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**Strengthening the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific region**

Partnerships in Asia and the Pacific for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Note by the secretariat**

Summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development gives partnerships an increasingly important role in supporting implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. This provides opportunities for innovative ways for partnerships to be developed at the national, subnational and local levels. This paper provides an overview of the "Guidelines for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development Goals Implementation in Asia and the Pacific" prepared jointly by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS). The guidelines aim to facilitate implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific by supporting member States in the region to effectively develop and implement partnerships for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This paper also highlights some of the challenges and the opportunities for multi-stakeholder partnerships.

I.   Introduction

1.   Achieving sustainable development depends, to a large extent, on our ability to engage, in a meaningful way, with partners from all sectors of society. The Preamble of the 2030 Agenda calls for a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity. It goes further to state that all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. Sustainable Development Goal 17 encourages multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in

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particular developing countries.[1] The Sustainable Development Goals address a complex, interdependent set of challenges and so require a systemic and holistic implementation response. Multi-stakeholder partnerships provide an important structure from which to develop strategies that explore options beyond "business as usual" and search for transformational changes that respond to these systemic challenges.

2.   This paper [2] provides an overview on guidelines for multi-stakeholder partnerships for Sustainable Development Goals implementation in Asia-Pacific. The guidelines were designed to facilitate implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific by supporting member States in the region to effectively develop and implement partnerships for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The guidelines aim to: i) help improve existing partnership processes and prepare better ones in the future; ii) provide practical and step-by-step guidance to address opportunities and challenges for partnerships; iii) promote inclusiveness; and iv) support capacity-building for developing, implementing and sustaining successful multi-stakeholder partnerships. The guidelines include the following five phases of partnerships: i) initiation; ii) formation; iii) managing and implementation; iv) review; and v) reinvent or sustain.

II.   Partnerships in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A.   Context

3.   There are several definitions of partnerships; the United Nations defines partnerships as voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both State and non-State, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits.[3] However, for the purpose of this paper, the concept of partnerships is understood as a manifestation of three principles: i) convergence of interest; ii) complementarity of approaches and resources; and iii) shared value, which are characterized by mutuality[4] (Figure 1). It is important to underline that in this document; the terms partnerships and multi-stakeholder partnerships are used interchangeably. Furthermore, in its broadest sense, when referring to a stakeholder, we refer to any individual, organisation, sector or community who has a 'stake' or interest in the outcome of a given decision or process.

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[1]   United Nations (2015) *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1*, available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication.

[2]   This paper builds on the *Guidelines for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for SDG Implementation in Asia-Pacific* prepared jointly by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the United Nations University – Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS) http://www.unescap.org/resources/guidelines-multi-stakeholder-partnerships-sdg-implementation-asia-and-pacific. These were validated in a two-day workshop entitled 'Validating Guidelines for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for SDG Implementation,' which was organized by ESCAP and UNU-IAS during SDG Week in November 2017. For details, see: http://www.unescap.org/events/workshop-validating-guidelines-multi-stakeholder-partnerships-sdg-implementation-0

[3]   United Nations General Assembly, *Enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector*, Resolution A/60/214, dated 10 August 2005 (https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/457/06/PDF/N0545706.pdf)

[4]   The Partnerships Resource Centre, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Figure 1.
The three core principles of a partnership
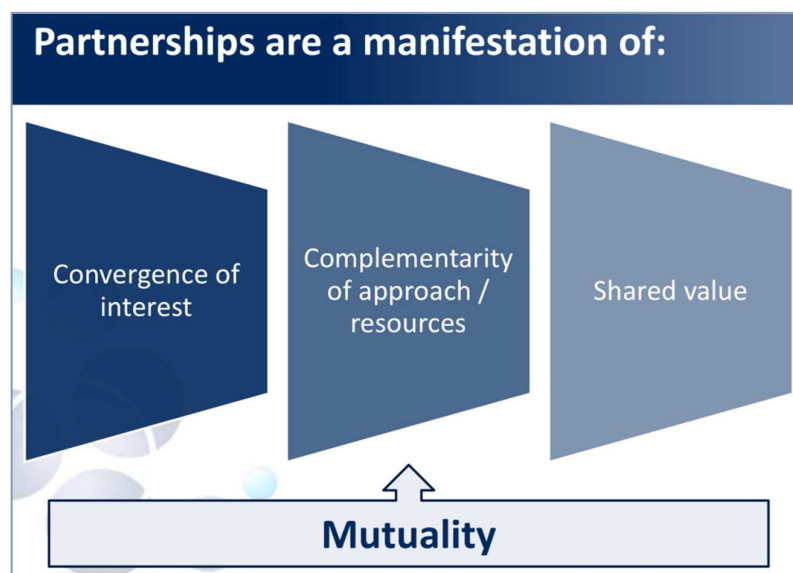
Source: The Partnerships Resource Centre, Erasmus University.

4.   The 2030 Agenda introduces five critical dimensions of sustainable development: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, which are also known as the "5P's of sustainable development". The two dimensions of peace and partnership, which are additional to the traditional approach to development, give a richer meaning to the concept of sustainable development.

5.   By including partnerships in the five critical dimensions of sustainable development, and making them part of the means of implementation, the 2030 Agenda highlights the importance of partnerships in implementation of the sustainable development goals. This also provides new opportunities for innovative ways for partnerships to be developed at the national, subnational and local levels, particularly how governments engage with non-State actors. Governments partnering with non-State actors, such as private sector, civil society organizations, academia and others, can harness their respective competitive advantages in the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda.

B.   Multi Stakeholder Partnership Framework

6.   Implementing the 2030 Agenda requires governments to mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals into their national policy and to bring government institutions together to develop and implement integrated policies. Formulating a policy agenda is an integral part of a standard policy cycle, and governments in the region are now in the process of integrating the goals into their policy cycles at the national, sub-national and local levels. This process is referred to here as "the 2030 Agenda policy cycle". This cycle follows a sequential order initiated by defining problems, developing policies, adoption and implementation of policies, and finally assessing these policies against their effectiveness and efficiency leading toward termination or renewal. In practice, policy elements may not always occur chronologically or strategically and require additional iterative steps along the overall cycle of policy formulation, decision making, implementation and review. Ideally, the cycle emphasizes the feedback processes between inputs and outputs of policy making as part of an iterative policy process.

7.   Along this policy cycle, there are multiple entry points for partnerships to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Partnerships can, for instance, help to overcome challenges during the formulation phase such as access to relevant data by partnering with research institutes, or can help to leverage diverse funds from public and private stakeholders during the implementation phase. To understand the alignment between the 2030 Agenda, the policy cycle and the steps required to setup a partnership, a framework was developed to outline the step-by-step approach of the partnership guidelines – the Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Framework.

8.   The Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Framework is designed as a process-based approach, it is characterized as a system of interrelated and collaborative processes that is aligned with the policy cycle and aims to support implementation of the sustainable development goals. It provides systematic guidance to setting up a partnership in the context of the 2030 agenda, to mobilizing of partners and resources, delivering outputs and outcomes, measuring progress, learning lessons, and scaling up (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.
Multi stakeholder partnership framework aligned to 2030 Agenda policy cycle
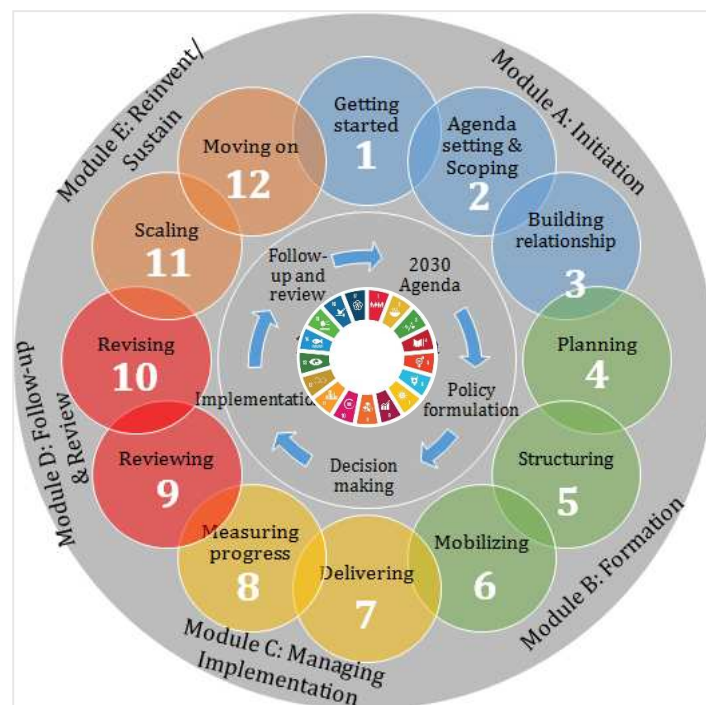
Source: ESCAP and the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS)

9.   The Framework has a non-linear approach which allows stakeholders to revisit its various steps as new information becomes available, new resources are secured, new stakeholders become involved, or other circumstances change. Furthermore, partnerships are considered as a system of collaborative processes, represented as modules that support each other. The Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Framework considers and in turn informs the 2030 Agenda policy cycle shaping strategies in different stages of partnerships formation.

10. The partnership Guidelines include five modules that are aligned with the phases of the policy cycle: i) initiation; ii) formation; iii) managing and implementation; iv) review; and v) reinvent or sustain. Building successful partnerships involves a series of steps and interrelated tasks for policymakers and other stakeholders (see Figure 2). Lessons learnt from the Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Framework will, in turn, inform the 2030 Agenda policy cycle, thus completing the crucial feedback loop helping understand and improve policies across the region.

Initiation

11. This phase is the foundation for any partnership building process. It is at this stage where those involved will: i) identify and frame the sustainable development challenge to be addressed; ii) organize the resources required for the successful development and implementation of the partnership; iii) identify relevant partners and their strengths, and map potential contributions; iv) set the goal and objectives in discussion with the stakeholders involved; and v) secure partners' commitment, in the form of a 'partnership agreement' with agreed procedures of governance and accountability. This phase includes three steps: firstly, getting started where the tasks include identifying the Sustainable Development Goal(s) that will be addressed, organizing resources and identifying partners; secondly, agenda setting and scoping where a collective understanding needs to be developed through clear goals and objectives that are in line with the Sustainable Development Goal(s) identified; and thirdly building relationships which involves mapping out partners and securing agreements and governance structures. Supporting the achievement of the 2030 Agenda requires partnering organizations to be collectively accountable not only to their beneficiaries but also to each other. Partnerships that face difficulties at any step during the development and implementation stages, will usually return to these foundational partnering steps.

Formation

12. The formation phase helps in detailing out the plan and structure that, in turn, will support mobilisation of resources. This stage involves: i) preparing a detailed plan of the components and activities to be implemented under the partnership; ii) structuring the roles and responsibilities of partnering organizations to deliver the agreed outputs in a cohesive manner; and iii) preparing a plan to mobilise the resources required to implement the activities in a coherent and successive progression in order to achieve the desired progress on the Sustainable Development Goal(s) and objectives. This phase includes three steps: planning where the various components of the partnership need to be formulated to ensure that the partnership contributes towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda in an effective way; structuring where all roles and responsibilities are allocated; and mobilising which entails securing human, financial, technological and other resources in line with Sustainable Development Goal targets 17.1, 17.2 and 17.3.

Managing Implementation

13. This phase supports the delivery of outputs and outcomes, and measures the related progress agreed under the partnership. It supports implementation and monitoring of tasks and activities and in doing so, it supports the partnership to achieve its objectives, with proper record of the implementation progress. This phase involves: i) effectively coordinating stakeholders to deliver outputs agreed under the partnership; ii) successfully implementing project components and activities; and iii) regularly monitoring progress made in the implementation of tasks and activities. This phase

includes two steps; delivering on the Sustainable Development Goal; and measuring progress in line with national policies and within the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets. The delivery outcomes of the partnership can inform policy and to an extent support the Voluntary National Reviews while ensuring accountability of all stakeholders.

Review

14.   This phase supports the review of progress made under the partnership, and revises the project components as necessary. This phase involves: i) conducting periodic and other reviews of progress made toward the agreed goal(s) and objectives; ii) revising the partnership's relevant components and/or activities, as necessary, in case implementation suffers from any managerial, technical or logistical setbacks, scheduling problems, coordination difficulties or other unforeseen problems; and iii) being able to resolve problems and bring the partnership back on track to meet its purpose and objectives. This module includes two steps; i) reviewing; and ii) revising. These will draw on the lessons learned from the periodic reviews and throughout the implementation process and can feed into the follow-up and review architecture of the 2030 Agenda while fostering peer learning and the sharing of practices.

Reinvent or Sustain

15.   If the conditions are suitable, this phase will support the process of scaling up, it may herald a transformation, or the demise of a partnership. The outcomes will depend on the successes or failures of the partnerships, and how it has either failed or succeeded in its implementation. This phase involves: i) consolidating lessons learnt, exploring the possibility for scaling up a successful partnership, and putting in place necessary arrangements; ii) sorting out the necessary conditions for the transformation of the partnership to be led and managed by one or more partnering stakeholder, if the partnerships has been successful and the partners are willing to sustain it; and iii) terminating the partnership if it no longer serves a purpose after completion of the objective, or has not been successful, and/or one or more partners are unwilling to continue cooperation, especially if there are no other partners to replace them. This module includes two steps: scaling up and moving on. Based on the lessons learned in the previous phase, especially if the partnership has been successful in generating its desired impact, partnering stakeholders may decide for scaling up. Moving on can involve the renewal or the termination of the partnership.

III.   Key opportunities and challenges for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

16.   Partnerships encourage collective efforts and provide opportunities to reduce costs, deliver socially equitable outcomes, and contribute to sustainable development. Partnerships can become key policy instruments for governments to implement their development policies and plans. Partnerships also work across national borders and have been stimulated by regional concerns and interests.

17.   At the same time, building successful partnerships can pose challenges than can have the potential not only to thwart partnerships but also the collective efforts towards sustainable development. Acknowledging the importance of knowing and understanding the key elements that provide opportunities, and challenges that can inhibit the development of successful

partnerships, ESCAP and the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability conducted a meta-analytical study of existing literature on partnerships across a range of sectors. This study identified key elements for building successful partnerships. These were validated through an online survey[5] to identify the most relevant elements for stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific.

A.   Key Success Factors for Building Successful Partnerships in Asia and the Pacific

18.   The following were identified as key elements that provide opportunities for the successful development of partnerships. They provide an insight on how stakeholders in the region pay greater attention to elements, such as convergence of interest, complementarity, mutuality, shared values and trust.

(a)   *Acknowledging the need for partnerships*. A successful partnership starts with understanding that individual stakeholders cannot achieve certain goals by themselves, especially where a convergence of interest can be built amongst them.

(b)   *Willingness to share information.* Sharing information allows stakeholders to build effective communication channels, mutuality and trust. Access to information is an added value of working through partnerships as not all stakeholders have the same level of access to information.

(c)   *Appropriate competency mix*. This provides complementarity to the partnership and contributes to allocating resources wisely. Securing an appropriate competency mix helps stakeholders develop an integrated approach to deliver partnerships more effectively.

(d)   *Shared agenda (collective goals and objectives)*. A commonality among stakeholders' programme's goals, objectives and target beneficiaries often leads to initiating a partnership. It fosters mutuality and shared values among stakeholders. A practical focus builds upon the understanding of what can be achieved collectively. Setting up collective goals and objectives, despite the presence of individual interests, is a step toward inclusiveness and is essential to maintaining partnerships.

(e)   *Mutual trust*. Successful partnerships require sufficient trust that enables stakeholders to work together beyond individual interests. In Asia-Pacific, trust is a key factor that builds gradually over time through continuous communication.

(f)   *Strategic planning*. Planning should be strategic, effective, and responsive to possible risks and success. It fosters voluntary collaboration among stakeholders. Strategic planning calls for integrated procedural and institutional arrangements. It should include clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders, and clear rules, policies and operating procedures acceptable to all.

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[5]   An online survey was conducted to solicit feedback from policy makers and practitioners from the Asia-Pacific region towards the preparation of the guidelines. During a period of two months in October-November 2017, the online survey received responses from 20 countries from across Asia-Pacific, including Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States, and helped capture perceptions of stakeholders who included government officials at the national and subnational levels, and representatives of private sector, civil society organizations, and knowledge institutes.

(g) *Monitoring mechanisms*. Accountability is central for success. Mechanisms to monitor all stakeholders' activities and progress toward achieving the desired outcome is important to ensure accountability and measure the successful delivery of outputs.

B. Key Challenges in Building Successful Partnerships in Asia and the Pacific

19. The following were identified as key challenges for multi-stakeholder partnerships.

(a) *Availability of legal provisions*. In many countries across the region, legal provisions are essential to involving non-governmental stakeholders into any collaborative effort. Policy and legal frameworks set the basis for managing power balance, and attaining legitimacy and accountability. Many partnerships fail to gain legitimacy due to unfavourable legal conditions for partnerships with non-State actors.

(b) *Securing resources*. By and large, without sufficient financial, human and knowledge resources, partnerships either stall or fail. Securing resources externally or internally is challenging, and requires an effective network that that enables partnerships to access private and public budgetary processes that partnerships can tap into. In many countries in the region, such networks are not always available. Stakeholders will often rely on their internal organizational networks to allocate sufficient resources for contributing to the development and implementation of partnerships. Complex organizational bureaucracies often create barriers to securing internal resources with competition among internal silos.

(c) *Ownership and commitment*. Sustaining partnerships requires strong ownership from all stakeholders. Ensuring ownership usually builds long term support towards collective goals. Partnerships require committed stakeholders willing to see through and to work together.

(d) *Ensuring inclusive decision-making*. Successful partnerships foster participations and inclusiveness amongst all stakeholders. Inclusive decision-making calls for a consensus where all stakeholders agree before a decision is made. The larger and more diverse the stakeholders, the more difficult it is to gain consensus in a relatively short period of time.

(e) *Flexibility*. Many countries across the Asia-Pacific region have complex bureaucratic structures that can decelerate partnership-building processes and complicate and hinder the work of partnerships. There are considerable problems to ensure flexibility in rules, regulations, policies and operating procedures to deal with unplanned challenges during implementation. Many partnerships face difficulties in setting up feasible timelines for developing and implementing effective programmes.

IV. Matters calling for the attention of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

20. In discussing the role of governments in facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships that support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, member States may wish to reflect on:

(a) The role of multi stakeholder partnerships in national and regional implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

(b)   Modalities for building and sustaining partnerships at the national and subnational level, including through quality engagement processes and mechanisms that facilitate partnerships between, and with civil society organizations, academia, the business sector and all relevant stakeholders.

(c)   Opportunities to strengthen regional peer-learning and triangular cooperation to exchange experiences, share knowledge of successful (and unsuccessful) partnerships for sustainable development and to further encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships.

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