



2018 ECOSOC Partnership Forum

“Partnering for Resilient and Inclusive Societies: Contributions of the Private Sector”

4 April, 2018, New York

SUMMARY¹

The Economic and Social Council convened the eleventh Partnership Forum on the theme of *“Partnering for resilient and inclusive societies: contributions of the private sector”* on 4 April 2018. The meeting brought together over 300 representatives of Member States and a wide range of non-state actors including the private sector, civil society organizations, philanthropic organizations and academia to explore concrete ways in which the private sector can help to build more inclusive societies for all. The Forum focused on two main sub-themes: innovative business models and the role of big data analytics for public good, especially in driving inclusion and participation.

The discussion was premised on the understanding that while the main responsibility for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda lies with national governments, multi-stakeholder partnerships that harness the contribution of the private sector, can help find innovative solutions to fast track the implementation of 2030 Agenda. It is critical for the private sector to be inclusive of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations. Today’s private sector is being called on to maximize its positive impact throughout their supply chains and within each community where they operate.



“Achieving SDGs is not possible without pursuing inclusion and combatting inequality - without reaching out to those furthest behind first”

- President of ECOSOC



¹ This informal summary of the Partnership Forum will inform the 2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting, *“Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all”* and the 2018 HLPF.



KEY MESSAGES

Partnering for resilient and inclusive societies: contributions of the private sector

The Forum underscored the importance of investment for building inclusive societies, acknowledging that it is a “win-win partnership” for the private sector. Bringing in women, youth and vulnerable populations in all business strategies and operations helps the private sector better understand potential needs, expand markets and can lead to larger returns on investment.

The Forum emphasized the need for the private sector to make concrete contributions to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Many companies are already working in this direction but additional work needs to be done to ensure more impactful and accountable partnerships. The use of corporate sustainability benchmarks aligned with the SDGs was considered as an important modality to assess the contributions of businesses to the 2030 Agenda.

The Forum stressed the importance and the urgency for all stakeholders to align their policies with the inclusion targets of the 2030 Agenda, including targets geared towards incentivizing the practical contributions of the private sector towards more inclusive growth.

The Forum brought new emphasis to need for more robust public-private dialogue mechanisms aimed at strengthening the interface between the private sector and communities, in particular vulnerable groups, in respective national contexts.

The Forum advanced discussions on the responsible and ethical use of big data, the unique role of the private sector and public-private data partnerships in promoting public good. Quality and privacy of data and associated issues of trust were seen as key challenges faced by all stakeholders, including governments and the private sector.

The Forum highlighted the importance for development partners to provide the necessary financial, technical and technological capacity support for both the public and private sector entities in developing and fragile country contexts to create inclusive value chains and data infrastructure. The private sector and other partners should work closely with the most marginalized, to make their future business efforts more sustainable and help build more inclusive societies.

Delegations referred to the important role of oversight of Member States for UN-associated partnerships and called for a mapping exercise across the UN system to assess the effectiveness of partnerships involving the United Nations. The need to align partnerships with national priorities of Governments was also underscored.

The ECOSOC Partnership Forum was welcomed as a platform for open, critical and action-oriented dialogue among all stakeholders, producing concrete policy guidance in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

I. From commitment to results: contributions of the private sector to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Forum featured an Opening Conversation with three eminent speakers: Mr. Bob Wigley, Chairperson of UK Finance, Kirstine Cooper, General Counsel of AVIVA and Mr. Dan Matjila, CEO of Public Investment Corporation of South Africa. At the heart of the conversation was how to get from commitments to results.

Mr. Wigley highlighted the Women in Finance Charter designed to promote increased inclusion of women in financial leadership positions. The charter ties executive compensation to progress in gender inclusion. He also underlined the importance of optimizing technology to further promote inclusion and introduced the first [report](#) of the Block Chain Commission.

Ms. Kirstine Cooper, General Counsel of Aviva, introduced the World Benchmarking Alliance aimed at assessing the sustainability performance of firms in accordance with the SDGs to foster a race to the top among businesses to support the SDGs, inviting all to join in current [online consultation](#) on benchmarking perspectives.

Mr. Matjila underscored the need for conducive legislation and public policies to enable companies to comply with clear sustainability standards. Mr. Matjila informed the Forum of a planned projects that include the founding of a bank dedicated for women and youth, he also welcomed any inputs regarding how this envisaged bank could effectively promote financial inclusion for vulnerable groups.

II. Inclusive business models that drive inclusion

What is the role of the private sector in achieving the inclusion agenda of the SDGs?

The private sector is expected to play a bigger role in not only financing, but also in sharing expertise, innovation and technologies to achieve sustainable development. In this regard, the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda highlight the need for the private sector to align their business strategies in line with the national sustainable development priorities and local contexts.

Inclusion targets in the SDGs can be translated into concrete “business objectives”. The private sector can contribute to inclusion agendas through creating more inclusive value chains; establishing diversity policies; including marginalized groups in decision-making processes; and spurring disruptive innovations that bring marginalized groups into the mainstream of economic and social life.

“Inclusivity is about all aspects of core business – it is about how you manage to create value chains. How you serve and manage consumers.”

- Andrew Wilson, ICC



What are the opportunities and challenges for the private sector in meeting inclusion targets?

Co-designing value chains involving vulnerable groups helps the private sector better understand the potential needs and returns of investment. Engaging vulnerable groups in designing products and services allows for more accurate market research and demand-driven businesses, which promise more profit with decreased transactions costs. Co-developing value chains with vulnerable groups also contributes to sustainable corporate branding and the formation of demand-driven multi-stakeholder partnerships.

More businesses are now shifting towards unlocking the business potential of the inclusion agenda, which is no longer considered as an “add-on” to corporate social responsibility exercises nor a philanthropic venture, but as part of a core business strategy. Firms recognize the importance of fostering win-win strategies to perform for profit-making and make impacts for social good including through effective communication and engagement strategies. According to recent research², sustainable business models could unlock economic opportunities worth up to USD 12 trillion and increase employment by up to 380 million jobs by 2030.

“Profit is not a dirty word. It is not a greed. Profit creates sustainability and the very sustainability creates systemic change.”

- Vincent Molinari, Liquid M Capital

Firms are already aligning their business strategies and practices with the 2030 Agenda. Companies are offering capacity building support using cutting-edge technologies to provide equal opportunities to women, youth and vulnerable groups. Some firms are exploring possibilities to use blockchain solutions to accelerate the movement of capital and remove barriers for vulnerable groups. Companies are also including youth in their value chains through efforts to provide employability and digital training and by creating decent employment for them. Some businesses are fostering an impact-based outsourcing method to support the disadvantaged youth in developing countries while others are implementing business models that generate social value through working with a group of poor women. Firms are also setting specific targets for female employees in key corporate leadership roles.

Responsible businesses often encounter various challenges in implementing inclusive business models. These difficulties include: securing sustained access to capital, markets and connectivity for the base of the pyramid and vulnerable groups; finding technology-based solutions to tackle the global talent mismatch; scaling programmes and projects to enable a larger reach; including vulnerable groups in co-designing process early on; dealing with restrictive legislative frameworks and unfavorable policies; and building a long-term vision for and maintaining relationships with vulnerable populations.



² For more information, see: <http://businesscommission.org/news/releasesustainable-business-can-unlock-at-least-us-12-trillionin-new-market-value-and-repair-economic-system>



What are some of the lessons learned in leveraging the potential of the private sector in building more inclusive societies?

Robust engagement mechanisms should be in place aimed at strengthening dialogues between the private sector and target vulnerable groups from the beginning so as to understand their needs and make them a part of solution. Empowering vulnerable groups through inclusion in decision making processes requires close and consistent dialogue. Appropriate mechanisms should be embedded not only at the policy design stage, but also throughout all development and business processes including the monitoring and evaluation phases as well.

“Sustainable businesses are good businesses and the only businesses we can have. We are what we sow.”

- Ricardo Oteros Sanchez-Pozuelo, Supracafe

It is critical for the private sector to go beyond the ‘funder-recipient’ model by investing in long-term trust- and partnership-building with local communities and civil society. This can be done by hiring and sourcing locally to build business infrastructure in line with the priorities of local communities. It is critical to show the positive results of inclusive business practices in communities to incentivize and engage other companies.

Governments should align their policies with inclusion targets of the 2030 Agenda and initiate policy dialogues with the private sector, geared towards incentivizing the practical and innovative contributions of businesses towards inclusive growth. The needs and capacities of vulnerable groups should be embedded in national sustainable development policies. More systematic links between national economic and social policies can lead to more coherent and enabling policy environments for catalysing the private sector’s contributions towards building inclusive societies. Putting in place regulatory and legal changes to move capital in more effective way is also instrumental.

Keeping abreast of international norms on inclusion, businesses should improve their partnerships with civil society to manage supply chains more inclusively and use their relations with government and customers for social good. They should adopt and go beyond the ‘first do no harm’ principle wherever possible to demonstrate an active commitment to uphold the labour and human rights in their business administration. Firms should delink the corporate social responsibility agendas from advertising and marketing budgets and involve civil society in the making of philanthropic funding decisions.

Business should network with other companies for peer-learning and capacity-building in the spirit of multi-stakeholder partnerships. The UN can provide the neutral space for this and facilitate the replication and scaling up of good practices.

Right vision and leadership should be in place globally to drive the opportunities for meaningful and effective partnerships to break down the silos, share the knowledge, exponentiate the transformative changes and take quantum leaps in building more inclusive societies. It is critical to engage partners, alliances and advocacy groups to achieve inclusivity targets collectively.

Development partners can provide the necessary financial, technical and technological support for both public and private sector entities in developing and transitional country contexts to implement inclusive business strategies. Technical cooperation, including through South-South cooperation, can



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help build public structures such as certification, credit rating and research facilities, to promote inclusive business models and practices.

III. Building momentum for the SDGs: the role of big data for public good

What are some of opportunities of big data in building more inclusive societies?

Big data can detect those farthest left behind through analyzing emerging risks around the outcomes of policies and programmes in real time. Big data used in combination with existing statistical data infrastructure can make the marginalized populations more visible and can be used by governments to reach out to those who are not reaching out.

Big data can enable “smarter” implementation of the SDGs, including through real-time analytics of immediate perceptions and feedback of the public to inform government’s interventions. Big data can assess and measure the effectiveness of daily efforts and affect the behavioral change at an unprecedented speed with minimal time gaps.

A new generation of instruments (financing, technology and policy) can be unlocked by “big indicators” powered by big data and reliable statistics. Big data can provide additional key insights, which will help identify more granular and timelier indicators and better instruments for problem-solving.

What are some of risks associated with big data in promoting more inclusive societies?

Big data is hard to anonymise and can be repurposed in ways that can subvert behaviours and political processes. The concern around privacy protection is real and not just about ‘having nothing to hide’.

Big data can be inherently limited and biased against the most marginalized and aggravate the gaps between the ‘data haves’ and ‘have nots’. While some sources of big data may reach every square meter on this earth, countless people still remain invisible in the new world of information due to lack of education, limited technology infrastructure, language barriers, poverty, geographical isolation or other factors caused by various prejudices and exclusion.

A greater risk associated with big data is continued non-use of big data for public good. The daily opportunity costs are too high for not improving the tracking of epidemics, early warning systems, crisis responses and other public services and modernizing the institutional practices.

What role can the private sector play in big data?

Big data is an important component of business assets which the private sector can donate to governments for more informed public policy-making. The UN Global Pulse has been working to promote the concept of “data philanthropy” of the private sector for public good.



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The private sector can carefully balance the risks against the innovation and use big data responsibly and ethically for social good with good privacy protection measures in place.

“We still have to figure out the balance between innovation vs. risk in a way that works for all constituents.”

- Ms. JoAnn Stonier, MasterCard

It is critical to develop and expand the right governance model to assess the risks versus rewards of innovation. This model would allow innovation to drive improvement first and ensure the evaluation of losses and gains will be a part of the conversation – while sound codes of conduct and training programmes for suppliers and staff are in place.

What is the role of partnerships in unleashing the potential of big data for public good?

Big data can be used best for social good when “good partnerships” are in place involving all actors effectively sharing the responsibilities and risks in developing frameworks, policies, guidelines and



privacy and security protection measures, while putting the public first. Big data can be optimally utilized when industry dialogues and multi-stakeholder collaborations exist among: those who have and can provide the data; those who can analyse them; and those who can take actions on them.

Public-private partnership (PPP) is a crucial tool to

make the data revolution work for sustainable development: good models exist while demand and supply for data partnerships are surging. A growing number of companies recognize the promise and peril of big data and feel the need to partner with governments, researchers, communities and other relevant stakeholders. More governments – of both developed and developing countries – have decided to work in partnership with the private sector, local governments and civil society to take advantage of the potential of big data for better policy making, taking bold steps to invest public funds in highly experimental approaches and reaping the benefits already, in some cases.

“Information is power. So we thought it is wise to empower our people with information so that they could make informed decisions.”

- Eddy Mukooyo, Uganda AIDS Commission

In order to get data partnerships to scale, there is an urgent need for significant capacity building in shaping inclusive and transparent architecture for data collaboration.

Challenges encountered, include information silos and the constraints in processing and analytical capacities. Investment is needed in building human capital; technology- and data-management infrastructures and institutions;

“To harness the potential of big data, you need a good national data infrastructure as a benchmark.”

-Stefan Schweinfest, UN Statistical Division

as well as norm-setting efforts, including development of legislative framework, regulations, codes of conducts, self-assessment tools, among others. In this regard, the important role of partnerships and development cooperation including technical cooperation was underlined. Until the adequate data infrastructure is established, it is critical to work with the third parties in parallel to fill the data gaps.



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Trust and relationship-building are indispensable to successful and sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships in big data. It is essential that all partners and end users have a clear understanding of what is asked of them and what they will get in return. It is important to share the sustainable long-term vision and look beyond the immediate monetary gains.

How do we address the competing needs of data ownership and privacy?

While responsible and ethical use of big data is still an evolving subject, the commonalities of values, especially the basic human right to privacy, should be fully respected and duly taken into account in corporate and governments’ governance systems and regime including codes of conduct for dealing with big data. In this regard, it is important to raise the awareness of the general public about the potential benefits and risks of big data analytics – including their rights – and capably respond to changing expectations accordingly. **A new data policy framework for dealing with big data should be considered.**

“Privacy is a right. In the long term, wanting to be using big data for public good means we really need to make privacy work.”

- Mr. Robert Kirkpatrick, UN Global Pulse

What are some of the lessons learned?

It is critical to bridge the gap in digital highways and understand among whom and where the data asymmetry exists to focus on the most excluded and marginalised and reach the farthest left behind first.

Big data can enable timely monitoring, reporting, informed policy-making and smarter implementation of the SDGs. Its potential limitations include: over time consistency, over space comparability and other possible biases that should be taken into account to avoid misrepresentation of any groups of populations and poor policy-making. Official statistics, big data and geospatial information should complement each other to generate quality data. In this regard, the national information infrastructure and the leadership of national statistical offices should be in place.

To get to scale with the use of big data, an evolution is needed in how big data is collected and utilized around the world, in ways that balances the risk of misuse (privacy) against the risk of non-use. Big data analytics should be grounded on a common, agreeable methodology and be fully transparent, accountable, sensitive to contexts and put the rights of people at the core. It is critical to put in place enabling environments where the governments and the private sector partner across sectors and industries under smart and agile global regulations and in a culture of collaboration that allow innovations to flourish.



IV. Ways forward and next steps



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Partnerships play a key role in both implementing an inclusive business agenda and advancing a big data revolution in support of sustainable development and more inclusive societies. Building on the discussions of the Partnership Forum, further evidence and best practices should be accumulated on how to harness the potential contributions of the private sector, including leveraging its new frontier technologies, to improve the lives of people and reach the most vulnerable and farthest left behind first.

To this end, many participants noted the unique role of the ECOSOC Partnership Forum in addressing partnerships and the importance of engagement of and oversight by Member States and other non-state actors to accelerate efforts to achieve a sustainable future for all.