



Summary Report of an Informal Dialogue on
2015 Challenges and Opportunities:
Contributions from the Geneva International Scene
Wednesday, 8 April 2015, at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Introduction

On Wednesday, 8 April 2015, the GSO convened an informal dialogue at the Palais des Nations on “2015 Challenges and Opportunities: Contributions from the Geneva International Scene”. The dialogue is part of a project being developed by the GSO in association with the Office of the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. The purpose of this particular dialogue was to define, promote and facilitate a Geneva-based approach for supporting multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral initiatives and collaboration related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - and linking them as well to the outcomes envisioned for the Climate Change Summit. The proposed approach being developed by the GSO involves a colloquium series focusing on cross-cutting linkages and partnering possibilities to effectively address the challenges of meeting the SDGs and the Climate Change outcomes.

Thirty participants graciously participated in this interactive dialogue from United Nations agencies, the WTO and the ITC, NGOs, multi-stakeholder partnerships, academia and diplomatic missions. The dialogue was moderated by Deborah Vorhies, the GSO President. Ms Vorhies introduced a panel comprised of GSO Executive Director Katherine Hagen, former Director of the UNDP Office in Geneva Cécile Molinier and UNOG representative Charlotte Warakaulle. Brief opening remarks from each of the panel members set the stage for an exchange of views among the participants.

In summary, the three major outcomes of the discussion are as follows:

- Geneva is indeed an excellent choice for establishing a platform for multi-stakeholder initiatives for achieving the SDGs because of the strong Swiss and Geneva commitment to the process and the concentration and diversity of technical expertise in Geneva-based international institutions;
- Country level ownership, accountability and responsibility should be integrated into building alliances that are receptive to multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral partnerships;
- There is a need for conducting a series of dialogues to establish linkages among the SDGs and also between the SDGs and the outcomes of the Climate Change Summit, emphasizing pragmatic partnerships that are issue and outcome-based.

Ms. Warakaulle emphasized the importance of inclusiveness, being open to different points of view, of practicality on how to operationalize the SDGs, and the cross-cutting nature of the exercise. Ms. Hagen explained that the GSO has been convening roundtable discussions on identifying specific linkages among the SDGs, and supporters of the process have urged a transition to identifying actual partnering opportunities in the Geneva international arena. Ms. Molinier noted the wide expertise on





development and human rights among the Geneva international organizations, the challenge of how to ensure a Geneva contribution to the New York process when the lead is political, i.e. New York based, while there is a wide diversity of Geneva perspectives, but also the challenge of recognizing that national governments are in the lead, which implies strong national ownership for mutual accountability and the importance of building alliances between non-State actors and member states for the implementation of the SDGs.

While the discussion was free-ranging and open-ended, there were several clear themes – the unique strength and support from both the local and national leadership in Geneva and in Switzerland; the need to establish linkages among the multiplicity of goals and targets in the SDGs, as well as their interplay with impending climate change commitments; the obstacles in mobilizing the necessary finance and resources for the SDGs, as well as for Global Public Goods, exemplified in the Financing for Development process; the particular challenge in implementing the SDGs (and climate-related commitments) through national accountability, ownership and responsibility while also operating in the increasingly multi-stakeholder and inter-dependent nature of today's world; and the advantages of the complexity and diversity of technical expertise in Geneva-based international organizations. What follows is a summary of the responses to the five questions that participants were invited to consider. As summarized by Ms. Vorhies at the conclusion of this particular dialogue, there is strong support for developing a broad-based partnering platform. And clearly, she concluded, there is support for a series of dialogues to develop a sense of what to do to work together, to identify and build on existing partnering experiences, and to stimulate coherence.

1. What does multi-stakeholder partnering mean for the many different organizations based in Geneva?

Participants highlighted the role of Geneva in all its complexity as a unique hub for responding to the 2015 challenges and opportunities of the SDG and climate change processes, as well as for the upcoming financing for development summit in Addis Ababa. Geneva-based organizations have wide technical expertise in development and human rights to complement and broaden the politically driven culture of the United Nations in New York. There is also a distinct advantage to the leadership and integrity of the Geneva and Swiss presence and their commitment to the international networks here, as well as the long tradition of Geneva and Swiss leadership on peace and security issues. Thus, the potential for multi-stakeholder partnering has a strong and diverse knowledge base, as well as an independence and humanitarian character.

2. Are there certain thematic priorities that would benefit from partnering across sectors?

The impending adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development goals triggered many observations about missing linkages across the SDGs, about the absence of explicit linkages in their targets. And yet, the SDGs are all cross-cutting in nature. There may be too many targets and too much “UN-speak” in the package, and there is a need to create a space to make these linkages explicit. Furthermore, it was noted that the SDGs are significantly different from the MDGs – more technical and resource-based. The UN itself is a good platform, said one participant, but it is also one party among others in numerous multi-stakeholder initiatives. Another participant proposed that the SDGs are meant to be about integration, that the challenge to be addressed in a place like Geneva is to build on the SDGs for a more coordinated approach to overcoming the turf battles and real bureaucratic hurdles of the past.





With regard to the upcoming Climate Change Summit, participants had some useful insights as well. Reference was made to the Calderon “New Climate Economy Report” with its messages on low-carbon and climate-resilient growth. The challenge is to address these messages for combining climate action with strategies to reduce poverty and hunger, to build vibrant and inclusive cities, and restore and protect the world’s natural environments by channeling climate-resilient sensitivities into the SDGs. Another important observation, however, was that more needed to be done to bring an understanding of the social implications of climate change into the Climate Change Summit process. One such example was to relate the SDGs into the “solutions agenda” at the Climate Change Summit.

Thus, for both the SDGs and the Climate Change process, there were broad thematic priorities that would benefit from partnering across sectors. Several participants also offered specific thematic priorities from their own experiences that could serve as models for scaling up the partnering across sectors or stakeholder groups – the ITC and WIPO on the benefits of branding for enhancing the competitiveness of export-oriented products from developing countries, for example, or the GAVI initiative on the benefits of public/private collaboration on improving access to vaccines.

3. What kinds of initiatives might benefit from partnering?

Three significant observations were made by participants here. First, there was a reaffirmation of the central role of governments and country-driven initiatives for all of the goals and commitments being made in these 2015 summits. Any globally-driven partnering would need to have relevance to the ownership and accountability of government action at the country level.

Second, however, participants remarked on the growing presence and diversity of non-state actors in development. They reflected on the increasing recognition of the need for a diversity of actors in both multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder initiatives and the increasingly collaborative inter-dependence of these multi-stakeholder initiatives. Such initiatives might not be immediately effective, but they involve situations where each partner recognizes that doing it alone will no longer work.

Third, there was a strong pull to rethink ways of doing things, to reassess what one participant described as “the mind-set of consumption-led economic growth”. Another participant reminded the group that we have gone through many strategic visions for solving the world’s problems, and yet they (the problems) are still there. Or, to put it another way, there are even more challenges yet to address. Just think, he said, of what is needed to prepare for a recurrence of something like the Ebola outbreak. New skill sets are needed, agreed another participant, and new partnerships should be created to respond to the ever more complex challenges in today’s world.

Even as the initiatives that are required to implement the goals and targets in the Post-2015 Development Agenda or the commitments in the intergovernmental agreement at the Paris Climate Change Summit will need to be driven by member states at the country level, the inter-dependent nature of the world calls for various combinations of global partnering to support these initiatives. And the diversity of governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector calls for both multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder initiatives. Finally, there are changing skill sets and new thinking about things like sustainable consumption and production patterns that suggest exploring cross-cutting strategies as envisioned, for example, in the Calderon report.





4. Who should be invited to engage?

There was agreement around the room for the usefulness of a multi-stakeholder dialogue to continue to address the challenges and opportunities that have been identified in this 2015 context. Inclusiveness and being open to different points of view were highlighted as guiding principles. Several participants mentioned that there is an important role for the private sector – even beyond private sector representation in such multi-stakeholder coalitions as GAIN or GAVI or in such broad-based membership associations as WBCSD. There was also interest expressed in bringing in the private financial sector, particularly since there is a large financial sector in Geneva. Of course, it was implicit in the discussions that government representatives should be involved in the dialogue, as well as the Geneva-based international organizations and NGOs with an interest in the SDGs and Climate Summit.

Moving beyond dialogue to actual partnering was also addressed by the participants at this event. Building partnerships requires caution and takes a lot of time to understand the different functions and mandates of each partner. Partnerships need to deliver benefits – a win-win situation – for all its partners. Partnerships, furthermore, need to be issue-specific and outcome-driven in order to be successful and sustainable. These observations reinforced the need for a stock-taking exercise of successful partnerships and to assess their relevance for filling the gaps due to the absence of linkages among the SDGs and their targets, including linkages with the Climate Summit.

5. Should there be a broad-based partnering coalition?

Participants observed that all elements are here for a Geneva-based platform to emerge for broad-based partnering in support of the means of implementation, including the financing proposals under consideration in the Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa, for both the SDGs and the commitments emanating from the Climate Change Summit. (While the Sendai conference on climate resilience was not specifically mentioned by participants, it should be noted that both Sendai and Addis Ababa summits are part of the 2015 challenges and opportunities, along with the SDG Summit in New York and the Climate Summit in Paris.) With the diversity of technical expertise and strong presence of Swiss leadership, Geneva is well placed to serve as a hub for cross-cutting and multi-stakeholder partnering for the SDGs and climate change commitments. The SDGs will be formally adopted in September, and the intergovernmental agreement at Climate Change Summit in December. The time is now to hold a series of dialogues and to build a sense of what can be done by working together, identifying and building on existing partnering experiences, and stimulating coherence.

At the conclusion, Ms. Vorhies observed that the participants showed strong support for developing a broad-based partnering platform. Ms. Hagen reviewed the merits of a stock-taking exercise and opening up the process to more stakeholders. Ms. Molinier noted that the Economic and Social Council will be addressing functions, mandates and resources to make the UN development system fit for purpose in the post 2015 development agenda context and that it would be useful to keep the dialogue going in Geneva and especially to build alliances with member states receptive to multi-stakeholder dialogue. Ms. Warakaulle agreed with participants that we all need to question the assumptions of the past and reiterated that there should be a broad-based partnering coalition to move things along. The effort should focus on being results-based and identify where we can all add value.



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Going Forward

With this affirmation, the GSO is offering an independent forum for a colloquium series to focus on the identification of linkages and of the development of partnering capacities. The series should encompass a stocktaking exercise of specific examples of successful partnering initiatives and how to take the collaborations to a more advanced level. It should be supported by a “Group of Friends” to select different subjects for the series of dialogues. It should take into account the transformation that is needed to make the linkages explicit among the SDGs and responsive to the commitments for climate change. The whole process should be non-bureaucratic and interactive, with the ultimate objective of making recommendations for a broad-based multi-stakeholder partnering platform.

The GSO welcomes the association of the Office of the Director-General of the United Nations at Geneva and others who may wish to form a “Group of Friends” for this project. The GSO is also inviting prospective sponsors for this project. A proposal for a colloquium series is available on the GSO website here, and a proposed budget is available on request.

