

Pooling public-private partnership best practices

By Michael Sweikar 20 January 2015



Shadrack Kioko, a consultant for IBM, captures data on road conditions and traffic congestions in Nairobi, Kenya. The computer giant has established its first research lab in Africa, which collaborates with government and other sectors to solve the biggest challenges in the continent such as transportation and water services. Photo by: Nichole Sobecki / IBM / CC BY-NC-ND

Government leaders today have recognized the need to engage the private sector in development.

While in the past, federal agencies supplied the majority of funding going toward developing countries, that percentage has continued to decrease over time — it is now down to around 9 percent. With 91 percent of global development funding now provided by nongovernment sources, the private sector has become a major player in the global development effort, and it is becoming increasingly important to find common objectives that garner their investment.

The University of Notre Dame Initiative for Global Development has played a part in convening a variety of actors to discuss shared values in public-private partnerships and examine multifaceted solutions that work for all stakeholders. Through discussions and dialogue with leaders from nongovernmental organizations, universities and the government, including those from the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#), [U.S. Department of State](#) and [Millennium Challenge Corp.](#); and corporate representatives

from companies such as [Accenture](#), [IBM](#), [Hewlett-Packard](#), [Deloitte](#), [Cummins](#), [Boeing](#), [PricewaterhouseCoopers](#), [Xerox](#), [SAP](#), [Microsoft](#) and [Caterpillar](#).

During these roundtable discussions, business, government, NGOs and university stakeholders identified 10 important best practices for partnership with the private sector:

1. The value of “bridge” employees: Hiring employees who can serve as a bridge between organizations — between academic institutions and corporations or NGO implementers and corporations — can promote better partnerships with more shared value.

Bridge employees must possess a unique skill set to work between distinct organizations and speak credibly to both parties. For example, bridge employees have the potential to help move forward operational research so it is useful to practitioners, or align global development projects with business investment models.

The [World Bank](#) Group and the Notre Dame Initiative for Global Development are two examples of organizations using this type of model. Organizations must be able to show their leadership the value proposition of having these bridge staff to build this type of infrastructure within their organization.

2. More than “goodwill” required: Companies expressed that in order to invest their financial and human resources in projects, there should be more reason to do so than goodwill alone. Companies expressed the need for any engagement to be aligned with their business interests and investment strategies in emerging markets to engender the buy-in needed from company leadership.

3. Talent in the United States and emerging markets needed: Talent acquisition both in the United States and in emerging markets is one of the key reasons for companies to invest in global development projects. Companies know that they must attract and retain talent to be successful. This is necessary as companies open new offices in emerging markets, but companies also invest because highly skilled millennials in the U.S. workforce want to see evidence that their company is improving the lives of others throughout the world. This helps companies foster inclusion, diversity and leadership among U.S.-based staff. When their employees are involved, it is easier for companies to make a financial investment.

See more from this series:

- [Where partnerships are taking global development](#)
- [For public-private partnerships to succeed, get beyond the definitions](#)
- [GSK and Save the Children UK's 'joint venture'](#)

4. Shared benefit in scaling: One theme cited by all stakeholders was that one of the primary benefits of these multisector partnerships is that they provide each of the partners a better opportunity to scale their projects, innovations, etc. Including more partners poses challenges, but the potential to expand the scope, sustainability and geographic region of each partner’s global development activities is seen as a worthwhile trade-off for the added challenges.

5. Operational research needed: Companies, government and NGO stakeholders asserted their desire for research from universities that is not formal academic research. Companies, government and NGOs are interested in operational research in a variety of areas such as monitoring and evaluation — including randomized controlled trials and impact evaluation — information communication technology for development, indices and analytics.

In order to facilitate partnership, universities need to make research digestible and identify areas where interests converge. Because timelines, research interests and tenure processes do not always align, bridge employees at universities can help organizations do this.

6. Companies are willing to invest, but need political stability: Companies need the help of the public sector, NGOs and universities because they are reliant on political stability for their business operations to function and grow in emerging markets. Without political stability and mechanisms to deal with corruption, businesses will have a hard time succeeding in emerging markets.

7. Universities as intellectual leaders, conveners and transformational educators: Universities can do more than provide expertise in monitoring and evaluation, innovation, research and analytics. Business and government leaders expressed interest in having universities as intellectual thought leaders, helping in the design of global developing strategies and projects, during implementation and in providing policy analysis. They also said that universities can play a key role as a convening power to move the global development agenda forward.

8. Project sustainability relies on the business operations: Companies indicated that in order for their organizations to invest long term in a project and increase sustainability, it is important for the projects to meet metrics for business operations. Projects that are started out of business divisions within the company, or that include a corporate foundation, in addition to the interest of business divisions can lead to long-term investment from the company.

9. Transparency needed: All stakeholders expressed the need for transparency and metrics from project design through the end of the project. It is also very important to speak the same language and work through terminology together.

Government, corporations, universities and NGOs often express the same idea differently. Partners recognize in almost all environments where global development projects are implemented, circumstances on the ground change rapidly and new obstacles to implementation occur. Partners must be clear about expectations from the beginning and be willing to be open to discussing challenges when they occur. It is possible that the expertise of one of the partners can help fill in the gap.

10. Analytics and market knowledge needed for decision-making: Companies and other stakeholders indicated the need for more analytical resources for business decision-making. University research such as indices for global climate adaptation were viewed as valuable examples of the type of data that companies could use for better decision-making to determine where they want to invest within emerging markets.

Devex, in partnership with Abt Associates, is examining lessons learned through partnership development, what scale means in the post-2015 agenda and how to create an enabling environment for partnerships in this special three-week series “[Collaboration Post-2015: Where Can Partnerships Take Development?](#)”

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