



Wilton Park
USA



Image: Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

Together for Nutrition: applying principles for public-private engagement

Thursday 8 – Friday 9 November 2018 | WP1642

Held in Rome



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Executive Summary

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The future of food continues to be one of the most pressing global challenges, with malnutrition profoundly affecting every country. Progress towards the ambitious 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is too slow and the scale and complexity of the problem underscores the need for deepened collaboration and renewed commitment to improving nutrition outcomes for all, especially the most vulnerable. Countries cannot achieve their SDG goals without an aligned, motivated and incentivised private sector as a key partner. In this context, improved dialogue and collaboration between government, business, civil society and international organisations is crucial for guiding engagement and focusing efforts where they can have the most sustainable impact and long-term success.

Global food and agriculture constitute a \$US7.8 trillion industry, employing up to 40% of the working population in many countries. In recognition of the essential role played by the private sector, this second dialogue builds on the first, convened in October 2017 in New York by Wilton Park USA, the United States Council for International Business (USCIB) Foundation and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). This event developed a draft set of “Principles of Engagement” between the public and private sectors.

This second high-level dialogue explored ways to put the draft Principles into practice. The programme focused on both undernutrition and increases in overweight and obese populations.

Those invited to this dialogue included leaders of governments, development agencies, and the private sector, from a wide range of countries, with a particular focus on developing countries with high burdens of malnutrition.

The dialogue was co-sponsored by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), the USCIB Foundation, which is the educational arm of the United States Council for International Business (USCIB), and Wilton Park.

Key points

- The Principles of Engagement are freely available to all, to use and adapt to their own context in order to facilitate and support stronger public and private engagement related to achieving global nutrition goals.
- This dialogue process on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) should expand to include a greater focus on drivers of consumer behavior. It should also take the discussion to regions with the highest burdens of malnutrition.
- Using the term “engagement” (Public-Private Engagement) instead of the term “partnerships” (Public-Private Partnerships) provides a broader definition and allows more actors to engage with their counterparts in the first instance. Engagement is essential to foster debate, learning and help shape new partnerships and action around malnutrition. Partnerships are a subset of engagement, with more active shared goals, typically involving explicit shared objectives, co-funding, and designated roles for partners and conducted under specific guidelines agreed by the parties.
- Many existing principles and guidelines do not treat businesses as equal or co-responsible partners in public-private engagement. Rather than view business as merely a funding or delivery mechanism, true partnerships should be co-created, co-funded, co-owned, and co-implemented. Trust is critical for PPPs to succeed.
- Businesses do better in societies that are thriving, therefore positive inducements for all stakeholders to promote nutrition goals provide useful win-win outcomes.
- Measuring impact and gathering evidence is critical to expanding confidence and cooperation between the public and private sectors. Accordingly, targets should be a stretch, but realistic and achievable. Businesses can then do what is within their own parameters to meet the agreed objectives; different companies will have different capabilities and skill sets.
- Data has the potential to improve our understanding of global nutrition issues and can help identify critical areas for improvement. However, within PPPs it can be challenging to effectively share data, even with a common purpose in mind. Important considerations include collection and reporting methods, data gaps, conflicts of interest and commercial competitiveness interests.
- The proliferation of initiatives can distract from actual progress. Consistency and simplicity may produce more tangible public-private engagement outcomes, especially around reporting and accountability. Businesses highlighted that duplication and multiplicity of reporting systems was a problem.
- Solutions are needed for low-income consumers whose circumstances make addressing their nutritional needs difficult to address via standard “business models”.
- Progress in meeting the nutrition and food security needs of large numbers of people remains worrying; the number of hungry, of overweight and obese people has risen in the year since the first meeting. The need for improved public-private engagement to address this problem has never been more urgent.

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1. The GAIN and USCIB Principles of Engagement were developed at the first ‘Together for Nutrition’ event held in New York in October 2017, and they were then launched in Geneva in July 2018. The Principles offer a set of top line agreements

and a possible framework for collaboration. Importantly, they do not require governments, organizations, institutions or bodies to formally “sign up” to them. Instead they are an optional platform that can be used to further public-private interaction where useful, and serve as a way of grounding conversations on difficult issues.

2. Following the conclusion of the first meeting a number of recommendations were made to advance public-private engagement in pursuit of the global nutrition goals. One of the recommendations was to hold a follow up event in 2018 to further advance the dialogue. This second dialogue, held in Rome on 8-9 November 2018, focused on ways to implement and scale coordinated approaches with a view to putting the Principles of Engagement into action.
3. When pursuing PPPs, timing can have a considerable impact on whether an endeavour is successful. It is important to not only coordinate between the actors involved, but also with the wider community of stakeholders. The principles do not seek to suggest that everything is perfectly aligned, but rather offer a transparent framework to pursue collective goals.
4. Trust is a crucial element of PPPs. Without trust businesses in particular might be discouraged from engaging in partnerships. In order to establish trust, it is useful to understand what is driving each partner to engage, and whether there are any conflicts of interest. Although difficult, one strategy to build trust is to measure and communicate observable outputs, and thereby build an evidence base on impact.
5. A lot of the language and approach within existing principles governing interactions between the public and private sectors have been developed by, and reflect the needs of, the public sector. This can disincentivise the willingness of businesses to engage in joint activities. For the private sector, proposals presented in business cases, using executive language, are easier to interpret and act on than extensive reports and peer reviewed journal articles. Targeting the right individuals within a company is also critical.
6. Policy responses to malnutrition may include both positive and negative incentives for business. Reliance on policies that set out to ‘restrict’, ‘tax’, ‘ban’, and ‘prevent’ can discourage business participation. Positive incentives are also needed to motivate changes. Examples could include joint public messaging for nutritious foods, tax breaks for healthy products, building consumer loyalties. Good examples could be championed as a further incentive for other actors, showing that doing the right thing can also yield business results. The investment community increasingly seeks a “double bottom line”, which creates opportunity for the private sector to engage broader social wellbeing goals including in support of nutrition.
7. Businesses are very diverse, and face challenges in an increasing number of areas. These include highly competitive markets with low margins, rapidly shifting demographics (age, urbanisation), as well as responding to environmental issues such as climate change and land use. The vast majority are also small and lack capacity and skills to readily adjust business models.
8. The larger companies have the potential, through technical capabilities, expertise, training opportunities, and financial resources, to alleviate some of the challenges both farmers and producers are facing, and many good examples of these types of collaboration exist. Specific areas discussed for intervention include mitigating food contamination, and food loss and waste in the early food chain processes.
9. Consumer demand plays a role in defining PPP objectives. Consumer behavior will likely drive part of the demand for healthy foods; however, governments must also prioritise health goals to drive objectives and commitments for PPEs. Marketing companies can also be used to enhance the effectiveness of a specific campaign in ways the public sector cannot.

10. The use of data is still a contested issue. It is acknowledged that data has the ability to be used for good in the public sphere, however there are a number of practical limitations to consider before data can be shared or used effectively. The way data is collected and interpreted can differ between organizations and indeed regions, and some data may not be credible, compromising its ability to be aggregated by others. In addition, there are important issues to address around the sharing and use of proprietary and/or competitive data. To mitigate against data gaps, it might be useful to pose the question 'if we had the data, what would it allow us to do?' and ask companies to set out what data they think they could provide in the public interest.
11. One possible solution could then be to have an independent third party, such as a trade association, manage and 'own' the data. Another possibility might be to utilize 'black box funding' whereby a third party is given a brief and the resources to independently gather or collect the data. If data is considered to be 'pre-competitive' businesses might also be more inclined to share it; however, the public sector may be overestimating the extent of the data held by the private sector.
12. Changing consumer behavior is central to improving many global nutrition goals and should be a focus of Public-Private collaboration.
13. One in three people are malnourished. Overweight and over nutrition are now issues for every country, with some of the fastest rates of growth now in the global South. This is therefore a shared problem. Consequently, it was suggested that this series of discussions should be pursued via regional meetings.
14. Notable feedback during the discussion included the absence of retailers from the dialogue, and whether the Principles of Engagement could also be applied to producers, non-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations.
15. The meeting underlined the importance of streamlining reporting and accountability for PPPs in food and nutrition security and reducing the proliferation of overlapping mechanisms.

Next Steps

In the concluding session partners actively engaged participants and posed a series of questions:

- Can the Principles be expanded beyond nutrition to include food security? There was broad agreement that they can be.
- Is it possible to apply the Principles of Engagement to an existing PPP as a pilot? Several organizations indicated that this could be possible, and follow-up was taken offline.
- Can the Principles of Engagement be taken to regions? Many supported the notion that variations in regional approaches to nutrition goals made it necessary to continue the dialogue in different regions.
- Can the Principles of Engagement be taken to the Rome based UN Agencies? There are existing protocols that will allow dialogue sponsors to share the principles with agencies with a view toward adaptation or adoption.

Conclusion

The widespread impact of global nutrition challenges demands new forms of public and private engagement. The USCIB and GAIN Principles of Engagement offer a framework that will be utilized, adapted, and help augment future collaboration for improved nutrition and beyond. Future Wilton Park dialogues will seek to broaden stakeholder engagement, including efforts to engage highly impacted regions. The Principles of Engagement, in the meantime, will be stress tested through viable collaborations aimed at scaling public and

private engagement in support of global nutrition goals.

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