

One for All—SDG 17 as a Driver to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

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1. Introduction

One for all! The first part of the famous musketeer motto seems to fit perfectly with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, “Partnerships for the Goals”. While the sixteen goals before are directed towards concrete areas of action, SDG 17 serves as a convener and facilitator for all the other goals. With the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2001, collaboration was seen as an important driver to attain these goals (Goal 8). With the SDGs, this approach was accentuated. Before 2015, 6203 partnerships were registered on the UN Partnership Platform. From 2015–2018 (latest figures available), a total of 7924 partnerships were registered. Thus, the number of partnerships for the SDGs has already outnumbered the partnerships before them. This article offers a short introduction to SDG 17. In particular, it opens up a discussion on how different combinations of partnerships should be embedded in order to achieve the targets of SDG 17.

In this article, we will provide a theoretical foundation of collaboration building for co-creation and co-production. Additionally, we will present the progress of SDG 17 so far. Finally, we will discuss several propositions for future development that are informed by the following chapters of this volume.

2. Collaboration through Co-Creation and Co-Production

In the analysis of the MDGs, the division of the world into donors and recipients of assistance was accentuated as one of the limitations to success, although a global partnership was proclaimed as one of eight goals (Wysokińska 2017). Hence, one of the major differences between the MDGs and the SDGs is the universal nature of the latter without differentiation and the full inclusion of all areas of society, including state, market, and civil society. From a theoretical perspective, the MDGs’ failure can be explained by a wrong, albeit unilateral, perception of partnership.

The concept of co-production is a helpful starting point to build a theoretical foundation for partnerships for the SDGs. The concept was developed in the field of public service provision as attempt to describe the inclusion of ordinary citizens in the delivery of public services (Brudney and England 1983). Today, the idea of citizen

involvement goes beyond mere production and includes production topics such as governance, creation and the management of public services (Pestoff et al. 2006). Joshi and Moore (2004) define institutionalized co-production as “the provision of public services (broadly defined, to include regulation) through a regular long-term relationship between state agencies and organized groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions”. Hence, co-production entails long-term relationships between different types of actors, and resources are provided by all parties involved.

This definition is very helpful to transfer the idea of co-production onto the global partnership for SDGs, where partnerships between state, business and civil society are sought to provide financial resources, access to technology, increase capacities, support global trade and build on system development.

Moreover, further aspects on co-production can be derived from the literature. Osborne et al. (2016) postulate that co-production is oriented towards meeting the needs of individuals or the society at large and towards building capacities to resolve future challenges. By emphasizing the “service” aspect of co-production, they implement the idea of value co-creation. Hence, every combined effort for public service provision, governance, design, management or the production of service creates a value for and has an impact on society.

Another aspect of co-production is the question of voluntary or involuntary contribution. Initially, the participation of citizens in co-production was defined as a voluntary cooperative action (Brudney and England 1983). Nowadays, co-production has gained major attention in public reforms and, thus, is often installed as the only option. Citizens may become obliged to participate in public service provision (Lindenmeier et al. 2019). Similar effects can be observed in the development and the implementation of the SDGs.

Finally, coproduction is a universal concept to address public service provision. The previous literature investigates the use of co-production in areas such as healthcare (Vooberg et al. 2015), agriculture (Carolan 2006), environment protection (Kasymova and Gaynor 2014), urban regeneration (Carter 2013), natural resource management (Maynard 2015), or civic engagement (Clark et al. 2013). One may find research on co-production for every different SDG.

3. Content and Progress of SDG 17

The aim of SDG 17 is formulated as “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”. In essence, five areas of activity are covered by this goal: finance, information and communications

technology (ICT), capacity building, trade, and systemic issues. Table 1 provides an overview of the related targets and indicators. The latest progress report is available for 2019 (UN 2019). The report names positive development in the area of technology, especially in terms of access to the internet. At the end of 2018, more than half of the global population had access to the internet. However, finance and trade remain challenging targets for the SGDs. In finance, official development aid (ODA) net flows reached up to USD 149 billion in 2018, a decrease of 2.7 per cent in real terms compared to the year before. On the contrary, personal remittances to low- and middle-income countries reached an all-time high of USD 550 billion. No special mention is found in the report on donations and private grant-making. However, data on private donations for development aid are scarce. A survey by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) in 2018 reported annual donations of USD 7.9 billion by the largest grant-making foundations, mainly from the United States (OECD 2018). In Europe, for instance, private donations for development aid stem typically from individuals, not foundations. Hence, data availability is even lower.

In terms of trade, the share of the merchandise of the least developed countries in world merchandise remains below 1 per cent. This slow growth threatens the expected targets for 2020. Additionally, tariffs still cause barriers for worldwide trade and global trade is threatened by tensions among the largest economies (UN 2019).

The UN progress report further elaborates that ODA for capacity building has been stagnating since 2010 at 14 per cent of total sector-allocable aid, mainly in Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (UN 2019).

A further important target for SDG 17 is the improvement of multi-stakeholder partnerships. In 2018, progress on multi-stakeholder partnerships was reported by 51 of 114 countries, leading, for instance, to better public financial management and an increase in contributions by civil society and the private sector (UN 2019).

Table 1. Targets formulated for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, Partnerships for the Goals (Source: UN 2017).

Targets	
Finance	
17.1	Strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection
17.2	Developed countries to implement fully their official development assistance commitments, including the commitment by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of ODA/GNI to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries; ODA providers are encouraged to consider setting a target to provide at least 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries
17.3	Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources
17.4	Assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, as appropriate, and address the external debt of highly indebted poor countries to reduce debt distress
17.5	Adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries
Technology	
17.6	Enhance North–South, South–South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism
17.7	Promote the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on favorable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed
17.8	Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology
Capacity-Building	
17.9	Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North–South, South–South and triangular cooperation

Table 1. Cont.

Targets	
Trade	
17.10	Promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda
17.11	Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020
17.12	Realize timely implementation of duty-free and quota-free market access on a lasting basis for all least developed countries, consistent with World Trade Organization decisions, including by ensuring that preferential rules of origin applicable to imports from least developed countries are transparent and simple, and contribute to facilitating market access
Systemic Issues	
17.13	Enhance global macroeconomic stability, including through policy coordination and policy coherence
17.14	Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development
17.15	Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development
17.16	Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries
17.17	Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships
17.18	By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts
17.19	By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries

4. Research and Practical Implications on SDG 17

In the following chapters of the volume, different types of multi-stakeholder partnerships are the focus of the research. This may be surprising as the core focus of SDG 17 is financial and ICT topics. However, the goal itself targets strong partnerships, which should not only be understood as partnerships between states, but also between different social actors. The question then arises as to how different actors from the public and private sectors and civil society can cooperate in order to strengthen and achieve the targets of the SDGs. Hence, building on the outcomes of the following chapters, we posit the following implications for future research and practical transition.

4.1. Exploitation of the Diversity of Cross-Sector Collaboration

The dominant logic of cross-sector collaboration is a public–private partnership (PPP). At its core, this approach describes “long-term collaborative relationships between one or more private actors and public bodies that combine public sector management or oversight with a private partner’s resources and competencies for a direct provision of a public good or service” (Kivleniece and Quelin 2012, p. 273). The advantages of PPPs in the context of the SDGs are their potential to overcome massive infrastructure gaps and the fact that they can be arranged as hybrid constructs to create social value beyond service provision (Berrone et al. 2019). However, as the chapters in this volume show, there are more variations to the idea of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Roza and Meijs (2020) elaborate on the case study of a collective corporate foundation that transitions corporate resources to social enterprises and nonprofits. Although no public actor is involved, this case study supports the idea of co-production. Ryan and Hauser (2020) show examples of academia–private sector collaborations for the SDGs. Pattberg and Enechi (2020) highlight the potential of bottom-up governance and inclusiveness. In particular, local actors should be better included in partnerships. Chama and Mwitwa (2020) present a case study on co-management through the involvement of communities. In addition to the examples mentioned in the chapters, one can think about new forms of impact investing, such as conditional conversion models or layered funding that could increase the financial resources to achieve the SDGs (Hebb 2013). Another stream of innovation could be generated through a further analysis of hybrid organizations (Billis 2010). Hence, reaching the targets of the SDGs requires an intensified search for different and innovative forms of cross-sector collaboration. This search has to be both research-based and informed by practical experience.

4.2. Develop and Demand Overarching Standards and Rules

A constant critique of multi-stakeholder partnerships—especially when partners from different parts of the world are involved—is the unbalanced levels of norms or regulations. While the political debate about standards envisions more regulation based on legal requirements, Marx and Depoorter (2020) discuss another option, voluntary sustainability standards (VSS). These standards are especially promising to realize another target of SDG 17, the promotion of a non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system. Existing VSS cover the topics of several SDGs. However, as the authors show, VSS face challenges in terms of legitimacy, effectiveness and coordination that need to be solved in the near future. One of the most well-known VSS, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), is the focus of an analysis in the chapter by Hengevoss and Arnold (2020). By applying institutional logics theory, they highlight that implicit rules play an important role in both hindering and succeeding in collaborative processes. Hence, for the success of the SDGs, it is necessary to not only provide targets and indicators, but also common standards of regulation and implementation. The debate on VSS highlights different perceptions of co-creation and co-production. While the co-creation of VSS is usually successful, co-production in the realization phase is much more difficult. Thus, we call for the further advancement of procedures of co-production, so that VSS are more frequently used as standard operating procedures than regulations and documents of control.

4.3. Engage in Comprehensive Evaluation of Partnerships

It is no secret that results—even hard figures—are always in need of interpretation. Potluka (2020) highlights different purposes of evaluation, such as accountability, quality improvement, capacity building, and learning. The last two purposes are of special interest in regard to SDG 17. Capacity building can only happen through learning and knowledge exchange, be it North–South, South–South or cross-sector collaboration. In his analysis, Potluka (2020) shows that most evaluation studies are concentrated on issues of accountability and performance measurement. As a further improvement, they should incorporate a wider range of purposes, especially learning and empowerment.

4.4. Build on Trust and Willingness to Achieve Progress

Several chapters in this volume discuss the power relationships in multi-stakeholder partnerships (Chama and Mwitwa 2020; Pattberg and Enechi 2020; Hengevoss and Arnold 2020). Chama and Mwitwa (2020) analyze the management of fisheries and emphasize that management strategies should be directed towards

community development rather than conservation. Although the SDGs entail many aspects of preservation (of nature, for instance), they proclaim an idea of progress and development, especially for the less developed areas of the world. Wong et al. (2020) highlight that engagement is one of the crucial aspects for successful multi-stakeholder partnerships. They show how participating organizations and individuals profit from outcomes generated by other partners. Hence, further analysis on trust-building activities in the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships is needed (Sloan and Oliver 2013). A solution may be found in adopting approaches of co-production that were developed to empower citizens and to build trust between public service agencies and citizens (Brudney and England 1983).

5. Conclusions

A major take-away of the MDGs is that collaboration is crucial for the success of the SDGs. Although the figures report a strong increase in partnerships for the SDGs, the situation remains critical. First, many partnerships do not achieve their aspired targets and fall short in becoming strong, sustainable partnerships. Second, the hurdles to build and install partnerships—especially cross-sector partnerships—remain high and hinder further development. Third, evaluations on the outcomes of partnerships are difficult, as real change often happens with a larger time lag. However, the chapters in this volume discuss several promising approaches and offer theoretical analysis for the future development of partnerships for the SDGs. In this sense, we are convinced that this collection of research will help to achieve the SDGs through increased partnerships and more financial resources, better access to technology, improved trade systems, and an increase in resources for capacity building.

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