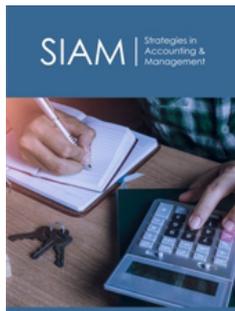


# Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development How Easy are They in Practice?

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## Abstract

The seventeenth Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations, Partnerships for the Goals, aims to foster the wider recognition that combining the efforts and reconciling the interests of different stakeholders in creative and constructive ways will revitalize and give fresh impetus to the global partnership for sustainable development and strengthen the means of implementing it. This short review analyses the concept of multi-stakeholder partnerships, the importance of the latter, as well as its limitations. The article gives examples as to how projects with similar stakeholder contexts can be a success or failure depending on how strong the different partnerships are.

**Keywords:** Stakeholders; Multi-stakeholder partnerships; SDG 17

## Introduction

The seventeenth Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations, Partnerships for the Goals, aims to foster the wider recognition that combining the efforts and reconciling the interests of different stakeholders in creative and constructive ways will revitalize and give fresh impetus to the global partnership for sustainable development and strengthen the means of implementing it. The successful grafting of the objectives of this 17th Goal onto practical daily groundwork will contribute to the successful execution and achievement of the other sixteen goals. While each of the first sixteen SDGs works towards a particular area of action, SDG 17 “Partnership for the Goals” serves as a convener and a facilitator for all the other goals. This last goal opens the discussion of how the actors in different partnership relationships should best work together to achieve specific targets. For the Millennium Goals (2000-2015) Goal 8 was the equivalent of SDG 17, however the latter is more universal than the former and applicable to all areas of society including the state, the market and civil society.

The new SDGs came into force in 2015. There are 17 goals and 169 targets, and they comprise an integral part of the document entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” [1]. The seventeen SDGs were developed with goals at the country level, therefore, the strategies developed vary according to the priorities of each State. Like the MDGs, the SDGs were a statement of aspirations, a voluntary agreement beyond a binding treaty. Among the issues addressed by the SDGs are the role of the international economy, population and human resources, food security, species ecosystems, energy, industry, and proposed legal principles for environmental protection [2]. More specifically these issues are addressed practically in SDG17 targets 17.6 and 17.7, that relate to multi-stakeholder partnerships.

“17.6. Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries

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17.17. Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships”

The type of development promoted by the SDGs is described as “transformational development”, which requires the participation of all, including the State, the market and civil society. Prior studies carried out by the author have demonstrated that multi-stakeholder partnerships at the project level often require patience, constructive dialogue, and an openness to recognize the legitimate concerns and needs of other stakeholders. To date the experience of applying SDG17 at a project perspective presents a mixed picture, as does the experience of developing and applying lessons learned from one project to another, perhaps rather different in nature. However, sharing and building upon experiences and identifying and applying the elements generating successes remains essential to progress and develop effective strategies towards the achievement of the SDGs.

According to the SDG Partnership Guidebook 2020, sustainable development can only happen if business, civil society, and governments work together. Currently the resources of our planet are limited, whether they are economic, technological, natural, or anthropogenic, which requires their optimization for the benefit of all. Therefore, the development of alliances is essential to ensure the alignment of interests between the providers of these resources in order to promote maximum impact. These partnerships should include the widest spectrum of stakeholders and potentially include NGOs, and universities, among others.

However, although the context of multi-stakeholder associations can look very good on paper, the questions linked to the main challenges are how to promote collaboration between stakeholders as varied as governments, scientists, and the NGOs? How will it be possible to ensure that they work together systematically to achieve the shared vision of the SDGs? How will this new way of working become a new normal? The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of promoting global collaboration and effective partnerships between all types of different sectors and stakeholders. Multi-stakeholder collaborations are therefore essential mechanisms to tackle the problems and challenges arising from the coronavirus context as societies begin to recover and to construct more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive models [3]. We might also argue that the success and effectiveness of SDG 17 is context dependent. The author has analyzed SDG 17 and

the effectiveness of multistakeholder partnerships using marine environmental conservation as the basis for her empirical work. Two case studies were analyzed; the first dealt with a marine turtle bycatch project based in Valencia [4] and the second a dolphin conservation project based in Normandy, France [5]. The stakeholder analyses that were carried out demonstrated very different results. In the first project there was alignment among the different stakeholder perspectives, which enabled their collaboration with respect to the project goal. In the second case study however, the mission of the project which is the conservation of the bottlenose dolphin population is affected by various issues including the non-collaboration of NGOs that strive towards the same conservation goal and the building of marine wind farms. The latter lead to conflicts of interest and thereby hinder the project’s development.

At this point in the discussion, we can perhaps question the effectiveness of SDG 17 in practice and present a few of its limitation:

A. At present multi-stakeholder partnerships need to be widened in their scope so as to include more varied stakeholders such as for example NGOs and universities

B. There exists a need for a greater degree of transparency and a willingness to share information more openly to ensure greater effectiveness toward the achievement of the different SDGs.

C. Finally, there is a clear need for more effective metrics to measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of SDG 17. The COVID-19 pandemic has not helped in this respect, but in general more effective KPIs are necessary.

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