Partnerships beyond borders: “From Gleneagles to New York”

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“At no time in human history have the fates of every woman, man and child been so intertwined across the globe. We are united both by moral imperatives and by objective interests. We can build a world in larger freedom – but to do it we must find common ground and sustain collective action.”

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General

One of the most frequently used terms in business and development today is ‘partnerships’. This buzz word has taken on renewed importance in a post 9/11 world. And while it has different meanings for different sectors, it is clear that the need for working together has become paramount. Collaborating and benefiting from each other’s relative strengths is increasingly the viable way to tackle problems, be they global, national or local.

The G8 Summit at Gleneagles will highlight, as the United Nations has advocated, the necessity of public-private partnerships for business and development. As globalisation and information technologies draw peoples closer, so do they knit together social, economic, political and cultural issues. This was stressed in the Opening Plenary Statement by Prime Minister Tony Blair at the 2005 World Economic Forum in Davos: “We may disagree about the nature of the problems and how to resolve them, but no nation, however powerful, seriously believes today that these problems can be resolved alone. Interdependence is no longer disputed.”

Partnerships for a better world

Although partnerships, especially public-private partnerships, are not new to the international community, innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships have gained importance in the last few years – some well known examples include the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Global Alliance for Vaccine Immunization (GAVI), the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and the UN ICT Task Force.

The United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP) has been building partnerships for the past six-plus years and is, in itself, the product of a partnership. Established by the Secretary-General in March 1998 to serve as the interface between the UN system and the UN Foundation (UNF) – the public charity responsible for administering Ted Turner’s US$1 billion contribution in support of UN causes – it has supported over 320 projects in 122 countries and successfully promoted new United...
Nations partnerships and alliances worldwide. Working with companies, foundations and civil society organisations, UNFIP engages partners not only on a financial level, but also in strategic planning and in policy dialogue, transferring new technology, expertise, and innovative delivery systems to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Recent experience has shown that the critical aspect of partnership is the ability to develop and harness the strength of the different stakeholders, provide for equal ownership of all those involved, and, more important, the avoidance of a ‘top-down’ approach.

UNFIP works with the private sector to encourage conversion of policies into action and ideas into concrete investments projects, many of which offer possibilities for scaling up and replication. Too often the rhetoric of partnerships obscures the reality of innovative models already working on the ground. Some of these are summarised below.

The Equator Initiative is a partnership among the United Nations, governments, civil society, businesses and foundations, linking economic improvement and job creation to protection of the environment by building the capacity and raising the profile of community enterprises in the tropics. Recognising the superior performance of specific enterprises, the Equator Initiative shows that conserving biological diversity is an integral part of the business bottom-line for these thriving local firms engaged in activities ranging from sustainable forestry and fishing, to organic agriculture and ecotourism. In addition to providing public recognition awards, the Equator Initiative develops local capacity through community-to-community learning exchanges and contributes to the creating and sharing of knowledge to make an impact on policy and public awareness.

MTCT-Plus is a five-year HIV care and treatment partnership between the United Nations, numerous foundations and other civil society actors, designed to link prevention with care and treatment for HIV-infected women and their families in the poorest countries. Co-ordinated by the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University and supported by a coalition of foundations, MTCT-Plus brings HIV care and treatment to existing programmes to prevent mother-to-child transmission (MTCT).

India Solar Credit Facility is a four-year, US$7.6 million, solar loan programme set up to help accelerate the market for financing solar home systems in southern India. A partnership between UNEP and two of India’s major banking groups – Syndicate Bank and Canara Bank – it aims to accelerate the market for credit financing of PV solar home systems by assisting these banks to develop lending portfolios targeted at financing solar home systems. With the support of UNF and the Shell Foundation, the project provides an interest rate subsidy to reduce the cost of financing. This project challenges Indian banks to develop new loan products in the expanding clean energy sector, and has leveraged approximately US$6.3 million in loan capital from the Canara and Syndicate Banks. The credit facility is now offered through several thousand local bank outlets and exceeded expectations in Year One performance.

Global Sustainable Energy Islands Initiative is an initiative that seeks to accelerate the transition of small island nations toward cleaner and more sustainable energy use. Specifically, the project supports the development and implementation of national sustainable energy plans in Grenada, St Lucia and Dominica by demonstrating market-based approaches to the delivery of clean energy services. Working with governments, the private sector, the investment community and other stakeholders in the Caribbean region, the project partners are developing a portfolio of priority investment projects that can increase clean energy supplies and services while reducing petroleum demand in the islands.

GeSCI is a partnership working at the local, national, and international level to support, create, and implement strategies to harness Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for education and community growth. It focuses on delivery, offering project development and management, strategic support, facilities and resource mobilisation, and implementation. GeSCI partners consist of a broad range of key stakeholders in the donor, private, multilateral and non-profit sectors. This global network deploys ICTs where they are needed most to increase directly the number of children who participate in formal education; the number of skilled teachers in the classroom; and the number of literate adults, particularly among women.

Innovative Production of Heat and Power in China is a pioneering partnership to provide heat and power from biomass in rural China. The United Nations Development Programme has teamed up with UNF and the local Jilin Provincial Government to finance a combined heat and power plant to be fuelled by corn stalks and other agricultural wastes. The plant is
designed to produce cooking gas, heat and electricity simultaneously and to demonstrate the technical, economic and market viability of a modern biomass gasification system. While the initial investment is targeting a small village of 224 households, the project seeks to demonstrate a viable business model and commercialisation strategy to promote project replication on a wider scale in rural China. The project has succeeded in negotiating a power purchase agreement – a significant breakthrough in China – which is a key element of its financial viability.

**Measles Initiative** is a partnership aiming to control measles deaths in Africa by vaccinating 200 million children through both mass and follow-up campaigns in up to 36 sub-Saharan countries. Mass measles campaigns are designed to reach every child in a target group. The population at risk may vary from country to country, but in general the target population is children under the age of 15 years. Leading this effort are UNICEF, WHO, UNF, the American Red Cross, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Other key players in the fight against measles include the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and governments of countries affected by measles. By the year 2005, it is estimated that 1.2 million lives will have been saved, bringing deaths from measles in Africa to near zero.

**Turning aid into investment**
The momentum generated in 2002 by the Johannesburg process with its focus on Type II partnerships – practical, voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives contributing to implementing inter-governmental commitments – must be maintained. The upcoming Millennium Review Summit, which will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in September 2005, will provide an opportunity to do so – and will directly build upon the development focus of the UK’s G8 Presidency. On this occasion Member States will have before them the United Nations report *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, released in March 2005 by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and the Millennium Project report *Investing in Development – a Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals* – both of which provide major creativity points to bring various stakeholders together to address development as it is linked with security and human rights. Both reports stress the need for alliances, collaboration and partnerships.

Our focus must increasingly be on investment. Prime Minister Tony Blair’s commitment at Davos cautioned against the “old donor/recipient relationship as patronising and unworkable” and stressed partnerships which “help not as charity but as a route to independence from it”. The United Nations recognises there is “aid fatigue” and is increasingly looking at innovative approaches to increase the level of investments in Africa. The challenge for the international community is to create sustainable livelihoods – ‘wealth creation’ needs to replace the ‘poverty eradication’ mantra.

Initiatives such as Ericsson’s First on the Ground – an in-kind contribution at the disposal of the UN system to provide and maintain effective mobile communications equipment and expertise for humanitarian relief operations – and the Cisco Networking Academy Least Developed Countries (LDCs) Initiative – providing students with skills that enable them to design, build and
We hope that central to the G8 recommendations will be the creation of a more enabling environment for public-private partnerships.

Partnerships maintain computer networks in the local market – are excellent examples of how aid and investment can be brought together for the common good.

We need to think out of the box and set up bold and creative initiatives such as the Acumen Fund, which works to identify some of the world’s best entrepreneurs and organisations focused on delivering critical and affordable goods and services – such as water, healthcare and housing – to improve livelihoods, health and opportunities for the poor. Using the skills of business, the flexible capital of philanthropy, and the rigour of the marketplace, the Acumen Fund develops and delivers systems-changing solutions to the world’s problems. Their investment approach focuses on organisational sustainability, strong leadership and scalability through managerial support and financial investment.

While partnerships are certainly not a panacea and are by nature difficult to implement in practice, the benefits of working together are numerous and with the sheer scale of the MDG challenge quite simply indispensable. Increasingly, new partners come to the United Nations to explore how best to support humanitarian causes and the achievement of the MDGs. Working with the United Nations is not always easy. Navigating the complex UN system and securing the right contact information can be a daunting task to anyone not familiar with the organisation. Nevertheless, the benefits of working with the United Nations far outstrip the challenges. The Global Compact initiative is providing a ‘policy framework’ for the private sector and promotes better corporate social responsibility. Through this network it is encouraging companies to increase their involvement in these collaborations.

Opportunity for renewal
The United Nations has a key catalytic role to play that cannot be underestimated. Comprised of 191 member states, the United Nations network covers most countries in the world with the mandate and operational capacity to advance peace and development across the globe. Seventy per cent of the work of the UN system is dedicated to development assistance programmes and it would be a missed opportunity not to engage this mechanism in new and creative ways.

Millennium Development Goal 8 calls for the development of a global partnership for development. This goal is not an end per se: public-private partnerships are a bridge to achieving the other seven goals embodying the 18 targets. The timing of the G8 Summit provides a great opportunity to feed its outcome into the United Nations Millennium Review Summit in September. We hope that central to the recommendations will be the creation of a more enabling environment for public-private partnerships, especially to bring business closer to the development community.

Websites
- [www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)
- [www.unicttaskforce.org](http://www.unicttaskforce.org)
- [www.unfoundation.org](http://www.unfoundation.org)
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