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Partnerships for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Transformative, Inclusive and Accountable?

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Partnerships for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Transformative, Inclusive and Accountable?

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) as an essential tool for realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were adopted alongside the Agenda. However, prior experience of such partnerships between state and non-state actors (from the private sector and/or civil society) has shown mixed results: significant successes have been marred by too many failures. To what extent do policymakers and other relevant actors integrate these insights into multi-stakeholder partnerships – especially as regards the relevant conditions for success – when calling for and fostering new partnerships for the SDGs?

This study presents inter alia the results of a series of interviews with selected international actors – from (1) the United Nations, (2) donors and funders, (3) governments and (4) private initiatives. We will first consider their assessments of partnership performance to date, before soliciting their views of the necessary framework conditions to make future partnerships transformative, inclusive and accountable, in keeping with the requirements of the 2030 Agenda.

All our interviewees agreed that partnerships needed to be improved to achieve these criteria. However, opinions differed widely as to whether such improvement was possible and, if so, how. One group of representatives from sceptical NGOs and several developing countries almost entirely rejects partnerships, especially with the private sector, except possibly where governments retain sovereignty over their design and stipulate a strict framework for regulation and verification. In contrast, another group, which is more concerned with the business sector and realpolitik, fears that too much bureaucracy will deter potential partners and hinder flexibility and innovation. Moreover, this group claims that the risk of failure in partnerships must be weighed up against the risk of not attaining the SDGs. Taking up position between them is the (largest) group, which generally is amicable to the idea of better support and oversight of partnerships – but is often unsure how to do so in a targeted and balanced manner.

This study builds on previous findings which show that partnerships can be effective, inclusive and ac-

countable, but only under specific conditions. A framework therefore needs to be drawn up for improving partnerships that is goal-orientated and includes continual learning processes.

Alongside the actors' subjective appraisals, we also examined the extent to which the UN, donors and funders, governments and private actors already engage in de facto "meta-governance" to develop, guide and verify partnerships more consciously. By meta-governance we mean overarching principles or rules that are intended to guide, accompany or evaluate the work of partnerships. Here, too, the results are mixed: we found many potential building blocks of meta-governance, but the overall picture was highly fragmented rather than coherent. Our policy recommendations derive from these findings.

Germany has been strongly committed to multi-stakeholder partnerships both at the UN level and in bilateral and multilateral development cooperation. For the UN General Assembly, Germany usually draws up the bi-annual resolution Towards Global Partnerships (TGP). According to the schedule, these negotiations should have been held in autumn 2017. Normally Germany drafts the resolution before it submits it along with the European Union (EU) and other sponsoring countries. Following difficult talks, however, these year's negotiations have been postponed to 2018. Member states could not agree on whether to support the proposals contained in the Secretary-General's accompanying TGP report; they also wanted clarification on the Secretary-General's plans for further reform. Germany should use the 2018 negotiations to push for a more coherently applied strategy for transformative, inclusive and accountable partnerships within the UN system. Our study contains some practical proposals for achieving this. The timing is opportune since the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is currently trying to reform the UN's development system.

Furthermore, since late 2016 Germany has co-chaired the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) with Bangladesh and Uganda. Partnerships in line with the principles of the "aid effectiveness" agenda are a focal point of the GPEDC's work. As co-chair, Germany should engage with the issue and build on the Netherlands' preparatory work concerning partnerships. For instance, it would be useful to establish a well-equipped platform under the aegis of the GPEDC wherein partnerships can discuss their work and governments their meta-

governance for partnerships, and all concerned can pool their efforts.

Both the UN and the GPEDC should also concentrate on supporting governments in making national provisions to develop and implement partnerships transformatively, inclusively and accountably. Particularly at that level, there is a lack of support and guidance as well as monitoring and control. The current weak and fragmented meta-governance for partnerships could lead to past problems being repeated and partnerships ultimately failing to be an effective means for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Partnerships for the 2030 Agenda

Partnerships between state and non-state actors are considered an effective and innovative instrument for realising objectives in sustainable development policy.¹ In the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* published in September 2015, the UN member states once more designated them an important “means of implementation” for the 17 SDGs.²

During the negotiations of the 2030 Agenda, many delegates were calling for partnerships – without clarifying what exactly that meant. Some use the term *partnership* to mean bilateral and multilateral agreements between governments “as equals”. SDG 17 likewise confirms the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development in the sense of an overall improvement in cooperation in financing and capacity-building, “based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity”. Others mean public-private partnerships (PPPs), which go hand in hand with (part-) privatising public assets or services. Business tends to welcome PPPs, whereas some civil society vehemently criticise them.³ This study will focus on the *Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships* (MSPs), meaning forms of lasting cooperation between various stakeholders⁴ – state actors (governments or international organisations) and non-state actors

(from businesses, trade associations, foundations or non-governmental organisations) – with the stated aim of providing common goods.⁵ SDG 17.16 states that MSPs shall “complement” the Global Partnership and shall “mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries”.⁶ In other words, MSPs aim to mobilise and pool the various *resources* different actors have (knowledge, funds, technological knowhow, decision-making powers, etc.). SDG 17.17 calls for efforts to “encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships”.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), adopted by UN member states in 2015, specified partnerships as one means of raising funding for the SDGs. Alongside state tax revenues, public borrowing and public development funds, it lists so-called *blended financing* models as sources of funding. Such models commonly are used to finance partnerships. Experts have pointed out the considerable successes of the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria, among others, and recommended so-called “goal-based investment partnerships”.⁷ To date, however, similar approaches in other areas have not yielded comparable successes.⁸

The expectations of MSPs have only increased with the 2030 Agenda – “Transforming our World” (as its title proclaims) is now the aim. Accordingly, partnerships are now supposed to have a *transformative im-*

1 Marianne Beisheim, *Partnerships for Sustainable Development. Why and How Rio+20 Must Improve the Framework for Multi-stakeholder Partnerships*, SWP Research Paper 3/2012 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, February 2012).

2 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UN-Doc. A/RES/69/315 and A/RES/70/1 (New York, 2015).

3 Barbara Adams and Jens Martens, *Fit for Whose Purpose? Private Funding and Corporate Influence in the United Nations* (New York: Global Policy Forum, 2015); Jens Martens and Karolin Seitz, *Globale Partnerschaften. Wundermittel zur Umsetzung der 2030-Agenda?* (Bonn: Global Policy Forum, 2017); Mathieu Vervynck and Maria José Romero, “Gefährliche Täuschung. Öffentlich-private Partnerschaften sind riskante Finanzierungsinstrumente”, in *Partnerschaften mit Risiken. Über die Chancen, Gefahren und Nebenwirkungen von Multi-Akteur-Partnerschaften für nachhaltige Entwicklung*, ed. Brot für die Welt et al., (2017), 16–17.

4 “Stakeholders” are the people, groups or institutions that are concerned by an issue and may demand to be involved in decision-making (cf. Andrew L. Friedman and Samantha Miles, *Stakeholders. Theory and Practice* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2006]).

5 Marco Schäferhoff, Sabine Campe and Christopher Kaan, “Transnational Public-Private Partnerships in International Relations. Making Sense of Concepts, Research Frameworks, and Results”, *International Studies Review* 11, no. 3 (2009): 451–74.

6 UNGA, *Transforming our World*, 2015 (see note 2).

7 Guido Schmidt-Traub and Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Financing Sustainable Development. Implementing the SDGs through Effective Investment Strategies and Partnerships* (Sustainable Development Solutions Network [SDSN], 2015).

8 Cf. e.g. for the education sector, Karen Mundy and Caroline Manion, “The Education for All Initiative. History and Prospects Post-2015”, in *Education and International Development. An Introduction*, ed. Tristan McCowan et al. (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 49–68.

pact. This means that partnerships shall address not only the symptoms of structural and systemic deficits, but also find solutions to them, for instance by transforming markets.⁹ Under the principles set out in the 2030 Agenda, MSPs should also be designed to be *inclusive*, leave no-one behind and “reach the furthest behind first”.¹⁰ Inclusiveness here refers both to the extent to which society participates in the MSPs and to the issue of who benefits from their work. Finally, MSPs shall be held *accountable* for their actions. Articles 84 and 89 of the Agenda 2030 call on partnerships and other non-state actors to report on their activities. During the negotiations, developing countries’ governments justified this demand *inter alia* by pointing out that they frequently felt they were neither informed about the activities of non-state actors in their countries nor able to steer or control them.

At the UN level, responsibility for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs resides with the annual High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). As part of the HLPF review, a “platform for partnerships” shall be made available.¹¹ The results of various review processes shall inform member states’ political decisions regarding further implementation of the SDGs (in the sense of evidence-based political guidance).

This review will be useful because analyses of MSPs show that they have not necessarily been more successful than other instruments of cooperation.¹² At the same time, however, a few MSPs are deemed very successful, such as the vaccination partnership GAVI Alliance.¹³ Studies agree that those participating in partnerships therefore need to take into account the different *conditions for success*, which depend on the

⁹ Jane Nelson, *Partnerships for Sustainable Development. Collective Action by Business, Governments and Civil Society to Achieve Scale and Transform Markets* (Cambridge: Harvard Kennedy School, and London: Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017).

¹⁰ UNGA, *Transforming our World*, 2015 (see note 2), para 4.

¹¹ Marianne Beisheim, *Follow-up and Review. Developing the Institutional Framework for Implementing and Reviewing the Sustainable Development Goals and Partnerships*, Working Paper FG 8, 2016/02 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, May 2016).

¹² See: Beisheim, *Partnerships for Sustainable Development*, 2011 (see note 1); *Transnational Partnerships: Effectively Providing for Sustainable Development?*, ed. Marianne Beisheim and Andrea Liese (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Philipp Pattberg, Frank Biermann and Sander Chan et al. (eds.), *Public-Private Partnerships for Sustainable Development. Emergence, Influence and Legitimacy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2012).

¹³ Marco Schäferhoff, “Partnerships for Health”, in *Transnational Partnerships*, ed. Beisheim and Liese (see note 12), 45–62.

participants’ point of departure and task profile.¹⁴ Where partnerships want to establish voluntary standards, for instance, they should use inclusive processes to draw them up and involve those actors who will subsequently voluntarily observe the standards and/or those who are meant to benefit from them.¹⁵ Where breaching the standards might seem appealing, those involved should agree on independent monitoring. Service partnerships, where money and other resources circulate, must be well-organised to prevent mismanagement or even misuse of funds.¹⁶ Responsibilities must be agreed in detail, and ways of adapting to local conditions and interests must be resolved early on. Especially in fragile areas, it is advisable to be familiar with the security situation beforehand, communicate intensively with local actors and build and strengthen capacities.¹⁷

Many of these success factors are relevant for development projects in general. They are especially valid for MSPs, which are carried out by several actors, whose respective strengths must be mobilised. For example, our case studies showed that MSPs were particularly successful in implementing projects in fragile areas if they worked together with competent local brokers

¹⁴ *Transnational Partnerships*, ed. Beisheim and Liese (see note 12); Philipp Pattberg and Oscar Widerberg, *Transnational Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development. Building Blocks for Success*, IVM Report, R-14/31 (Amsterdam: Institute for Environmental Studies [IVM], 2014); Katja Treichel, Anne Höh, Sven Biermann et al., *Multi-Akteurs-Partnerschaften im Rahmen der Agenda 2030. Eine praxisorientierte Analyse von Potentialen, Herausforderungen und Erfolgsfaktoren* (Bonn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, 2016).

¹⁵ Marianne Beisheim and Christopher Kaan, “Transnational Standard-Setting Partnerships in the Field of Social Rights. The Interplay of Legitimacy, Institutional Design, and Process Management”, in *Democracy and Public-Private Partnerships in Global Governance*, ed. Magdalena Bexell et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 122–44.

¹⁶ Marianne Beisheim and Sabine Campe, “Transnational Public-Private Partnerships’ Performance in Water Governance. Institutional Design Matters”, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 30, no. 4 (2012): 627–42.

¹⁷ Andrea Liese, Hannah Janetschek and Johanna Sarre, “Can PPPs Make It Anywhere? How Limited Statehood and Other Area Factors Influence PPP Effectiveness”, in *Transnational Partnerships*, ed. Beisheim and Liese (see note 12), 131–60; Marianne Beisheim, Andrea Liese, Hannah Janetschek et al., “Transnational Partnerships. Conditions for Successful Service Provision in Areas of Limited Statehood”, *Governance* 27, no. 4 (2014): 655–73; Marianne Beisheim, Annekathrin Ellersiek and Jasmin Lorch, “INGOs and Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Governance and Limited Statehood*, ed. Tanja A. Börzel et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 211–30.

and, with their help, organised participatory processes both before and during project implementation.¹⁸ Without such partners and processes, they would lack the necessary knowledge to implement projects successfully in situ for the target audience. In some MSPs business partners were especially good at elaborating intelligent business cases for local actors, giving them an incentive to continue projects independently once external financing suspended. A major difficulty in many partnerships is precisely how to implement not only good pilot projects, but ones that also have a far-ranging and lasting impact. Many MSPs fail to realise such added value that could and should be generated by their partners. Some of our cases even showed that partners get mired in conflicts before the actual work even commenced.¹⁹ Accordingly, both in our survey and other analyses, an initial, professionally moderated phase of “partnering” – including good conflict management – proved crucial for successful MSPs.²⁰

The Issue: Meta-Governance

How can we safeguard lessons learned from previous partnership experiences?²¹ We took the afore-mentioned insights concerning MSPs’ conditions for success as our starting point and asked how actors build on those insights now that MSPs are confronted with even higher expectations. Specifically our question was: *What do relevant actors, such as the UN, governments, donors or private initiatives, request or undertake to configure Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for the SDGs?*

We examine how the actors we surveyed plan to and already do to enable and/or ensure the work carried out by partnerships for the SDGs. Given the requirements of the Agenda 2030, we pay particular

attention to the extent to which these measures aim to make MSPs *more transformative, inclusive and accountable*, and how different actors understand and operationalise these terms. Here we focus on institutionalised regulatory frameworks, such as principles, criteria, guidelines or other standards and rules, and conceptualise this as “meta-governance” for partnerships.²² We draw on scholarly concepts that define meta-governance as “governing of governing” or “organisation of self-organisation”.²³ We understand partnerships as non-governmental institutions that deliver governance efforts, such as voluntary standards, or services, for instance in health or nutrition. Meta-governance comprises all the overarching rules intended to guide, accompany and evaluate this governance work of partnerships. Meta-governance can be carried out on national and international levels by state, inter-governmental and non-state actors; however, state actors stand out for having regulatory measures and sanctions at their disposal that are backed up by their legislative authority.

Our focus is on the activities and opinions of actors in four policy arenas: (1) the UN, (2), various donor institutions, (3) the nation-state level, using Kenya as an example, and (4) private forms of meta-governance for partnerships. There is certainly empirical overlap between these categories, for instance where private foundations support national platforms for partnerships, as is the case with the SDG Philanthropy Platform in Kenya, coordinated by the local United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office.

¹⁸ *Transnational Partnerships*, ed. Beisheim and Liese (see note 12); Jana Hönke and Markus-Michael Müller, “Brokerage, Intermediation, Translation” in *The Oxford Handbook of Governance and Limited Statehood*, ed. Börzel et al. (see note 17), 333–52.

¹⁹ See also Pamela Sloan and David Oliver, “Building Trust in Multi-stakeholder Partnerships. Critical Emotional Incidents and Practices of Engagement”, *Organization Studies* 34, no. 12 (2013): 1835–1868.

²⁰ Pattberg and Widerberg, *Transnational Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development* (see note 14).

²¹ Marianne Beisheim, “Don’t keep reinventing the wheel”, *D+C: Development and Cooperation*, no. 10 (2014): 392; Stamatios Christopoulos, Balazs Horvath and Michael Kull, “Advancing the Governance of Cross-Sectoral Policies for Sustainable Development. A Metagovernance Perspective”, *Public Administration and Development* 32, no. 3 (2012): 305–23.

²² Marianne Beisheim and Nils Simon, *Meta-Governance of Partnerships for Sustainable Development – Actors’ Perspectives on How the UN Could Improve Partnerships’ Governance Services in Areas of Limited Statehood*, SFB-Governance Working Paper Series no. 68 (Berlin: SFB700, 2015).

²³ Cf. Jan Kooiman, *Governing as Governance* (London: Sage, 2003), 170; Eva Sørensen, “Metagovernance. The Changing Role of Politicians in Processes of Democratic Governance”, *The American Review of Public Administration* 36, no. 1 (2006): 98–114 (98); Bob Jessop, “From Governance to Governance Failure and from Multi-Level Governance to Multi-Scalar Meta-Governance”, in *The Disoriented State. Shifts in Governmentality, Territoriality and Governance*, ed. Bas Arts et al. (Heidelberg, 2009), 79–98; Christopoulos et al., “Advancing the Governance of Cross-Sectoral Policies for Sustainable Development” (see note 21), 306.

Empirical Foundations

Broad empirical research informs this study. First, we analysed documents such as agreements, declarations of intent, project information and project publications by partnerships and involved actors, and (independent) evaluations of partnerships and associated programmes. Second, we participated as observers in relevant conferences and negotiations, for instance attending expert meetings and partnership fora and observing negotiations concerning partnerships and sustainable development. At some of these meetings, we also organised our own sessions on the subject: for example, in 2016 at the HLPF and, in 2017, at the High-level Meeting of the GPEDC in Nairobi, and during the Global Partnership Week in Washington, D.C., organised annually by USAID and the US State Department. In addition, we conducted interviews with about 60 institutional actors. We selected the interviewees in such a way as to include international, national and local actors; state and non-state actors; civil-society and private-sector actors; and both supporters and critics of the partnership approach.

Unfortunately the information we obtained from our interviews was often rather sparse. The respondents mostly concurred that better partnerships are needed for realising the SDGs (excepting those that reject partnerships). They also confirmed that prior experiences with partnerships and knowledge about their success conditions should inform endeavours for improvement. However, only a few interviewees referred to concrete measures already undertaken or had specific ideas for implementation. Hence, we identified several building blocks that are or may become relevant for partnerships from a meta-governance perspective, in particular for integrating businesses as part of PPPs, but also for certain sectoral partnerships or more generally for cooperation between state organisations and private-sector or civil-society actors. Frequently, however, these measures and ideas addressed individual aspects of meta-governance for partnerships in isolation, thus falling short in having a major impact – let alone a transformative impact – unless embedded in a coherent and effective implementation strategy backed up by sufficient resources.

Meta-Governance for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Meta-Governance by the United Nations

The UN has been cooperating with non-state actors since its foundation. As of 1946 the Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations has organised and decided consultative relations with non-state organisations on behalf of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). But how is the UN positioned as regards (Multi-Stakeholder) Partnerships for the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals?²⁴ Several UN units have evolved a number of meta-governance activities for partnerships, but despite years of efforts, there is still no unified set of rules for the UN's partnerships with private actors that is valid for the entire UN system.²⁵ In sum, what exists is a rudimentary and fragmented framework for partnerships, which lacks a consistent and coherent implementation process within and by the UN system.

In 2000 the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the first of its resolutions entitled "Towards Global Partnerships" (TGP).²⁶ Member states tasked the Secretary-General with submitting a report on the subject the following year, which he has since done every other year, in the run-up to the bi-annual negotiations on the TGP Resolution. The 2001 TGP Resolution emphasises that the principles and approaches governing partnerships should conform to the principles and objectives of the UN Charter.²⁷ The Resolution names several tenets: inter alia, the pursuit of a common purpose, transparency, the equal treatment and inclusion of relevant partners, and safeguarding the independence and integrity of the United Nations and its orga-

nisations. The Resolution does not dwell, however, on *how* these principles might be attained.

The Secretary-General (SG) presented his "Guidelines on Cooperation between the United Nations and the Business Community" in 2000. After two revisions, the SG's "Guidelines on a principle-based approach to the Cooperation between the United Nations and the business sector" have been valid since 2015. They stipulate that all UN units shall make sure that companies involved in cooperation projects with the UN adhere to fundamental norms and principles, inter alia with a view to transparency and accountability.²⁸ However, our interview partners pointed out that not all UN entities feel bound by the SG's guidelines, but instead follow the rules of their respective Board. Some UN institutions evidently implement the guidelines, but for others it is not known if they do or, if so, how – since there is no implementation or verification mechanism.

In the course of the SDG negotiations, several experts proposed accountability measures for partnerships.²⁹ Critical non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the Global Policy Forum, want to ensure that the companies involved will comply with fundamental norms and that partnerships will bring substantive and verifiable advantages to the people affected by them. Similarly, in conversations we conducted and negotiations we observed, member states as well as NGOs repeatedly called for consistent due-diligence measures to verify that potential private

²⁴ For a more detailed discussion, see Beisheim and Simon, *Meta-Governance of Partnerships* (see note 22); see also Marianne Beisheim and Nils Simon, "Die Umsetzung der SDGs durch Multi-Stakeholder Partnerschaften. Bessere Meta-Governance seitens der Vereinten Nationen gewünscht?", in *Globale politische Ziele. Bestandsaufnahme und Ausblick des Post-2015 Prozesses*, ed. Philipp Lepenies et al. (Baden-Baden, 2017), 195–217.

²⁵ Peter Utting and Ann Zammit, *Beyond Pragmatism. Appraising UN-Business Partnerships* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2006).

²⁶ UNGA, *Towards Global Partnerships*, UN-Doc. A/RES/55/215 (New York, 2001).

²⁷ UNGA, *Towards Global Partnerships*, UN-Doc. A/RES/56/76 (New York, 2002).

²⁸ This ties into the human-rights obligations of businesses as set out by the UN Human Rights Council in the "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights".

²⁹ Adams and Martens, *Fit for Whose Purpose?* (see note 3), 115–17; Beisheim, *Partnerships for Sustainable Development* (see note 1); Joseph Foti, *Promises Kept. Ensuring Ambition and Accountability through a Rio+20 "Compendium of Commitments"* (Washington, D.C.: World Resources Institute, 2012); Felix Dodds, *Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships. Making Them Work for the Post-2015 Development Agenda* (2015); Barbara Adams and Jens Martens, *Partnerships and the 2030 Agenda. Time to Reconsider Their Role in Implementation* (New York: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016); David Steven and Eric Kashambuzi, *Turning Ambition into Reality. Platforms and Partnerships for Delivering Agenda 2030* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, New York University, 2016).

partners adhere to fundamental normative rules, such as the UN human rights charter or the ILO's key labour standards. While the larger UN bodies tend to have their own due-diligence procedures, some smaller programmes have pooled their queries and passed them on to external auditors with the help of the Global Compact Office (GCO). One particularly far-reaching request that we heard was for partnerships to contribute to the UN's core budget or for private partners to pay a form of fee for partnering with the UN, so that the money could then be used to pay for verification measures.

During preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the so-called "Bali guiding principles" were discussed, on the basis of which the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) adopted a set of principles and guidelines for partnerships in 2003.³⁰ These state that partnerships should offer added value compared to existing initiatives and should be innovative, transparent and accountable. They should act in accordance with national legislation and international agreements, and also report on their activities to a national contact office for sustainable development. Article 23 of the UNCSD decision also sets down rules for registering and monitoring partnerships. Subsequently, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) created a database registering all partnerships that announced their founding in writing. The listed partnerships referred both to the WSSD Johannesburg resolutions from 2002 and to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the information was not updated and became soon outdated.

In 2016, after the SDGs had been adopted, UNDESA created a "Partnerships for SDGs online platform". This databank lists partnerships, but also voluntary commitments and other initiatives that explicitly aim to implement the SDGs. As of December 2017, it had 3,679 entries. In 2012, UNDESA had already established specific registration requirements, the so-called SMART criteria.³¹ Yet UNDESA lacks the resources to systematically verify the information provided. One of its requirements is to submit an annual activity report. Partnerships that do not report on their progress with-

³⁰ UNCSD, *The Implementation Track for Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation*, (New York, 14 May 2003).

³¹ Partnerships are supposed to make their goals as "specific, measurable, achievable, resource-based, and time-bound" as possible: see UNDESA, *Registry of Commitments for Sustainable Development*, Information Note (New York, 2012).

in the deadline are now flagged using a traffic light system: yellow after one year, red after two. Submitted reports are published on the platform and have a comments function, enabling civil-society groups, for instance, to ask questions or point out discrepancies. The voluntary partnership reports are also the basis for an annual UNDESA Special Report. UNDESA presents this overall system as a "voluntary accountability framework" with three pillars: first, the report itself; second, the registry or databank; and third, existing independent third-party reviews.³² Yet experts and NGOs call for the HLPF to commission independent assessments.³³ However, our interviews suggested that the main UN contributors reject such assessments for cost reasons. Our research also showed clearly that many partnerships have so far either not complied with the request to submit reports or, if they have, the reports are often not very informative.³⁴

Finally, there has been a yearly ECOSOC debate on partnerships since 2008. Since 2013 held as the ECOSOC Partnership Forum, it has still not received an unequivocal mandate from member states. The 2015 Partnership Forum addressed "lessons learned from MDG partnerships" and recommended "clear oversight and governance".³⁵ In late 2015, UNGA called on the 2016 ECOSOC Partnership Forum to lead a discussion on "best practices and ways to improve, inter alia, transparency, accountability and the sharing of experiences of multi-stakeholder partnerships and on the review and monitoring of those partnerships, including the role of Member States in review and monitoring".³⁶ Although representatives of member states and UN organisations, civil society and

³² UNDESA, *Voluntary Commitments & Partnerships for Sustainable Development*, Sustainable Development in Action Newsletter (New York, 2013).

³³ Steven Bernstein, *The Role and Place of the High-Level Political Forum in Strengthening the Global Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013); Steven Bernstein, Joyeeta Gupta, Steinar Andresen et al., *Coherent Governance, the UN and the SDGs*, POST2015/UNU-IAS Policy Brief (Tokyo: UN University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, 2014).

³⁴ In December 2017 the website announced 241 so-called "progress updates". However, only 76 of them were "progress reports", cf. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/> (accessed 4 December 2017).

³⁵ ECOSOC, *The Role of Partnerships in Achieving the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Making It Happen* (2015); *ECOSOC Partnerships Forum Informal Summary* (New York, 2015).

³⁶ UNGA, *Towards Global Partnerships. A Principle-based Approach to Enhanced Cooperation Between the United Nations and all Relevant Partners*, UN-Doc. A/RES/70/224 (New York, 2016), para 15.

academia discussed various options for improving transparency and accountability at an Expert Group Meeting in early spring 2016,³⁷ these were not taken up during the 2016 ECOSOC Partnership Forum.

The slow and tedious nature of the reform process seems due to a lack of knowledge and the sometimes conflicting interests both of individual member states and of the multitude of UN institutions that work with and on partnerships. Alongside the bodies already mentioned – the General Assembly, ECOSOC, HLPF, and various divisions of UNDESA – there is the UN Office for Partnerships (UNOP), which offers consultation on partnerships with the UN and also manages the UN Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP). However, UNOP is poorly equipped and has no power to issue guidelines. The Global Compact, which is connected to the UN only via the Secretary-General, has a better equipped office (GCO) and works with private-sector partners on ten principles derived from UN documents (on human rights, labour and environmental standards, and anti-corruption) and now also on the SDGs.³⁸ The GCO maintains the website UN Business Action Hub, compiles various publications and assists partnerships with recommendations. Every two years, the GCO also conducts a survey within the UN system on partnerships, which feeds into the Secretary-General's TGP report.³⁹ Finally, the GCO organises the network of the UN institutions' Private Sector Focal Points. It is thus a lynchpin for cooperation on partnerships within the UN system. Given this overall fragmentation, a report by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) had urged a unified framework for partnerships already in 2009.⁴⁰ In 2010 a

report by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) voted for the GCO and UNFIP to be merged.⁴¹ The corresponding project by UNSG Ban Ki-moon, who proposed establishing a central UN Partnership Facility in 2013, foundered because of the resistance of several member states, which did not wish to finance the Facility and/or did not want the SG's office to run it without member states' oversight.

The new UNSG Antonio Guterres has now responded to the call for a "system-wide approach to partnerships" as part of his reform proposals on the UN Development System (UNDS). In his reform report, presented in late July 2017, he proposed extending the UN's "convening power" via partnership platforms.⁴² The report advocates improving the embedding of MSPs in the UN's "core business model", a perspective similar to that of the Independent Team of Advisors (ITA)⁴³ chaired by the former Director-General of the ILO, Juan Somavia, and the former German Federal Minister for the Environment and Executive Director of UNEP, Klaus Töpfer. Guterres recommended that the UNDS "pools" its expertise so as to support the national demand for partnerships, and emphasised the special relevance of inclusive processes:

"As partnerships increasingly claim space in planning processes from global to country levels, the UN development system must be ready to support national demands for inclusive alliances and participatory planning processes that take account of the needs of the most vulnerable and excluded. As citizens and others helped shape the 2030 Agenda, so too should they shape its implementation. Failure to be inclusive in shaping our common future will only heighten anxieties, create tensions and cloud the possibilities for high impact collaborative action and results."⁴⁴

The recommendations of the SG's TGP report, published in August 2017, continue this approach, but

³⁷ Marianne Beisheim and Nils Simon, *Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Implementing the 2030 Agenda. Improving Accountability and Transparency*, Independent Analytical Paper for the 2016 ECOSOC Partnership Forum (New York: UNDESA, 2016).

³⁸ Andreas Rasche, "The United Nations and Transnational Corporations. How the UN Global Compact Has Changed the Debate", in *Globally Responsible Leadership. Business According to the UN Global Compact*, ed. Joanne T. Lawrence et al. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2012), 33–49; Georg Kell, Anne-Marie Slaughter and Thomas Hale, "Silent Reform through the Global Compact", *UN Chronicle* 44, no. 1 (2007): 26–30; Wade Hoxtell, Domenica Preysing and Julia Steets, *Coming of Age. UN-Private Sector Collaboration since 2000* (New York: UN Global Compact Office, 2010).

³⁹ UNGA, *Enhanced Cooperation Between the United Nations and all Relevant Partners, in Particular the Private Sector*, Report of the Secretary-General, UN-Doc. A/70/296 (New York, 2015).

⁴⁰ UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), *Audit Report. Management of the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships*, AN2008/522/01 (New York, 2009).

⁴¹ UN Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), *United Nations Corporate Partnerships. The Role and Functioning of the Global Compact* (Geneva, 2010), 8.

⁴² ECOSOC, *Repositioning the UN Development System to Deliver on the 2030 Agenda – Ensuring a Better Future for All*. Report of the Secretary-General, UN-Doc. A/72/124-E/2018/3 (New York, 2017), para 41.

⁴³ Independent Team of Advisors, *Partnerships for the UN Development System*, Report to the UN Economic and Social Council (New York, 19 April 2016).

⁴⁴ ECOSOC, *Repositioning the UN Development System* (see note 42), para 43.

without stressing inclusivity to the same extent. Instead, they place greater emphasis on how the UN, in cooperation with the private sector, might attain more “innovation, scalability and impact” for the SDGs.⁴⁵ They call for the corresponding capacities of UN staff to be built up, including at the country level, and for performance criteria to be adapted accordingly. The SG encouraged all UN entities to follow his existing request and report on their partnership activities. He recommended a public commitment to the ten principles of the Global Compact as a minimum standard for businesses. He also suggested that the GCO establish a yearly report on partnership activities within the UN system and bring together all relevant information in a databank.

The SG plans to set out further measures in his next reform reports. The proposals on UNDS reforms, concerning for example the UN Country teams or UNDESA, need to explore how the UN should handle partnerships at the global and local level. This would be useful not least because our interviews revealed that, behind the scenes, there are a number of ongoing turf battles within the UN system about responsibilities and resources.

As for the *future*, our interviews indicated that most of the respondents wished for partnerships rules that were better coordinated and more precise, but opinions diverged greatly on how much meta-governance was necessary, and what kind. NGOs that disapprove would prefer a total renunciation of partnerships or, at the very least, a restrictive meta-governance with strict rules for ex-ante due diligence and ex-post accountability. These should ideally be binding under international law and linked to a binding treaty on transnational and other business enterprises, like the one negotiated by the open-ended intergovernmental working group that has been established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2014. However, actors with close ties to the business sector are already deterred by UN bureaucracy and are calling for unified and reliable, but also flexible, rules.⁴⁶ Most respondents fall

⁴⁵ UNGA, *Enhanced Cooperation between the United Nations and All Relevant Partners, in Particular the Private Sector*. Report of the Secretary-General, UN-Doc. A/RES/72/310 (New York, 2017). This shows not only the different histories of the reports, but also the co-authors’ personal hallmarks.

⁴⁶ The Business Communiqué “Business is stepping up for transformational partnerships”, adopted by the HLPF in 2017, has similar views: “We invite Member States and the UN system to [...] create an enabling policy environment [...] Long-term policy clarity, stable legal frameworks, and the reduc-

somewhere in the middle and – broadly speaking – favour well-drafted rules and framework conditions tailored to the needs of certain types of partnerships and sectors.

Representatives of the UN member states tend to call for more inter-governmental control – they want to strengthen the Bureaus or Boards rather than UN bureaucracy. In our interviews, they pointed to the SIDS (Small Island Developing States) Partnership Framework, adopted by the General Assembly in December 2015, as a model.⁴⁷ This framework encompasses an inter-governmental Steering Committee, an annual partnership dialogue and a standardised reporting form for progress reports. It remains unclear, however, to what extent this has actually made the SIDS partnerships more transformative, inclusive and accountable – UNDESA intends to commission a first evaluation soon. Another model mentioned was the World Health Assembly’s WHO Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors (FENSA), adopted in 2016.⁴⁸ One of its particularities is that it features different sets of rules according to whether they apply to cooperation with NGOs, the private sector, philanthropic foundations or academic institutions. Many of our respondents thought this a logical approach, given possible conflicts of interest or reputational risks. Many also called for the UN to do more to enable member states to draw up partnerships with private actors (see the paragraph on meta-governance at the national level).

Meta-Governance by Donors and Funders

Donors and funders support and steer partnerships through resources and supporting services and the framework conditions and rules for implementing them.⁴⁹ They can implement such measures ex-ante,

tion of investment risks will be key towards incentivizing sustainable business models” (SDG Business Forum, *Business is Stepping up for Transformational Partnerships*, [United Nations, 18 July 2017]).

⁴⁷ UNGA, *Sustainable Development. Follow-up to and Implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States*, UN-Doc. A/70/472/Add.2 (New York, 2015).

⁴⁸ World Health Assembly (WHA), *Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors*, WHA69.10 (28 May 2016).

⁴⁹ See also Annekathrin Ellersiek, *Donors’ and Funders’ Meta-Governance of Partnerships: Effective, Inclusive and Transformative?*, unpublished manuscript (Berlin: SWP).

for instance through funding requirements, or ex-post, for example through reports and evaluations. Alongside donor countries, multilateral donor institutions such as the World Bank or private foundations have many years of experience in providing funds and meta-governance via partnership programmes and facilities.

In sum, we observed that donors can influence the direction of partnership implementation by the parameters they impose, and have long done so. The results of our research reveal, however, that donors do not yet fully realise their potential in encouraging transformative, inclusive and accountable partnerships as a means of implementing the 2030 Agenda. For example, earlier this year, the OECD-DAC once again postponed its decision on the framework conditions for using official development assistance (ODA) to harness private-sector investment.

Initially, the meta-governance provided by donors for partnerships primarily aimed to ensure accountability back towards the donors, especially concerning the allocation of public funds. The shift from development aid to partnership cooperation suggests greater emphasis on multidirectional exchange, mutual accountability and debate on effective ways of more horizontal cooperation at eye-level.⁵⁰ At four high-level forums on the effectiveness of development cooperation (in Rome in 2003, Paris in 2005, Accra in 2008 and Busan in 2011), donor and recipient nations and other actors looked for ways of making their cooperation more effective given the more limited public resources. In the final declaration of the Busan meeting, all participants reiterated their intention to work in partnerships taking into account the following principles: (1) ownership of development priorities by (developing) countries; (2) a focus on results; (3) inclusive partnerships; and (4) mutual responsibility and accountability.⁵¹ The Busan principles thus correspond to Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda, which defines effective and inclusive partnerships as an important instrument for implementation.

Previous experience shows, however, that not all partnerships conform to these principles.⁵² Due to

their mandate, donor institutions should be particularly interested in, and accountable for, the success of partnerships. As donors and funders of partnerships, they also are in a particular position to influence implementation and make partnerships more effective, inclusive and accountable. Many donor institutions have years of experience in providing meta-governance for partnerships. Programmes and facilities promoting the participation of non-state actors have long been a definite component of development work of many OECD-DAC countries. Denmark, for instance, has been offering a series of such programmes to enable private-sector participation since 1993.⁵³ Its most recent programme, the DANIDA Market Development Partnerships, fosters partnerships that concentrate on implementing SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).⁵⁴ The USA has also provided instruments for fund allocations to partnerships through USAID for some time, such as through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).⁵⁵ During Global Partnership Week 2017, representatives of the US state department and USAID discussed framework conditions for the MCC PPP platform, which supports partnerships in attaining SDG 9 (Infrastructure).⁵⁶ Others, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, have been offering similar programmes since the early 1990s and our interviews suggest that these countries too, are currently undertaking efforts to launch new and adapt existing instruments to provide better support for partnerships for implementing the SDGs.

Germany also has numerous programmes to promote development partnerships together with busi-

Entwicklungszusammenarbeit” (Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik [DIE], 2002); Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), *Final Private Sector Development Synthesis Report* (Ottawa, 2002); Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), *Evaluation of DANIDA Business-to-Business Programme 2006–2011. Synthesis Report* (Copenhagen, 2014); Deutsches Evaluierungsinstitut der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (DEval), *Das develoPPP.de-Programm: Eine Portfolioanalyse* (Bonn, 2016).

⁵³ DANIDA and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, *The World 2030. Denmark’s Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action* (Copenhagen, 2017).

⁵⁴ DANIDA, *Danida Market Development Partnerships Launch of 2017 Call for Proposals*, <http://um.dk/en/danida-en/business/danida-market-development-partnerships> (accessed 29 September 2017).

⁵⁵ Steven Radelet, *Challenging Foreign Aid. A Policymaker’s Guide to the Millennium Challenge Account* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2003).

⁵⁶ GPW, *Global Partnerships Practitioners Forum 2017*, <http://www.p3.co/2017-gpw-agenda/> (accessed 23 October 2017).

⁵⁰ Shannon Kindornay, *From Aid to Development Effectiveness: A Working Paper* (The North-South Institute, 2011).

⁵¹ GPEDC, *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness* (Busan: Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 29 November – 1 December 2011).

⁵² Tilman Altenburg and Tatjana Chahoud, *Synthesebericht über die Evaluierung “Public-Private-Partnership in der deutschen*

ness and civil-society. The programme *develoPPP*, created in 1999, is still Germany's most extensive programme promoting partnerships with the business sector.⁵⁷ One result of Germany's dialogue on its Charter for the Future (*Zukunftscharta*, denoting the shared vision for and guiding principles behind Germany's development policy)⁵⁸ is that the government, through the initiative "Partnerships 2030" has created a platform which encourages MSPs to implement the SDGs in Germany as well as in partner countries.⁵⁹ This initiative brokers funding opportunities,⁶⁰ and has also begun supporting dialogue and exchange with other partnership platforms in partner countries.

At the international level, Germany along with Uganda and Bangladesh took over from the Netherlands, Mexico and Malawi as co-chairs of the GPEDC in late 2016. The GPEDC was founded in 2012 following the above-mentioned forum in Busan. Our interviews during the GPEDC's High-level Meeting (HLM) in Nairobi, Kenya, showed that the Netherlands had driven the issue of partnerships within the GPEDC. In Nairobi, it presented the "Promoting Effective Partnering" (PEP) Facility, which had been developed under its co-presidency.⁶¹ PEP prepares checklists and knowledge resources that guide practitioners towards implementing partnerships more effectively, inclusively and accountably. The final declaration in Nairobi called for the creation of this and other kinds of coordination mechanisms to support "efforts to ensure an enabling environment for inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships, including through country-level platforms for collaboration, to perform complementary roles in a transparent and accountable manner"⁶². However, some countries – including Brazil, China,⁶³ India and

South Africa – have a critical perspective on the GPEDC, inter alia because they see it as too much driven by the interests of OECD members. In particular, they criticize the GPEDC for 'imposing' principles of democracy promotion and good governance,⁶⁴ which they seem to equally associate with efforts to make partnerships more inclusive and accountable.⁶⁵ The GPEDC secretariat, hosted by UNDP and the OECD, was an early supporter of interlinking the aid-effectiveness agenda with the SDGs, which are supported by these countries.⁶⁶ However, during our investigations we have been unable to get solid information on whether Germany and its GPEDC co-chairs will attempt to pursue the topic of partnerships, and if so, how.

Both in the relevant literature and in our interviews, the various donors' breakdowns of the *success factors* for partnerships refer to the principles of (1) individual responsibility and ownership, (2) inclusiveness and (3) increased transparency and mutual accountability for partnership outcome. However, we found different interpretations and implementation strategies with regard to these three principles:

Our interviewees concurred that the framework conditions they currently set for partnerships intend to (1) strengthen individual responsibility and ownership of partnerships. Yet they differed in their understanding of these concepts, and how they might be fostered by meta-governance. Programmes and facilities that pursue the primary objective of making private-sector participation and investment in development partnerships attractive rarely promote closer cooperation between partnerships and local governments.⁶⁷ And while interviewees emphasised that it was important to tie partnerships into local develop-

⁵⁷ Altenburg and Chahoud, *Synthesebericht über die Evaluierung "Public-Private-Partnership in der deutschen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit"* (see note 52); DEval, *Das develoPPP.de-Programm* (see note 52); DEval, *Evaluierung des develoPPP.de-Programms* (Bonn, 2017).

⁵⁸ German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), *Charter for the Future. ONE WORLD – Our Responsibility* (Bonn, 2014) (v.a. chapter 8).

⁵⁹ MAP platform, <https://www.partnerschaften2030.de> (accessed 29 September 2017).

⁶⁰ For the business sector via *develoPPP* and for civil society via *Engagement Global/bengo*.

⁶¹ Promoting Effective Partnering (PEP), *About PEP*, <http://www.effectivepartnering.org/about-pep/> (accessed 2 October 2017).

⁶² Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC), *Nairobi Outcome Document*, 1 December 2017, 16.

⁶³ On this point, see also Xiaoyun Li, *Should China Join the GPEDC? The Prospects for China and the Global Partnership for Effective*

Development Co-operation, Discussion Paper 17/2017 (Bonn: DIE, 2017).

⁶⁴ Panel discussion during the HLM2 in Nairobi, Kenya, November 2016: DIE, *DIE Side Events at the Second High-level Meeting (HLM2) of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation 2016*, <https://www.die-gdi.de/veranstaltungen/die-at-gpedc/> (accessed 23 October 2017).

⁶⁵ Interview with PEP coordinator during the HLM 2, Nairobi, Kenya, December 2016.

⁶⁶ On this point, see also DIE, *Future of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation 2017*, <https://www.die-gdi.de/veranstaltungen/future-of-the-global-partnership-for-effective-development-co-operation/> (accessed 23 October 2017).

⁶⁷ BMZ, *Stellungnahme des Bundesministeriums für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung zum DEval-Bericht: "Evaluierung des develoPPP.de-Programms"* (Bonn, 2017).

ment strategies⁶⁸ they also cautioned that in some cases governments hindered rather than supported partnerships, for instance through repressive legal and political framework conditions, excessive bureaucratic obligations and ineffective institutions.⁶⁹

Representatives of multilateral donor organisations offering partnership programmes and facilities to promote PPPs for infrastructure and public service provision see local governments as key actors that must be included to ensure local responsibility and ownership of PPPs.⁷⁰ To this effect, they offer a broad range of guidance and services to build and strengthen a supportive political environment as well as government capacities for planning, implementing and verifying PPPs.⁷¹ Despite this broad scheme, meta-governance for PPPs in the construction and infrastructure sector primarily aims to strengthen governments as contracting partners. In health and education, by contrast, meta-governance is more designed to ensure inclusive and “democratic ownership”⁷² of PPPs by governments, for example by strengthening governments’ capacities for facilitating inclusive partnering processes and consultations⁷³

Private donors also increasingly view the state as the key to strengthening local ownership of partnerships.⁷⁴ The global SDG Philanthropy Platform is an initiative by several private foundations⁷⁵ that have joined forces to make their contributions to SDG implementation more coordinated, transparent and visible. One of their objectives is to develop platforms at the country level in cooperation with governments to enable the common planning and implementa-

tion.⁷⁶ To date, such platforms have been established in five selected pilot countries. One of our interviewees reserved judgment on the success of the pilot projects, pointing at the mixed results of past experiences with donor-coordination instruments.⁷⁷ Others questioned generalisability to other countries, in which the potential for cooperation between civil-society and local governments is curtailed by distrust and state repression.⁷⁸

Yet despite (or perhaps because of) this, many donor institutions strive to (2) promote *inclusive partnerships*. The World Bank, for instance, promotes approaches that orientate PPPs towards marginalised social groups (such as women) and/or private-sector actors (such as small and medium or young enterprises).⁷⁹ In our interviews, donors listed many advantages of inclusive partnerships, particularly increased innovation, legitimacy and acceptance in the local context.⁸⁰ Simultaneously the framework conditions set by donors for promoting inclusive partnerships all too frequently reflect a limited understanding of inclusion. For instance, partnership programmes and facilities for fostering private-sector investment mostly define applicants as businesses from *donor* countries.⁸¹ The involvement of local partners often is merely welcomed, but not defined as a prerequisite for funding. Likewise, the inclusion of marginalised groups or the implementation of partnerships in the least developed countries (LDCs) is often merely seen as an added bonus, but not a necessary funding requirement. Evaluations suggest this lack of measures ensuring the involvement of local actors among the key reasons for why the devel-

68 Interviews with programme officers from DANIDA, GIZ, SIDA, USAID.

69 Interview with programme officer from MCC PPP-Facility.

70 Interviews with programme officers from Public-Private Partnership Group/World Bank, IADB, MIF.

71 Interviews with programme officers from IADB, The Public-Private Partnership Group/World Bank, MIF.

72 On the conceptual differentiation between “governance ownership” and “democratic ownership”, see Paddy Carter, *Where Next for Development Effectiveness? Investing in Private Enterprises*, 2016 Cape Conference, Conference Note 3.

73 Interview with programme officer from IADB/public sector branch.

74 Interview with director, partnerships programmes, MasterCard Foundation; programme officer, MasterCard Foundation; advisor, SDG Philanthropy Platform; country coordinator, SDG Philanthropy Platform.

75 Among many others, the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Hilton Foundation, Ford Foundation, MasterCard Foundation and Foundation Center.

76 SDG Philanthropy Platform, *Converging Interests: How Governments and the Philanthropy Sector are Collaborating to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals – A Synopsis* (2016).

77 Interview with partner organisation, SDG Philanthropy Platform.

78 Interview with advisor, SDG Philanthropy Platform.

79 An overview of these approaches to “Innovative Public-Private Partnerships for Inclusive Development” can be found, inter alia, at the Public-Private Partnership in Infrastructure Resource Centre (PPPIRC), <https://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/library/creating-new-models-innovative-public-private-partnerships-inclusive-development-latin-ameri> (accessed 29 September 2017).

80 For an overview of all the interviews we conducted, cf. Ellersiek, *Donors’ and Funders’ Meta-Governance of Partnerships* (see note 49).

81 For the develoPPP programme, which concerns German and other European enterprises, cf., e.g.: sequa, *Project Grants for Enterprises: develoPPP.de Ideas Competition 2/2017*, <https://www.sequa.de/en/news/117-develoPPP-de-en/2086-project-grants-for-enterprises-develoPPP-de-ideas-competition-1-2017> (accessed 17 August 2017).

opment successes of the supported partnerships and the overall programme impacts are only partially sustainable.⁸² However, learning processes are at work here. Thus our interviewee from DANIDA reported that Denmark had launched the DANIDA Market Development Partnerships (DMDP) programmes in 2017, whose guidelines make the participation of local partners a binding precondition for funding.⁸³

By contrast, at the multilateral level participation and inclusion often play merely a subordinate role in partnerships. The final document of the Forum on Financing for Development (FfD Forum), which took place in May 2017 in New York, barely mentions partnership implementation from the perspective of inclusion or the democratic ownership of funds obtained this way.⁸⁴ Representatives of multilateral donor institutions point out that the interests of local actors are legally protected by social and environmental safeguards and by the involvement of governments as contractual partners in PPPs.⁸⁵ In cases where governments are unable or unwilling to guarantee democratic ownership or inclusive partnerships themselves, our interviewees considered it difficult to “move beyond” governments.⁸⁶ One interviewee saw the Forest Carbon Partnership (FCP)⁸⁷ as a model because of its inclusive “governance” structures at the global level that could guide inclusive PPPs at country and project-level. Yet, one of our interviewees, who is involved in implementing the FCP, voiced concerns that local partners could not implement such inclusive but often complex structures at country and project levels⁸⁸. Research on the FCP confirms this gap in implementation, but

suggests that donors do not do enough in requiring from governments backing for inclusive partnerships.⁸⁹

Private foundations also foster inclusive partnerships, for instance via “inclusive-business” approaches. The MasterCard Foundation, for example, finances partnerships that build financial systems in rural areas via the Fund for Rural Prosperity. However, here too support criteria define the involvement of local partners as desirable without making it a requirement.⁹⁰ Applicants merely have to make sure that local “clients” are trained in using the products and services provided by partnerships. As our interviewees found – and as the literature on “inclusive-business approaches” in informal and low-wage markets confirms⁹¹ – these measures do not suffice to ensure the involvement of local actors as co-producers.⁹² The SDG Philanthropy Platform also targets inclusive MSPs. However, our interviewees could not yet point to any clear strategy for supporting MSPs in countries whose governments are unable or unwilling to secure broad “democratic ownership” or reject external influence, in particular by international civil society actors.⁹³

Across our interviews, we noticed strong attempts to (3) *increase accountability for the outcomes* of the supported partnerships. This is primarily brought about through ex-ante framework conditions, which connect donors’ priorities in development policy with the investment interests of the private sector and turn those priorities into funding requirements.⁹⁴ Sweden’s Sida, for instance, launches issue-specific or region-specific “challenge funds”, which prescribe development-policy interests and look for matching private investments. These evolved inter alia into the Global Resili-

82 DANIDA, *Evaluation of DANIDA Business-to-Business Programme 2006–2011* (see note 52); Deval, *Evaluierung des developp.de-Programms* (see note 57); Annika Billing, Maja Forslind and Karin Mettel Cueva, “Swedish Development Cooperation and the Private Sector. The Role of Business in Poverty Alleviation and the Role of Donors in Promoting Private Sector Contributions to Development”, *Perspectives* 22 (2012); Mikael Söderbäck, *Desk Study of Sida’s Experience from Private Sector Collaboration*, Sida Decentralised Evaluation 2016:6 (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, November 2015).

83 DANIDA, *Danida Market Development Partnerships. Guidelines* (Copenhagen, 2017).

84 ECOSOC, *Implementing the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The 2017 ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up* (New York, 2017).

85 Interviews with programme officers, Public-Private Partnership group/World Bank, IADB, MIF.

86 Interview with programme officer, World Bank.

87 The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, <https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org> (accessed 29 September 2017).

88 Interview with programme officer, FCP/World Bank.

89 Kate Dooley, Tom Griffiths, Francesco Martone et al., *Smoke and Mirrors: A Critical Assessment of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility* (Moreton in Marsh: FERN/Forest Peoples Programme, 2011).

90 See for instance the MasterCard Foundation’s Fund for Rural Prosperity: Fund for Rural Prosperity, *2017 Competition*, <http://www.frp.org/competitions> (accessed 17 August 2017).

91 BoP Innovation Center, *Developing BoP Partnerships: Towards Collective Impact at the Base of the Pyramid*, Utrecht 2013; Ted London, *The Base-of-the-Pyramid Perspective: A New Approach to Poverty Alleviation*, Ann Arbor: William Davidson Institute & Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, 2008; Derek Beach/Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Causal Case Studies. Foundations and Guidelines for Comparing, Matching and Tracing*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014.

92 Interview with programme officer, Mastercard Foundation.

93 Interview with advisor, SDG Philanthropy Platform, see also: SDG Philanthropy Platform, *Converging Interests* (see note 76).

94 DEval, *Evaluierung des developp.de-Programms* (see note 57), 78.

ence Partnership and partnerships to support innovative enterprises in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹⁵

Multilateral donor institutions use meta-governance primarily to foster accountability through contracting⁹⁶, for example, by minimising investment and implementation risks. They particularly support public partners in developing the required capacities for implementing and enforcing such contracts, and better embed individual partnership projects in so-called project-pipelines and longer-term development strategies to reduce costs and investment uncertainty. Our interviewees from private foundations suggested they commit to initiatives that strengthen local evaluation and control capacities,⁹⁷ for example by bolstering independent local evaluation institutes.⁹⁸

Yet evaluations of the reviewed programmes and facilities find that the reviewed programmes and facilities commit substantially more resources to creating partnerships rather than to holding them accountable, especially locally, still.⁹⁹ A DEval study criticised this imbalance: “The M&E [monitoring & evaluation] systems at the programme, portfolio and project level do not adequately show the achievement of objectives or efficiency of the developPPP.de programme. As a consequence, [the implementing organisations] BMZ and DO can hardly use these M&E systems as control or steering instruments.”¹⁰⁰

According to the donors and implementing organisations we interviewed,¹⁰¹ such shortcomings make it difficult to judge the efficacy of partnerships in terms

of implementing development policy.¹⁰² One of our interviewees, however, did not feel that the absence of follow-up measures caused the inefficiency. Rather he deplored local causes – which donors are not always able to influence – such as the lack of coherent and long-term development strategies or even data that would make it possible to gauge the effects of PPPs in the first place.¹⁰³ Corruption is also a problem. Most recently, the case of the World Bank’s sanctions against its largest partner for implementing infrastructure PPPs in Asia has shown how hard it is for donors to ensure accountability.¹⁰⁴

There can also be conflicting objectives in the design of meta-governance, for instance when increasing transparency in PPPs by demonstrating efficiency comes at the expense of inclusive processes and democratic ownership, and the involvement of marginalised groups due to ever more demanding reporting requirements and complex contracting schemes. Pointing to the scant resources and capacities our interviewees affirmed that, when faced with potential trade-offs, local governments are more inclined to address financial risk mitigation rather than to ensure inclusive processes.¹⁰⁵ This tendency can be explained inter alia by the fact that donors and private investors frequently demand legal protection against financial risks, whereas rendering the implementation of partnerships inclusive is usually voluntary.

Meta-Governance at the National and Local Level

Most of our respondents concurred that meta-governance at the *national and local* level was particularly important: national meta-governance should ensure that accountable public actors, relevant stakeholders and those involved can transparently follow and influence the work of MSPs locally and that MSPs account for

95 SIDA, *Challenge Funds 2017*, <http://www.sida.se/English/partners/resources-for-all-partners/Challenge-Funds/> (accessed 23 October 2017).

96 Interview with programme officer, Public-Private Partnership Group/World Bank.

97 Interview with programme officer, MasterCard Foundation.

98 For some of the initiatives funded by the MasterCard Foundation, see Michele Tarsilla, “Evaluation Capacity Development in Africa. Current Landscape of International Partners’ Initiatives, Lessons Learned and the Way Forward”, *African Evaluation Journal* 2, no. 1 (2014): Art. #89.

99 DANIDA, *Evaluation of DANIDA Business-to-Business Programme 2006–2011* (see note 52).

100 DEval, *Evaluierung des developp.de-Programms* (see note 57), ix.

101 DANIDA, *Evaluation of DANIDA Business-to-Business Programme 2006–2011* (see note 52); DANIDA and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, *Denmark’s Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action* (see note 53); DEval, *Evaluierung des developp.de-Programms* (see note 57); Söderbäck, *Desk Study of Sida’s Experience from Private Sector Collaboration* (see note 82).

102 Interview with programme officers, SIDA, DANIDA, GIZ, sequa.

103 Interview with programme officers, Public-Private Partnership Group/World Bank, IADB.

104 Lisa Cornish, *One of the Largest Engineering Players in Aid to Asia Was Hit with World Bank Sanctions. What Happens Now?* (2017), <https://www.devex.com/news/one-of-the-largest-engineering-players-in-aid-to-asia-was-hit-with-world-bank-sanctions-what-happens-now-91183> (accessed 23 October 2017).

105 Interviews with programme officer, IADB and programme officer, Public-Private Partnership Group/World Bank.

their outcomes in the local context. However, de facto we found few examples of such meta-governance at the national level.

David Nabarro, the UNSG's Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, made clear in his conversation with us that the UN should primarily support its member states in building and accompanying functional partnerships that address local needs. In late 2016, the UN General Assembly also called for the UN to support governments in initiating and designing partnerships.¹⁰⁶ Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed stated that the UN needed to become a “policy broker” and support governments in identifying the best partnership options.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, as the NGO World Vision International points out, following the 2030 Agenda principle of “leaving no-one behind”, SDGs should be implemented particularly for the weak and marginalised. It therefore calls for *national platforms* and accountability mechanisms for inclusive partnerships to be set up and strengthened.

It is dismaying that we found so few meta-governance initiatives, particularly at the national level, that meet these requirements. Of the 63 countries that have so far submitted voluntary national review (VNR) reports to the HLPF about their activities implementing the 2030 Agenda nationally, almost all mentioned partnerships as a means of implementation. But only six referenced explicit efforts to foster partnerships accordingly – and even those remarks were rather vague. Sweden, for instance, indicated that it had founded a series of platforms and partnerships, and Afghanistan reported that the government intended to launch a “high-level platform” for various stakeholders.¹⁰⁸ Denmark referred to an existing “business platform” and to setting up a “multi-stakeholder plat-

form”.¹⁰⁹ Since 2015 Japan has been running the Open 2030 Project as a “co-creation business lab” to develop innovative MSPs.¹¹⁰ It is noticeable that the VNR reports often contain references to *separate* platforms for consulting or including civil-society actors or else private-sector actors. Several countries also designated sectoral PPP platforms for individual SDGs. For instance, the DANIDA Market Development Partnerships initiative concentrates on partnerships to implement SDG 8.¹¹¹

Building upon our previous empirical research on local partnership activities, we chose *Kenya* as a case study for a more in-depth analysis of national meta-governance for MSPs.¹¹² Kenya sees itself as a champion of the SDGs and highlighted MSPs both in UN negotiations on the 2030 Agenda and in its first national report to the HLPF.¹¹³ And yet we could not identify a state-run platform that provides cross-sectoral support to MSPs.¹¹⁴ Instead the SDG Kenya Forum mobilises civil-society actors while the Kenya Private Sector Alliance serves as a platform for the business sector.¹¹⁵ Kenyan NGOs are sharply critical of the lack of formal institutional structures and mechanisms to develop MSPs in a participatory and sustainable manner, since they believe it undermines the potential of MSPs if civil-society actors have to constantly fight for their right to be involved.¹¹⁶

Our interviewees in Kenya identified further potential building blocks for a national meta-governance for MSPs in Kenya. The Kenyan Non-Governmental Organisations Coordination Board is tasked with registering,

106 “Assisting Governments in Leveraging Partnerships”, UNGA 2017: *Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System*, A/RES/71/243, adopted on 21 December 2016, New York, para 21(d).

107 IISD 2017: *UN Secretariat Reports on QCPR Follow-up*, 5 May 2017.

108 Sweden, *Sweden and the 2030 Agenda. Report to the UN High Level Political Forum 2017 on Sustainable Development*, HLPF Report (2017), 4; Afghanistan, *Voluntary National Review at the High Level Political Forum. SDGs' Progress Report – Afghanistan*, HLPF Report (2017), 18 (for all HLPF reports, see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/> [accessed 23 October 2017]).

109 Denmark, *Report for the Voluntary National Review. Denmark's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, HLPF Report, 44.

110 Japan, *Japan's Voluntary National Review. Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*, HLPF Report (2017), 14.

111 DANIDA, *Danida Market Development Partnerships Launch of 2017 Call for Proposals* (see note 54).

112 *Transnational Partnerships*, ed. Beisheim and Liese (see note 12).

113 Ministry of Devolution and Planning, Republic of Kenya, *Implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in Kenya*, HLPF Report (2017).

114 Marianne Beisheim, Anne Ellersiek, Lukas Goltermann and Pauline Kiamba, “Meta-Governance of Partnerships for Sustainable Development. Actors' Perspectives from Kenya”, *Public Administration and Development*, doi: 10.1002/pad.1810.

115 Ministry of Devolution and Planning, Republic of Kenya, *Implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in Kenya* (see note 113).

116 SDGs Kenya Forum, *Voluntary National Review (VNR) of Progress on Sustainable Development Goals in Kenya* (2017), 32f.

supporting and steering NGOs and receiving their annual reports.¹¹⁷ It remains unclear, however, to what extent the Board also engages with MSPs. Kenya has had a PPP Unit since 2013, which focuses on registering and coordinating infrastructure PPPs and was built with support from the World Bank. In 2016 the government requested that a complementary Vulnerable and Marginalised Groups Framework be set up¹¹⁸. It remains to be seen whether this request will be implemented by PPP projects. To date, there are no comparable structures for MSPs, and some of our Kenyan interviewees criticised these inequalities regarding requirements and support services.¹¹⁹

In 2015 an SDG Philanthropy Platform was established in Kenya with the help of various private foundations. It is managed by the local UNDP office. It aims to finance and coordinate MSPs and thus make a contribution to implementing national Kenyan development objectives. Respondents who helped launch this platform emphasised that the platform takes an inclusive approach to MSPs.¹²⁰ The first calls for tender by the platform are open to all actors.¹²¹ Whether or not the inclusive approach to MSPs is ultimately implemented will need to be verified.

Going more into detail, we focused on support and guidance provided for MSPs in the Kenyan *water sector*.¹²² Various Kenyan institutions oversee donor coordination and accompany and evaluate the multitude of projects in the water sector by different sponsors, such as the Donor Coordination Unit in the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, the national Kenya Water Resource Management Authority, and the local Basin Water Resource Committees. The Kenya 2030 Water Resources Group, initiated in 2015 with help from the World Bank, also supports MSPs. NGOs, how-

ever, criticise that these sectoral institutions have so far not been embedded in a more extensive and coherent national SDG or MSP architecture.¹²³ The national Kenya Vision 2030 and, at the district level, the Integrated Development Plans do stipulate strategic objectives, but these have not yet been adequately translated into concrete instructions (“how-to”).¹²⁴

Our interviews and research on two *water partnerships* in Kenya suggest that externally financed MSPs could respond better to typical problems if they received more effective instruction and support from national authorities.¹²⁵ Thus the *Kenyan Water Partnership* (KWP) (part of the Global Water Partnership, GWP) was hampered from the outset by the Kenyan government’s lack of ownership. KWP’s objective was to convince the Kenyan government of the need for a national plan for Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). However, it was stranded in a turf battle between competing Kenyan institutions and levels of administration – a typical pitfall for externally- or donor-initiated MSPs. The KWP also failed to adapt its work quickly enough to the ongoing devolution processes in Kenya. If national meta-governance had ensured that the KWP’s contributions were better *aligned* with the national and local development processes and priorities from the beginning, such problems could at the very least have been reduced.

The second water partnership faced a different set of problems. *Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor* (WSUP) was able to garner broad local ownership and acceptance and was very successful in implementing projects in situ, with the help of credible Kenyan community-based partners and broad consultation processes. However, initially, the partnership fell short in moving beyond the project-level. Moreover, individual local government officials saw WSUP’s successes as a challenge to the reputation of state institutions, since they felt that the government’s contribution to these successes was inadequately or not sufficiently communicated by WSUP. Here too national meta-governance could have helped. WSUP could have offered the government better proof of its efficiency and the gov-

117 NGO Co-ordination Board, *Who We Are* (2015), http://www.ngobureau.or.ke/?page_id=43 (accessed 2 October 2017).

118 Ministry of Devolution and Planning, Republic of Kenya, *Implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in Kenya* (see note 113).

119 Beisheim et al., “Meta-Governance of Partnerships for Sustainable Development. Actors’ Perspectives from Kenya” (see note 114), 6.

120 Interview with programme officer, SDG Philanthropy Platform Kenya.

121 For the most recent call for tender, see the SDG Philanthropy Kenya Platform: <https://www.sdgphilanthropy.org/node/27> (accessed 2 October 2017).

122 *Transnational Partnerships*, ed. Beisheim and Liese (see note 12). Marianne Beisheim, Hannah Janetschek and Johanna Sarre, *Partnerships for Development and the Provision of Water and Sanitation*, SWP-Comments 17/2011 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, July 2011).

123 World Vision and The Partnering Initiative, *Delivering on the Promise. In-country Multi-stakeholder Platforms to Catalyse Collaboration and Partnerships for Agenda 2030* (Uxbridge, Middlesex, and Oxford, 2016), 26.

124 SDGs Kenya Forum, *Voluntary National Review (VNR) of Progress on Sustainable Development Goals in Kenya* (see note 116), 33f.

125 Beisheim et al., “Meta-Governance of Partnerships for Sustainable Development. Actors’ Perspectives from Kenya” (see note 114).

ernment then could have provided state support for scaling successful projects, while highlighting its supportive role.

One government official that we interviewed stressed the importance of registering MSPs, so that governments could get a clearer picture of how to integrate MSPs into national development strategies. Then again, we also encountered scepticism regarding tighter embedding of MSPs in government-led processes. Some interviewees feared there might be inappropriate political interference driven by vested interests, or bureaucratic restrictions imposed on the flexible working methods of MSPs. Civil-society actors pointed to the potential risks associated with increased state control, especially in the context of the debate about the “shrinking space” available to NGOs in a growing number of countries.¹²⁶ They felt that the decisive issue was the political will of state officials and their administrative and organisational capacities to implement multi-stakeholder processes transparently, inclusively and goal-oriented.

During our research, we came across several other examples of national meta-governance for MSPs. The SDG Philanthropy Platform has built platforms not only in Kenya, but also in Ghana, Colombia, Indonesia and Zambia. In Mozambique and Zambia, donor institutions initiated national MSP platforms in collaboration with national governments and private advisors.¹²⁷ In October 2017 the German MAP Platform organised an international workshop for the actors involved in national MSP-support platforms to share their experiences. The participants expressed their wish for more support and guidance in identifying the guidelines and offers relevant to their work. UNDESA-DSD had planned a workshop for UN member states in spring 2017 on the topic of “Developing Partnerships for SDGs in Africa”. But the event had to be cancelled at short notice due to a lack of interest. Our overall impression is that, at the national level, the debate is only slowly gaining content and momentum, and is more likely to do so where it fits into ongoing national reform processes for localising the SDGs.

¹²⁶ Civicus Monitor, <https://monitor.civicus.org> (accessed 2 October 2017).

¹²⁷ Zambia Business in Development Facility (ZBIDF), siehe <http://zbidf.org/about-us/> (accessed 23 October 2017); Rik Overmars, “IBA Facility LINK Announces Partnerships in Mozambique”, *Inclusive Business Accelerator*, 27 November 2014, <https://iba.ventures/2014/11/27/iba-facility-link-announces-partnerships-in-mozambique/> (accessed 23 October 2017).

Meta-Governance by Private Initiatives

Our interviewees and expert reports frequently point at a certain unease to air problems or errors officially for fear of eroding trust – despite it being constructive to be (self-)critical in order to learn from mistakes.¹²⁸ Several of our respondents therefore called for informal *private platforms* where participants could evaluate partnership activities in a more open manner. Such private initiatives could then also react quickly and flexibly when adjusting their meta-governance activities for partnerships.

In this context, many of our interviewees praised the work of several private consultancies which are committed to and can be hired for relevant learning processes. These include The Partnering Initiative (TPI) in Oxford, the Collective Leadership Institute (CLI) in Potsdam, among others, which in 2015 jointly formed the Promoting Effective Partnering (PEP) Facility.¹²⁹ These private initiatives do not have the authority to prescribe meta-governance to partnerships. But since they advise on the conditions of success – working either with the actors involved or as part of an official process – they are important agenda-setters and do influence the design and implementation of partnerships. Thus members of the PEP Facility have advised the GPEDC, and the CLI has shaped several German partnership initiatives. Their services are chargeable, however; only generalised information is provided free of charge. Our interviewees from UN institutions and developing countries pointed out that they could not afford such professional consultancy services without additional financial support.

Some academic institutions also act in an advisory capacity, such as the Partnerships Resource Centre (PrC) of the Rotterdam School of Management at Erasmus University or the Centre for Development Innovation (CDI), an affiliated research institute of Wageningen University. In 2015 the latter published an *MSP Guide* on its “Knowledge Co-Creation Portal Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships”, and it also offers other resources and courses.¹³⁰ These institutions tend

¹²⁸ Alan AtKisson, *Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in the Post-2015 Development Era: Sharing Knowledge and Expertise to Support the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals*, Background Paper for UNDESA Expert Group Meeting, New York, 2015.

¹²⁹ Promoting Effective Partnering (PEP), *About PEP* (see note 61).

¹³⁰ Herman Brouwer, Jim Woodhill, Minu Hemmati et al., *The MSP Guide. How to Design and Facilitate Multi-Stakeholder Part-*

to work with blended financing and provide some of their products, such as the *MSP Guide*, free of charge.

Finally there are individual *NGO alliances*, which use learning networks, workshops, training and other activities to try to set, or demand, standards for partnerships or for the involvement of NGOs in partnerships. Even before the SDGs had been adopted, the Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC) was promoting its *Cloud of Commitments*, a civil-society platform for partnerships and voluntary commitments. The platform was sophisticated in design, yet the NRDC failed to mobilise sufficient resources to manage it. Nevertheless, our interviewees emphasised that the accompanying advocacy work at least drew attention to the issue and to the benefits of independent information. The International Civil Society Centre (ICSC) in Berlin was also an early promoter of “transformative post-2015 partnerships” between NGOs, progressive government institutions and businesses – and wanted to establish itself as their platform. Today the ICSC supports civil-society actors in innovation management, reporting and inclusive participatory formats.

The *CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness* (CPDE), which represents civil-society interests in the GPEDC, is a vocal advocate of inclusive partnerships. It is, however, largely limited to making recommendations. It is also involved in the annual reporting by donor countries, wherein it helps to assess the indicators “Strengthening the Role of Civil Society in Partnerships” and “Improving the Dialogue with Business-Sector Actors and Others”.¹³¹

A recent initiative is the drafting of an *MSP Charter* to establish a common vision and set of principles for MSPs.¹³² To that end, its architects, who previously worked for NGOs or in consultancy, plan to carry out a broad international consultation process. Those who sign the MSP Charter will then be expected to report on their implementation activities. Whether the initiative succeeds, and by what means, will depend on the institutional preconditions being set for it. When

we were conducting our research, the founders were looking to secure financial backing from a private foundation.

Among the private initiatives, one that stands out for its sophisticated meta-governance is the *ISEAL Alliance*.¹³³ It has inter alia drawn up a series of principles and three codes of good practice for partnerships that want to develop and implement voluntary standards. Members of the ISEAL Alliance include the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Fairtrade International. The ISEAL codes tackle three processes: developing a voluntary standard, verifying compliance with it, and measuring its impact. ISEAL members must comply with the three codes, and their compliance is verified using external evaluations. This gives members considerable credibility. In return, ISEAL members are willing to pay significant annual membership fees, as well as additional fees for periodic evaluations of the three codes.¹³⁴

Our interviews revealed that the credibility of ISEAL’s standards is especially important for relatively young partnerships, such as the *Alliance for Water Stewardship* (AWS).¹³⁵ By applying ISEAL principles and codes from the outset, the AWS was able to capitalise on ISEAL’s legitimacy and garner credibility for its own newly defined international water standard. In keeping with the ISEAL codes, the AWS carried out extensive global, regional and local consultation processes. Using roundtable debates with international participants and local workshops, AWS was able to attain considerable inclusiveness and participation in the development of its standards. Our interviewees confirmed that inclusive processes were particularly important. The interviewed AWS staff also deemed the support they received through ISEAL’s meta-governance very helpful, especially for the ‘local applicability’ of the standard, something that is considered to be crucial for success. In line with the two other ISEAL codes, the AWS was in the process of establishing a monitoring and evaluation programme, which it will then use as the basis for its reporting. AWS and other members provide constant feedback to ISEAL, which

nerships (Wageningen UR: Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University, 2015).

131 CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), *Enhancing Civil Society Role in Development Partnerships Post 2015*, 2017; OECD, *Making Development Co-operation More Effective. 2016 Progress Report* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016).

132 The MSP Institute, *Making Multi-stakeholder Partnerships Work for the Sustainable Development Goals*, 53f, <http://msp-institute.org/projects/making-msps-work-for-the-sdgs> (accessed 2 October 2017).

133 Previously known as the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance.

134 ISEAL, *ISEAL Member Fee Schedule*, <https://www.isealliance.org/online-community/resources/iseal-member-fee-schedule> (accessed 2 October 2017).

135 Lili Mundle, Lars Berger and Marianne Beisheim, “How Private Meta-Governance Helps Standard-Setting Partnerships Deliver”, *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal* 8, no. 5 (forthcoming).

then applies its elaborate code development and revision procedure to rework its codes every four years, again accompanied by public consultations. This means that ISEAL's meta-governance is constantly improved and extended in a reflexive process.¹³⁶

All the private initiatives mentioned thus far credibly work towards making MSPs more effective, inclusive and accountable. Unfortunately, however, we know little about the "dark side" of private meta-governance for MSPs – for instance, private consultants or initiatives that do not share these principles or undermine them out of vested interests. This problem has been identified in international nutrition policy, where NGOs accuse some initiatives of using (supposed) "multi-stakeholder" platforms to create an ostensible legitimacy while simultaneously putting the interests of large investors above those of local producers and consumers in their decision-making processes on PPPs.¹³⁷ With the help of these initiatives, (inter-) governmental fora may then be circumvented or even undermined. Concurrently, studies carried out by critical NGOs condemn private donors' fixation with neoliberal economics, technological solutions and short-term measurable success¹³⁸ – as opposed to long-term and inclusive, emancipatory and transformative approaches. Problems also arise when external private consultancy services are influenced by commercial or other particular interests or when governments hand over political decision-making to ostensibly "neutral" experts and advisors.¹³⁹ Thus, the Global Policy Forum, for instance, is calling for a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for MSPs, with binding guidelines and accountability, both at the UN level and at the national level.¹⁴⁰

In sum, it is evident that private meta-governance initiatives can provide effective and innovative support for MSPs, but that they are always dependent on financing. If money is short, it is unlikely that these initiatives will be active in the long-term or have a broad impact. Dependence on private financing also carries the risk of particular interests having disproportionate influence. A meta-governance "club" funded by its members, such as the ISEAL Alliance, is only possible if it is financially advantageous for all.

136 Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing, "Making Governance Networks Effective and Democratic through Metagovernance", *Public Administration* 87, no. 2 (2009): 234–58.

137 Benjamin Luig, "'Multistakeholderism' ohne Grenzen – Konzerne im Zentrum der internationalen Ernährungspolitik", in *Wirtschaft Macht Politik: Einfluss privatwirtschaftlicher Akteure in internationalen Politikprozessen*, ed. Misereor, Global Policy Forum and Brot für die Welt (Aachen, Berlin and Bonn, 2016), 31–38 (38).

138 Jens Martens and Karolin Seitz, *Gestiftete Entwicklung? Die Kooperation zwischen der deutschen Entwicklungspolitik und privaten Stiftungen* (Aachen, Berlin and Bonn: Misereor, Global Policy Forum and Brot für die Welt, 2017).

139 Luc Brès and Jean-Pascal Gond, "The Visible Hand of Consultants in the Construction of the Markets for Virtue. Translating Issues, Negotiating Boundaries and Enacting Responsive Regulations", *Human Relations* 67, no. 11 (2014): 1347–82.

140 Martens and Seitz, *Gestiftete Entwicklung?* (see note 138), 53f.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Meta-governance for partnerships should institutionalise learning processes that help decision-makers in politics and partnerships to build on past experiences, rather than reinvent the wheel each time. All of our interviewees confirmed the necessity of learning from past successes, but also past failures, so as to create improved framework conditions for MSPs working towards realising the SDGs. The majority of our interviewees and of the political documents we analysed also repeat, mantra-like, that MSPs should be an important means of implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Yet existing meta-governance for partnerships is de facto weak and fragmented. Whilst the UN and donor institutions have at least debated adapting their meta-governance, only a few governments have seriously addressed the issue – although our interviews emphasise that the biggest potential for steering partnerships towards the local implementation of SDGs is believed to be at the national level. Private initiatives show the value of a goal-driven debate on the conditions for success and of minimum standards for effective, inclusive and accountable MSPs.

The *content* of the existing meta-governance usually focuses on the effectiveness of partnerships and, in that context, their accountability. Those actors who see partnerships primarily as a means of generating additional resources prefer to talk about supportive measures. They fear that too many requirements will deter potential, financially strong partners. To date, therefore, demands for inclusiveness have rarely been binding, and the issue of how MSPs could target a systemic transformation has barely been addressed.

At the *UN level* Germany and the EU should commit themselves to drafting and negotiating a TGP resolution (to be debated in 2018) that is broader in content and formulates fundamental principles and operative guidelines with minimum requirements for the UN's partnerships. The emphasis should be on balanced risk management rather than on complete avoidance of risks.¹⁴¹ An important addition to the principles

¹⁴¹ For contrasting positions on this issue, see: Jens Martens and Karolin Seitz, *Multi-Akteur-Partnerschaften in der 2030-Agenda. Elemente eines rechtlichen und institutionellen Rahmens*, GPF-Briefing (Bonn: Global Policy Forum, February 2017); as well as Wade Hoxtell, "Wirksam und verantwortungsvoll gestalten:

and guidelines would be a (currently lacking) process for their systematic and consistent implementation within the UN system as well as their further development in a reflexive process. Responsibilities should also be made clear. The TGP resolution should describe in more detail which UN institutions and platforms – decentralised and specialised, but coherent – would support the implementation of these guidelines in the UN system and operate learning and verification processes. Here the Global Compact Office should not take on any tasks that require member-state oversight so as to avoid endangering its flexible working methods. ECOSOC could organise a new entity which would be the central interface for implementation and coordination within the UN system. This should most sensibly be done in close cooperation with the UN Private Sector Focal Points network and also UNDESA's Stakeholders Engagement Programme. The resolution could confirm that the HLPF is responsible for reviewing partnerships' contributions to the SDGs. In addition, the UNDS should be called on to provide stronger support for governments building national platforms for transformative partnerships (see below).

Germany and the EU should also push for the UN to work with the reports submitted by partnerships and use them as the basis for institutional learning processes. Thus, an assessment based on the reports could initially be discussed at the ECOSOC Partnership Forum, which usually takes place in spring, and the results then be presented at the HLPF in July, preferably with a focus on the year's special topics.¹⁴² The corresponding synthesis report could be drawn up by UNDESA itself or – if the requisite budget is available – by an independent team of experts. The empirical

UN-Partnerschaften mit der Wirtschaft am Scheideweg", *Vereinte Nationen* 64, no. 6 (2016): 259–63; or Barbara Adams and Sarah Dayringer, "UN partnerships in the public interest? Not yet", *Global Policy Watch Briefing* (October 2017) and Wade Hoxtell, "Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships and the 2030-Agenda – Challenges and Options for Oversight at the United Nations", Report (Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute), March 2017.

¹⁴² Cf. Beisheim and Simon, "Die Umsetzung der SDGs durch Multi-Stakeholder Partnerschaften" (see note 24).

foundations for the synthesis would not only be the voluntary reports posted on the online platform Partnerships for SDGs, but also reports by UN organisations and national or civil-society fora. During the ECOSOC Partnership Forum and HLPF Partnership Exchange, officials in charge from UN organisations and partnerships could make themselves available for discussion with member states and NGOs. UN member states could formulate recommendations in the HLPF ministerial declaration. This would correspond to the HLPF's mission of providing "political guidance" for the implementation of the SDGs. As a learning institution, this would also be an opportunity for it to continuously reflect on its work with SDG-related partnerships.

This reform would be more likely to succeed if it was integrated into the reform agenda driven by UN Secretary-General Guterres. To date, the main change has been for the debate to shift towards stronger UN meta-governance for partnerships in the future. However, so far it has been all "talk" and neither "decision" nor "action".¹⁴³ UN member states are certainly interested in working with effective partnerships to realise the SDGs – but our interviews show that their willingness to invest the necessary work and resources lags behind. However, without an unequivocal mandate, clearly defined responsibilities and an adequate budget, UN meta-governance for partnerships cannot substantially improve.

Donor institutions could do more to align partnerships closely with the 2030 Agenda, beyond the framework conditions they already set. They should adapt and harmonise the legal project framework conditions for their numerous programmes and facilities so as to pursue a coherent partnership strategy both individually and collectively. Local partners in particular should be more actively involved to anchor partnerships in the local context and implement them inclusively. Moreover, the framework conditions for funding should allow for and ensure an extensive analysis of the local requirements and preconditions for effective implementation. Donors need to clarify the extent to which partnerships can rely on local government support and capacities. Where these conditions are not met or merely partially met, the relevant capacities and incentives should be created. Here special attention should be paid to counteracting the increasing restrictions placed on civil society in many

countries. Since this and other issues require concerted response, it would be useful to synchronise meta-governance for partnerships so that individual donors are not left to themselves, exacerbating further risk of fragmentation. The German federal government should use its co-presidency of the GPEDC to apply, along with its members, the established Busan principles on effective development cooperation to partnerships, and to develop common operative guidelines and measures that conform to the principles of the 2030 Agenda. In the OECD-DAC negotiations postponed to 2018, Germany should champion an inclusive and accountable design of the guidelines on promoting private-sector investment through ODA.

Disappointingly, the commitment of *governments* to accompanying MSPs through meta-governance frameworks has so far been rather meagre. Individual coordinating entities and sets of rules frequently exist; yet they tend not to specifically target MSPs but to cater to the individual needs of the business sector, NGOs or classical infrastructure PPPs. Only rarely did we find platforms that initiate, support and follow-up on transformative, inclusive and accountable MSPs: pilot projects funded by private foundations. For a broader impact, it would be helpful if both the UN and donor institutions supported the building and expansion of national platforms for MSPs. These platforms should be arranged to develop MSPs based on local needs and reconcile them with national strategies to improve local ownership, efficiency and coherence. The platforms themselves should have inclusive structures and processes. The partnership investment requested by governments should be tied to minimum standards for implementing these resources locally. A verification component could ensure learning processes, broad support for successful MSPs, and withdrawal of support for failing "zombie" partnerships.¹⁴⁴ The German federal government should support dialogue processes among national platforms, as already commenced by the German MAP platform, and promote these internationally, e.g. via the GPEDC, OECD-DAC and UN-HLPF. It would be best if the German government could agree on a coherent, cross-departmental partnership strategy; there is room for synchronisation and improvement, especially as regards standards for inclusiveness.

¹⁴³ Nils Brunsson, *The Organization of Hypocrisy. Talk, Decisions, and Actions in Organizations* (Chichester, 1989).

¹⁴⁴ Global Development Incubator, *More Than the Sum of Its Parts. Making Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives Work* (2015); Steven and Kashambu, *Turning Ambition into Reality* (see note 29).

Among the *private forms* of meta-governance, we identified several very sophisticated and also effective examples, such as the ISEAL Alliance for standard-setting partnerships, which fosters exchange between its members and develops codes that are based on learning processes and define a high quality standard. Other private meta-governance initiatives are innovative and forge ahead where the UN and others makes no headway, for example the initiative for an MSP Charter for UN-registered SDG partnerships. Here finances are always the critical issue. To date, the only initiatives to stand independently are those that are organised as exclusive “clubs”, whose members are willing to pay for the distinction granted by membership (the “gold standard”). However, where minimum standards with a broad impact are concerned, it is difficult to find a reliable financial basis. There is also the risk that dependence on private financing may affect the rigor in standard setting and assessment.

Our results do not show that swift progress is made towards building a solid meta-governance for transformative, inclusive and accountable MSPs. The currently rather scant debates on the issue tend to get stuck at the level of general principles. The details for practically implementing these principles are politically controversial at both the international and national level. This is due to various ongoing debates, either on principled support or opposition to the partnership approach, or on the cost-benefit ratio of regulation versus flexibility, as well as turf battles about influence and resources. Without coherent meta-governance, however, it is likely that partnerships will repeat past mistakes instead of learning from them. Without such learning processes, partnerships will struggle to contribute to “transforming our world” along the lines of the 2030 Agenda.

Abbreviations

AAAA	Addis Ababa Action Agenda	UNDS	United Nations Development System
AWS	Alliance for Water Stewardship	UNFIP	United Nations Fund for International Partnerships
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development	UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency	UNOP	United Nations Office for Partnerships
CPDE	CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee	VNR	Voluntary National Review
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency	WHA	World Health Assembly
DEval	German Institute for Development Evaluation	WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
DFG	German Research Foundation	WSUP	Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor
DIE	German Development Institute	ZBIDF	Zambia Business in Development Facility
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (UN)		
EU	European Union		
FCP	Forest Carbon Partnership		
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council		
GCO	Global Compact Office		
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH		
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation		
GPF	Global Policy Forum		
GWP	Global Water Partnership		
HLPF	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development		
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank		
ICSC	International Civil Society Centre		
ITA	Independent Team of Advisors		
IVM	Institute for Environmental Studies		
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management		
JIU (UN)	Joint Inspection Unit (United Nations)		
KWP	Kenyan Water Partnership		
LDC	least developed countries		
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation		
MDG	Millennium Development Goal		
MSP	Multi-Stakeholder Partnership		
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation		
NRDC	Natural Resources Defence Council		
ODA	Official Development Assistance		
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee		
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services (UN)		
PEP	Promoting Effective Partnerships		
PPP	Public-Private Partnership		
PPPIRC	Public-Private Partnership in Infrastructure Resource Center		
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review		
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal		
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network		
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency		
SUN	Scaling-Up Nutrition		
TGP	Towards Global Partnerships		
UN	United Nations		
UNCSD	United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development		
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs		