

A Defense of SDG 17

Why Collaboration is our Best Chance at Success

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Abstract

Often seen as a “blueprint for change,” the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) require a strong commitment on the part of member-states to follow through on the expectations set forth by the international community. That being said, no single country can address the issues without multi-lateral support. For that reason, I contend that SDG 17: “Partnership for the Goals,” is a prerequisite to realizing the impacts of any other goal. The UN explains, a successful sustainable development agenda requires partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society. These inclusive partnerships built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals that place people and the planet at the center, are needed at the global, regional, national, and local level.” For smaller nations struggling to reduce carbon dependency or suffering from an inability to uphold a standard of public health, this begins with addressing the root cause of the issue, which for many nations stems from their inability to mobilize resources to improve domestic revenue collection. For larger nations, especially those home to manufacturing giants and large-scale polluters, developing more stringent environmental regulations and offering financial assistance to developing countries would go a long way in curbing the damage. At the end of the day, cross-sector collaboration represents a better chance at success when it comes to fighting climate change. Within this paper, I explore how public-private partnerships, or PPP’s, can help mitigate our climate risk, while fostering resiliency throughout our current systems. In doing so, I plan to describe some of the underlying issues preventing us from realizing this impact and argue that a dramatic paradigm shift is needed to truly embrace SDG 17 and all the potential it offers.

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Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations drafted and adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agenda sets forth 17 overarching goals, from eradicating poverty to maintaining peace and justice throughout institutions across the world. Although extremely broad and lofty in nature, the goals represent a call to action for each of the UN member states, and a way to set expectations for nations to meet expected targets. Within each goal is a set of targets that states should aim to meet, either unilaterally or with the support of other countries. Nevertheless, the world has changed dramatically since the goals were originally written. Given the strain on resources and uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries, especially in the developing world, have shifted their attention toward the issues at hand, placing climate goals on the backburner. Even more critically, many of these debt-distressed nations are struggling to implement recovery efforts given the lack of available capital. Without the immediate and comprehensive support of the international community, many of these countries could reverse years of progress and potentially lose sight of the bigger picture. For that reason, I contend that SDG 17: “Partnership for the Goals,” is a prerequisite to realizing the impacts of any other goal. The UN explains, “A successful sustainable development agenda requires partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society built upon a shared vision, and shared goals that place people and the planet at the center.” For developing nations struggling to reduce carbon dependency or suffering from an inability to uphold a standard of public health, this begins with addressing the root cause of the issue, which for many nations stems from their inability to mobilize resources to improve domestic revenue collection.¹ For developed nations, especially those home to manufacturing giants and large-scale polluters,

¹ SDG 17. United Nations, <https://sdg-tracker.org/global-partnerships>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2022.

developing more stringent environmental regulation, and offering financial assistance to developing countries would go a long way in curbing the damage. At the end of the day, cross-sector collaboration represents a better chance at success when it comes to fighting climate change.

To better understand the argument presented in this report, and the difference between mitigation, resiliency, and adaptation (as it relates to climate change), I draw on the following definitions outlined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in their 2018 special report.

- **Mitigation:** A human intervention to reduce emissions or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases.
- **Resilience:** The capacity of social, economic and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance, responding or reorganizing in ways that maintain their essential function, identity and structure while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning and transformation. This definition builds from the definition used by the Arctic Council in 2013.
- **Adaptation:** In human systems, the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In natural systems, the process of adjustment to actual climate and its effects; human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects.

Why SDG 17?

When it comes to the topic of sustainability, it's important that policymakers, business leaders and the rest of civil society begin incorporating some foresight into their conversations. To have any real material impact, sustainable development requires satisfying the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to act on their own accord.² The goals are meant to address sustainable development in its entirety, which includes a broad focus on economic, social, and environmental welfare. However, given how inextricably linked many of the goals are, tackling one, or at least attempting to, can have tangential ramifications which can impact the lives of millions. For example, improving access to quality education (SDG 4) in developing countries could serve as the foundation to improving gender equality (SDG 5) around the world, by empowering young girls to seek out employment opportunities and to push traditional norms. This could lead to less income inequality (SDG 10), fewer individuals falling below the poverty line (SDG 1), and greater economic output nationwide (SDG 8). Nevertheless, hitting certain targets requires a collaborative effort between the public and private sector, as well as NGO's. For that reason, I believe that setting the stage for effective collaboration, and perhaps even building a replicable model to be used for different PPP's, is a pre-requisite to realizing the other SDG's. Otherwise, we risk spending millions of dollars in taxpayer money, as well as the time and efforts of large MNC's, just to fall short of our goal. Looking at a recent example involving COVID vaccine distribution, it's worth noting that over 11.3B doses of the vaccine have been distributed over the last year and a half. Indeed, successful dissemination of the vaccine around the world would not have been possible without

² "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future." *Brundtland Commission Report*, United Nations, 1987, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>.

engineering a comprehensive plan beforehand, and ultimately relying on the resources brought to the table by both the public and private sector.³

In setting a 2030 timeline to curb emissions by 1.5°C, the UN has also established a theoretical “carbon budget.” The idea is to avoid the most serious impacts of climate change, such as coastal flooding, by limiting our GHG exposure. Unfortunately, our current trajectory has been derailed due to delays and a lack of accountability measures. Often heralded as one of the biggest steps forward in addressing climate change, the Paris Agreement lacked a global mechanism of enforcement, making it hard to hold nations accountable for their actions.⁴ That being said, it did go a long way in bringing major players to the table, at least beginning the conversation on solutions to climate change.

Each actor has a pivotal role to play; however, independently, each can only go so far. Governments and multilateral institutions can set targets, frameworks, and mandates for other actors to change their ways. However, without institutions and private sector firms to take action on those targets, the initiatives will continue to fall short. Meanwhile, the private sector really is the backbone to attaining many of these larger goals. They provide the knowledge and technologies to make solutions more accessible and affordable to all - especially multinational corporations operating across multiple business sectors and industries. This leaves NGO’s to be the enforcers of action by promoting transparency and, in turn, accountability.⁵

It’s worth acknowledging the fact that the public and private sector have collaborated on many initiatives in the past. The idea of utilizing them as a mechanism to achieve sustainable

³ Scotti, Veronica. “Public-Private Partnerships: If Not Now, When? | World Economic Forum.” *World Economic Forum*, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/in-the-fight-against-climate-change-public-private-partnerships-are-the-only-way-to-go/>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2022.

⁴ Huggins, Anna. “The Paris Agreement’s Article 15 Mechanism: An Incomplete Compliance Strategy.” *Debating Climate Law*, Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 99–110, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781108879064.009>.

⁵ Kim, Dong. “How Collaboration Is Driving the Global Climate Agenda | World Economic Forum.” *World Economic Forum*, WeForum, 13 Jan. 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/how-cross-sector-collaboration-is-driving-the-global-climate-agenda/>.

development, however, is not being talked about nearly as often as it should. To better understand how these partnerships can be utilized to promote economic, social, and environmental welfare around the world, it's important that we learn from our past mistakes, while retaining and adapting best practices to different contexts. This report breaks down three case studies and the specific components that I believe can be replicated in partnerships with different actors around the world.

Case Studies

Economic

An illustration of the potential benefits derived from such a system is the SunLink bank linkage model pioneered by the NGO Pride Africa. Through this system, a commercial bank provides financial backing and a line of credit that allows Micro-financing institutions (MFIs) to meet the requirements for a banking license. MFIs then accept deposits from clients and manage the aggregation of deposits that is then invested into the commercial bank.⁶ The bank is then able to invest these aggregate deposits more profitably than would the MIFI itself since it has larger, more profitable investment opportunities and higher margins due to its aggregate capital. This allows the commercial bank to serve a downstream market without having to manage the transaction costs of multiple depositors. The risk is thereby absorbed between the two entities, allowing for more profitability. In this way, the provision of capital not only benefits the MFIs through increased stability and profitability, but also provides commercial banks with alternatives for growing their market reach.⁷

⁶ Pride Africa, Banking on Africa - Commercial Bank Linkages with Microfinance Institutions, ITDG PUBLISHING (ALTERNATIVE FINANCE: MICROFINANCE ARTICLE LIBRARY) (2002), <http://www.alternative-finance.org.uk/cgi-bin/summary.pl?id=148>.

⁷ Pride Africa, Banking on Africa - Commercial Bank Linkages with Microfinance Institutions, ITDG PUBLISHING (ALTERNATIVE FINANCE: MICROFINANCE ARTICLE LIBRARY) (2002), <http://www.alternative-finance.org.uk/cgi-bin/summary.pl?id=148>.

Social

The world's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is an insightful case study of how the public and private sector, along with NGO's, can come together to help distribute vaccines around the globe. Given the West's size, resources, and connection to big pharma, it makes sense that we see higher vaccination rates in places like the US, Canada, and Western Europe. Even now, we are seeing people in these countries opting into their third dose; meanwhile 21 countries in Africa have fully vaccinated less than 10% of their populations.⁸ Connor Sovoy of the Center for Strategic and International Studies argues that the significant disparity in vaccination rates between high-income and low--income nations will grow more acute before it diminishes. Fortunately, the solution may lie in collaboration.⁹ Supplying, distributing, and administering Covid-19 vaccines through the use of public-private partnerships (PPPs) that focus on the production, supply, and distribution of vaccines alongside public-led targeted outreach to unvaccinated populations could help bridge that gap. Transporting supplies of vaccines from the US and other Western nations requires the use of multinational freight forwarders such as FedEx, DHL, and UPS. Even more importantly is the effort required to ensure the vaccine is actually distributed safely and securely from point A to B. Sovoy suggests that tapping into existing private-sector distribution networks to assist in the storing and administering of vaccines will be critical if we're to achieve any progress on SDG 3 and COVID eradication.¹⁰

⁸ Bhatia, Gurman, et al. "Latest Updates: COVID-19 Vaccination Charts, Maps and Eligibility by Country." *Reuters*, 25 Mar. 2021, <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/vaccination-rollout-and-access/>.

⁹ Sovoy, Connor. "Beyond COVAX: The Importance of Public-Private Partnerships for Covid-19 Vaccine Delivery to Developing Countries | Center for Strategic and International Studies." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* , 13 Sept. 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/beyond-covax-importance-public-private-partnerships-covid-19-vaccine-delivery-developing>.

¹⁰ Sovoy, Connor. "Beyond COVAX: The Importance of Public-Private Partnerships for Covid-19 Vaccine Delivery to Developing Countries | Center for Strategic and International Studies." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* , 13 Sept. 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/beyond-covax-importance-public-private-partnerships-covid-19-vaccine-delivery-developing>.

Environmental

As defined by the Center for Sustainable Enterprise, blended finance is the use of catalytic capital from public or philanthropic sources to increase private sector investment in sustainable development.¹¹ It's often used when investors can't justify the risk associated with the investment or are interested in leveraging private capital into the deal. When it comes to environmentally focused PPP's, few eclipse the success of partnerships like the Green for Growth fund. The GGF provides an example of a tiered financial mechanism leveraging public and private funds to support energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. The GGF, a European public-private partnership aimed at achieving a 20% reduction in energy consumption and/or a 20% reduction in CO2 emissions in target countries in line with the Europe-2020 initiative.¹² The fund aims to traverse knowledge gaps and act as a local market enabler by providing direct financing loans to non-financial institutions, as well as refinancing of partner financial institutions by establishing credit lines for on-lending. GGF's organizational structure comprises of international donors and financial institutions and private investors, allowing for a tiered risk-sharing structure to support low-risk financing for private investors.

Charting a New Path Forward

To achieve the sort of impact we're after, by 2030, we need a serious effort from stakeholders in every corner of the world. However, the current prioritization of climate change, or lack thereof, by our political system is extremely apparent.¹³ A lack of education and

¹¹ "Lift Challenge." *Center for Sustainable Enterprise*, <https://cse.unc.edu/liftchallenge/index.php/resources/#>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2022.

¹² "Lift Challenge." *Center for Sustainable Enterprise*, <https://cse.unc.edu/liftchallenge/index.php/resources/#>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2022.

¹³ Huggins, Anna. "The Paris Agreement's Article 15 Mechanism: An Incomplete Compliance Strategy." *Debating Climate Law*, Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 99–110, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781108879064.009>.

collaboration at the highest level has led to the misalignment of policy goals and the mechanisms by which choose to achieve them.¹⁴ In addition to addressing our current climate vulnerabilities, we also need to be thinking in terms of building resiliency for the years to come. As the climate becomes more unpredictable, we'll need to ensure our basic systems are prepared to handle the onslaught of effects brought forth by rising sea levels and warming temperatures. Shifting from a reactive approach to a proactive approach when it comes to policymaking, and adopting innovative, systems-based solutions is at the core of a successful solution. Satheesh Sundararajan of the World Bank contends that deep uncertainty regarding long-term climate risks reinforces the need for a paradigm shift in how PPPs incorporate long-term resilience in infrastructure investments.¹⁵ To harness the true potential of SDG 17 and provide our world with the best chance to fight climate change, we need to embrace the shift and be prepared to support it both publicly and commercially.

Re-aligning Policy

To say that the developing world isn't trying to catch up with the West in terms of sustainable development would be to severely discredit the work done by state governments in building national adaptation plans and securing protection for natural resources. In fact, by now, most countries around the world have recognized the importance of developing nation-wide solutions to tackle climate change.¹⁶ Unfortunately, a major obstacle to realizing the impact of climate policy is the extent to which the political frameworks outside a traditional climate agenda

¹⁴ Gross, Samantha. "Republicans in Congress Are out of Step with the American Public on Climate." *Brookings*, Brookings, 10 May 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/planetpolicy/2021/05/10/republicans-in-congress-are-out-of-step-with-the-american-public-on-climate/>.

¹⁵ Sundararajan, Satheesh. "Climate Risks and Resilience in Infrastructure PPPs: Issues to Be Considered." *PPIAF*, World Bank Group, 2016.

¹⁶ "Unprecedented Impacts of Climate Change Disproportionately Burdening Developing Countries, Delegate Stresses, as Second Committee Concludes General Debate | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases." *Welcome to the United Nations*, 8 Oct. 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/gaef3516.doc.htm>.

are not aligned with sustainable development objectives. For example, a policy that reflects local climate vulnerabilities, and/or addresses adaptation and resilience strategies for a specific sector should also be reflected in a country's PPP policy. Integration of such policies requires political will, strengthening institutional arrangements and applying appropriate economic tools.

Aligning the goals we set, the mechanisms to achieve them, and the incentives behind the scenes is a critical first step. After all, climate change and development are fundamentally interconnected with one another. Without significant action to address the climate crisis and begin the transition to more resilient pathways, any gains that come about through sustainable development will be erased.¹⁷ Solutions are only solutions if we devote the time, energy, and resources needed to maintain them. For that reason, it's important to ensure that the transition to greener pastures is inclusive to both the developed and developing world. Alignment encompasses supporting a just and comprehensive shift globally and shoring up the health of critical systems to realize the full economic, social, and environmental benefit.

Based on the recent IPCC report, it's critical that our response to this climate crisis is swift and ambitious.¹⁸ As argued by the OECD, development co-operation should help developing countries to extricate themselves from dependence on fossil fuels by focusing on overcoming financing, policy, and capacity gaps that constrain developing countries from making use of existing solutions to achieve better development.¹⁹ The technology to start developing nations on the right path forward already exists. The inaccessibility has fostered a dependence on high-polluting energy solutions in the developing world; financial and repetitional assistance of western nations can facilitate breaking that dependence.

¹⁷ Sundararajan, Sathesh. "Climate Risks and Resilience in Infrastructure PPPs: Issues to Be Considered." *PPIAF*, World Bank Group, 2016.

¹⁸ "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability | Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability." *IPCC — Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, United Nations, 2022, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>.

¹⁹ "Aligning Policies for a Low-Carbon Economy - OECD." *Home Page - OECD*, <https://www.oecd.org/knowledge-sharing-alliance/aligningpoliciesforalow-carboneconomy.htm>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2022.

Adopting a Systems-based Approach

A rather unique phenomenon that has begun to take shape in the private sector is the development of high multiplier partnerships. These partnerships prioritize impact on the same plane as competitive business considerations and create innovative strategies to accelerate impact. Satheesh Sundararajan of the World Bank Group argues that it's time we start considering PPPs within a "multi-sector resilience plan," starting at the regional or country level, and then identifying and specifying project-level resilience requirements.²⁰ Examples include forming active partnerships with the insurance industry and engineering firms on wider infrastructure development, and the use of climate screening tools and risk-forecasting tools for project appraisal. Sundararajan furthers that a degree of flexibility should be built into PPP processes, starting with the project selection, preparation, and procurement, through to implementation and contract management. This active approach also requires strategic partnerships with stakeholders representing multiple disciplines, where openness, transparency and cost effectiveness would underpin the partnerships with solutions focusing on technical, financial, legal, and institutional capacities.

Indeed, from planning and selection to pricing and evaluation, achieving value for money depends on the ability of the public and private actors to identify, allocate and price risks appropriately. In particular, adequate risk transfer from the government to the private sector is a key requirement if PPPs are to deliver high-quality and cost-effective services to consumers and the government.²¹ By ensuring a transparent and credible evaluation of risks, a comprehensive fiscal accounting and reporting standard would also allow for comprehensive disclosure of all

²⁰ Wang, Nannan. "PPP as a Tool for Sustainable Development." *Wiley Library*, 2017.

²¹ "Public-Private Partnerships (International Monetary Fund) | Public Private Partnership." *PUBLIC-PRIVATE-PARTNERSHIP LEGAL RESOURCE CENTER*, 25 Oct. 2021, <https://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/library/public-private-partnerships-international-monetary-fund>.

risks, including contingent fiscal liabilities, and thereby enhance the effectiveness of the overall process of selecting and implementing projects.

Focusing on Resiliency Post-Pandemic

As companies move forward, we are seeing those which prioritize resiliency and sustainability leading the charge out of this recession.²² Share prices for companies that have the highest E.S.G. ratings are significantly outperforming others and have recovered more quickly since the onset of COVID.²³ By developing internal systems with longer life cycles and more localized or geographically diversified supply chains, companies can begin to build resiliency. The mantra of “make where you sell” is putting new emphasis on automated manufacturing and localized supply chains. Companies are taking this unique opportunity to set themselves apart as a brand. Consumers have a renewed interest in protecting humanity against existential risks such as climate change, and therefore seek out corporate leadership committed to tackling those problems.²⁴ Now more than ever, companies have the ability to anchor their business around environmental responsibility and set themselves apart from the competition.²⁵ More stakeholder-oriented firms appear to be faring far better in the short term and making choices that will set them up for success in the future.²⁶ This ought to send a message that the trend toward

²² Paun, Ashim. “ESG Stocks Did Best in COVID-19 Slump | Insights | HSBC.” *Global Banking and Markets | HSBC*, 27 Mar. 2020, <https://www.gbm.hsbc.com/insights/global-research/esg-stocks-did-best-in-corona-slump>.

²³ Paun, Ashim. “ESG Stocks Did Best in COVID-19 Slump | Insights | HSBC.” *Global Banking and Markets | HSBC*, 27 Mar. 2020, <https://www.gbm.hsbc.com/insights/global-research/esg-stocks-did-best-in-corona-slump>.

²⁴ “How to Pursue Sustainability During COVID-19: A Tactical Guide for Brand Professionals - Sustainable Brands.” *Sustainable Brands*, 3 Apr. 2020, <https://sustainablebrands.com/read/walking-the-talk/how-to-pursue-sustainability-during-covid-19-a-tactical-guide-for-brand-professionals>.

²⁵ “How to Pursue Sustainability During COVID-19: A Tactical Guide for Brand Professionals - Sustainable Brands.” *Sustainable Brands*, 3 Apr. 2020, <https://sustainablebrands.com/read/walking-the-talk/how-to-pursue-sustainability-during-covid-19-a-tactical-guide-for-brand-professionals>.

²⁶ Paun, Ashim. “ESG Stocks Did Best in COVID-19 Slump | Insights | HSBC.” *Global Banking and Markets | HSBC*, 27 Mar. 2020, <https://www.gbm.hsbc.com/insights/global-research/esg-stocks-did-best-in-corona-slump>.

stakeholder capitalism, in which companies create value for all stakeholders, is gaining serious momentum.

Policy makers could benefit from proactively acting to identify potential co-benefits during the policy design stage and shaping implementation criteria to maximize total impact. Recovery packages that are focused purely on consumption, rather than investment that delivers sustainable returns, could exacerbate intergenerational inequalities.²⁷ There has been increased focus on green stimulus packages that spur job growth and create a more resilient system. The best example of this collaboration comes from International Development Association who teamed up with the World Bank to raise and distribute over \$93B in recovery relief. A substantial portion of the funds have gone to tackling climate change in a post-pandemic world, with a focus on helping countries to adapt to rising climate impacts and preserve biodiversity.²⁸ IDA will also deepen support to countries to better prepare for future crises, including pandemics, financial shocks, and natural hazards. While IDA20 will support countries globally, resources are increasingly benefiting Africa, which will receive about 70 percent of the funding. With this strong package, IDA will be able to scale up its support in the pandemic and address health challenges, helping 400 million people receive essential health and nutrition resources.²⁹

²⁷ Hunter, Matthew. "Over 150 Global Corporations Urge World Leaders for Net-Zero Recovery from COVID-19 | UN Global Compact." *Homepage | UN Global Compact*, UN Global Media Compact, <https://unglobalcompact.org/news/4535-05-18-2020>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.

²⁸ Group, World Bank. "Global Community Steps Up with \$93 Billion Support Package to Boost Resilient Recovery in World's Poorest Countries." *World Bank*, World Bank Group, 15 Dec. 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/12/15/global-community-steps-up-with-93-billion-support-package-to-boost-resilient-recovery-in-world-s-poorrest-countries>.

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Conclusion

Despite a recent rise in the private sector's participation in infrastructure finance in developing countries, especially in electricity and telecommunications, private finance continues to provide just a small portion of aggregate infrastructure investment in the developing world. Despite lofty pledges and commitments to curb emissions and promote sustainability, the international community, and more specifically the West, continues to prioritize their own interests over the needs of the developing world. Even with over \$100B pledged annually to helping developing nations, we have to wonder how much is actually going toward adaptation and climate compliance. For as much progress as we've made so far, the fight is nowhere near over. We can't afford to get complacent now, with many of our biggest challenges arguably still ahead of us. While COVID-19 may have slowed us down, it's critical that the world not lose sight of its overarching goals. Collaboration at the international, national, and local represents our best chance at being successful. From sharing knowledge and technology to political will and capital, the path forward could be championed by a collaborative effort from the international community. At the end of the day, concentrating on SDG 17 will help build a more resilient tomorrow.

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