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SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

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Introduction

SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals, aims to 'revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development'. It is an overarching goal, promoting engagement in partnerships as a means to achieve the other 16 goals of the 2030 Agenda. This goal acknowledges that the targets of the 2030 Agenda are unattainable without partnerships at the 'global, regional, national and local levels' (United Nations, 2020a).

SDG 17's targets fall into five broad categories: finance, technology, capacity building, trade and systemic issues. Finance, encompassing targets 17.1 to 17.5, focuses on developed countries partnering with and assisting developing countries in revenue collection, mobilising aid, long-term debt sustainability and promoting investment. Technology, targets 17.6 to 17.8, addresses the technological divide between the global North and South. Measures to overcome the divide include enhancing existing partnerships and mechanisms, improved coordination, a global facilitation mechanism, and development and dissemination of environmentally sound technologies on favourable terms. Capacity building, addressed in target 17.9, addresses the necessity of international support to build capacity in developing countries for the implementation of national plans for all SDGs through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation (United Nations, 2020a). Trade, targets 17.10 to 17.12, draws attention to the importance of rules-based and equitable trading and seeks to increase the share in international trade by developing countries through the use of multinational organisations and frameworks.

Systemic issues cover three broad areas. Targets 17.13-17.15 focus on policy and institutional coherence to enhance macroeconomic stability and sustainable development, intertwined with an approach that respects country specific modalities. Targets 17.16 and 17.17 address the necessity of multi-stakeholder partnerships for coordinating and sharing resources, knowledge, expertise and technology in support of the SDGs, in particular in developing countries. Targets 17.18 and 17.19, cover data, monitoring and accountability, supporting and enhancing countries' capacity to increase the availability of high quality data, and to develop statistical capacity in developing countries (United Nations, 2020a). The achievement of this last target in particular is in doubt due to the lack of funding required for full implementation, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020).

The European Union and SDG 17

The EU's 2015 trade and investment strategy, 'Trade for All', takes account of the fact that trade can potentially contribute to sustainable development via job creation through exports. Trade also offers the opportunity to obtain foreign currency which may lead to further integration of developing countries into world markets and thus reduce the necessity of external financing (Eurostat 2020). The 22 June 2020 Eurostat progress report notes moderate overall progress against SDG 17 for the previous five years, but significant progress regarding steadily increasing EU imports from developing countries. The total monetary value of these imports in 2018 equated to €894 billion. The compound annual growth rate aggregated by the EU27 grew by 4.6% per year over the five-year period from 2013-2018. However, while the EU is contributing to the overall progress of targets 17.11 and 17.12, developing and increasing trade and exports from developing to developed countries, the report notes insufficient progress in the EU's financial support to developing countries. Overall, in 2018, the EU allocated €104 billion in financial support to developing countries. In the five-year period from 2013-2018, the compound annual growth rate of EU financial support to developing countries was recorded as -0.5% per year. The achievement of targets 17.1 to 17.5, focussed on developed countries' financial assistance to developing countries, is in in doubt.

Another key takeaway from the Eurostat report (2020) is insufficient progress in addressing/increasing the share of environmental taxes in total tax revenues. This objective aims to ensure that the cost of negative externalities, i.e. pollution and other damage to health and the environment, is included in the price of goods and services (Remeur, 2020). The four types of environmental taxes are energy taxes, transport taxes, and pollution and resource taxes. These taxes theoretically increase the economic competitiveness of sustainable products and services by monetising the negative impacts of unsustainable practices on the environment, making unsustainably sourced and produced goods and services more expensive, thus incentivising engagement in more sustainable practices. In the five-year period from 2013-2018, the compound annual EU growth rate was recorded at -0.7% per year. Thus, achievement of targets 17.16 and 17.13 is at risk due to insufficient progress on environmental tax (United Nations, 2020a).

International climate finance is an EU policy addressing SDG 17 as well as the Paris Agreement, in line with the EU's support of climate action (European Commission, 2020a). The policy aims to provide investment funds for relevant projects in developing countries. Loans of €21.7 billion in 2018 made the EU, member states and European Investment Bank the largest source of climate funding globally. The 2014-2020 European Commission budget committed to providing €14 billion (or an average of €2 billion a year) in support of climate activities in developing countries (European Commission, 2020a). The Commission's strategy in this area is twofold: grant funding is provided directly to the poorest and most vulnerable countries. That funding is then used to leverage private investment by combining grants with loans and equities from public and private sources including development banks. This approach is linked to target 17.9, Capacity Building, given it offers developing countries the opportunity to invest in sustainable and renewable projects.

The EU's 'Joint programming of development cooperation' policy is a measure to ensure that all aid provided is effective in achieving its objectives (European Commission, 2020c). It involves a 'joint response from the EU and its member states to the national development plan of a partner country' (European Commission, 2020c), making aid more coherent, location-specific and scalable, thus offering better value for money. This policy directly addresses targets 17.16 and 17.7, establishment of multilateral and/or stakeholder programs to address the Sustainable Development Goals specifically in developing countries.

The EU also engages in partnerships in the field of research and innovation. The current program, 'Horizon 2020' (possibly succeeded by new initiative 'Horizon Europe', for the period 2021-2027) has made just under €80 billion in funding available (European Commission, 2020d) for the period of 2014-20. This is assisting emerging economies to enable participation of their researchers in projects such as the research program undertaken following the Zika outbreak in 2015 (European Commission, 2016). The European Commission has also advocated global cooperation on research and investment in multilateral settings, (e.g. OECD bodies, G7, G20), reaffirming its support for global partnerships. This program specifically addresses targets 17.7 as well as 17.7, which promote the use of partnerships in research and development as well as the knowledge and technology transfer between the Global North and South on favourable terms.

Impacts of COVID-19

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Developments has seen some progress since its adoption in 2015. However, even prior to COVID-19, progress had been slow and uneven. COVID-19 has put the gains made in doubt. The United Nation's 2020 Sustainable Development Report (United Nations, 2020b) projects a decline in trade, foreign direct investment (FDI) and remittances.

Due to the impact of COVID- 19, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020) is expecting a 19.7% decline in global remittances. In monetary terms this means a shortfall of up to $445 billion for low- and middle-income countries, highlighting the need for future partnerships to help alleviate this setback. The Department also expects trade to decline between 13% - 32% due to the pandemic. This decline might disproportionally affect developing countries due to the effect of decreases on trade weighted tariffs. The expectations for FDI are also negative: a decline of up to 40% is expected for 2020 due to investment delays as a result of the decline in global demand, and a further decline of between 5 – 10% for 2021.

Another aspect highlighted by the pandemic is the digital divide, a concerning development as the 'Internet is now essential' (United Nations, 2020b, p. 59) for many activities, but a large proportion of the world's population is still not connected. Internet access numbers are particularly low in Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) and sub-Saharan Africa.

Finally, the pandemic could also affect Official Development Aid (ODA) which in the past has often ameliorated the impact of crises. The severity of COVID-19, though, may impact on donor countries' aid budgets, although the Development Assistance Committee committed to trying to protect aid budgets (United Nations, 2020b).

Partnerships to tackle COVID-19 and its effects

Vaccines

Partnerships are particularly important in global crises situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiative, one of the three pillars (diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines) of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-Accelerator), is an example of collaboration among governments, scientists, businesses, civil society, philanthropists, and global health organisations (Hassoun, 2020; WHO, 2020).

COVAX is a global collaboration to accelerate not only development and production of vaccines but also to achieve equitable distribution. It is led by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation and Gavi, and the Vaccine Alliance, itself a public-private partnership. With a financial contribution of €500 million, the EU is a major donor to the facility to secure access to future COVID-19 vaccines in low and middle-income countries to ensure a speedy global recovery (European Commission, 2020f).

Team Europe

With its overall commitment to development through partnerships, the EU has also been involved in fostering a coordinated multilateral response to COVID-19 by leading efforts in conjunction with the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other multilateral actors, via the 'Team Europe' initiative (European Commission, 2020e). The aim of the initiative is to support partner countries in dealing with the pandemic through the (re)deployment of combined resources from the EU, its Member States, and financial institutions, such as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. To date the Team Europe package has a capacity of €38.5 billion with €19.23 billion disbursed in payments (European Commission, 2020g).

In this context, the Council of the European Union (2020) stressed the importance of ensuring that short-term and emergency responses of the Team Europe packages align with longer term measures to address the structural impacts of the pandemic on partner countries effectively, and that recovery plans are sustainable and in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the European Commission's Green Deal.

Conclusion

At no other time in recent history has the necessity of global cooperation been clearer than in 2020. COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on the interconnectedness of the world: the spread of the virus is global, and its impacts are felt globally, too. What has also become obvious in the crisis is the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 17, Partnerships for the Goals. SDG 17 explicitly addresses the fact that partnerships between governments, the private sector, civil society, and other parties are a necessary precondition to achieve the first 16 goals (Pierce, 2018; Eurostat 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a stark reminder that unless there are joint and concerted efforts, achievement of the 2030 Agenda is impossible. Effective multilateralism and global partnership are more important than ever.

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