

Partnership Platforms

- A look at the landscape

Background

Over the last decade, green growth has become a major concern for leading businesses, investors, NGOs and governments. In 2015, a global framework was established through the signing of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Financing Conference in Addis Ababa and the conclusion of the landmark Climate Agreement in Paris. Multi sector partnerships have been recognised as a key vehicle to help deliver on these commitments.

As the partnership approach has spread widely across different sectors and regions, so has the system that supports them. This support system aims to understand when and how partnerships succeed, to share best practices and help partnerships to increase their impact. Dedicated tools, methodologies, events, consultants, publications and trainings have emerged all over the world to support partnerships for green growth and sustainable development.

The Global Green Growth Forum (3GF) is an important part of this support system. 3GF convenes governments, businesses, investors and international organisations to act together for inclusive green growth. Established in 2011, the 3GF is currently undergoing a 'rethinking' process to define a new vision, mission and strategic goals whilst building on its strong foundations. As part of this rethinking process, the 3GF has been reflecting on other partnership platforms to understand who it might partner with and to avoid a duplication of effort.

We felt it would be valuable to share some insights:

Partnerships have become mainstream

Almost all organisations working on green growth and the SDGs have developed internal expertise and knowledge about partnerships. In some situations this is an individual responsible for stakeholder relations or external affairs and in others a specific role is dedicated to strategic partnerships. Typically, these organisations are partners rather than partnership platforms. The growth of such positions indicates the importance of partnerships and the need for a specialised function and skillset.

Partnership platforms are operating globally

There are a number of organisations located in North America and Europe which are solely dedicated to supporting partnerships with the UK offering a particular expertise. It's worth noting that although these organisations are located in North America and Europe, the partnerships they are working on are typically global in reach or located in developing and emerging economies. Many platforms have increased their international profile and operations. There are a number of national platforms slowly emerging and this number is expected to increase in the future.

Partnership platforms are structured differently

Partnership platforms vary significantly in terms of their target audience, their focus and priorities and their organizational structures. They are all working to progress collaborations between government, business and civil society but differ in how they do this. Some benefit from an online community, others are embedded into a membership and fee based structure. Some are based in governments and others in academia or in consultancies. An important trend is the growth in issue based platforms, for example in nutrition, health and education.

Platforms are offering a wide variety of services

Partnership platforms offer a wide variety of services including networking, learning, training, brokering and measuring impact. Whilst definitions differ, the table highlights the broad service areas that platforms tend to provide. The differences between platforms can be subtle and there is space for some alignment between some of these platforms (to help the user, to create efficiencies and achieve greater impact). Moving forward, there will be a greater need for partnership platforms to differentiate themselves.

Key service areas of partnership platforms	
Services	Description
Advocacy	shaping the agenda through policy discussions and influencing organisational priorities
Convening	providing a platform that brings key stakeholders together to grow partnerships
Brokering	bringing together stakeholders to initiate discussions and explore potential collaborations
Enabling	providing partnership advice, support and direction e.g. tools, methodologies
Networking	facilitating contacts, expertise and outreach
Learning	synthesises and shares learning about partnership performance, outcomes, success factors
Communicating	providing communication support and dissemination opportunities
Training	building capacity of partners and partnership brokers
Measuring	evaluating the impact of the partnership
Researching	systematic review and write up of partnership performance / academic case study

Services are converging around “enabling” “and convening”

There are a group of partnership platforms that provide convening services, using networks, events and brokering capacity to drive partnerships forward. There are also a group of partnership platforms that provide enabling services such as training, measuring and learning. Only one or two organisations provide both enabling and convening services.

Partnership methodologies are widely available

Almost all platforms offer a methodology to support partnerships during their life cycle and include materials on stakeholder engagement, problem identification, conflict management and negotiation, communication and measurement. However these methodologies and tools seem most effective when embedded into a process or at a minimum when a broker is available for support. There is much more support for partnerships at the beginning of the life cycle in the start-up phase and less available later on.

Partnership success stories are largely anecdotal

All platforms have excellent examples of partnership in action – stories, quotes, summaries. However, these examples are largely anecdotal. This makes it difficult for others to replicate what works, particularly when partnerships fall into such a broad area. There need be a more systematic way to measure the impact of partnerships – both to help understand what works and what needs to improve.

Brokering and skills matter

Brokering is a critical success factor in many partnerships and is offered by both enabling and convening platforms. However it can be difficult to explain the value of brokering and justify the investment or cost. There is also a set of core competencies for individuals involved in partnership building including: relationship management, analysis and synthesis and facilitation and negotiation.

Gaps

Partnership platforms have emerged over the last decade and are playing an increasingly important role in achieving sustainable development. There are however a number of potential gaps....

Theme	Gaps
Measure the impact	Develop approaches to help partnerships measure impact including understanding better the risks and benefits of partnership and designing a methodology / tool to understand impacts on partners, partnership and stakeholders
Learning & sharing	Effective assessment, communication and dissemination of partnership good practice / impact. New areas of research e.g. partnership models to understand different approaches & structures and wide scale training around the 'how to' of partnerships
Funding	Provide funding or matchmaking services to partnerships e.g. feasibility funding to support the development of a concept or brokering funding to help with support services
Scaling impact	Understand more effectively what scaling impact means e.g. through design for scale, to identify and scale up best practice or explore systemic solutions e.g. landscape approach
Work with other platforms	How to align the various partnership platforms and the work of different organisations – to increase efficiencies and increase impact / speed. How to do this, when / what / where and how