Transformational partnerships and partnership platforms

INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is built on a fundamental shift in approach to development as it seeks to engage the unique roles and resources of all sectors of society, and requiring extensive collaboration across sectors to achieve its ambitious goals.

Partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are multi-stakeholder initiatives voluntarily undertaken by Governments, intergovernmental organizations, and other stakeholders, and whose efforts are contributing to the implementation the 2030 Agenda.

SDG 17, which reads "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development", recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) as important vehicles for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the SDGs in all countries, particularly developing countries. Goal 17 further seek to encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

MSPs can range from networks made up of hundreds of organizations through to joint ventures between two or three entities. This broad definition encompasses a multitude of types of collaborative arrangement with quite different scopes. The figure below shows a 'Partnership Spectrum' as a way of visualizing the range of different collaborative arrangements that fit within this definition.

Transformational partnerships for the SDGs are those that deliver system shifts to move from an unsustainable (either economically, socially or environmentally) system, to a more sustainable one. Such partnerships are characterized by multiple actors bringing together essential complementary resources that together create the levers required to deliver system transformation, which could not have been achieved by any one actor working alone.

The 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) recognizes that major transformations in areas like energy systems, health, food and urbanization make

Summary

- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 recognizes the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) as part of the means of implementation to achieve the 2030 Agenda. MSPs can be powerful mechanisms to achieve the SDGs, as they can bring to bear a range of different levers from diverse societal sectors, including human and financial resources, technologies, and knowledge.
- More recently, multi-stakeholder collaboration has proven to be critical to tackle the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and will be essential in the recovery efforts to 'build back better' towards more sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies.
- To support effective partnership building, an enabling partnership ecosystem is required at all levels, including policies and standards that support multi-stakeholder inclusion and collaboration, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders have the necessary knowledge and capacities for partnership creation, and fostering inclusive partnership platforms.
- Partnership platforms can be particularly effective catalyzers of new and transformative partnerships at all levels as they can serve to mobilize key sectors and stakeholders around joint action and provide coherence and coordination, including alignment of investments for SDG implementation.
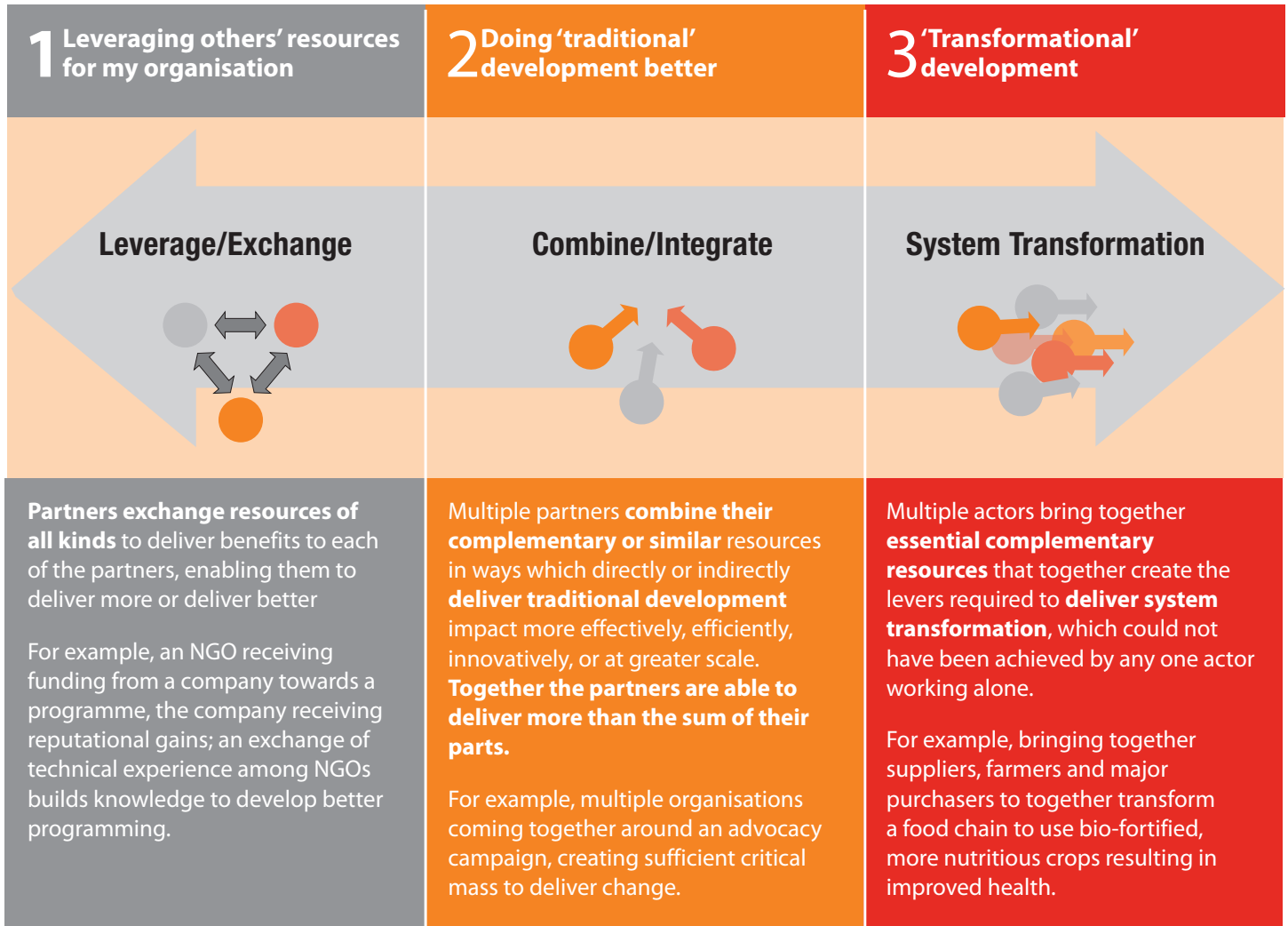
it necessary to radically rethink partnerships between science, government, the private sector, civil society and more. The report also notes that rapid change can only happen when different actors work together in an integrated way towards shared goals through strategic partnerships, and by sharing and applying available scientific, technological and policymaking knowledge.

EXPERIENCES FROM COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of enhancing global collaboration and building effective partnerships among all sectors and stakeholders,

Figure 1
Partnership Spectrum, SDG Partnership Guidebook, UN DESA & TPI, 2020

1 Leveraging others' resources for my organisation	**2** Doing 'traditional' development better	**3** 'Transformational' development
Leverage/Exchange	Combine/Integrate	System Transformation
Partners exchange resources of all kinds to deliver benefits to each of the partners, enabling them to deliver more or deliver better For example, an NGO receiving funding from a company towards a programme, the company receiving reputational gains; an exchange of technical experience among NGOs builds knowledge to develop better programming.	Multiple partners **combine their complementary or similar** resources in ways which directly or indirectly **deliver traditional development** impact more effectively, efficiently, innovatively, or at greater scale. **Together the partners are able to deliver more than the sum of their parts.** For example, multiple organisations coming together around an advocacy campaign, creating sufficient critical mass to deliver change.	Multiple actors bring together **essential complementary resources** that together create the levers required to **deliver system transformation**, which could not have been achieved by any one actor working alone. For example, bringing together suppliers, farmers and major purchasers to together transform a food chain to use bio-fortified, more nutritious crops resulting in improved health.

while building back better, together.

In the face of the significant challenges imposed by the pandemic and the deep economic recession it has yielded, the global community has made significant efforts to mobilize new partnerships from all stakeholders The year 2020 witnessed a growing number and scope of MSPs which aim to address the various challenges brought by the pandemic, from developing vaccines and providing urgent health and socio-economic responses to the pandemic, to supporting communities to live with the pandemic and working towards a post-pandemic sustainable recovery.

A recent study by UN DESA[1] on "Partnerships in response to COVID-19 - Building back better together" shows that:
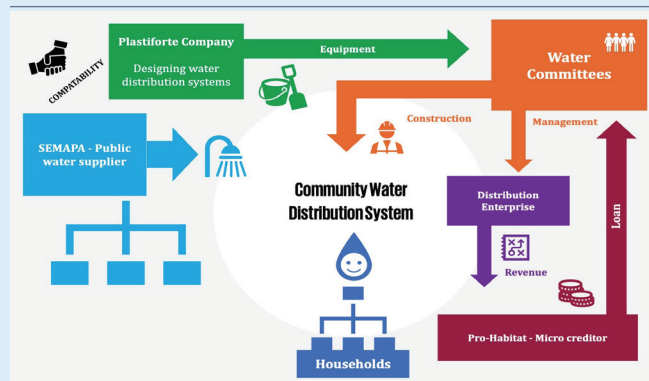
- A wide range of types of partnerships have been formed during the pandemic, most of which have been focusing on the immediate response to the pandemic.

- Partnerships during the pandemic have provided technical assistance; supported direct project implementation and delivery; facilitated research; provided financial support for non-research partnerships; carried out data and analytics; and coordinated international COVID-19 response actions.

- A wide range of institutions have initiated partnerships during the pandemic, with the United Nations and the private sector playing a leading role. A prominent example is the ACT Accelerator - a ground-breaking global collaboration to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines.

- The sense of urgency, existing networks and previous partnership experiences, the use of digital technologies, and adoption of innovative practices have been important factors facilitating the speedy

Box 1
Transformational partnership: Water for All (Agua para todos)

In many of the suburban areas of Cochabamba, Bolivia, residents did not have household pipeline access to water. Water supply was exceedingly expensive, with households individually buying water from commercial water trucks. The Water for All (Agua para todos) partnership brought together SEMAPA; a water pipe manufacturing company, Plastiforte; the residents, organized into 'Water Committees' of 200 households; and a micro-credit and capacity-building organization, Pro-Habitat. Residents now have access to water at considerably lower cost than previously, as they can buy the water in bulk from the commercial companies. The secondary water distribution system is managed by commercially viable community-based SMEs, keeping maintenance costs low, providing livelihoods and ensuring long term sustainability.

Levers applied through the partnership
- **Organization; human capital:** The local people organized together as Water Committees and became partners in the solution – using their own human resources to deliver much of the work and reduce otherwise impossibly high construction costs
- **Capacity development:** Developing the Water Committees' capacity to build, manage and maintain the distribution system
- **Regulation:** The government needed to change the regulations to allow the Water Committees to own and manage the water distribution system
- **Infrastructure development:** By SEMAPA extending its main pipeline to these areas, the cost savings on water become even more significant, making it more and more viable for other communities to invest in the creation of their own community distribution systems
- **Technological innovation:** The plastic pipe manufacturing company, Plastiforte, created new, affordable technologies for the secondary water distribution system
- **Access to affordable finance:** The micro-financing from Pro-Habitat was essential to allow the residents to purchase the equipment and build the community distribution systems
- **Commercially viable approach:** The management of the distribution system is undertaken by commercially viable local enterprises to ensure sustainability.

formation of partnerships during the pandemic.
- Key success factors of COVID-19 responsive partnerships have included leadership and vision, trust, alignment of interests, flexibility, commitment, and adaptive governance structures.
- Communication between partners, access to key financial and human resources, and uncertainty given the rapidly changing conditions have been some of the major challenges in the creation and management of partnerships during the pandemic.

PARTNERSHIP PLATFORMS FOR THE SDGS

It is partnerships at the global, national, sub- national and city level – those that can best harness and optimize the resources available – that will drive forward the real change required to deliver the SDGs and impact people's lives for the better. In this regard, a fundamental challenge will be to ensure systematic collaboration by different societal sectors toward delivering the shared vision of the SDGs.

Partnership platforms for the SDGs are emerging as key mechanisms for brokering new partnerships, providing coherence and coordination among stakeholders, and aligning investments for SDG implementation. Such platforms are being developed around the world, including in Kenya, Uganda, and Samoa, among others, and appear to have great potential to accelerating progress towards the SDGs.

The following typology illustrates how partnership platforms are distinct from other multi-stakeholder mechanisms:

While there are hundreds of examples across the first three categories, there are relatively few platforms that fit in the last category. It should be noted that this typology does not constitute a value judgement. Dialogue platforms, for example, can play an essential role in building trust between stakeholders and have an influence on the policy and regulatory environment. However, there is a hierarchy of function: each category includes and builds on the previous category. A 'knowledge exchange' platform, for example, will have some element of dialogue as well; and a standard-setting platform will contain both knowledge exchange and dialogue functions.

The critical distinction is that **transformational partnership platforms** go beyond dialogue and knowledge exchange and focus on catalyzing and implementing partnerships. Such partnership platforms are characterized by the following elements:
- **Convening and dialogue:** bringing together key

Platform typology, Partnership Platforms for the SDGs (UN DESA & TPI, 2020)

1. Dialogue	2. Knowledge Exchange	3. Reporting and Standard-setting	4. Transformative Partnerships
• Stakeholder engagement and consultation • Usually one dominant stakeholder	• Exchanging knowledge and experience across multiple stakeholders	• Shared measurement and reporting frameworks • Development of new norms and standards	• Catalysing and brokering partnerships for the SDGs • Supporting SDG-aligned investments

Less engagement
Less commitment to shared goals
Less trust required

Strong engagement
Strong commitment to shared goals
Greater trust required

stakeholders from across sectors around issues of common interest

- **Partnership brokering:** active fostering of partnerships between stakeholders around priority issues
- **SDG-aligned investments:** providing a mechanism to align aid, foreign direct investment, philanthropy, domestic financing and other forms of capital in

ways that contribute to the SDGs

- **Building an enabling environment:** advocating for a common agenda across societal sectors, as well as strengthening the enabling environment for collaboration at all levels
- **Coordinated commitment to action:** enabling stakeholders to commit to a common plan, while ensuring mutual accountability and responsibility for delivery.

BUILDING AN ENABLING ECOSYSTEM FOR PARTNERSHIPS

To support effective partnerships building, an enabling ecosystem is required at all levels. This includes policies and standards that support multi-stakeholder inclusion and collaboration, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders have the necessary knowledge and skills for partnership creation, and fostering partnership platforms that can bring different actors together and catalyze new partnerships and actions across sectors.

At the global level, there are a number of United Nations mechanisms and processes that support a growing network of institutions and organizations seeking to drive implementation of the SDGs through inclusive partnerships. These include the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the ECOSOC Partnership Forum, the SIDS Partnership Framework, and the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, amongst others.

At the national level, the Voluntary National Reviews

Box 2
Kenya SDG Partnership Platform

SDG PARTNERSHIP PLATFORM KENYA

The Kenya SDG Partnership Platform was established in 2017 under the leadership of the Government of Kenya with the support of the UN Resident Coordinator and wider UN system in Kenya, development partners, and partners from private sector and philanthropy.

The Platform seeks to take leadership on overarching facilitation, coordination and demonstration of how public-private collaboration can effectively translate the SDGs into action on the ground and thereby guide and accelerate innovations, impact, maximize investments and optimize resource utilization in support of the realization of Kenya's Vision2030 and the "Big Four" agenda – Health (SDG 3 cluster), Food & Nutrition Security (SDG 2 cluster), Manufacturing (SDG 9 cluster), and Housing (SDG 11 cluster).

Figure 4

The Partnership Enabling Ecosystem, The SDG Partnership Guidebook, UN DESA & TPI, 2020

(VNRs) prepared by Member States on their implementation of the 2030 Agenda can serve as important vehicles for mobilizing multi-stakeholder support and partnerships. VNRs make possible the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, and are a key part of the overall follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Research by UN DESA of the VNRs presented between 2016 and 2019 has shown that around 75% of countries reported on the inclusion of non-state actors in related governance mechanisms, including high-level coordination or governance mechanisms, technical committees or working groups, as well as explicit commitments to engage with non-state actors through, for example, advisory bodies.

Partnerships also play a crucial role for the United Nations at the country level, where Resident Coordinators have the overall responsibility to lead UN country teams in ensuring system-wide accountability of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – the instrument for planning and implementation of the UN development activities at country level. The framework is embodied by a spirit of partnerships with the national government, civil society, academia, parliaments, the private sector, and bilateral partners to leverage strengths and drive transformative change on the ground.