



Summary Report

## 2015 Interagency Roundtable on CSR

### *Implementing the SDGs: the Role of the Private Sector*

27 October 2015 | Palais des Nations | Geneva

#### 1. Introduction

With the recent launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) setting the Post-15 development agenda, it has become clear that all sectors must play a role in achieving these goals. The United Nations and other international organizations are increasingly looking to the private sector to contribute to international development, fight poverty and inequality, create decent employment, especially for youth, and promote environmentally sustainable growth. With the launch of the SDGs, businesses, international organizations and NGOs will have a newly relevant framework to guide their strategic priorities and efforts toward society. Thus the SDGs represent a significant opportunity to drive sustainable business.

A month after the launch of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, the fifth annual Interagency CSR Round-table was held to discuss the implementation of this new development agenda. Participants included representatives of international organizations, government, civil society and business. The Round-table was moderated by Ambassador Marta Maurás Perez, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva.

The meeting took the form of an open discussion where all the participants had the opportunity to share their experiences, analysis and proposals. The meeting was divided into three sessions: 1) inclusion and the private sector; 2) financing the SDGs; and 3) implications for how international organizations engage with the private sector.



## **2. Overview of Key Discussions by Session**

### **Session I: Inclusion and the private sector**

Numerous points of agreement came out of the discussions in this session. Experts highlighted the importance of supporting the SDGs, and supported these new goals' breadth and comprehensiveness in comparison to the MDGs. Among the differences noted between these two sets of development goals, one that was of particular interest was the incorporation of the private sector. However, participants highlighted that while the private sector is an essential contributor to reach these ambitious goals, its role should not be confused with that of the state. The role of the state should not be diminished or confused with the role of the private sector.

Participants emphasised that one of the key roles of the private sector in sustainable development and the SDGs is to foster new job creation and skills development. In tandem, the role of states is to put in place policies that encourage companies to hire and invest in training workers.

In discussions on increasing private sector involvement, participants deliberated the importance of the baseline principle that companies should "do no harm". It was highlighted that while some companies had made progress in focusing on proactive positive contributions to sustainable development, it was nevertheless critically important to ensure first and foremost basic compliance with a "do no harm" approach, particularly in the areas of legal compliance and human rights.

Other issues which arose in discussions included:

- The importance of the government's role and accountability
- Provision of benchmarks and consistency of standards, including for social development and economic growth
- The need for coherent terminology and a shared understanding of terms related to the SDGs
- The different aspects of CSR (both voluntary and obligatory) and how these relate to the SDGs
- The role of the multilateral trading system as a way to hear the voice of less developed countries

Various participants highlighted the mapping exercises their institutions have undertaken to connect the SDGs and the many targets of the SDGs with the work programmes of their institution. A proposal was raised to implement a collective mapping exercise on what the UN as a whole has to offer states and the private sector in support of achieving the SDGs. One participant passed around copies of the mapping exercise already conducted by the office of the head of the United Nations Office at Geneva, but participants felt that despite being a good start, it needed to be further developed.



## **Session II: Financing the SDGs**

This session addressed financing from both private and public means. Particular attention was paid to: i) how to make the use of funds already available more efficient and therefore have a greater impact on SDG-oriented projects; and ii) how to increase the flow of funding from private sector sources towards SDG-oriented projects.

Concerns were raised about accountability, preserving the independence of the UN, and whether part of the solution lay in better use of existing resources within the inter-governmental system. Nonetheless, there was a general consensus that the SDGs required an increase in funding from new sources and that both governments and the private sector have important financing roles to play.

In terms of directing investment to projects which could enhance sustainable development, the group discussed the promotion of more effective investment promotion policies and capacity building strategies. In addition, there were concerns raised about the of awareness in the financial community regarding sustainability and the SDGs. Comments suggested that the SDGs are requiring more from the private sector than ever before, but a baseline of responsibility is needed to mitigate risk. However, tensions still remain between the goals of attracting private investors and ensuring social and environmental safeguards.

Participants also commented on the following areas:

- New financial mechanism being developed
- Public-Private-Partnerships
- Why Nations Fail Thesis
- How to measure costs, particularly when it comes to jobs and quality

## **Session III: Implications for how international organizations engage the private sector**

In this session, participants focused the discussion on the following ideas:

- The importance of tackling corruption, including in measurement of progress in SDG
- The core role of governance and how to standardize partnerships across sectors
- The changing role of companies in sustainable development, but the reiteration of the importance of keeping a clear line drawn between state and private sector responsibility
- How the United Nations can be more effective in partnerships
- The United Nations brand acts as a 'currency' that can lose value if not properly managed
- Maintaining UN values and beliefs within a partnership.



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Experts mentioned the importance of governance as the private sector's role evolves, and the importance of transparency between organizations to create a trusting environment as a key factor of any partnership. While engagement with the private sector is still only in early stages at many United Nations agencies, there are some agencies that have become more accustomed and comfortable with private sector partnerships. Funding from the private sector may affect the way in which international organizations operate, and therefore partnerships based on knowledge sharing rather than funding may present a better opportunity. In particular, the private sector, acting as an advocate or champion, has potential as a new voice to allow the UN and other IOs to be better heard by the public. While most participants agreed that more collaboration with the private sector is needed, there was some hesitation and caution displayed, particularly in reference to human rights.

### 3. Key Outcomes of the Meeting

1. There was a call for more collaborative work between agencies such as that displayed in the CSR Round-table, and a suggestion for more such round-tables to take place throughout the year.
2. Participants agreed that more data and more examples were needed of private sector collaboration with the UN, governments and other international organizations, that has a clear division of roles and clear governance.
3. A mapping of the SDGs for all agencies (connecting their work programmes with specific SDG targets) would be helpful to show where synergies exist for interagency collaboration on specific targets. This can also present efficiencies of funding; along these lines, there was a call for measurement and forecasting of the costs of each goal.
4. The SDGs improve on the MDGs in particular by explicitly calling for contributions from both the public and private sectors in efforts to achieve the development agenda.



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## Participants List

Organization	Name
Permanent Mission to the UN, Chile	Ambassador Marta Maurás Perez (Moderator)
Permanent Mission to the UN, Chile	Mr Pablo Lazo
European Commission	Mr Daniel Beck
ILO	Ms Githa Roelans
ILO	Ms Emily Sims
ITC	Ms Petra Walterova
OECD	Ms Cristina Tebar-Less
SIDA	Ms Sanna Leino
UNCTAD	Mr Joerg Weber
UNCTAD	Mr Anthony Miller
UNCTAD	Mr Hamed El Kady
UNECE	Ms Maria Rosaria Ceccarelli
UNECE	Mr Jose Palacin
UNEP	Ms Elisa Tonda
UNEP Finance Initiative	Ms Elodie Feller
UNIDO	Mr Frank Van Rompaey
UNOHCHR	Ms Lene Wendland
UNOHCHR	Ms Live Sydness
WTO	Ms Sainabou Taal
CUTS International	Mr Rashid Kaukab
IOE	Mr Matthias Thorns
Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI)	Mr Will Marindale
Vincular/OHCHR	Mr Dante Pesce
WBCSD	Ms Carina Larsfalten