

Partnerships for the UN Development System¹

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development underscores that all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement the SDGs. Given that no one actor can realize the SDGs and that an essential feature of the goals is that they are interlinked, the 2030 Agenda emphasizes the role of partnerships – the interlinking of human agency to achieve a common purpose – as a critical means of implementation. While Agenda 2030 recognizes that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development, it highlights the need for Global Partnerships for Sustainable Development and also multi-stakeholder partnerships, involving private sector, civil society organizations and philanthropic institutions, as means for delivering the SDGs. In Sustainable Development Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda, Member States resolved to *“enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources.....and encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships”*.²

Given the overarching role of the UN in Agenda 2030 the UNDS is entrusted with the responsibility to forge and facilitate collaborative partnerships, within and across countries, to support the realization of the sustainable development agenda. The UNDS is expected to play a catalytic and support role for broadening and deepening the scope of partnerships, across a wide range of actors, to facilitate implementation of the SDG agenda. It will be critical for the UNDS to assume the role of a broker or facilitator of partnerships during the SDG period, taking into account the priorities and needs of people and countries implementing the SDGs. Partnerships will be one of the critical mechanisms that will determine the success of SDGs. Partnerships will define one of the critical “hows” of the 2030 Agenda.

The imperative of forging partnerships is not new for the UNDS. In fact, all UNDS entities engage in partnerships – in one form or other – to deliver its normative, policy advocacy and programmatic functions. The key partner for any UNDS entity is often the national government. But it also partners with international financial institutions, regional development banks, civil society organizations, and increasingly also engages private sector entities, to deliver on its mandates. The Busan Partnership Agreement, which was adopted in 2011, has assisted in establishing common principles and ensuring accountability and enhanced effectiveness in the context of partnerships and development cooperation. A chronology of UNDS partnerships for sustainable development is included in Annex I.

During the SDG period, UNDS will need to strengthen its role as a broker in facilitating the creation of inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships, which engage both traditional and non-traditional development partners for the benefit of countries in the realization of the SDGs. Partnerships should

¹ The Co-Chairs of the Independent Team of Advisers (ITA) led the process of drafting the paper, with inputs from ITA members and a research team. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent consensus among all ITA members. Additional viewpoints from ITA members are available in a separate compendium. The ITA Co-Chairs would like to thank all ITA members for their invaluable contributions to the paper.

²The 2015 resolution of the General Assembly on the “Global Partnership for Development” defines partnerships as “voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve common purpose or undertake a specific task and, as mutually agreed, to share the risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits”.

include governments, and such actors as civil society, non-governmental organizations, academia, multilateral and regional development banks, regional organizations, media, businesses, youth groups, cities and municipalities, think tanks and others.

I. Partnerships during the SDG period

UNDS entities typically engage in two types of partnerships: a. partnerships where one or more UNDS entities are a direct party; and where UNDS is not a direct party, but plays the role of intermediary broker or facilitator to bring two or more stakeholders together. In the context of the first type, a UNDS entity would be expected to forge partnership, for example, with a national statistical authority to strengthen data collection or with a private sector entity to deliver basic services. The UNDS entities could also play an important role in forging partnerships for domestic resource mobilization and transfer of knowledge and technology. The second type of partnerships includes public-private or private-private partnerships – including partnerships between and among civil society organizations, NGOs, academia and private sector entities – facilitated or brokered by a UNDS entity within or across countries. During the SDG period, this role will become increasingly critical and UNDS entities will be expected to forge more such partnerships to mobilize domestic and external resources, facilitate transfer of technology, generate venture capitals for small entrepreneurs, strengthen policy development and policy advocacy and strengthen peer and partnership reviews. Given the universality of the 2030 Agenda, these will also include partnerships in the context of South-South, North-South, South-North and North-North cooperation.

A broader vision on partnerships must recognize the centrality of the role of civil society organizations, popular participation and experts from national and international technical agencies and academia in periodic review processes as a central component of SDG implementation. Such broad-based partnerships will also contribute to strengthening the governance of UNDS, improving organizational arrangements and enhancing periodic monitoring and learning mechanisms.

The UNDS entities would also need to contribute effectively to partnership management, enhancing transparency in, and accountability for, partnerships. Random checks and random audits of various partnerships can play an important role in enhancing accountability and making partnerships more effective for sustainable development.

In order to ensure that partnerships effectively contribute and reinforce other efforts towards the realization of the SDGs within and across countries, UNDS entities would need to:

- a. Forge partnerships that are need-based and aligned with country priorities as well as with UNDS functional priorities for SDGs;
- b. Promote multi-sectoral and multidimensional partnerships;
- c. Simplify the rules of engagement for partnerships, while managing risks;
- d. Enhance effectiveness and ensure accountability for results.

a. Forging need-based, demand-driven partnerships

Partnerships during the SDG period should be demand-driven, and not pushed by supply-side factors. The UN is a valued brand for many stakeholders, particularly for those seeking to enhance their visibility, legitimacy and credibility. There can be direct or indirect pressure on UNDS entities to accept a partner. Leveraging their brand value, UNDS entities should be able to choose and forge partnerships, taking into account specific needs at national, regional and global levels. For partnerships to effectively contribute towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda, it is an imperative that UNDS entities facilitating partnerships are guided by a clear understanding of country needs as

well as the existing gaps in UNDS functions, capacities and funding and how a potential partnership can help fill these gaps. The ultimate objective of partnerships should be to address needs of countries as they pursue the 2030 Agenda.

Currently, the UNDS lacks a system-wide capacity for assessing the needs and scope for various types of partnerships. Presently a number of UNDS offices have assigned roles in furthering multi-stakeholder partnerships, namely the UN Office for Partnerships, the Global Compact Office and DESA. According to a 2010 study of the Joint Inspection Unit, these entities typically work in isolation, resulting in unclear responsibilities, overlaps and duplication of effort among them. This underscores the imperative of a system-wide delivery support for partnerships, to integrate and streamline the large number of initiatives of UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies. The system-wide delivery support could assume the role of an incubator and broker to facilitate partnerships and provide various partnership services, including simplifying the rules of engagement and promoting multi-sectoral partnerships.

Options	Pros and Cons
<p>UNDS establishes a system-wide delivery support, with dedicated planning and coordination capacities, to support scaling-up of sector-specific and multi-sectoral partnerships at national, regional and global levels.</p> <p>The system-wide delivery support should act as a broker for intermediating demand and supply for partnerships and reduce transaction costs for individual entities.</p> <p>It should develop common rules and procedures for forging partnerships and make partnerships more transparent and accountable.</p> <p>The proposed system-wide delivery support should also provide partnership resources and enhance the collection of data on various partnerships and their development impact.</p>	<p>The proposed delivery support for partnerships would need significant staff capacity and financial resources to provide dedicated planning and coordination support to all UNDS entities.</p> <p>Many UNDS entities may not use the system-wide delivery support even if it is established, given that the system-wide delivery support may make the process lengthy and cumbersome.</p> <p>The delivery support may be too far removed from actions on the ground to understand the demand for various types of partnerships at the country level.</p>
<p>Establish delivery support for partnerships at the regional level, strengthening capacities of UN regional commissions to facilitate, broker and coordinate partnerships, especially partnerships that involve parties across national borders.</p>	<p>This could be cost-effective given that many cross-border partnerships – including South-South and Triangular Cooperation partnerships – have regional and sub-regional dimensions.</p> <p>This may also ensure effective division of labour between UNDS entities at the country level and UN Regional Commissions in the regional level, with the latter assuming facilitation and coordination roles for managing partnerships.</p>
<p>Empower and capacitate the UNRCs to forge and vet partnerships at the country level on behalf of all UN entities to ensure leadership, coordination and integration.</p> <p>Effective coordination and leadership from the UNRC will help ensure that UNDS entities forge partnerships that offer system-wide benefits.</p>	<p>The UNRC system would need significant additional staff capacities and resources to coordinate partnerships for all UNDS entities.</p> <p>Many UNDS entities may not want to rely on the UNRC to lead partnership efforts on their behalf, especially if the UNRC is not perceived as neutral.</p> <p>Given the national level mandate, UNRCs may not be in a position to effectively identify and broker cross-</p>

	border, multi-sectoral partnerships, including partnerships for South-South cooperation.
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b. Promoting multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional partnerships

During the MDG period, UNDS entities formed or facilitated many multi-stakeholder partnerships. In a typical multi-stakeholder partnership, a number of key actors primarily from within the same sector were crowded in to enhance synergies and impact. Sustainable Energy for All is an example of such a multi-stakeholder partnership. Another example is the Climate & Clean Air Coalition to reduce short-lived climate pollutants. There are many such multi-stakeholder partnerships in the climate sector. Complementing multi-stakeholder partnerships, there were also Action Networks, which were “initiatives that aimed to catalyze new commitments within a certain thematic area.” These Action Networks were partnerships themselves but also often included other partnerships. Many existing multi-stakeholder partnerships and Action Networks are essentially sectoral.

The scale, universality and extensive inter-linkages of the 2030 Agenda will require UNDS entities to look beyond sectoral partnerships and prioritize multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional partnerships within and across countries. The multi-sectoral partnerships would need to link actors from various sectors and dimensions, including economic, social and environmental dimension. UNDS entities would need to play a leadership role in identifying and strengthening various inter-linkages that transcend sectors, dimensions and national boundaries. It would need to assume the role of an effective facilitator to bring the relevant actors to identify the inter-linkages in the context of SDGs. Strengthened South-South, North-South and Triangular Cooperation – intermediated by various UNDS entities – can play a very important role in forging multi-stakeholder and multi-dimensional partnerships for sustainable development

Options	Pros and Cons
<p>The UNDS undertakes a mapping exercise at the global, regional and national levels, to identify a selection of the various types of multi-sectoral, multi-dimensional partnerships needed for supporting specific or strongly interlinked SDGs. The mapping exercise should identify which areas of the SDGs have little or no partnership platforms in place, for example inequalities, oceans, peace and access to justice. To ensure that the Agenda is treated as indivisible, these areas should be given special attention to ensure that some goals are not left behind.</p> <p>The mapping exercise should also identify defunct partnerships that are no longer relevant to Agenda 2030 implementation.</p> <p>The mapping exercise should be guided by a clear understanding of existing capacity and resource gaps in countries.</p>	<p>Member States may be concerned that some areas of the SDGs not receive more attention than others. To avoid this, a mapping exercise should clearly have delivery partnerships in place, which need to be strengthened or adjusted and which need to be initiated in order not to be left behind in implementation</p> <p>The process could be viewed as top-down. There is clearly no way every multi-sectoral or multi-dimensional partnership at regional, let alone national, levels can be identified and mapped. A number of partnerships will develop organically as the strategies for achieving the SDGs become better understood. It is a process of learning and must include failure as well as success. A mapping of best practices, of types of partnerships etc. would be very helpful provided it does not lead to excessive top-down directives.</p>
<p>Alternatively, the UN Regional Commissions – given their proximity to UNDS entities at the country level – may lead the mapping exercise and identify the needs and scopes for multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional partnerships for SDGs. The leadership from the Regional Commissions can also help to strengthen</p>	<p>UN Regional Commissions would need capacities and resources to lead the mapping exercise for identifying the needs and scopes for multi-sectoral partnerships.</p> <p>This means that the UN Regional Commissions would need to prioritize partnership management, which</p>

linkages between global and national level efforts for forging multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional partnerships.	may not be forthcoming without some changes in their mandates.
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c. Simplifying the rules of engagement and managing risks for partnerships

There needs to be clear and system-wide understanding of what constitutes a partnership. The process of establishing formal partnerships is often unclear and bound by various rules, procedures and practices. It may take months, if not years, for a UNDS entity to enter into a meaningful partnership arrangement or broker a partnership.

There is also the possibility that a UNDS entity may encounter Type I or Type II errors in considering prospective partnerships, rejecting partnership opportunities when it should have accepted or accepting a partnership when it should have rejected. These errors often take place because of complex and cumbersome bureaucratic processes for assessing the underlying risks of a potential partnership. When a UNDS entity is too risk averse, it may undertake excessive due diligence in finalizing a partnership which may discourage a good partner. On the other hand, a potentially hazardous partner may be willing to take advantage of loopholes and pass a bureaucratic vetting process with perseverance. In essence if a partnership vetting process is too cumbersome and bureaucratic, it may induce the so-called “adverse selection” problem, where bad risks can drive out good risk. While some risk classification exists at the entity level, there are considerable discrepancies in the classification and application across entities. As such, it is an imperative to develop a common and uniform framework for identifying and assessing risks in partnerships that will apply to all UNDS entities.

To facilitate effective partnerships, the UNDS would need a set of simplified and flexible rules. There should be efforts to classify partnerships according to the levels of risk. A line could potentially be drawn between for-profit (higher risk) and not-for-profit organizations (lower risk). For example, if the partner is a national government, the risk should be considered very low. On the other hand, if a partner is a private sector entity with a clear or potential conflict of interest in its area of engagement, partnership risk should be considered very high. Alternatively, partnerships can be classified by the type of engagement. An implementing or funding partner could carry a high risk for a UNDS entity whereas an advocacy partner could carry very little risk. In case of potentially high risk partnerships, UNDS entities should accept a partnership only if risks are commensurate to returns. UNDS entities should always strive to limit its risk exposure, clearly classifying risks and limiting liabilities upfront, without discouraging potentially good partners.

Options	Pros and Cons
The proposed UNDS delivery support for partnerships should standardize and adopt procedures for partnership agreements, simplifying and harmonizing the rules and processes for forging partnerships.	This could entail a very lengthy process. The revisions of rules and regulations may require explicit consents of the Member States, which may be difficult to mobilize.
This will require significant revisions and amendments to various existing UN protocols, agreements and other legal framework.	The UNDS entities may not necessarily use the standardized UN procedures, especially if they are too prescriptive.
The proposed UNDS delivery support should introduce a review and certification process to enhance transparency and accountability in partnerships. This will help minimize risk exposures, prevent adverse selection and create incentives for good performance from a partner.	This will require a strong political leadership at the highest level, as many current and prospective partners may oppose the introduction of a system-wide review and certification process. This will also require some investment to develop

<p>The system-wide partnership delivery support will be in the best position to introduce a common review and certification process, based on the profile of a partner (national government, cities, NGO, CSO, private sector, for-profit, not-for-profit etc.), the number of years in operation, financial solvency, operational motives, track records etc. The review should be undertaken every 2-3 years to reflect both good and poor performance and unethical practice in the recent past.</p>	<p>objective criteria for measuring partnership performance and also to institutionalize a process for collecting and updating data.</p> <p>The proposed review and certification process will become effective only if UNDS entities participate in the process and share necessary data with the system-wide delivery support for partnerships.</p>
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d. Enhancing effectiveness and ensuring accountability for results

Proponents of multi-stakeholder partnerships argue that they bring significant additional value to the work of the UNDS, such as, greater pooling of resources, an ability to move quickly, and high level of innovation. Critics, however, point out that limited evaluative information is available on the effectiveness of many multi-stakeholder partnerships established and/or led by UNDS entities. A study, examining 348 multi-stakeholder partnerships included in the database of the Commission on Sustainable Development, concluded that 37 per cent of these partnerships produced no output at all in terms of the criteria applied.³

It is critical that in the context of Agenda 2030, the UNDS adopts transparent, measurable and verifiable performance indicators for partnerships, especially when one or more UNDS entities are direct parties to the partnership. Even as brokers they have a vested interest. When evaluating the outcomes of a partnership over time, the UNDS should ensure that the performance measurement is specific and limited to the value-added created by the partnership. This will require UNDS entities to take advantage of the extensive set of SDG indicators to measure and evaluate the performance of various partnerships.

Options	Pros and Cons
<p>UNDS develops a system-wide results framework – linked to relevant SDG indicators - to evaluate the performance and impact of various partnerships.</p> <p>The results framework should serve as one of the criteria for entering into, reviewing and certifying partnerships.</p> <p>The proposed UNDS partnership delivery support for partnerships may lead the process of developing the SDG-linked results framework for partnerships, incorporating inputs from all UNDS entities. This will ensure broad ownership and use of the results framework by the UNDS entities.</p>	<p>The system-wide results framework would need to strike a delicate balance between specificity and flexibility to make it applicable for partnerships that vary significantly in size, scope, modalities and country contexts and differentiated country needs, especially that of LDCs and countries in crisis.</p> <p>UNDS entities may lack incentives for using the standardized results framework to evaluate partnerships unless it is linked to resource allocation. For example, UNDS entities using the partnerships results framework may receive some additional resources from the delivery support for partnerships for implementing the partnerships results framework.</p>
<p>Further partnerships should include a clear and well defined exit strategy in specific high risk the agreements such as some of those with for-profit organisations, for quickly terminating any partnership that fails to deliver the intended results.</p>	<p>This will require significant revision of many existing partnership agreements, which may be difficult to implement.</p> <p>Some partners may not accept an exit strategy or termination clause in the partnership agreement,</p>

³ (Pattberg et al, 2012).

UNDS entities should be able to unilaterally exercise the exit option. A clear, well-defined exit clause in partnership arrangements should incentivize partners to deliver the agreed results.	especially if they fear that UNDS entities would exercise the option.
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II. Recommendations:

Partnerships will play a crucial role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by engaging actors beyond the UN to engage and leverage their resources, capacities and ambitions. Civil society, the private sector, cities and local communities, religious organizations, academia and many others have immense resources and creativity which can make a difference. Engaging people, business, local communities and many others for sustainable development is the prime focus for partnerships, not filling gaps in resource-strapped UNDS.

1. UNDS entities should facilitate, and engage in partnerships based on specific needs and priorities of countries, taking into account the existing gaps in capacities and resources at national, regional and global levels, catalyzing and motivating effect of partnerships and their role in fostering innovation, sharing experiences, leveraging capacities and resources;
2. The UNDS should establish a system-wide delivery support for partnerships at the global level with delegated responsibilities to Regional Commissions for Sustainable Development and UNRCs– that act as a broker and facilitator for overcoming challenges and a solid vetting process. , The UNDS partnership delivery support should also enhance transparency and accountability in partnerships and ensuring partnerships deliver specific results at global regional and country level;
3. The proposed UNDS partnership delivery support should develop and implement standardized procedures for partnerships, simplifying and harmonizing applicable rules and processes, including good governance principles and appropriate exit strategies in instances where these are deemed necessary, to encourage good and effective partnerships and make partnerships more aligned with, and effective for, SDGs;
4. The system-wide delivery support for partnerships should undertake a mapping exercise to facilitate multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional partnerships, identifying selected specific inter-linkages and the roles and contributions of all stakeholders in realizing the 2030 Agenda;
5. The The proposed UNDS partnership delivery support should, working with/through the UN Regional Commissions and UNRCs play an important role in forging and facilitating South-South, North-South, South-North and Triangular partnerships. Special focus should be given to partnerships with regional organizations, cities and local governance in an urbanized world;
6. The proposed UNDS partnership delivery support should facilitate the development and implementation of a system-wide review and certification process, incorporating various indicators of success and risks, results framework and performance measures to periodically review and evaluate the performance of various partnerships and enhance transparency, accountability and effectiveness of partnerships.

Annex I: Brief history of partnerships for sustainable development in the UN system

Year	Event
1998	UN Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP) established; manages \$1 billion from Ted Turner
2000	Millennium Development Goal 8 (MDG8) mentions multi-stakeholder partnerships
2000	UN Global Compact (UNGC) launched; promotes ten principles covering human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption
2000	Guidelines on Cooperation between the United Nations and the Business Community issued
2000	First resolution of UNGA “Towards global partnerships” adopted, followed by second resolution in 2001 and from then onwards on biennial basis
2001	Bali Guiding Principles for Partnerships for Sustainable Development established at final PreCom for WSSD
2002	World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) places partnerships prominently as means for implementation, including the announcement of 200 partnerships at the Summit
2003	Building on the Bali Guiding Principles (2001), CSD11 decides on criteria for partnerships and starts holding Partnerships Fairs
2004	UNDESA establishes online database on partnerships
2006	UN Office for Partnerships (UNOP) created as hub for collaboration between UN and the private sector and foundations
2008	ECOSOC starts its annual Partnership Forum
2009	First revision of the Guidelines on Cooperation between the UN and the Business Community; greater emphasis places on assessment, transparency, and accountability
2012	UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20); partnerships and other voluntary initiatives are seen as means of implementation of Conference outcomes
2013	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development established; mandate mentions “platforms for partnerships”
2014	SAMOA Pathway adopted at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States; SIDS Partnership Framework established one year later by GA
2015	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted; including 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets; SDG 17.16 and 17.17 deal with multi-stakeholder partnerships
2015	Second revision of Guidelines on a Principle-based Approach to the Cooperation between the UN and the Business Sector; stronger focus on due diligence and transparency