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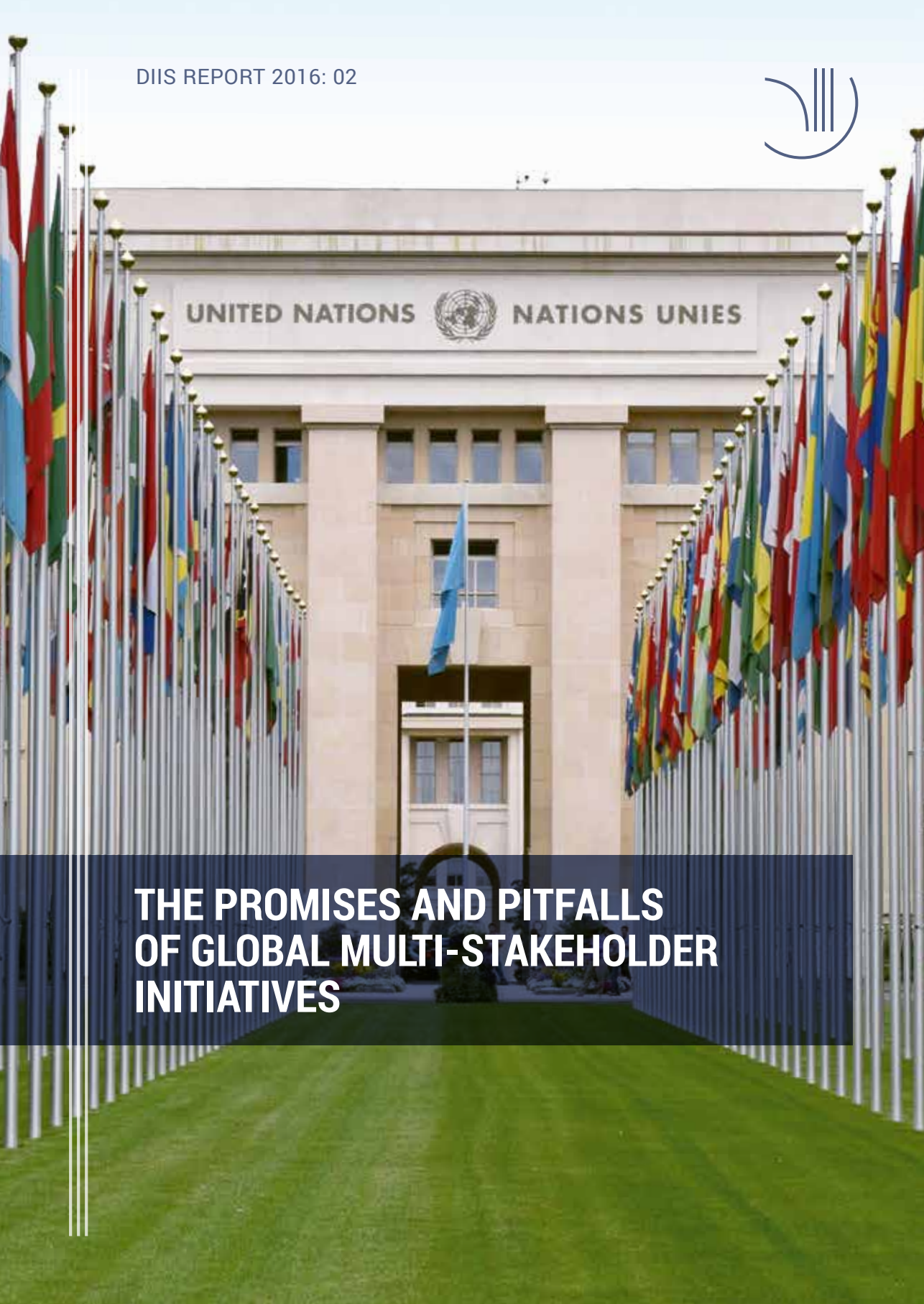

THE PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF GLOBAL MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEPC	Alternative Energy Promotion Centre
ESAP	Energy Sector Assistance Programme
GAVI	GAVI Vaccine Alliance
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
LDC	Least-Developed Country
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MSI	Multi-Stakeholder Initiative
NEA	National Electricity Authority
NPC	National Planning Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
QUODA	Quality of Official Development Assistance
REDP	Rural Energy Development Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SE4ALL	Sustainable Energy for All
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report assesses experiences with global multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs), cooperation platforms that are expected to complement governmental efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A defining characteristic of such initiatives is their interest in mobilizing resources such as funding, expertise and access to networks from diverse actors. Their creation is motivated by the recognition that the scale, complexity and transnational character of global challenges require innovative approaches to cooperation. The report reviews studies that analyse the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder initiatives and examines the perceived added value of the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative by drawing evidence from its country-level footprint in Nepal.

Although MSIs have been pitched as vehicles for generating additional resource commitments and promoting greater participation in global governance, researchers and practitioners have identified numerous challenges to implementation. General concerns about MSI effectiveness include the fact that they do not always produce genuinely new resource commitments, may reinforce existing power imbalances within their governance structures and do not have sufficient capacity to monitor their own performance. Assessments of global program funds have also highlighted distortions in allocation priorities and fragmentation as potential problems, while reviews of sustainable development partnerships have drawn attention to gaps between partnership goals and the organizational capacities needed to promote them as a constraint on effectiveness. These studies point to the adoption of clear, ambitious and realistic goals to orient activities, the early clarification of the roles and responsibilities of diverse stakeholders in implementation, and the promotion of a stable and diverse funding base for a partnership secretariat as key factors contributing to partnership success.

SE4ALL is a global multi-stakeholder initiative with ambitious goals to promote universal energy access, greatly improve energy efficiency and expand reliance on renewable energies. Based on a case study of SE4ALL-related action in Nepal, this report notes that the initiative faces challenges in expanding stakeholder engagement, promoting additional resource mobilization, fostering coordination and facilitating knowledge exchange. Stakeholder engagement with the initiative centres on bilateral and multilateral development partners that are already committed to core SE4ALL goals, while enthusiasm for the initiative among governmental actors and the private sector has been restrained. Nascent SE4ALL efforts to improve coordination among core actors in the energy sector in Nepal are limited by underlying differences in bureaucratic preferences and by the lack of capacity of the cross-governmental body charged with overseeing country-level coordination. In short, the initiative is not yet fulfilling its potential to stimulate new forms of collaboration to promote the development of sustainable energy in this country context.

Evidence from Nepal indicates that there are two key issues that SE4ALL must deal with in order to generate momentum for the initiative. First, SE4ALL must address a basic resource challenge to ensure that there is the organizational capacity to assume the convening and facilitation roles associated with the initiative at the global and country levels. One possible avenue for doing this is to encourage development partners who support the initiative at the global level to identify how country-level financing decisions can be aligned with broader political commitments to the initiative. Another avenue for securing a more robust resource base would be to expand outreach beyond the small group of OECD-DAC aid providers that have sustained organizational development to date. Alternatively, SE4ALL can ensure that existing resources are not spread too thinly by articulating a clearer division of responsibilities between the organization and its many implementing partners, as well as by focusing on country contexts and activities within countries where the added value of the initiative can be demonstrated. Secondly, given that the effectiveness of partnerships depends on the context in which they are implemented, the SE4ALL initiative needs to identify how it can contribute to addressing the underlying framework conditions that influence the achievement of its key goals. Additional commitments to SE4ALL may be difficult to mobilize if the platform is not able to demonstrate its role as a catalyst in transforming cooperation within the energy sector at the country level.

INTRODUCTION

Multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) have emerged as attractive platforms for mobilizing funding, technology, expertise and networks to support global development objectives. They are expected to play a complementary role alongside governmental funding and policy commitments in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Current efforts to promote multi-stakeholder initiatives within the United Nations system are an extension of expanded outreach with private-sector actors dating back to Kofi Annan's tenure as United Nations Secretary-General. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has also made promoting partnerships and increasing their effectiveness across the UN system a core part of his leadership agenda (Annan 1998; United Nations 2012).

Although political interest in promoting MSIs remains strong, analysis confirming their added value as an alternative to other forms of cooperation is limited.

Global multi-stakeholder initiatives have been advanced as vehicles for addressing a variety of challenges. Key examples can be found in the health sector (The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, the GAVI Alliance, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative), the Type-II agreements that emerged from the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, and the initiatives associated with the Lima-Paris Action Agenda to support climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Third International Conference on Small Island States in 2014 created the SIDS Partnership Development Platform to support such states in dealing with diverse sectoral issues using a multi-stakeholder approach. Examples of multi-stakeholder approaches also abound at the national and subnational levels. These initiatives point toward shifts in patterns of global governance that place an emphasis on using network approaches to address core global challenges (Khanna 2012).

Although political interest in promoting MSIs remains strong, analysis confirming their added value as an alternative to other forms of cooperation is limited. This report summarizes findings from existing research on the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships and examines the opportunities and challenges associated with their introduction. It first offers conceptual starting points for studying MSIs and provides an overview of the rationale for establishing them. It then reviews studies dealing with the functionality of global program funds and sustainable development partnerships to highlight general challenges in implementing MSIs. These findings from existing research on MSIs inform a case study analysing the country-level footprint of the global Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative in Nepal that highlights the relationship between this multi-stakeholder initiative and existing development cooperation structures.

DEFINITION, RATIONALE AND CRITIQUE OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES

Global multi-stakeholder initiatives are a type of partnership that can be defined with reference to their constituent parts and their functions. The United Nations has broadly defined partnerships as voluntary and collaborative relationships between state and non-state actors "in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and to share risks, responsibilities, resources, competencies, and benefits" (United Nations General Assembly 2003). In line with this definition, partnerships are based on shared objectives, the recognition of the unique assets of individual partners, and a desire to achieve a relevant division of labour through collaboration (Brinkerhoff 2002). This implies that partnerships are a form of burden-sharing and that the different stakeholders involved have complementary strengths to contribute to the collective endeavour. Apart from suggesting that the participation of actors is voluntary, this definition does not prescribe any particular institutional form or governance structure. Thus, a wide variety of initiatives fall under this label.

The rising interest in MSIs as vehicles for cooperation can be understood as a response to the failure of national governments to make substantial policy or financial commitments to support sustainable development goals in inter-governmental agreements or to provide adequate funding for multilateral cooperation.

Although a core defining characteristic of multi-stakeholder partnerships is their interest in mobilizing resources such as funding, expertise and access to networks from diverse actors, initiatives vary in their specific functions. Multi-stakeholder initiatives can fulfil four key functions: 1) mobilizing commitments to action, 2) service provision and implementation, 3) knowledge generation and sharing, and 4) norm and standard-setting (Engberg-Pedersen 2014). These functions are linked to a broader role of partnerships in providing a dialogue platform for actors to identify and initiate work programmes of common interest (Hazlewood 2015). A wide geographical scope and the participation of stakeholders from different sectors distinguish global multi-stakeholder initiatives from other partnerships.

The rising interest in MSIs as vehicles for cooperation can be understood as a response to the failure of national governments to make substantial policy or financial commitments to support sustainable development goals in inter-governmental agreements or to provide adequate funding for multilateral cooperation (Martens 2007). The partnership approach may also reflect dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of existing development cooperation models and the recognition that the scale, complexity and transnational character of development challenges require innovations in practice (Beisheim 2012; Bezanson and Isenman 2012). Beyond their contribution to infusing international cooperation with fresh knowledge and funding, MSIs have been associated with closing a participatory deficit in global governance by including a broader range of actors in global policy-making (Bäckstrand 2006). Through standard-setting, they may also contribute to closing regulatory gaps in global governance (Pinkse and Kolk 2012).

In reviewing multi-stakeholder partnerships in the UN system, the lack of alignment with inter-governmental decision-making has been a subject of controversy in light of the potential for private-sector actors to assume an agenda-setting role within partnership initiatives.

To ensure that partnerships create added value in international cooperation, the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development outlined a list of principles (the Bali Guiding Principles) to inform partnership design and implementation. This list emphasizes that partnerships should ideally be voluntary and based on shared responsibility, propose commitments that are additional to rather than a substitute for governmental action, and align with priorities identified through inter-governmental processes, given their affiliation with the UN brand (see Box 1). The guiding principles also suggest the importance of adopting a participatory orientation involving a broad range of stakeholders from an early stage of planning, as well as introducing measures to maintain transparency, accountability and learning from best practice (UN DESA 2003).

Box 1. The Bali Guiding Principles for partnership initiatives (2003)

PARTNERSHIPS SHOULD

- Reinforce the implementation of outcomes of intergovernmental negotiations
- Have a voluntary and self-organizing nature, based on mutual respect and shared responsibility among partners
- Mobilize additional capacity for implementing commitments and not be considered a substitute for government commitments
- Adopt an integrated approach to sustainable development and be consistent with sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies in the relevant implementation context
- Involve a range of relevant actors using a multi-stakeholder approach in partnership development from an early stage
- Have an open and transparent character and include monitoring and review mechanisms
- Define intended outcomes and benefits, have clear objectives and establish measurable targets and timelines for achieving them
- Have an added value and be 'new'
- Involve local participation and international impact
- Inform the Commission on Sustainable Development about their progress to promote sharing of lessons learned and best practices

Core criticisms of MSIs reflect their shortcomings in translating these principles into practice. For example, Chan and Pauw (2014) note that concerns highlighted in reviewing partnership initiatives associated with the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development include the lack of fresh resources mobilized for implementation, their reinforcement of existing power imbalances and failure to reflect the interests of weaker stakeholders, and the absence of monitoring frameworks to assess the performance of initiatives over time. In reviewing multi-stakeholder partnerships in the UN system, the lack of alignment with inter-governmental decision-making has been a subject of controversy in light of the potential for private-sector actors to assume an agenda-setting role within partnership initiatives (Martens 2007; Adams and Martens 2015).

An awareness of persistent challenges related to partnership development also exists within the United Nations system. While noting that many UN entities have made progress in developing and implementing effective partnerships over time, a report from the Secretary-General in 2013 highlighting the state of UN cooperation with the private sector indicated that the limited financial and human resources being devoted to partnerships, mixed support from leadership and inflexible bureaucratic procedures remained key obstacles to increasing the effectiveness of partnership activities. The report also pointed to a need for improvements with respect to monitoring and evaluation practices, knowledge sharing, and communication both within the UN system and to external audiences about unfolding partnerships. Deficiencies in knowledge-sharing and communication are linked to coordination challenges among UN entities, which are driven in part by competition within the UN system for the additional resources that cooperation with private-sector actors may provide (United Nations General Assembly 2013).

LEARNING FROM PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES WITH MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES

As noted above, the discourse related to creating novel partnerships to promote development goals is at least two decades old. In this time, a wide variety of multi-stakeholder initiatives serving different purposes have taken shape. This section reviews findings from assessments of MSIs in the form of global program funds and sustainable development partnerships in order to identify general lessons in promoting the effectiveness of these forms of cooperation.

GLOBAL PROGRAM FUNDS

Global program funds addressing global health, environmental and other challenges have been among the most prominent examples of multi-stakeholder initiatives that aim to mobilize and direct resources to specific sectors. The purpose in creating sector-specific initiatives such as the Global Fund to Combat AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, or the GAVI Vaccine Alliance was to raise the visibility of narrowly defined priorities and offer an innovative funding model to address them. The creation of program funds in the field of global health has been credited with significantly expanding the resources committed to disease-specific interventions since 2000 (Kruk 2012). They serve as examples of global MSIs because of their integration of representatives of the private sector, civil society and other stakeholder groups in their governance structures and their interest in attracting private resources to support core goals. Their governance structures and funding bases are nevertheless dominated by national governments, and these initiatives can therefore be considered an extension of North-South development cooperation (Isenman and Shakow 2010).

Global program funds addressing global health, environmental and other challenges have been among the most prominent examples of multi-stakeholder initiatives that aim to mobilize and direct resources to specific sectors.

The rationale for bilateral and multilateral donors to support global program funds has been seen as an outgrowth of their interest in increasing the traceability of donor contributions to development results that has led to the growth in earmarked funding for multilateral organizations (Browne and Cordon 2015). While global program funds must still be responsive to donor interests, their narrow organizational mandates have allowed them the autonomy to develop funding models that provide partner countries with access to significant resources allocated on the basis of performance-related criteria (Browne and Cordon 2015; Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2015). Key attributes of these program funds are thus linked to the operating procedures that they are able to put in place and not only to their sector-specific character.

Given the important role that OECD-DAC donor governments have played in creating and overseeing these global funds, evaluations of their performance have largely adopted assessment criteria derived from the aid effectiveness agenda. At the centre of this agenda is the consideration of how external financing can support country-level development efforts.

Decisions to create new initiatives have not always been based on an assessment of the need for new funding vehicles in light of the availability of other forums for addressing the same problems.

A World Bank-directed assessment from 2008 analysing the links between global program fund activities in five African countries and aid effectiveness principles highlighted several general concerns related to the growing reliance on these funding instruments (World Bank 2008). Although partner governments have welcomed financing from program funds, the fact that this funding largely originates from the same sources as other forms of bilateral and multilateral development cooperation indicates that it has not always been additional but instead reflects a reallocation of priorities within aid portfolios. A strong reallocation to narrowly defined sectors has been perceived to distort country-level funding patterns to the detriment of horizontal programs that seek to promote an integrated approach to development that is conscious of the mutually interdependent character of interventions in different sectors (Kruk 2012). Creating a stronger link between program funds and country systems and maintaining funding for multilateral cooperation with a complementary horizontal orientation have been proposed as ways of countering this potential distortion in aid allocation via program funds (World Bank 2008; Isenman and Shakow 2010).

These different aspects of the performance of multilateral funds reflect the fact that there are many different criteria for assessing the effectiveness of development interventions. The positive performance of certain forms of cooperation in accordance with particular criteria may be balanced out by poor performance on others. This is the message of the Quality of Official Development Assistance (QUODA) analysis, which presents a comparison of bilateral and multilateral cooperation providers along four broad dimensions of aid quality. In this assessment, global vertical funds are considered efficient in comparison to the average of aid providers examined due to their strong thematic focus and emphasis on monitoring, though the small number of vertical funds examined are considered below average in terms of responsiveness to partner country priorities, given their inability to adjust the sectoral focus to changing national circumstances (Birdsall and Kharas 2014).

In the first decade of experiences with sustainable development partnerships, a state-centric bias in participation in partnerships has been evident, with private-sector actors engaging less frequently in comparison.

Global program funds have also been associated with the proliferation of development initiatives and consequent fragmentation in the donor landscape, a factor thought to contribute to higher administrative burdens being placed on partner governments (EURODAD 2008). Fragmentation becomes a problem when initiatives introduce varied channels of implementation and reporting procedures, underlining the importance of donor commitments to align their interventions with partner government policies and promote harmonization efforts. National ownership of development policy is in turn considered an enabling factor for better coordination among donors and initiatives, suggesting the reinforcing character of diverse dimensions of the aid effectiveness agenda (World Bank 2008). These challenges are not unique to global program funds: they persist for varied types of aid providers. However, because program funds are regarded as novel, their repetition of acknowledged mistakes in past development practice suggests that they have not adequately incorporated lessons from the other cooperation experiences they are seeking to improve on (Lele, Sadik, and Simmons 2007).

In a synthesis study presenting findings from existing comparative studies of the performance of sector-specific global partnership programs and a review of the effectiveness of governance arrangements for eleven such programs, Bezanson and Izenman (2012) encourage stakeholders to exercise caution in establishing new partnership initiatives. They stress that decisions to create new initiatives have not always been based on an assessment of the need for new funding vehicles in light of the availability of other forums for addressing the same problems.

These authors also outline the pitfalls to avoid in organizational development once a decision has been made to create a partnership. A first concern relates to the inclusiveness of the governance structures of new partnerships. While multi-stakeholder initiatives are characterized by their openness to participation by diverse organizations, Bezanson and Izenman (2012) suggest that a high level of inclusiveness in governing boards through constituency-based representation can have a clear trade off in terms of decision-making efficiency. A second core concern is based on the observation that many partnerships invested inadequately in strategy development at the time of their creation. Such investments are needed to set out realistic objectives and outline criteria to demonstrate an initiative's added value in addressing these objectives over time. These concerns point to the importance of clearly defining expectations of the roles and responsibilities of the diverse stakeholders represented in an initiative at its inception. Finally, the synthesis study underlines the importance of providing adequate funding for secretariats of new partnerships so that they have the capacity to undertake this strategic work at the outset.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Analyses of the performance of sustainable development partnerships have echoed many of the concerns and suggestions for improving partnerships outlined in the literature assessing the effectiveness of global program funds. The sustainable development partnerships emanating from the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 have attracted attention from researchers in the field of global environmental governance in particular, given the novelty of including the partnerships as an official outcome of the summit and the perception that these partnerships would compensate for shortcomings in the summit's inter-governmental achievements (Andonova 2014). The interest in assessing the performance of these partnerships has thus primarily had a different origin and orientation than assessments of global program funds that examine partnerships through the lens of the aid effectiveness agenda.

Although sustainable development partnerships vary in scope, they are associated with the concept of global multi-stakeholder initiatives due to their links with the United Nations system. As Bäckstrand and Kylsäter (2014) suggest, the multi-stakeholder approach in these partnerships can be interpreted as an effort to legitimize the UN's sustainable development agenda among a diverse range of actors. Nevertheless, in the first decade of experiences with sustainable development partnerships, a state-centric bias in participation in partnerships has been evident, with private-sector actors engaging less frequently in comparison.

Leadership and inclusive participation are considered essential for maintaining early momentum in partnership development.

One main body of research on the effectiveness of sustainable development partnerships measures effectiveness in terms of outputs or activities related to the stated functions of partnership initiatives. For example, Szulecki et al. (2011) examine correlates of partnership effectiveness by combining a descriptive analysis of forty-six clean energy partnerships with more detailed study of ten partnerships split evenly between those respectively identified as effective and ineffective. From their broader analysis, the authors concluded that many partnerships did not have visible outputs, either because activities had ceased or because they had never commenced in the first place. The partnerships included in the study were mainly spearheaded by states or multilateral organizations, though the authors suggest that factors other than the composition of the actors involved have greater relevance in understanding partnership effectiveness. Szulecki et al. (2011) draw special attention to elements of organizational development in explaining partnership success or failure, noting that the activities being undertaken should match a partnership's intended core functions and that a secretariat is needed to ensure that activities are implemented.

A longer-term research program similarly used observable outputs as the main angle for assessing the effectiveness of sustainable development partnerships. Drawing conclusions from a sample taken from the 340 partnerships linked to the Johannesburg summit, this research indicated that roughly forty percent of partnerships examined produced little or no measureable output after five years. In addition, only sixty percent of active partnerships undertook activities directly related to their publicly stated goals (Pattberg and Widerberg 2014, 2016). Partnerships studied were considered to fall short in terms of fulfilling perceived areas of added value, such as fostering the implementation of international agreements or including diverse stakeholders in their governance structures.

On the basis of findings from this broad research program on partnership effectiveness, Pattberg and Widerberg (2014, 2016) have identified numerous building blocks that can serve as a foundation for partnerships to fulfil their potential as innovative instruments of cooperation. These authors recognize on a basic level that the quality of the partners involved shapes prospects for partnership success, suggesting that the study of participants' underlying constellations of interest and power resources should reveal the potential of specific initiatives. Leadership and inclusive participation are considered essential for maintaining early momentum in partnership development. Building on findings from another long-term research project on the effectiveness of transnational environmental partnerships, Beisheim (2012) links leadership to the provision of adequate resources for partnership secretariats. Secretariats require stable funding to ensure they have the capacity to promote a given agenda and assume management functions related to implementation.

The institutionalization of partnerships is a factor shaping their success, as this concept implies both a clarification of roles and responsibilities among stakeholders and the existence of a capable bureaucratic structure to guide and monitor partnership implementation.

Another category of factors supporting the formation and maintenance of effective partnerships relates to their internal organizational characteristics. At a strategic level, the formulation of clear and ambitious goals can be considered a means of establishing realistic expectations among participating stakeholders and promoting a commitment to a partnership's agenda (Pattberg and Widerberg 2014). Organizational capacities linked to the level of professionalization and specialization of staff in relation to partnership objectives influence the ability of the partnership to secure a diverse and reliable funding base and put procedures in place to monitor and evaluate partnership activities. The institutionalization of partnerships is a factor shaping their

success, as this concept implies both a clarification of roles and responsibilities among stakeholders and the existence of a capable bureaucratic structure to guide and monitor partnership implementation (Beisheim et al. 2014).

One final message from this line of research is that it is important to consider the contextual determinants of partnership success in judging their effectiveness (Beisheim 2012; Pattberg and Widerberg 2014). Attention to context first means understanding the place of a given partnership within a complex landscape of governance arrangements and cooperation instruments that attempt to address similar objectives, implying that the intended contribution and added value of new partnerships should ideally be defined in relation to existing avenues of cooperation at the outset.

Particularly when partnerships involve a country-level implementation component, attention to context also suggests that factors including the quality of governance or the nature of national or local interests can shape the prospects for partnership effectiveness, thus signalling a need for partnerships to respond to local demands and to provide capacity development support in cases where local conditions may pose an implementation constraint (Beisheim et al. 2014). This emphasis on the political and institutional setting for implementation returns the discussion of partnership success to key considerations that recur in the study of effective development cooperation. Reinforcing this point, the OECD's most recent Development Cooperation Report stresses that, for varied types of partnerships to be successful, they must be country-driven and context-specific and avoid duplication and fragmentation (OECD 2015).

Insights into how to promote effective multi-stakeholder initiatives are thus available from varied sources, including reports from within the UN system that outline challenges involved in advancing the partnership approach and independent assessments of the performance of multi-stakeholder partnerships within diverse sectors. From the discussion above, two basic lessons can be derived from these sources of learning about ways to improve future partnerships. First, the assessments point to a need to define a clear mandate in developing a partnership that identifies the unique contribution of an initiative in relation to other ways of addressing similar objectives and that facilitates the identification of roles and responsibilities among diverse participants. Secondly, the functionality of an initiative depends on the availability of resources to support the organizational development of a secretariat, ideally stemming from a broad base of relevant stakeholders and endowing the secretariat with the capacity to perform core management tasks, including the monitoring of activities.

Box 2. Key lessons learned from existing assessments of multi-stakeholder initiatives

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Define clear, ambitious and realistic goals to orient action
- Outline the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved in implementing partnership objectives
- Identify the value-added of the initiative in relation to other forms of cooperation at the outset

ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Equip a secretariat with a stable and diverse funding base to assume the expected management role
- Invest in outreach to promote and sustain diverse stakeholder participation
- Introduce procedures to encourage the monitoring of partnership activities

Implementation challenges for global MSIs

LESSONS FROM THE SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FOR ALL INITIATIVE

The remainder of this report focuses on the opportunities and challenges involved in promoting global multi-stakeholder initiatives by analysing early experiences with the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative. After providing background information on the goals and character of this initiative, the report outlines key dimensions of the initiative's perceived added value and provides a summary of findings from a country-level study of the initiative's implementation. These findings inform concluding reflections on how to shape the initiative's further development.

OVERVIEW OF SE4ALL

SE4ALL is a multi-stakeholder partnership that was launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in 2011 and that focuses on three key objectives: 1) ensuring universal access to modern energy services; 2) doubling the rate of improvement in energy efficiency; and 3) doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.[1]

The global character of SE4ALL's agenda and the emphasis on the transformation of a core sector of economic activity across many jurisdictions make the initiative very ambitious in scope.

The initiative thus rests at the intersection of two global agendas with high political significance: supporting poverty reduction objectives by increasing access to energy, and promoting a climate-friendly energy transition by encouraging energy efficiency and greater reliance on renewable energies. The three core goals are considered mutually reinforcing, and their universal orientation is anchored in Agenda 2030 as SDG 7. Nevertheless, individual goals may have greater political relevance in certain national contexts. The access dimension of the agenda is particularly important in Sub-Saharan African countries, for example, given that in some African countries less than twenty percent of the population has access to electricity.

The clear vision these objectives represent is one of the key elements of SE4ALL's added value according to its own self-presentation.[2] Other perceived advantages of the platform relate to its potential to mobilize stakeholders from governments, the private sector and civil society to promote innovation and the diffusion of best practices in the energy sector and to create conditions facilitating resource mobilization in order to support implementation of the agenda.

The global character of SE4ALL's agenda and the emphasis on the transformation of a core sector of economic activity across many jurisdictions make the initiative very ambitious in scope. Building on a central convening role played by the Office of the UN Secretary-General and the World Bank, SE4ALL seeks to identify opportunities for action to support its main objectives, mobilize diverse stakeholder commitments to expand resources directed to energy goals, guide partnership development among stakeholders and promote knowledge exchange through the development of a monitoring framework (Secretary-General's High-Level Group on Sustainable Energy for All 2012). It therefore aspires to fulfil multiple functions (mobilizing commitments to action; knowledge generation and sharing; standard-setting) that are associated with multi-stakeholder initiatives in general (Engberg-Pedersen 2014).

The organizational apparatus for overseeing these broad categories of actions remains lean. The secretarial functions for SE4ALL are primarily assumed by a Global Facilitation Team, which consisted of eighteen Vienna-based staff members and eight staff members affiliated to the UN Secretariat in New York in 2014 (Sustainable Energy for All 2014). Guided by the strategic input of a high-level advisory board, these staff members fulfil responsibilities linked to convening stakeholders and transmitting guidance for implementation of the agenda among a wide network of actors. This network includes organizations that are formally linked to SE4ALL as regional or thematic hubs (see Box 3), as well as a broader range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders involved in implementation in diverse geographies (Yumkella 2015).

A distinctive element of the SE4ALL initiative is its promotion of action organized both along thematic lines across geographies and at the country level.

The financial support for the work of the Global Facilitation Team has come primarily from a small number of like-minded bilateral donor countries (Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Sweden) via contributions to a multi-donor trust fund (Sustainable Energy for All 2015c). The secretariat itself therefore does not have funds to disburse to other entities that are engaging with the platform, but rather depends on separate resource commitments from bilateral and multilateral partners, national governments and other stakeholders to enable its agenda to be implemented. This network model of resource mobilization distinguishes SE4ALL from the global program funds described above.

Box 3. SE4ALL regional and thematic hubs

REGIONAL HUBS	THEMATIC HUBS
■ African Development Bank	■ Copenhagen Centre on Energy Efficiency
■ Asian Development Bank (Asia-Pacific)	■ Energy Conservation Center, Japan
■ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Europe-Mediterranean-Central Asia Hub)	■ International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Abu Dhabi
■ Inter-American Development Bank	■ World Bank (Knowledge Hub)
	■ The Energy and Resources Institute, New Delhi (Capacity-Building Hub)
	■ UNDP (Bottom-of-the-Pyramid Hub)

Another distinctive element of the SE4ALL initiative is its promotion of action organized both along thematic lines across geographies and at the country level. SE4ALL considers country-level actions to be flagship programs and recognizes their significance in maintaining support for the initiative as a cooperation platform. One hundred and six countries are currently listed as partners for the initiative, including seventy developing countries that have prepared the analytical reports that are considered to be an initial step in implementation of the initiative at the country level (SE4ALL 2015b). In a key reference document to guide country-level actions, the SE4ALL secretariat highlights their importance for the success of the global initiative in noting that: "in order to maintain global political momentum, SE4ALL needs to decisively increase support for concrete energy actions on the ground." It thus emphasizes the potential of integrated country approaches to leverage investments in energy from diverse stakeholders and to foster coherence and coordination among partners supporting the initiative's goals (Sustainable Energy for All 2015a).

SE4ALL IMPLEMENTATION AT COUNTRY LEVEL: EVIDENCE FROM NEPAL

Case selection and research approach

In light of the orientation of development cooperation toward country-focused actions, the analysis of SE4ALL's footprint at the country level provides a relevant starting point for assessing the initiative's added value as a cooperation approach in comparison to existing development cooperation structures.

This report presents findings from a study of the implementation of SE4ALL in Nepal. Nepal displayed an early commitment to SE4ALL as one of the initiative's thirty initial focal countries. Together with Bangladesh, it was expected to be a leader in the Asia-Pacific region in terms of completing the formal steps associated with SE4ALL country-level action (Asian Development Bank 2015). It was also one of the first of the focal countries to complete a Rapid Assessment and Gap Analysis report to provide a baseline overview of energy challenges within the country to create a foundation for action around the SE4ALL agenda (Government of Nepal / National Planning Commission 2013). As such, informed observers considered Nepal to be an early mover with respect to its engagement with the initiative. In spite of national specificities related to Nepal's energy profile and the general framework conditions for cooperation within the sector in recent years, Nepal's early engagement with the initiative suggests that findings from this single case should illustrate the potential challenges involved in promoting the SE4ALL agenda in other country contexts.

The summary of SE4ALL implementation in Nepal presented here is primarily based on information collected during a two-week field study in Kathmandu carried out in late October and early November 2015. The field study consisted of interview research that aimed to identify the added value of SE4ALL in Nepal by gathering stakeholder perceptions of how diverse actors were engaging with the initiative. It also examined progress made by SE4ALL in promoting key goals related to the mobilization of additional resources for energy development, the facilitation of coherence and coordination among actors within the sector, and knowledge exchange. Another objective of the interviews was to identify areas for improvement in the further development of the initiative at the country level. In total, the author interviewed 21 stakeholders, including ten representatives of bilateral and multilateral development partners, five individuals representing diverse governmental entities, three civil-society representatives, two independent observers and one private-sector representative. As interview partners were assured that their input would be treated confidentially, there are no direct attributions to consulted stakeholders in this text.

Country context

Nepal continues to have the status of a Least-Developed Country (LDCs), ranking 145th in the UNDP's Human Development Index in 2015 (UNDP 2015). While the country has progressed over the long term with respect to core indicators of development progress, its recent history has been characterized by a period of political transformation, including recovery from a decade-long civil war and the transition toward a stable democratic and federal political structure (United Nations Country Team Nepal 2012). In the midst of the process of political reform, in April and May 2015 the central part of the country was hit by major earthquakes that caused around 9,000 fatalities and were estimated to have affected about one third of the country's population. The rural poor were disproportionately affected, and a vulnerable three percent of the population was pushed into poverty. The earthquake also generated severe economic losses related to infrastructure damage and lost output and revenue, with the funding needs for earthquake recovery estimated to reach $6.7 billion (National Planning Commission 2015). Since September 2015, political unrest in the south of the country and an unofficial blockade restricting Nepal's fuel supplies have hampered earthquake recovery efforts, compounded economic difficulties and created new humanitarian challenges (Domínguez 2015).

Even before recent crises intervened, Nepal faced significant challenges in the development of its energy sector and has experienced a long-term energy and electricity crisis.

Even before these recent crises intervened, Nepal faced significant challenges in the development of its energy sector and has experienced a long-term energy and electricity crisis (Sovacool et al. 2013). Its energy profile is heavily dominated by the use of traditional biomass (85 percent of total energy consumption), with petroleum products accounting for another nine percent of the energy mix. Nepal is entirely dependent on petroleum imports that are important for transport and the provision of cooking fuel. This vulnerability was brought into focus by the fuel shortages in the fall of 2015. Although the country has significant potential in the development of hydropower and solar energy capacity, these renewable energies combined represent only three percent of the total energy mix. Between 53 and 75 percent of the population of Nepal is estimated to have access to electricity. The large range of estimates reflects differences in data sources and collection methods. Given the dominance of biomass as an energy source, a large share of the energy mix can be labelled renewable. At the same time, dependence on biomass and other consumption patterns contributes to adverse impacts on the environment and health, as well as a low performance in rates of efficient energy use.

Although the Rapid Assessment and Gap Analysis for Nepal completed under the umbrella of the SE4ALL initiative highlighted numerous policy commitments on the part of the Government of Nepal to address energy deficits, the report also outlined a long list of barriers to promoting SE4ALL objectives, including the lack of reliable data on energy access, a fragmented institutional landscape in energy governance, and shortcomings related to the regulatory environment and business climate (Government of Nepal / National Planning Commission 2013).

Stakeholder engagement with SE4ALL at country level

As highlighted above, a key objective of SE4ALL and other multi-stakeholder initiatives is to provide a platform for bringing a diverse range of actors together to collectively support an agenda that they are unable to advance effectively on their own. A first dimension of the assessment of the added value of a multi-stakeholder initiative is therefore the question of whether stakeholders are engaging with the initiative and investing energy in raising its profile and strengthening its output. The field study examined the engagement of the national government, bilateral and multilateral development partners, civil-society organizations and the private sector with SE4ALL at the country level.

The balance of stakeholders consulted in Nepal provides one indication of the interest of diverse actors in the SE4ALL agenda and activities related to its implementation in the country, given that development partner representatives constituted the single largest group of interviewees. However, as a first step in establishing a program for country-level action in SE4ALL is a Declaration of Partnership from a host government (Sustainable Energy for All 2015a), the initiative's country presence is not possible without a minimal sign of support from the national government. The early commitment of the Government of Nepal to the initiative in 2012 underlines its recognition of the relevance of SE4ALL's goals for energy development in the country and a perception that there would be immediate benefits to participating in the initiative. At the government level, the National Planning Commission, a cross-sectoral apex body providing guidance to various ministries, assumed a key role in assuming a governmental coordination function related to SE4ALL. The overarching role of the National Planning Commission (NPC) fits the aspirations of the initiative to promote an integrated approach to energy development.

Responsibilities for diverse dimensions of energy development are nevertheless distributed across multiple ministries and other governmental entities in Nepal. The ministry with the largest portfolio on energy-related matters is the Ministry of Energy, which has a core mandate to increase power generation to support economic objectives (Ministry of Energy Government of Nepal 2016). The Ministry of Energy oversees the National Electricity Authority (NEA), the agency with primary responsibilities with respect to the generation and distribution of electricity in the country (Banerjee et al. 2011). Another key government unit with a mandate closely related to the goals of SE4ALL is the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC), an agency previously under the purview of the Ministry of Science, Technology, and the Environment and currently overseen by the newly formed Ministry of Population and Environment.[3] AEPC focuses on expanding small-scale renewable energy production to support rural development in particular (Alternative Energy Promotion Centre 2016).

As in other country contexts, bureaucracies with different mandates and power resources do not necessarily promote the same interests or political solutions to resolving core development challenges. For example, differing mandates influence divergent interpretations of which priorities are most relevant in addressing the broad goal of increasing energy access. Beyond these variations in policy preferences, the small number of interviews with government stakeholders made it clear that there are different perceptions of the value of the country coordination structure for SE4ALL that assigns a pivotal role to the NPC, with voices supportive of this body in maintaining its current form and functions; supportive of the consolidation of governmental guidance of the SE4ALL agenda in the hands of the Ministry of Energy; and supportive of strengthening the cross-governmental coordination capacity of the NPC, thus reflecting the diversity of opinions among civil servants.

Other stakeholders observed a limited commitment on the part of government actors to advance country-level action on SE4ALL in Nepal. A primary explanation offered by interview partners to account for this is that the government's expectations of an infusion of additional external resources for the development of the energy sector following the initial governmental commitment to SE4ALL remained mostly unfulfilled. The potential for obtaining new funding could thus be considered a key attraction for governmental actors in participating in SE4ALL activities, with other possible benefits such as technical support to promote policy reforms or assistance in improving coordination among actors within the energy sector sparking less interest. The limited governmental leadership role in moving SE4ALL forward is viewed as an impediment to expanding the impact of the initiative within Nepal. Identifying mechanisms for increasing the government's interest in and support for SE4ALL will therefore be an important element in providing momentum for the initiative.

A mixed verdict on stakeholder support for country-level action on SE4ALL is also evident in examining the engagement of bilateral and multilateral development partners with the initiative. Given SE4ALL's links with the UN system and the initial expression of interest from the Government of Nepal, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) was the first focal point for SE4ALL activities in the country. Within the UNCT, the UNDP country office assumed a leadership role related to SE4ALL due to its pre-existing engagement in the energy sector. Its concrete commitment involved a reallocation of country-level funding to support the work of a part-time consultant to provide technical assistance to the government to coordinate the production of analytical outputs and promote collaboration across government.

The early commitment of the Government of Nepal to the initiative in 2012 underlines its recognition of the relevance of SE4ALL's goals for energy development in the country and a perception that there would be immediate benefits to participating in the initiative.

As with UNDP, the involvement of other bilateral and multilateral development partners in the SE4ALL initiative could be considered an extension of prior commitments to support energy development in Nepal. For example, the Danish government assumed a leading role among bilateral development partners in promoting improvements in energy access and the adoption of renewable technologies via the Energy Sector Assistance Programme (ESAP) beginning in 1999, with additional support for the programme over time coming from the Norwegian government, as well as smaller contributions from British and German development cooperation (Alternative Energy Promotion Centre 2013). Between 1996 and 2011 the Rural Energy Development Programme (REDP), reflecting collaboration between the Government of Nepal, the World Bank and UNDP, promoted an inclusive approach to energy development for poverty reduction in expanding rural energy infrastructure, providing policy support and fostering local capacity development (UNDP 2012a). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) also demonstrated a

commitment to energy access and renewable infrastructure development prior to the arrival of SE4ALL. While the ADB has had a role in providing technical input for SE4ALL country planning, and while the initiative can be viewed as having some influence over the work agenda for country staff, the introduction of SE4ALL was not perceived to have substantively altered the priorities of multilateral actors.

Overall, the stakeholders who were interviewed suggested that, among bilateral and multilateral development partners, the SE4ALL agenda was seen to be aligned with their existing orientations, but not regarded as an impetus for policy or funding adjustments. The signing of a framework agreement between core development partners and the Government of Nepal under the umbrella of the International Energy and Climate Initiative (Energy +) spearheaded by the Norwegian government in September 2014 is one sign of this alignment. Supported by the Danish and Norwegian governments, the ADB and UNDP, the Energy + agreement frames programmatic and results-based support for renewable energy cooperation in Nepal as a vehicle for the achievement of SE4ALL's three goals (Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu 2014).

The government's expectations of an infusion of additional external resources for the development of the energy sector following the initial governmental commitment to SE4ALL remained mostly unfulfilled.

In the same way that SE4ALL's goals resonated with bilateral and multilateral development partners that were already incorporating a poverty-focused approach to energy development in their cooperation programmes, the SE4ALL framework was also viewed favourably by civil-society representatives, who felt that the initiative legitimized their own agendas within the sector. For non-governmental organizations that are prioritizing energy development and that see a pressing need to raise the profile of renewable energy access and to introduce innovative business models to reach a larger proportion of the population, there is nevertheless some disappointment that SE4ALL has not yet contributed to an acceleration or intensification of activities in this domain. In addition, civil-society representatives expressed concerns about the opportunities available for non-governmental organizations with sector-specific expertise to participate in the process and asked whether activities associated with the initiative adequately incorporated distributional and gender-related concerns in its approach.

Although the United Nations partnership model underlines the importance of strengthening outreach with private-sector actors, there has to date been limited private-sector involvement in the SE4ALL platform in Nepal. Domestic private-sector actors have been formally included in dialogue structures related to the initiative, but this does not equate to a shift in the intensity of exchange between the government, bilateral and multilateral development partners, and relevant private-sector entities in Nepal such as power producer associations.

Among bilateral and multilateral development partners, the SE4ALL agenda was seen to be aligned with their existing orientations, but not regarded as an impetus for policy or funding adjustments.

At one level, the lack of private-sector involvement in SE4ALL's country-level activities may reflect a limited exchange of information about the advantages that the initiative itself proposes to bring to energy development within the country. At another level, however, the distance between the private sector and SE4ALL might relate more to underlying constraints on private-sector investment in the energy sector linked to the business climate and the framework conditions for private infrastructure development. Constraints on investment include political instability, fragmentation among governmental entities managing energy issues, and shortcomings in the policy and regulatory environment. The lack of an independent energy regulatory agency and of energy-pricing policies are among the specific impediments to the domestic private sector contributing to increasing power generation capacity and closing the gaps in energy access. Limited private-sector involvement with SE4ALL can be considered an extension of a difficult relationship between the private sector and the national government, rather than solely a reflection of SE4ALL-specific dynamics.

Beyond these stakeholders, other relevant actors with the potential to influence the scale and quality of energy development in Nepal are governments and private investors in Nepal's two large neighbouring countries, China and India. Both countries have provided development cooperation to Nepal for several decades and have had similar approaches to cooperation. Their project-focused funding has primarily supported infrastructure development, reflecting a mixture of commercial and strategic motivations (Adhikari 2014). The importance of India as a partner in promoting the development of the energy sector in Nepal was underlined in October 2014 with the signing of a power trade agreement between the two countries

encouraging the facilitation of investments related to transmission lines and the connection of national grids for the joint benefit of the signatory countries (Government of Nepal and Government of the Republic of India 2014). In spite of their importance as development partners, China and India have both been reluctant to engage with the donor coordination structures in which multilateral development partners and OECD-DAC aid providers actively participate. Their distance from SE4ALL can thus be regarded as similar to their approach to engaging with other external actors within the country.

Resource mobilization

The quality of stakeholder participation in SE4ALL at the country level is closely linked to the question of whether the initiative has contributed to resource mobilization in support of energy development goals. On the one hand, the infusion of resources from specific stakeholders related to the SE4ALL agenda can provide an indication of their commitment to SE4ALL goals and interest in supporting the platform. On the other hand, resource inflows traceable to the initiative might influence the perception of governmental actors of its added value as a cooperation platform within the country.

In Nepal, SE4ALL has to date produced limited additional funding for energy development. As noted above, one tangible financial commitment to support activities related to the initiative came from UNDP's country office through technical assistance to support the work of the National Planning Commission, the SE4ALL governmental focal point. At the time stakeholder interviews were carried out, the Norwegian government was expected to provide significant additional funding (USD 400,000 over a two-year period) to strengthen UNDP's capacity to provide technical assistance and to provide a more robust secretariat-like function to guide SE4ALL activities in the country.

Apart from the resource commitments made by UNDP and significant pledges of additional support for sustainable energy development from the Norwegian government, other decisions affecting the development cooperation funding landscape in the energy arena can be regarded as independent of SE4ALL's existence (Nepal Energy Forum 2015). For example, although Denmark had long been a leader in the promotion of renewable energy in the country, in the fall of 2015 the Danish government announced its intention to phase out development assistance to Nepal. Fresh funding for energy infrastructure development was at the same time expected to follow from the signing of a Compact Agreement between the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Government of Nepal, reflecting the MCC's recognition of energy deficits as a constraint on economic growth and poverty reduction, rather than being directly linked with SE4ALL as an initiative.

It is perhaps unfair and premature to judge the added value of SE4ALL on the basis of limited additional resource flows in the early stages of country-level action related to the agenda. This is because the framework for country action outlined by the global initiative presents a sequence of steps to pave the way for additional investment, in particular from private-sector actors. Building on the rapid assessment and gap analysis identifying constraints on the poverty-oriented development of the energy sector, SE4ALL proposes outlining a country strategy to address priorities supported by the government and diverse stakeholders. This should in turn lead to the development of a more specific investment prospectus outlining concrete opportunities for investment, supportive measures needed to accompany this investment and potential financing mechanisms (SE4ALL 2015a).

In Nepal, SE4ALL has to date produced limited additional funding for energy development.

In addition to indicating the untapped potential for mobilizing funding for energy development within the domestic private sector in Nepal, stakeholders pointed to the potential for additional government investment in the energy sector. The reform of energy subsidies was highlighted as one area where the government could encourage shifts to free resources for further investment in the sector while promoting new commercially oriented business models for clean energy provision. This underlines the central role of reforms in government policy frameworks as a stimulus for various forms of resource mobilization. These reflections are consistent with a conventional view that investment is responsive to improvements in the framework conditions that governments create for private-sector activity. In Nepal, political instability and infrastructure deficits have been identified as important general constraints on the national investment climate. Given that energy deficits limit investment in other economic sectors (Afram and Salvi del Pero 2012), there should be added impetus for the government to address the underlying constraints to investment in the energy sector.

Coherence and coordination

The SE4ALL initiative aims not only to engage a diverse range of stakeholders in work supportive of its key goals, but also to encourage changes in how stakeholders interact to promote a more integrated and coordinated approach to sustainable energy development. Consistent with this goal, a key element of SE4ALL's footprint in Nepal alongside its country-focused analytical output has been an effort to promote dialogue and coordination among stakeholders at the national level. A first coordination mechanism to provide guidance for the country-level implementation of the initiative was formed shortly after Nepal signed up to SE4ALL in 2012. The mechanism attributed overall responsibility for coordination to the National Planning Commission, with high-level representatives of five ministries and a specialized unit within the Ministry of Energy also participating. In recognition of the lack of inclusiveness of the private sector, and of civil society in particular, a revised SE4ALL coordination mechanism was proposed in 2013 (Asian Development Bank 2015).

A key element of SE4ALL's footprint in Nepal alongside its country-focused analytical output has been an effort to promote dialogue and coordination among stakeholders at the national level.

The new coordination structure has two tiers. It has retained the high-level mechanism, but expanded representation in this body to include not only private-sector and civil-society associations, but also a larger roster of eight ministries, additional government agencies and a representative of development partners active in the energy sector. The second tier aims to promote coordination along three dimensions corresponding to the core goals of SE4ALL in increasing energy access (associated with off-grid renewable energy development), fostering an increased role for renewables in the energy mix (with a focus on on-grid activities) and improving energy efficiency. Within this tier, membership of the coordination groups reflects the mixture of stakeholders included in the high-level mechanism and is overwhelmingly composed of representatives of government entities and national private-sector and civil-society organizations. Development partners are expected to play a supportive role in different thematic groups, building on existing efforts to coordinate energy cooperation focused on off-grid renewables, on-grid energy development and energy efficiency.

Several challenges to ensuring that these coordination structures fulfil their objective of stimulating cooperation among diverse stakeholders and promoting a more holistic approach to energy development were apparent from the stakeholder interviews. First, although there is support for locating the responsibility for cross-governmental coordination within the National Planning Commission, several interview partners signalled that there are deficits in the NPC's capacity to assume an overarching coordination function. These deficits relate to the NPC's dependence on ministries for technical expertise, its political and administrative character, and the differential in power resources between the NPC and relevant line ministries that limit the NPC's ability to shape ministry agendas. Secondly, in assigning the overall coordination responsibility for individual dimensions of the SE4ALL agenda to different ministries and promoting the representation of multiple ministries, both within the high-level structure and in the thematic coordination groups, the apparatus to support SE4ALL implementation reinforces the existing compartmentalization of energy-related action within the government. As noted earlier in the text, bureaucratic fragmentation has been identified as a core constraint on the mobilization of additional resources to support SE4ALL goals. Finally, the willingness of diverse stakeholders to allocate time to participate in coordination structures may be dependent on their perception of whether a clear output can be generated by coordination meetings, which to date has been limited.

The persistence of a contested division of mandates in managing energy development across national bureaucracies is an important contextual factor that shapes the potential of the SE4ALL initiative to promote a more holistic approach to energy development and encourage coordination among governmental actors. Bridging the silo thinking among bureaucracies involved in the energy sector might in turn be a first step in improving the links between the sustainable energy development agenda and other dimensions of the country's social and economic development. Given the resistance of administrative units to a redistribution of competencies, however, bureaucratic reform to consolidate responsibilities for providing policy guidance in the energy sector or to define more clearly the division of labour among governmental units within a more robust coordination framework is likely to require a political decision and could take a significant amount of time and energy to implement. Alternatively, SE4ALL can focus on identifying potential areas for policy and administrative reform to generate the momentum for cooperation within the sector in the short term while keeping the long-term goal of systemic reform in mind.

Knowledge exchange

Enabling knowledge production and exchange to identify the constraints on achieving the SE4ALL goals and to propose solutions for overcoming them is another stated objective of the SE4ALL initiative. At the global level, this dimension of the SE4ALL agenda is reflected in analytical work to draw up a Global Tracking Framework charting country progress with respect to energy access, energy efficiency and renewable energy goals, as well as outlining broad policy priorities for advancing the agenda across national settings (Angelou et al. 2013). Country-level knowledge products follow a similar model of outlining the national energy situation and presenting recommendations for governmental action to address the SE4ALL objectives. Existing studies from multilateral organizations and government agencies appear to be a key basis for analyses of this nature completed in Nepal (UNDP 2012b; Government of Nepal and National Planning Commission 2013).

The issue of defining responsibilities among multilateral actors points to the still-evolving global structure of SE4ALL and the need for clarification on how global hubs can effectively be linked to national-level processes.

Although stakeholders articulated the need for knowledge exchange to identify means of expanding the energy supply, to provide advice on policy reforms and to introduce new technologies, on the basis of the limited information collected on knowledge transfer via SE4ALL in interviews, the initiative has not yet provided a vehicle for changing patterns of knowledge production and exchange within the energy sector. Potential explanations for a lack of knowledge exchange include the limited personnel working directly on facilitating knowledge exchange at the country level, open questions concerning the division of responsibilities among multilateral organizations (e.g. ADB, World Bank, UNDP) in promoting knowledge exchange, and the limited ability of government to participate in dialogue processes that are intended to encourage networking at the national and international levels. The issue of defining responsibilities among multilateral actors points to the still-evolving global structure of SE4ALL and the need for clarification on how global hubs can effectively be linked to national-level processes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment of experiences from the early stages of SE4ALL implementation at the country level in Nepal reinforces core messages from existing studies of the performance of multi-stakeholder initiatives. One key recommendation emerging from the assessments of global program funds and sustainable development partnerships reviewed in this report is that multi-stakeholder partnerships should set out clear, ambitious and realistic goals to orient action and ensure that there is a match between these objectives and the resources available to achieve them.

One strong selling point of the SE4ALL agenda is that it articulates a clear vision for increasing attention to clean energy development as a driver of poverty reduction and the transition to a climate-friendly model of economic development. While the initiative's overarching goals are ambitious in scope, the funding base specific to the initiative is limited in relation to the SE4ALL agenda. A dearth of resource commitments for organizational development reflects the network character of the initiative, which means that goal achievement depends on the mobilization of funding and personnel from a range of actors that share a commitment to core goals and the responsibility for implementing them. In Nepal, the low amount of additional resource commitments associated with the initiative was perceived to have two key effects. First, the lack of new funding reduces the perception of added value from the perspective of the national government, which in turn may have consequences for the government's commitment to linking energy development efforts to the SE4ALL platform over time. Secondly, the limited resources are restricting the potential scope of activities undertaken under the umbrella of SE4ALL within the country.

One strong selling point of the SE4ALL agenda is that it articulates a clear vision for increasing attention to clean energy development as a driver of poverty reduction and the transition to a climate-friendly model of economic development.

There are different strategies available for dealing with the challenges related to limited resource mobilization around SE4ALL. One broad strategy would be to attempt to increase the resource base for secretariat-like functions to promote a stronger role for SE4ALL in undertaking the convening, analytical and knowledge-sharing functions associated with the role of catalyst within the energy sector, whether at the global or country level. These resources, whether in the form of additional funding or seconded personnel, could come from actors who have already indicated that the SE4ALL agenda is aligned with their own goals but who have not necessarily adjusted their cooperation portfolios to strengthen joint action through the platform. For these actors, the country study suggests that there may be a gap between support expressed globally for the initiative and country-level financing decisions. Hence, key SE4ALL supporters can review the consistency of their investments in SE4ALL across levels of action.

In an era of strained development cooperation budgets, an alternative strategy for coping with the gap between the initiative's goals and the resources available to achieve them is to promote a greater focus on the activities directly associated with SE4ALL as an organizational entity.

Other potential additional resources are states that remain outside of the core group of financial supporters of the initiative. Both globally and at the country level in Nepal, concrete support for the management of SE4ALL activities comes from a small group of OECD-DAC donors and multilateral organizations. The links to the United Nations system and the general recognition of the need to involve a broad range of stakeholders in efforts to transform energy cooperation should provide an impetus for SE4ALL to expand its base of support beyond the OECD-DAC community.

In an era of strained development cooperation budgets, an alternative strategy for coping with the gap between the initiative's goals and the resources available to achieve them is to promote a greater focus on the activities directly associated with SE4ALL as an organizational entity. This greater focus can be promoted at three levels. First, it may be realized through clearer reflection and communication about what output can be attributable to SE4ALL as opposed to other actors in implementing the ambitious agenda at the global level. Drawing a sharper distinction between the role of SE4ALL as a convener and the responsibility of other partners in implementing actions to transform energy cooperation could be useful in this context. Secondly, the focus can be advanced via a concentration of resources in particular country contexts where SE4ALL can demonstrate its added value. The restrained enthusiasm of governmental actors in Nepal for SE4ALL shows that national commitments to breathe life into the initiative may be linked to the visibility of output and the clear articulation of the benefits that participant countries can expect to obtain. A concentration of SE4ALL in countries with favourable framework conditions for advancing the agenda may therefore increase the demonstration

effect and encourage other governments to increase their commitment. Finally, a greater focus can be achieved through higher selectivity in country-level activities related to SE4ALL. The challenges related to inter-ministerial coordination in the energy sector in Nepal outlined above suggest that SE4ALL support for lower level changes within government agencies or in specific policy frameworks might demonstrate the added value of the initiative and sustain its momentum more easily than the promotion of broader bureaucratic reforms.

The further development of the SE4ALL platform will need to identify what instruments can be deployed to achieve a leveraging effect and thus create a more supportive environment for public and private investment to extend energy access, promote renewable energies and increase energy efficiency.

Another core message from assessments of previous experiences with global multi-stakeholder initiatives is the realization that the achievement of core cooperation goals is dependent on features of the implementation context – a basic insight from aid effectiveness research. As analytical reports on the status of cooperation in the energy sector in Nepal have underlined, the context for sustainable energy development in the country includes a fragmented bureaucratic landscape that creates hurdles for stakeholder engagement with the government and limits the promotion of a holistic approach to addressing the SE4ALL agenda. Beyond this challenge of fragmentation, policy and regulatory reforms represent an obstacle to unlocking the significant investment potential in the country. SE4ALL by itself currently has limited capacities for shaping these underlying conditions through means other than small-scale technical assistance. As a result, the further development of the SE4ALL platform will need to identify what instruments can be deployed to achieve a leveraging effect and thus create a more supportive environment for public and private investment to extend energy access, promote renewable energies and increase energy efficiency.

In light of the challenges presented by underlying country-specific framework conditions, and given the limited resources available to promote the SE4ALL agenda, the success of SE4ALL as a catalyst for change in country-focused action is likely to be contingent on the initiative's ability to explain how targeted actions can contribute to influencing the constraints that inhibit sustainable energy development in the country. As noted above, one of the emphases of SE4ALL-related work in Nepal has been an effort to generate the momentum for improved coordination among actors by promoting a multi-tiered coordination framework. Given that these coordination structures do not affect the underlying distribution of competencies or power among ministries, their ability to overcome the problems associated with bureaucratic fragmentation in the energy sector may be limited. In developing the initiative further within Nepal and in other country contexts, SE4ALL should be careful to avoid reinforcing structures that do not function well. Instead, activities related to the initiative should be explicit about the ways in which it can offer a corrective to the constraints identified in analyses of the context for sustainable energy development in the country, thus underlining the link between the roles of SE4ALL in supporting problem analysis and in offering solutions.

Although SE4ALL was launched in a spirit of innovation and with an interest in laying the foundation for new forms of cooperation, the analysis of country-level implementation in Nepal suggests that it has not yet escaped from longstanding development cooperation dilemmas. In part, this reflects the fact that at the country level it remains largely dominated by donors and public-sector actors and therefore does not yet offer a fundamentally new cooperation model. In developing the initiative further, core stakeholders should therefore not only intensify efforts to encourage buy-in from private and public actors beyond the OECD-DAC donor community, but also distinguish the SE4ALL approach more clearly from existing cooperation approaches in order to highlight its unique added value.

NOTES

1 http://www.se4all.org/our-vision_our-objectives

2 http://www.se4all.org/our-vision_our-value-added

3 Following a recent bureaucratic reform, the responsibilities of the former Ministry of Science, Technology, and the Environment have been allocated to two ministries: the Ministry of Population and Environment, and the Ministry of Science and Technology.

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