



SUMMARY

HOW CAN PURPOSEFUL CONNECTION SPARK STRONGER COLLABORATION?

BUSINESS FIGHTS POVERTY GLOBAL GOALS SUMMIT 2026
LUNCH SESSION / 22ND SEPTEMBER 2026

Mabel McKeown, Head of Corporate Partnerships, **Save the Children**
Kindra Halvorson, Chief Transformation Officer, **TechnoServe**
Xavier Longan, Acting Director, **United Nations SDG Action Campaign**

DURING THE GLOBAL GOALS SUMMIT LUNCH SESSION, THREE SPEAKERS REFLECTED ON WHAT LONG-TERM COLLABORATION CAN TEACH US ABOUT BUILDING RESILIENCE, CREATING SHARED PROSPERITY AND SUSTAINING PROGRESS TOWARDS 2030 AND BEYOND. DRAWING ON PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SAVE THE CHILDREN AND GSK, TECHNOSERVE AND ANGLO AMERICAN, AND THE WIDER EXPERIENCE OF THE SDG MOVEMENT, THE SESSION EXPLORED HOW TRUST, SHARED PURPOSE AND A CLEAR FOCUS ON OUTCOMES CAN STRENGTHEN COLLECTIVE ACTION. SPEAKERS HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING OPENLY FROM WHAT DOES NOT WORK, ADAPTING APPROACHES TO LOCAL CONTEXTS, ALIGNING SOCIAL AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS, AND BUILDING THE STRUCTURES NEEDED FOR IMPACT TO LAST. LOOKING AHEAD, THE DISCUSSION ALSO ASKED WHAT LESSONS FROM THE SDGS SHOULD SHAPE THE NEXT PHASE OF THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA, AND WHY REBUILDING TRUST AND BROADENING PARTICIPATION WILL BE ESSENTIAL TO PROGRESS BEYOND 2030.

Mabel McKeown, Head of Corporate Partnerships, Save the Children, on their partnership with GSK

Mabel McKeown reflected on Save the Children's more than 13-year partnership with GSK, using it to illustrate how long-term collaboration can evolve as organisations learn what produces the greatest impact. The partnership began with a broad shared ambition to give as many children as possible a healthy start in life. Over its lifetime, Save the Children and GSK have collaborated across 51 countries and reached more than 3.5 million children. Its current phase is considerably more focused, concentrating on reaching "zero-dose" children, those who have not received routine vaccinations, in Nigeria and Ethiopia, in alignment with wider efforts led by Gavi.

A central lesson is the importance of becoming highly specific about the outcome a partnership is trying to achieve. Rather than spreading activity across multiple countries and themes, the organisations have increasingly concentrated their expertise and resources around a clearly defined objective. She described this as becoming "obsessed with the outcome" and organising the partnership around achieving it.

Trust was equally important. Mabel recalled one of her early experiences in the partnership: a symposium at Save the Children specifically examining a programme that had failed. Rather than emphasising only the positives, the partners deliberately spent time understanding what had not worked. She argued that this willingness to examine failure openly demonstrates both trust and institutional bravery and creates valuable learning.

The partnership's longevity has also enabled continued innovation and improvement. However, Mabel distinguished innovation from scale, observing that organisations can become preoccupied with developing new pilots even though many ultimately fail to scale. The current challenge is therefore to bring other organisations into approaches already shown to work. In Ethiopia and Nigeria, Save the Children and GSK have invested heavily in understanding local communities, cultures and contexts and in identifying how best to support governments to deliver vaccinations. The next phase is about expanding participation in these proven approaches so that they can reach substantially more children. Her overall message was that effective collaboration requires long-term commitment, deep trust, openness about failure and relentless focus on a shared outcome.

"The partnerships that last are built on trust. They move beyond a donor and recipient dynamic into a genuine shared endeavour with both organisations bringing their resources, expertise and energy to the same problem, because they're equally invested in solving it."

Mabel McKeown, Head of Corporate Partnerships, Save the Children.

Kindra Halvorson, Chief Transformation Officer, TechnoServe on the Tokafala partnership lessons with Anglo American

Kindra drew lessons from TechnoServe's 15-year partnership with Anglo American, which began in 2011 with a relatively small enterprise-development programme in Chile and has since expanded across five countries in South America and Africa. Over that period, the partnership has worked with local farmers, entrepreneurs and workers, helping them generate an additional US\$150 million in income. She described increased income as the “north star” guiding the partnership's programmes.

Three principles underpin the work: helping communities and economies diversify beyond mining, recognising SMEs as engines of economic growth, and strengthening the wider local ecosystem needed for businesses to succeed. However, Kindra stressed that those common principles cannot translate into identical programmes everywhere. In Botswana, the Tokafala programme builds on an existing entrepreneurial community by helping businesses grow. In Chile, where the local business ecosystem is relatively strong, programmes have focused more narrowly on skills development for women and young people so they can access better-paid technical and mining-related jobs. In Zimbabwe, where farming dominates the local economy, the partnership has supported aggregation businesses that connect farmers with higher-value markets.

Her most transferable lesson was the need to identify the intersection between commercial and social interests. Partners should understand how each side defines value and progress, agree measurable KPIs and continually reassess whether the partnership is delivering against that shared value proposition. Trust is fundamental, and Kindra linked it directly to TechnoServe's emphasis on data. Consistent transparency with companies, communities and governments, including openly acknowledging when something is not working, creates the conditions for course correction and sustained commitment.

Kindra also emphasised formal governance and planning for what happens after philanthropic support ends. In Botswana, TechnoServe and government partners helped establish an independent entity capable of continuing business support. In Zimbabwe, a commercial aggregator owned through a trust by farmers is intended to sustain the model. Her unresolved challenge is scale: economic inclusion cannot simply be replicated through a standardised “wash, rinse, repeat” model. Organisations must determine what can be scaled efficiently while preserving the local adaptation required for genuine success.

“Sustained partnership and impact need good data, trust, and the space to share hard truths, challenge initial hypotheses, and pivot together when local conditions shift.”

Kindra Halvorson, Chief Transformation Officer, TechnoServe

Xavier Longan, Acting Director, United Nations SDG Action Campaign, on partnerships and trust

Xavier argued that one of the most important lessons from the Sustainable Development Goals is that the SDG movement did not begin when governments formally adopted the goals on 25 September 2015. Its foundations had already been built through the extensive “post-2015” engagement process that preceded adoption. For Xavier, a crucial ingredient was the political space created by UN member states for a wide range of stakeholders to participate meaningfully in defining the new development agenda. Their involvement was not merely symbolic: consultations and dialogue were incorporated into the formal process itself.

He highlighted the scale of that engagement, including consultations in more than 150 countries and a survey that attracted around 10 million responses. By the time the SDGs were formally agreed, a substantial constituency already existed across civil society, business, local government, academia and other groups. This created ownership and momentum beyond national governments. In the years following adoption, stakeholders worked both to increase public awareness of the goals and to implement them, contributing to significant progress in a number of areas.

Xavier contrasted that early momentum with the disruption beginning in 2020. COVID-19 was followed by food and financial crises and conflicts around the world, reversing progress on many of the goals. He argued that the present challenge goes further: not only the goals themselves, but some of the values and principles underpinning them are increasingly being questioned or directly challenged. As the world approaches 2030 and begins considering what follows, Xavier urged stakeholders to recover the lessons of the pre-2015 process while recognising that the current environment presents challenges that were not fully anticipated at the time. A shared destination remains essential, but common goals alone are insufficient. Partnerships require organisations and communities to navigate differing perspectives, realities, interests and contexts.

His strongest concluding emphasis was on trust. Genuine partnership begins by building trust across differences while remaining focused on improving people's lives. Rebuilding that trust, he argued, will be fundamental both to making progress during the remaining years of the SDGs and to creating a credible and stronger development framework beyond 2030.

“The SDGs provide a shared destination. Genuine partnership begins by turning a shared vision into shared ownership, building trust across differences, and keeping a clear focus on improving people's lives, even when interests differ.”

Xavier Longan, Acting Director, UN SDG Action Campaign

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the three contributions reinforced a consistent message: meaningful progress depends on long-term collaboration, clarity of purpose and trust. Mabel McKeown showed how partnerships become stronger when organisations are willing to focus on a specific outcome, learn openly from failure and build on approaches that have already proved effective. Kindra Halvorson highlighted the importance of aligning commercial and social objectives, using data transparently and adapting solutions to local economic realities rather than assuming one model can simply be replicated everywhere. Xavier Longan widened the lens to the global development agenda, arguing that the SDGs gained strength because they were built through broad participation and a shared sense of ownership.

Zahid Torres-Rahman, Co-founder and CEO, **Business Fights Poverty** brought these lessons together around the question of what comes next. As the world approaches 2030, the challenge is not only to preserve the ambition and alignment created by the SDGs, but to ensure that future frameworks are shaped by the right people and informed by what has been learned in practice. The session closed on a clear conclusion: progress remains possible, but it will require organisations to keep working together, share what works and rebuild trust across sectors, communities and perspectives.

"We need to be asking how we stay ambitious in times of crisis and constraint and how we can keep driving change that improves people's lives, strengthens livelihoods and expands opportunities to learn."

Zahid Torres-Rahman, Co-Founder and CEO, Business Fights Poverty