Briefing: The Context for Successful Partnerships—A Private Sector Perspective

[Adapted from 2018 UNDPI NGO Conference Panel by Dan Bena, Founder and President, www.danbena.com]

In August of 2018, the World Development Foundation convened a panel to address, and provoke spirited dialog around, the perspectives on partnerships. The underpinning context was SDG 17, advancing partnerships for the Global Goals, and the term "Public-Private Partnership" has specific meaning and definition to many stakeholder groups. This abstract, and the panel upon which it is based, takes a much more fundamental look at the foundation for partnerships, writ large.

Trust as the foundational prerequisite of successful, lasting partnerships

Most people agree that trust is a crucial element of any authentic, sustained partnership. The Edelman Trust Barometer has been surveying trust globally for over a decade. Their 2018 report indicates a "world of distrust" among the general
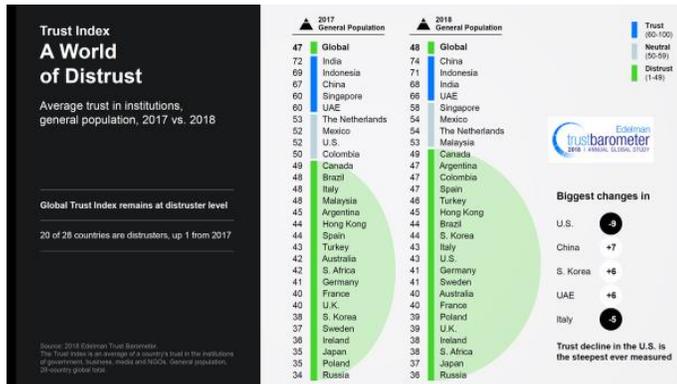
populace in 28 countries, worse than the year before (see figure at left). Looking more closely at trust in institutions, Edelman identified that Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) were distrusted in 10 of those 28 countries; Business was distrusted in 16 of 28; Government distrusted in 21 of 28; and Media in 22 of 28 countries.

Clearly opportunity exists to build trust in all institutions, and the Edelman report identifies a list of actions—"trust-building mandates"--that, in their analysis, can help build trust, based on specific expectations of each institution (see figure below).

Economic Growth and Supporting the Poor represent opportunities to build trust

One of the themes common for three of the four institutions (Business, NGOs, Government) relates to the need for economic growth/supporting the poor. According to the Business and Sustainable Development Commission report, Economic growth is one of the core objectives of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, representing $12 trillion (US) per year in business value, and the potential to create more than 380 million new jobs by 2030. While the Global Goals are, arguably, common goals, given the broad acceptance by United Nation Member States, as well as their

embrace by the private sector, academia, and other sector partners, there could be insight gained from looking at common needs and desire through a humanistic lens.


This was done by BBMG and Globescan in their report, representing conclusions from surveying 16,000 people across 16 countries. Of note are the four remarkably common, human desires expressed by those people surveyed in the study (see figure to left): **(1) Health and Well-being; (2) Financial Security; (3) Meaningful Relationships; and (4) A Sense of Purpose.**

In addition to wanting an individual sense of purpose, **65% of survey respondents want to support companies with a sense of purpose**, which is a crucial message for the private sector.

Equally important, however, is that **when those same respondents were asked to name a company that makes a positive difference in society, only 45% could name even a single company**. According to the report authors, **that 20% difference represents the "Brand Purpose Gap,"** a significant opportunity for brands to fill. **This links directly to the context for partnerships with private sector companies, particularly when trying to align on common principles and goals for the partnership.**
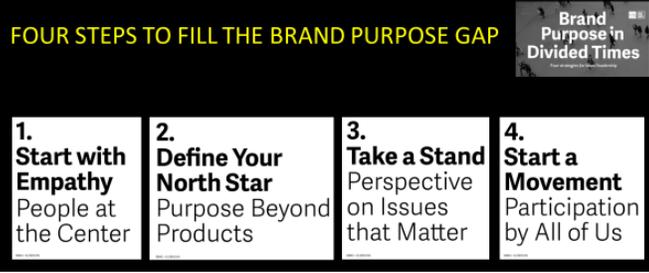
The four steps listed in the figure to the left were identified as the process through which the "Brand Purpose Gap" can be filled in authentic, lasting ways. Most critical is the expectation that **brand owners in the private sector are willing to take a visible, vocal perspective on issues that matter to the progress of broader society**. Again, a strong opportunity to frame upon one or more of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

Elements of successful partnerships

The Rockefeller Foundation and Business for Social Responsibility, in their report, identified five key success factors as a blueprint for impact in the context of private sector collaboration toward the Sustainable Development Goals (see figure below).

These success factors include, at the core, a **Common, Compelling, Purpose**. This, in turn, should inform and drive the **Right Partners in the Right Roles**; arranged in an **Organization Design that is Fit for Purpose**; and strengthened by **Accountability and Good Governance**.

Many others have explored the elements that lead to successful partnerships, particularly with participatory private sector partners. One of the more comprehensive reports which describe the landscape of multi-stakeholder partnerships, particularly with the private sector, was created earlier in 2018. The report assessed 125 impact partnerships, across 39 countries, and included input from 1150 experts. The report is also part of the Sustainable Development Goals Leadership Series, specifically in the context of SDG 17 around partnerships. In this report, a pyramid describing the effective elements of partnerships was constructed (see figure at right) and reinforces many of the tenets of the Rockefeller/BSR Report. The importance of collective vision, common language, complementary goals, and specific roles and accountabilities were highlighted as crucial to success.
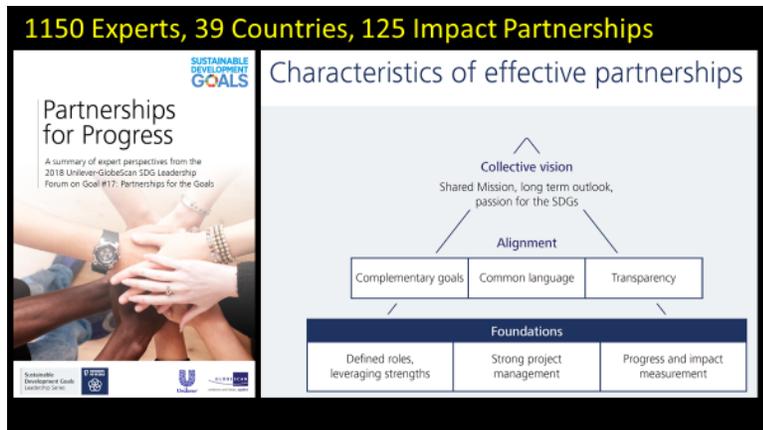
In summary, the Global Goals, to many represent a gift to modern society, and present a framework upon which every sector of stakeholder, including individual global citizens, can collaborate and act to advance the needs of the greater good. Partnerships in pursuit of the Goals continue to increase, yet the challenge remains to construct these partnerships from the very beginning upon a foundation of trust, authenticity, common language and goals, and clear roles, accountabilities and measures. Trust is not owned by the institution; rather, borrowed from their stakeholders.