



INSIGHTS SUMMARY

RETHINKING BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE SDGS

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We would like to thank the following speakers:

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Moderator: Jane Nelson, Director, Corporate Responsibility Initiative, **Harvard Kennedy School**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents not just a commitment, but a challenge to reshape the future through new business paradigms and dynamic partnerships. In the quest to make tangible progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), businesses cannot operate in isolation.

INSIGHT 1: DRIVE SYSTEM-LEVEL PARTNERSHIPS FOR WIDESPREAD IMPACT

To tackle pressing global challenges, businesses need to adopt a broader vision that exceeds individual ambitions. System-level transformations, which go beyond the reach of singular entities, are essential in sectors like food, energy, education and health. It's a call for businesses to break from the conventional mould and embrace pre-competitive coalitions that focus on shared objectives and

Social agency at that grassroots level [is important] to ensure that whatever innovations that external businesses and partner stakeholders can come into will actually derive the most benefit to the people who need it most.

Duncan Muriira Koome, Program Project Manager, African Futures & Foresight Action Forum

I think the private sector needs to be more intentional about embedding these issues into how they do business... really mainstreaming sustainable development.

Payal Dalal, SVP, Social Impact, International Markets, Center for Inclusive Growth, Mastercard

collective progress. Moreover, for these transformations to manifest their full potential, an enhancement in business-to-business partnerships is essential. By promoting collaboration over competition, businesses can create ecosystems that foster innovation, drive shared value and enable the scaling of sustainable solutions.

Getting more analysis and insights into regions around the world so that there is good data and analysis that can feed into the decision-making is really important.

Astra Bonini, Senior Sustainable Development Officer, United Nations Department Of Economic And Social Affairs

INSIGHT 2: INTEGRATE INTERSECTIONAL SDG THINKING INTO BUSINESS OPERATIONS

The SDGs are interwoven, forming a complex network of goals that influence one another. Businesses must acknowledge and understand these interrelations, considering how an advancement in one area may impact another. For instance, initiatives promoting clean energy can pave the way for job creation, addressing both environmental and economic SDGs simultaneously. However, for this integrated approach to make a real difference, it must be intrinsic to business operations. It is not sufficient for SDG-aligned actions to be peripheral or separate initiatives; they must be integral to a company's mission, operational strategies, and long-term vision.

We need to get beyond individual company brands and find ways to address all of these SDG challenges as teams and across sectors. I think too many companies are still doing their own thing, and I know people mentioned that we need to build on what exists instead of shiny new things. And I am really hopeful in that regard.

Amanda Gardiner, Head of ESG, Meta

INSIGHT 3: CHAMPION GRASSROOTS ACTION AND PERSPECTIVES

System-level action is key to scale, but we also need to support millions of on-the-ground initiatives that offer context-specific solutions. Grassroots actions, powered by local insights, can drive interventions that are not only relevant but also sustainable in the long run. Businesses, therefore, have a responsibility to seek, nurture and elevate these local initiatives. Partnering with grassroots organisations can provide a deeper understanding of local intricacies, ensuring that interventions are both pertinent and impactful. Additionally, data plays a pivotal role. A structured mechanism that collates, analyses and integrates local-level data into strategic decision-making can ensure businesses remain attuned to the evolving needs and realities of the communities they serve.

IN SUMMARY

As we progress towards 2030, the need for a renewed approach to business partnerships becomes increasingly evident. Embracing systemic change, embedding intersectional SDG thinking, and prioritising grassroots perspectives will be pivotal. By aligning their strategies with these insights, businesses can move beyond mere compliance, championing a vision of sustainability that's holistic, inclusive, and most importantly, effective.

We need action on a large-scale, collective basis. But we also need scale in terms of distributed local-level empowerment and leadership. (...) Then the scale there is from millions of flowers blooming and from us coming up with something more than we could each do if it was just us on our own.

Jane Nelson, Director, Corporate Responsibility Initiative, Harvard Kennedy School