



# PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Until the late 1960s, the state has been the major sector responsible for promoting economic and social development. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), which provides momentum for

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a renewed UN engagement with the private sector. How have governments across the world, if at all, incorporated the private sector in their development strategies and how inclusive has this process been? This paper will attempt to answer these key questions by examining the experiences and lessons learned from across the UN system including some aspects of the cooperation of the UN system with the private sector. In doing so, the paper will provide a summary of the key recommendations from the recent UN Joint Inspection Unit report entitled **United Nations – Private sector partnership in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. Central to discussions was the need to create an enabling environment encouraging the contribution of the private sector to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and stimulate its interest to engage in partnership with the UN system organisations as well as to improve efficiency in the use of resources. More importantly the paper will outline the challenges that can be observed and what opportunities for improving the UN system are available. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of strategic and policy implications of these findings and provides recommendations.

**Keywords:** Public-Private-Partnerships; Sustainable Development; Sustainable Development Goals; Agenda 2030; United Nations; Strategy and Policy

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## INTRODUCTION

Until the late 1960s, the state was the major sector responsible for promoting economic and social development in most developed and emerging countries. In 2015, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup> and its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). This agenda has provided the momentum for a renewed UN engagement with the private sector. Paragraph 67 recognises the role of the private sector in development and calls on their contribution:

*Private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth and job creation ..... We call upon all businesses to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges. We will foster a dynamic and well-functioning business sector, while protecting labour rights and environmental and health standards [...]*".

As part of its mandate, and the only independent external oversight body entrusted by the UN General Assembly to conduct system-wide evaluations, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) organised a major conference at the Palais de Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

(10-13 April 2018). This was held jointly with the World Association for Sustainable Development (WASD) and used to present its report from the recent Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) review entitled *United Nations - Private sector partnership in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (JIU/REP/2017/8). However, this is not the first time that JIU has examined some aspects of the cooperation of the UN system with the private sector. In the past, JIU looked into the basic elements necessary for the undertaking of successful partnerships and for protecting the UN image, reputation and values<sup>2</sup>. Special attention was paid to self-protecting measures to mitigate reputational risk and misuse of the UN symbols.

The four-day conference, entitled *Public private partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, aimed to explore ways and means of improving the contribution of the private sector to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and stimulate its interest of engaging in partnership with the UN system organisations, as well as improving efficiency in the use of resources. The conference brought together the experiences and lessons learned from across the world, focusing on initiatives and case studies in the vital role of PPPs in the implementation of Agenda 2030.

The IIU report that is summarised in this paper is more comprehensive in scope and more ambitious in intention than previous reports. It proposes a coherent and bold set of recommendations that encompass all the rules, regulations and practices that affect the way the UN works with the private sector. Despite the inherent differences between the norms that operate in distinct organisations, so diverse in mandates and governance configurations, all recommendations were inspired by reflections and ideas coming from experienced practitioners; they aspire to be a common denominator at the highest possible level.

## PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Central to discussions in this paper is the need, as recognised in SDG17, for partnerships to: *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development* (UN, 2015). This implies more qualitative and quantitative engagement of the private sector in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, an enhanced impact of UN values and objectives, in particular related to sustainability, on the business models of private companies, advances in the engagement of businesses from corporate social responsibility to direct contributions to the realisation of the

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<sup>2</sup>*United Nations corporate partnerships: The role and functioning of the Global Compact* (JIU/REP/2010/9); *Corporate sponsoring in the United Nations system: Principles and Guidelines* (JIU/NOTE/2009/1), and *Private sector involvement and cooperation with the United Nations system* (JIU/REP/1999/6).

SDGs, or expansion of for-profit actors' activities in areas that were usually addressed by public entities.

According to the UN, SDG 17 aims to create an umbrella under which various forms of collaboration can occur. Partnerships between governments and the private sector can happen on a bilateral basis, but they can also happen as part of a larger set-up in a multi-stakeholder, multi-level (*local, national, supra-national*) and multi-dimensional framework, involving different relevant actors with their respective roles in fostering sustainable development (SD) in a country.

The concept of partnerships as a vehicle for the UN facilitating actions in achieving SDGs has evolved over decades. Since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the launching of the Global Compact, partnerships with the private sector, as means of implementation of UN objectives, has been increasingly recognised by Member States. The multiple commitments taken through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for SD<sup>3</sup> include the Global Partnership, SDG 17, as an essential instrument to capture expertise and knowledge, and to mobilise financial as well as in-kind resources from multiple sources, including the private sector.

Partnerships between public, private and NGO sectors, have been the subject of numerous UN sessions and resolutions and the UN system agenda, as confirmed by the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) of the High-level Committee on Management of the UN System (HLCM) strategic plan for 2017-2020; this includes six priorities, one of which is to *Increase the capacity of the UN System to work effectively with multi-stakeholder and multi-sectorial partnerships*.

## **SO WHAT DO THE TERMS 'PARTNERSHIP' AND 'PRIVATE SECTOR' REALLY MEAN?**

Over recent years, PPPs have been suggested as a way of providing public infrastructure and services by many international and national bodies (e.g. European Commission; OECD; World Bank; ADB/IADB; UN). The UN encourages the use of PPPs, acknowledging the importance of collaboration among a multitude of stakeholders, and the complexity and far reach of their goals; however, PPPs should not be accepted uncritically. In this paper, the concepts of 'partnership' and 'business sector' are defined according to the *Guidelines on a principle-based approach to the cooperation between the UN & the business sector*<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>United Nations, General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 25 September 2015, A/RES/70/1.

<sup>4</sup>See para. 8a in "Guidelines on a principle-based approach to the Cooperation between the United Nations and the business sector" at <https://business.un.org/en/documents/5292>.

**Partnership:** “voluntary and collaborative agreement or arrangement between one or more parts of the UN system and the business sector, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and to coordinate their respective responsibilities, resources, and benefits. Neither party has power to bind the other party to any specific course of action without that party’s consent, or to contract in the name of the other party, or to create a liability against the other in any manner whatsoever”;

**Business sector** (private sector): “either for-profit, and commercial enterprises or businesses; or business associations and coalitions (cross-industry, multi-issue groups; cross industry, issue-specific initiatives; industry-focused initiative); including but not limited to corporate philanthropic foundations”.

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## METHODOLOGY

The JIU review used different mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection and analysis. The evaluation begins with the preparation of the review of preliminary objectives to be further updated with the output of brainstorming sessions with representatives of participating organisations, followed by a desk review of any documentation available.

Moreover, an additional data collection phase, including questionnaires and interviews with selected participating organisations and private sector firms, was undertaken.

- **Questionnaires** were developed to seek the formal views of public sector organisations, as well as to collect data and information on their respective involvement in partnerships with the private sector. An online survey of key actors (*based on identified organisations with an interest in partnership with the private sector and civil society*) was used to facilitate data collection, compilation and quick data analysis.
- **Interview** guidelines were also be prepared, submitted to concerned organisations and analysed before missions were undertaken. The following **evaluation criteria and questions** have been identified.

### *Relevance*

- To what degree is the engagement in private sector partnerships relevant and responsive (fit for purpose) to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? Are organisations ‘fit-for-Partnerships’?
- Do participating organisations use the *Guidelines for the Cooperation between the Governments and the business sector* in a consistent manner? Are these guidelines still considered relevant, comprehensive and up-to-date?

### *Effectiveness*

- What are the enabling factors for the successful and effective engagement in partnerships with the private sector? What are the main obstacles in this regard?
- Are participating organisations effective partners from the perspective of the private sector?
- Do government provide incentives and a relevant policy-frame to favour partnerships with the private sector?
- How are media involvement and information campaigns conducted to promote partnership with private sector firms?

### *Efficiency*

- What resources/structures are allocated by organisations to deal with the private sector, including partnerships with the private sector?
- How is the partnership's efficiency determined?
- How is the partnership with the private sector being implemented and monitored at a regional level to gain efficiency and effective proximity?

### *Coherence*

- Are any frameworks for cooperation with the private sector shared by all organisations in the country, and are they coherent with the values upheld by the system?
- What measures have been introduced to ensure a coherent application of the *Guidelines on a Principle-based Approach* to the cooperation between the government and the business sector?
- Is the process of selection of private sector partners consistently applied across organisations? Is there a system-wide central information hub to facilitate partner selection?
- How is partnership information, including lessons learned and best practices, shared across the system?

### *Impact*

- What is the sustainability and impact of major partnership initiatives for development?
- What are the main mechanisms for the monitoring and reporting of partnership progress?
- How are government values and principles internalised and applied by private sector partners?

- What is the impact of the private sector contribution on major global partnership initiatives? What are the main areas/modalities for cooperation with the private sector (i.e. capacity development, finance, knowledge sharing, policy dialogue, philanthropy, etc.)?

The data collection phase is followed by an in-depth analysis of data.

### **PUBLIC-PRIVATE-PARTNERSHIPS (PPPs)**

The existing literature on the concepts and history of PPPs locate its relevance for budgeting and development planning in developed as well as developing countries. Such literature often draws out the advantages and disadvantages of these concepts with a strong focus on the financial implications to the shareholders (McQuaid, 2016, 2010). Important PPP issues in the literature include innovation, efficiency, budget enlargement, governance, transparency and a growing emphasis on services rather than infrastructure. However, there appears to be less emphasis on the effects of these concepts and gaps between theory and practice of PPPs.

Many models of PPPs have emerged, depending on the object of the partnerships. These types of alliances can be used to generate value (Austin, 2000), build infrastructure (Rocca, 2017), or reduce the effects of natural disasters (Auzzir et al., 2014). The most important models of infrastructure and service PPPs are Design-Build-Finance (DBF), Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT), Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Maintenance (DBFOM) and many others (Zhao, 2011). The Triple Helix concept of university-industry-government relationships is another form of PPP that was introduced by Etzkowitz (1993), and refined later by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1995). The Triple Helix forms the basis of a triadic relationship between university-industry-government and for the Knowledge Society. The Triple Helix advocated in the early 1990s is a 'derived' form of PPP. It has been considered as a neo-institutional perspective that promotes a growing prominence of universities, research centres, and other R&D institutions to favour and develop public (government) and private (business) partnerships. As an evolutionary form, the Triple Helix aims to make effective and quick benefits of innovation, R&D and knowledge for society, by gathering in an efficient and relevant partnership between university-industry-government.

The definitions of PPPs, whether formulated by researchers or practitioners, vary with regard to the scope of what can be considered as a PPP, its content, and applicable services (Gardiner et al., 2016; Grimseu and Lewis, 2016). The term PPP is often defined broadly and ambiguously as a joint venture between a government and a private entity to undertake a traditional public activity together in capital intensive infrastructure development projects (Savas, 2000). Today, PPPs are becoming central to infrastructural development projects all over the world. *Efficiency, performance*

*standard and value for money (VfM)* are the three strategic objectives of PPPs in infrastructural development projects (Akintoye et al., 2003; Zhang, 2006). Savas (1982) reinforces the reduction of the role of the state in the provision of public services through private companies, which results in greater public efficiency.

The World Bank defines PPPs as a *long-term contract between a private party and a government agency, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility* (World Bank, 2014, p.17).

The literature review also helped draw lessons learned from various reports published by other international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>5</sup>; World Bank Group<sup>6</sup>; Global Environmental Facility (GEF)<sup>7</sup>; European Union (EU)<sup>8</sup>; UN System Staff College (UNSSC)<sup>9</sup>; UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)<sup>10</sup>; UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)<sup>11, 12</sup>; CEB and the UN-Business Action Hub website<sup>12</sup>.

Regarding the links between PPPs and SD, many scholars have observed that there are many concepts associated with SD. Making the world a better place is an assumption of SD; for this research, however, Sachs's (2004, pp.15-16) definition of SD, which outlines five pillars necessary for SD, is more relevant. Sachs (2004) warns that without the active participation of individuals in the five pillars, SD is compromised. The factors that underpin SD are the avoidance of wasting education for conscious and ecological consumption, promoting population growth in a balanced manner, avoiding conflicts and violence, reducing poverty and miserable conditions, and environmental degradation and precarious education.

Sachs's (2004) **Five Pillars** for SD include: **Social**: fundamental for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons, since social differences exist in a threatening way in many problematic places on the planet, including in Africa; **Environmental**: life sustaining system as a provider of resources and as a 'container' for the disposal of waste (often unnecessarily produced); **Territorial**: related to the spatial distribution of

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<sup>5</sup>See <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/4316031e.pdf?expires=1477573353&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=624F2B7818054B0144BDECB3E01E98B9>.

<sup>6</sup>See <https://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/library/public-private-partnerships-reference-guide-version-20>.

<sup>7</sup>See <https://www.thegef.org/topics/private-sector>.

<sup>8</sup>See COM (2014) 263.

<sup>9</sup>Recently, UNSSC has opened the Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development in Bonn to equip the United Nations and its partners with a vehicle to deliver on the learning agenda pertaining to Agenda 2030.

<sup>10</sup><https://www.unitar.org/partnerships/home>

<sup>11</sup>See Ann Zammit (2003) Development at Risk: Rethinking UN-Business Partnerships, UNRISD.

<sup>12</sup>See Moira V. Faul (2016) Multi-sectoral Partnerships and Power, UNRISD.

<sup>12</sup>Global hand is a matching service: a non-profit brokerage facilitating public/private partnership designed to bring together people from all parts of the spectrum.

resources, populations and activities; **Economic**: economic viability is indispensable for a country; and **Politics**: democracy is a fundamental value and a necessary tool to make things happen.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The JIU report is based on the widely shared conviction that the 2030 Agenda for SD provides unique momentum for a renewed engagement of the private sector in the service of the SDGs. Such a need is not only dictated by the authority of the 2030 Agenda: it is also an expression of the changes in the conditions for global collective action and the rise of non-governmental emerging powers, whose dynamics surpass the pace of multilateral intergovernmental processes. While acknowledging and reviewing the existing safeguards in due diligence and risk management, JIU report places emphasis on making the UN system more effective in its cooperation with the private sector to support the 2030 Agenda and to implement sustainability in their business models.

### The Imperative for Change

The JIU report intends to find ways of improving the existing arrangements of cooperation with the private sector to reflect the new context, namely the holistic, integrative and universal approach of the 2030 Agenda. The changes needed are not easy to carry out. However, **the UN system could not “transform our world” unless it transforms itself**. High-level political commitments contained in the 2030 Agenda still represent an aspiration: they do not describe the existing reality. They rather imply a process that would need to be supported by concrete and effective changes in the current normative, administrative and operational arrangements.

It is against this reality that, on the one hand, the JIU report suggests possible lines of action by the UN system to indicate its own readiness to adapt itself to the imperatives of its current responsibilities, and, on the other hand, to convey this vision and these goals to the private sector and to motivate the latter to internalise and put them into practice.

An overwhelming majority of UN organisations have adapted, or are in the process of adapting, their respective strategies and/or policies to reflect the 2030 Agenda. The review ascertains the existence of advanced and comprehensive practices of dealing with the private sector. The review does not attempt to focus on individual UN system organisations. A valuable collection of mature frameworks and formal agreements for partnerships with the private sector is available. What is needed is more system-wide coordination and efficiency.

## A Focus on System-wide Action

Indeed, one could witness, once again, a new wave of creating silos, based on the same good intentions for the future, but following the same individualistic ways as in the past. While many organisations consider the 2030 Agenda as an overall framework to guide their work, most of them indicated that there was a need for a coherent and coordinated approach to the engagement with the private sector, from a UN system-wide perspective.

The 2030 Agenda also calls imperatively on all stakeholders to “enhance policy coherence for sustainable development”. While contributing to the global goals, the UN should provide such policy coherence in its own courtyard, namely at the system-wide level. This explains the main emphasis placed by the JIU report on recommendations for joint action.

The JIU report looks into the supporting framework provided by the UN system to facilitate the contribution of the private sector to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda under several aspects: legal, financial, administrative, operational, and motivational. The report favours system-wide solutions that will fuel permanent and reliable forms of inter-agency interaction, resource pooling, and knowledge sharing. The recommendations are intended to be realistic and do not necessarily require additional financial resources. Instead, they call for additional willingness to fight individual resistance to change and institutional inertia.

The JIU report was also inspired by the increased need for a gradual shift in emphasis from *ad hoc*, short-term partnerships, focused primarily on resource mobilisation, towards multiple, long-term, more strategic and stable collaboration with the private sector. While aware of the pre-existence of counter-arguments, the report also took the opportunity to recommend a system-wide coordination on innovation partnerships. The implementation of this recommendation may prove that the system can indeed “deliver as one”, at least on a newly emerged priority and in an environment conducive to change inspired by the 2030 Agenda.

## Converging Wills

The author of the JIU report<sup>13</sup>; was pleased to note that the spirit of some recommendations made had also been underpinned by the Secretary-General’s report *Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda - Ensuring a Better Future for All*<sup>14</sup>. As several recommendations are addressed

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<sup>14</sup>United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General: *Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda - Ensuring a better Future for All*; June 2017. A/72/124 - E/2018/3.

directly to the Secretary-General, the Inspector hoped that the potential synergies and complementarity would be valued in implementation.

Although the global engagement of the private sector regarding the SDGs is still at an early stage and much remains to be done, the Inspector found that there is progress, at least at the level of perception and awareness among diverse players in the private sector itself. Some companies have already included sustainability as part of their business models. Small and medium-sized enterprises represent an immense potential owner of support for the SDGs. This category of companies is largely uncharted and non-utilised. While the Global Compact is already a good promoter of private sector energies, the local Global Compact networks wait for new guidance and inputs to facilitate the activation of latent energies.

A majority of the private sector entities, irrespective of their size and specificity, still need information and understanding of the nature and scope of the SDGs, and of the modalities to engage. Certainly, these educational efforts are a major responsibility of the United Nations system, as the orchestrator and facilitator of partnerships at regional, national and global levels.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The analysis of the challenges currently faced by many UN operational staff in charge of partnerships with the private sector, is complemented by a set of 12 formal recommendations clustered in 7 lines of action. They are addressed to either the General Assembly or to the Secretary-General of the UN, to the Executive Heads of all other organisations or to a group of the latter. Some of the recommendations, especially 4 and 5, may be less understandable for the readers who are not very familiar with the internal organisational complexity of the UN Secretariat. Nevertheless, they are reproduced because they represent significant actions to be taken at the working level, in a coherent and synergetic whole. After all, while JIU's report is addressed to its own 28 UN participating organisations, it is also a presentation of its working credentials to the immense multitude of businesses that are invited to respond to the call to work in partnerships for the implementation of the United Nations agenda.

### *Action line I: Revision of the Guidelines*

1. Based on a report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to be submitted during the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly, the General Assembly of the United Nations should consider a review of the “Guidelines on a principle based approach to the cooperation between the United Nations to the private

sector”<sup>15</sup>. This is with a view to reflect the changes needed for the increased contribution expected from the private sector in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and their system-wide implications. The review should take into account an updated common interpretation of the stipulations of the General Assembly Resolution 92 (I) entitled the “Official Seal and Emblem of the United Nations”, shared by the network of legal advisers from all United Nations organisations that are members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. Particular attention should be paid to the scope of the “authorisation by the Secretary-General”, the meaning of “prohibition”, and the definition of “commercial purposes”. This common interpretation will be reflected in the revision of the “Guidelines”. The use of individually conceived and adapted logos for specific activities, projects and campaigns, limited in scope and time, should also be considered in this context; adequate safeguards for their protection should be stipulated in the partnership agreements. All things considered, the revision process should aim at an outcome that remains pragmatic, agile in scope and implementation and, at the same time, rigorous.

*Action line II: Towards a system-wide coordinated operational framework*

- 2. A set of rules and operational guidelines for partnerships with the private sector:** The Secretary-General of the United Nations should propose, after prior consultation with all participating organisations, a set of rules and operational guidelines, designed to match the specific needs of partnerships with private sector entities, allowing more flexibility, simplification of procedures and speed in reaction. The proposals of the Secretary-General should be submitted to the General Assembly, at the latest during its 74<sup>th</sup> session (2019-2020).

The set may include, *inter alia*:

- more flexible financial rules governing the transfer of funds in relation to businesses, in the specific context of partnerships;
- a methodology for the valuation of in-kind contributions;
- allowing space for innovative financial tools to facilitate the co-creation and co-development of projects;
- the introduction of selection criteria related to the promotion and use of sustainable development practices in the rules on procurement, where applicable, and in an adequate form;

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<sup>15</sup><https://business.un.org/en/documents/5292>

- the re-evaluation of the red-lines between partnership and procurement;
- the simplification of the internal operational processes and workflow;
- granting more delegation of authority to lower managerial and operational levels where appropriate, while taking additional measures aimed at building capacity and increasing accountability and transparency;
- an outline of soft system-wide monitoring, assessing, and reporting guidelines for partnership engagement with the private sector.

Such a minimum set of rules and operational guidelines should be considered, having in mind the need to simplify, as opposed to adding layers to, existing processes and workflow. The common frameworks, when feasible, should not necessarily entail joint operational procedures if they cannot reflect the specificity of individual mandates.

- 3. Partnerships' brokering and advice facilitation:** The Secretary-General of the United Nations and the heads of United Nations system organisations, assisted by the United Nations Global Compact, should coordinate and streamline a unique, system-wide package of information about the opportunities for partnerships offered to the private sector by the Sustainable Development Goals, for the benefit of interested organisations. The package should contain the description of the specific needs and exigencies of the United Nations system, an indication of the potential partners, existing good practices, etc., and is to be used by all interested private companies, as one entry point, in a coherent, uniform and comprehensive way. It may be built around a central existing platform or by associating all the existing initiatives in a single platform with multiple entries. The system-wide package is not supposed to preclude or prevent individual organisations from using existing information and communications modalities that are strictly specific to their own mandates.
- 4. Streamlining responsibilities within the United Nations Secretariat:** Within his current reform initiatives, the Secretary-General of the United Nations should review, streamline, clarify and strengthen the division of labour, and the specific lines of responsibility and accountability within various departments of the Secretariat, in particular the mandate of the United Office for Partnerships, to provide advice on, guide and facilitate partnership events and initiatives in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 5. An enhanced role for the Private Sector Focal Points Network:** The heads of United Nations organisations should enhance the role and responsibilities of the Private Sector Focal Points network to share knowledge, promote good practices, and find innovative solutions to problems related to partnerships with the private sector, including entrusting them with specific tasks and agenda items on which to report.

*Action line III: Towards a common vetting system*

6. **A system-wide database:** All heads of the United Nations system organisations, assisted by the United Nations Global Compact, should jointly create a common database on the profile and performance of the businesses involved with, or potentially interested in, partnerships with the United Nations, based on the information inputs voluntarily submitted by the participating organisations. With inputs and feedback coming from, and accessed by, all organisations, the database should serve as a minimal resource in any vetting and due diligence processes, without prejudice to the final decision of each participating organisation. A special chapter of the database should include shadow reports from civil society organisations.
7. **Common standard procedures and safeguards for due diligence:** The Secretary-General of the United Nations, and all the Executive Heads of participating organisations, should identify and agree on a minimum set of common standard procedures and safeguards for an efficient and flexible due diligence procedure, to be applied system-wide in a transparent way by the United Nations operational staff engaged in the initiation and implementation of partnerships with the private sector. The Inspector is aware of the existing advanced due diligence systems that have been developed in organisations, which may not see added value in a common vetting system. However, many other organisations, as well as entities under the authority of the United Nations Secretariat, claimed the need for a common approach. Recommendations 6 and 7 do not propose a ‘common’ system in the sense of ‘centralised’ and ‘compulsory’. It proposes only a common resource for voluntary use by interested organisations, in a more efficient and transparent way than in the current situation.

*Action line IV: Winning the Global Compact’s new battles*

8. **Revised mandate for the Global Compact:** The General Assembly, based on a report by the Secretary-General, should initiate a revision in the current mandate of the Global Compact, which should include, *inter alia*:
  - a clearer role of the Global Compact, at global and national levels, in effectively engaging business to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
  - an enhanced role of Member States in its governance structure;
  - an updated definition of the relationship between the Global Compact Office and the Global Compact Foundation, with an emphasis on the transparency of the Foundation’s fundraising activities;
  - a clear definition of the relationship between the Global Compact Headquarters and the Local Global Compact Networks.

### *Action line V: Enhancing ownership and partnership at regional and country level*

9. The Economic and Social Council should invite the Executive Secretaries of the regional economic commissions, if they have not done so already, to initiate and institutionalise a systematic and regular consultative dialogue with high-level representatives of private sector companies that contribute to, or have expressed interest in, contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
10. The Secretary-General of the United Nations should, in concertation with the Executive Heads of UNAIDS<sup>16</sup>, UNDP<sup>17</sup>, UNESCO<sup>18</sup>, UNFPA<sup>19</sup>, UNHCR<sup>20</sup>, UNICEF<sup>21</sup>, UNIDO<sup>22</sup>, UNOPS<sup>23</sup>, WFP<sup>24</sup> and other Executive Heads of any interested United Nations organisations with a presence in the field, encourage a multi-stakeholder mechanism of consultations and solution-seeking at the country level, steered by the Resident Coordinator, in which businesses can be involved from the beginning in the design of partnerships in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Where such mechanisms initiated by the governments exist, the United Nations country teams should encourage multi-stakeholder participation.

### *Action line VI: towards a system-wide innovation coordination service*

11. **Coordination of innovation partnerships:** The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, and the Executive Heads of interested organisations, should build on existing and on-going efforts and continue to empower the United Nations Innovation Network or other existing United Nations joint innovation initiatives to identify and discuss issues that are relevant for the coordination of the existing innovation initiatives, funds, labs, accelerators and incubators, and their interface with the private sector, with a view to facilitating and stimulating innovation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

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<sup>16</sup>UNAIDS

<sup>17</sup>United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

<sup>18</sup>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

<sup>19</sup>United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

<sup>20</sup>UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

<sup>21</sup>United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

<sup>22</sup>Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

<sup>23</sup>Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

<sup>24</sup>World Food Programme (WFP)

### *Action line VII: A platform for SMEs*

**12. Support for SMEs' engagement:** The Secretary-General should request that the United Nations System Staff College Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development, in cooperation with the International Trade Centre, host a system-wide online platform to facilitate communication with micro-, small- and medium sized enterprises on the 2030 Agenda, interaction among enterprises, information on access to funding, promotion of good practices, and opportunities to engage in United Nations operations.

In addition to the 12 formal recommendations described above, the JIU report also included some soft actions **aimed at building a United Nations-private sector *esprit de corps* around SDGs, based on engagement, trust and accountability.** These recommendations include:

- a. that the Executive Heads of the United Nations organisations, where appropriate, encourage human resources exchanges with businesses (internships, joint training programmes, sabbatical years, etc.) on a reciprocal or unilateral basis, in order to bridge the cultural and operational differences and incompatibilities, as well as create a pool of experts capable of understanding and guiding partnerships both ways;
- b. that the Executive Heads of the United Nations organisations consider using a system of symbolic Sustainable Development Goals related awards, when appropriate, individually or system-wide, aimed at publicly recognising and rewarding companies that introduced the sustainability elements as contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in their business-models, based on clear and transparent criteria, and supported by verifiable evidence.
- c. that the Global Compact identify and encourage among existing external professional services, those who could provide an impartial and objective certification or ratings of companies according to their adherence to the Sustainable Development Goals and their implementation, based on a strict and transparent methodology, which would include inputs from the United Nations system organisations and civil society organisations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The overarching objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the transformation of the world. It is no longer enough - to echo the words of the United Nations Charter - "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". Wars are still part of our human landscape, but humankind is conscious that current and future generations must face other forms of self-destruction, such as the exhaustion of the planet's natural resources, climate change, the extinction of living species,

increased polarisation and inequalities, etc. The private sector is called on by the United Nations to change policies, mentalities and practices, and to engage in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Even more importantly, the private sector is asked to make sustainability a key component of their business models. The JIU report is an attempt to bridge the operational and conceptual gaps between the business world and the United Nations mechanisms, based primarily on values and public service. The private sector is expected to understand and to act. The essential tacit assumption of the author of these lines is a very bold and risky bet: maybe profit-making and providing global public goods can sometimes be compatible, after all.

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