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Tiziano Peccia
Rasha Kelej
Ahmed Hamdy
Ahmed Fahmi

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A reflection on Public-Private Partnerships' contribution to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals[§]

by Tiziano Peccia*, Rasha Kelej**, Ahmed Hamdy***, Ahmed Fahmi****

Abstract

The primary aim of this research paper is to analyse and discuss how the implementation of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can maximize the impact of capacity building in scientific research and in turn, contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is discussed that there has been a movement towards an evolution of PPPs systems, particularly in regard to new financial methods for education and scientific research. This paper demonstrates that international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) are increasingly encouraging the adoption of PPPs. Also discussed are the challenges faced during the cooperation between the private sector and multilateral organisations during the adoption of PPPs. Practical casework from the African continent is also explored. This article showcases joint-initiatives (such as the UNESCO-Merck Africa Research Summit) that aim to create fertile ground for spillover effects, such as North-South and South-South scientific cooperation, as well as gender empowerment in research. Following controversial literature, PPPs can catalyse stronger relationships among heterogeneous actors which include international organisations, industry, research centres and universities.

L'obiettivo primario di questo studio è analizzare e discutere come lo sviluppo di partenariati pubblico-privati (PPP) possa massimizzare l'impatto di progetti legati al "rafforzamento delle capacità" nella ricerca scientifica e, allo stesso tempo, contribuire al raggiungimento degli obiettivi di sviluppo sostenibile sanciti dall'Agenda 2030. Negli ultimi decenni si è sviluppato un notevole interesse sull'evoluzione di sistemi di PPP, soprattutto in relazione ai meccanismi di finanziamento dell'educazione e della ricerca scientifica. Viene qui inoltre descritto il ruolo di organizzazioni internazionali, quali le Nazioni Unite, nell'incoraggiare l'adozione di PPP per perseguire i propri obiettivi di

§ The authors of this paper have been in collaboration in creating and implementing the joint initiative, among UNESCO, Merck Foundation and the African Union, which constitutes the background of the research. The opinions expressed in this paper are the author's own and do not reflect the view of UNESCO, the African Union, or the Merck Foundation.

* Science Policy and Capacity Building, Natural Science Sector, UNESCO.
Email: t.peccia@unesco.org

** Merck Foundation. Email: rasha.kelej@merckgroup.com

*** Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology, African Union.
Email: hamdya@africa-union.org

**** Capacity Building in Science and Engineering, UNESCO. Email: a.fahmi@unesco.org

sviluppo. Tali meccanismi non sono scevri da dibattiti e potenziali sfide, specialmente in merito alla cooperazione del settore privato con attori multilaterali nell'adozione di modelli di PPP. L'articolo include l'analisi di casi pratici ed esperienze degli autori, impegnati nella cooperazione tra organizzazioni di diversa natura (UNESCO-MERCK Africa Research Summit) che ambiscono a creare un terreno fertile per generare esternalità positive ed effetti "spillover" che coinvolgano la cooperazione Nord-Sud e Sud-Sud, così come l'*empowerment* di genere nella ricerca. Facendo riferimento alla controversa letteratura sul tema, questo lavoro vuole sottolineare il potenziale di partenariati pubblico-privati nel catalizzare relazioni tra attori eterogenei che includano organizzazioni internazionali, il mondo dell'industria, centri di ricerca, università e società civile.

Parole chiave / Keywords

Public-Private Partnership, UNESCO, Merck, Development, Africa

Partenariato pubblico-privato, UNESCO, Merck, sviluppo, Africa

Introduction

International cooperation among heterogeneous actors, particularly between multilateral organisations and the private sector, is playing an increasingly important role in providing reliable logistical and financial support to socially-oriented initiatives. Indeed, several international and regional organisations are intensifying their inter-sectoral interaction with the private sector via joint investments and joint-missions, especially for the following reasons:

- to address issues regarding the need to find new resources, and to supply or increase financing from the public sector;
- to fulfil the need for coordinating the actions of multilaterals with industries and key stakeholders, which play a prominent role in reshaping and determining habits and global and local growth within societies.

This form of cooperation follows the evolution of today's assets and organizations. The private sector plays a leading role in determining the trajectories of economic development and trade (Shogren 1993); as aid budgets shrink, commercial organizations¹ are joining public sector involvement and investments in an international

1 "These competitors include: venture philanthropists pledging significant sums to tackle global challenges; hybrid social enterprises encouraging pro-poor venturing; and large corporations investing in global public goods" (Gulrajani 2015).

cooperation *milieu* that creates a continuous process of adaptation and “modernization” (Gulrajani 2015). Furthermore, crucial infrastructures and R&D hubs are often managed or owned by the private sector (ENISA 2011). Thus, the need of promoting a synergy among public and private actors functions as a natural outcome of globalisation and liberalism. In light of the increasing importance that these relationships play in supporting and driving economic and social development - as well as in alignment with the framework for the achievement of Agenda 2030 - the 194 countries of the UN General Assembly resolved to dedicate a specific Goal to strengthen partnerships: the Sustainable Development Goal, number 17 (“Partnership for the Goals”). By structuring these partnerships with a holistic approach that incorporates governments, the private sector and civil society. Goal 17 prioritizes people and planet with a call for action at levels of global, regional, national and local significance. For example, the World Bank Group defines this Goal as one of their “key pillars of support for the SDGs”, which is evidenced by their involvement in several global partnerships such as the *Financing for Development with Multilateral Development Banks and UN partnership*, moreover, their work as the umbrella organisation for various partnerships implementing initiatives like “Every Woman Every Child” and “Sustainable Energy for All” (World Bank Group 2017).

However, conscious of the need of cooperating with a diverse array of actors (i.e. private companies, governments), it is important to demonstrate with concrete examples that partnerships among heterogeneous actors could lead to positive outcomes. In order to effectively promote initiatives where people and the planet are central, it is crucial to contemplate ways to find win-win solutions that level the relationship between the private and public spheres. Further, to generate positive externalities like an *“investment environment which encourages the most socially productive use of capital”* (Shogren 1993). The following research paper reflects the cumulative experiences of a heterogeneous group of collaborators with different affiliations and missions (UNESCO, MERCK Foundation and African Union) that will conclude with an examination of UNESCO-MARS, a specific case study that highlights the importance of promoting projects and strategies that yield win-win outcomes and accomplish the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

1. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) refer to a broad set of relations defining cooperation between the private and public sectors in order to provide infrastructure

and a variety of services. Even if ill-defined, PPPs may still generate private sector participation (PSP) and privatization, which distinguishes them from other forms of Public-Private collaboration (Asian Development Bank 2008).

In some regions, PPPs have a longstanding tradition, as seen in EU Member States and Anglophone countries (Coen et al 2010). In others, these partnership approaches are continuously evolving to follow – and drive – economic growth. A recent OECD Growth Study emphasizes the need for governments be more responsive to business needs and strategies and to the transformation of innovation processes. In this respect, PPPs can be seen as key to increasing responsiveness, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of innovation and technology-related policies (Guinet et al 2003) (EPEC 2015).

Referring to the European Commission definitions, it is possible to analyse four principal points characterising the role of the private sector in PPP schemes:

- the possibility of providing additional capital;
- the provision of alternative management and implementation skills;
- the provision of value added to the consumer and the public at large;
- the identification of needs and optimal use of resources (European Commission 2003).

These principal points were taken into consideration for the first time in the discussions and open working groups that led to the drafting of the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, where the role of the private sector in financing sustainability was highlighted. In particular, concerning the importance of (i) creating partnerships ensuring coherence and coordination between stakeholders and institutions in policy processes; and (ii) increasing the mobilization and allocation of resources in order to foster sustainable development, particularly for what concerns stakeholders and processes of the post-2015 development agenda. This convergence of interests creates also the fruitful occasion for supporting development cooperation (UN Task Team 2013) and to share the risks related to investments. Moreover, private investments may also reinforce the resilience of public institutions, providing the necessarily economic support in order to reduce - and hamper - the negative externalities created by disasters and economic crisis, which recurrently affect public actors (World Economic Forum 2015) (Oldrich 2017).

Thereafter, PPPs can potentially help also in breaking the “vicious cycle of budget constraints”, such as been outlined in the conceptualization paper of Francoz of the *Agence française de développement*, as shown below:

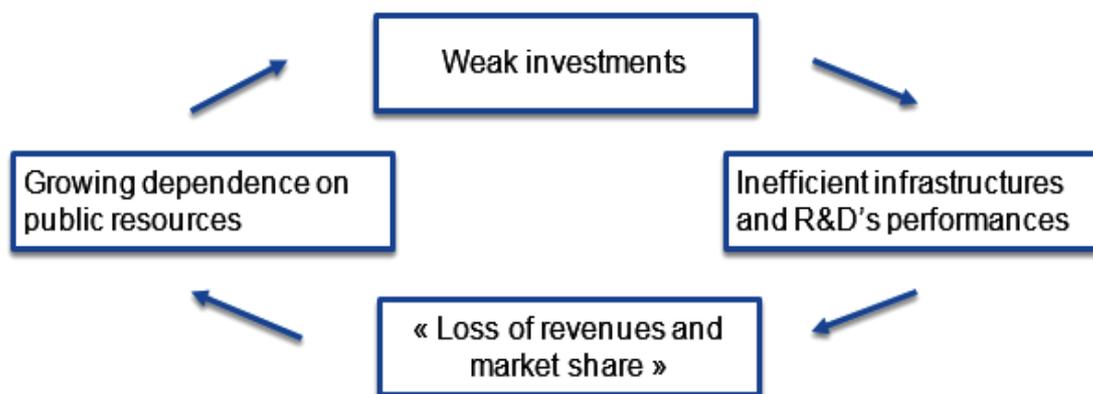


Fig. 1: “Vicious cycle of budget constraints” (Francoz 2010)

Furthermore, by definition, public goods are non-rivalrous and non-excludable. Indeed, a non-rivalrous good does not reduce the possibility for the individual Y of benefitting of the same good that the individual X already consumed. Non-excludable, reflects the impossibility of excluding an individual X while including the rest of the community in the consumption of a Z good. An illiteracy free community is, for example, a pure public good. On the other side, private goods are defined by reality end excludability. It is crucial to take into account that public sectors have both rival and non-rival elements, for example schools. Schools, for socio-economic or infrastructure-related factors, can exclude students for several reasons (i.e. capacity of the classes, cost or education level) (Ellery 2009). Even taking into account these existing “limits”, it is important to highlight that even in a situation of rivalry and excludability it is possible to generate non-excludable and non-rivalrous outcomes, such as research and knowledge. Consequently, it is crucial to brainstorm in order to trigger spillover effects, to inspire and mobilize communities and heterogeneous actors in taking action and giving birth to virtuous cycles. However, it is important to remember that there is often a risk of over confidence in the ability of the private sector to tackle endemic market failures in eradicating the obstacles affecting a real poverty reduction (Blowfield&Dolan 2014) (Gulrajani 2015).

In the specific case of this article, where there is the will of understanding possible strategies of achieving “win-win” outcomes in the cooperation with multilateral and private sector, it is important to pay attention also to the undesirable consequences of PPPs – particularly in the cases that concern the work of the authors, such as education empowerment. Indeed, there is still a huge debate on PPPs, such as their roles in sectors such as education. The education system as a whole is complex sector characterised by several social and political aspects and claims, and there is strong public opinion worldwide affirming it should remain the competence of the public sector

having the role to serve public interests (Robertson 2012). Indeed, if some scholars affirm that Education Public Private Partnerships (ePPPs) are a new form of synergy in order to improve access, quality and equity to the system (King 2009)², others claim it is just a new – and “friendly” – face of a “privatisation of education”-agenda (Hatcher 2006) (Robertson 2012), which is not necessarily a “panacea for development” (Farlam 2005; Mgaiwa&Poncian 2016³; Rizvi 2016). On the other hand, higher education systems in a number of countries are amenable to partnerships with the industry. In 2013, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics surveyed manufacturing firms that were active innovators in order to analyze the cooperation with Universities and public research centers in producing innovative products and know-how (Avenyo et al 2015). The outcome of the survey showed a complete lack of interaction between private manufacturing firms and public research institutions. Among 31 high-income countries surveyed, the lowest university–industry interactions were: in Australia (1.4% of firms), in the UK (4.7%) and in Italy (5.3%). Even Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, New Zealand, Portugal, the Russian Federation and Spain recorded less than 10% of industry-university ties/collaborations. Japan and the Republic of Korea, which are particularly vibrant in contributing to Research and Development (R&D), registered respectively 15.7% and 10.0%. The Report also highlights that the cooperation with universities is an effective use of R&D investments, in certain cases more convenient than developing endogenously the technology (i.e. (US) companies in technology heavy industries) (UNESCO Science Report 2015). The OECD also notes that partnerships between industry and actors such as laboratories, universities and research institutes, optimize social returns generated from the commercialisation and implementation of R&D and skilled investigators (OECD 2015).

In the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Goal 17 –

2 In this case we could recall the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

3 A study on Public-Private Partnerships in Higher-Education in Tanzania, carried out through the analysis of data published secondary academic sources and from primary documents from Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), highlights that the impacts of the partnerships are not necessarily positive. The paper concludes that PPPs in Education played a positive impact in creating opportunities to the access in higher education and in reducing – significantly – the gender gap (the paper shows that public institutions enroll less female students than private institutions). However, PPPs have not helped in improving the quality of education or curricula because of an inadequate number and qualifications of the teaching staff. Moreover, with a significant increase in private higher education institutions, public institutions need to cooperate with the private ones to receive the support of their – private - academic staff to supply the increasing demand of the students. This study outlines that on one side PPPs are producing positive externalities to face the low enrolment rate in Tanzania higher education, but at the same time they require clear and efficient measures to avoid compromising the quality of education provided (Mgaiwa&Poncian 2016).

“Partnership for the Goals”⁴ is poised to act as an umbrella in creating the charters and basis for facilitating the achievement of the other SDGs.

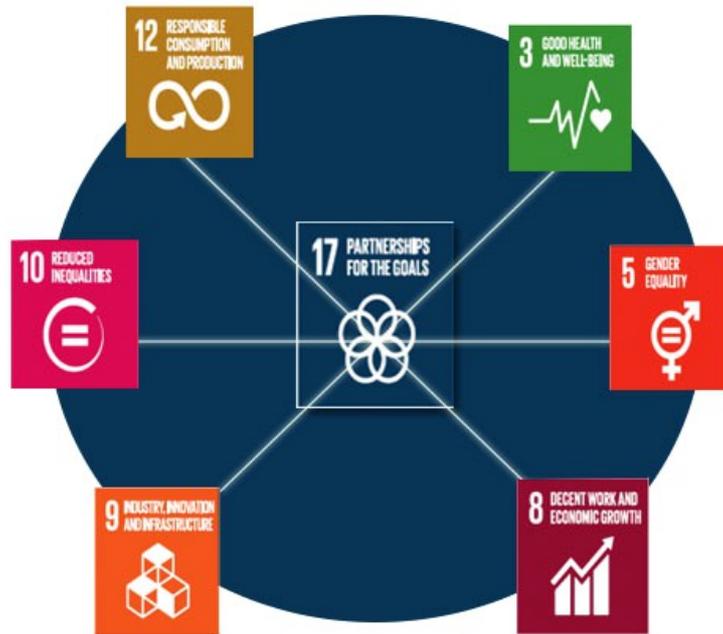


Fig. 2: Diagram SDG 17 acting as an ‘umbrella’ in order to support the other SDGs

Target 16 of the Goal 17 states that the goal is to “*enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the (SDGs) in all countries, in particular developing countries*”. This SDG has a strong link with the concept of global public goods, especially nowadays that epidemics, nuclear proliferation, malicious software put strain on both more economically developed country and developing countries, private and public actors (Wouters&Cogolati 2015). The concept of global public goods entered in the agenda of numerous development actors; in 2006, the International Task Force on Global Public Goods, co-chaired by the Former President of the United Mexican States Ernesto Zedillo and Tidjane Thiam, Former Minister of Development of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, called for “significant additional expenditures on global public goods” (Wouters&Cogolati 2015). The Task Force highlighted that, financing for global public goods is not a benefit just for developing countries but also for donors, and that development assistance is not pure altruism and solidarity. Inge Kaul⁵ affirms that – in comparison to the previous Millenium Development Goal 8, which perpetuated the

4 Sustainable Development Goal 17: “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”.

5 Former Director of the Office of Development Studies at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), pioneer in the definition of the concept of “global public goods”.

dichotomic model “Donor-Recipient” of the aid – the SDG 17 reflects a new awareness of global public goods.

2. Corporate social responsibility: new frontiers for international development

If the conventional and diffused perception of corporate social responsibility (CSR) corresponds to the concept of “philanthropy”, its definition constantly evolves and changes in time (Secchi 2005). This evolution reflects the contextual relationships between business and society, particularly for what concerns the contribution of a company in taking action to resolve social problems. Indeed, CSR reflects the response of a corporation to the impact of its activity on “customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders, communities and other stakeholders as well as their environment” (Ismail 2009). The concept of triple-bottom-line (TBL) is often used by corporates to explain or to justify their position for what concerns issues of sustainability. In fact, TBL takes into account the imperatives of acting with a multilevel approach to environmental, social and economic imperatives.

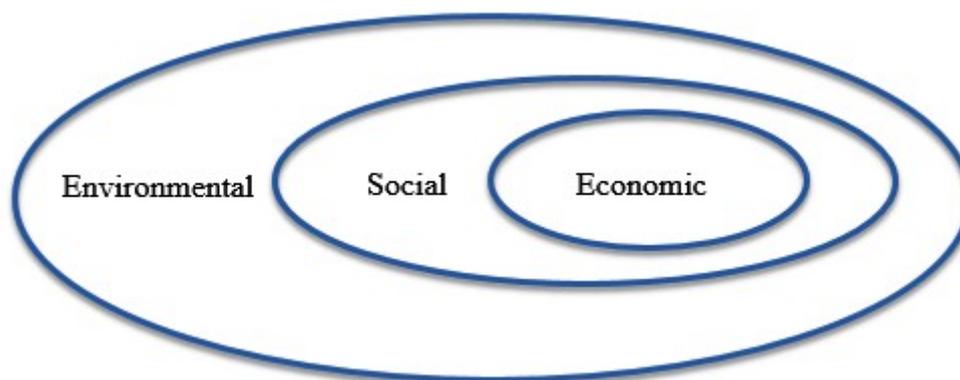


Fig. 3: Readapted Sustainable Developed diagram (Mitchell et al 2007).

This corporate responsibility can either be voluntarily (as an internal initiative) or can be ordered by a legislative party (i.e. because of a trial); in both cases it has to concretely contribute to community development in creating the basis for sustainability. Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account that CSR should not be perceived as a unilateral exchange with the local community but as a bilateral or multilateral exchange of services and benefits. For example, the consolidation of the corporate on the territory, the advantages generated by corporate tax behaviours, and the creation of an “interdependency relation” and this often develops marketing, liability and image-related benefits (Marano et al 2017). In fact, marketing literature confirms that

consumers positively respond to social-oriented initiatives (Maignan&Ferrell 2004). For example, CSR-related initiatives in education-related fields (i.e. scholarships and fellowships) can contribute to alleviating poverty and affirming a fundamental human right, all the while, improving the reputation and image of the corporation. This, in turn, means that it becomes more enticing for young and local talents to apply for work. Moreover, Multinational Companies (MNC) may benefit from CSR initiatives in developing countries by creating and reinforcing bridges among the different offices/regional areas, and facilitating international technology transfer (Bakken 2011) and a broader “MNC’s internationalisation”.

The multifaceted and reciprocal relationship in education among the private sector, that of the public and the civil society is reflected in the former Secretary-General of the United Nation affirmations. Indeed, Ban Ki-moon stated: *“Investing in education creates a generation of skilled people who will have rising incomes and demands for products and services – creating new markets and new opportunities for growth (...) Corporate philanthropy is critical, but we need more companies to think about how their business policies and practices can impact education priorities”* (UN Global Compact Reports 2013). Additionally, local, regional and international initiatives under the umbrella of international organisations or “neutral actors” have also the potential to amplify the impact of science soft-power, giving the possibility to actors with different backgrounds to work together in order to achieve common goals (Pandor 2012).

The United Nations played a key role in encouraging business to promote the concept of “do-no-harm”, endorsing two initiatives in particular: UN Global Compact and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. This enforces a culture of integrity and social responsibility among corporations in order to create the basis for long-term success. The UN Global Compact’s Ten Principles list the fundamental responsibility in the fields of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption in order to harmonize and converge business and sustainable development-related needs (ANNEX I) (United Nations Global Compact 2004). Nonetheless, in the framework of supporting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is some confusion in understanding a “principles-based approach to business” (i.e. UN Global Compact) and in achieving objectives such as the SDGs. However, the principles and the goals are crisscrossed and linked by direct and indirect contributions, with the UN Global Compact Ten Principles supporting SDGs achievement. For example, the UN Global Compact and UN Women developed the Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs), delineating seven principles in order to advance

gender equality (SDG 4⁶).

This case, founded on these principles – which embrace gender equality in several areas, such as in leadership and in the supply chain – can converge and support goals' achievements. In fact, the UN Global Compact has mapped and linked these seven principles to all the 17 SDGs and their targets (UN Global Compact 2016). Moreover, the possibility of converging principles promoting values such as equality and mutual respect with frameworks and targets for responsible and inclusive business movement is an historical occasion for the UN-system and its - public and private - partners, collaborators and civil society to transform this kind of enthusiasm into concrete actions.

Indeed, valorising and improving people's skills and know-how is the only meaningful way to foster and generate development. Investments in education, capacity building, development and training all have the same goal: to strengthen and "*improve human skills*"; industries and private companies with their consolidated expertise within in-house training can provide a significant contribution to this purpose (Hopkins 2012).

3. PPPs and capacity building in the African continent. A double-edged sword?

Lack of skilled personnel and weak institutional capacity are two of the biggest issues slowing down intersectoral cooperation within the African continent. For this reason, in countries lacking proper capacities, even less risky, smaller projects and initiatives can produce positive externalities triggering spillover effects (Farlam 2005). Often the fragility of the local private sector affects the ability of the State in implementing the PPPs, reducing the possibilities for fundraising, for establishing productive links of mutual-trust and know-how sharing among heterogeneous actors. Therefore, international cooperation with the intervention of external capitals can be a potential solution to filling in the gap.

In 2004, the former Southern African Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel affirmed: "*This is what PPPs are about. The public gets better, more cost effective services; the private sector gets new business opportunities. Both are in the interest of the nation*". South Africa has been at the forefront of PPPs in the continent with deals and agreements forged with the private sector in support of IT industry, healthcare and transport (Mutandwa&Zinyama 2015). It is important to note, however, that States and

6 SDG 4: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls".

elected Governments play a role of primary responsibility in leading the positive conduct of PPPs. In case public institutions are fragile and vulnerable (i.e. with high level of corruption), PPPs become weak as well; one of the perverse effects that PPPs could lead to a situation of poor governance since private actors will pursue profit maximization over public needs (Pusok 2016).

Nevertheless, the nature and the operating of the private sector is often perceived with suspicion, not just by individuals, civil society (i.e. associations, NGOs) and the media but, also by institutions and governmental bodies' themselves (Winter 2017). These suspicions are fed by constant scandal or corruption-related indignities feeding cross-sector trust erosion (Gao et al 2015). The bioscience industry has been particularly exposed to these denunciations, along with the pharmaceutical and agrochemical sector (Fahmi 2017). Pharmaceutical industries were among the most respectable in the past for their contribution in improving people's life. However, nowadays their reputation is very close to those of the tobacco and finance industries (Harris Interactive 2013). The reputational decline of pharma industry can be rooted also in the managerial direction of these corporations. Indeed, pharma industry's multinational big players can often evoke a feeling of frustration and insurmountable obstacles for market penetration, leaving few possibilities for "smaller" companies to compete. Since then there has been a gradual recognition of this problem, as large companies have increasingly become involved in regional, local and community-based development, sending a first important "signal" that traditional business models are not sustainable and have to be changed. Moreover, all the Wall Street pressures in which pharmaceuticals compete for drugs and medical services' market with all the related consequences often evokes the impression that these corporates are only interested in profits, making the needs of patients secondary (Kessel 2014). Nevertheless, for the survival of a flourishing pharma industry it is crucial for those corporates to rebuild this link of trust with patients and civil society.

This is one of the reasons for why it is so crucial nowadays for companies - even through their CSR departments - to give something back to communities, for example through the promotion of initiatives with a social dimension. On the other hand, a lack of market competition between pharma can also risk creating a strong dependency on prices, which can start negative externalities rooting to structural and chronic problems of certain territories (i.e. high prices related to a lack of competition turning into lucrative strategies). It is estimated that around 79% of all pharmaceutical products in Africa are imported, showing a strong dependency from international suppliers. The demand for drugs affordability, safety and effectiveness is extremely high but is not

supplied by local pharmaceutical manufacturing capacities, affecting competitiveness and consequently high-prices. Even if the access to life-saving medicines is a human right, this goal is far away from being achieved in Africa (Dong&Mirza 2015).

4. Casework: UNESCO-MARS

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) historically played a prominent role in valorising local talents in science and in fostering sustainable development and constructive actions through its initiatives. Particularly, the Natural Sciences Sector (SC) for the advancement and sharing of scientific knowledge constantly works for empowering women and young people in science and future generations of investigators and researchers to work in a fruitful and peaceful environment (Csermely et al 2007).

Recently, UNESCO took action with the CSR department of Merck, a leading Science and Technology Company, together with the African Union and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, promoting intersectoral cooperation in order to support science advancement in the African continent. In this framework, the UNESCO-Merck Africa Research Summit (UNESCO-MARS) has been a joint annual initiative between the public and private sector. This partnership reflects the advantages of capacity building in contributing to community development in the fields of research, life and chemical sciences, gender empowerment and education. Furthermore, Africa and Gender Equality are the paramount priorities of UNESCO (UNESCO 2013), outlining the reasons encouraging the Organization to be committed in promoting this project on annual basis.

One of the main goals of the initiative is the creation of bridges for North-South and South-South cooperation. For example, the interaction and the connection among several institutions such as the University of Cambridge (UK), l'Institut Pasteur (France) and the University of Rome Tor Vergata (Italy) with other centres such as the Uganda Infectious Institute (IDI), the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI), and the implementation of the network through dialogue with the UNESCO Regional Centre for Biotechnology Education, Research and Training (India) and the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (South Africa). This constitutes spillover effects in paving the way to a more cohesive international, regional and African scientific community. Annually, UNESCO and Merck Foundation nominate - in collaboration with academic partners - a Scientific Committee with the goal of selecting

the scientific theme, the speakers to invite and the young PhD/Post-Doctoral investigators to sponsor the event through a public call. The scientific theme reflects the most urgent needs of the African continent in the field of life sciences, taking the occasion of raising awareness on subjects such as “HIV Research Capacities and Ebola” (1st edition of UNESCO-MARS in Geneva), “Infectious diseases and Women’s health” (2nd edition in Ethiopia), “Cancer and Vaccine Development” (3rd edition to be held in Mauritius) (Omange 2017). Benefiting from the soft power of science and of the attention of media and important policy-makers, the choice of the scientific themes has the goal of going “beyond” research outcomes themselves, raising awareness on several SDGs (i.e. Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being; Goal 5: Gender Equality; Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals).

One of the values of UNESCO-MARS is to address and acknowledge African pluralism and heterogeneity, such as Francophone and Anglophone-speaking countries⁷. Indeed, avoiding any sort of discrimination and its negative consequences, it is possible to generate positive externalities and a link of trust among multilateral and attendees. Attendees were sponsored by Merck to take part in the event and to present their works through addresses and poster-sessions, providing a platform for networking and for proposing future scientific collaboration (North-South and South-South). Furthermore, the Summit included Ministerial panels⁸ with Government-representatives

7 The 2nd edition of the Summit attracted researchers from 11 French-speaking countries of Cameroon, Congo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Gabon, Gambia, Morocco, Niger, Rwanda, and Senegal. Researchers and investigators from – mostly - English-speaking countries came from Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In addition, researchers and experts from Arab, Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Angola and Mozambique took part to the event. Indeed, covering several geographical areas and involving Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone and Lusophone countries, it is possible to implement a best practice in respecting, valorising and promoting cultural (and linguistic) differences, avoiding the negative outcomes related to actors’ marginalization (i.e. resentment (Murphy 2005)).

8 The first ministerial high level panel on “Defining interventions to advance research capacity and empower women in research to improve women health in Africa,” involved: Hon. Sarah Opendi, State Minister of Health for General Duties of the Republic of Uganda; Hon. Idi Illiassou Mainassara, Minister of Public Health of the Republic of Niger; Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Development, Republic of Liberia; Hon. Jesús Engonga Ndong, Minister of Education and Science, Republic of Equatorial Guinea and Prof. Frank Stangenberg-Haverkamp, Chairman of Executive Board and Family Board of E. Merck KG. The second ministerial concerned “Research and policy making gap in Africa – challenges and opportunities – Africa as a new international hub for research excellence and scientific innovation”. It included: Hon. Yifru Berhan, Minister of Health and Hon. Afework Kassu Gizaw, Minister of Science and Technology, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; Hon. João Sebastião Teta, Secretary of State for Science and Technology, Republic of Angola; Hon. Zuliatu Cooper, Deputy Minister of Health and Sanitation, Republic of Sierra Leone and Mr Rashid Aman, Chairperson of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (KNATCOM) Board.

in order to highlight the importance of translating knowledge into action and in creating synergy among all the levels of research and healthcare. Actors within these groups include: policy-makers, industry, scientists, early-stage researchers, students and civil society. Another interesting point is played by the positive externalities generated by leadership, such as the soft power of “inspiring” new generations of young people and researchers. Indeed, among the invited speakers of the Summit, figured also prominent researchers, managers and academics, such as L’Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science International Awards and UNESCO-Equatorial Guinea International Prize for Research in Life Sciences’ laureates, creating a synergy among the different projects of UNESCO. In fact, effective leaders trigger a process of social influence, inspiring “to do willingly what they might not otherwise be inclined to do” (Lukey&Tepe 2008), such as to start challenging research projects, to join mobility programs or to pursue personal ambitions. Leadership positive externalities work not just in a vertical way (from the successful researcher to the youngest student), but also horizontally (from student to student, researcher-to-researcher, policy-maker to policy-maker), creating a set of inputs that could generate positive outcomes.

Moreover, these kinds of events are also a fruitful occasion to improve endogenous and internal dialogue and communication, for example among experts of the same disciplines as well as transdisciplinary dialogues with a shared vision. For example, during one of the Ministerial Panels, Dr Ahmed Hamdy from the African Union emphasized: *“Ministers of Science should communicate the impact of Science even on GDP. To show only scientific evidence such as publications could be not enough for Ministers of Finance. The gap is also in communication”*. Indeed, one of the most effective outcomes in capacity building and in creating platforms for dialogue such as summits and events is the multiplication of possibilities in translating knowledge into action. For example, Rasha Kelej, CEO of Merck Foundation announced a new virtual forum where African researchers can exchange experiences and knowledge with their peers and senior experts across the globe; she emphasized that *“this online platform will contribute to the improvement of networking, communication and research capacity in Africa and developing countries”*. One example of the concrete outcomes of the Summit is the support provided to young investigators through the assignment of fellowships from Merck Foundation (i.e. Merck Africa Research Summit Best African Woman Researchers Awards; Best Young African Researchers Awards). Outside the economic contribution of the fellowship itself, several researchers have had the opportunity to have a training/working experience with Merck or partner institutions.

As an outcome of the 2nd edition of UNESCO-MARS, the Regional Centre for

Biotechnology (RCB)⁹ and Merck Foundation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for building capacity of young researchers in the African region and in the field of Biotechnology. Merck Foundation proposed to finance, through the Merck-Africa Research Award Fellowship, the training of six young researchers. On 1st July 2017, two researchers (Ms Beatrice Nyagol and Mr Asahngwa Constantine, respectively from Kenya and Cameroon) joined the Centre for a 3-months advanced training. Ms Nyagol - specialized in HIV-research - declared that these fellowships accelerate the empowerment of Women in research in Africa; her expectations for this training are to acquire scientific skills allowing her to motivate and increasing performance of scientific enquiry and research in her workplace, facilitating also the knowledge transfer between two institutions (i.e. RCB and the Kenya Medical Research Institute). Mr Constantine, specializing in Medical Anthropology with a research project focusing on “the experiences of Women living with trachoma in Africa”, hopes to acquire critical skills in grant and scientific writing that will allow him in preparing a grant proposal to implement a study in his home country.

Conclusion

PPPs, which traditionally played a crucial role in Anglophone (Coen et al 2010) and European economies, are registering an increasingly influential trend worldwide. PPPs can be a key to face insufficient investment and growing pressures on government budgets in Africa (Zuma 2008), creating also the possibility to share positive or negative consequences, as previously showed in this work. Indeed, it is fundamental to encourage the needs of the private sector to converge with those of the public, not just in finding alternative ways to finance development and international organizations' activities but, in also being aware of the common interest of joining forces (i.e. knowledge transfer and know-how sharing). CSR is a crucial approach in spreading in an ethical and social-oriented way the benefits of a corporation to the community development, creating multilateral and bilateral advantages (i.e. consolidation of the activities of the company on the territory; marketing and image returns for the company promoting a CSR initiative). Indeed, “the ethics of a company are at the top of many reputational measurement systems” (Kessel 2014).

For this reason there is a concrete need of working on new models for several

9 # Category 2 Regional Centre for Biotechnology Training and Education in the Republic of India, established on 14 July 2006 through an agreement between UNESCO and the Government of India.

industries to contribute in “win-win” outcomes, where civil society can concretely benefit of R&D and innovation through models and strategies based on transparency and reducing government lobbying. However, failures and negative externalities created by an improper management of PPPs could potentially create more problems than they solved, creating a general “fear” and distrust around the possibility of imagining an intense interaction between many sectors with different natures. On the other hand, these partnerships have also raised some criticism by civil society groups and academics due to the way that some firms have used these partnerships with UN organizations to “bluewash” their mandate and to give the impression that their achievements are in the context of human rights (Berliner&Prakash 2015). It has being perceived that a large number of these PPPs have been based on the collaboration on project design and execution, but seldom on the follow-up and monitoring of such projects. This criticism has highlighted a precarious “monitoring strategy” in the framework of the UN Global Compact partnership and project management, being one of the main causes of so defined “bluewashing” strategies. In order to make of UNESCO-MARS a transparent platform, we solicited internal services which have direct access to national governments and their associates (i.e. National Commissions to UNESCO). The same involvement in monitoring the development of the project from the point of view of sustainability and risk management has concerned external members, such as the experts of the international Scientific Committee and continuous consultations with representatives of the concerned UNESCO member States, in particular in the case of our partnership, national universities, local NGOs and media.

Involving actors with heterogeneous status (i.e. private and public sectors, academia and policymakers), at local and international level is also a way to think at innovation as a holistic approach, where with the idea of innovation as an “inclusive concept” is validated (Godin 2016). It is possible therefore to use this model to fight the marginalization of scientific research and to bridge-the-know-how-gap which are challenges slowing the translation of ideas and findings of science into action for the public good.

From our experience, the UNESCO-MARS initiative can be an example to showcase that building scientific research capacities and skills in Africa and promoting gender equality (which are the main priorities of UNESCO), can be achieved through converging and coordinating the goals of the private sector’s CSR and UNESCO’s mandate in building peace in the world. Supporting and promoting the empowerment of young researchers in science in Africa, is important to achieving SDGs and bridging the North-South gap, particularly nowadays that *“it is hard, and getting harder, to get a foot*

in the research door" (Nature 2016). To conclude the reflections of this research paper, and to recall the previous statements, PPPs when established under clear terms between private sector and UN-organizations can be a good model to implement projects for SDGs.

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ANNEX I

The **UN Global Compact's Ten Principles** are derived from:

- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work
- the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development
- the United Nations Convention Against Corruption

Human Rights

Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and

Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

Labour

Principle 3: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;

Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;

Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour; and

Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Environment

Principle 7: Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;

Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and

Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

Anti-Corruption

Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

ANNEX II

“The **Women's Empowerment Principles** are a set of Principles for business offering guidance on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. They are the result of a collaboration between the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Global Compact and are adapted from the Calvert Women's Principles®. The development of the Women's Empowerment Principles included an international multi-stakeholder consultation process, which began in March 2009 and culminated in their launch on International Women's Day in March 2010.

Subtitled Equality Means Business, the Principles emphasize the business case for corporate action to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and are informed by real-life business practices and input gathered from across the globe. The Women's Empowerment Principles seek to point the way to best practice by elaborating the gender dimension of corporate responsibility, the UN Global Compact, and business' role in sustainable development. As well as being a useful guide for business, the Principles seek to inform other stakeholders, including governments, in their engagement with business”.

Principle 1: Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.

Principle 2: Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.

Principle 3: Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.

Principle 4: Promote education, training and professional development for women.

Principle 5: Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.

Principle 6: Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.

Principle 7: Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.