KEY INSIGHTS

The Global SDG Synthesis Coalition

What works to accelerate progress on the Partnership Pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals

Based on the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition's Partnership Pillar Synthesis

Key insight 1

Emphasizing principles of horizontal cooperation - including fair, equitable and trust-based international cooperation - is key for sustainable development. Partnerships are not sufficiently calibrated to enable LDCs and LMICs to benefit from global trade, finance and technology transfer, despite this being the foundation of SDG 17.

Partnerships are falling short in their impact at the scale needed to catalyze a more equal playing field for the least-developed (LDCs) and lower-middle income countries (LMICs) to achieve the SDGs. The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development needs to be reinforced and underpinned by approaches to international cooperation that are fair and which provide an equal footing for developing countries.

Key insight 2

Partnership models, including South-South, North-South, public-private and trilateral arrangements, benefit from using principles of horizontal cooperation based on trust and aligned incentives in partnership design, funding modalities and governance.

Partnerships of all kinds, whether focused on trade, technology, finance, capacity building or systemic issues, are more fruitful when development incentives focus on addressing all partners´ incentives and priorities. Partnerships are also more successful where the uncertainties around implementation are abated by concrete planning to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Countries' incentives for collaborating on SDG 17 components are influenced by their priorities, which are often similar for countries with the same income status. South-South, North-South and trilateral cooperation excel when grounded in trust and national ownership, and exhibit greater capacity for success when they are guided by horizontal principles. There is a role for multilateral partners as brokers, using their skills to promote context-specific solutions and prioritize localized approaches to strengthen capacities and enhance institutional trust. Collaboration fosters cooperation, while one-sided solutions hinder it. Recognizing countries' motivations involves designing informed initiatives, establishing mutually agreed outcomes rooted in equitable power dynamics, and incorporating funding and long-term institutionalization mechanisms advocating for fair, equitable and improved trade; increasing the share of exports of developing countries; achieving duty-free and quota-free market access for the least developed countries.

Key insight 3

Partnerships to unlock trade opportunities for lower-middle income countries (LMICs) and least-developed countries (LDCs) and to support them to comply with regulatory standards in high income countries (HICs) could help increase their exports.

Middle income countries (MICs) have benefited from regional agreements, providing a potential roadmap for LMICs and LDCs. Readiness for trade in partnerships requires institutional strengthening and trust building to support countries to navigate trade regulations. Practical steps such as reducing unnecessary regulations and addressing non-tariff barriers have proven effective for importing countries. Although trade liberalization reduces tariff-based government revenues, there is strong evidence that points toward tax reform as a promising way to make up for this loss in the medium to long term.

Key insight 4

Tailored tax regimes can better enhance domestic capacities. While tax collection capacities have improved, official development assistance (ODA) and strategic partnerships remain essential for limiting the negative consequences of the debt crisis, and for promoting sustainable economic growth and financial reform, especially for LDCs.

Fostering domestic resource generation involves addressing international financial challenges. Evidence shows that support for national tax generation is promising, but not necessarily in countries with substantial informal sectors. Experimentation is key to finding the right solutions to maximize government revenue. There is also a trend toward building tax bases and implementing consumption-based taxes, which has proved to be effective in middle-income countries. Effective partnerships should tailor tax regimes to specific contexts and emphasize the local communication of new taxes. While domestic capacities have improved, ODA remains crucial for low-income countries.

Key insight 5

Effective green technology adoption requires route-to-market analysis, investment de-risking, subsidy reform and green finance, underscoring the importance of tailored, context-specific interventions.

Available evidence suggests that top-down, pre-defined interventions falter when they do not consider the local factors that support technology adoption. Investment in green initiatives is insufficient on its own to drive more widespread adoption of green technologies at the required pace and scale. While they consistently promote innovation, interventions need to be adapted to local realities or may fail to facilitate transformative shifts away from polluting technologies.

Key insight 6

Successful digitization initiatives drive growth, often led by governments partnering with the private sector.

These initiatives were able to affect growth in the digital financial services sector by enhancing the delivery of digital public services (e.g., electronic birth registration and online tax administration), and improving the cost-efficiency of technology for rural work. Large-scale broadband programmes have been delivered with a strong lead from governments, often working with private companies.

Key insight 7

The principle of leaving no one behind is fundamental to all SDGs. However, the systemic inattention to equity in the design and implementation of SDG 17-related initiatives may lead to the further marginalization of those most likely to be left behind.

Equity considerations should not be an afterthought, but the primary driver of interventions connected to trade, finance, technology, capacity development and systemic issues. Evaluations of these initiatives should better test approaches and disaggregate findings on their effectiveness for vulnerable populations. By taking a proactive stance on equity, partnerships can ensure that their initiatives are not only effective, but also just, inclusive and context specific.

Key insight 8

Comprehensive risk analysis, the utilization of disaggregated data and evaluative evidence, and the application of data science techniques for reporting on the progress of SDG 17 are essential elements to enhance the effective use of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

A thorough risk assessment enables countries to identify and address potential obstacles to SDG 17 targets, while disaggregated data (e.g., disaggregated by gender/sex, age - including children and youth – and by level of poverty and/or vulnerability) provides insights into disparities and aids precise policy development. Evaluative evidence draws on past experiences to inform decision making, and data science has the potential to leverage machine learning to connect VNR insights with objective data on progress toward the SDGs. Collectively, these components can bolster the credibility and effectiveness of VNRs and other reports, making them more informative and actionable for policy makers and stakeholders.