

DECEMBER 2023

Advancing the SDGs through Collaboration

How business-led multi-stakeholder collaborations can accelerate progress towards the 2030 agenda



BSR®



Sida

Introduction

When the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a global call to action and universal roadmap to end global poverty and protect the planet, they promised to deliver a future in which no one would be left behind by 2030.

Halfway to its deadline, progress on the 2030 Agenda is weak and socioeconomic inequality continues to grow. The UN predicts in its latest progress report that at current rates, over half a billion people will still live in extreme poverty by 2030, and only around a third of nations will reduce national poverty levels by half.¹ These gloomy projections beg an important question: Who will step up to act on these global challenges?

The answer to this question is reflected in the SDGs themselves as well as represented in a standalone goal, namely SDG 17—Partnerships for the Goals. To fully achieve the SDGs, the world needs partnerships of unprecedented scale and ambition between the private sector, governments, and civil society.

Multi-stakeholder collaborations are already well established and a key part of the solution. In fact, the SDG Actions Platform shows nearly 8,000 commitments and partnerships made by stakeholders in support of the implementation of the SDGs².

Drawing on BSR's extensive expertise in incubating, designing, and facilitating collaborative initiatives, the purpose of this report is to explore how business-led multi-stakeholder collaboration can help to advance the SDGs and contribute to poverty reduction. The report leverages concrete examples of collaborative initiatives incubated through the CoLab SDGs program, a partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

How BSR defines “business-led multi-stakeholder collaboration”

BSR defines business-led multi-stakeholder collaborations as voluntary efforts that engage multiple participants primarily from the private sector in non-commercial, pre-competitive collaboration to achieve positive sustainable outcomes.

While the collaborations may include participants from civil society or the public sector—making them a multi-stakeholder effort—business actors are the primary decision-makers, and solutions developed or identified in the collaborations leverage the resources and assets of the private sector.

About the CoLab SDGs Program

In October 2020, BSR, in partnership with Sida, launched the CoLab SDGs program. This five-year partnership seeks to increase and deepen the effective contribution of the private sector to achieving the 2030 agenda. The implementation of the program is guided by two objectives.

First, the partnership aims to generate and incubate ideas to establish up to 10 new impactful multi-stakeholder collaborations in service of the SDGs. Second, the program seeks to strengthen and harmonize existing coalitions to drive greater impact, e.g., through the development of two or three meta-collaborations. Meta-collaborations are collaborations that align existing initiatives with shared objectives and strategies and improve coordination. To date, the CoLab SDGs program has resulted in the launch of four new collaborations, including the support of two collaborations not hosted by BSR, and the formation of two meta-collaborations.

The CoLab SDGs program is supported by BSR's 30 years of experience in designing and growing business-led collaborations that successfully create systemic change in pursuit of a more just and sustainable world. BSR focuses on ideating, designing, and facilitating initiatives that inspire companies and their stakeholders to engage in collective action, aiming for the changes the

world needs to achieve the SDGs and build resilience in communities that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

BSR has launched over 50 collaborative initiatives and currently manages around 20 collaborations that bring together more than 430 organizations from diverse business sectors to drive progress on issues including human rights, women's empowerment, and more.

Disclaimer

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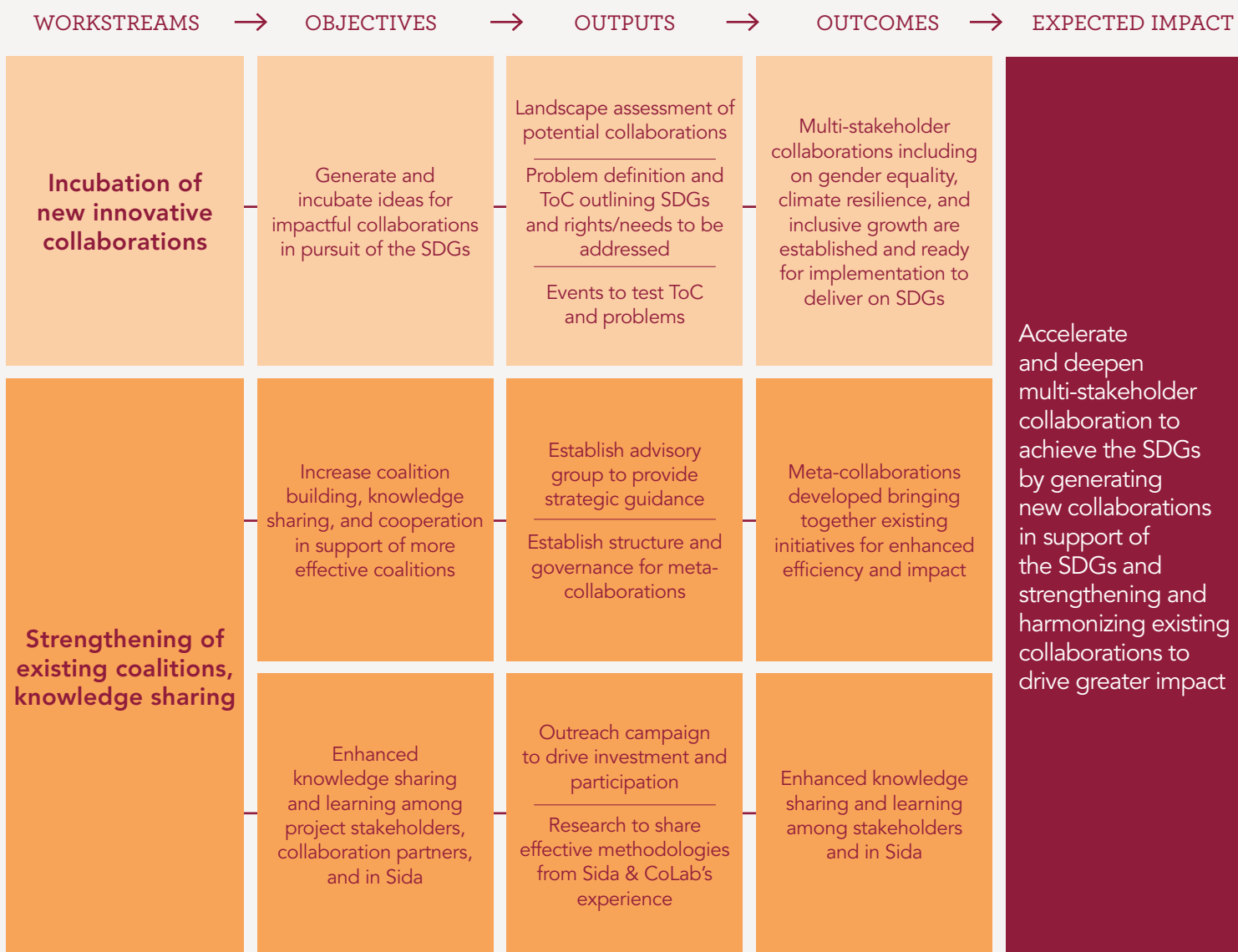
This report was written by Laura Hansson and Nicolas Ronderos. The authors wish to thank Charlene Collison, Cameron Steagall, Ouida Chichester, Christine Svarer, and Emilie Van Landeghem for their insights.

Theory of Change | CoLab SDGs

The work of the CoLab SDGs program is guided by the following theory of change (TOC).

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

- There is a big potential for impact if collaborations follow the IDEAS (ideate, design, explore, accelerate, and scale) phases and collaborations are developed and accelerated. BSR supports the phases ideate and design, but explore, accelerate, and scale depend on partners and external influences.
- If multi-stakeholder public private partnerships are well established (SDG 17), they will contribute to reaching other SDGs.
- The support provided by Sida will enable BSR to leverage additional financial support from the private sector and other donors.
- Partners value the benefit and the enhanced impact in meta-collaborations, although there can be challenges aligning the objectives, resources, etc.



KEY RISKS

- Companies do not see the value of partnerships and do not allocate resources for partnerships. Competing interests in collaborations prevent the establishment of collaborations and meta-collaborations.

Collaboration in the Context of the SDGs




From addressing growing socioeconomic inequality to tackling the devastating impacts of climate change, multi-stakeholder collaboration is needed to fulfill the objectives laid out in the SDGs.

Business needs to play a leadership role in these collaborations for a number of reasons. First, unlike the Millennium Development Goals, which were focused on government, the SDGs intentionally call out the role for business. It's widely recognized that business is affected by and affects sustainable development by creating employment, shaping policy environments, or providing access to critical services where government regulation or action may be limited. Second, businesses, working together with stakeholders, have the power to tackle systemic challenges related to the SDGs such as climate change, economic inequality, and gender inequality through the mobilization of resources, expertise, and innovation.

Finally, due to the complexity of today's global challenges, it is essential that business leaders participate as an active partner alongside governments, foundations, civil society, and other key stakeholders, going beyond good intentions to build high-impact collaborations that can deliver systemic change to meet these ambitious targets.

Collaborations in the CoLab SDGs Program & their Contributions to the SDGs

NEW COLLABORATIONS

<p>INCUBATED BY BSR</p>  <p>7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 13 CLIMATE ACTION</p>	<p>SUPPORTED BY BSR</p>  <p>1 NO POVERTY 5 GENDER EQUALITY 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>
 <p>1 NO POVERTY 5 GENDER EQUALITY 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION 13 CLIMATE ACTION</p>	<p>WATCH & JEWELLERY INITIATIVE 2030</p>  <p>5 GENDER EQUALITY 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 13 CLIMATE ACTION 15 LIFE ON LAND</p>

META-COLLABORATIONS

 <p>Reimagining Industry to Support Equality</p>  <p>5 GENDER EQUALITY 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>	  <p>9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 13 CLIMATE ACTION</p>
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Examples of Collaborations Contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The key premise of the SDGs is to reduce poverty and ensure that even the world's poorest and most marginalized can fully participate in or benefit from global development, innovation, and economic growth. While poverty is widely understood as the lack of material resources, the concept of multifaceted poverty applied by Sida also defines poverty as the lack of power,

voice, and respect for human rights, a lack of opportunities and choice, and a lack of human security, among other factors. Aligned with Sida's concept of multidimensional poverty,³ this section explores how business-led multi-stakeholder collaborations can impact poverty reduction, human rights, gender equality, climate and environment, and peace and conflict.

Collaboration Impacts on the 2030 Agenda

Private-sector led collaborations play a critical role in global poverty reduction, and have a strong impact in the following areas:



Multidimensional Poverty

Address key aspects related to multi-dimensional poverty including access to resources, power, and opportunities for productive employment.



Gender Equality

Understand differentiated impacts on men and women and outline their different roles, challenges, and barriers in the just transition.



Human Rights

Identify impacts on human rights and key rightsholders including vulnerable groups and understand role of duty bearers in fulfilling rightsholders' rights.



Climate & Environment

Assess opportunities to positively contribute to environmentally sustainable development and mitigate potential adverse impacts on the environment or climate vulnerability.



Conflict

Bring together key stakeholders in a cooperative manner and manage potential conflicts and competing interests of collaboration partners.

Examples of Collaborations Contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Multidimensional Poverty

Despite significant progress, poverty remains widespread. According to the UN, in 2015, more than 736 million people lived below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per day.⁴ In addition, it is estimated that the Covid-19 pandemic reversed much of the progress made on global poverty reduction.

While poverty reduction was not expressed as an explicit objective, many of the collaborations incubated as part of the CoLab SDGs program indirectly contributed to poverty reduction resulting from job insecurity and actual or potential job losses; poor working conditions and labor exploitation; or a lack of access to physical assets, financial services, or economic opportunities.

The Sustainable Coconut Platform (SCP)—a global membership organization working toward a responsible and resilient coconut sector that drives positive impact for farmers' livelihoods, the climate and the environment—recognizes the interconnectedness between production challenges in the coconut sector as a result of environmental challenges and poor farming practices and farmers' livelihoods.

By bringing together more than 80 actors across the coconut supply chain, SCP identifies solutions and makes shared investments to ensure the sustainability of coconut for current and future generations of farmers.

Gender Equality

Sida stipulates that gender equality is not only a matter of human rights, but also a prerequisite for eradicating poverty in the world. However, in 2022, a report by UN Women estimated that it would take close to 300 years to achieve full gender equality at current rates of progress.⁵

These figures clearly demonstrate that there is a long way to go to end discrimination and violence against women and ensure their full and effective participation in economic opportunities.

Several of the collaborations incubated or supported under the program have placed gender equality at the core of their vision and mission. For example, the Watch & Jewellery Initiative 2030 (WJI2030), a collaboration that aims to create a fully sustainable watch and jewelry industry that is resilient to climate change, preserves resources and fosters inclusiveness, supports the UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), and requires its members to sign the WEPs and develop a workplan to pursue gender equality in their operations and value chain.⁶ RISE (formerly Empower@Work) is another example of a collaboration that aims to remove systemic barriers for women workers in global garment supply chains.

Through workplace training programs on reproductive health and financial literacy, RISE tackles underlying challenges such as gender discrimination, violence in the workplace, sexual harassment, and traditional gender roles, ensuring that women can thrive in the workplace and in their communities.

Examples of Collaborations Contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Human Rights

While not expressly defined as a goal, human rights underpin the entirety of the SDGs. The 2030 agenda for sustainable development is deeply grounded in international human rights standards and norms and seeks to ensure that the human rights of all are realized.

In fact, most of the collaborations incubated or supported via the CoLab SDGs program have human rights at their core. For example, Energy for a Just Transition, a collaboration that brings together energy, utilities, and related companies to support a worker and community-centered transition to a net-zero economy, recognizes that climate change has profound negative implications for human rights, posing serious threats to the right to life itself, through adverse impacts on the rights to food, health, and housing, among others.

On the other hand, a transition toward a low-carbon economy may also have significant adverse human rights impacts such as forced labor in renewables supply chains, exploitation of migrant workers, socioeconomic impacts, or adverse impacts on Indigenous or local communities with regard to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

Therefore, the initiative has integrated respect for human rights, including social dialogue and meaningful stakeholder engagement, as a central aspect of its work, as expressed in the recently published Just Transition Planning guidance document.⁷ The guidance, which was informed by stakeholders including labor unions, UN agencies, and just transition experts, points out that assessing, prioritizing, and mitigating the human rights impacts of the transition is a fundamental step in just transition planning.

Climate & Environment

From clean water and sanitation to climate action, environmental and climate issues are central to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. And while there is significant reason for concern—six of the nine boundaries have been transgressed⁸ and the physical impacts of climate change will continue to worsen dramatically without strong climate action—business-led multi-stakeholder collaborations can play a key role in addressing climate change.

The Sustainable Freight Buyers Alliance (SFBA), a meta-collaboration that empowers companies to reach net-zero freight logistics carbon emissions no later than 2050 in line with a 1.5°C maximum global temperature increase, provides a promising example. Transportation is recognized as one of the largest sources of emissions around the world. SFBA works to decarbonize this hard-to-abate sector via collective action, demand pooling, transparent reporting, and scaling innovation, ultimately contributing to fewer emissions, fewer toxins in the air and water, and better overall health for people and the planet.

In the agricultural sector, SCP seeks to promote good agricultural practices and reduce climate vulnerability, demonstrating that productivity and sustainability can go hand in hand.

Examples of Collaborations Contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Conflict

The final element of Sida's perspective focuses on conflict. Conflict in the context of a business-led multi-stakeholder collaboration can occur if objectives are misaligned or decision-making processes are unclear; it must be prevented or addressed to ensure the efficiency of the collaboration. The collaborations incubated and launched under this program manage conflict in various ways.

For example, the Resilience Fund for Women in Global Value Chains, a collaboration that invests in community-based, women-led organizations to advance women's empowerment and resilience, seeks to prevent and reduce conflict via its inclusive governance model.⁹

The collaboration's Advisory Board features a balanced representation of investors and civil society/women's fund leaders, which guides the initiative through decisions about grants, expansion to new regions, governance processes, board membership and terms, and other strategic oversight. Strong governance is a key lever in addressing conflict between business and non-business stakeholders alike.

Overall

The SDGs highlight the interconnectedness of the well-being of business, society, and the environment and acknowledge that all societal sectors—governments, business, and civil society alike—are key actors in advancing sustainable development.

Similarly, the various collaborations linked to the CoLab SDGs program seek to identify and act on opportunities to contribute to the various interlinked dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and inclusive manner.

While impacts of these collaborations need to be carefully tracked over time, it is clear that designing business-led multi-stakeholder collaborations with the SDGs in mind will lead to positive contributions to the 2030 agenda in the short and long run.



Lessons Learned from the Program

After more than three years of implementing the CoLab SDGs program, it is clear that business-led multi-stakeholder collaborations are critical to advancing the 2030 agenda.

On the following pages are some of the key lessons learned from incubating, launching, and harmonizing collaborations under the partnership with Sida.

Lessons Learned from the Program

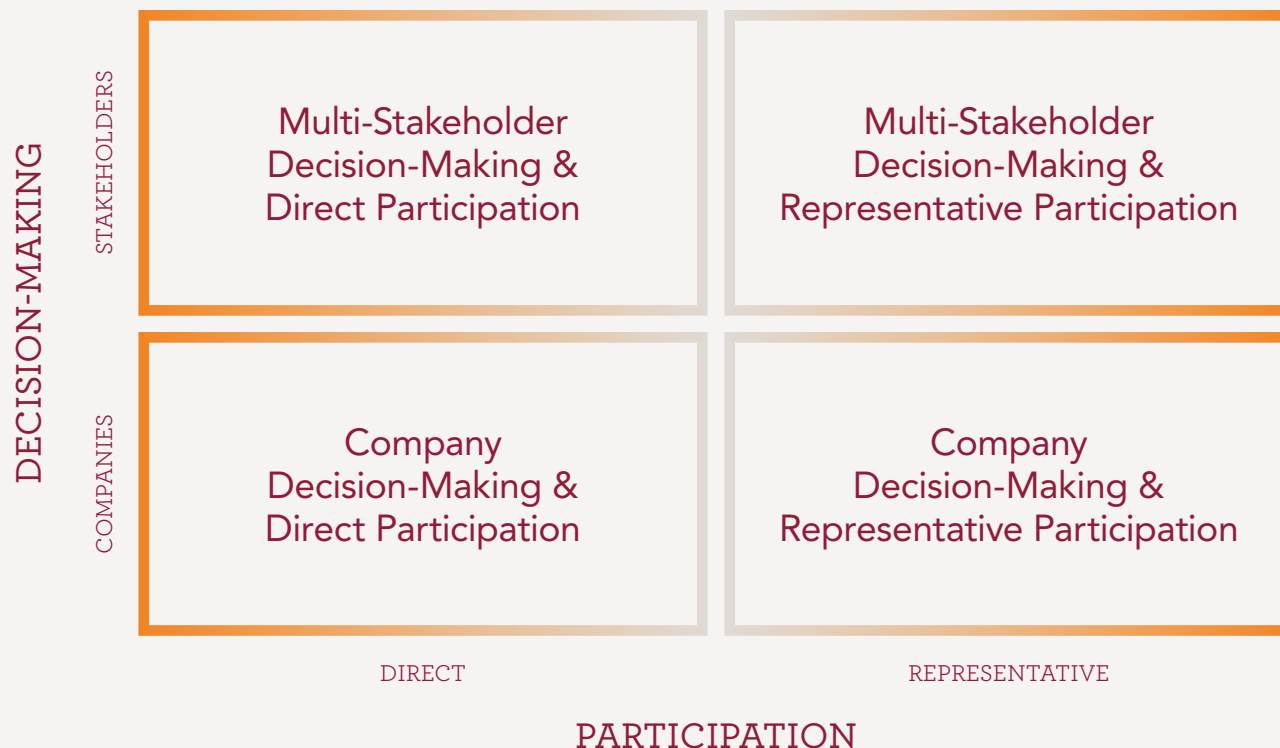
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Striking the right balance between participation and decision-making:

Good governance is a fundamental aspect of collaboration as it enables successful partnerships, fair decision-making, and transparency about the roles and responsibilities of actors involved in collaborations. In addition, good governance creates legitimacy. Based on its work with the CoLab SDGs program, BSR has developed a governance framework that is based on two factors—decision-making and participation—and results in four distinct governance models.¹⁰

The framework is particularly useful in the context of business-led collaborations, in which companies can decide whether to open the collaboration and governance seats to other stakeholders. For example, the Sustainable Coconut Partnership makes decisions via a steering committee made up of industry/business members but allows participation of diverse stakeholders in the collaboration. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to governance, and governance models need to be carefully designed based on the vision, mission, intended outcomes, and participants of the collaboration.

BSR COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK



¹⁰ Advancing Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration: Four Governance Models for Business | Blog | Sustainable Business Network and Consultancy | BSRFund

Lessons Learned from the Program

2

Centering the rightsholder perspective:

The SDGs pursue the vision of a world in which no one is left behind. However, business-led collaborations developed to address the SDGs frequently run the risk of designing solutions for and catering to those rightsholders most in need without actually including their voices in the process in a meaningful way. It is therefore critical for collaborations to map their stakeholders and rightsholders carefully; design engagement approaches that are appropriate, culturally sensitive, and accessible; and consult or engage them systematically throughout the entire collaboration lifecycle, from ideation to launch and daily operations. This is critical to ensuring that the collaboration's interventions and programs actually benefit rightsholders in the short and long term. The Watch & Jewellery Initiative 2030 integrates stakeholder engagement and partnerships as one of its collaboration principles and has published an extensive stakeholder report,¹¹ summarizing insights from its engagement of over more than 80 stakeholders including business, civil society, academia, trade associations, and

others. In addition, the initiative's governance model also includes nonbusiness stakeholders such as civil society or subject matter experts (e.g., in the Multi-Stakeholder Engagement Committee and the Multi-Stakeholder Action Committees, respectively).¹² RISE is a strong example of a collaboration that centers the voices of key rightsholders. The initiative includes the perspectives of women workers through continuous engagement in their native language and via local partner organizations or representatives. RISE also guarantees that women workers are represented at every level, from governance to project implementation, ensuring that the work responds to their real needs and priorities. Only by understanding the realities of the nature of work and challenges that women workers face, RISE can bring about positive change in the global garment, footwear, and home textiles industries. To conclude, integrating the voices of multiple and diverse stakeholders—particularly those of beneficiaries or rightsholders—either directly or via representatives such as labor unions or grassroots organizations, is critical to ensuring that collaborations contribute effectively to sustainable development for all.

Lessons Learned from the Program

3

Measuring collaboration impacts in a systematic manner:

While a key objective and success factor of the CoLab SDGs program is to establish 10 new initiatives, not all ideas for partnerships result in formal business-led multi-stakeholder collaborations. Even ideas that are discarded during the initial landscape assessment—a process undertaken to understand potential collaboration impacts and ensure that the potential collaboration addresses unmet needs and avoids duplication—may result in an increased understanding of the context and collaboration challenge, yield concrete proposals for alternative solutions, or result in timebound projects or one-off stakeholder discussions that can help advance knowledge on critical sustainability issues. For example, through Keeping Workers in the Loop, a project that explored the impact of circularity on jobs in the fashion industry, stakeholders across the fashion industry uncovered the need for further research on the ecological, social, and economic impact of global used-textile product flows. While no formal business-led collaboration has been established as a result of initial discussions, a clear need to further understand the multifaceted challenge has been identified. Ultimately, further research in this field will help advance the foundation for solutions and innovative approaches to the global issue of textile waste. What this example demonstrates

is that measuring collaboration success must be a systematic endeavor, considering not only the direct outcomes (i.e., whether an initiative has been established or not) but understanding that positive benefits and impacts can play out in a number of different ways.

While these three initial lessons may stand out, BSR looks forward to sharing more detailed insights and takeaways about business-led multi-stakeholder collaborations in a future report, to be published in 2024.



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About BSR

BSR is a sustainable business network and consultancy focused on creating a world in which all people can thrive on a healthy planet. With offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR provides its 300+ member companies with insight, advice, and collaborative initiatives to help them see a changing world more clearly, create long-term value, and scale impact.

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