partnerships. While Member States had the main responsibility in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the increasingly important role played by the private sector in its implementation was acknowledged. The success of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, however, required a broader multistakeholder approach with the involvement of the different actors, not only Governments and the private sector, but also local authorities, NGOs, social partners, academia, foundations and other relevant organizations.

While the United Nations system was encouraged to pursue multistakeholder partnerships, it was emphasized that these partnerships needed to follow key **principles and values**, and that they were transparent, accountable, and follow effective monitoring and review process. The success of the 2030 Agenda will also be determined on the degree to which its





principles—human rights, labour rights, the environment and anti-corruption—are respected. All partnerships the UN system engaged in should help advance the implementation of the Agenda and the public interest must always shape the public-private partnerships.

## Principles and guidelines

**Guidelines and principles** for engaging with partners can help promote measured risk-taking while promoting effective partnerships for the implementation of the Agenda. The private sector considered a common set of guidelines and principles useful in engaging with the UN entities in a coherent and coordinated way. In addition, a common set of core guidelines and principles for the whole UN system was considered crucial to safeguard the reputation and integrity of the organization, but there was lack of consensus on the exact nature of the role of Member States. Some were of the view that new mandates and guidelines were not necessary, and that the focus should be on better and more effective partnerships as well as ways to improve transparency and accountability.

The existing “Guidelines on a principle-based to Cooperation between the United Nations and the Business Sector” provided a common framework for the UN to build on. Despite progress in recent years, there was potential for improvement in particular in the field of **transparency, reporting, due diligence and risk management**. Disclosure of all private sector partners, contributions and matching funds has not been systematic across the UN system. Furthermore, a common and systematic approach to due diligence and transparency remained lacking.

While **robust due diligence** at the initial stage was considered critical, evaluation of the actual and potential impact of partnerships needed to be an on-going process. It was recommended that the United Nations Global Compact participation be made a minimum mandatory prerequisite in business partner selection across the UN system. Companies that have been delisted from the Global Compact should not be eligible to become partners with the UN system entities. Different level of due diligence would be necessary depending on the type of engagement, such as multi-stakeholder partnerships, UN-led initiatives, and public-private initiatives led by Member States. There was concern that framework for the procurement in the UN system does not rise to the same level of the “Guidelines on a principle-based to Cooperation between the United Nations and the Business Sector”.

It was argued by some that depending on their mandates, however, the United Nations entities might need to work with **certain sectors** to positively influence partners’ behaviour. For example, engagement with the tobacco industry could help eliminate child labour and increase opportunities to secure decent work and improved incomes for adults who depend



on the tobacco sector for their livelihoods. Therefore, flexibility was needed for each entity to respond quickly to specific circumstances, to reach out to different stakeholders and adapt to a dynamic environment.

Some emphasized the need for a **uniform approach to partnerships** within the UN system. To this end, it was noted that the **Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the UN system (QCPR)** called upon the entities of the United Nations development system to share knowledge and best practices in partnership approaches with a view to improving transparency, coherence, due diligence, accountability and impact. Suggestions included information to be made available regarding the partners, their contributions and matching funds and projects for all partnerships with the UN, including at the country level. Systematic reporting on such partnerships to the relevant **Executive Boards and Governing Bodies** could be strengthened. The potential role of Executive Boards and Governing Bodies in the effective implementation of respective guidelines and principles was also emphasized.

**Diversity** was considered one of the core strengths of the UN System. In the case of ILO, specific guidelines for public-private partnerships since 2009 have ensured an internal coordination of efforts with a sound internal clearance mechanism which required compliance through a consultation process with ILO's social partners. The involvement of ILO's social partners in the design and implementation of PPPs has resulted in their further increased participation and buy-in. It has also provided a high degree of oversight and monitoring. As a normative agency, the ILO recognized that partnerships to encourage compliance and respect for labour standards and the protection of workers through effective social dialogue was equally critical.

The UNHCR was working on a **Global Compact on Refugees**, to be proposed to the General Assembly in 2018, which will include a Programme of Action underpinning the Framework that sets out actions that can be taken—both by Member States and by other relevant stakeholders—to ensure its full implementation.

Some were of the view that the focus should be on ensuring the effectiveness of existing guidelines rather than looking at the gaps in the guidelines. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) was called on to lead a **mapping exercise** of UN partnership initiatives and identify gaps in guidelines and principles. In the area of UN-business partnerships, the **Global Compact's** sharing of best practices through the UN Private Sector Focal Points Network was acknowledged as an important resource. The private sector needed to be mobilized and sensitized on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.



At the **intergovernmental level**, various platforms existed, including the High-Level Political Forum which reviewed progress in the achievement of SDGs, including through multistakeholder partnerships. The ECOSOC Partnership Forum could serve as the hub for demonstrating how partnerships can respond to the strategic challenges posed by the 2030 Agenda.