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Towards global partnerships

Enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

While the United Nations system underscores that recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals require more robust alliances and partnerships, in particular with the private sector, it is also acknowledged that greater efforts are required to enhance the impact of those partnerships and to better measure and communicate such impact. In its resolution [73/254](#), the General Assembly outlined recommendations for enhancing cooperation between the United Nations and the private sector, recognizing that achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would require the United Nations to cultivate new pathways for achieving common societal goals by expanding the scope and impact of collaboration between governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and others. The United Nations has demonstrated significant progress with regard to the recommendations made in the previous report. However, further efforts are required to realize more networked and inclusive multilateral cooperation.

Throughout the United Nations system, partnerships with external actors, in particular the private sector, are evolving towards deeper and more strategic collaboration, focusing on innovation, scalability and impact. As outlined in the present report, COVID-19 has motivated the United Nations system and its partners to take a more agile and timely approach to partnering. United Nations development system reform has contributed to making the Organization a more effective partner. While the United Nations is placing greater emphasis on strategic and long-term collaboration with external partners, in particular at the country level, there remains significant untapped opportunity for a continuing evolution in partnership policy and practice to ensure that the Organization best leverages its convening power and expertise to mobilize a broader, more diverse range of actors and to mobilize new coalitions in the decade of action. The present report provides a number of actions and recommendations intended to better position the United Nations system as a catalyst for inclusive and networked multilateral cooperation by enhancing the impact of collaboration between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector.

* [A/76/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [73/254](#), entitled “Towards global partnerships: a principle-based approach to enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners”, in which the Secretary-General was requested to submit to the Assembly at its seventy-sixth session a report on the resolution’s implementation. The report builds on previous reports of the Secretary-General on enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and relevant partners ([A/56/323](#), [A/58/227](#), [A/60/214](#), [A/64/337](#), [A/66/320](#), [A/68/326](#), [A/70/296](#) and [A/73/326](#)).

2. As the world is reeling from coronavirus disease (COVID-19), a worsening climate crisis, alarming biodiversity loss, rampant pollution and significant shortfalls in progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, partnerships are more important than ever as a tool for recovery and an engine for building forward better. The COVID-19 crisis underscores the urgent need for revitalized, inclusive and networked multilateralism, with the private sector as a key player to address global challenges. COVID-19 has been a stark reminder of the fragility of the world’s social contract, the need for improved corporate sustainability and the opportunity for responsible business practices to reinforce the stability of societies and markets alike. Bringing the full weight of the private sector to bear in facing these challenges and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development still requires massive reallocation of private sector innovations, resources and support. While the social contract is under strain in many countries and communities around the world, some recent studies¹ suggest increasing levels of public trust in business. Deeper and more strategic relationships between the United Nations system and the private sector can inspire companies to honour the public trust and to more swiftly allocate human capital, technology and intellectual property, value chains, financial investments, corporate assets and strategies towards the interests of people and the planet.

3. The present report is informed by various data sources, including two surveys gathering system-wide input from senior management and partnership experts across 30 participating United Nations entities. The surveys are complemented by in-depth interviews with various United Nations partnership experts and external stakeholders. Drawing on these data-driven insights and reflections, it is attempted in the report to map a path towards stronger and more effective partnerships as engines of inclusive and networked multilateralism for the 2030 Agenda. In the report, global trends affecting partnerships are examined, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is considered, stock is taken of new partnership developments in the United Nations system, the way in which partnerships have helped to advance the repositioning of the United Nations development system is assessed and recommendations to further enable the United Nations to enhance its partnership scale and impact in the years ahead are provided.

4. While the domain of partnerships is vast and diverse, the present report, like the previous ones, is focused on partnerships between the United Nations and the private sector. At the same time, many of the trends, insights and recommendations outlined apply to all forms of partnership between the United Nations and other actors.

¹ See, for example, the findings of the Edelman Trust Barometer reports from 2021, 2020, 2019 and 2018, which showed a consistent trend of stronger public trust in business compared with that in many other institutions. Available at www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2021-01/2021-edelman-trust-barometer.pdf.

II. Global trends influencing United Nations partnerships

5. Since the previous report, United Nations partnership activities have been affected by several major trends and developments, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the worsening triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution, increasing market recognition of sustainability as a driver of business performance and heightened investor emphasis on environment, social and governance factors. Taken together, the trends have impelled a growing corporate interest in allocation of resources to the Goals through partnerships, which offers the United Nations many opportunities to increase the scope and scale of its work with the private sector in the years ahead.

6. COVID-19 has been described as a wake-up call and dress rehearsal for potentially worse crises to come. It has spurred widespread recognition that more innovative and agile collaboration across sectors is needed to respond to global emergencies. Most United Nations leaders and partnership experts surveyed for the present report agreed that cross-sector alliances and partnerships are essential to address Sustainable Development Goal setbacks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises. Similarly, half the more than 1,100 chief executive officers participating in the United Nations Global Compact surveyed in 2021 believed that COVID-19 had increased their reliance on strategic, multisectoral partnerships on sustainability issues as a business strategy.

7. While COVID-19 has created significant economic disruptions and stock market volatility, many analyses indicate that sustainable companies proved to be more resilient and outperformed their peers during a significant economic downturn.² The trend, in particular if validated by additional research over longer periods, creates even greater economic incentives for companies to commit themselves to responsible business practices. Many companies are recognizing the need to engage with outside stakeholders more actively and to leverage the Goals to help to guide and shape their sustainability journeys. With noticeable pressure from both investors and consumers, more and more companies are making net zero and net negative carbon commitments, lending their voices to calls for more ambitious climate action and pursuing sustainable business models, such as those based on circularity or nature-positive operations.³ Many companies are making stronger commitments to diversity, inclusion and gender equality, recognizing that diversity within executive-level leadership and on boards can be a critical strategy for long-term business success.

8. Corporate analysts have noted that investors and companies that prioritize environment, social and governance factors often see better long-term returns on average than their peers.⁴ Many studies have shown that companies with women chief

² See, for example, Ashim Paun, “ESG stocks did best in COVID-19 slump”, *HSBC Global Banking and Markets Insights*, 27 March 2020; Imogen Tew, “How ESG-linked stocks outperformed in 2020”, *Financial Times Adviser*, 9 November 2020; and Jon Hale, “Sustainable funds weather the first quarter better than conventional funds”, *Morningstar, Inc.*, 3 April 2020.

³ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat, “Commitments to net zero double in less than a year”, press release, 21 September 2020.

⁴ See Principles for Responsible Investment, “Linking ESG ratings to returns and volatility”, in *A Practical Guide to ESG Integration for Equity Investing*, 5 September 2016; Gordon L. Clark, Andreas Feiner and Michael Viehs, *From the Stockholder to the Stakeholder: How Sustainability Can Drive Financial Outperformance*, March 2015; Tensie Whelan, Ulrich Atz and Casey Clark, “ESG and financial performance: uncovering the relationship by aggregating evidence from 1,000 plus studies published between 2015–2020” (New York University Stern Business School and Rockefeller Asset Management, 2021); and “How ESG-linked stocks outperformed in 2020”.

executive officers tend to outperform those led predominantly by men.⁵ Companies increasingly recognize that achieving long-term business success in the face of growing global volatility requires a more substantial commitment to planetary well-being and people's welfare. In the financial sector, there is growing adherence to the Principles for Responsible Investment, an investor initiative in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative and the United Nations Global Compact. The initiative, with over 3,000 signatories, representing over \$100 trillion in assets under management, encourages engagement in environment, social and governance issues and is witnessing record levels of signatory interest in sustainability strategies. Corporate reporting on sustainability performance and contributions to the 2030 Agenda is becoming increasingly robust,⁶ and there is growing momentum on initiatives involving financial managers, insurers and other market participants.

Box 1

United Nations Global Compact: Chief Financial Officer Taskforce for the Sustainable Development Goals

The Chief Financial Officer Taskforce for the Sustainable Development Goals was launched by the United Nations Global Compact in December 2019 with the goal of inspiring a new meaning for the role of chief financial officers as architects of long-term sustainable value creation by raising awareness of the transformative impact of corporate finance across financial markets, the global economy and society as a whole. In July 2021, the Taskforce included 58 leading companies with a combined market capitalization of over \$1.6 trillion.

The Taskforce has helped its participating stakeholders to launch major new financial products and offerings aligned with the Goals. In January 2021, a multinational retailer launched a sustainability-linked bond of 750 million euros that, for the first time, is tied to the company's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Also in January 2021, a large investment bank in Latin America raised \$500 million in green bonds. In February 2021, they registered the issuance along with two others on the National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations (Nasdaq) Sustainable Bond Network, the United States stock exchange's database of information on the main issuances of sustainable bonds around the world. Also in February 2021, a multinational drink company announced a \$10.1 billion sustainability-linked revolving credit facility. In June 2021, a multinational energy company launched a multi-tranche sustainability-linked bond for institutional investors in the Eurobond market totalling 3.25 billion euros, the largest sustainability-linked transaction ever priced in the fixed-income capital markets.

⁵ See BBC News, "Firms with more female executives 'perform better'", 27 July 2020; Corinne Post, Boris Lokshin and Christophe Boone, "Research: adding women to the C-suite changes how companies think" (*Harvard Business Review*, 6 April 2021); Daniel J. Sandberg, "When women lead, firms win" (*S&P Global*, 16 October 2019); and Sharon Bell, "The stock market boost from having more women in management" (*Financial Times*, 9 November 2020).

⁶ See Wojciech Leoński and Karolina Beyer, "Reporting as an important instrument of corporate social responsibility", *Journal of Corporate Responsibility and Leadership*, vol. 3, No. 67 (February 2017); Global Reporting Initiative, "Integrating SDGs into sustainability reporting", 2019–2021; and Global Reporting Initiative and United Nations Global Compact, *Business Reporting on the SDGs: An Analysis of the Goals and Target*, 2017.

9. Companies are increasingly prioritizing corporate climate action and increasing ambition in line with climate science. Over 270 companies, representing more than \$3.6 trillion in market capitalization, have signed the Business Ambition for 1.5°C commitment of the United Nations Global Compact. In May 2020, more than 150 companies, with a combined market capitalization of over \$2.4 trillion and representing over 5 million employees, signed a statement urging alignment of COVID-19 economic aid and recovery efforts with the latest climate science. The companies, as part of the Science Based Targets initiative, are calling for policies that will build resilience against future shocks by supporting efforts to hold global temperature rise to within 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, in line with reaching net zero emissions well before the year 2050. From a partnership standpoint, the Science Based Targets initiative represents an encouraging trend towards coalition-building, with multiple partners making specific, credible commitments backed up by accountability mechanisms to enable and encourage scale and impact.

10. In addition to the United Nations system, the private sector has sought ways to reconceptualize its role and responsibilities as a responsible stakeholder in economies and societies. Examples of innovative thinking in this regard include efforts of the World Economic Forum towards advancing the concepts of stakeholder capitalism and a great reset. At the country level, there have been landmark policy developments, such as the Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation of the Business Roundtable of the United States of America.

Box 2

United Nations partnerships with the insurance industry

In 2021, the United Nations Development Programme will launch its Insurance and Risk Finance Facility, bringing for the first time its work across risk finance, insurance, risk transfer and the financing of resilience into a single strategy and set of tools, guidelines and sources of support for country offices and programme countries. The Facility's work covers inclusive insurance, sovereign risk finance, natural capital and risk, the investment side of insurers and the integration of insurance into development financing. Partnership is critical to this work, and the Facility's flagship, the Tripartite Agreement (signed by the Programme, the Government of Germany and the Insurance Development Forum) will work in 20 countries over the next four years, bringing public and private sector expertise together to support the long-term financial resilience of developing countries and communities.

In 2021, The United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative convened a group of 22 leading insurers and reinsurers that published the first comprehensive guidance for the insurance industry to identify and disclose the impact of climate change on their businesses. The group collaborated under the auspices of the Principles for Sustainable Insurance initiative to pilot methodologies that insurers can use to implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures.

III. Partnering for development in emergency mode: lessons learned from partnering in response to COVID-19

11. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused drastic setbacks in the world's progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and altered the development financing landscape, with diversion of Sustainable Development Goal funding and investments to more

immediate pandemic response needs. Those challenges have affected the United Nations partnership landscape in many ways.

12. With the pivot to remote work arrangements, the United Nations system and many of its partners sought to translate the challenges of isolation and quarantine into opportunities to strengthen relationships and connections through digital tools for convening and cooperation. A shift towards virtual collaboration often allowed for a wider range of stakeholder engagement opportunities than traditional in-person connections could offer. For example, as the pandemic spread rapidly in March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) began to convene weekly meetings with global private sector stakeholders represented through international business associations and networks to offer detailed briefings on the WHO pandemic response and opportunities for private sector support. By creating an inclusive, informal multi-stakeholder platform, WHO was able to reach a wide and diverse range of business leaders to encourage them to take action within their own spheres of influence. Among other issues, the group worked together to identify ways in which the private sector could combat the pandemic through good workplace health and safety practices, cooperation to tackle global supply chain challenges and advocacy for greater international cooperation for the development and distribution of vaccines and medical equipment.

Box 3

Connecting Business initiative

Launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the Connecting Business initiative supports business networks that, together, represent over 4,000 core members. For example, in response to Tropical Cyclone Harold, in April 2020, when borders and airports were closed owing to the COVID-19 lockdown, the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council – the Connecting Business initiative member network in that country – played a key role in relief efforts. The Council activated its private sector cluster system to ensure effective coordination with the Government, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. It undertook detailed technical damage assessments in the worst-hit villages and conducted aerial, ground and marine assessments to provide the National Disaster Management Office with recommendations on gaining access to remote settlements and organizing the logistics of immediate response items. The Council provided over 35 tons of food and non-food items to 1,000 remote coastal households.

13. In many instances, COVID-19 has spurred the United Nations to adapt procedures for new partnerships. Many partnership experts surveyed for the present report noted that their organizations had attempted to fast-track partnership vetting procedures to support new partnerships for pandemic response. At the country level, partnerships with the private sector and public-private partnerships have formed an important pillar of many of the socioeconomic response plans developed by United Nations country teams and resident coordinator offices to guide pandemic response efforts.

14. The global private sector has demonstrated growing openness to pre-competitive collaboration in response to the pandemic, such as in the context of research and development for the roll-out of vaccines. Entities such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have leveraged such goodwill to bring major players in the logistics and transport industries together to sign a charter committing themselves to making resources, ranging from flight capacity to warehouse storage, available to UNICEF to assist with its COVID-19 response.

15. In a recent report commissioned by the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator initiative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, various partnerships providing technical and financial support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were studied.⁷ Noting that COVID-19 had prompted an unprecedented all-sector rapid response, the authors identified five key factors contributing to the successful and speedy formation of partnerships to combat the pandemic: (a) the emergency nature of the crisis; (b) the use of technologies to overcome barriers imposed by the crisis; (c) the adoption of innovative practices in the partnerships; (d) building partnerships based on trust and existing networks; and (e) the flexibility of partners and the partnership to face uncertainties.

16. Drawing on lessons learned, the authors made a series of recommendations to promote more effective partnerships in the longer term. They noted that the pandemic showed how certain organizational policies and procedures could be modified or streamlined by the United Nations and governments during emergencies to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Such modifications include shortening timelines between partnership negotiations, the signing of formal contracts or agreements and action among partners. The embracing of new technologies and communications platforms as a result of restrictions on travel during the pandemic have inspired efforts to mobilize and engage a broader range of partners. Wherever possible, the United Nations should consider how such new ways of working can be scaled and sustained beyond their use in emergency mode and extended to other Sustainable Development Goal-focused partnerships to enable greater inclusivity, speed, scale and impact with a more diverse range of change agents.

Box 4

United Nations Global Compact: catalysing partnerships in Thailand for sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

In August 2020, the Global Compact Network Thailand, in partnership with the United Nations country team in that country, convened leading Thai companies and the Government to catalyse public-private partnership efforts in support of the sustainable recovery of the Thai economy and in support of the Goals. Thai business leaders collectively pledged to invest approximately \$46.2 billion by 2030 in 1,088 projects and initiatives, in support of achieving the Goals and addressing Goal funding gaps in Thailand, while also committing to embedding the Goals in core business strategies and activities.

17. The COVID-19 crisis, and the response efforts coordinated by the United Nations, attest to the increasing complexity of global challenges. As the number of empowered actors and influencers multiplies, a new form of inclusive and networked multilateralism is required. The new networked multilateralism must be inclusive to represent, engage in and deliver the goals of the Charter of the United Nations to all the people of the world more equitably. No Government, sector or organization acting alone can solve the monumental challenges confronting humanity or deliver the promise of the Goals. Multilateralism offers the world the best opportunity to shore up global public goods and address issues of common interest to humanity.

18. The United Nations system should continue to leverage its strength as a convener and a catalyst while recognizing that the United Nations itself does not always need to be a formal partner to mobilize effective collaboration to achieve the

⁷ See <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/partnerships-response-covid-19-building-back-better-together-33018>.

2030 Agenda. The Organization must continuously strive to engage with an ever wider and more diverse range of actors whose interests and values align with those of the United Nations, but whose work has traditionally fallen outside the orbit of the Organization. It must continue to build bridges and a common cause on a broader global scale, offer a platform to give voice to young leaders and entrepreneurs and ensure that the partnerships of today are designed in the interest of future generations.

IV. New developments in United Nations partnerships

19. In the previous report ([A/73/326](#)), five critical pathways to accelerating the impact of partnerships between the United Nations and the private sector were outlined: (a) moving away from donation-based partnerships and building more strategic business relationships; (b) shaping more innovation-based partnerships that leverage core private-sector competencies and technologies; (c) increasing the focus on multi-stakeholder partnerships, which agencies expect to more than double in number in the next three to five years; (d) connecting and convening wider ecosystems of actors; and (e) expanding opportunities for engaging micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises for greater local impact. Although the United Nations system has made significant progress along the pathways, they remain instructive. If pursued further, they can help to lead the system towards more inclusive and networked multilateral cooperation.

Box 5

International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Children's Fund: Giga initiative

Launched in 2019, the Giga initiative was aimed at connecting every school to the Internet and every young person to information, opportunity and choice. The COVID-19 pandemic has created an even more urgent need, with over 463 million children unable to obtain access to remote learning as a result of school closures. The initiative is focused on three aspects related to connectivity: identifying the location and status of schools, enabling broadband connectivity through transparent procurement and creating the business models necessary to sustain such activity and provide connectivity to the surrounding community.

The operationalization of the Giga initiative is made possible through partnerships between the International Telecommunication Union and UNICEF and a range of organizations, including companies in the telecommunications, technology and logistics sectors, as well as foundations.

20. Based on the information provided by the 30 United Nations entities that contributed data for the present report, there are currently at least 3,200 private sector partnerships under way across the United Nations system. This is a conservative estimate, given the difficulty of assembling definitive data from across all United Nations entities at the Headquarters and field levels. With this caveat, the number represents a twofold increase from the previous estimate, undertaken in 2017. While growth in the number of partnerships is encouraging, bilateral partnerships continue to dominate the landscape, with over half of reported partnerships involving only one company partner. Continued efforts are needed to advance longer-term and strategic partnership models, including those through which multiple partners can be engaged with over an extended period and those that can more systematically capture results and learnings.

Box 6

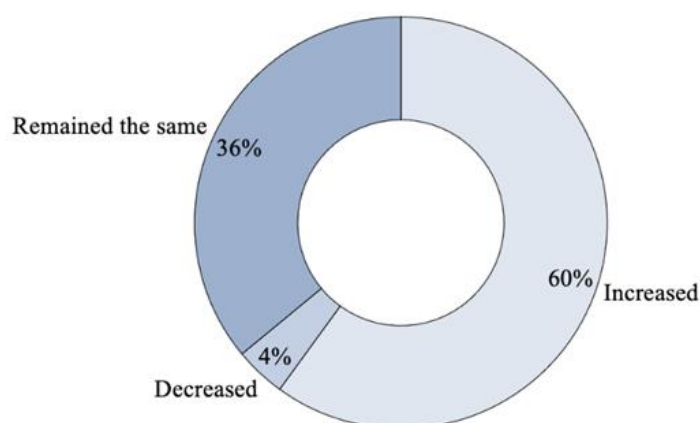
**World Food Programme and International Chamber of Commerce:
technical partnership fostering strategic regional and national collaboration**

In 2021, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Chamber of Commerce launched a technical partnership to foster strategic collaboration at the regional and national levels in support of the Goals. The partnership connects WFP field operations in 84 countries with the more than 45 million companies worldwide that are members of the Chamber. Opportunities range from the exchange of technical expertise to joint advocacy and communication campaigns on key themes, such as famine, nutrition and food waste, to connections aimed at financial and in-kind support. Leveraging the Chamber's worldwide network of chambers of commerce, the initiative is aimed at catalysing transformational partnerships between private sector stakeholders and WFP and working side by side to achieve zero hunger.

21. The United Nations system is partnering with an increasingly diverse portfolio of partners, with noticeable growth since 2017 in engagement with companies operating at the national and local levels. A number of entities have taken steps to foster more enabling internal environments for partnerships, including by developing and adopting new organizational partnership strategies. As illustrated in figure 1, 60 per cent of entities surveyed reported an increase in staff with partnership development responsibilities. Entities agreed that, in the future, partnerships would be more focused on strategic engagement and less on philanthropy or resource mobilization. There is growing consensus across the system that increased private sector interest in United Nations engagement is motivating the organization to scale up its private sector partnership activities.

Figure 1

Change in the number of staff working on partnerships across the United Nations system, by percentage of entities surveyed



Box 7

United Nations Industrial Development Organization: Programme for Country Partnership

To accelerate inclusive and sustainable industrial development in Member States, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization has developed an innovative service, the Programme for Country Partnership. Based on the principle of national ownership, each Partnership is tailored to country needs and the national development agenda and is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the country. The Partnership rests on a multi-stakeholder partnership led by the host Government, involving United Nations agencies, development partners, financial institutions, the private sector, academia and civil society. The model is aimed at capitalizing on each partner's unique strengths in a coherent manner to create a greater overall impact. Interventions are aimed at unlocking public and private investment, in particular for the realization of large-scale industrial projects with high potential for job creation and economic growth. Partnership countries include Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Zambia.

22. Since 2017, entities have reduced their focus on fundraising as the primary purpose of engaging with businesses, a trend that creates opportunities for new, more strategic forms of collaboration. United Nations-private sector partnerships are based increasingly on reciprocal value propositions and are designed to generate mutual benefits. A growing number of entities, from 8 per cent in 2017 to 21 per cent in 2021, are pursuing partnerships for innovative financing.⁸ Notwithstanding such progress, most United Nations entities surveyed for the present report still view the private sector primarily as a funding source. Continued prioritization of resource mobilization over strategic relationship-building within the United Nations system creates a misalignment with private sector partners, which may be discouraged from partnering when financial donations are prioritized, in particular at the outset of the relationship-building process. At a time when many companies face significant pressure to simply remain in business, the United Nations must apply a more nuanced and dynamic approach to partner development. Instead of soliciting donations at the outset of discussions with potential partners, entities could invite companies to consider where core corporate assets and expertise, advocacy of shared public policy concerns, strategic investments and financial products, co-creation of solutions or other forms of technical cooperation on new sustainable business models might yield greater longer-term impact and mutual benefits for all parties involved. In this context, the need to shift the perspective of partnerships from funding to financing has been emphasized: moving away from an emphasis on funding for United Nations programming and towards a more holistic perspective on how all partners, including the private sector, can contribute to financing of the Goals.

⁸ Innovative financing mechanisms in this context are defined as partnerships in which: (a) partners generate revenue streams to reinvest in the initiative; (b) partners provide seed funding/loans to programme participants; (c) partners support mechanisms for crowdfunding; (d) a United Nations project is issued as a green bond, a social impact bond or a development impact bond; and (e) a United Nations project is eligible for certified carbon offsets.

Box 8

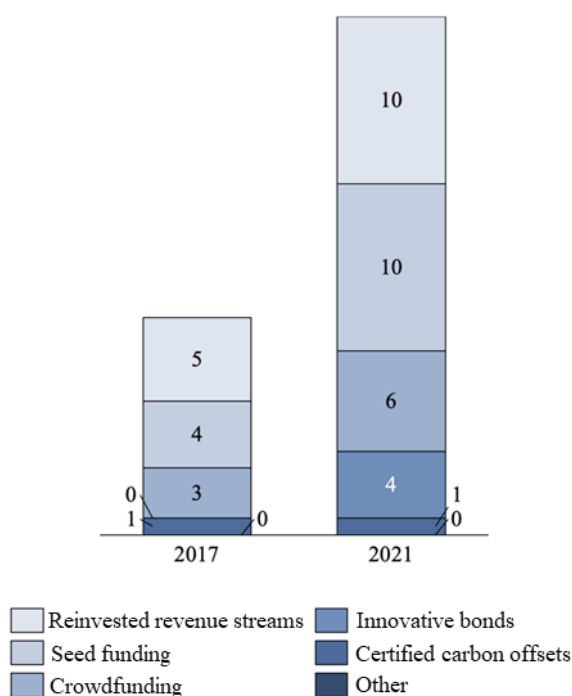
Peacebuilding Fund: blended finance for sustaining peace in Colombia

As encouraged by the Secretary-General in his report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace (A/72/707-S/2018/43), the Resident Coordinator Office in Colombia set out to leverage resources from the private sector and to move from funding to financing to sustain peace. Translating theory into action, a prototype was designed with the United Nations multi-partner trust fund for sustaining peace in Colombia as the implementing vehicle.

The trust fund, which was supported by the Peacebuilding Fund as the funding partner, issued an innovative call for proposals for de-risking private sector investments with a positive impact on peacebuilding under the basic principles of blended finance. The initiative leveraged private sector funds to invest in municipalities most affected by the conflict, which are currently largely reliant on resources from the national Government and international donors. A total of \$13 million was leveraged with a Peacebuilding Fund investment of \$2.1 million, with a ratio of 1 to 6. Thus, for every dollar invested by the Fund, on average \$6 was mobilized from private sector entities. As a result, over a two-year period, more than 2,000 farmers and producers developed and strengthened agribusinesses for açai, paddy rice, cocoa, coffee and sugar cane crops. An estimated 5,500 loans will be issued to farmers and microentrepreneurs (including over 1,700 women) in the agricultural sector, and all investments are made with a view to promoting environmental sustainability.

Figure 2

Adoption of innovative financing mechanisms, by number of United Nations entities with projects in a given category, 2017 and 2021



Box 9

United Nations Children's Fund: CryptoFund

The CryptoFund, launched in October 2019, is the first cryptocurrency-denominated financing vehicle within the United Nations. Since launching the CryptoFund, UNICEF has brought on board new cryptocurrency donors and received new fiat donations. The French National Committee for UNICEF has been at the forefront of cryptocurrency donations, having launched the first UNICEF cryptocurrency campaign in 2018 to support UNICEF work. For example, a gaming company that launched a blockchain-based video game in 2020 announced a charity auction in support of UNICEF using innovative technologies, such as the auction of non-fungible tokens.

23. Public reporting of partnerships by United Nations entities is increasing, but measuring and communicating impact remains a challenge. Over half of entities surveyed acknowledged the need to capture results and learnings from their partnerships with the private sector more consistently while reiterating the need for further guidance and resources to communicate partnership impact effectively.

24. As was noted in previous reports, United Nations leaders and partnership experts remain eager to find ways to further scale innovative partnerships, building on successful existing partnership models within current regulatory and risk management frameworks while considering opportunities to further strengthen the capacity of the Organization to expand spaces for collaboration with external stakeholders.

Box 10

United Nations Office for Project Services: Sustainable Investments in Infrastructure and Innovation Global Innovation Centre programme

United Nations Office for Project Services Sustainable Investments in Infrastructure and Innovation Global Innovation Centres bring together a diverse range of innovators, entrepreneurs, programmers and researchers to provide creative ideas and solutions needed to advance the 2030 Agenda and achieve the Goals. The centres are aimed at solving real-world challenges by advancing innovation and private sector involvement in sustainable development, as well as by leveraging new technologies to enable innovative practical solutions with a tangible impact on the Goals. In the period 2020–2021, the centres had incubated over 35 start-ups across the globe.

For example, in Antigua and Barbuda, a range of partners from the public and private sectors have provided workshops on open-source programming and entrepreneurship to students and young people at the centre. Among the centre's notable start-ups are an effort to take sargassum seaweed and process it for sustainable use in the fashion industry, as well as a coral reef restoration start-up.

V. Partnerships and United Nations development system reform

25. United Nations development system reform has led to dedicated investments in local partnering capacity to help resident coordinator offices to foster more effective collaboration between United Nations country teams and external actors, not only as

donors but through a wider range of strategic partnership activities leveraging the full complement of skills, expertise and opportunities that country teams can offer to other stakeholders. With an impartial coordination function and stronger capacities, resident coordinators have shown the unique value of the convening power of the United Nations regarding the 2030 Agenda.

26. Resident coordinators have contributed positively to the expansion of partnerships, consolidating the strategic engagements of United Nations entities and the joint resource mobilization efforts of United Nations country teams. They have played an important part in creating and managing various country-level pooled funds and in facilitating the access of country teams to United Nations trust funds. Resident coordinators are enabling more coordinated development cooperation, including, in many cases, as the co-chairs of donor and national Government aid platforms, a role that many perform at the request of national counterparts. More effective links are being established across all parts and levels of Government with development partners, including civil society and the private sector. The creation of a new Partnership and Development Finance Officer function within resident coordinator offices has been a significant driver of the positive developments. The new cohort of partnership experts provides matchmaking, brokering, strategy and advisory support to country teams while assisting external stakeholders in identifying opportunities for local engagement.

27. Underpinning the local efforts towards more strategic and transformational partnerships is the global United Nations partnership ecosystem. As part of United Nations development system reform, the United Nations Office for Partnerships, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Global Compact have worked together to optimize and clarify their distinct roles and functions and to enhance their respective support for partnerships across the wider United Nations system, in particular at the country level.⁹ As an outcome of the efforts, the respective roles of each of the three entities have been clarified.

28. The United Nations Office for Partnerships serves as the global gateway to catalyse and co-create collaborations that accelerate solutions to deliver the Goals. The Office mobilizes international, regional and local stakeholders, engaging the public sector, the private sector, civil society, academia and philanthropic entities in the work of the United Nations system. To uphold the promise of leaving no one behind and to fulfil its mandate, the Office is organized around three main initiatives and funds. The first is Sustainable Development Goal advocacy, communications and engagement. To catalyse global actors in support of the Goals, the Office hosts the Secretary-General's Sustainable Development Goals Advocates and the Sustainable Development Goals Strategy Hub. The second is the United Nations Democracy Fund, which funds projects that empower civil society and strengthen democracy. The third is the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships, the primary interface between the United Nations Foundation and the United Nations system, which supports projects implemented globally by agencies, funds and programmes.

29. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has primary responsibility for supporting intergovernmental processes in the area of sustainable development, including supporting intergovernmental discussions on partnerships developed in those contexts or that relate to them by drawing on expertise and advice from across relevant

⁹ The efforts are a response to many of the themes and proposals in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the United Nations system: private sector partnerships arrangements in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (JIU/REP/2017/8). This study of private sector partnership modalities, challenges and opportunities across the United Nations system underlined the importance of Member States' clarifying the role and mandate of the United Nations Global Compact. The report contained many recommendations regarding the continued streamlining and integration of private sector partnership guidelines, calling for a stronger common system-wide approach to issues such as due diligence and partnership policies.

parts of the United Nations system. The Department's primary roles include supporting intergovernmental discussions on partnerships and providing a platform through which diverse stakeholders can engage in them, as appropriate; supporting the development of policy guidance related to partnership alignment with intergovernmental mandates and processes; advising relevant actors within and outside the system on supporting new partnerships that can be launched through or connected to major intergovernmental processes; supporting multi-stakeholder policy dialogue and knowledge-sharing regarding critical issues that are on the agenda of major intergovernmental processes; convening annual partnership-focused meetings in collaboration with other entities, as well as advising other entities on or supporting them in major partnership-focused meetings that they may convene. In line with General Assembly resolution 75/290 A on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs will support the Council in convening a broadened partnership forum in February annually with a view to providing an impetus for and inspiring the work of the Council and its subsidiary bodies in the following months. The Department also takes a lead in managing, housing and preparing data, analysis and related tools that support partnerships for the Goals.

30. The United Nations Global Compact is a special initiative of the Secretary-General that acts as a driver of responsible private sector engagement across the United Nations system and scaled-up private sector support for the Goals. Its strategic ambition is to accelerate and scale the global collective impact of business by upholding the 10 principles of the Global Compact and delivering the Goals through accountable companies and ecosystems that enable change. The 10 principles provide companies with a principle-based approach to doing business and set out fundamental private sector responsibilities in the areas of human rights, labour rights, the environment and anti-corruption. Those core principles form an agenda that the United Nations development system should consistently signal and advance in its operations and engagements with the private sector. The Global Compact leverages its unique position to catalyse greater global collective action and business resources to change the way in which companies operate, how they affect the environment, including through their subsidiaries and supply chains, and how they contribute to the objectives of the Paris Agreement. The Global Compact delivers that, among other actions, by better connecting United Nations country teams with the private sector, including small and medium-sized enterprises, at the national and local levels. The Global Compact is working increasingly closely with United Nations country teams in preparing companies to be partner-ready for deeper engagement with the rest of the United Nations system at the country level. United Nations entities are similarly encouraged to leverage Global Compact networks, resources and technical expertise at the global, regional and local levels.

31. A United Nations Global Compact strategy for 2021–2023 was developed in 2020 with extensive inputs from Member States, the United Nations system, Global Compact Local Networks, companies and other stakeholders around the world. The Five strategic shifts will be pursued through the strategy: (a) stronger corporate accountability; (b) balanced growth of local and regional networks for global coverage; (c) measurable impact anchored by the 10 principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption as fundamental drivers of corporate sustainability; (d) harnessing the collective action of small and medium-sized enterprises with a targeted and cross-cutting programme for such enterprises that leverages digital tools and value chains to reach scale; and (e) strong and active engagement with the rest of the United Nations system.

32. The strategy includes a call for deeper United Nations collaboration at all levels to unlock the collective contribution of the United Nations system in advancing corporate sustainability and responsible business practices globally. Among other

efforts, the United Nations Global Compact will ensure that the “four guardians”, custodian entities of the conventions and normative frameworks on which the 10 principles were built – the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – are actively involved in delivering the strategy. An important step forward in this regard was taken in 2021 with the creation of a new rotating seat on the Global Compact Board for a United Nations principal to represent the four guardians. The Global Compact is reviewing and revising existing agreements with other entities to strengthen and align existing relationships with its new strategy and to forge new alliances, where appropriate.

33. To ensure that the global strategy is translated into meaningful and measurable local impact, the United Nations Global Compact will continue to deepen relationships with resident coordinator offices and United Nations country teams. Such renewed emphasis on country-level collaboration will help to incorporate private sector data, insights and expertise into cooperation frameworks. The Global Compact can help to ensure that local private sector partners have a greater sense of clarity, incentive and ownership in advancing country-level Sustainable Development Goal priorities. Making cooperation frameworks a common reference point for collaboration can provide the private sector with a better understanding of where it can most effectively contribute to national Goal-related priorities while also laying foundations for more effective United Nations-private sector partnerships to deliver stronger, measurable development impact.

34. In pursuing its new strategy, the United Nations Global Compact is adopting a more rigorous approach to annual strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The new approach to measurement is results-oriented. Collective impact will be evaluated in five critical areas: (a) the number of Global Compact participants committed to the goals of the Paris Agreement; (b) making public commitments to human rights and labour; (c) demonstrating broad-based gender parity in operations; (d) enforcing compliance with regard to anti-corruption and bribery; and (e) taking actions to advance the Goals. A refreshed communication on progress, the reporting tool for Global Compact participating companies that links progress to impact across the 10 principles, will be introduced in early 2022 as a more ambitious framework through which to engage with companies on their individual sustainability journeys while enabling an aggregate view of impact. It is hoped that such data will also help other United Nations entities to identify areas in which their own private sector partnerships and strategies can have greater impact.

35. Noting the critical importance of optimizing the potential of partnerships across the United Nations system, in particular in the context of recovery from COVID-19, efforts will be made to enhance the capacity of resident coordinator offices as conveners, catalysts and platforms for partnership. As noted in the recent review of the resident coordinator system, the capacities of resident coordinator offices will be strengthened by delineating the partnership officer function from the development finance function. Local efforts will be geared towards a more common system-wide partnership approach.

36. United Nations entities will anchor private sector engagement with United Nations country teams around the new generation of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and common country analyses. Resident coordinators and country teams will continue to strengthen relationships with Global Compact Local Networks and other local business organizations to facilitate more strategic long-term collaboration between the United Nations and the private sector in support of national Sustainable Development Goal priorities. Specifically, such collaboration will be anchored in robust consultation and the involvement of the private sector in the design and implementation of cooperation.

37. The 10 principles will continue to be the foundation for partnerships between the United Nations and the private sector. The United Nations Global Compact and all other entities will review relevant partnership strategies and policies to ensure that their interactions with the private sector advance the aims, activities and purposes of the United Nations, including the 10 principles. The purpose, roles and responsibilities of the partnership will be defined clearly and will reflect the values shared between the United Nations and the engaging entity. United Nations entities will openly promote the 10 principles by asking companies to publicly commit to respecting them and will promote companies' participation in the Global Compact.

38. The Secretariat will assess opportunities to strengthen and expand space for innovative partnerships. While acknowledging the unique nature of the United Nations system and its privileges and immunities, the Secretariat and other entities will further explore partnership opportunities, including an update of their regulatory framework, with the support of Member States, as necessary, in an effort to leverage the fullest possible range of contributions of external actors. As part of the exercise, the United Nations will explore opportunities to expand partnership activities that are aimed at inspiring and shaping the work needed and to help to drive the massive reallocation of resources required to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

VI. Recommendations

39. To better harness the potential for cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, including the private sector, the following recommendations are proposed for the consideration of Member States:

40. Member States have the opportunity to embark on new levels of increased participation and inclusion. Embracing multi-stakeholder partnerships will be critical to address current and potential life-threatening crises. Both the public and private sectors have a role to play in this regard, building on efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. I encourage Member States to enable and encourage the participation of stakeholders at all levels, in particular to tackle challenges that know no borders, such as climate change and the protection of the oceans.

41. Member States can help to shape an enabling environment for partnerships that are aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, it is crucial that the private sector prioritize the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and negative biodiversity impacts across its entire value chain while maintaining the highest standards of environmental integrity.

42. Member States can encourage responsible innovation and leveraging of technology for sustainable development.

43. It is paramount to count on the support of Member States in the implementation of the Global Compact Strategy for 2021–2023. Strong and sustainable companies are built on global values, including human and labour rights, environmental sustainability and anti-corruption, all of which are enshrined in the United Nations Global Compact. By supporting the Global Compact, including at the country level through Global Compact Local Networks, Governments can galvanize the coordinated action of the private sector to align its business models with the Goals. Participation in the Global Compact will provide further accountability to ensure that the full weight of the private sector is mobilized to move the needle on a sustainable recovery from COVID-19.

Annex

United Nations entities that contributed to the report

Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
International Atomic Energy Agency
International Labour Organization
International Maritime Organization
International Organization for Migration
International Telecommunication Union
International Trade Centre
Office of Ahmed Al Meraikhi, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General
Office of Information and Communications Technology
Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
United Nations Children's Fund
United Nations Department of Global Communications
United Nations Development Programme
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
United Nations Environment Programme
United Nations Industrial Development Organization
United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
United Nations Office for Project Services
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
United Nations Population Fund
United Nations System Staff College
World Food Programme
World Meteorological Organization
World Tourism Organization
