ISSUES PAPER

Partnering for Sustainable Development: Challenges and Pathways for Building Cross-Sector Partnerships

Global Compact
Network Australia

About the Global Compact Network Australia

The Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA) is the Australian, business-led network of the United Nations Global Compact, the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative.

The GCNA brings together signatories to the UN Global Compact in Australia – including a number of Australia's leading companies, non-profits and universities – to advance corporate sustainability and the private sector's contribution to sustainable development.

We do this through a platform for dialogue, learning and influence that is inclusive, practical and leading edge, supporting our companies' practical implementation efforts and bringing the UN Global Compact to life in the Australian context and wherever Australian companies operate. Through its activities, the GCNA provides a meeting point where organisations can build best practice around sustainability and connect with networks and experts within Australia and globally.

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Introduction

This issues paper was commissioned by the Global Compact Network Australia in response to the growing interest in cross-sector partnering as a way to drive sustainable development, including implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

There has been growing momentum, both globally and within Australia, around cross-sector partnership as well as engaging the private sector as a development actor.

In 2015, United Nations member states adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 17 global goals which lay out a path to 2030 to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and protect the planet. The goals are universal; they apply to all countries whether developed, emerging or developing in their economy and human development. The SDGs require individual and collective action from government, the private sector, civil society and academia. In recognition of this, Goal 17 specifically calls for a new global partnership for the goals – embedding the importance of collaborative working to achieve a sustainable future.

Further, the Hon. Julie Bishop MP, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, launched the *Ministerial Statement on engaging the private sector in aid and development – Creating shared value through partnership*, the Australian Government's invitation to the private sector to collaborate with the aid program to implement sustainable solutions that tackle development challenges.

Despite these developments, and energetic discourse among stakeholders about the need for collaboration, to date there has been an emphasis on the opportunities of partnering but less acknowledgement of the potential difficulties in building and maintaining effective partnerships. There has also been little focus on the 'how to' of good partnering practice, and the need to build our collective capability to partner. Addressing the need for evidence-based methodology and sharing strategies for overcoming challenges to partnering will be key to fostering future collaborative efforts.

This paper has been developed following consultations with business, non-government organisation and academic institutions on their experiences of cross-sector partnering. The purpose is to understand current practice and challenges arising from collaborating across sectors for sustainable development, and identify pathways to support effective partnering toward sustainable development.

The content of this paper will be discussed at two multi-stakeholder workshops focusing on the practical 'how to' of partnering being convened by the GCNA in November 2016.

Summary of Findings

Discussions with participants representing business, non-government organisations and academia explored current partnering activities, their experience of getting new partnerships off the ground, and challenges that arise during cross-sector partnerships. The primary reflections on current practice include:

- A variable understanding of the definition of partnership.

- Transformative partnerships are rare but highly valued.

- There are positive examples of partnership among all sectors.

The discussions were wide-ranging and many participants contributed examples of current and past partnerships, and shared both successes and challenges. Key challenges are clustered into the following themes:

- Different worldviews, different frames of reference, different timelines.

- Lack of trust between business and NGOs.

- Conflicting perceptions of value and relevance.

- Lack of common partnering process and framework.

- Limited capability to partner.

- Internal or structural barriers for NGOs.

- The need for impact measurement.

Participants discussed some areas of potential action that would support more effective partnering and could help overcome some of the abovementioned challenges. These have been augmented with our understanding of emerging thinking and good practice internationally for supporting partnerships for the SDGs. Potential pathways for the future include:

- Building empathy across sectors.

- Identifying areas of common impact using the SDGs.

- Agreeing 'rules of engagement' and a common process for partnering.

- Building our collective capability to partner.

- Impact-led metrics and design.

Method

Input to inform this paper was gathered from business, NGOs, academia and government using the following methods:

- Roundtable discussions with businesses (n=25)

- Roundtable discussion with NGOs representatives (n=9)

- Individual conversations with academic organisations (n=2)

Organisations were encouraged to share both positive and negative experiences as they discussed the range of relationships they were in, and shared insights from their partnering experiences.

Perspectives were sought from business on their experience of partnering with other sectors (NGOs, academia and government), NGOs on partnering with business, academia and government etc. rather than partnering within sectors.

The discussions were held under the Chatham House Rule and as such, none of the content is attributable to an individual or organisation.
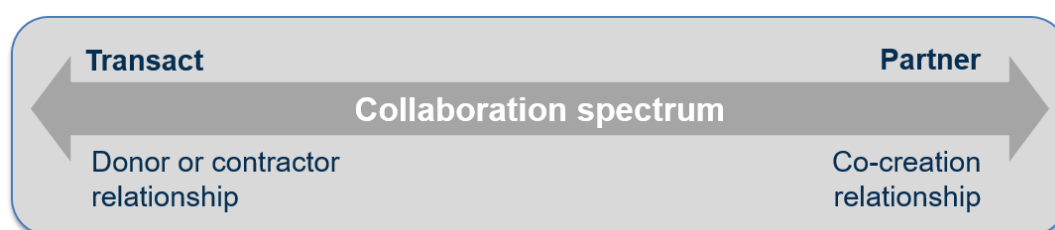
Setting the context for partnerships

In order to create a common frame of reference for all participants, there were three pieces of information introduced at the beginning of each discussion:

A definition of partnership

The Partnering Initiative defines a cross-sector[1] or multi-stakeholder partnership as an ongoing working relationship between organisations combining their resources and competencies and sharing risks towards achieving agreed objectives while each achieving their own individual objectives.

A collaboration spectrum (simplified)

Source: Adapted from Partnership Brokers Association

The partnering cycle

Source: Partnership Brokers Association

1. In the context of cross-sector partnerships, the term 'sector' refers to government, business, civil society (NGO/not-for-profit/for-purpose) and academia. Cross-sector partnering implies a partnership between organisations from two or more of these sectors.

Current practice

Participants reflected on the range of relationships their organisations were currently involved in or had recently been involved in. Themes that emerged around current practice indicate that:

- all would benefit from greater clarity over the terminology of cross-sector partnerships;
- there is early evidence that all sectors have interest in and some experience trying cross-sector partnerships; and
- partnerships are hard to establish but worthwhile.

There are diverse understandings of the definition of partnership

Most participants agreed that there was confusion around what 'partnership' really means within their organisation, and it was noted that the use of the word 'partnership' was often discouraged by legal departments given its specific legal meaning.

When referencing a simplified collaboration spectrum (see p.3), many suggested that most of the cross-sector relationships they were in sat toward the transactional rather than transformational (partnering) end. This is not surprising, given the traditional ways of working between government, business and NGOs have encouraged contractual and financial exchanges such as grant making, philanthropy, sub-contracting and pledging. This may also be due to the emergent nature of the transformative partnership approach and the relative complexity, time and risk associated with investing in them.

There are positive examples of cross-sector partnerships among all sectors

Despite inviting comment from all participants on their experience of partnering with all other sectors, the weight of the conversations focused on business and NGO partnerships.

One example cited was a business-NGO partnership for joint advocacy which arose from the realisation that the two organisations have a shared objective: to change the policy landscape in the same direction. There is no funding involved in this relationship, rather a commitment to share technical and contextual expertise, and where there is public policy alignment to advocate together. It involves sharing both risk and benefit to achieve the collective objective, while also advancing the partners' individual objectives.

Both business and NGO participants noted productive and effective experiences of partnering with academic institutions. This was attributed to the establishment of clear objectives for engagement and clear roles and responsibilities at the outset. However, in one example, an NGO described being engaged by a university in a 'research partnership' as part of a funding application. The application was successful; however, the NGO was left disappointed when they were not invited to contribute to or co-design the research approach. Ultimately, the NGO felt 'used' for their reputation rather than being valued for their expertise and relationships with community. They felt that this ultimately limited the potential value of the research.

Although participants were not able to discuss certain partnerships due to confidentiality, at the time of the discussions several partnerships were under development as part of DFAT's Business Partnerships Platform initiative. This evidences the role of government as another sector active in cross-sector partnerships.

Transformative partnerships are rare and highly valued

There were a handful of examples cited of long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships between businesses and NGOs. These included:

- a partnership between a business and environmental NGOs to define strategy and policy related to supply chain sustainability and responsible business; and
- a partnership between a business and a community organisation to co-create support services for customers experiencing hardship and vulnerability.

Several such transformative partnerships arose during a crisis or time of great challenge for the business involved, when they felt they had no choice but to become 'radically transparent'. Through 'taking a risk' by inviting NGOs or community organisations to become more deeply acquainted with their business drivers and challenges, they built a level of trust that enabled exchange of ideas and value, rather than remaining in an adversarial stand-off. This type of collaboration was unusual but highly valued and required significant internal change and leadership courage to establish.

Challenges to cross-sector partnering

The challenges identified by participants were largely common across all sectors and are often overlapping and interdependent. The findings are collated into themes, with specific challenges identified by sector where appropriate.

Different worldviews, different frames of reference, different timelines

'We operate in different worlds, languages, motivations, time frames. We look at 10-12 year projects. It's hard to find businesses doing this.' *NGO participant*

'Business needs to understand how development and quality programming works.' *NGO participant*

'There tends to be a lack of willingness to really listen and understand the context of the other, and the implication of that context for the relationship.' *Business participant*

'Some NGOs misunderstand business realities, so sometimes expectations are totally unrealistic.' *Business participant*

Worldview

There was much discussion by participants about the different way that people saw the world, and sustainable development challenges, depending on which sector they represented.

When exploring drivers and motivations to partner, one NGO participant suggested that many businesses seek a business case approach to participate in sustainable development, while NGOs are typically driven from an altruistic perspective. Another noted the different 'theories of change' held by organisations, which are often not explored to promote deeper appreciation of an issue. For instance, where business might consider that infrastructure is the best way to solve a problem, an NGO may think this will exacerbate the problem.

These different worldviews can give rise to tension between sectors or partners, particularly when time is not invested in building greater appreciation for different perspectives.

Business participants noted that they have felt 'attacked' for their views, rather than NGOs seeking to more deeply understand their perspective. By the same token, NGOs suggest there is a poor understanding by business of the development process and the complexity involved in sustainable development, leading to differences on the best way forward.

This difference in worldview is often exacerbated by several other issues identified in the discussions including different language, culture, perception of risk and operating pace.

Language

Several participants cited different use of language as a barrier to effective partnering, and using similar words but meaning different things. The use of the word 'partnership' was a key example requiring clearer definition, given there is such a range of relationships (including suppliers, contractors, alliances, networks and co-created solutions) which are referred to as partnerships. This can create confusion around expectations, approaches to management, measurement and time to achieve outcomes.

In contrast, an NGO/academic partnership that was shared was seen to be highly effective as the two organisations 'spoke the same language', had clear and shared objectives and articulated roles and responsibilities. The same sentiment was shared about a partnership between business and academia focused on climate change.

Culture

Building an understanding of different cultures was also cited as important. In some cases, this can be difficult when individuals have worked most of their lives in a single sector, or for prolonged periods in one organisation which forms their dominant cultural frame of reference. Having people work across sectors means they build a stronger understanding of each other, and can support the ability to translate language and culture between organisations from different sectors. For some, this type of experience can be highly valuable in identifying inter-connectedness and collaborative opportunities within systems, often referred to as 'boundary spanning'.[2]

This is seen as highly advantageous for those who instigate and broker cross-sector partnerships and need to be adaptive to different cultural landscapes.

One business participant outlined how critical it was that all parties commit to actively listening and seeking to understand others and their context. In particular, they cited an example of an

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2. Boundary spanning is defined as reaching across borders, margins, or sections to 'build relationships, interconnections and interdependencies': Williams, P. The Competent Boundary Spanner. Public Admin. 2002; 80: 103-124.

NGO who was hesitant to partner until the business agreed to several conditions, while the dominant culture within the business was to move quickly and take risks. In making time to deeply understand the reputational risk for the NGO, and the importance of reputation to achieving their mission, the business was able to ensure the appropriate conditions were in place in the partnering agreement that would provide a level of certainty for the NGO.

For many NGOs, the due diligence process required to assess appropriate partners can be much more than a values alignment assessment. It can be deeply complex and include considerations of reputational risk (and the ability to advocate and attract future funding) and risk to communities of engaging or not engaging.

Operating pace

'There is little patience for the process of brokering partnerships. People are looking for quick wins and impact – and this is on both sides.' *NGO participant*

'True partnerships require a big investment in time and resources, and we don't want to do that for all our relationships.' *NGO participant*

Several participants acknowledged that effective partnering takes time, usually longer than initially expected. Also, communication breakdowns are common, and ongoing dialogue and revisiting of expectations is critical. Organisations must be selective and strategic in how they invest. There seemed pressure from the leadership of both business and NGOs to show results quickly, which limited the ability to spend time developing greater understanding and ways of working, thus potentially reducing partnership effectiveness. For others, there was benefit to working together in some way, as they could develop a deeper understanding of each other 'on the job'.

The NGO participants commented on the need to adapt their internal systems, processes and culture to respond to business partner needs, which takes time and can reduce their responsiveness to business partners who may feel they are too slow to be an effective partner.

Variable levels of trust and understanding between business and NGO sectors

'It feels like whatever we do, we get criticised.' *Business participant*

'Both sectors (business and NGO) get it wrong sometimes. It's essential that the objectives don't get lost. Being clear on them and keeping them front of mind is critical.' *Business participant*

'We don't want to erode NGOs' advocacy role – that's really important. But it's about how we engage with each other.' *Business participant*

'We want to work with an NGO on a particular issue but they need to not want to run a campaign.' *Business participant*

Understanding the drivers behind another's agenda was discussed as an important first step in partnering. Both business and NGOs felt they were often stereotyped by the other as 'all NGOs are…' or 'all businesses are…' which did not lend itself to enabling trust in initial conversations. On this note, there was an acknowledgement that neither sector is homogenous.

Investing in building a greater understanding of an organisation and their drivers, rather than making assumptions, will be critical in building trust for partnerships. In addition, agreeing shared objectives up front, and articulating additional (individual) objectives, rather than allowing them to surface as the partnership develops, were seen as good practice to foster trust.

There was much discussion among businesses about the impact of some activist NGOs on growing mistrust between the sectors. Business participants welcomed the voice of activist NGOs in holding business to account and calling out poor corporate performance. They acknowledged that business 'doesn't always get it right' and that leading businesses have a role to play in setting and raising the bar for others. However, they felt there were instances where activist NGOs were more focused on furthering their own organisational interests rather than addressing the issue at hand or even 'getting the facts straight' by engaging meaningfully and respectfully with business on the issue.

In the case of one activist report that was discussed, the NGO did not engage the businesses referred to in the report to verify their facts, seek appropriate input or acknowledge positive performance.

Business participants suggested that, should they be engaged proactively, they may join forces with NGOs and support action on an issue. Unfortunately, this missed opportunity to engage and collaborate has led to a loss of credibility and trust for some NGOs by some businesses, and a sense of the NGO sector becoming 'muddied'.

This conversation raised the idea to create some simple 'rules of engagement' for partnering across sectors. Such rules could enable more productive dialogue and an opportunity to build mutual understanding and respect, supporting a more constructive environment for partnering. Such rules should also become enablers for mutual benefit given good partners will look out for their partners' interests and actively seek ways to support them.

Conflicting perceptions of value and relevance

It was suggested that in some cases, businesses feel they can drive sustainable development without NGOs, creating a crisis of relevance for NGOs who hold a wealth of experience, capability and technical resources dedicated to this pursuit. While effective in some cases, it does not always acknowledge the complexity and interdependency of issues and the actors necessary to solve humanity's most wicked problems, and can risk bypassing the enormous body of knowledge and practice progressed by the development sector.

The sense that this intellectual, social and technical capital is sometimes not valued by the private sector gives rise to feelings of disempowerment for some NGOs working in partnership with business. On the other hand, businesses have often felt that NGOs do not understand the broad positive contributions that they make to communities.

One participant who had worked in both businesses and NGOs suggested that there is often an unhelpful perception that business 'takes away' while civil society 'gives back'. Another unhelpful assumption is that business has funds, while NGOs have expertise. In practice, it is unlikely that things are ever so binary and rather

that all organisations can contribute value in a range of ways.

It will be important for future partnerships to be mindful that a critical ingredient of effective partnering is the sharing of power as a precursor to mutual respect. This may involve a shift away from traditional or stereotyped power dynamics and can be fostered by valuing the respective roles, resources and capabilities of all partners in co-creating impact.

There was acknowledgement that NGOs have grass-roots approaches that can be highly beneficial to businesses who may lack these.

Some business participants acknowledged that they may not do as well at solving sustainable development challenges on their own in all cases, but can find working with NGOs difficult. Joining with NGOs may enable them to achieve greater impact, but adaption is required on both sides.

Business participants noted the changing nature of corporate partnering objectives. There is a general move away from philanthropy and more focus on partnerships that support core business objectives. Some businesses are looking for civil society to advise them on technical or contextual areas and build their capacity. NGOs must be mindful of where a business's focus lies when considering how to engage and not just see business as a provider of funds.

Academic partners are seen as able to support transfer of knowledge and innovation in partnerships seeking to shift policy and practice. The history, credibility and reputation of lead researchers, along with perceived impartiality and openness to engage with business are seen as a positive determinant in effective cross-sector partnerships involving academia.

Lack of common partnering process and framework

The NGO participants raised the challenge of trying to partner without a clear and agreed process for scoping, co-creating, agreeing to partner, agreeing roles and responsibilities and reviewing partnerships. This was common to their partnerships with business and academia.

Also mentioned was the importance of considering the difficult conversations that partners must have about and throughout the 'partnership lifecycle', including topics such as:

- How long will the partnership last?
- Where does liability for resources and outcomes sit and for how long?
- When and how does risk or ownership for an initiative or impact transfer? To whom?
- What happens if things go wrong?
- How will the NGO or community be financially sustainable after the partnership ends?
- What are the potential ways we might formalise the partnership?

These issues require skill and capacity to work through, and it was acknowledged that not many business or NGO teams have a great deal of either.

Also cited as difficult were partnerships often referred to as 'arranged marriages', where the decision to partner is made at a Board or executive level, before really understanding the alignment or allowing for scoping and feasibility. Similarly, signing an agreement too early, locking partners into an arrangement that is not mutually beneficial was also mentioned as challenging.

One NGO described being pursued by a business for partnership in order to win a tender, but then not being invited to contribute to the project design. Accordingly, they felt they were used to lend credibility to win a contract, rather than sought for their expertise in genuine partnership.

Without investing in establishing the right mindset and process, poor articulation of roles and responsibilities means organisations default to traditional power dynamics (i.e. recipient takes direction from funder/contractor). This minimises the opportunity to leverage all parties' resources and expertise and may risk some partners not feeling valued for what they can contribute.

One NGO shared that in the rapid response / humanitarian space, they are often trying to build partnerships in a rush after a disaster occurs. They have found this is rarely effective. Their reflection is to invest in time up front to scope and build, then put agreements in place, in readiness to respond.

As partnerships develop, participants also noted a need for review to ensure they are delivering on set objectives, taking account of changing circumstances, managing expectations, enabling all parties to achieve what they need, and ensuring continued engagement.

Limited capability to partner

'What we're talking about is more sophisticated than what smaller NGOs can do in terms of time and capability.'
NGO participant

'We need people who can understand both sides [business and NGO] and we need to help them understand each other – this is the role of the broker.'
NGO participant

All sectors raised the challenge of having the appropriate skills and time to partner effectively. Issues raised included:

- The need to have difficult or uncomfortable conversations that explore what might go wrong and prepare for such scenarios.
- The need to invest time and resources to building capability on all sides – to understand each other, to negotiate etc. – was not always acknowledged or valued.

In many NGOs, partnerships are conflated with fundraising relationships and may be managed by sales and marketing teams. NGOs identified a need for greater internal 'translation' and collaboration between fundraisers and development experts to ensure partnerships capture all available technical expertise within the NGO to deliver the best outcomes.

The capability and time to broker and partner is limited for all sectors, so there is often a need to focus on very few, highly strategic partnerships. Business in particular expect to quickly establish the viability of a partnership and will move on quickly if they do not see value in further engagement.

Internal or structural barriers for NGOs

NGO participants discussed the need to establish new ways of working, and teams that allow them to partner with business more effectively. Many NGOs are traditionally structured around fundraising activities which can limit their ability to adapt to more complex relationships that require multi-faceted engagement and innovation.

The NGO discussion also identified the tension that exists between advocacy, fundraising and partnering objectives, with participants noting that internal teams may find themselves pursuing conflicting agendas with business. They also spoke of the need to establish a partnership structurally and operationally in the organisation to ensure the right skills and capability are applied to enable it to flourish.

The need for impact measurement

Measuring the social impact of an organisation's activities and of a partnership was seen as a challenge for all. Despite this, reporting which better conveys impact (rather than just inputs and outputs) and the complexity of development work is increasingly critical for both upward and downward accountability.

There was a sense that some NGOs were critical of business' evaluation efforts, while not always reporting their own impact. It was also noted that in some NGOs there is a lot of money spent on trying to keep more money coming in, rather than focused on areas of greatest impact.

Business also acknowledged they were not always good at telling their own stories about impact and that there is an opportunity for business to 'join hands' with other sectors to evaluate impact.

Some suggested that the NGO sector may have stronger capability than business in evaluating social impact in some circumstances, which could be an opportunity for cross-sector collaboration.

Potential pathways to support improved cross-sector partnering

In all discussions, participants identified constructive pathways to help overcome the challenges identified above, and support a better enabling environment for partnering among Australian organisations. These ideas have been augmented with leading thinking and practice emerging globally around cross-sector partnering for SDGs. The potential pathways identified included:

- Building empathy across sectors;
- Using the SDGs to identify areas of common impact;
- Agreeing 'rules of engagement' and a common process for partnering;
- Building the collective capability to partner;
- Impact-led metrics and design.

Each will require ongoing investment and commitment by interested organisations. While each will create value on their own, the greatest impact will come from an investment in all of them.

Building empathy across sectors

Several participants identified the need to build a much deeper understanding of the drivers, technical expertise, challenges and culture of other sectors in order to create the foundational elements of trust and mutual respect which are essential for potential collaboration. Both business and NGOs identified a need for:

- business to develop a stronger understanding of the complexity of the development process, quality program design and the internal challenges for NGOs to partner; and
- NGOs to better understand business drivers and commercial realities and accept that while business must make a profit to be sustainable, they may have a 'higher purpose' that also drives them.

A greater understanding between sectors may also help overcome the focus on difference, and replace it with an appreciation of diversity. Given the complexity and intractability of the issues at the core of sustainable development, it is critical to leverage the opportunity arising from diversity and improved complex problem solving.

Research[3] shows that when solving large, complex problems, diverse groups of thinkers outperform highly intelligent thinkers working alone. However, to optimise the opportunity provided by diversity, groups must know how to work together effectively. By thinking and acting differently, partners might find new ways to solve complex problems that they would not have found alone.

Identifying areas of common impact using the Sustainable Development Goals

'One challenge we face is identifying others who have shared goals. The SDGs could help with this.'
Business Participant

'When we combine hands, we can have a greater impact, even if our individual objectives are different.'
Business Participant

It was widely agreed that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can provide a useful framework for helping organisations identify the sustainable development issues most relevant to their organisation. Many GCNA business members have conducted mapping exercises to identify priority areas for their business within the SDG agenda.

Some NGOs have also started articulating their areas of expertise and impact in line with the SDGs. As more organisations do this, there is an exciting new opportunity to use the SDGs to identify other organisations with common priorities and areas of focus, and build clusters of actors with common interests.
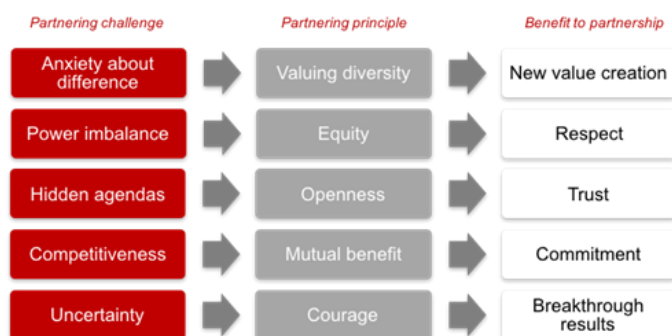
SDG clusters would enable knowledge to be shared, duplication to be reduced and synergies to be exploited. Most critically, it would provide a platform to identify organisations with complimentary skills and resources to spark shared purpose partnerships. Several participants mentioned the value that the GCNA could play in convening a cross-sector partnership platform and brokering such partnerships.

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3. Page, S.E. (2008) *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*. New Jersey, USA. Princeton University Press.

Agreeing the 'rules of engagement' and a common process for partnering

As noted, the general level of trust and understanding between business and NGOs is low, although there being specific examples of trusted relationships between organisations.

Participants spoke of their desire for some agreed 'rules of engagement' that would foster greater trust and mutual respect. The Partnership Brokers Association sets out five principles that are critical to overcoming some of the commonly identified challenges to partnering which might inform our rules of engagement:

Partnering challenge	Partnering principle	Benefit to partnership
Anxiety about difference	Valuing diversity	New value creation
Power imbalance	Equity	Respect
Hidden agendas	Openness	Trust
Competitiveness	Mutual benefit	Commitment
Uncertainty	Courage	Breakthrough results

Considering these principles and some of what was discussed among participants, the rules of engagement may include statements like:

- Approach all interactions with curiosity and respect - be mindful we are all people, with personal values, histories and aspirations. We are not our organisations or sectors. Be mindful of the power you assume and seek to build shared power in your partnerships.
- Seek to consider all people and organisations without assumptions or aspersions. Ensure time to explore interests and expectations up front and continue to revisit throughout your partnership.
- Openness and transparency are critical for building trust.
- Seek deeper understanding or perspective on issues that concern you. Listen. Ask clarifying questions.
- Offer time and space for people and their organisations to respond to alleged poor performance or misconduct, before publishing accusations against them.
- Focus on the power that exists in diversity.

Having a common process, or at least a frame of reference, can support organisations seeking to partner. Agreeing a pathway to scope, build, manage and sustain partnerships is critical to ensure there is shared understanding of process, and maintains a focus on the health of the relationship when there is often a tendency to be distracted by the activities of the partnership.

The Partnering Cycle developed by The Partnering Initiative and The Partnership Brokers Association (as referenced above) provides an evidence-based methodology and tools that can support organisations and partnership brokers in their partnering efforts. Observational research, such as Collective Impact (which was based on several partnerships built using the Partnering Cycle), and the work of the Tamarak Institute and Collaboration for Impact, also offer insight to support collaborative working in complexity.

Building the collective capability to partner

Building capability within organisations to partner is critical to getting cross-sector partnerships off the ground and creating sustained impact. In some cases, organisations must adapt and transform to accommodate the innovation driven by a partnership, and as such it is important to ensure sufficient time and resources are applied to work on the partnership, as well as on the activities generated by the partnership.

It can be helpful to appoint an internal or external broker to support scoping, building, and agreement negotiation. They will seek to transfer knowledge and coach partner organisations to do it for themselves, then be called on for independent partnership review or to facilitate troubleshooting. Alternative models might consider setting up a partnership secretariat with resources seconded from the partner organisations, or establishing a 'backbone' organisation, to drive operational affairs separate from the partner organisations.

Impact-led metrics and design

'A robust follow-up and review mechanism for the implementation of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require a solid framework of indicators and statistical data to monitor progress, inform policy and ensure accountability of all stakeholders.' *UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division*

Measuring how organisations are contributing to sustainable development is important to understand for multiple reasons:

- Is the investment being made having the desired impact?
- Are there any unintended consequences of the initiative that are contributing positively to other issues or having a negative impact?
- How can we learn from our experience and that of others to re-design, scale up or amplify the impact of investments or initiatives?

Evaluation and learning tend to fight for attention and funding in many projects. Placing greater emphasis on impact measurement will lead to improved evidence for initiative design, scale up, communication and ultimately progress toward sustainable development and the SDGs.

Next steps

There will be time for further exploration of the challenges and strategies for overcoming them in the GCNA partnering workshops being convened in November 2016. The GCNA is also exploring additional ways to support the realisation of the opportunities outlined above and will continue to engage and communicate with members and stakeholders as these develop.