

**PRESIDIUM MODEL UN CONFERENCE 2017**

*“Connecting Responsible Businesses with Higher Education Institutions for Sustainable Development”*



***UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COMPACT  
(UNGC)***

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call for action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices on how to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations. They provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt in accordance with their own priorities and the environmental challenges of the world at large. The SDGs provide us with a common plan and agenda to tackle some of the pressing challenges facing our world such as poverty, climate change and conflict.

*“By 2030, the UN wishes to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship”*

-UN on Sustainable development goal

The above mentioned is **one** of the targets given by the United Nations under the fourth Sustainable development goals (SDG) of expanding education access. Over the years, with change in society and nature of businesses, the skill set that companies require in students have changed drastically. The problem arises when training and skill set provided by the higher educational institutions doesn't match with the real skill set required by companies, thereby making sustainable development in the field of education a far cry. In various other arenas of sustainable development goals, such as protection of marine life, the institutions might formulate research and technology which might still remain inaccessible because of the gap between institutions and businesses. **Therefore to meet all SDGs, it is important that two of the major stakeholders collaborate in the field, and make these goals attainable.**

The problem lies in creating a comprehensive space where responsible businesses and higher educational institutions (universities, academies, colleges, seminaries, vocational schools) can be linked together to bridge the gap. A comprehensive space, which includes a strong partnership, a consistent government policy and avid

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

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interest of those involved including company professionals, students and teachers. These gaps, more often the not, occur due to lack common agendas to work on, inconsistent company policies and plans, government interventions in the functioning of universities and very importantly, lack of funds.

However, connecting businesses and higher educational institutions cannot just be depended on the two of them. Governments play an imperative role in regulating higher educational institutions and other government policy. Students are essential catalysts to the process of association; teachers are responsible in determining how effective this collaboration might be, therefore, they continue to be important in the discussion of these associations. A *responsible business*, the one that balances profit-making activities with activities that benefit society involving developing businesses with a positive relationship to the society in which they operate, therefore needs to be linked into a positive partnership with all of them to make their association with HEI's yield result.

**Basically, we wish to connect socially responsible businesses with higher educational institutions so that students get required skills and businesses get the trained man power to achieve the SDGs.**

### QUESTION TO CONSIDER

1. Is association with higher education institutes important for businesses even if they are effectively meeting their sustainable development goal implementation targets?

### ADDITIONAL LINKS

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/19/sustainable-development-goals-united-nations>

<https://hbr.org/2017/03/how-companies-can-champion-sustainable-development>

<http://www.skilledup.com/insights/getting-real-in-the-real-world-latest-in-university-business-partnerships>

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### 2. WHAT IS OUR PRIORITY, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CONNECTION STAKEHOLDERS OR BOTH?

The sustainable development goals for the year 2030, not only focused on the role of government in achieving them, but also on the role of businesses and private sector. More often than not, the businesses lack focus on the areas where they should work and do not have the people with the required expertise to integrate these goals in their business models. For example, we cannot expect companies like Reliance Energy to work on goal 7 for affordable and clean energy. This ultimately results in cherry picking or selectively choosing the goals that best suit their needs, which results in some SDG getting prioritized at the expense of others. Like, very few companies are working towards goal 14 of improving marine life.

Our agenda, connecting responsible businesses with higher educational institutions for sustainable development, therefore highlights two key terms; connecting and sustainable development. But what yields more importance?

Our priority **cannot just be sustainable development** because businesses cannot contribute to it without trained workers with required skills. And sustainable development cannot be achieved without the private sector because they are the key to economic growth and also one of the largest contributors to ecological imbalance.

We **cannot prioritize only collaboration** because such collaborations need to be fruitful for the larger global goals and should not just be targeted to increase employability.

**Our priority, hence, is both.** It is devising ways where collaboration focuses not only on providing students with business knowledge but knowledge that helps the companies to become a vibrant contributor to the global sustainable goals.

Integration of responsible businesses and higher educational institutions (HEI) provide a historic opportunity to both to contribute to sustainable goals. For the first time in history, United Nations has also specifically worked on the same with the development of UNGC’s **sister initiative, PRME** (<http://www.unprme.org>) that **hopes to associate business schools and companies.**

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### QUESTION TO CONSIDER

1. What are various arenas that can be targeted in collaborations?
2. Are alternative higher education platforms (like vocational course colleges) equally important considering more and more students are opting for them each year?

### ADDITIONAL LINKS

<https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>

<http://www.unprme.org/resource->

<docs/InspirationalGuideImplementingthePRMEinExecutiveDegreePrograms.pdf>

<http://www.unprme.org/resource-docs/businessschoolpartnerships.pdf>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ingrid-embree/how-17-companies-are-tack\\_b\\_11991808.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ingrid-embree/how-17-companies-are-tack_b_11991808.html)

### 3. IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

- **It enriches the learning experience for students.**

In most education institutes, learning is limited to textbooks and class room teaching. Collaboration with business allows students an opportunity to get the real idea about what is it like to use your skills in real corporate platform. This is supremely imperative when it comes to implementing sustainable development goals because there remains a great gap in its conceptualization and real life use.

- **It improves research by broadening academic thinking and creating results with greater impact and relevance.**

Collaborating with business houses gives institutions an opportunity to target their research based on what the companies may require in general. This helps in targeted allocation of resources and funds to find out the real implementation challenges.

- **It supports a curriculum that improves student development as scholars, researchers, leaders, and engaged citizens.**

Sustainable development as a curriculum may improve if teachers, scholars and other engaged citizens get an inside into what the companies really require to make their businesses implement the SDG's.

- **It advances opportunities for interdisciplinary research and teaching.**

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Students get an opportunity to put their skills at use and solve real time problems in SDG implementation faced by companies.

- **It helps universities demonstrate accountability in an era replete with calls for greater scrutiny and demands for return on investment.**

It helps the universities demonstrate a socially responsible image by collaborating with businesses for the greater good of the world community.

- **It expands innovative practices by allowing researchers to test ideas in a real-world setting.**

The outcome of research and theoretical learning can be put to test in the real world to bridge the gap between sustainable development policy making and its implementation in the nation.<sup>2</sup>

### ADDITIONAL LINKS

<http://sloanreview.mit.edu/projects/joining-forces/>

[http://mkne.hu/fajlok/hirek/SUPPORT\\_Coll-and-ESD-book.pdf](http://mkne.hu/fajlok/hirek/SUPPORT_Coll-and-ESD-book.pdf)

## 4. THE STAKEHOLDERS

### 1) UNITED NATIONS

#### **Contribution:**

United nation wishes to achieve the sustainable development goals by 2030. For the same, it feels the importance of integrating private sector in the same because most ecological footprints are left by this sector. Therefore, it even convened the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), a platform for companies to come together to work for the same motive.

In its various committees and sessions, it not only brings together countries, but also non-governmental organizations, universities so that it provides a common arena for the various stakeholders to interact. Therefore, UN remains the key arena for connecting businesses and higher educational institutions.

The UN expressed the desire to “enhance the contribution of non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in national development efforts” through global partnerships. The resolution encouraged public-private partnerships in the following areas: generation of new investments and

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[http://outreach.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/the centrality of engagement in higher education.pdf](http://outreach.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/the%20centrality%20of%20engagement%20in%20higher%20education.pdf)

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employment, financing for development, health, agriculture, conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and environmental management, energy, forestry and the impact of climate change. The development of tripartite partnerships, encouraged by UN agencies and institutions has contributed to bringing NGOs and business closer together in order to promote development. **For example, the World Bank launched Business Partners for Development in an effort to bring together business, NGOs and government on particular projects.**<sup>3</sup>

### **Interest:**

The UN wishes to overcome the drawbacks of the Millennium development goals by integrating various stakeholders. More importantly, it also wishes to spread education for the need of sustainability. **If businesses work in collaboration with higher education institutions, it gives an incentive to students to study and contribute to the field thereby bringing UN closer to achieving its targets.**

### **Areas of collaboration:**

UN can contribute in the following ways:

- 1) Providing adequate and essential data for companies and institutions to work upon.
- 2) Create opportunities of research and statistical data collection for higher educational institutions
- 3) Provide a platform for various stakeholders to come together and collectively work on goals
- 4) Creating programs for businesses and institutes to work together on
- 5) Providing global reach to various initiatives taken by businesses and institutes
- 6) Facilitating and channeling funds for research and training

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. What were the shortcomings of Millennium Development Goals and why is it therefore necessary to bring all stakeholders together?
2. What are the platforms at which HEIs and corporates have come together under the allegiance of UN?

## **2) COMPANIES**

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<sup>3</sup> <http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=curej>

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### **Contributions:**

The private sector is important for the achievement of the SDGs for various reasons. First, their contribution is essential as a funding sector for not just governmental projects, but also to HEI for research. Private sector continues to be largest recruiter of the students of educational institutes therefore, it provides an opportunity to institutes to train its students with the skill set to help the company policy holistically and provide them with ideas and innovative ways to implement SDG in their company structure without them having to sacrifice much on their profits. Companies', the largest contributors to ecological imbalances, makes it imperative for them to adopt sustainable growth mechanisms in their company culture. **A study carried out in UK in 2008 found that over half of employers surveyed (n=87) had at some time referred to social and environmental responsibility in their selection of recent graduates.**<sup>4</sup>

### **Interests:**

Companies work on sustainable goals for various reasons, including the long-term sustainability of their companies. They hope to create long-term stable societies and expand in global markets through the SDGs. With better-informed consumers, companies are more likely to project themselves as having a positive global image.

The association of businesses and HEI help the businesses in variety of ways. The HEI's help train the high level decision makers in the field of sustainable growth. **General electric is using its human resource department to integrate sustainability into the company's culture, ranging from hiring practices and training to employee wellbeing programs which are trained by stalwarts from various universities.**

The companies can collaborate with them on areas of research and most importantly provides an opportunity to differentiate themselves from their competitors by giving a social responsibility face to their businesses

### **Areas of collaboration:**

- 1) Business can yield a large influence on how HEI shape their curriculum to integrate both a business and sustainable outlook into it.
- 2) Training students in the essentials skill sets required to achieve company visions.
- 3) Collaborating with them for research and therefore, providing funds for the same.
- 4) Guest speaking programs and other student engagement for drawing the student attention on the necessities of sustainable growth.
- 5) Providing internship opportunities and recruiting the students with knowledge of sustainable development.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Education-sustainable-development-Guidance-June-14.pdf>

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### 3) UNIVERSITIES/HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

#### **Contribution:**

HEIs have been the most significant stakeholders when it comes to achieving sustainable development. They train future decision makers in the principles of sustainable growth so that this idea can be passed from one generation to the next. With the right curriculum, they are able to generate a conscious awareness on the looming challenges to these goals. However, HEI being institutions in themselves, need incentives from businesses to continue this education so that its students become employable along with being socially sensitized citizens. For this, it is important to bring both of the stakeholders on a common ground of association. **A survey by the NUS in UK over 2010, 2011 and 2012 has shown that over two-thirds of students surveyed believe that sustainable development should be covered in their degree courses (5,763 responses in 2010; 3,193 in 2011; and 6,756 in 2012). The final tranche of the study reported that 80 per cent of third year students (2,657 respondents) see universities as key actors in the delivery of skills for sustainable development.**

#### **Interests:**

Higher education institutions (HEIs) want to attract the best students, as the expectations of new generations of students are changing and increasingly focused on values including societal responsibility. Working with responsible businesses give a competitive advantage, as they will be able to fully prepare their students to assume responsibility in their professional and civil life. Within education, the personal involvement of top administrators is an important signal to faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders that the institution's citizenship engagement is a strategic and operational priority. An institution-wide commitment can thus have tremendous influence. HEIs can also move the focus beyond the classroom and research projects into their own institutional operations. Their objective is to enhance the operation of SDGs, by focusing on their broader responsibilities as organizations, corporate entities, schools, and agents of wider social change.

#### **Areas of collaboration:**

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Education-sustainable-development-Guidance-June-14.pdf>

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HEI can collaborate with businesses for the following:

1. Convening leaders and regional thinkers from academia, corporates and governments and providing them with a platform to exchange idea, develop goals, set priorities and discuss their concerns about achieving the SDGs.
2. Institutions with highly developed research bases can help bridge the gap between ideas and right talent to make them work. With the funding from the private sector, they can collaborate to develop product and technology required for achieving global sustainable goals.
3. HEI can also work to train the existing recruits of the company by developing comprehensive curriculum for the same.
4. They can also act as consultants and work in close associations with high level decision makers to take the right and timely decisions on a sustainable model of their business development along with bringing considerable acceleration in SDG implementation.

### **4) Students**

#### **Contribution:**

Students are the backbone of how long the sustainable development goals take time to be achieved. Without the contribution of the youth, 70% of which is currently enrolled in higher education, these goals would never become a reality. It is with their man power, education, skills and intelligence that the decisions of existing leaders can be challenged and they being the future leaders, be channeled.

#### **Interests:**

With companies taking an active part in achieving the global 2030 goals, the students have an unprecedented opportunity to channelize their skill development based on the need of the hour. With specialization in the fields now required by businesses to achieve SDG or opening up a responsible business committed to the vision of UNGC, students have varied interests in carrying the SDGs forward.

#### **Areas of collaboration:**

Students can collaborate and help bridge the gap between HEIs and Businesses by

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- 1) Talking part in short term training programs with universities if not long term courses.
- 2) Establishing a strong alumni network to help facilitate guidance in this field of work.
- 3) Volunteering and organizing events for public awareness
- 4) Harboring new age ideas on achieving the goals and establishing an understanding of its shortcomings by engaging in public debate.

### **5) Governments**

#### **Contributions:**

Governments have been the most important and integral contributors in achieving any goal aimed at sustainable development. Without the government effort, even the conceptualization of the goals would have been impossible. The UN thrives on the intent and approach of the countries on how they envision the future. Therefore, the ideology of the government has to be consistent with the core values established in the Rio +20 summit. Therefore, with the help of NGOs, companies, public sector and various other organizations, the governments channelize their funds to achieve these goals because in reality, these goals are made for the wellbeing of its citizens and the sustainable growth in its economy.

#### **Interests:**

Governments invest in the realization of sustainable development for reasons mentioned above. But it also has special interests in the association of HEIs and businesses. Since many universities are government run, it allows it to minimally influence the actions of the companies in the field of development through the universities. Moreover, enhanced research in HEIs with private funding is also essential to the governments to enhance its productivity levels. Their association for science and technology is of extreme importance to governments.

#### **Areas of collaboration:**

The stakeholders can collaborate with the governments in the following areas:

- 1) Providing scholarships to students working in the field of sustainable development.
- 2) Promote businesses working in the field of renewable energy and other industries working for the fulfillment of sustainable development goals by giving incentives like tax concessions.
- 3) By providing a platform for companies and universities to come together for common agendas.

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4) Developing schemes and awareness programs for the general public

### 5. AREAS TO CONSIDER

#### 1. Identifying incentives:

“The effort needs to help each partner organization achieve something significant. Incentives such as ‘we’ll do this for good publicity’ or ‘we don’t want to be left out’ are not sufficient.”

—Nigel Twose, director of the Development Impact Department, International Finance Corporation,  
World Bank Group<sup>6</sup>

Incentives can be found by identifying motivations that the companies may want to work on. As mentioned above, lack of incentive often leads to cherry picking of goals. Enlightened self-interest is the only genuinely sustainable motive. Sometimes external events can force different players to acknowledge that change is necessary. The collapse of the North Atlantic’s Grand Banks cod fisheries in the early 1990s made commercial fisheries much more interested in sustainable harvesting practices, laying the ground for the birth of the MSC. Therefore, it is more often than not, difficult for companies to identify incentives to work with universities for collaboration.

These incentives are often provided by governments in the form of tax concessions.

#### 2. Unsteady Policies:

Policymakers need to ensure a predictable, stable environment of funding and regulation on for long-term strategic partnerships to thrive. Usually, with change in government policies, the focus of public universities changes, making the partnerships with companies futile. Sometimes, companies also find it tough to get licenses to work on arenas that are not in the focus of the government. Conflicting state and central policies also add to why businesses would not want to enter into long term associations with HEI’s. **For instance in MALTA, their environmental research institution had been promised funds and a building, but, these took a long time to be forthcoming, mainly due to the ‘bureaucratic government system’ which was prevalent on the island.**<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/sustainability-and-resource-productivity/our-insights/creating-partnerships-for-sustainability>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/jtes.2012.14.issue-1/v10099-012-0004-x/v10099-012-0004-x.pdf>

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### 3. Finding the right partners:

Finding an entry point to connect with a business or business school can sometimes be the most challenging part of developing a new partnership. Ultimately, there need to be representatives on both sides that are deeply committed to the project and in a position to drive progress. Problem also arises when governments don't recognize various alternative higher educational institutes, which might be strategic partners of companies but yet remain inaccessible to them.

### 4. Universities are not autonomous decision makers

The best people to decide a university's strategy are its own board and faculty heads, not government ministries. Without freedom to operate – with appropriate checks and balances – they cannot form effective partnerships. For example, governments may pressurize universities to only have collaborations with home companies. This may be advantageous to them, but keeps the entire agenda of promoting sustainable development at bay.

### 5. Unstable Businesses

The instability of businesses makes it very tough for universities to repose their trust. The businesses work on profit models and therefore universities are reluctant to have any long term associations (like research) with them due to their changing priorities and funding. For instance, universities that collaborated with Kingfisher, suffered great losses due to the bankruptcy of the company which makes universities distrust the stability of businesses in changing global markets.

### 6. Intellectual property rights

Intellectual property (IP) refers to creations of the intellect for which a monopoly is assigned to designated owners by law. Intellectual property rights (IPRs) are the protections granted to the creators of IP, and include trademarks, copyright, patents, industrial design rights, and in some jurisdictions trade secrets. When universities and businesses collaborate on research projects, the problem of intellectual property and patent arises as a contention between the two. Moreover, since universities often align with more than one firm, businesses do not want to open up about their policies to prevent trade secrets being exploited. For instance, **8In July 2012, a judge awarded the University of Pittsburgh more than \$70 million in a patent-infringement lawsuit it brought in 2008 against a medical-device manufacturer.**

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<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intellectual\\_property](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intellectual_property)

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**Earlier in the year, Brigham Young University settled a six-year-old lawsuit against Pfizer for \$450 million.<sup>9</sup>**

### 7. Time and scale of associations

Associations can be a various types. A company might associate with universities for placements, guest programs among others. But it is often hard to bind companies into long term associations that include research based projects because of unstable funds and company policies. Some companies, that only believe in sustainable development as a marketing policy would consider such collaborations a waste of their money. Therefore, it is important to understand what kind of companies we are planning to collaborate with.

### 8. Company houses with their own universities

Various company houses, like Times of India, Reliance LMT, have their own universities. The association of companies therefore occurs, but is such associations helpful in the long run target of meet SDGs. The question therefore to consider is that is it important for business to collaborate with universities outside of their company?

However, it is also to be noted that in these cases, various challenges to association of both stakeholders, like lack of incentive, funding and distrust are erased out of the picture making research and training more suitable, effective and long lasting.

### 9. Type of student education

The question that we should also look into is how we plan to incorporate sustainable development values into students. Is to be added as a skill which would be useful in increasing their employability? If that is the case, then it might be a deception since many companies might not consider it as an additional skill or might not be looking for individuals with it in general and would focus on profit enhancement only. Should this be made as a compulsory course in curriculum or should the students be free to choose it if they want to. **For instance in Malta, a research conducted by its institute for environmental studies found that students did the course in sustainable development because they thought that the course didn't require too much effort (87.5 %).**<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.agb.org/trusteeship/2012/7/when-your-institution-sues-patent-infringement>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/ites.2012.14.issue-1/v10099-012-0004-x/v10099-012-0004-x.pdf>

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### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What can be some recommendations for stakeholders to make these associations more long lasting?
2. How can these challenges be overcome without any apparent loss to any stakeholder?
3. How can the problem of cherry picking be mitigated on a corporate platform?
4. How can CSR be integrated in the process of sustainable development?
5. Should associations between HEIs and corporates be made compulsory by the government?

### ADDITIONAL LINKS

<http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/151211-getting-started-guide-FINAL-PDF-.pdf>

<http://theconversation.com/yes-it-is-our-business-how-corporations-can-help-on-sustainable-development-goals-48247>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bobeccles/2015/10/20/un-sustainable-development-goals-good-for-business/>

<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150108194231213>

[http://www.ees.uni.opole.pl/content/01\\_10/ees\\_10\\_1\\_fulltext\\_05.pdf](http://www.ees.uni.opole.pl/content/01_10/ees_10_1_fulltext_05.pdf)

<http://dspace.unimap.edu.my/dspace/bitstream/123456789/5828/1/THE%20ROLE%20OF%20UNIVERSITIES%20IN%20SUSTAINABLE%20DEVELOPMENT%20WITH%20SPECIAL%20FOCUS%20ON%20PAKISTAN.pdf>

## 6. SOME GOOD COLLABORATION PRACTICES

### 1. Set a clear vision and purpose for the collaboration

Business priorities and stakeholder requirements most often drive participation in sustainability collaborations. Because many organizations participate in more than one partnership, setting a clear vision and goals for the collaboration is critical to avoid duplication with other organizations or initiatives. A clear vision and purpose will define the structure and longevity of the group, determine executive leadership support, and play a critical role in recruiting new partners.

### 2. Develop a clear governance model

Many collaborations start as informal partnerships. Often if successful, they evolve into formal entities. Regardless of the organizational structure, setting a clear governance model early in the collaboration, which outlines decision-making processes for both daily operations and strategic choices, helps achieve significant results quickly.

### 3. Engage relevant functions from the member organization

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The success of external partnerships often depends on members’ ability to collaborate internally in their own organizations and engage relevant functions such as R&D, Investor Relations, and HR. Promoting internally sustainability collaborations through targeted communication and information forums is important.

### **4. Establish a transparent communication process**

Transparent communication within the partner organizations, among partners, and externally with stakeholders supports the success of the collaboration. Partners should develop a media policy for the group, design a communication process, and select channels and milestones for communication, aligned with the collaboration objectives.

### **5. Establish a platform for collective action**

Most sustainability collaborations are virtual and deploying technology to design a platform/virtual workspace for internal and external use enables the collaboration process. The platform can include a social media component that allows members and stakeholders to share feedback and build on the collective thinking of the group.<sup>11</sup>

#### **ADDITIONAL LINKS**

<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/14635770610644574>

<http://www.innovationalliance.eu/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/01-bps-successful-innovation.pdf>

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.corporateecoforum.com/collaborating-sustainability-8-best-practices/>