

# Partnerships for SDG Transformations

Dr David Horan, Postdoctoral Researcher  
School of Politics and International Relations, UCD

UN Sustainable Development Transformation Forum, 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 2021

# Overview of talk

- Sustainable industrialization and the role of partnerships
- A new approach to partnerships for transformations
- Recommendations on how to operationalize it

# Sustainable Industrialization

- Once it takes off, industrialization can happen in a single generation (Haraguchi 2019).
- Decisions made in the early stages can have long-term unsustainable consequences (Unruh 2000, 2002).
- Several advantages to industrializing after others (Sachs 2019, Vogel 2000):
  - Leapfrog, avoid previous mistakes, adopt more inclusive institutions.

# Role of Partnerships

- Partnerships have a key role to play in sustainability transformations, but the role is not well understood (Chan 2020, Westman 2018).
- Partnerships can help to initiate, accelerate and smooth transformations (Horan 2019, pg. 6-8).



Article

## A New Approach to Partnerships for SDG Transformations

David Horan <sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Politics and International Relations, Centre for Sustainable Studies and the Geary Institute for Public Policy, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland  
<sup>2</sup> Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), New York, NY 10115, USA; dgh2131@columbia.edu

Received: 17 May 2019; Accepted: 5 September 2019; Published: 10 September 2019



**Abstract:** Recent scientific reports highlight the urgent need for transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and long-term sustainability. This paper presents a new approach to partnerships that focuses on their role in transformations, the types of partnerships that may be needed and their enabling environment. It introduces transformation effectiveness as a criterion to evaluate a portfolio of partnerships and pathways as a tool to frame discussion of required partnerships. Guided by energy decarbonization and using a simple model of partnership formation, I highlight a (potential) mismatch between the types of partnerships required for transformation and the partnership types arising under the currently dominant voluntary approach. The model suggests the bottom-up approach can deliver some, but not all, of the partnerships needed. Five specific problems are identified—compensation for losers, partnering capacity, short-time horizons, inadequate coordination mechanisms and misaligned incentives. The paper then outlines some policy tools—transfers, regulation, public investment—governments could use to strengthen the bottom-up framework and orchestrate missing partnerships. The conclusion addresses two problems specific to the transformation approach: how to identify more systematically the partnerships needed (identification problem) and how to implement them (implementation problem); and outlines some ways to deal with these—science, deliberation, international leadership coalitions and frameworks/monitoring systems for transition partnerships.

**Keywords:** sustainable development; SDG transformations; means of implementation; partnerships; governance; governments

### 1. Introduction

Several recent scientific reports from international agencies highlight that global development is moving dangerously along the wrong path [1–7], and it is increasingly recognized that transformations are urgently needed in a range of areas to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and long-term sustainable systems [8–13]. While many governments and societal stakeholders recognize the need for change and the importance of engaging each other in the process, there is a worrying lack of consensus in how to do this.

Much of the confusion revolves around the means of implementation (Mols) and how to effectively

# Policies and partnerships

- Standard answer to “how to industrialize” tends to focus on getting the policies right.
- Underlying this, partnerships can play an important role in harnessing effective policies as well as other means of implementation.

# Case of Ireland 1990-2007

Policies	Partnerships
Low corporation tax rate.	With diaspora community and business leaders in the USA.
Access to the European Single Market.	EU Membership (1973).
Investments in infrastructure and higher education institutions.	EU Regional Development Funds. Partnerships with philanthropists.
Relative low wages.	Social Partnership (1987-). Wage agreements between government and trade unions (O'Donnell 2020, 2008).
Good Friday Agreement (1994).	Partnership across communities brokered by governments.

# Towards a portfolio of partnerships

- Calls for a portfolio of partnerships to achieve SDG transformations (TPI & UNDESA 2020, Mazzucato 2020, Moreno 2020, Horan 2019).
- Need to consider carefully the mix of partnerships required: Helpful to think in terms of two portfolios (Horan 2019)
  - **Current portfolio:** partnerships currently in place.
  - **Target portfolio:** partnerships that would deliver sustainable industrialization.
- Are there missing partners, partnerships? How can gaps be filled?

# Probing the target portfolio for energy:

What mix of partnerships might be needed?

Stage of Transformation	Partnerships for Energy Decarbonization (Horan 2019)	LIC Partnerships for Leapfrogging (?)
Initiate	Dutch Energy Agreement	Partnerships with international leaders in sustainability to access technology and finance
	Just Transition Fund	Partnerships with universities for educating and skilling up green workers
Smooth	German Coal Exit Commission	Others?
Accelerate	Nordic transmission grid	?
	International Solar Alliance	?



# Orchestrate

- Governments (with the support of the UN system) should seek to **orchestrate a portfolio aligned to transformation** (Horan 2019).

## Main steps:

1. Construct a registry of current partnerships through data sharing agreements.
  2. Use roadmaps to build a shared vision of partnerships for transformation and the missing partnerships.
  3. Invest in partnering infrastructure, partnership brokering, skilled representatives, organizational capacity.
- **Goal:** diverse, country-specific, coherent portfolio involving local, national, regional and international actors.

# Key takeaways

- For transformations, take a portfolio perspective
- Roadmaps as useful tools for framing discussions of partnerships needed
- Build supportive institutions and policy frameworks for a portfolio approach

Practice and share good practice!

# Thank you!

Email: [David.horan@ucd.ie](mailto:David.horan@ucd.ie)