Engaging with the private sector through multi-stakeholder platforms

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DCED
The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development

Contents

About the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED)

The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) is the global forum for learning, from experience, about the most effective ways for creating economic opportunities for the poor by working with and through the private sector. The DCED's member agencies have developed a substantial body of knowledge and evidence about effective approaches – as summarised on the DCED website.

Donors are now engaging directly with the private sector, as partners in development. This represents a major shift in mode of operation, relative to the more traditional, bilateral model. Complementing the broader work of the OECD's recent peer review on private sector engagement, DCED members are looking to the DCED for practical support in making that shift. As a basis for next steps, the DCED is currently reviewing specific themes selected by members. In addition to this briefing note, DCED research is examining how organisations are transitioning to increasing their work with the private sector, what we can learn from results measurement work in the Impact Investing community, how business structure influences social impact, and the enabling environment for inclusive business. Earlier DCED work on the topic private sector partnerships and engagement can be viewed at www.enterprise-development.org/implementing-psd/private-sector-engagement.

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Photographs on front page courtesy of: MDF/Rob Rickman, Drik/Katalyst and Tran Viet Duc/ Global Affairs Canada

List of Abbreviations

BCtA:	Business Call to Action
BFP:	Business Fights Poverty
CSO:	Civil Society Organisation
DCED:	Donor Committee for Enterprise Development
DFID:	Department for International Development
GAIN:	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
GAVI:	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization
GPE:	Global Partnership for Education
IBAN:	Inclusive Business Action Network
ICAI:	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goals
UNGC:	United Nations Global Compact
WBCSD:	World Business Council for Sustainable Development

Executive Summary

DCED members note that many multi-stakeholder platforms have been established in recent years, to facilitate collaboration between development actors and business. They have therefore requested a review of experience gained. What are the objectives, achievements and roles of some of these platforms? This Paper reports the findings of a literature survey, a review of 29 platform websites, and 17 semi-structured interviews with staff of donor agencies, platforms and business.

Most of the literature does not make a clear distinction between multi-stakeholder partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms. This paper views platforms as a particular form of public-private collaboration and is focused on platforms that: have a knowledge-sharing or standard-setting purpose; are focused on issues which contribute to the development of the private sector in developing countries; and involve a larger number of organisations or members.

Results expected from platforms include:

- Outputs produced by the platform itself
- Partnerships brokered between members
- A contribution to development goals
- Benefits to individual members

Existing evaluations and studies on the achievements of multi-stakeholder partnerships (including platforms) present a mixed picture and they are often seen as not meeting expectations while being costly, risky endeavours. While existing studies highlight limited development outcomes and some outputs such as research papers, other studies highlight a range of organisational benefits, some of which are tangible, such as increased resources, and others intangible, such as increased reputation. This mixed picture is consistent with this study. Few of the 29 platform websites reviewed in this study had substantive information on their websites about their achievements with less than half having very little or no information on results. Most interviewees cited process or output types of results, such as reports produced or increased membership, but many also noted benefits for their organisation, such as increased knowledge of the private sector and increased visibility and credibility.

Aspirational development goals may enable donors to more easily link platforms to their organisational strategies and policy directives and therefore justify their membership, but they limit the ability and willingness to evaluate the effectiveness of platforms. Limited tangible or perceived achievements, however, do not seem to have notable bearing on organisations' support to platforms. This situation might imply that members are gaining sufficient value from them and, consequently, there are few drivers to improve the evaluation of multi-stakeholder platforms. More realistic and modest expectations about what changes platforms could contribute, and assessing platforms' contribution to nearer-term outcomes, seem feasible. This would alter how the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder platforms is viewed, as well as provide a more practical focus for an evaluation.

Combined with the SDGs and enhanced role of the private sector in development, the ongoing slow global economic growth and decreasing aid budgets suggest support for multi-stakeholder platforms will at least continue at current levels. Interviewees were, however, divided about the future scope

and function of multi-stakeholder platforms. Some interviewees felt the number of platforms would increase but highlighted that platforms needed to be 'more practical', 'strategic', and with an emphasis on 'quality', rather than quantity. Others felt that duplication should be avoided; rather, the capacity of existing platforms to take on new initiatives should be assessed. Several interviewees saw a movement towards greater consolidation, either in formal structures or through more combined efforts. They felt that connections between platforms with a common agenda and goals needed to be strengthened, because a 'whole system' approach was necessary to address development problems. There is some overlap between the focus and membership across existing platforms, and a number are already starting to work together. Consolidation could bring advantages: greater economies of scale, professionalism, possibly increased influence and impact, and more incentives to improve the evaluation of platforms. But consolidation may also lead to less diversity, creativity and innovation. Global platforms will continue to provide the broad visibility desired by donors and businesses. However, an opportunity for growth and diversification may exist for local platforms that are grounded in the realities of the local context to address local development issues.

The study concludes that it would be useful if donors were more explicit about the benefits or outcomes that they expect to achieve for their organisation from participation in a platform - rather than expressing outcomes only in terms of development goals. They could also be more explicit about how the platform complements their other strategies for engaging with the private sector on development issues. While donors may have greater negotiating power with platforms that have fewer members, or that are resource poor, it is important to avoid skewing the platform's focus and work so much, that it moulds itself into the culture of the donor organisation. If that happens, businesses and other organisations may lost interest, even though their participation could have been the reason for the donor wanting to participate, in the first place.

1. Introduction

Recognition of the potential role of the private sector in contributing to poverty alleviation has risen and with it government and non-government organisations have shown greater interest in partnering with the private sector (DCED, 2014; OECD, 2015). There has been a significant increase in the number of multi-stakeholder partnerships, of which platforms are one type. Reid et al (2014) has described multi-stakeholder platforms as part of key infrastructure to increase private sector collaboration. DCED members have expressed interest in better understanding what multi-stakeholder platforms exist, which ones provide effective avenues to collaborate with the private sector, and the achievements of platforms. These are not easy questions to answer – amid the growth of partnerships to achieve the SDGs, the language around partnering and private sector engagement is ambiguous. This perhaps emphasises the need to examine the effectiveness of platforms as a way to engage with the private sector for development outcomes.

This paper examines the following questions:

1. What is the purpose and objectives of multi-stakeholder platforms?
2. What are the main achievements of multi-stakeholder platforms?
3. Looking forward, to what extent are platforms useful for private sector engagement?

Section 2 outlines the methodology used for this study. **Section 3** summarises the literature concerning multi-stakeholder platforms, drawing on literature concerning multi-stakeholder partnerships since the distinctions between partnerships and platforms are not always clear. After a review of definitional issues to situate platforms within the broader spectrum of multi-stakeholder partnerships, this section looks at two typologies that illustrate different types of multi-stakeholder arrangements. The rationale for multi-stakeholder platforms are summarised, which provide a foundation for examining different objectives, structures and benefits expected by different types of organisational members. Lastly, this section highlights literature on the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships and the key factors affecting their outcomes. **Section 4** presents the findings from this study drawing on the view of data from 29 multi-stakeholder platform websites as well as 17 interviews with donors, business and managers of platforms. The expected benefits of platform members and supporters are reviewed as well as the achievements and interviewees predictions about the future of platforms. **Section 5** of the paper draws conclusions to answer the three key questions guiding this study about the objectives of platforms, their effectiveness and their future outlook.

2. Methodology

This research was initiated following the DCED Annual Meeting in Sweden in June 2016. A number of members expressed interest in learning more about what multi-stakeholder platforms existed and opportunities for effectively engaging with the private sector through this avenue as well as learning more about what platforms achieved. Given the number of multi-stakeholder platforms focusing on private sector development issues or involving the private sector in addressing development issues in developing countries and the limited quality and depth of publicly available information, mapping multi-stakeholder platforms to a useful level of detail was an extensive task and beyond the capacity of this review.

Therefore, a narrower focus to this study was taken by narrowing the key questions and limiting the focus on certain types of platforms. These are outlined below

2.1 Key questions

Therefore, the research focuses on a narrower set of key questions, which are:

1. What is the purpose and objectives of multi-stakeholder platforms?
2. What are the main achievements of multi-stakeholder platforms?
3. Looking forward, to what extent are platforms useful for private sector engagement?

2.2 Definitions

Public-private partnership is an umbrella term for the increasingly systematic and strategic efforts of development organisations to work with business to achieve development results. While the word 'partnership' has often been used as an all-encompassing term for initiatives involving public and private stakeholders, this trend makes agreement on different formats and terminologies a growing priority. This paper places particular importance on articulating the – often implicit – distinction that development agencies increasingly make between partnerships and other forms of public-private collaboration. Specifically, to qualify as a partnership, public-private initiatives should be co-developed and implemented based on equal and active participation of the partners and deliver mutual benefits. They typically involve the sharing of resources, risks and responsibilities.

A distinct, although not exclusive, sub-form of partnership is multi-stakeholder platforms, which:

- have a primary knowledge-sharing or standard-setting purpose;
- are focused on international development issues;
- involve multi-stakeholder members, participants, supporters and funders; and involve a large number of organisations.

Platforms are one part of the multi-stakeholder partnering that has developed over recent years. Multi-stakeholder partnering is firmly embedded in the implementation approach of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the literature on multi-stakeholder partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms does not provide clear distinctions between the two (Caplan, 2013). Relationships of this nature have been called partnerships, platforms, coalitions, alliances, challenges, networks, global action networks and initiatives (Stern et al, 2015). [1]

[1] For example, the following two definitions illustrate the lack of a consistent terminology in the literature: An example of definitional issues is illustrated below. The UN defines partnerships as: *voluntary and collaborative*

A number of additional criteria have been used to select platforms for the data collection phase of this review:

- Relevance to DCED member objectives regarding private sector development
- Apparent level of recent activity based on website information; and
- A mix of global, regional and local platforms.

The platforms selected met most of the criteria but not necessarily all. However, some types of platforms were excluded. For instance, service provision multi-stakeholder partnerships in the health and education sectors, such as the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI), Global Fund, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and Global Partnership for Education (GPE), were excluded. Additionally, partnerships involving a small number of partners were also excluded.

The literature review will refer to multi-stakeholder partnerships (or 'partnerships' for short) since this is the terms most commonly used in most of the literature and the distinction between partnerships and platforms is not always clear. Section 4, which outlines the findings of this study, will refer to multi-stakeholder platforms (or in the abbreviated form 'platforms').

2.3 Data collection and analysis

To answer the key questions, data were collected through three processes, which are briefly explained below. Data were collected between August and November 2016.

Literature review

Existing literature on multi-stakeholder platforms was identified through website searches. Key words included multi-stakeholder platforms, partnerships, alliances, networks, coalitions. These searches identified literature from peer reviewed journals as well as publications from research organisations, NGOs, donors and consultancy companies.

Website scan

A number of platforms were identified to include in an initial review of websites. Platforms were identified based on the existing knowledge of DCED Secretariat and internet search engine searches. Following this process, 29 platforms were selected (see Annex 2) for an initial review of their websites, website resources, and social media accounts and activity to better understand their objectives, membership base, structure and achievements.

The following data were recorded from the website: date established; number of members; types of members; DCED members; membership fees; mission; offer to members; results achieved; website visits in the last six months; social media activity (Twitter followers, Facebook likes, LinkedIn

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relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and, as mutually agreed, to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits'. Freeman et al (2016: 5) defines 'partnership platforms' as: *an ongoing mechanism to catalyse collaboration for development in a systematic way. Platforms undertake activities to convene and align government, business, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), donors and other development actors around a particular issue or geography, facilitate innovative collaborative approaches and directly broker and support new partnering action.*

connections); and events held over the last six months. Information related to the mission, membership type and numbers, and results from multi-stakeholder platform websites was analysed. The data were also coded and sorted to identify themes and patterns, and compared to the findings from the interviews.

Interviews

Seventeen interviews with staff from DCED member organisations (six), from organisations managing multi-stakeholder platforms (six) and from businesses who are members of multi-stakeholder platforms (five) were conducted during September to November 2016.

The initial scan of platform websites was used to identify potential interviewees from DCED members, platforms and businesses. Two strategies were used to identify potential interviewees from businesses. Firstly, the initial scan of platforms was used to identify businesses who were members of several platforms and then a request was made for an interview. Secondly, platform managers were asked to provide introductions to members who may be willing to participate in the research. A number of strategies were also used to identify potential platforms to interview. Firstly, the initial scan of platforms was used to identify platforms where a number of DCED members were already funders or supporters. Secondly, interviewees were asked for contact details and/or introductions to certain platforms. Lastly, DCED Secretariat staff professional contacts were used.

Seventeen interviews were conducted (see Annex 2). Interview data was coded and sorted to identify themes and patterns. Findings were compared to the website scan and literature reviewed.

2.4 Limitations

The distribution of platforms reviewed in this research is not representative since the selection of platforms was not random.

While it was expected that scanning websites would be a relatively easy way for information about platforms to be accessed, website information often lacked depth. For instance, not all websites provided basic data about membership numbers or members. Few contained substantive information about achievements. This meant that in-depth analysis of publicly available information was not possible.

While the two typologies were useful for examining multi-stakeholder platforms from different perspectives, the categorisation of platforms to a 'type' was not straightforward. This was due to the variety of platforms' structures, objectives and ways of working combined with limited publicly available information. Therefore, the categorisation should be regarded as a suggestion about their best fit.

A small number of qualitative interviews were undertaken. Responses cannot be considered representative of the population of actors interviewed. Information about specific multi-stakeholder platforms has not been triangulated and therefore judgements about the effectiveness of individual platforms are not made in this paper.

3. Literature review

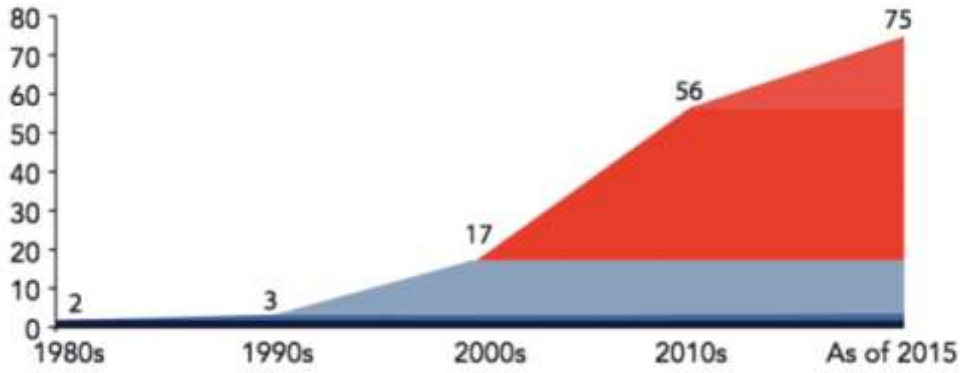
With the growth of multi-stakeholder platforms over the last 10-15 years, there has also been a growing discussion about these platforms. This section, firstly, looks the drivers for the growth of multi-stakeholder partnerships and, lastly, the outcomes and benefits expected by different stakeholders.

As highlighted above, in Section 2.2, **the literature review will refer to multi-stakeholder partnerships (or partnerships for short) since this is the terms most commonly used in most of the literature and the distinction between partnerships and platforms is not always clear. Section 4, which outlines the findings of this study, will refer to multi-stakeholder platforms (or in the abbreviated form 'platforms').**

3.1 Drivers for the growth of multi-stakeholder partnerships

The growth of multi-stakeholder partnerships, of which platforms are one type, is part of the wider push towards engaging business in finding solutions to development problems. Stern et al (2015) illustrates the growth of multi-stakeholder partnerships[2] over the last 30 years, with the greatest level of growth occurring between 2000 and 2010.

Diagram 1: Growth in multi-stakeholder partnerships



Some authors (such as Martens, 2007; Bulloch et al, 2011) have suggested that the recent increased interest in working with the private sector, and subsequent growth of multi-stakeholder partnerships, is a response to dissatisfaction with the scale, scope and speed of poverty reduction efforts. Yet as many authors (Hemmati, 2002; Marten, 2007; Findlay-Brookes et al, 2010; Sloan and Oliver, 2013; Partnerships Resource Centre, 2015; Beisheim and Nils, 2016; OECD, 2016) highlight, the reasons for the growth in multi-stakeholder partnerships are varied. The percentage of aid compared to other financial resources generated through trade, remittances and foreign direct investment has been decreasing and therefore the influence of actors with larger non-aid sources is increasing. The global financial crisis of 2008 and ongoing slow economic growth in developed countries have contributed to reduced aid resources being available and, consequently, alternative means of financing poverty alleviation efforts being sought. Not only are governments seeking

[2] Stern et al (2015) refer to multi-stakeholder partnerships as multi-stakeholder initiatives, which they also refer to as collective action efforts.

supplementary resources from the private sector but NGOs are seeking alternative funding streams as government funding decreases. As the importance of the private sector in developing countries continues to increase, traditional donors seek to encourage responsible businesses through partnership arrangements while businesses aim to enhance their reputations. Nearly 80% of CEOs responding to the UN Global Compact CEO Study 2016 (Accenture, 2016) see brand, trust and reputation as driving action on sustainability. Developed country governments are also driven by domestic pressures to create opportunities for domestic businesses to gain access to new markets, and effectively contribute to foreign direct investment in developing countries. Over the last 30 years, governments have often positioned trade and aid as separate endeavours but the current trend is towards a narrowing of this separation. Große-Puppendahl et al (2016) noted that nine out of 23 donor policies reviewed directly referenced their support to domestic businesses working abroad. Governments and businesses may also use partnerships to mitigate risks around reputation or investments.

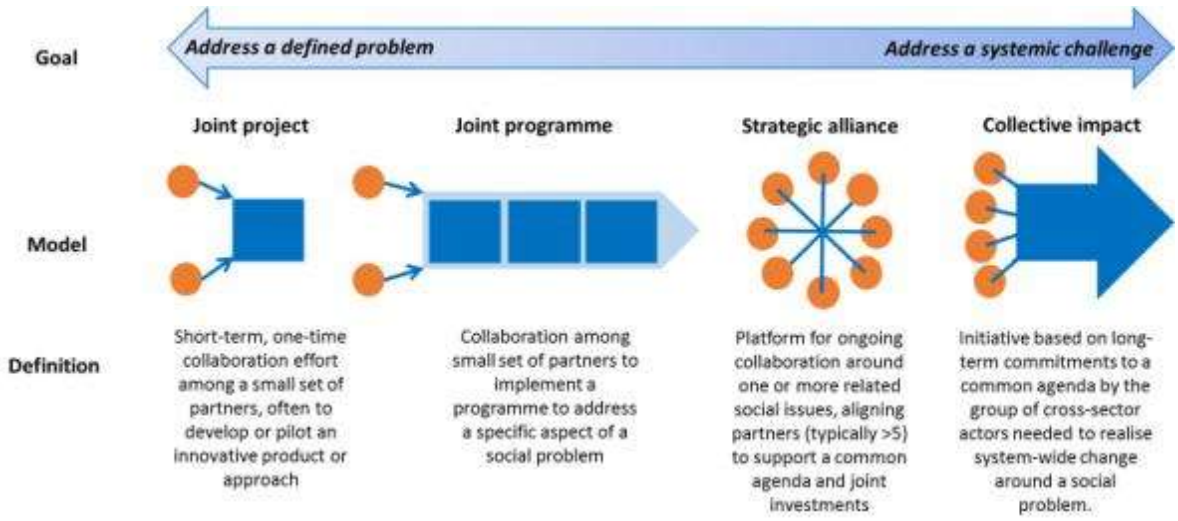
3.2 Types of multi-stakeholder partnerships

The first typology categorises multi-stakeholder partnerships primarily according to the types of problems they address, while the second categorises them according to their primary objective.

3.2.1 Typology 1: Defining partnerships according to the type of problem they address

Hazlewood (2014) distinguishes between multi-stakeholder partnerships according to the type of problem they address (Diagram 2). Partnerships range from those involving a small number of members who come together to address a defined problem within a set period to those that involve many organisations of different types working on systemic problems and are long term in nature.

Diagram 2: Basic typology of multi-stakeholder partnerships



Source: Hazlewood (2014: 2)

3.2.2 Typology 2: Defining partnerships according to their primary objective

Buckup (2012) categorises multi-stakeholder partnerships against three types of change – knowledge sharing, service provision and standard-setting. Each is explained below.

Knowledge-sharing multi-stakeholder partnerships: Knowledge-based multi-stakeholder partnerships have modest aims since the knowledge sharing and learning is built on trust between non-hierarchical members whose participation is voluntary (Sloan and Oliver, 2013; Buckup, 2012).

These types of multi-stakeholder partnerships assume that solutions to problems may already exist but because information about solutions is not shared the ability to replicate them at scale is lost. Hence, sharing information is critical to development (Smith, 2013). Another form of knowledge-sharing can be seen in multi-stakeholder partnerships that are focused on brokering relationships between different organisations. This form relies on the partner's knowledge and ability to identify organisations with common interests and capacity to build trust (Smith, 2013). Examples of knowledge sharing multi-stakeholder partnerships include the Inclusive Business Action Network, Asian Venture Philanthropy Network, and the Africa CEO Forum.

Service providing multi-stakeholder partnerships: These multi-stakeholder partnerships are more active than knowledge-sharing platforms since they seek to address market failures by providing goods and services, mobilising resources or enabling innovation and the development of products and markets (Buckup, 2012). These types of partnerships are more directly outcomes-focused and may be based on different types of structures such as 'contracting-out' models, where a donor contracts a business to deliver a good or service. Service providing multi-stakeholder partnerships come in many forms. Some may be structured like the joint projects or joint programmes outlined in the first typology above. Examples include: 1) Ericsson helped the UN operate a mobile telephone network following the earthquake in Haiti in 2010; 2) Unilever working with Oxfam to conduct research on Unilever's impact on sustainable development in Indonesia. Shared-value partnerships may involve businesses, donors and NGOs to implement concrete development solutions with a direct impact on poor beneficiaries through a company's core business[3]. Other service-providing multi-stakeholder partnerships fit at the strategic alliance or collective impact end of the spectrum. For example US philanthropic organisations, such as the Gates Foundation, that have had a long association with UN organisations and made considerable long-term financial contributions to specific causes[4] (Buckup, 2012). They may also be mechanisms to support the implementation of multi-lateral agreements (Pattberg and Widerberg, 2014).

Standard-setting multi-stakeholder partnerships: These multi-stakeholder partnerships aim to design, strengthen and enforce norms and standards and are focused on addressing public-sector failures (Beisheim and Nils, 2016; Buckup, 2012). They may differ in terms of the strength of their obligations, internal verification and compliance procedures, and formality (Beisheim and Nils, 2016; Buckup, 2012). While there are differences, standard-setting multi-stakeholder partnerships frequently address common themes. For instance, the Global Reporting Initiative aims to increase regular and comparable reporting of economic, social and environmental performance; the United Nations Global Compact is built around ten principles related to human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption that they want to mainstream across businesses globally; and the Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative is industry-specific with an objective to reduce corruption and transparent revenue reporting (Buckup, 2012).

While partnerships may have a primary objective they may still undertake activities that may better align to another objective. For example, the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) has a knowledge-

[3] The term and concept of shared-value was developed by Michael Porter and Mark Kramer (2011) in the 2000s who argued that companies could create social and environmental value through business operations, which differed from corporate philanthropy and charity.

[4] The Gates Foundation provides 60% of the funding for the largest global health partnerships engaged in the development of drugs and vaccines compared to the 16% provided by the public sector (Buckup, 2012)

sharing objective but also 'convenes companies, CSOs, governments and others in public-private partnerships. Together we drive the joint design, co-funding and prototyping of new economically viable approaches to realize green and inclusive growth at scale in commodity sectors and sourcing areas', which is more like service-provision. It also supports other platforms, such as the Global Coffee Initiative and Sustainable Vanilla Initiative[5], and has been involved in developing standards, such as those for responsibly farmed seafood.[6]

Of the variety of partnership-types outlined above, strategic alliance and collective impact models that are focused on knowledge sharing and standard-setting align most closely with this paper's use of the term multi-stakeholder platforms.

Multi-stakeholder platforms also differ in the diversity of their membership or the type of organisations participating. For instance, large platforms such as the Global Reporting Initiative include members from business, civil society, industry membership based organisations and government departments. In contrast, some multi-stakeholder platforms started with a single-stakeholder focus and have diversified. For instance, traditionally members of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development were only global companies. However, since 2015 WBSCD has sought to diversify its membership base to include universities, think tanks and foundations as "knowledge partners" which they see as 'central to designing and scaling up business solutions'[7].

3.2.3 Global versus local platforms

Some global multi-stakeholder platforms have local structures, although the relationship between the global and their country or regional platforms differs. For instance, the Global Reporting Initiative has GRI staff working in its network of six regional hubs in Brazil, China, Colombia, India, South Africa and USA. There are also project-based staff in Indonesia, Ghana, Peru and Vietnam. In contrast, the UN Global Compact has a network of 75 country chapters. While the global United Nations Global Compact lends its name to the local chapter and materials, it does not provide financial resources for local chapters and they must do their own fundraising.

Local or national platforms that focus on systemic change problems and with a standard-setting or knowledge-sharing primary objective seem to be less common. Joint project and joint programmes focused on service provision and centred at a local or national level seem similar to newer models of development programmes that bring a small number of different types of organisations together to address a more defined problem. Chambers of commerce or business associations differ from multi-stakeholder partnerships because their primary purpose is to protect members' private interests or improve businesses' competitiveness (Tan Lan, 2000). Stern et al (2015: 7) note:

> *… they are generally not constituted of stakeholders across sectors, are usually entirely funded by their industry members, and are primarily concerned with the protection of their industry and employees rather than the furtherance of public benefits.*

3.3 Expected results

The typologies above provide a broad indication of outcomes that are expected – knowledge, services and standards, systemic change or narrower-defined change - yet the desired outcomes for

[5] www.globalcoffeeplatform.org; www.idhsustainabletrade.com/initiative/sustainable-vanilla-initiative; www.idhsustainabletrade.com/sectors/coffee
[6] www.idhsustainabletrade.com/about-idh
[7] www.wbcsd.org/Overview/Our-members

each multi-stakeholder partnership differ depending on their focus – sector and geography, who is involved and set-up. There are also differences in the clarity of expected results. Caplan (2013) argues that multi-stakeholder partnerships focusing on more systemic change require 'Greater flexibility around targets, deliverables and timeframes as they are expected to emerge organically as the context evolves' (Caplan, 2013: 3). The expectations then may differ to joint project and joint programme partnerships.

This section outlines the types of results expected from multi-stakeholder platforms countered with the criticisms that have been directed at them.

3.3.1 Results

Reid et al (2014) outline three types of results for multi-stakeholder platforms. Firstly, those relating to the platform itself, e.g. outputs that it produces; the partnerships that it brokers; and the overall contribution to development goals. Outputs and outcomes also relate to how the platform operates. Proponents argue that multi-stakeholder partnerships are more flexible, efficient, and pragmatic than other types of problem-solving, and can thus achieve greater scale and sustainability (Beisheim and Nils, 2016; Caplan, 2013; Marten, 2007).

A second results area relates to the benefits that individual participating organisations expect to receive[8] and these are apparent in the drivers behind multi-stakeholder partnerships – more financial and human resources; new skills; increasing the responsibility of business, increased business for domestic businesses and improvements in numerous development issues. However, organisations may have different reasons for joining multi-stakeholder partnerships. Barnett (2016: 4) notes that 'With limited resources and operating in competitive environments, corporations are more likely to take on social problems and more able to sustain their efforts if they profit from doing so'. In this context, profiting extends beyond making money and includes reputational gains or to mitigation against potential future risks or events. Different multi-stakeholder partnerships may provide different benefits and therefore organisations seek to join multiple multi-stakeholder partnerships (Muoio and Rimland Flower, 2016)[9].

Tewes-Gradl et al (2014)[10] also distinguishes between the benefits for donors versus businesses, although the benefits experienced may differ depending on the role that the organisation plays in the platform, e.g. whether they participate to working groups or on boards or steering groups.

[8] Clarke and MacDonald (2016) identify two types of goals of multi-stakeholder partnerships: the social goals of the partnership; and the strategic goals of individual partners, while effectively managing the partnership. The authors present a theory of change for partnerships which purports that understanding partner benefits is vital to motivating partners to engage, which in turn strengthens the 'partnership', which then enables the partnership to meet their aims.

[9] While based on a different typology than the two examined in this review, the authors assess the different types of benefits arising from different types of networks. They refer to a number of platforms that are also referred to in this paper including the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative, the Better Cotton Initiative and Grow Africa.

[10] Tewes-Gradl et al's (2014) paper covered partnerships ranging from only two organisations through to those that included multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, working with other organisations. No distinction is made between benefits and partnerships of different types.

Table 1: Benefits for businesses and donors

For businesses	For donors
Access to technical support and complementary skills (e.g. community access, capacity building, awareness-raising	Access to specific know-how and capacities available within the private sector
Access to networks	Sustainable and scalable results, as businesses continue to work after end of donor support
Contacts with new organisations	Leverage private resources for development objectives
Facilitation of dialogue with government	Influence company's perception of their development role
Enhanced reputation and legitimacy	
Access to grant funding	

Source: Adapted from Tewes-Gradl et al (2014: 4)

Lastly, it is important to recognise that results may occur in some areas but not all. For instance, a respondent in Finlay-Brooks et al's (2010: 184) study, states:

> *One partner wants money, the other wants legitimacy by association. The mere act of coming together satisfies these underlying needs of the separate partners, which may be termed success, even if the written objectives are not achieved.*

3.3.2 Criticisms and risks

While there are expected benefits, potential criticisms have also been raised about multi-stakeholder partnerships. Concerns relate to the creation and cessation of multi-stakeholder partnerships, the influence of certain organisations, and their effectiveness[11] (Caplan, 2013; Beisheim and Simon, 2016; Große-Puppendahl et al, 2016; ICAI, 2015; Martens, 2007; Stern et al, 2015; Pattberg and Widerberg, 2014).

Tewes-Gradl et al (2014) also identify potential risks for members. For businesses, they suggest that multi-stakeholder partnerships can create reporting and administration burdens and increase the visibility of failure. For donors, support to the private sector requires the need to demonstrate additionality from their contribution (as is the case for support to the private sector more broadly), while there might also be reputational risks associated with working with the private sector.

3.4 Effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships

3.4.1 Findings from evaluations and studies

There are few publicly available evaluations of the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships. However, there are many resources on how to set up multi-stakeholder partnerships, build trust and foster partnerships.[12] Some global multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as the United Nations Global

[11] These criticisms are of multi-stakeholder partnerships in general. Reports do not usually distinguish between different types of partnerships and to do so would be difficult given the range of definitions used.

[12] For instance, see Wageningen University's portal of resources www.mspguide.org/ ; and the Rockefeller Foundation and Monitor Institute's 'How Funders Can Support and Leverage Networks for Social Impact' at https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/report/engage-how-funders-can-support-and-leverage-networks-for-social-impact

Compact, have been the subject of numerous academic papers,[13] due to their global nature, high-profile and longevity. The lack of publicly available evaluations of multi-stakeholder partnerships and platforms may be due to a lack of clarity around their goals. Pattberg and Widerberg's (2014) found few multi-stakeholder partnerships, involving the UN, had monitoring and reporting mechanisms which they note 'severely limits partnership effectiveness at an aggregate level' (ibid, p.3). If evaluations have been conducted multi-stakeholder partnerships do not wish to share the findings, something that is more likely if findings are less than positive (Saul et al, 2010; Sloan and Oliver, 2013).

Overall, studies on the achievements of multi-stakeholder partnerships present a mixed picture. Generally, multi-stakeholder partnerships are seen as not meeting expectations and being costly, risky endeavours (Sloan and Oliver, 2013; Stern et al, 2015). In a paper of transnational multi-stakeholder partnerships[14], Pattberg and Widerberg's (2014: 8) state 'There are certainly some that perform excellently and have had impressive impacts on their issue areas but these should be considered as anomalies'.

A 2012 study (Pattberg, 2012) of over 300 World Summit on Sustainable Development partnerships, involving governments, private sector and NGOs, found:

> *… 38 per cent of all partnerships sampled are simply not active or do not have measurable output. 26 per cent of all partnerships show activities but those are not directly related to their publicly stated goals and ambitions. Their output (such as research, capacity building, training or building infrastructure) does not match their self-reported function (e.g., service provision, knowledge transfer or standard setting). In 12 per cent of the sample, the output partially matches with the self-reported function and in 24 per cent of the sample, all output matches with their self-reported function* (Pattberg and Widerberg, 2014: 9)

In this study, the authors also found that most partnerships were led by international organisations and government agencies and the private sector had a less prominent role, which is possibly an important issue if DCED members wish to use these types of mechanisms to engage with the private sector.

On a more positive note, Beisheim and Simon (2016) found that case studies of multi-stakeholder partnerships highlight how some have produced solutions to social issues and helped to mobilise additional resources around particular issues.

Clarke and MacDonald's (2016) study of Canadian multi-stakeholder partnerships[15] and individual partners' strategic interests found benefits relating to physical and financial capital, organisational capital and human capital.[16] Some of these outcomes, such as physical and financial capital that

[13] For instance, see Sethi and Schepers (2014) and Berliner and Prakash (2014) and their lists of references in relation to the UN Global Compact.

[14] This is defined as 'institutionalised transboundary interactions between public and private actors, which aim at the provision of collective goods.' (Pattberg and Widerberg, 2014: 8) The study excluded national or local-level partnerships and private-public partnerships.

[15] The study focused on multi-stakeholder partnerships or cross-sector social partnerships that address complex social issues and involve voluntary collaboration to tackle an issue of common interest. In particular, the study focussed on MSPs that implement a Local Agenda 21 and which had detailed plans.

[16] Physical and financial capital – savings; and reduced waste, energy, water; organisational capital – these benefits are broad ranging and include: new and stronger networks or relationships, community relations;

includes energy or waters savings, are more tangible while others, such as increased respect or legitimacy, are 'causally ambiguous' and 'socially complex' (Clarke and MacDonald, 2016). Despite the vagueness of these benefits, Clarke and MacDonald (2016) found that partners benefited from partnerships even if individual-partner strategic goals are not explicitly targeted. A recent impact study of initiatives by the Sustainable Trade Initiative's (IDH) noted 'IDH's active role in promoting public-private cooperation, the positive – albeit modest – impact for smallholder producers and workers and the prospects for moving the work beyond certification'[17].

Clarke and MacDonald (2016) concluded that a focus on tangible results that are easily measurable may overshadow recognition of intangible results. Similarly, the UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) assessment of the Business Call to Action found that it presented good value for the Department of International Development (DFID), noting that relatively little funding to networks and platforms was provided and what was provided was worthwhile because it enabled the network to be more effective than it would otherwise be. The reviewers, however, stressed that the focus on aggregated quantitative impact, such as the number of people who secured employment or who received training, overlooked the platform's contribution to more attributable outcomes of increasing the evidence base for inclusive business and the impact that businesses can have on the poor and thereby influencing discussions on this topic. Therefore, it seems more appropriate for multi-stakeholder partnerships to identify outcomes that are closer to their actual work but beyond the output level (Saul et al, 2010).

Clarke and MacDonald (2016) note partner engagement is challenging to develop and maintain in partnerships involving many stakeholders since the partnership process prioritises the larger objectives of the partnership over individual partner's interests. Where larger numbers of partners exist, it may be harder for partners to pursue their individual interests.

3.4.1 Lessons

Various reports (Beisheim and Liese 2014; Clarke and MacDonald, 2016; ICAI, 2015; Liese and Beisheim 2011; OECD, 2015; Pattberg and Widerberg, 2014; Sloan and Oliver, 2013; Stern et al, 2015) note a range of internal and external factors that contribute to the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships. While these are not always linked to explicit discussions about achievements, or lack thereof, they imply lessons for establishing and managing multi-stakeholder partnerships[18]. In summary, factors noted by these authors as influencing the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships include:

<u>Goals:</u>

- More targeted objectives.

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feeling of contributing to something larger; improve reputation (increased respect, recognition, legitimacy and image); gained influence; accessed market opportunities (through increased visibility, created sponsorship opportunities; gained publicity); accessed business opportunities, including increased programme funding; increased capacity due to new engagement mechanisms; added new internal or external processes, programmes or entities; increased impact on community sustainability; human capital – gained knowledge; built awareness, change drivers, cultural shifts.

[17] www.idhsustainabletrade.com/about-idh/

[18] Annex 3 includes a list of questions compiled by Pattberg and Widerberg (2014) to guide organisations in their decisions to join multi-stakeholder partnerships. The questions are based on their review of the literature about which factors are important to a partnership's effectiveness. Additionally, the link to The Rockefeller Foundation online guidebook 'How Funders Can Support and Leverage Networks for Social Impact' is provided.

- The existence of other partnerships doing the same or similar things.
- For local initiatives, country ownership is important. A definition of country-ownership and who 'owns' may differ depending on the objectives of the multi-stakeholder partnership.
- Local contexts that may impact on the effectiveness of the platform should be assessed. Contexts may refer to security issues, sufficient infrastructure or space for policy dialogue.

Box 1: Improving partnership goals (Saul et al, 2010)

Outcomes are:

Near-term: changes in behaviour or condition that reflect a positive shift toward social impact. *Note:* outcomes generally begin with a verb like increase, expand or improve
Specific and measurable: tracking data to monitor outcomes is practical and timely
Meaningful: achieving an outcome indicates fulfilment of mission and progress toward longer-term impact

Outcomes are *not*:

Activities or processes (hosting an event is an activity, increasing awareness is an outcome)
Immeasurable long-term change

Leadership

- Effective leadership with clear vision or objective and theory of change, participatory goal-setting processes and clear roles and responsibilities for different partners and good communication.
- Externally-hired CEOs are associated with more effective multi-stakeholder partnerships, than CEOs associated with the founding organisation.

Governance

- Appropriate organisational set-up based on goals, contexts and partners. This includes governance arrangements (board structure and membership), decision-making processes, accountability mechanisms and regular monitoring and evaluation.
- Larger numbers of funders at the launch of a partnership as well as core sponsor, who might provide funding of more than 50% and be committed for the long term, are associated with more effective multi-stakeholder partnerships.
- Higher levels of institutionalisation influence effectiveness (that is the extent to which partners are bound to by their commitment; the clarity of partnership rules; and extent external parties have the authority to implement, monitor or enforce the decisions of the partners).
- An independent and well-resourced secretariat to support the multi-stakeholder partnership leadership, including effective funding and resource management.

Membership

- Limited number of members to effectively contribute to cross-sector learning, policy dialogue and targeted development interventions.
- Partners are committed and willing to invest time and resources into the partnership. The level of value gained through being a member is influenced by the level of participation in stakeholder engagement opportunities such as seminars, workshops, and working groups.
- Developing a business case for local partners, that where necessary includes developing local capacity.

- Where multi-stakeholder partnerships include smaller project-type partnerships these are flexible and designed to fit the objectives, partners and local context.

4. Findings of this study

This section presents the findings from the review of multi-stakeholder platform websites and social media and interviews. It provides the basis for answering the three key questions guiding this study. The sub-headings are structured similar to those of the literature review. Firstly, the multi-stakeholder platforms included in the website scan were reviewed to determine their type using the two typologies outlined in Section 3.2. Subsequently, the expected results of multi-stakeholder platforms are reviewed along with their effectiveness and finally the future of platforms for private sector engagement is examined.

4.1 Types of multi-stakeholder platforms

Of the 29 multi-stakeholder platforms scanned for this review, 17 had been created since 2006[19] reflecting the growth reported by Stern et al (2015, and cited in Section 3). Platforms pursue a wide variety of objectives such as knowledge-sharing, advocacy, facilitating public-private initiatives in sectors or value chains, implementing joint development projects on the ground, and developing or promoting standards or guidelines for members. Most of platforms reviewed generally fit the strategic alliance or collective impact type, although within these broader-focused platforms joint projects or programmes are sometimes established to address narrower specific issues over a shorter time-period. For instance, Grow Asia's in-country partners 'collaborate through working groups that co-design, co-implement, and co-fund value chain initiatives that benefit smallholder farmers'[20] while Business Fights Poverty[21] seeks to organise 'collaboration around specific, fast-paced Challenges'.

Multi-stakeholder platform websites generally included statements that provided some insight into their primary objectives. For example:

- The UN Global Compact is 'A call to companies to align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and take actions that advance societal goals'.[22]
- AIM Progress seeks 'To enable and promote responsible sourcing practices and sustainable supply chains'[23].
- The World Business Council for Sustainable Development promotes 'the role of eco-efficiency, innovation and corporate social responsibility'[24].
- Farming First 'exists to articulate, endorse and promote practical, actionable programmes and activities to further sustainable agricultural development worldwide'[25].

[19] Establishment dates could not be found for two MSPs.
[20] www.growasia.org/
[21] www.businessfightspoverty.org/about-us/
[22] www.unglobalcompact.org/about
[23] http://www.www.aim-progress.com/introduction
[24] www.wbcsd.org
[25] www.farmingfirst.org

Due to the broadness of goal statements, it is somewhat challenging to categorise multi-stakeholder platforms according to their type. **Table 2**, below, is a suggested categorisation using the two typologies examined in the literature review[26].

Table 2: Categorisation of multi-stakeholder platforms reviewed

Primary objective ➔	**Knowledge-sharing**	**Service-provision**	**Standard-setting**
Problem Approach ⬇	-		
Joint project (problem clearly defined)	- African Cashew Initiative - Aim Progress - Business for 2030 - Responsible Business Forum - Sankalp Forum - SEED Forum - Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform	Africa CEO Forum	
Joint program	- Business and Sustainable Development Commission - Asian Venture Philanthropy Network - European Venture Philanthropy Network Farming First		
Strategic alliance	- Business Fights Poverty DevEx Impact - Grow Africa - Grow Asia - IDH (Sustainable Trade Initiative) - IBAN - Philippines Business for Social Progress		- Global Reporting Initiative - UN Global Compact - Better Cotton Initiative - Sustainable Apparel Coalition - Tanzania Responsible Business Network
Collective action (systemic change problem)	- Business Call to Action - Green Economy Coalition - Forum for the Future - FSG – Shared Value Initiative - Green Economy Coalition - World Business Council for Sustainable Development		- Ethical Trading Initiative

Knowledge-sharing was the most frequent primary objective and examples include the Inclusive Business Action Network (IBAN), Business Fights Poverty, and DEVEX Impact. Knowledge-sharing platforms also had the broadest range of structures ranging from those focussing on specific problems to those focussing on systemic problems. It is unsurprising that standard-setting platforms

[26] Annex 4 illustrates our thinking around the categorisation of four platforms.

are strategic alliances or collective action since they are premised on influencing large numbers of actors. A number of platforms included in our research also had a component focussed on service provision but this was not their primary objective. For instance, the impact measurement component of the Business Call to Action might be considered as having a service provision element to it. A number of projects funded by IDH might also be seen as service-providing.

Three local platforms were included in this review, two of which are based in developing countries – the Tanzania Responsible Business Network, the Philippines Business for Social Progress and the Global Compact Network Australia (which is part of the UN Global Compact platform). Two are standard-setting platforms while the third in the Philippines has principally a knowledge-sharing focus related to inclusive business.[27]

4.2 Expected results

The following sub-sections examine platforms according to outcomes in the following areas:

1. The overall contribution to development goals;
2. the partnerships among members that the platform brokers;
3. those relating to the platform itself e.g. outputs that it produces;
4. the benefits for members.

4.2.1 Contribution to development goals

Few of the multi-stakeholder platforms reviewed have a clear theory of change linking intended development goals to what they do. Multi-stakeholder platform's statements about their mission and development goals vary greatly, although most could be described as ambitious or aspirational. For example:

- The African Cashew Initiative aims to sustainably increase the productivity of African cashew farmers and establish sustainable in-country processing and make it competitive on the world market[28].
- Business for 2030 seeks 'to stimulate a more productive partnership between the public and private sectors at the UN and at national levels and to demonstrate the need for a proportionate role for business in the negotiations, implementation and follow-up mechanisms of the 2030 Development Agenda at both the UN and at national levels'[29].
- The Asian Venture Philanthropy Network aims to increase the flow of financial, human and intellectual capital to the social sector[30].
- Business Fights Poverty aims 'to harness and scale the positive impact of business on people and the planet'[31].

Even though Caplan (2013) suggests these broad goals provide greater flexibility to implement a range of activities that might emerge from the process of establishing partnerships and

[27] The Tanzania Responsible Business Network is a Tanzania-based platform. It was initiated in 2011 with signatories being a mix of Tanzanian and international companies, who belong to other global platforms. The Philippines Business for Social Responsibility is a long-standing NGO that also undertakes a range of other activities including implementation of development activities. The UN Global Compact Network Australia comprises Australian companies, a sub-set of which work in developing countries.

[28] https://www.comcashew.org/

[29] www.businessfor2030.org/about/

[30] https://avpn.asia/

[31] www.businessfightspoverty.org/about-us/

relationships, it often appears few platforms have clarified goals and outcomes over time. In a few cases, platform goals are clear and concise, although not necessarily less ambitious. For example, the Tanzania Responsible Business Network aims 'To create a business operating environment in Tanzania that encourages integrity and sustainability' while the Better Cotton Initiative had a very specific goal – 'to have 5 million Better Cotton farmers producing 8.2 million metric tonnes of Better Cotton by 2020'[32].

The Better Cotton Initiative was the only platform with a specific 'achievement' date – 2020, although another four platforms referred to the SDGs and/or 2030 development agenda. Based on the lack of timeframes and high membership numbers, few of the platforms meet Hazlewood's (2014) definition for joint projects or programmes which consist of a small number of partners and time bound goals. Even where membership numbers were relatively few, the objectives of the platforms were broad. For instance, the Business and Sustainable Development Commission is a nine-member organisation and their mission is to make the case for why business leaders should seize upon sustainable development as 'the greatest opportunity of a lifetime' and to 'show how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the private sector with a framework for achieving this market shift'[33].

Overall, interviewees rarely mentioned expected outcomes directly related to development effectiveness or development impact, such as reducing poverty or increasing jobs. One donor agency noted that they joined platforms to improve the effectiveness of value chains, thereby advancing their agency's current political and policy agenda. Hence the objectives and type of platform they joined were important in making decisions about membership. Several interviewees described ways in which they expected to use multi-stakeholder platforms to influence others to achieve shorter term development results, e.g. improve the business environment. A number of issues may affect why interviewees did not highlight development outcomes as benefits. These include: most of the multi-stakeholder platforms covered in this review were knowledge-sharing or standard setting and, therefore, somewhat removed from development impact; multi-stakeholder platforms are not seen as having notable direct influence on development impacts; or interviewees believe that it is obvious and therefore not explicit in their responses. However, it might also imply (as suggested by Sloan and Oliver, 2013) that the ambitions of platforms are low and/or they do not have much a of a results focus.

4.2.2 Partnerships brokered

Few of the platform websites provide specific information about the partnerships they sought to broker even though this is an explicit aim of several, such as the Sankalp Forum, Seed Forum and Business for 2030.

4.2.3 Outputs produced

Several websites listed what they were going to do or how they were going to do it rather than desired outcomes, although as noted earlier it was often not possible to see an explicit theory of change about how these related to development outcomes. Examples include:

- GRI 'provides the world's most widely used standards on sustainability reporting and

[32] https://bettercotton.org/who-we-are/our-aims-strategy/
[33] www.businesscommission.org/

disclosure'[34].

- The Responsible Business Forum's goal is to 'explore deeper integration of sustainability and social responsibility to deliver longer-term business success'[35].
- The Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) 'accelerates and up-scales sustainable trade by building impact oriented coalitions of front running companies, civil society organizations, governments and other stakeholders that will deliver impact on the Sustainable Development Goals'[36].

However, these broad outputs statements also provide multi-stakeholder platforms with flexibility to respond as partnerships develop. In many cases, it was possible to find more detailed information about what platforms did through pages listing resources and events.

4.2.4 Benefits for members, supporters and funders

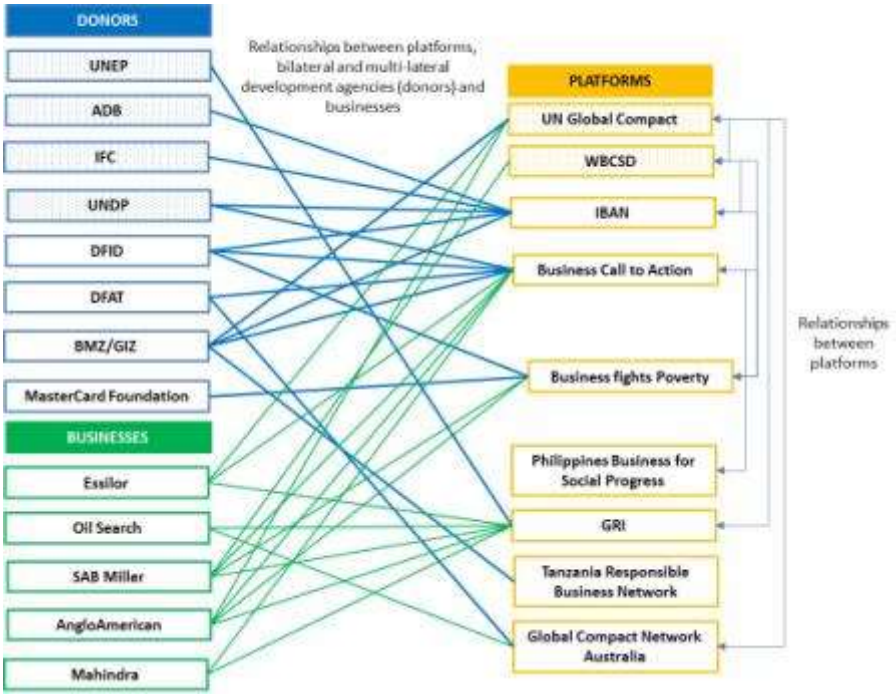
Regardless of a platform's objective, organisations frequently have different reasons for joining and therefore their expectations about potential benefits also may differ.

Some organisations are also members of several platforms. Among the 29 platforms reviewed (and where information was available), DFID and BMZ/GIZ had a relationship as supporter, funder or initiator of eight multi-stakeholder platforms each and Sida of five; Unilever was a member or supporter of eight platforms, Coca Cola and H&M four each and SABMiller three. Some platforms are also working with other platforms. **Diagram 3** maps some of the relationships, but not all, between a selection of platforms, donors and businesses[37]. Even in this partial illustration of the relationships, a complicated picture develops.

It was not always easy to ascertain precisely what organisations gain from their memberships and the extent to which these differ across different multi-stakeholder platforms. One donor interviewee assumed that different platforms must offer different benefits to organisations or else efforts would be duplicated, while another interviewee who is managing a platform, said that they often asked themselves 'what do they [companies] get out of it?' referring to a membership of platforms focussed on sustainability. In contrast to an involvement in many platforms, one business interviewee noted a preference for focusing their efforts on relatively few platforms where they could concentrate on being an active member within these communities. Part of the rationale was that membership needed to be justified in terms of how specifically it meets the clear sustainability objectives of the business. Another interviewee also noted they were willing to test membership of a platform where there was no membership fee.

[34] https://www.globalreporting.org/
[35] https://www.responsiblebusiness.com/
[36] www.idhsustainabletrade.com
[37] The unshaded boxes are organisations that contributed to this research, while shaded boxes denote organisations that did not contribute. This diagram does not show all linkages between all organisations included in this diagram as to do so would increase its complexity – the partial representation is for illustration purposes only. For instance, other linkages not shown include: BMZ/GIZ is a UNGC participant but they also part-fund and host the secretariat of the German Global Compact Network. The former relationship is shown but not the latter; Donor organisations may have project-based relationships with individual businesses and these are also not illustrated; BMZ/GIZ, DFAT, DFID, Sida and UNDP are also current funders of GRI. WBCSD is also a strategic partner of GRI and served for 10+ years on the GRI board (although is not currently on the board).

Diagram 3: Networks of relationships



Many multi-stakeholder platform websites included long lists of member benefits. These can be categorised into six areas of potential benefit:

1. Manage or improve legitimacy, credibility or visibility.
2. Access to others.
3. Influence others.
4. Problem resolution.
5. Access to information.
6. Access to financial resources.

Where multi-stakeholder platforms noted long lists of benefits, it was sometimes difficult to determine the focus of the multi-stakeholder platform and their target members. It may be that a long list of potential benefits aims to attract a broad range of organisations. This approach is consistent with the use of broad goal statements which could then refined over time. However, it could also suggest that multi-stakeholder platforms' target audiences are not clearly defined or prioritised.

Platform websites most frequently listed potential benefits for members related to managing or improving their legitimacy, credibility and visibility. This was followed by providing access to other organisations. Managing or improving legitimacy, credibility or visibility includes benefits such as demonstrating and showcasing achievements, sharing expertise, publishing articles on the platform blog, sharing best practises and measuring success. Access to other organisations includes access to partners and linkages with companies, networking and invitations to exclusive events, and may contribute to increasing visibility, building credibility and legitimacy. Websites also listed potential benefits not cited by donor and business interviewees in this study. These were access to reports

and research, access to financial resources, access to policy makers and invitation to exclusive events.

Interviewees from donor agencies and businesses were asked about their reasons for joining multi-stakeholder platforms and what they hoped to achieve. That is, the benefits that they expected to materialise from their membership. Donor interviewees most frequently noted that they supported platforms as funders or members to increase their access to businesses, which in turn improved their knowledge about businesses and business issues. Some donor interviewees described platforms as an efficient shortcut to talk with business, rather than trying to talk to different businesses individually. In most cases, interviewees from donor agencies did not link general knowledge-gathering benefits to more specific organisational objectives, such as inputs into a policy or programme design.

Business interviewees most frequently mentioned expected benefits related to solving problems affecting their businesses. This included identifying potential business partners, addressing integrity and transparency issues in their business environments, and finding solutions to business operational challenges such as logistics. One interviewee also stressed the relevance of local multi-stakeholder platforms for problem solving rather than global multi-stakeholder platforms. A global platform might be relevant for a business' headquarters and useful for the CEO to signal issues that are important for the company, they were considered as little relevance on the ground. At that local level, it was argued that local managers were responsible for taking the CEO's signalling and addressing the needs of the local business operations. It is in also this context of problem solving that trust might be a key aspect of benefits. Several interviewees noted that platforms provided a safe space for open discussion between businesses and their competitors, allowing for interactions outside of a conventional, market-based environment. Interestingly, while some platform websites mentioned problem resolution as a benefit, the platforms usually only mentioned identifying and discussing challenges or issues rather than solving them, perhaps signalling their limited capacity to achieve problem resolution directly.

Secondly, business interviewees noted potential benefits related to managing and improving their legitimacy, credibility or visibility. While donors seek access to businesses through multi-stakeholder platforms, business interviewees did not seek access to donors through platforms although one business interviewee noted that discussions via platforms allowed a 'triangulation of views'. The motivation of businesses was to find out what 'other people are thinking and doing'.

An interviewee from a platform also suggested that membership might be used to seek to influence practices within a members own organisations, since being a member provides an internal signal to staff of the importance of a business' goals around certain issues. Arguably, this strategy may also be used by donors seeking to internally promote their private sector engagement work.

Interviewees from donor agencies and businesses had a reasonably common understanding of the benefits that the other party is looking for. Donors felt that businesses joined multi-stakeholder platforms to address issues affecting their businesses and this was the most frequently mentioned reason noted by business interviewees. Most business interviewees believed that donors benefit from their involvement with multi-stakeholder platforms because it provides them with a better understanding of businesses and their concerns. Platform interviewees noted some common

benefits for donors and businesses, related to legitimacy, credibility or visibility, e.g. showcasing their work, providing assurance to investors, and access to networks.

Interestingly, the potential benefits noted by donors for businesses seem more active than the potential benefits donors identified for themselves. For instance, interviewees from donor agencies noted that multi-stakeholder platforms enabled businesses to 'collectively tackle issues' and 'collaborate on issues affecting many businesses' whereas donors' own benefits related to 'understanding business and business issues'. One business interviewee felt platforms provided donors with increased access to a greater number of businesses, something that they felt donors would be interested in if trying to achieve systemic change. Yet, influencing businesses was not a potential benefit highlighted by donor agency interviewees.

Donors also identified increased visibility as a potential benefit for businesses, even though increased visibility was not identified by businesses themselves. For businesses, reputational benefits were expected to come from the credibility gained by being associated with other organisations, such as the UN and participating in standard-setting multi-stakeholder platforms. Donors' reputational benefits came from opportunities to 'promote' and increase the 'visibility' of their work or their Ministers. Studies of multi-stakeholder platforms, such as Tewes-Gradl et al (2014), often mention reputational benefits for businesses but rarely for other types of organisations.

The expected benefits are not necessarily static and some interviewees noted changes in their expectations of platform involvement over time. Reasons provided included: changes in their organisational representative and their interests or changes in the organisations political or policy directions. For instance, one interviewee from a donor agency stated that in the past they would have joined platforms principally for knowledge-sharing but after a shift in government policy directions, platform-membership was a way to broker partnerships with private sector actors. Similarly, as some governments adopt development policies that support their own national interests, platforms were seen as an avenue for encouraging their domestic businesses to act responsibly when doing business overseas, to showcase their domestic businesses' ethical actions and to build up the 'brand' of the country.

4.3 Effectiveness of multi-stakeholder platforms

This section summarises the findings from the website review and interviews regarding platforms' effectiveness and achievements. Effectiveness relates to the ability to achieve outcomes and impact from the services and products produced by the platform. It differs from the desired goals and potential benefits that were explored in the previous section. Achievements may be assessed from a goal-orientated view: the extent to which the platform's desired results (covering impacts, outcomes and outputs) were achieved. This is the usual approach applied in international development. However, achievements may also be reviewed by looking at what happened regardless of what was planned or if not specific goals or plans existed.

Overall, few of the 29 platforms reviewed had substantive information on their websites about their achievements. About 20% of the websites, such as IDH, noted achievements that were at the outcome level. Nearly half of the multi-stakeholder platforms reviewed had no or little information about results. This included Asian Venture Philanthropy Network, Business Fights Poverty, Green Economy Coalition, Inclusive Business Action Network and the UN Global Compact. And about a

third of the websites listed outputs such as reports and events. In the majority of cases it was not possible to easily link the results to the goals of the platform, in part because goals were often vague. This is discussed below. However, the lack of results information on platform's websites does not mean that information does not exist or that results were not achieved. It merely emphasises that the information is not easily accessible by the public. One interviewee summed up the overall findings on platform achievements best, stating 'that the question of results was the key question to answer' and that they had 'not cracked this'.

In lieu of clear statements of achievements, several interviewees provided explanations about why performance was not assessed (deeply or frequently). Some interviewees felt that results measurement was a low priority. One business interviewee suggested that 'evaluation in the short-term can be counter-productive, but if you have a theory of change that allows you to link up your business objectives with the aims of the platform, then you have a good basis for mutually-beneficial cooperation'. Another interviewee stressed that platforms were not quick to set up, that there are no guidelines for such partnerships, and that can take diverse and complex forms. As such, this interviewee argued that much more time is needed to build a full body of evidence regarding performance.

Most interviewees were unclear on how platforms' performance was or would be assessed although some provided suggestions. Some donor agencies noted that their objectives were measured using largely qualitative, ad-hoc methods against the organisational or unit priorities, budgets, and strategies. One business interviewee suggested 'There are certain quantitative metrics which could be used (for instance, how many partnerships with commercial actors has a platform helped to deliver) but these are not really generalisable across platforms.' Limited resources for results measurement was also cited by one business interviewee, who highlighted that their sustainability team who deals with the organisation's developmental objectives is 'relatively light on resources'.

The following sub-sections examines achievements noted on websites and by interviewees linking them to different types of achievements for multi-stakeholder platforms:

1. the overall contribution to development goals
2. the partnerships among members that it brokers
3. those relating to the platform itself e.g. outputs that it produces
4. benefits experienced.

4.3.1 Contribution to development goals

Largely, progress against develop goals by platforms is not articulated well. Few websites have information on their contribution to development goals. Where multi-stakeholder platforms report their contribution to development goals, these are often presented as quantitative data. For example, the Africa Cashew Initiative platform notes:

> *17 small to medium scale new cashew processing factories are fully functional, three more are in different stages of finalization. These 20 units receive regular technical assistance and business advice from ACI partners. So far ACI supported factories processed 4,250 metric tons of African*

cashew kernels worth US $31 million which were exported to European and US markets. The new factories employ more than 4,700 workers, 75% of whom are women.[38]

Similarly, the Business Call to Action website also focuses on quantitative development outcomes: 3 million people with increased access to financial services, 6.2 million farmers experiencing better agricultural yields and 1.6 million people with improved nutrition.

The Sustainable Trade Initiative's (IDH) annual report summarises results by sector (which is made up of several interventions or pilot projects). Results presented are mostly quantitative (for instance, volume (in metric tons) of certified cocoa produced and volume (in metric tons) of certified/ verified tea available (metric tons)), although explanations of progress and changes to plans are also noted.[39] Even though the Better Cotton Initiative had the most specific goal, its results were presented as qualitative 'stories from the field' rather than a report against its goal.

Where development results are reported by platforms, progress against a baseline or targets results is often unclear. Additionally, platforms' contributions to changes are often not addressed. For instance, it is not possible to determine the extent to which the Africa Cashew Initiative's work led to an increase in the productivity of African cashew farmers as is one of its stated goals.

Even where development goals may not be achieved, outcomes on the path to development outcomes may possible. To be able to influence others it is assumed that multi-stakeholder platforms need to be connected to a range of actors, and possibly large numbers of actors, depending on the type and degree of influence that they wish to achieve. For the 29 platforms reviewed, two proxies for influence were examined: 1) membership numbers; and 2) website visits (in the six months previous to September 2016), social media presence and activity (such as Twitter followers, Facebook likes and LinkedIn connections) and numbers of meeting or events.[40]

Where cited, membership numbers varied widely. The median number of members was 158 but levels ranged from nine organisations (the Business and Sustainable Development Commission) to 23,000 for the Sankalp Forum, where individuals' sign-up to the forum. Multi-stakeholder platforms also had different types of members. For instance, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development is a business-only platform; the Philippines Business for Social Progress members are predominantly businesses; and the Business Fights Poverty, UN Global Compact and Global Reporting Initiative include businesses and non-government organisations.

Most platforms, except the Tanzania Responsible Business Network, have websites. The Global Reporting Initiative had more than 100,000 website visits, UN Global Compact over 200,000 website visits and DevEx Impact had more than 600,000. However, a number had insufficient activity for an assessment of website visits – this included the Business and Sustainable Development Commission, AIM Progress, Grow Asia, UK Business Council for Sustainable Development (a branch of the World

[38] https://www.comcashew.org/

[39] While IDH noted it commissions third party impact studies which it uses, along with other reports, self assessments, and discussions 'for a constant cycle of progress and impact assessments. Lessons learned are looped back into our program strategies to deliver maximum impact'[39], impact studies could not be found on the website. The 2015 annual report summarises results (outcomes and impacts) across individual programmes.

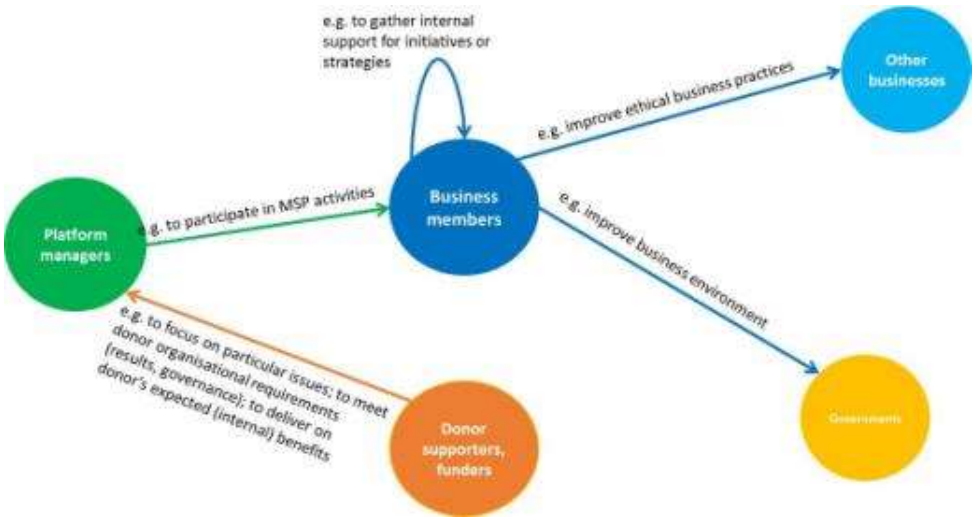
[40]Connectedness is not the same as influence, since someone may follow a MSP on twitter but not read the tweets or even if they read the tweets it does not mean it influences their thinking or actions. Other measures would be needed to understand the effect of social media on behaviour change (Lefebvres, 2012).

Business Council for Sustainable Development) and the Seed Forum. Most platforms also have social media accounts with Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, although not necessarily all three. Twitter and LinkedIn accounts were most often established while fewer platforms had Facebook accounts. There is a weak correlation between membership numbers and website visits and social media activity, such as the number of Twitter followers. For instance, while Sankalp Forum had the most number of members, they had proportionality few website visits. There were other platforms with smaller membership numbers yet proportionality greater levels of activity. This included the Shared Value Initiative Forum and Forum for the Future.

While several platform websites and (platform) interviewees noted membership helped influence others, only some donors and business interviewees had noted this as a potential benefit. Influence seems particularly relevant for standard-setting multi-stakeholder platforms, although the desire to influence others is often captured in other types of platform's objectives. In a small number of cases, interviewees referred to achievements in terms of behaviour changes, linking it implicitly to a platform's influence. Some Interviewees (platforms and businesses) reported using platforms to influence business practices, of which some reported some successes, such as an increased number of businesses adopting standards and other market actors requiring compliance with standards. Other interviewees sought to use platforms to influence government on issues, such as improving specific issues within the business environment, e.g. corruption within the taxation office that was negatively affecting their business operations. However, neither of the attempts to influence government were successful. In one case, the government was reluctant to engage with the platform because of the sensitive and political nature of the issue. In the second case, the issue was too specific to their business and therefore there was insufficient incentive for the platform to support them in their endeavour.

Sometimes members' or funders' influence was also directed at the platform itself, sometimes to help them meet their organisational requirements and/or goals. To varying degrees, donors use their role to influence the direction and activities of platforms. Some are involved in establishing platforms, such as BMZ/GIZ and DFID and therefore have a notable level of influence. Others have influence by providing levels of funding that enable platforms to implement activities they would otherwise not have been able to. In some cases, donors describe a passive role while others may also be part of the platform's governance structure, e.g. sit on the board as is the case with DFID and the Business Call to Action which is used to influence platforms' direction, management and operations, including meeting the donor's objectives and organisational requirements, such as a focus on short-term measurable goals. The types of influencing tactics used by platforms and members found in this study are illustrated in **Diagram 4**.

Diagram 4: Influencing relationships described by interviewees



4.3.2 Partnerships brokered

Due to the lack of information about which partnerships platforms expected to broker it is not possible to determine how effective they were in doing this. Where platforms have created partnerships, websites often refer to the numbers of partnerships rather than what the partnerships achieved. For instance, the Business for 2030 website notes that it created 145 initiatives from 37 companies covering 74 of the 169 SDG targets and across more than 150 countries.[41] The Seed Forum notes that in 2011 an average of seven investor 'A-leads' were created per company per forum. The Seed Forum explicitly notes that it does not evaluate the outcome of these leads:

> *As Seed Forum cannot legally influence on the further contact and negotiations with investors after the forum we are not evaluating the number of investment deals and acquired capital from the process.*[42]

Regardless of the lack of control that the Seed Forum has on the steps following the leads, it seems important to understand the outcomes of A-leads.

The Business Fights Poverty website lists the partners and supporters involved in specific challenges although it is not clear what the platform did to 'broker' partnerships between these parties. IDH lists numerous case-studies of partnerships between small numbers of partners who are implementing service-delivery joint-projects. However, like BFP it is not clear what IDH may have done to 'broker' these partnerships or whether they came ready-made to IDH.

4.3.3 Outputs produced

Several platform websites listed what they were going to do or how they were going to do it rather than the expected outcomes themselves. For example:

- GRI 'provides the world's most widely used standards on sustainability reporting and disclosure'.
- The Responsible Business Forum's goal is to 'explore deeper integration of sustainability and social responsibility to deliver longer-term business success.'

[41] www.businessfor2030.org/progress/; accessed September 2016
[42] https://seedforum.org; accessed September 2015

- The Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) 'accelerates and up-scales sustainable trade by building impact oriented coalitions of front running companies, civil society organizations, governments and other stakeholders that will deliver impact on the Sustainable Development Goals'[43].
- Business Fights Poverty aims 'to harness and scale the positive impact of business on people and the planet.

As noted above about one third of platform websites reviewed listed outputs that had been produced by the platform. For instance:

- GRI: the GRI Sustainability Reporting Standards (and related supporting material and services).[44]
- Responsible Business Forum: lists past and future events.
- AIM Progress noted that 'Over 17,700 audits were conducted by members in 2015, an increase of 26% compared to 2014. Members recognized nearly 400 audits as part of mutual recognition in 2015, generating efficiencies and reducing costs'.
- The Business and Sustainable Development Commission website does not provide a summary of results against a strategy or plan but it does publish outputs such as case studies, commissioner thought pieces, research highlights and papers.[45]
- Farming First notes it produced more than 100 case studies created, five policy papers and two toolkits.
- Business Fights Poverty does not provide overall numbers of outputs but individual reports produced through "challenges" are available on the website[46].

Interviewees mostly highlighted activity or process-type achievements. Responses referred to: the number of in-person meetings; increased membership; setting up working groups; bringing people together; raising businesses' awareness of social issues and pushing the debate; partnering with government; managing funds; and the number of joint projects.

Several platform websites noted other types of process information such as numbers of persons or organisations reached. For example, the Grow Asia website states 'We currently reach more than 100,000 farmers working with 100+ partners on 28 initiatives in Indonesia, Vietnam, Myanmar and the Philippines' even though the impact on these farmers is not reported.[47] Another example is the Africa CEO Forum which states 'since the first edition there have been over 1600 participating companies, 63 countries represented, over 1000 participants, and over 750 CEOs'.[48]

4.3.4 Benefits experienced

Achievements, however, may also be determined by whether individual members, supporters or funders realised the benefits that they expected from their involvement. These do not necessarily relate to development goals or specific outputs produced by the platform. Several members noted how their expected benefits had materialised. For instance, one donor had increased their

[43] www.idhsustainabletrade.com
[44] The GRI has also collected the reports produced and published based on these standards. These reports are the outputs of other organisations but could also be seen as 'outcomes' for GRI as they are examples of the standards being applied.
[45] http://businesscommission.org/our-work
[46] Reports are listed at http://businessfightspoverty.org/reports/ and can be accessed through pages on individual challenges.
[47] www.growasia.org/
[48] www.theafricaceoforum.com

organisations profile and that of their Minister through their support to a particular platform, while another obtained increased access to businesses; and a business interviewee noted their organisation and their CEO had increased its profile through participating at an annual platform meeting.

Some interviewees emphasised that if their objectives for joining platforms were not being fulfilled then they are willing to withdraw from platforms. Yet, there were also examples of organisations continuing with membership despite their original objectives not being fulfilled. In part, it seemed that continuation was also influenced by a greater sense of what was platforms were capable of and understanding how they operated. In this example, an interviewee (business) noted that they felt that the benefits would materialise overtime once country-specific membership had expanded and therefore were intending to retain their membership.

There is a good level of overlap between the long list of benefits on platform websites with the benefits for businesses and donors listed by Tewes-Gradl et al (2014). However, there is less overlap between Tewes-Gradl et al's (2014) list and interviewees (Table 3).

Table 3: Benefits noted by interviewees compared to Tewes-Gradl et al's (2014) list

For businesses	***Interviews***	**For donors**	***Interviews***
Access to technical support and complementary skills	Not noted	Access to specific know-how and capacities available within the private sector	Not noted
Access to networks	Noted by platform, donor and business interviewees	Sustainable and scalable results, as businesses continue to work after end of donor support	Noted by one donor interviewee
Contacts with new organisations	Noted by platform, donor and business interviewees	Leverage private resources for development objectives	Noted by platform interviewees
Facilitation of dialogue with government	Not noted	Influence company's perception of their development role	Not noted
Enhanced reputation and legitimacy	Noted by platform, donor and business interviewees		
Access to grant funding	Not noted		

4.4 Issues affecting effectiveness

The issues raised by interviewees related to goals, governance and membership. Obviously, multi-stakeholder platforms must 'offer value to members', supporters and funders. Yet, value is difficult to pin down since different stakeholders have different perspectives on what is valuable to them. The variety of factors suggested by interviewees highlight the range of different perspectives. For instance, some stakeholders might value more inclusive platforms where several different types of organisations are present, while other stakeholders might place greater value on discussions with smaller groups. Overall, it is difficult to obtain any sense of the most important issues.

Goals

One platform interviewee felt effectiveness was influenced by platforms' ability to 'frame the problem to be solved' while another by the 'technical quality of the product produced' by the

platform over time, where it had been refined and improved based on experience. One business interviewee stated that they concentrated their energies on platforms with specific activities rather than signing up to platforms with wider programmes, which they felt could be a waste of resources. This interviewee stressed that larger platforms have trouble isolating deliverables and mobilising activities, whereas 'smaller, more nimble platforms' were more useful. The focus of platforms may be influenced by their membership base and whether they seek to attract a range of stakeholders or target a more limited type of organisations.

One interviewee criticised platforms for rarely specifying an exit strategy, saying that this was 'the number one defect with multi-stakeholder platforms is that many do not have an exit strategy. They simply exist without specific deadlines or goals.'

Governance

Governance and decision making processes were considered important by some interviewees. One interviewee stressed that boards should include persons with not only corporate social responsibility skills but also finance, compliance and risk. Two interviewees noted that it also took time to build the platform and highlighted their experience whereby the initial governance arrangements were changed to better meet the needs of the platform.

Several interviewees noted the importance of human resource and financial capacity, which again relates to the business model of the platform. One platform interviewee noted the issue of membership fees should be decided early on, while another noted that even with membership fees it was donor funding that enabled them to increase the secretariat staffing and activities. The absence of a membership was attractive to at least one business interviewee, who noted that this meant that they were able to test the benefits and it was easier to justify internally. There are few examples cited by interviewees where businesses were willing to provide financial resources to the platform. Of the websites reviewed, only five published membership fee information on their websites. Rather resources were likely to be in-kind by way of staff time or perhaps to fund specific initiatives that might have been developed as a way. This situation challenges perceptions that the private sector will provide funding for development issues. It may indicate that the private sector is more selective and likely to fund activities that are more specific and of value to them rather than provide operational funds to a platform. The absence of membership fees means reliance on other types of funding, such as from donors. In reality, most platforms are likely to have limited funding avenues available and therefore, as highlighted by Stern et al (2015), are unlikely to ever be fully financially sustainable. However, this does not necessarily mean that donor funding is not valuable. ICAI's review of Business Call to Action noted that DFID achieved value for a relatively small financial contribution.

It is impossible to determine how membership fees affect membership numbers although very large membership bases of individuals rather than organisations meant it is free to sign-up.

Membership

While one business interviewee felt smaller platforms were more effective, one donor interviewee felt that platforms involving stakeholders from multiple areas contributed to more robust platforms, which is likely to increase the membership numbers. However, they also noted that platforms with like-members, such as only businesses, eased coordination and communication. Like-members are

also likely contributors to the level and depth of trust. Rather than the breadth of members, another platform interviewee felt that having a core set of supportive members contributed to effectiveness, while another was attracted to a specific platform because of the type of organisations who were members. Donor interests also vary. While one donor noted they did not support a local platform linked to a global platform because they could not find 'common ground' with the members, another donor supported an equivalent organisation in their country.

4.5 Future of multi-stakeholder platforms

Interviewees felt platforms would continue to play an important role in development cooperation, in the context of the SDGs and involvement of the private sector in development issues. However, beyond a growth in the relevance of platforms, interviewees were more divided about their future, and interviewees largely disagreed about the future scope and function for platforms.

While some interviewees felt the number of platforms would increase, they also highlighted that platforms needed to be more practical, strategic and that quality not quantity was critical. The emphasis on quality is interesting given the limited availability of information on platforms' effectiveness. One donor interviewee also noted that although platforms play a useful role in engaging with the private sector, they are not essential since most of the linkages between donors and businesses occur at the programme level.

Additionally, another donor interviewee felt that establishing platforms in the future would incur fewer transaction costs because of the lessons learned from experience. Although, as highlighted in the previous section the lessons on establishing and managing platforms are well-known but it is unclear if they are being learned. On this note, one platform manager suggested it was important for a community of practice of platform managers to be established so they could discuss and share issues, including on how to measure success.

In comparison, other interviewees felt it was important that connections between platforms with a common agenda and goals needed to be strengthened because a 'whole system' approach was needed. One business interviewee noted that it was important to not duplicate and set up another platform, but rather use existing platforms to address new issues. A process of consolidation or harmonisation is already visible with platforms working together. For instance, Business Fights Poverty is running a challenge, 'how can we scale distribution and sales networks that create opportunities at the base of the pyramid', where BCtA, IBAN and WBCSD are partners. Another business interviewee predicted that there would be a move towards fewer "open" platforms, that is platforms that admitted any organisation who paid a membership fee since these types of platforms were seen as inefficient and not worth their organisation's time. Rather their interest would be in 'exclusive' multi-stakeholder platforms that were very limited in size, scope and goals to effectively tackle specific goals, and with restricted membership to those organisations whose aims aligned closely with the platform and other members. So again, the emphasis is placed on quantity not quality.

Some interviewees also wished that a gap be filled, that it the need for local multi-stakeholder platforms which may or may not be connected to global multi-stakeholder platforms. One interviewee was particularly cognisant that there were many multi-national companies who were not based in Western countries but were important players in local, regional and global economies.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that there is little robust evidence about the overall effectiveness of multi-stakeholder platforms. Donors and businesses have modest expectations of platforms' contribution to development outcomes yet appear to obtain sufficient value for their organisations that they remain members, funders or supporters. Donors find them an efficient avenue to talk to the private sector and get the private sectors' views, to signal their government's policy directions and to increase their visibility with the private sector. These process outcomes seem to be more important to donors than a substantive contribution to development goals, which donors seek to affect more directly through other strategies, such as programme delivery. Businesses find multi-stakeholder platforms sufficiently useful to help solve business problems and for increased credibility and visibility. In this environment, there is little indication to suggest a major drive for improving the evaluation of platforms to determine, and possibly improve, their effectiveness in the short term.

This section summarises conclusions in relation to the key questions guiding this study along with recommendations for donors using platforms to engage with the private sector.

1. What is the purpose and objectives of multi-stakeholder platforms?

There is a great variety of multi-stakeholder platforms, in terms of their objectives, structures and reach. Primary objectives can be categorised as knowledge-sharing, service-provision and standard-setting and may be focused on defined problems or systemic challenges. Four types of results are expected from multi-stakeholder platforms. These are: those relating to the platform itself, e.g. outputs that it produces; the partnerships among members that it brokers; the overall contribution to development goals; outcomes relating to the benefits that individual participating organisations receive. Most of the platforms reviewed in this study are knowledge-sharing and standard-setting and strategic alliances or collective impact initiatives. While platforms' goals are sometimes vague, the benefits marketed to potential members are often more tangible.

Organisational outcomes are more important than development outcomes. Very few interviewees in this study mentioned expected benefits relating to increasing development effectiveness or development impacts, such as increasing jobs or reducing poverty. This situation perhaps emphasises that members' ambitions of platforms are low or that the linkages between what the platform does and development impacts are indirect or theory of change unclear. Donor agency interviewees referred to, firstly, increasing understanding about the private sector and secondly, increasing the visibility of their organisation, work and leadership. Knowledge-gathering benefits were not linked to more specific organisational objectives, such as inputs into policy or programme design. In the literature, visibility benefits are normally associated with the benefits for businesses rather than donors. Business interviewees most frequently mentioned expected benefits related to solving problems affecting their businesses, such as identifying potential business partners and addressing business environment issues. Secondly, business interviewees noted potential benefits related to managing and improving their legitimacy, credibility or visibility.

2. What are the main achievements of multi-stakeholder platforms?

Achievements cover four areas: development impacts; partnerships brokered; outputs produced; and organisational benefits for members. Generally, it is difficult to determine what multi-stakeholder platforms achieved. This is principally because of a lack of clarity about goals and

outcomes, together with unclear theories of change, and results measurement systems. The few evaluations and studies on the achievements of multi-stakeholder partnerships (including platforms) present a mixed picture. Some studies highlight limited development outcomes and some outputs such as research papers, while other studies highlight a range of organisational benefits, some of which are tangible (such as increased resources) and others intangible (such as increased reputation). This mixed picture is consistent with this study. Few of the 29 platform websites reviewed in this study had substantive information on their websites about their achievements with less than half having little or no information on results. Most interviewees cited process or output results, such as reports produced or increased membership, but many also noted benefits for their organisation, such as increased knowledge of the private sector, increased visibility and credibility. While there remains a knowledge-gap regarding how effective multi-stakeholder platforms are, the key issues impacting on the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships and platforms and suggestions for developing and managing them are well-documented, suggesting perhaps that lessons are yet to be fully learned.

Limited tangible or perceived achievements, however, do not seem to have notable bearing on members support for platforms. While some interviewees emphasised that if their objectives for joining platforms were not being fulfilled then they would withdraw from platforms, most others did not indicate this. In one situation, an interviewee explicitly noted their objectives had not been achieved but they were willing to continue with the expectation that perhaps they would in the future, combined with a greater understanding of what a platform might be able to offer an individual member. However, this situation would also seem to imply that there are few drivers to improve the evaluation of multi-stakeholder platforms.

3. Looking forward, to what extent do multi-stakeholder platform provide useful platforms for engaging the private sector on development issues?

While the SDGs and enhanced role of the private sector in development provides fertile ground for a growth in the number of multi-stakeholder partnerships, the global economic situation is also one of decreasing aid budgets and slow economic growth. Interviewees agreed the relevance of multi-stakeholder platforms would continue or grow. However, they were more divided about platforms' future scope and function. Some interviewees felt the number of platforms would increase but highlighted that platforms needed to be 'more practical', 'strategic', and with an emphasis on 'quality' not quantity. Others felt that duplication should be avoided and rather the capacity of existing platforms should be assessed to take on new initiatives.

Several interviewees saw a movement towards greater consolidation, either in formal structures or through more combined efforts. They felt that connections between platforms with a common agenda and goals needed to be strengthened because a 'whole system' approach was necessary to address development problems. There is a lot of focus and membership overlap across many platforms and a number are already starting to work together. If platforms were to consolidate this would reflect broader trends in the international development industry whereby consortiums are regularly established to deliver development programmes and numerous mergers and acquisitions have taken place between development consulting companies over the last fifteen years. Consolidation could bring advantages – greater economies of scale, increased influence and impact and more incentives to improve the evaluation of platforms. But consolidation may also lead to less diversity, creativity and innovation.

Donors use a range of private sector engagement strategies; membership or support of multi-stakeholder platforms is just one of these. While the options for platforms to join are numerous, their effectiveness is difficult to determine as the depth and quantity of evidence about their achievements is weak.

Given the increased prominence of multi-stakeholder partnerships in the SDG agenda, and ongoing popularity of partnering, an effort to improve the evaluation of platforms is warranted. More realistic, modest and near-term expectations about what platforms could contribute is desirable. This would alter how the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder platforms is viewed as well as providing a more practical focus for an evaluation.

Donors looking to support or join platforms should be explicit about the benefits or outcomes they expect to achieve for their organisation (not development goals) and how the platform complements other strategies for engaging with the private sector on development issues. Similarly, donors should weigh the importance of their organisational goals and the platform's goals. While platforms with a smaller number of members, or ones which are resource poor, may provide greater negotiating power for organisational interests it is important to not skew the platform's focus and work so much that it moulds itself into the culture of the donor organisation and thereby the platform excludes other organisations that may have been the reason for the donor joining in the first place, e.g. businesses.

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Annex 1: List of platforms included in initial review

1. Africa CEO Forum
2. African Cashew Initiative
3. Aim Progress
4. Asian Venture Philanthropy Network
5. Better Cotton Initiative
6. Business and Sustainable Development Commission
7. Business Call to Action
8. Business Fights Poverty
9. Business for 2030
10. DevEx Impact
11. Ethical Trading Initiative
12. European Venture Philanthropy Network
13. Farming First
14. Forum for the Future (UK based)
15. FSG - Shared Value Initiative
16. Green economy coalition
17. Global Reporting Initiative
18. Grow Africa
19. Grow Asia
20. IDH (Sustainable Trade Initiative)
21. Inclusive Business Action Network
22. Responsible Business Forum
23. Sankalp Forum
24. SEED Forum
25. Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform
26. Sustainable Apparel Coalition
27. UK Business Council for Sustainable Development (a branch of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development)
28. UN Global Compact
29. World Business Council for Sustainable Development

Annex 2: List of interviewees

Tristan Armstrong, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Megan Christensen, Oil Search

Alice Cope, Global Compact Network Australia

Simon Cramp, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Steve Cumming, MasterCard Foundation

Steven Gannon, Tanzania Responsible Business Network

Christian Jahn, Inclusive Business Action Network

Rey Laguda, Philippines Business for Social Progress

Rapa Lopa, Philippines Business for Social Progress

Anuj Mehra, Mahindra

Ian Miller, UK Department for International Development

Richard Morgan, Anglo American

Grace Pedragosa, Philippines Business for Social Progress

Paula Pelaez, Business Call to Action

Bernhard Rohkemper, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

Birgit Seibel, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

Alyson Slater, Global Reporting Initiative

Sahba Sobhani, Business Call to Action

Anna Swaithes, SABMiller

Zahid Torres-Rahman, Business Fights Poverty

Kenneth van Toll, Global Reporting Initiative

Laura Viscovich, Essilor

Annex 3: Questions to guide organisations considering joining multi-stakeholder partnerships

See the Rockefeller Foundation's guide to 'How Funders Can Support and Leverage Networks for Social Impact', specifically, http://engage.rockefellerfoundation.org/how-do-i-get-started/checklist-am-i-clear-on-my-intention-for-getting-involved-in-a-network/

Also from Pattberg and Widerberg (2014: 34)

The following guiding questions will assist stakeholders in their decision as to whether to engage in multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Leadership

- Is there sufficient leadership available that promises an inclusive and transparent process, fair and effective conflict-resolution, the ability to consolidate divergent views and create trust among partners?

Partners

- Is the inclusion of partners based on a satisfactory analysis of who to involve?
- Are the included partners genuinely committed to the goals and vision of the partners?
- Are there key players that are excluded or even opposing the partnership?

Goal setting

- Is there sufficient time and effort given to generate a common vision, goal and commitment among the partners?
- Are goals formulated in a specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed way?
- Do they lend themselves to third-party verification?
- Are the goals supporting global norms on sustainable development?

Funding

- Is there a sufficient amount of seed funding to kick-start the process?
- Are there mechanisms in place to ensure a sustained flow of financial resources to reach the goals of the partnership?

Management

- Is there a professional and independent bureaucracy in place to handle day-to-day business?
- Does the management structure enable a lean and efficient process with the capability to adapt to new challenges?

Monitoring, reporting, evaluation and learning

- Is there a regular, independent and transparent monitoring and reporting framework envisaged that allows all stakeholders to have access to the same type of information and assess the progress and problems of the partnership?
- Are regular, independent and transparent evaluation practices envisaged that allow stakeholders to assess levels of effectiveness and identify points for improvement?

Meta-governance

- Are the partnership's goals and procedures in line with internationally agreed goals and norms (such as the MDG's or SDG's)?

Social and Political Context

- Are social and political contexts sufficiently taken into consideration in the design of implementing measures?
- Are there contingency plans for how to deal with new challenges and unforeseen problems in implementation in different contexts?

Problem structure

- Does the problem lend itself to be addressed by a multi-stakeholder partnership and do the measures, goals and vision fit the challenges ahead?
- Are the partners open for new framings of a problem and is there a common understanding of what the drivers and solutions are to reach the goals?

Annex 4: Categorisation of platforms reviewed

IDH (Sustainable Trade Initiative)

IDH is categorised as a knowledge sharing, strategic alliance. IDH aims to scale up sustainable trade "by building impact oriented coalitions of front running companies, civil society organizations, governments and other stakeholders." These coalitions are not necessarily limited to funding, but this does form an integral part. The coalitions mobilise funds to grow sustainable trading links, as well as facilitating partnerships that bring "procurement power, legislation, laws, regulations, know-how, networks, local expertise and credibility" together. IDH also aims to provide knowledge sharing between partners and access to learning and innovation.

Business Fights Poverty

Business Fights Poverty's primary objective is knowledge-sharing and its approach is as a strategic alliance. This multi-stakeholder platform provides an explicit service of linking interested partners to concentrate on specific "challenges". It then aims to connect tens of thousands of professionals from businesses, non-profits and governments to work together on these challenges. These challenges facilitate outputs that tend to be knowledge-based such as frameworks and guidelines, although some online tools are also produced. Its main offer is the opportunity to take part in the collective identifying of challenges to be addressed, then jointly organise ways to address these challenges. It defines "the world's largest network of professionals harnessing business for social impact."

Business Call to Action

We have categorised Business Call to Action as a knowledge-sharing multi-stakeholder platform that takes collective action as its primary approach. Business Call to Action is a platform that "aims to accelerate progress towards the SDGs by challenging companies to develop inclusive business models that offer development impact." These companies are then expecting to report annually on the results of this change of business model annually. As such, the platform is premised on influencing a large number of companies to alter their business models. It does not provide funding or other incentives for companies to change their business models. However, it offers members "a platform and opportunities to share expertise, knowledge, and best practices for market-based approaches to development." These linkages represent the sharing of information between non-hierarchical members. The platform does not seek to directly address market failures, but instead share information on how companies are building up their own developmental capacity.

Global Reporting Initiative

Global Reporting Initiative primary objective is standard-setting and its approach is a strategic alliance. GRI's primary function is providing "the world's most widely used standards on sustainability reporting and disclosure." It functions as a strategic alliance between different companies, with GRI advertising the opportunity to share achievements and learn from peers as primary benefits of joining the platforms.