ECOSOC PARTNERSHIP FORUM
“Partnerships for promoting opportunities, increased prosperity and sustainable development for all”
ECOSOC Chamber, New York, 5 April 2017

Draft Note on guidelines and principles for UN-associated partnerships

Background

Over the last two decades, many United Nations organizations have increasingly engaged in partnerships with the private sector, foundations, the civil society and non-governmental organizations to accomplish their work. While these partnerships cannot be a substitute for government responsibilities and commitments, they continue to be seen as instrumental in the implementation of the outcomes of all conferences and summits, including the 2030 Agenda. As a matter of practice, all conferences and summits now use a partnerships “platform” and “framework” for formal dialogue for launching voluntary commitments and initiatives from a range of stakeholders.

Given the ambition of the 2030 Agenda, improving the performance and impact of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) will be essential for helping the international community achieve its development objectives. Recent analyses have shown that while there have been some successes; the performance of MSPs have varied widely. A large majority of initiatives have proven to show a disappointingly low level of effectiveness. If it is agreed that the 2030 Agenda cannot be achieved without partnerships of all types, efforts would need to be made to ensure that they are efficient and effective and are aligned with the values and goals of the United Nations.

As part of its mandate related to the integrated and coordinated follow-up to conferences and summits, and, as a follow-up to General Assembly resolution 70/224, the Economic and Social Council, through the Partnership Forum, should continue to address the accountability and

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1 Multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs) are partnerships among Governments, private sector, foundations, non-governmental organizations, academia, for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources.

2 There are many definitions of public-private partnerships (Jomo, Chowdury and Sharma, 2016). On example cited is “ongoing agreements between government and private sector organizations in which the private organization participates in the decision-making and production of a public good or service that has traditionally been provided by the public sector and in which the private sector shares the risk of that production “

3 For example, see Pattberg et al: Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Building Blocks for success (2014).
transparency of MSPs and the role of Member States. One important aspect of ensuring accountability is to ensure that UN-associated partnerships conform to basic principles and guidelines that are clearly stated and in the public domain. In the context of an institutional culture that sometimes seem risk averse, principles and guidelines can encourage better protection of the UN’s integrity and reputation while promoting and incentivizing quality partnerships. Indeed, evaluating UN-associated partnerships would also require a set of guidelines as a baseline against which to measure whether they are achieving the objectives they have set for themselves in contributing to the internationally agreed development goals.

**Establishing principles and guidelines**

Currently, the “Guidelines on Cooperation between the United Nations and the Business Sector” serves to guide most parts of the UN system in their approach to engagement with private sector. They provide a framework to facilitate the formulation and implementation of partnerships between the UN and the private sector while safeguarding the integrity, impartiality and independence of the United Nations and preventing and mitigating potential risks of adverse impacts on people and the environment. They also take the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as the baseline reference point for expected business conduct and as a benchmark for responsible business implementation, as well as the UN Global Compact Ten Principles. Principles and guidelines are also found in the “Towards Global Partnerships” resolutions since 2000.

These guidelines, therefore, provide a broad tableau that should be considered as the basic minimum guidelines that apply to any partnership in which the UN is engaged. The UN partnerships should serve the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, while being coherent with national law and priorities and respecting international law, and complement national efforts. They should be transparent and accountable.

While the UN system for the most part uses the “Guidelines on Cooperation between the United Nations and the Business Sector” as the basic guide governing their partnerships, some parts of the UN system have also developed their own guidelines, which vary in scope and approach. Some provide a specific definition of who their partners would be, including the private sector, while others leave it vague. Some have been considered and endorsed by respective governing bodies of the entities.

In the meantime, member states committed in paragraph 48 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, to hold “inclusive, open and transparent discussion when developing and adopting guidelines and documentation for the use of PPPs, and to build a knowledge base and share lessons learned through regional and global forums.”

**Key questions:**

- Are principles and guidelines currently in place adequate for protecting the UN’s reputation and ensuring impactful UN-associated multi-stakeholder partnerships, or does more need to be done?

- What are the lessons learned from the UN system in utilizing existing principles and guidelines in ex-ante and ex-post evaluation of partnerships?
• Recognizing the need for differentiated guidelines for different types of partnerships, should there be a minimum system-wide set of principles and guidelines to guide their partnerships with outside actors? Would this lead to a more coherent approach to partnerships at the Headquarters and field levels?

• If so, should there be a reporting mechanism to show that guidelines and principles are being adhered to?

• How do we balance the need for nurturing partnerships with principles and guidelines, which potentially could be a disincentive for some stakeholders?

• How should any proposed principles and guidelines be linked to reporting of MSPs?

• What should be the role of Member States in ensuring principles and guidelines are being adhered to by the various partners? Should specific principles and guidelines for partnerships with the UN be inter-governmentally endorsed?

• What are some options for Member States guidance on principles and guidelines?

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