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Summary Report: Priorities, Challenges and Possibilities from Geneva ‘All In’ Roundtable on Inclusive Multilateralism, SDGs and Business

Organized by USCIB in partnership with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and The International Organization of Employers (IOE)
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“SDGs embody systems thinking, and at its best, inclusive multilateralism should catalyze systems doing”

I. The Geneva Roundtable – An Executive Summary of Priorities, Challenges and Possibilities

The Geneva ‘All In’ Roundtable began a global conversation about how to engage all necessary partners to achieve better results towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, working in synergy within the multilateral system. As the quintessential UN city, Geneva seemed like the best place to launch this conversation, understanding that it would be both complex and challenging.

Over 50 participants from diplomatic missions, UN bodies, NGOs, academia and business met in Geneva on May 8 at the first ‘All In’ Roundtable on Inclusive Multilateralism, SDGs and Business. While the participants came from diverse public and private sector stakeholder groups, what they had in common was involvement and commitment to the shared goals of 2015 and their implementation, and a growing concern that the international community is not on track to meet those goals.

At the same time, there was a wide agreement of the necessity to involve business and other stakeholders, and to co-create solutions and more effective institutional connections and engagements wherever possible to scale up shared value and impact to deliver on the SDGs, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement.

The group discussed the first 2 themes of the 6 themes highlighted by Campaign “All In”:

- **Enabling Public-Private Partnerships with the UN for the SDGs.** Partnership is reflected in SDG17, and the notion of partnership is in the DNA of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- **More than the sum of the parts: Leveraging public private cooperation in science and technology for the SDGs.** One of the unique contributions the private sector offers is the ability to marshal technological innovation and expertise, along with associated R&D, and bring it to bear on sustainable development challenges, including through transformational technologies.

For each theme, the Geneva 'All In' Roundtable explored the following:

- What are the priorities for focus that could deliver the greatest scale and impact to advancing 2015 outcomes?
- Which challenges could be addressed through improved institutional infrastructure and partnership?
- Where can possibilities for enhanced substantive engagement options in the multilateral system be pursued in the near term?

II. Designing Public Private Partnerships with the UN for SDG Impact

Priorities:

Enabling frameworks for partnership at regional and global levels that will connect with business and non-state actor motivations, means and opportunities. In this regard, platforms to help connect business with the UN system in creating, developing, executing and assessing partnership are needed.

Mainstreaming – As business and other stakeholders become more actively involved, governments should also remain involved, maintaining their fundamental responsibility, and not delegate action or solutions to the private sector. Public private partnerships supplement governmental policy and action, they do not replace it. Part of mainstream is shifting cultures, so that public and private sector organizations become outward looking to pursue partnerships. From a business standpoint, engagement in the multilateral system to help shape and pursue sustainable development partnerships relies on defining not just a business “case,” but the business imperative, with a clearly described problem to solve, and rationale for engaging.

Shared Value – Pursuing a shared value approach is key to designing and executing partnerships that are resilient and effective. Developing a roadmap setting out the steps in identifying partners, agreeing common objectives and designing, implementing and substantiating “shared value” partnerships in connection with the 2015 objectives would be helpful.

Metrics for Impact of Public Private Partnerships – Transparency is critical to assure awareness of existing partnerships, and to be able to then track and assess partnerships for their benefits and progress. In that regard

Challenges:

Design Attributes for Successful Impactful Partnerships – Partnerships should not be seen as an easy option. Even the willingness to collaborate among potential partners can not be taken for granted. Considerable capacity building is needed to build the skills needed for partnerships. In particular, institutional arrangements and structures to connect different stakeholders and build bridges between their diverse objectives, circumstance and expectations are still few and far between.

Due Diligence – Appropriate due diligence is important for public private and multi-stakeholder partnerships, building on existing standards, and applicable to all partners, not only to business.

Resilience and Resourcing: Lack of dependable funding often contributes to the failure or short-lived nature of some partnerships. Where partnerships can demonstrate their value and impact would be able to identify and attract sources of funding and other necessary resources.

Possibilities:

- The [2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator](#)
- USCIB/GAIN Together for [Nutrition Guiding Principles for Partnerships for Global Nutrition Goals](#)
- Launching dialogues between business and UN practitioners on how the private sector manages risks, including on conflict of interest.

III. Leveraging Potential - Public private sector cooperation on technical and scientific knowledge for targeted SDG implementation

Priorities:

More multilateral scientific assessments and bodies need encourage broad business involvement, building on the experiences of UN Environment’s Science Policy Business Forum and the IPBES. Multi-stakeholder entities, such as IUCN, are exploring how to strengthen the science-business- policy interface and pursue options that **promote the science-business-action link**.

Enabling eco-systems for innovation: To reach both small entrepreneurs and inventors, and scale up innovation towards transformation new options, creating the conditions for innovation and its appropriate deployment are more important than ever.

Challenges:

Transformative technologies can raise concerns, including with regard to implications for human rights. How can the multilateral system incent and encourage technologies, without picking “winners” and “losers,” and with a balanced view of promise and risk?

Private sector information, R&D and other technology can be regarded as biased and lacking credibility, so much so that intergovernmental entities do not trust it. Can established COI practices and new standards be used to ensure that private sector input and literature is rigorous, credible and subject to the same review as other non-state actor technical and scientific findings?

Lack of trust in some settings, whether by business of inter-governmental discussions, or by some in the public or NGO sector of business, hampers cooperative relationships and information sharing.

Possibilities:

- The WIPO Green model could be expanded to be more accessible to small and medium sized companies and micro-enterprises.
- Innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships that bring together scientists, academia and private sector technical experts show great promise. One example is [Hello Science](#), an “open invitation” initiative to share expertise, technology and resource to develop ideas into sustainable solutions.
- Pursuing stronger commercial and innovation dialogue with the multilateral system, connecting the WTO and WHO with business solutions that can advance economic opportunity sustainably for climate and SDG impact.

IV. Systems Thinking and Systems Doing – Looking ahead to the ‘All In’ Bangkok Roundtable

It is important to clarify and update the role of business in society and in the multilateral system to regard business as an embedded partner. Language and expectations of business in sustainable development have to shift to encompass creating jobs, economic growth, inclusive prosperity as being part and parcel of sustainable development. All this should be seen as part of the “business imperative” for multilateral engagement.

Pursuing SDGs is a mutual effort across public and private sectors, and the right institutional frameworks are needed in order to provide the connective tissue for collaboration towards shared value. Increased engagement and dialogue provides opportunities to educate one another, and agree on aligned objectives and values, despite different priorities, ways of looking at the world and approaches to problem solving.

The opportunity to enhance business engagement brings the potential for considerable scale. Governments can support and encourage multilateral systems to connect with the private sector. While all agree that partnerships are critical, more is needed to underpin this in practice.

Beyond finance, philanthropy and corporate responsibility, the business community is a force multiplier for the 2015 shared goals, through supply and value chains, and the private sector’s relationships with suppliers and customers, workers, consumers and communities.

A key priority is to translate the potential of sustainable development into SDG investment, including in connection with SDG8 comprising economic growth and empowerment and job creation, all elements of inclusive economic growth and empowerment.

Background: About the ‘All In’ Initiative

The ‘All In’ initiative is predicated on the following:

- in 2015, governments, inter-governmental organizations and stakeholders of all kinds, including business, united in pursuit of sustainability and inclusive prosperity.
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (Financing for Development) and the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement together provide an integrated blue-print for sustainable development that leaves no-one behind.
- While progress is being made towards some of these 2015 objectives, it is not widespread or rapid enough.
- All societal partners in public and private sectors, and in the multilateral system, need to cooperate to address these shortfalls and accelerate progress. Successful implementation of the SDGs and other 2015 outcomes depends on the private sector doing its part.
- The center of international cooperation to address the cross-cutting and transboundary challenges inherent in sustainable development is the multilateral system, comprising the UN, OECD and other inter-governmental entities.

The ‘All In’ initiative has decided to look at the institutional infrastructure that connects stakeholders with the multilateral system, whether in multilateral entities or in partnerships with those entities. In 2019, ‘All In’ is convening roundtables in UN cities to begin to gather ideas for an Action Plan to improve that connection in terms of its ability to deliver real results. What results are we talking about?

- Providing timely and useful information to member states and multilateral institutions
- Catalyzing awareness, support and action for agreed goals

To undertake this evolution, ‘All In’ foresees needed changes in 3 areas:

- In the conduct and engagement of the private sector and other stakeholders in engaging with the multilateral system
- In the shape of partnerships, whether public-private framework or multi-stakeholder institutions
- In the institutional frameworks for stakeholder and business participation, at regional and global levels.

As the UN and other multilateral entities (e.g. the WTO) consider their reform and evolution, the “All In” initiative sees opportunities to design in effective links and modes of working with the private sector and other stakeholders in order to accelerate, scale up and expand implementation and impact of the 2030 objectives.

Neither governments nor business can do this alone. Beyond systems thinking, we need systems doing, including the institutional infrastructure that would be needed to advance collaboration,

inclusiveness, shared value and real impact. Institutional infrastructure by itself is not a panacea, but it is a critical enabler and linkage to advance and aggregate action.

Key considerations in approaching these topics:

- **Look at the full picture of potential benefits and risks of engaging with non-state actors, including the business community.** Each UN forum follows its own rules and procedures for working with stakeholders, and some pursue a different approach to working with business versus with other groups. A balanced approach is key so that due diligence can go hand in hand with incenting and crowding in partnerships.
- **Improved inclusive engagement opportunities across the entire life-cycle of international cooperation:**
 - scientific and technical assessment, policy dialogue,
 - metrics and indicators to track effectiveness and impact
 - partnership and implementation
 - resource deployment
 - continuous improvement
- **Break out of silos, abandon outdated perceptions and enhance communication across the multilateral system to stakeholders to highlight shared value outcomes.**

Multilateral institutions still often view business in sectoral silos, or focus on CEOs alone, or regard business only as a source of finance. Too often, business also retains misperceptions and preconceived ideas about working with the UN. Involving the private sector in multisectoral bodies intended for inter-governmental deliberations will depend on shared value as a basis for involvement.

Numerous existing relationships and ongoing initiatives across the multilateral system are responding to and advancing the 2015 outcomes. Each intergovernmental entity has its own practices and policies in involving and working with the private sector and other stakeholders, reflecting its omission, organizational culture and leading member states. In addition, precedents, political disagreements, and lack of trust pose obstacles to innovation and evolution in institutional frameworks.

Instead of bogging down in these complexities, the 'All In' Initiative will work from practical experience and demonstrate that successful collaboration and arrangements can be expanded. Positive constructs should be replicated and scaled, and institutional approaches to dealing with challenging topics, such as conflict of interest and reputational risk, should not pursue the "lowest common denominator" options of sectoral bans and across the board restrictions on business.