

Consultative Roundtable and Dinner-in-Conversation

24 November 2016
UN City, Copenhagen, Denmark

1. Introduction

“In partnering with businesses, UN Environment can offer knowledge, identify internationally recognized best practices, help set global standards, and provide a platform to ‘name and fame’. What business can offer to such partnerships include outreach, technology, financial resources and a partner to discuss new ideas. Partnerships must be developed on the basis of mutual interest, co-designed in such a way that they generate opportunities for all partners.” Erik Solheim, Under Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Environment.

The Consultative Roundtable and Dinner-in-Conversation on engaging the private sector was held with business entities mostly from the Nordic region. Sponsored by the Government of Denmark, the Roundtable is part of a series of events which are taking place globally and which will ultimately contribute to informing and defining the platform in UN Environment and the Environment Assembly for engaging the private sector in partnerships for achieving environmental sustainability.

The meeting in Copenhagen builds on the outcomes of the *Sustainable Innovation Expo* (23-25 May 2016); the UN Environment Finance Initiative Global Roundtable in Dubai (25-27 October 2016); and the International Resource Panel high-level dialogue in Paris (18 November 2016).

The objectives of the Roundtable Consultation and Dinner-in-Conversation was to:

- I. Identify the elements that contribute to successful public – private partnerships for achieving environmental sustainability;
- II. Identify how UN Environment can support the private sector in taking responsibility to address global environmental challenges; and
- III. Identify the platform needed to facilitate dialogue and an action agenda for environmental sustainability between governments and the private sector in UN Environment and the UN Environment Assembly.

2. Background on UN Environment’s Engagement with the Private Sector

UN Environment is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. UN Environment holds the biennial Environment Assembly which is the highest level decision-making body on the environment in the UN system. The Assembly convenes Ministers of Environment, senior government officials, heads of international organizations, representatives from civil society and academia, as well as leaders from the private sector.

Currently, UN Environment is working closely with the private sector through various initiatives, such as the *Finance Initiative* which works with over 200 institutions to bring systemic change in global finance for sustainability; the *Global Programme of Action* for protection of the marine environment; *Partnership for Action on Green Economy*; the *Global Fuel Economy Initiative* and activities for the development of *Sustainable Lifestyles*, among others.

UN Environment is committed to strengthening its engagement with the private sector at national and global levels, especially in priority areas such as oceans, air pollution, conservation, green finance, urban landscapes and the circular economy.

3. Key Insights from the Consultative Roundtable and Dinner-in-Conversation

Expectations on the Role of the Public Sector:

In the area of the environment, it has become apparent that environmental issues are much too large to be addressed by any single entity, but rather require the concerted efforts of all sectors of our increasingly interconnected world. While governments are pivotal in strengthening the policies and regulatory frameworks, the private sector has a critical role to play in fostering sustainable solutions, innovation, employment and economic development. It is only through public-private partnerships that holistic solutions can be found to tackle our global environmental challenges.

Participants pointed out that:

- The current system of consumption and production is no longer sustainable. We are exploiting our natural resources. We need a transition to new economies, to a circular economy.
- The business community wants public sector entities that are “egoless leaders” in promoting coalitions and which operate as an aggregator in which partners join as equals in working together.
- There is a need for effective and well-designed regulations and policies that are piloted, with financial incentives and enforcement of the rule of law.
- We are moving into a situation in which politicians see the private sector as the leaders of change because they adapt earlier. There needs to be a healthy interaction with all stakeholders.
- How do you do market transformation? How do you protect against market failure? Public leadership is key. Governments have to de-risk the market.

Criteria for Successful Public-Private Partnerships:

- There is a need to build trust as the foundation for successful partnerships, know very clearly the rules of the game and have a very long-term vision for sustainable development.

- Partnerships should help us understand how we evolve in the next 5-10 years. New models of cooperation are needed as traditional instruments have not proven suitable.
- We have had enough risk reports. Now it is the time to stop focusing on the risks and start focusing on the opportunities and the solutions for society and the business sector.
- Business is where innovation takes place but let us not be naïve, a lot of innovation is taking place in public-private partnerships.
- It is important to “think small” – identify a few areas to work in, rather than aiming to engage in all sectors, find the best companies in the world to team up with, develop flagship initiatives and implement them. Eventually, all the competitors will join in.
- Map out the areas or “space” for partnerships and only engage in partnerships where each partner has a comparative advantage.
- Engaging the private sector is not about fundraising, rather it is about making transformational change to achieve the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Action Agenda: Platform/coalition for environmental sustainability:

- There is a proliferation of partnerships and networks. This has been a rocking horse for a long time. The question is not more partnerships but what makes them work.
- Our knowledge base is expanding and increasingly people across public and private sectors understand the risk of inaction.
- We need to drive systemic change. We need to provide the platforms where those who want to change, can change.
- The United Nations can convene a platform but it must ensure that participants can join as equals.
- The private sector is keen on working with UN Environment for its convening power through the UN Environment Assembly and it would like to contribute to the development of global environmental standards and policies.
- We need to speak in a language that policymakers, business and civil society understand. And we need to give an economic framework to the issues.

- For future platforms, it will be important to think about the need to consolidate initiatives and link to existing initiatives.
- A business coalition should be created around a common narrative. An example is the *We Mean Business* initiative, a coalition of organizations promoting the transition to a low carbon economy.
- The platform should enable the private sector companies to learn from each other, for example, on sustainable infrastructure and sustainable finance. Best-practice projects and initiatives on how to improve one's environmental performance should be showcased.
- UN Environment's knowledge, expertise and work with Member States should be used to develop standards and legislation to create incentives for sustainability and successful environmental solutions.
- UN Environment should engage with a broad and diverse range of non-governmental actors in the private sector, such as the finance community, small and medium enterprises and foundations.



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