



UN Monitor #03

UN Partnership Forum 2019

“Partnerships Driving Inclusive Implementation of the SDGs”

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[The Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\) Partnership Forum](#) will hold its annual session at UN headquarters on **11 April 2019**. This year it will focus on partnership efforts supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda is the subject of review by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) annually under ECOSOC and at summit level every four years (including 2019) under the auspices of the UN’s highest political body, the General Assembly.

The HLPF has a multiyear programme clustering the SDGs year by year but SDG 17, essential for the implementation of all SDGs, is reviewed every year. Framed as a goal to “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”, what was conceived as a global partnership led by States is being re-interpreted to emphasize partnerships with as many actors as possible. However, this shift has not been guided or governed by principles, criteria, and independent assessment and oversight. The 2030 Agenda indicator by which to assess the value of multi-stakeholder partnerships, which was meant to build on “experience and resourcing strategies”, measures only financial resources (17.17.1). This quantity not quality approach favours big business and big NGOs (see Global Policy Watch briefing #24: “[The semantics of partnerships](#)”).

The attention to UN engagement in partnerships has the potential to re-position the ECOSOC Partnership Forum from a market place of practices to a policy-shaping body. While it may be a forum to develop the understanding of UN partnerships, it does not deliver the accountability and oversight needed. Its orientation / DNA is to promote partnerships, side-stepping the essential first step of assessing in what circumstances partnerships are a legitimate approach or an effective modality (see [remarks](#) of Barbara Adams at the 2018 ECOSOC OAD segment, on “Strengthening partnerships and stakeholder engagement”).

Its emphasis on promotion implicitly allows a pick and choose approach, without robust indicators of impact and effectiveness apart from the results of resource mobilization.

Since the last Partnerships Forum, UN discourse has demonstrated a shift from an exclusive focus on the private sector to multi-stakeholder partnerships and UN reports have enumerated the constituencies of civil society, academia, foundations as well as the private sector as partners.

The importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships is emphasized in the [Partnerships Forum concept note](#):

The last decade has seen partnerships in the field of sustainable development burgeoning and diversifying at an accelerated rate. Sustainable Development Goal 17 ... recognizes the critical importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for the achievement of the SDGs in all countries.

However, the UN gatekeepers/interlocutors are those with private sector experience and lack substantial engagement with a diverse array of constituencies, especially those with a public interest commitment and non-profit experience. By illustration, this year the Partnership Forum is co-organized by the United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP) and the United Nations Global Compact, two such interlocutors, together with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

2019 Partnership Forum Agenda

The 2019 Partnership Forum will showcase good practices and lessons learned on the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships in driving inclusiveness and impacts under the overall theme of “Partnerships Driving Inclusive Implementation of the SDGs”. The agenda will include:

- multi-stakeholder partnerships and partnership platforms led by national governments to draw concrete recommendations on ways to address existing gaps in SDG implementation, and to catalyse value-additions and accountability for different stakeholders;
- ways to enhance the effectiveness of UN-associated partnerships in the context of ongoing UN development system (UNDS) reform; and the role of the United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) and UN local networks, including the Global Compact Local Networks; and
- an update on the work of the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) – formerly known as UN Development Group or UNDG – Strategic Results Group on Partnerships.

Additionally, UN partnerships are one of the six priority areas of the UN development system reform (see Global Policy Watch briefing #15: [“The UN development system: Can it catch up to the 2030 Agenda?”](#)).

UN development system reform and partnerships

More recently attention to UN partnerships arrangements has escalated with the Secretary-General’s reform recommendations for the UN development system. His December 2017 report, “Repositioning the United Nations development system (UNDS) to deliver on the 2030 Agenda” (A/72/684), asserted that “partnership efforts remain fragmented and overly focused on 'projectized' activities” and that the UN “must do better to manage risks and ensure oversight” (para 131).

The report outlined six partnership-focused work streams and made concrete proposals for improving UN partnership engagements, including measures to ensure increased transparency and accountability (paras 130-143).

1. UNSDG to agree on a system-wide approach to partnership
2. Strengthen system-wide integrity, due diligence and risk management, including the 10 Global Compact principles on for private sector engagement
3. Considerations of Global Compact leadership on ways to improve governance at the global level, its impact, and its oversight of Global Compact Local Networks

4. Reinvigoration of UNOP as the global gateway for partnership
5. A system-wide compact with the international financial institutions
6. Efforts to invigorate UN support for South-South cooperation

In May 2018 Member States responded positively to the Secretary-General's reform proposals on re-aligning its leadership, capacities and accountability mechanisms to meet the demands in delivering on the 2030 Agenda by adopting resolution [A/RES/72/279](#) "Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system". This resolution included attention to the importance of partnerships but did not endorse any concrete directions regarding the Secretary-General's proposals for partnership arrangements.

With the adoption of the reform resolution attention has shifted to its implementation and the UNDS will report on progress to Member States on **21-23 May 2019 at the [ECOSOC operational activities for development segment](#)**.

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