

SCALING FOR IMPACT

Learnings for business-NGO
partnerships from water stewardship
interventions



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FOREWORD

Business-NGO partnerships have been a powerful force in supporting people and planet. In a time of volatility, from climate chaos to inequality challenges, there is an opportunity to deliver even more, uncovering and collaborating on new approaches, from nature-based solutions to advanced precision agriculture.

Now is the time to listen to the secrets of success so far. Since partnerships are fundamentally about communication and collaboration, we need to hear from different perspectives, from within businesses, NGOs, and the wider civil society and academic partners they work with to uncover these insights. That way we can identify both the technical and organisational questions and the key relationship dynamics to address, develop, and innovate to succeed tomorrow.

We have been delighted to partner with Coca-Cola Europe* and the wide network of NGOs and partners they work with to distil key findings. We hope these will be useful in helping us all to meet the urgency and opportunity of today.

Pendragon Stuart, Director
GlobeScan

Water security is one of The Coca-Cola Company's global sustainability priorities, because water is essential to life, our beverages, and the communities we serve. That means we have a responsibility to help address water stress, protect local water resources, and help support community climate resilience.

As we have engaged on this journey for the last 20 years, both globally as well as in Europe, we have come to understand the need for collective action to meaningfully tackle these challenges. At Coca-Cola in Europe, we are privileged to work with a wide range of NGOs to deliver better outcomes for the people and communities we serve and source from. We are thankful for their partnership, their technical expertise, and community networks that help us create positive impacts on water and nature restoration while also creating a more resilient business.

Given this moment of rapid change, we felt it was valuable to reflect on those partnerships on water stewardship in Europe to identify lessons learned and how they can apply to broader business-NGO partnerships. The research was conducted by our independent partner, GlobeScan, to ensure confidential and candid feedback from all those involved in partnerships to identify the issues as well as the solutions. We want to both further improve our impact and share back to the wider community to create the collective progress we know we all need.

We are committed to ongoing learning and listening, and we welcome the opportunity to continue the conversation on how multi-stakeholder efforts can contribute to tackling some of the most pressing challenges our businesses and communities are facing in Europe to help create a better shared future.

Wouter Vermeulen, Vice President, Sustainability and Public Policy
Coca-Cola Europe

* Coca-Cola Europe represents the European subsidiaries of The Coca-Cola Company. Coca-Cola in Europe represents the Coca-Cola system in Europe, which includes the European subsidiaries of The Coca-Cola Company and its bottling partners Coca-Cola HBC and CCEP in Europe.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By combining our own experience with insights from interviewed experts, we at GlobeScan have identified seven key success factors that drive effective business-NGO collaborations. This paper explores both best practice today and how these partnerships can innovate and evolve in an increasingly challenging context to create deeper impact.

Trusted

Both partners need to build trust, so they are not just willing to work with each other, but are excited to deliver impact together. By better understanding each other's goals along with transparent ongoing communication, they build trust in shared authentic intentions. This supports internal buy-in and facilitates collaboration and innovation.

Value Creation-oriented

Framing a strong business case for any given partnership – like securing supply chain resilience in the case of water – ensures internal support and long-term commitment for the company. Articulating strong business benefits, alongside social and environmental value, helps NGOs diversify their funding sources and makes them more resilient to changes in donor priorities.

Measured

Ensuring the final projects are effectively measured to build transparency and confidence around impact through streamlined data.

Adaptive and Innovative

Impactful partnerships remain agile and ambitious: evolving goals, roles, and innovating approaches to sustain and increase impact without getting stuck.



Systemic

Greater impact and value come when partners can expand beyond initial pilot projects and individual collaborations to engage multiple stakeholder groups and create systemic solutions.

Sustained

Shifting from a tactical to a strategic approach with longer-term partnerships that unlock more impact. This also creates more certainty so NGOs and businesses can plan and invest more effectively.

Capability-building

Partnerships where businesses and NGOs actively help each other grow capabilities and deliver higher-impact, mutually beneficial, and future-ready solutions.



INTRODUCTION

Business-NGO collaborations are critical to sustainability today

The issues we all face – climate change, inequality, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity – are highly complex and deeply interconnected. No single actor, whether a business, government, or NGO, can solve them alone. They require coordinated action from all parties.

This collaboration is urgent. The UN has reported that only 17 percent of the Sustainable Development Goals are on track to be met by 2030, with many issues getting worse as carbon emissions continue to rise and the long-lasting impacts of the pandemic have increased poverty and hunger¹.

Business-NGO collaborations can turn these challenges into shared opportunities to support communities and create more resilient businesses at a time of volatility.

They bring together:

- Combined technical expertise to innovate new solutions at speed that can be scaled up;
- Complementary networks of industry actors and engaged communities, building the shared trust needed to create joined-up, more systemic impacts;
- New ways to channel funding efficiently and effectively to tackle specific issues on the ground.

So, what are the key success factors for effective business-NGO partnerships? How can we future-proof them at a time when complex changes are impacting the sustainability agenda?

This is the question Coca-Cola Europe set out to answer, in partnership with GlobeScan, to interview key internal and external stakeholders involved in Coca-Cola's long-standing partnerships across Europe, along with other experts in business-NGO partnerships.

The aim is to share actionable insights from this collective experience, including practical guidance that can be suitable across organisations at different stages and scales of partnership. This paper is written as a collaboration between GlobeScan and Coca-Cola Europe – and together we see this as our contribution to shared progress, which Coca-Cola Europe is also using to identify where to make further improvements in how to develop and implement their own partnerships. The beauty of collaboration is that there is always something to learn from each other, and we hope that this will help to stimulate further discussion.

¹ UN (2024) *With less than one fifth of targets on track, world is failing to deliver on promise of the Sustainable Development Goals, warns new UN report* | United Nations.

Using Coca-Cola in Europe's partnerships with NGOs on water stewardship as a lens

Over the last 20 years, Coca-Cola in Europe has developed multiple partnerships with NGOs on water stewardship and nature. This has resulted in more than 100 projects across 20 countries in Europe during this time. We used these water-focused partnerships as the lens through which we can see what makes business-NGO partnerships successful and how to evolve those in the future. Water is a helpful theme to generalise broader implications for business-NGO partnerships because it is:

1. A strategically central issue for business, including The Coca-Cola Company

Much more than an essential ingredient in beverages, water is vital for people to live and for our planet and ecosystems to thrive. As water scarcity increases due to climate change, The Coca-Cola Company is taking steps to help improve water security where it operates, sources ingredients, and touches people's lives. The Coca-Cola Company globally aims to return more than 100 percent of the water used in finished products globally, on an aggregate level, to nature and communities.²

Since 2015, the company has met or exceeded this goal with support from The Coca-Cola Foundation, the company's owned and independent bottling partners, and independent suppliers and partners. For example, Coca-Cola Europacific Partners (CEPE) and Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Company (CCHBC) also have their own water initiatives, such as CEPE's commitment for 100 percent regenerative water use in high-risk locations by 2030 and CCHBC's commitment to help secure water availability to all their communities in water risk areas.

The Coca-Cola system will also seek to return 100 percent of the total water used in more than 200 high-risk locations³ across the Coca-Cola system by 2035.

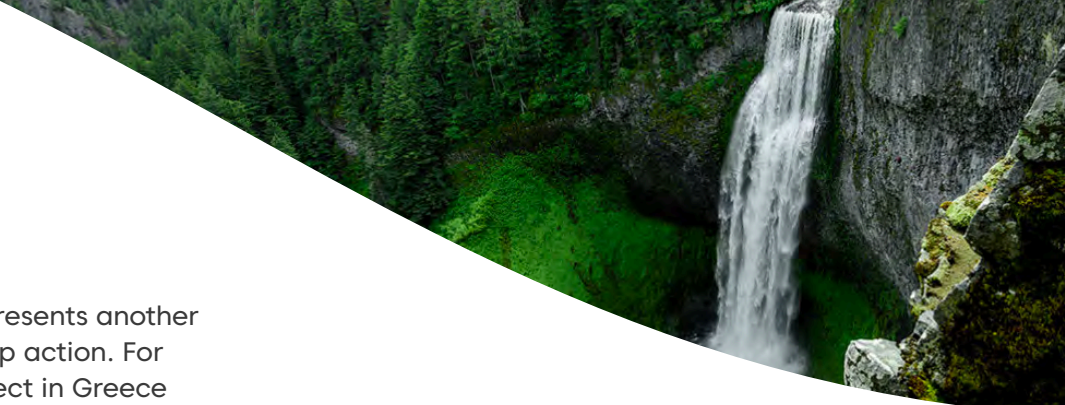
In Europe, these collaborations between Coca-Cola Europe, its bottling partners, and The Coca-Cola Foundation target different key areas, including nature-based solutions, regenerative agriculture, and community water access.

Examples of nature-based solutions include the Living Danube Partnership with WWF Central and Eastern Europe, The Coca-Cola Foundation and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, a decade-long collaboration which aims to restore wetlands and watershed health across eight countries in the Danube Basin, helping to enhance water resilience and biodiversity. Another example is working with the Rivers Trust in Great Britain to restore river catchments and strengthen climate resilience. Meanwhile, collaborations with Natuurpunt in Belgium and Natuurmonumenten in the Netherlands have protected nature reserves from drought, securing the CO₂ sequestered in peatlands and supporting biodiversity.

In agriculture, partnerships in Spain and Sicily focus on water-smart farming in water-scarce regions. In Sicily's citrus production chain, efforts such as using field sensors, drone monitoring, and training local farmers have reduced water usage while promoting sustainable farming. In Spain, the "Misión Posible – Desafío Guadalquivir" project is introducing water-saving irrigation technologies while improving biodiversity.

² The Coca-Cola Company (2025).

³ Locations were identified following an extensive analysis updated in 2024 using the World Resources Institute Aqueduct 4.0 tool and Coca-Cola system-level assessments of each production facility. The Coca-Cola system is made up of over 200 bottling partners and 950 production facilities. For the assessment of high-risk locations, the number of facilities evaluated was approximately 720 locations, as it does not include third-party contracted manufacturers.



Supporting communities represents another important area of partnership action. For example, the Zero Drop project in Greece helps address water scarcity with advanced filtration and recycling systems, saving up to 500 million litres annually for several local communities.

These projects underscore the critical role of cross-sector collaboration between private companies, public institutions, and NGOs in safeguarding and restoring our most precious resource: water. From that experience, Coca-Cola Europe has many lessons on what has worked – plus what has been challenging and where improvements can be made, shared here to help all readers all enhance the positive impacts we collectively deliver.

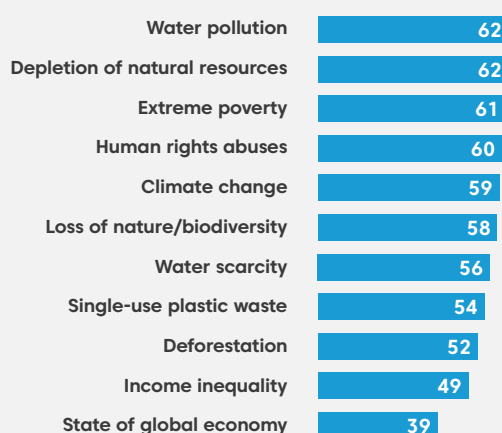
2. A high-priority, fast-changing issue that connects many challenges

Water is an area with urgent challenges and opportunities that require new innovative approaches. Forty-one percent of the people in the EU say they were affected by water scarcity in 2022, a significant increase from only 30 percent in 2000.⁴ Meanwhile, droughts are affecting food production and are already costing €2–€9 billion every year, and this is expected to increase further due to the impacts of climate change.⁵

Water pollution is also rated as the most serious global problem by citizens in nine countries across Europe, ahead of climate change, and water pollution is also the top global concern across the 31 countries surveyed around the world in the GlobeScan *Radar* survey. Water is also seen as one of the most serious issues by sustainability experts in Europe, and many other issues like climate change and loss of nature are also closely tied to water.

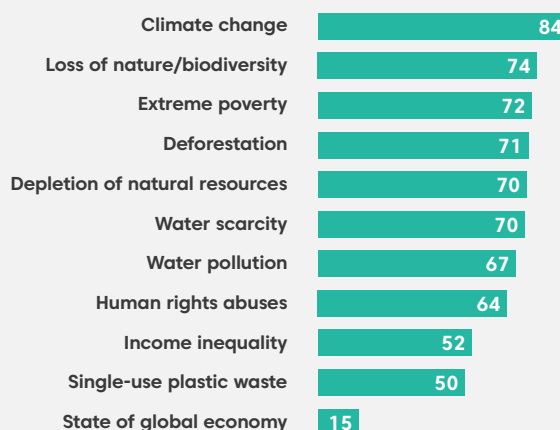
Perceived Seriousness of Global Problems for Europeans

Public: “Very Serious,” Average of Nine European Markets, 2024



T1. For each of the following possible global problems, please indicate if you see it as a very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious problem.

Experts: “Very Serious,” European Experts, 2024



Q1. We would like to better understand your views on global problems. Please indicate if you see the following as a very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious problem.

(Public n=5,597–5,728; Experts n=124)

From: GlobeScan, WWF (2025). [The Future Water Agenda](#).

⁴ European Environment Agency (2025). [Water scarcity conditions in Europe](#).

⁵ European Commission (2025). [Water scarcity and droughts](#).



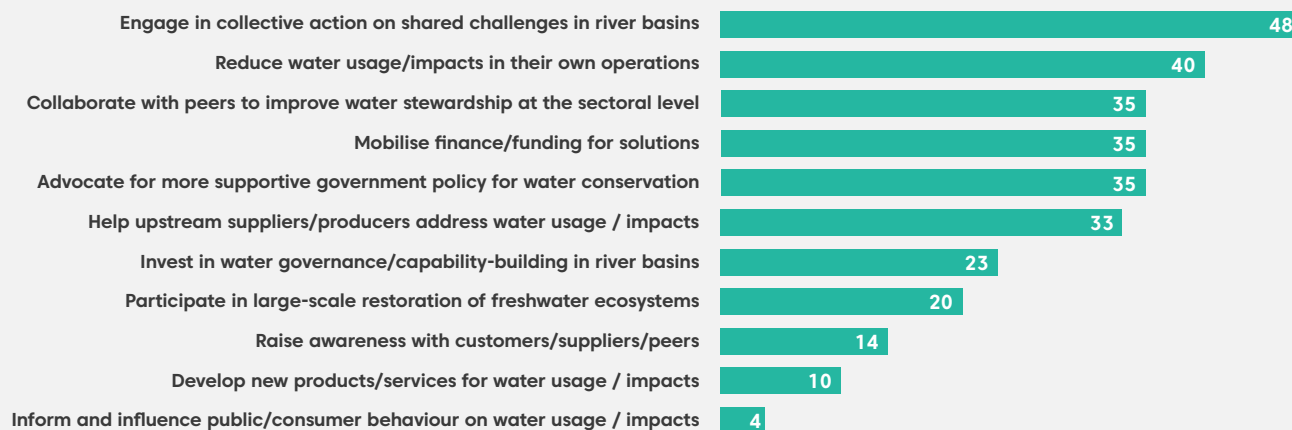
3. An area where collaboration is critical

Watersheds connect many communities, companies, NGOs, and governments – and require local expertise on how to tailor solutions. Many recent papers have focused on the central importance of collaboration, for example, the [Water Futures: Mobilizing Multi-Stakeholder Action for Resilience](#) and [Unpacking Collective Action in Water Stewardship](#).

The recent report [The Future Water Agenda](#), led by WWF and GlobeScan in collaboration with 19 businesses, found that the number-one priority for effective water stewardship according to European water experts is to “Engage in collective action on shared challenges in river basins” – the same top priority as global experts.

Most Beneficial Actions for Effective Water Stewardship

European Experts, 2024



Q7. Of the following actions that companies contribute to, which would be the most beneficial for more effective and impactful water stewardship outcomes?
Select up to three.

(Experts n=124)

From: GlobeScan, WWF (2025). [The Future Water Agenda](#).

METHODOLOGY

To map best practice in Business-NGO collaboration, GlobeScan began by reviewing existing literature and identifying common themes, together with a pressing need to understand how partnerships can evolve in the face of current opportunities and challenges.

This insight was built out through in-depth interviews with 37 experts across the Coca-Cola system, NGO partners, and thought leaders in Business-NGO collaboration. These were conducted independently by GlobeScan, with feedback shared anonymously to capture both new potential directions and the tensions to navigate.

	NGO partners and external experts	Coca-Cola system and value chain
Number of interviews	25	12
Stakeholder type	NGO partners and leading academics and experts in Business-NGO collaboration.	Colleagues from The Coca-Cola Company, The Coca-Cola Foundation, Coca-Cola bottling partners together with supply chain and consultant partners.

The interviews explored current and past partnerships, focusing on Coca-Cola in Europe with supporting insights from collaborations across The Coca-Cola Company globally. They explore what has driven success in these partnerships, what can be learned from other partnerships and innovations across other businesses and NGOs, and the evolving pressures facing business-NGO collaborations today and over the coming years. The summary findings of the seven key success factors were shared back with all interviewees to validate, stress test, and improve.



KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Insights from 20 years of business-NGO partnerships and emerging solutions for the next 20 years

These are the key features of partnerships that deliver greater impact. It is possible to have simple successful partnerships, e.g., sponsorships that do not involve significant levels of trust, systemic action, and sustained engagement. However, this paper's goal is how to maximise impact and help raise ambitions for the shared benefits we can all deliver together.

The seven key success factors to grow impact and future-proof partnerships

Fundamental foundations:
Ensure alignment and effective working relationships

Trusted:
Accelerates impact by overcoming concerns and building buy-in across actors

Value creation-Oriented:
Clarifies value to secure buy-in and adapt to shifting funding priorities

Scaling impact:
Elevating beyond initial pilot partnerships

Systemic:
Unlocks larger impact to meet the urgency of today

Sustained:
Secures ongoing impact beyond volatility

Capability-building:
Creates larger-scale impact and increases organisational resilience

Refining execution:
Best practices in ongoing delivery

Adaptive and Innovative:
New models help find opportunities in rapid change

Measured:
Helps identify ongoing improvement, building transparency and trust with auditable proof





Why it matters

Both partners need to build trust so they are not just willing to work with each other but are excited to deliver impact. This is the foundation for all success. By understanding each other's goals better through transparent ongoing communication, they build trust via shared authentic intentions. This supports internal buy-in and facilitates collaboration and innovation.

How to make this work

Creating trust means having open, transparent conversations on the goals and intentions of each party at the start, being clear on what is practical for each, and laying out specific expectations and roles. For example, the Partnering Agreement Template in [The SDG Partnership Guidebook](#), developed by The Partnering Initiative and UNDESA, can be a helpful start. Organisations can also align through existing structures like public sector frameworks:

“Working with Coca-Cola within the EU Water Framework was helpful as we developed a clear structure of goals and responsibilities, how we would work together, building confidence that we were all aligned for common impact, not greenwashing.”
(From a business partner)

This avoids the challenge of low-trust situations where parties do not feel the other understands and values their work. That in turn can lead to transactional relationships where parties limit exposure to each other and therefore never achieve the dialogue to find the most effective solutions.

The ideal situation is where each party asks the other what they need to deliver effectively, rather than dictating what needs to be done without the opportunity to discuss.

It takes time to establish the personal connections that are needed to build trust, which can be challenging when people switch roles. This can be solved by maintaining an ongoing dialogue between the organisations with regular reviews of partnership progress, so insights are captured and not left only to individual relationships.

“We did an evaluation of our collaboration with Coca-Cola at the end of phase 1 which helped us understand each other better.”
(From an NGO)

When trust is built, there is less time and energy wasted on misunderstandings and teams can break down formalities to work more effectively together.

It also supports innovation as both parties are willing to invest time to find better solutions for shared impact and have regular contact to identify opportunities and resolve issues as they arise.

“Shared goals mean we are always looking for new opportunities together, like how Coca-Cola suggested part-way through the project that we create a nature reserve for local communities alongside our water replenishment work as an easy way to create additional impact for communities beyond our original targets.” (From an NGO)

“Coca-Cola asked us to support with a new project in ten markets. We were present in only four of them, but as we knew and trusted their focus on impact, we were happy to do the extra work to find additional partners and connect them with a reputable company, which we wouldn’t do with a new partner we didn’t know.”
(From an NGO)

What next: Future-proofing and innovating for impact in a changing world

Broadening trust in the face of challenges

At a time when collective sustainability progress feels more challenging, with SDG targets off track and collective industry commitments harder to deliver, there is a risk that trust could break down. But trust is also built and demonstrated by how partnerships adapt to new challenges, which can make them stronger.

A key part of the solution is building trust beyond the core partnership team – who often understand well the genuine intentions and hard work – to reassure the wider organisations and sustain support.

“Colleagues not involved in the partnership directly sometimes raise concerns about working with large companies that can seem like ‘part of the problem.’ By building a deep relationship with transparency on goals, we have built the confidence within our core team in the constructive intentions and actions of our partners. And we are able to share that with our colleagues to build wider buy-in across the organisation.”
(From an NGO)

New ways to create trust quickly for bigger, higher-impact partnerships

Trust is even more important in bigger and broader partnerships involving farmers and suppliers in the value chain, or many companies and NGOs. However, the benefits are greater too, when it builds confidence to work together and advocate for broader change across a region or industry. For bigger partnerships, it is often valuable to have an independent neutral convenor. For example, The Coca-Cola system’s Africa Water Stewardship Initiative is led by Global Water Challenge (GWC) to deliver a nearly USD 25 million investment to help address critical water-related challenges in local communities in 20 African countries.



This structured approach is valuable for bringing together the wide range of NGO and Coca-Cola system partners including The Coca-Cola Company in Africa, its bottling partners Coca-Cola Beverages Africa (CCBA), Equatorial Coca-Cola Bottling Company (ECCBC), and Coca-Cola HBC, together with the implementing consortium that includes The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Building professional skills in partnership and structured approaches can be valuable, such as through the [Partnership Brokers Association](#), or the Theory-U approach from the [Presencing Institute](#), which also helps people connect at a personal level.

Building trust – and partnership opportunities – through supply chain transparency

Transparency can build trust and also help to identify new opportunities. For example, the apparel industry's [Open Supply Hub](#) initiative maps companies' supply chains, bringing greater clarity on where there may be impacts on people and the environment. This helps NGOs identify where there may be new opportunities to scale up existing initiatives, or to create new partnerships across companies based on shared locations, starting a relationship on a foundation of transparent trust.

As highlighted in the paper [Unpacking Collective Action in Water Stewardship](#), this is particularly useful for water, where many companies overlap.

The ideal outcome would be funded and jointly owned systems that identify which actors have projects, funding, capability, etc. That would include NGO presence and projects as well as corporate asset-level data and public sector activities at the river basin scale.





VALUE CREATION-ORIENTED

Why it matters

To get the attention and resources needed for impact, partnerships must demonstrate the value they create for communities and business. Speaking directly to business priorities like securing supply chain resilience ensures internal support and long-term sustainability. This can unlock additional funding from budgets beyond corporate foundations or sustainability, for example, R&D. Meanwhile, better demonstration of the social and environmental value helps NGOs navigate the increasingly complex funding landscape.

How to make this work

Value creation starts with aligning the views of each partner on what is material to their organisation to find the best areas of overlap, along with what the partnership can uniquely deliver for each party. The Value assessment framework in [The SDG Partnership Guidebook](#) can be a helpful tool to achieve this. This shared view highlights, for example, how water shortages and droughts can affect the supply chain of an organisation and what actions on water will have the biggest beneficial impact to broader society and the environment. For example, the recent partnership between The Coca-Cola Foundation and WWF Spain aims to save water in citrus cultivation, promote biodiversity on participating farms, and restore biodiversity in the Guadalquivir River. This includes ongoing training to farmers on good agricultural practices, saving water for farmers, and therefore supporting supply chain resilience and livelihoods.⁶

“In recent droughts in Barcelona, because of the water stewardship work we have delivered consistently with NGOs in a transparent and trusted manner, other companies that had not been reducing their water usage were expected to make more significant cuts to their water usage. Our business is more resilient because of these partnerships, and we expect this to become even more important as droughts get worse.”
(From Coca-Cola system)

Historically, many companies took a philanthropy-led approach to NGO partnerships, often associated with smaller grant-making. While this is still true for some companies, many have evolved to a more collaborative approach involving the core of the business. This is often associated with more involvement from the strategy, supply chain, and sustainability teams within an organisation, in addition to marketing and grant-making teams. Sustainability becomes a way to both de-risk the business and identify additional partnerships beyond initial NGO collaborations, such as with retailers and distributors. This can significantly increase impact and bring company expertise in how to deliver and scale the solution. For example, the [Millers for Nutrition](#) partnership, designed around increasing access to fortified foods across Africa and Asia, both directly targets the micronutrient deficiencies that harm 3 billion people globally and links to the core business of participating companies in selling healthier foods.

⁶ World Wildlife Fund (2021) [Misión Posible Desafío Guadalquivir | WWF España](#).



Meanwhile, The Coca-Cola Company and Carrefour have launched their first jointly developed Sustainability Linked Business Plan, with the aim to help reduce carbon emissions and packaging waste in France, Romania, and Brazil, understanding the shared value it will create for both parties.

Clearer guidance on how business case decisions are made and a better understanding of how organisations make money can also help NGOs design more compelling business cases to deliver their target impacts, making the process more efficient for all parties.

“By working closely with a hotel chain, we understood that their affluent international customers appreciated the value of having no endangered seafood on the menu, so this became a clear business case for investing in menu redesign.” (From an NGO)

Likewise, a clearer understanding of how NGOs create value for communities can help businesses deliver ongoing informal support.

“Even if we don’t have a project we are investing in, we still keep up a relationship with key NGOs so we can offer informal advice and support. We want to focus on generating value and impact for the community rather than only having a transactional relationship.”
(From Coca-Cola system)

What next: Future-proofing and innovating for impact in a changing world

Applying NGO expertise to corporate supply chain resilience

This is a growing priority, for example in the A.C.Q.U.A. Project 2, run by the Citrus Production District of Sicily and by the Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture of the University of Catania, supported by The Coca-Cola Foundation. This has helped pilot and demonstrate how farmers can improve water efficiency through the use of advanced agricultural technology to monitor and predict the weather to decide the optimal amount of irrigation.⁷ In some cases, these pilots and demonstrations can be funded directly by supply chain partners, but there can be funding challenges where the financial returns are slow. Innovating new ways to raise funds for supply chain transformation is a priority.

Collaborating to innovate new funding mechanisms

Given the scale of the issues, many NGOs predict it will be challenging to secure the funding needed to deliver impact at scale, and businesses can help innovate new approaches. For example, how NGO conservation projects can generate high-quality carbon and nature offsets that can be sold to companies to meet their ambitious targets with auditable evidence of impact.

⁷ Distretto Produttivo Agrumi di Sicilia (2023). [Project A.C.Q.U.A. 2 - Distretto Produttivo Agrumi di Sicilia](#).

Results-based financing is another model that is scaling up to build confidence in companies to invest in guaranteed results, unlocking larger investments and bigger commitments.

The growth of bigger projects to deliver broader impact is also creating new value-creation opportunities for NGOs where larger NGOs can act as coordinators across a range of NGOs that collectively deliver projects across several countries. The central coordinating NGO brings standardised best practice on delivery and clarifies the expectations of the company, reducing the administrative costs for companies while increasing consistency of the outcomes.

Innovating new ways to measure the value created by collaborations

The next innovation needed is better measuring of the social and financial capital delivered by business-NGO collaborations to create a stronger business case and demonstrate the multiplier effect the investment has on local environment and society.

Through Coca-Cola in Europe's work, they have learned that water replenish projects often have multiple co-benefits, such as better water quality, carbon sequestration, increased climate resilience, enhanced biodiversity, or tourism and community impacts.

They have worked with Denkstatt and other partners to develop a methodology to help quantify the co-benefits of several water replenish programs in Europe. This valuation methodology is being made available to industry partners. Similarly, for an overview of financial value that projects in different habitats can create, there is the [Nature-Based Services Benefits Explorer](#), a free online tool created by the Pacific Institute, the CEO Water Mandate, The Nature Conservancy, Danone, and LimnoTech.



Why it matters

Greater impact and value come when partners can expand beyond initial pilot projects and individual collaborations to engage multiple stakeholder groups across the value chain and among companies, NGOs, and governments to create systemic solutions.

Individual projects between companies and NGOs can be simpler to run, but in the case of water, multiple small projects in a watershed will have less impact than when the wider system is addressed.

How to make this work

The most effective systemic solutions are designed that way from the start, mapping out the key audiences early to ensure they will be engaged effectively. The stakeholder mapping template from [The SDG Partnership Guidebook](#) can be a helpful way to start this process.

While it can be easy to focus on technical solutions and proven technologies, projects are most effective when they engage with the stakeholders who will use them, e.g., hearing the concerns of farmers or citizens who resist when they are not clear on the impacts of the projects.

“If you want to fix water, 20 percent of it can be fixed with investments in water technology, but 80 percent needs engagement with wider stakeholders.” (From a business partner)

Creating a systems-level partnership requires trust with a range of stakeholders, from the suppliers and regulators who work closely with businesses, to the communities and academics who NGOs have deep connections with. One of the most powerful roles that business-NGO collaborations play is providing initial proof of concept of partnership that can then be scaled into bigger initiatives and additional collaborations.

“Our first project opened the doors to other sectors and companies to see that nature-based solutions are effective and cost-efficient. The example of working with Coca-Cola was very convincing when shared with other companies.” (From an NGO)

Business-NGO partnerships are also often the seed for bigger impact through different funding approaches, such as blended finance and working with governments. For example, The Living Danube Partnership with WWF has involved collaboration with multiple governments across the extended watershed and has already delivered 13.45 million m³ of water savings and the restoration of roughly 5,508 hectares of wetlands.⁸

⁸ WWF (2025). [WWF - The Living Danube Partnership](#).

“EU funds always require some pre-financing or co-financing, where Coca-Cola acts as the seed funding and venture capital to do the technical studies that are hard to fund, but then create a proof-of-concept to access the larger, systems-changing public funding.” (From an NGO)

Building on proven smaller partnerships, larger cross-company partnerships can be built, like the [Charco Bendito project](#) in Mexico, catalysed by the Beverage Industry Environmental Roundtable which brings together many companies to create a joint solution for the water basin, including reforestation, replenishment, and supporting Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) benefits. This has been particularly successful as the local grassroots organisations were engaged quickly and enthusiastically picked this up, together with close involvement of the local corporate teams who were able to involve their communities.

Collaborating in these partnerships can be challenging for companies and NGOs that are smaller or are earlier in their journey on the topic. This can create a tension between waiting for enough organisations to buy in to create broad impact with the need to start quickly. The most effective projects allow work to begin, with the opportunity for others to join when they feel ready.

To deliver bigger systemic impact, in addition to the targeted project work, advocacy for enabling policy frameworks and change within industry is highly valuable. NGOs appreciate the voice of large companies whose advocacy as a major employer and economic actor can carry more weight than a specialist NGO. Partnerships can create a natural platform for credible, evidence-based advocacy.

“Often local smaller companies are less focused on policy advocacy. We appreciate when Coca-Cola and other larger-scale companies help support stronger regulations.” (From an NGO)

“We are already working with Coca-Cola to engage other industry partners in reducing groundwater use and we hope to scale up this change agent role.” (From an NGO)

Systemic solutions also mean better connecting issues that are currently treated in silos. For example, climate, farmer livelihoods, biodiversity, community support and water are often addressed separately. However, there are often common solutions to address many of these. Wetlands restoration can sequester carbon, increase biodiversity, and protect against flooding. Precision irrigation in agriculture can help farmers to improve their yields and reduce water use. Meanwhile, work with Rivers Trust in Great Britain improved water stewardship, helped farmers while also creating relaxing natural environments that act as community amenities.



What next: Future-proofing and innovating for impact in a changing world

Unlocking the mindset shift and funding models for systemic solutions

Creating these systemic solutions is very valuable, but it does come with challenges to manage. Collaborating across multiple stakeholders can be complex and time consuming, and it is vital to allocate enough resources, manage expectations, and help amplify the benefits.

“The challenge we get is that ecosystem financing with multiple groups is slow to deliver, so organisations prefer to stick with quickly delivered small projects. We need a mindset shift to unlock this broader impact.”
(From a business partner)

It also requires clear agreement at the start on how to align with individual value chains and what impacts will be measured, claimed, or audited between partners and aligning on the shared impact and any agreed compromises. The benefits are worthwhile, but this needs to be planned for.

This challenge of funding time for project coordination, not just project implementation, is felt strongly within water projects but there are also innovative funding approaches suggested in recent deep-dive papers such as [Unpacking Collective Action in Water Stewardship](#) and [Water Futures: Mobilizing Multi-Stakeholder Action for Resilience](#), from management fees for projects in the water basin to tariffs on water bills, to the development of annuities and the opportunities to scale funding through green bonds.

For example, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has engaged multiple diverse stakeholders including The Coca-Cola Company, Fundación FEMSA, Global Environment Facility (GEF), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and International Climate Initiative (IKI). Together they have created 25 different water funds that offer attractive, cost-effective ways to deliver investments in watersheds.

Re-engaging citizens and consumers to mobilise public support and behaviour change

At a time when many citizens and consumers are feeling challenged by sustainability issues and companies are looking for how to better engage, it is increasingly valuable to consider how systemic partnerships can demonstrate real life impact in the areas that matter to consumers like water does. By showing that challenges can be addressed, it strengthens broader support across society for action on water stewardship, nature restoration, and sustainability progress. This is often most effective when it builds on proven delivery and technical solutions. These can demonstrate the impact that partnerships are already having before encouraging action from citizens. For example, the Alter Aqua project in Malta has addressed the challenges in one of the ten most water-scarce countries in the world. This project is designed and implemented by the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean, in partnership with the Energy and Water Agency (EWA) and Coca-Cola in Malta (General Soft Drinks S.A. and The Coca-Cola Company) and supported by The Coca-Cola Foundation and co-funded by EWA.

By bringing together multiple parts of the Coca-Cola system, the project has been able to further scale impact. Established in 2011, the project has run a range of programs that together have conserved over 19 million litres of water annually.⁹ In the most recent phase announced in 2025, there is a new focus on promoting greywater recycling, including tackling public misconceptions that act as barriers to widespread greywater recycling.¹⁰

Similarly, the Living Danube Partnership with WWF has a vision of long-term health for the Danube basin, working with communities that rely on it. Therefore the partnership has supported the direct nature restoration work by directly engaging 120,000 people in education and awareness campaigns, reaching over 70.7 million people through mass and social media.¹¹

Shift from engagement to empowerment

Creating change can be challenging when people feel they are being told what to do. But in the face of great challenges, like more visible water scarcity, it is becoming possible to adopt new models.

“Ten years ago, the discussion was about sharing public information, then stakeholder engagement. It is now shifting to stakeholder empowerment and the ‘citizen science’ of giving people the tools they need to make better decisions rather than trying to hand-hold them at every step.” (From an external expert)

Creating scalable models to reduce costs for the system

Not every project needs to be a large-scale multi-stakeholder collaboration. Businesses and NGOs are also meeting this need for broad impact by distilling individual project findings into models that can be used more broadly. For example, NGOs creating an e-learning course on water that can be implemented within the partner company but also offered to other companies and put into public use at no cost, since managing water use benefits all.

“From our project with Coca-Cola on climate buffers, we were able to create a map of where the same project could be delivered effectively, including by other companies and NGOs based on their footprints. That provides other organisations with a practical template to deliver.” (From an NGO)

⁹ Global Water Partnership (2023). [Alter Aqua Project Phase IV - GWP-Med.](#)

¹⁰ Global Water Partnership (2025). [Alter Aqua RECAP - GWP-Med.](#)

¹¹ World Wildlife Fund (2025). [WWF - The Living Danube Partnership.](#)



Why it matters

Shifting from a tactical to a strategic approach with longer-term partnerships unlocks more impact, ideally involving multi-year partnerships, not only one-year commitments. Sustained approaches also create more certainty so NGOs and businesses can plan more effectively.

How to make this work

Establishing partnerships that are designed to last longer than a year is valuable to ensure the impact delivered can be sustained. Behaviour change with communities, farmers, and suppliers is often not fully established after one year. Meanwhile, climate change is increasing droughts and damaging biodiversity, so gains from one year can be reversed in the next.

“I have seen brilliant recycling programmes set up that create jobs and effective waste management – but it needs to be a long-term investment in communities to scale and sustain. NGOs need to learn how to advocate for and sell the importance of longer-term.” (From an NGO)

Trust is vital for impact, so longer-term partnerships become much more efficient given the initial investment of time and energy needed to build trust. The longer-term commitment also builds more trust with all partners, as it demonstrates how seriously the issue is taken.

“In many of our projects, at least 70–80 percent of the time is spent building relationships with communities, governments, etc. We often have the tools for behaviour change, but when the land is owned by other people, we need time to build that buy-in.” (From an NGO)

Not every project needs to be multi-year on its own, but having a shared longer-term vision of the desired impact delivers more impact. This allows both NGOs and businesses to invest in personnel and skills needed, creating confidence to innovate for better solutions, not simply what can be delivered within a one-off small project. Coca-Cola in Europe has been proud to develop many of these sustained relationships with NGOs and partners across Europe, working on water and learning immensely from them. These include partnerships lasting over a decade such as with Natuurpunt on wetlands restoration in Flanders, together with other collaborations mentioned such as The Living Danube Partnership and Alter Acqua in Malta.

“Even when working on short-term and small projects, we can be much more effective when we develop these as part of a bigger plan.” (From an NGO)

“Our first seven-year collaboration followed by our current three-year collaboration has allowed us to make the case for investment, and has built our credibility with external partners.” (From an NGO)

In addition to delivering projects that last for several years, there is value in showcasing and planning for the long-term benefits of the project, beyond when the partnership completes its activities. This can range from establishing self-sustaining community solutions to creating long-term supply chain resilience.

“What I admire in NGOs is the longer-term thinking and impact thinking and the ability to tell the story of impact beyond the short-term metrics that give companies the confidence to commit.” (From a business partner)

What next: Future-proofing and innovating for impact in a changing world

Navigating funding volatility

Funding for NGOs is expected to become more complex given increased demands in Europe on public finances and cuts to international aid that may affect many national and international NGOs working on different issues. In that context, it is valuable for NGOs to review what funding they depend on and gain greater clarity on longer-term partnerships they can rely on to deliver ongoing impact.

Shifting focus to scaling over piloting projects

Many partnership projects can be classified into stages, where stage 1 is about scoping an issue and solution, creating a proof of concept, and a feasibility study. These can be expensive and complex, and many projects end here or do not secure the funding to scale after the proof of concept. Stage 2 is where the proven model is implemented and the solution is scaled. What some organisations, including The Coca-Cola Foundation, are doing is reviewing their overall funding, prioritising where they can identify more existing stage 2 projects to scale up and sustain rather than starting many individual stage 1 projects to prioritise funding for impact.

Pairing sustained support with policy collaboration

For many of the sustained, systemic changes sought, policy change is required, especially in response to issues like decreasing water availability, which call for more ambitious policy responses. For example, Coca-Cola Europe have been committed to supporting the EU Water Framework Directive and Nature Restoration Law, leading a business coalition to highlight the importance of this work and the value of nature-based solutions in delivering the objectives. These enabling policy frameworks are essential in helping all businesses to achieve their water stewardship goals.

“Many pilot activities can only be implemented properly if there are necessary changes in the regulations, but these happen very slowly and if these don’t happen in time, then the local pilots and the trust in local communities, experts, etc. can be weakened in the long term.” (From an NGO)



CAPABILITY-BUILDING

Why it matters

Partnerships where businesses and NGOs actively help each other grow capabilities to deliver higher-impact, mutually beneficial, and future-ready solutions help scale impact beyond the core partnership across the other activities of each partner.

How to make this work

Capability-building is most effective where partners discuss where they most need support, helping pre-empt potential challenges in project delivery and identify easy, quick wins. This also avoids any misunderstandings where one party assumes they know what the other needs or becomes overly involved in implementation when this is not the most efficient or effective use of time.

One common area for all organisations is training in partnership skills. A recent study on collaboration found that 91 percent of respondents believe it would make a significant difference to their organisation's / partnerships' collaborative success if all those involved were fully trained in partnering and shared a common language and approach. This is an area where both parties can share their best practice.¹²

Businesses often have larger teams with more resources compared to many NGOs, meaning there are multiple areas of capability building that NGOs appreciate. Business expertise in communication is especially valued, given the experience of marketing departments in communicating with a range of stakeholders, from industry to media to consumers, and their access to best-in-class creative agencies and talent.

This includes simple support like translation of materials to communicate with diverse stakeholder groups using in-house translation capabilities within businesses.

"We appreciate the support on communications, in particular how to speak with consumers to help engage and create behaviour change." (From an NGO)

NGOs tend to be well-connected with their communities and are very important for building trust locally and upskilling corporate partners about the issues on the ground. Together, partnerships can also create shared promotional materials to tell the story and clarify impact.

For example, with The Living Danube Partnership mentioned earlier, the Coca-Cola Europe team helped create compelling video content to tell the story and clarify the impact. WWF partners have been able to use this in their own communications and engagement with stakeholders beyond the project to demonstrate their impact and capabilities.

This promotional support also extends to how companies can help connect NGOs with their broader networks of businesses, through chances to speak at industry events and bringing NGOs into live conversations. This creates new opportunities for funding partners for NGOs and helps them better understand the needs and approaches within companies they could partner with.

¹² TPI (2023). [Unite to Ignite: Accelerating the transformational power of partnerships for the SDGs and beyond - The Partnering Initiative](#).



For many NGOs that have smaller teams, guidance on core functions can be very helpful, including project management, financial management, and time management, especially where they have small teams that scale up as part of delivering a project in collaboration.

One of the most helpful approaches can be connecting larger NGOs with smaller NGOs to help accelerate this progress.

“Sometimes we connect global NGOs to upskill the local NGOs on larger-scale water projects by conducting the project together for the first year, after which the local NGO has built the capabilities they need.” (From the Coca-Cola system)

NGOs consistently bring strong subject matter expertise that can help upskill a wide range of employees within companies. For example, with water, the issues are very locally specific, related to water availability, quality, local ecosystems, and the expectations of local communities. As the issues and challenges are becoming more technical, regulation is also evolving rapidly and becoming more complex, another area of technical excellence that NGOs bring expertise on.

“When we want to enter a new area, the NGO subject matter expertise is essential to map out the dynamics and local needs.” (From the Coca-Cola system)

Often, capability-building is a shared effort, for example, businesses training NGOs on how to create a robust business case to meet the demand for value creation, which NGOs can then use to tailor the content of their subject matter training so it is easy to apply.

Project Last Mile is an example of how this shared capability-building can deliver at scale. This is a long-term partnership aimed at tackling health issues in Africa, bringing together global health leaders of The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (Global Fund), the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the health ministries of 12 African countries, The Coca-Cola Company, and The Coca-Cola Foundation.

The global health partners play a critical role in advising Project Last Mile on where its support will be most valuable and facilitating linkages with ministries of health based on their local needs, demand, and alignment with financing. Meanwhile, Coca-Cola system employees bring their expertise and networks. For example, in Mozambique, collecting data on route optimisation for medicine delivery from vehicles owned by Coca-Cola Beverages Africa, the local bottling partner.

In the Kingdom of Eswatini, the Coca-Cola Africa marketing team has connected Project Last Mile with leading agencies to deliver the effective Girl Champ citizen campaign for youth empowerment.¹³

¹³ The Global Fund, The Coca-Cola Company, The Kingdom of Eswatini et al. (2022) [Project Last Mile: Partnering for Health](#).

What next: Future-proofing and innovating for impact in a changing world

Accelerating technology and AI use

Given how rapidly new technologies are developing, especially AI applications, there is a great opportunity to share experience with both new tools for measuring impact and new ways to improve efficiency and processes.

“We lack skills in some areas and appreciate mentoring from our Coca-Cola partners on areas like how to integrate AI as part of our regular check-ins.” (From an NGO)

Creating learning and upskilling networks

Businesses and NGOs are starting to create innovation and education communities to connect NGOs and corporations to learn from each other. For example, the Alliance for Water Stewardship have established member learning exchanges and developed their water stewardship standard which is being used by companies to train suppliers and upskill them so they can become “collective action ready,” with great success in regions such as Ica, Peru.

In Latin America, the Coca-Cola system has started connecting NGOs they work with in a broader ecosystem so they can learn from each other, including across traditional boundaries of subject matter expertise, so NGOs involved in water have found they have similar challenges to NGOs focused on plastic waste collection. This peer-to-peer exchange helps efficiently build capabilities, especially of smaller partners.

Supporting NGO capacities in a shifting funding dynamic

Pressures on global funding for many NGOs are creating volatility, which many experts expect will lead to some larger NGOs closing local offices and others scaling back their staff. This can create a loss of capacity and continuity, so support from businesses can become even more helpful.

Several experts raised the opportunity for short-term secondments of company employees to NGOs to quickly upskill in key areas.





ADAPTIVE AND INNOVATIVE

Why it matters

The external environment is shifting rapidly, from climate impacts to geopolitical shifts and evolving stakeholder expectations. Impactful partnerships remain agile and ambitious, evolving goals and roles, and innovating approaches to sustain and increase impact without getting stuck in narrow, transactional relationships.

How to make this work

As we have seen, innovation is fuelled by trust and sustained relationships, creating the willingness to experiment and confidence that there will be time to deliver impact from the investment required. Trust is also important for adaptability to ensure that both partners feel they can share issues as they arise and troubleshoot together, rather than taking a transactional approach of only communicating issues at the end, once they cannot be addressed. Indeed, it is helpful to regularly review what is working well in the partnership and what needs to be adapted. For example, the partnership health check template from [The SDG Partnership Guidebook](#) can be a helpful way to diagnose the current status, which should then be used to provoke opportunities for innovation.

In the case of water, given significant droughts in recent years, it has been challenging to meet set targets, and initial plans are not always suitable to the changing landscape, so many projects have required flexibility.

“The better the relationship, the higher the willingness to innovate. The next opportunity is for NGOs to more actively bring innovative concepts to test with businesses. The actual solutions can be co-created to build shared buy-in.” (From a business partner)

Innovation often benefits when partners find ways to manage the cost and risk initially. For example, working with industry bodies like WBCSD or larger NGO convenings like the WWF Climate Business Network that bring together many businesses to pilot approaches with minimal cost per business. Partnership with smaller, more agile NGOs can be effective, but requires active planning to marry the benefits of speed with the ability to scale.

“Innovation often comes from smaller NGOs, but these are often harder to find as they cannot afford to join sessions like World Water Week and can be harder to work with as they are not set up for the reporting or scaling with larger grants.” (From the Coca-Cola system)

New technologies are an important innovation driver, such as using drones to detect water stress in agricultural supply chains. Similarly, in Cyprus, the Zero Drop Mission, implemented by Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean with the support of The Coca-Cola Foundation, in collaboration with public authorities and local communities, has used smart water meters to transform water stewardship. These were installed in 25 municipal parks in Aglantzia, providing real-time monitoring of water consumption, helping identify the municipality to excessive water use and locate potential leaks in the irrigation water distribution system, without the need for costly onsite visits. However, new non-technological approaches are equally important.

“We have worked with WWF’s innovations in creating new floating wetlands, a natural environment that can be built within a watershed, which can help clean and retain water, as we have applied in Pakistan.” (From the Coca-Cola system)

What next: Future-proofing and innovating for impact in a changing world

Creating the innovation engine for sustainability

Given the speed of change needed, government-led campaigns can be too slow or inflexible because of the nature of building political consensus and significant budgets involved compared with more rapid business-NGO decision making.

“EU-funded projects like Horizon and LIFE tend to have relatively rigid structures where ideas are developed at the start, approved, and implemented. In private-NGO collaborations, there is more opportunity to adapt to shifting community needs and therefore develop new solutions.”
(From an NGO)

Creating new partnership models to fuel tech-enabled innovation

In addition to partnering directly with traditional NGOs, there is increasing experimentation with partnerships with startups, impact investors, and platforms which develop new technology-driven solutions, such as [enviu](#). These are often fuelled by new machine learning tools and deliver advanced technologies that, for instance, help measure soil health and reduce water usage for farmers. For example, in Spain, the Coca-Cola system is investigating how to drive regenerative lemon farming with lemon juice suppliers. They are exploring the use of satellite monitoring technology with [eLEAF](#) to support farmers in planning water use and for impact measurement.

The agile partnerships can be helpful for giving startups access to farmers and potential customers for their sustainability-focused solutions, and they are often structured to be able to scale up easily. These organisations are not always designed as much around community engagement and there is significant potential to bring them into wider partnerships as the solution provider needed to scale a systemic solution. NGOs are also developing their own version of startup labs.

“We’re developing an incubation facility for solutions that explore carbon, nature, and water credits with money from public and private institutions to tackle the challenge of how to make carbon markets financially viable outside the tropics.” (From an NGO)

Managing demands for immediate returns to sustain innovation

In the face of urgent issues, it is easy for innovation to be deprioritised as risky, or simply because it takes a long time to demonstrate sustained impact on an ecosystem or community. This can lead to new solutions being discarded too quickly in favour of traditional approaches that have already been proven, even if they are not as effective. For example, “grey” infrastructure for water like dams to control water flow are well understood, while “green” solutions like wetland restoration that improve water retention and have other biodiversity co-benefits are not always easily measured, or need many years to demonstrate the ecosystem restoration, so are not prioritised.





MEASURED

Why it matters

Ensuring the final projects are effectively measured builds transparency and confidence around impact through streamlined data. This should create a feedback loop for continuous adaptation and improvement, not simply generate a greater volume of reporting.

How to make this work

Reliable data are essential for building trust in the impact delivered. This is one of the fundamental reasons for business-NGO partnerships, where NGOs can independently gather quality data. Increasingly, with new reporting standards such as the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, these data are also being audited by third parties. This further improves reliability but often requires training and upskilling of all parties to ensure that data is audit-ready. This is also encouraging the wider use of standardised measures, such as Volumetric Water Benefit Accounting, that are peer-reviewed.

“One of the benefits of partnering with larger companies is the strong focus on KPIs that create more clarity, rigour, and discipline than there used to be in water management.” (From an external expert)

However, given the systemic changes that are demanded, innovation in metrics is needed. For example, going beyond the number of people impacted by water projects to measure the quality of life of those impacted, water access, biodiversity, and resilience of water systems and ecosystems.

These are most valuable when they are linked with natural capital and social capital measures to monetise the outcomes and impacts on environment and society that reinforce the business case and the funding case. This can create many new technical measures, so work is needed to make sure the impact is easily understood and communicated across all stakeholder groups, not only for the audit experts.

“For many of the systemic changes we are seeking, there isn’t a right set of metrics, so we will need some combination of storytelling and hard metrics to create the fuller picture.” (From a business partner)

These new approaches to measurement also create tensions to manage. Some NGO partners reflected that they have had to turn down partnerships when the reporting requirements were too complex, as they will spend too much time reporting and too little on delivering impact. Having trusted partnerships can help minimise reporting to essential features. Coordinating a wider range of measures across a larger number of partners in bigger projects can create more layers of interim reporting. Partnerships need to regularly review how practical the measurement demands are. New science-based measurements need to negotiate how to deliver a clear, confident message when the underlying data are highly complex. This includes challenges of how to measure additional benefit delivered in a changing environment. For example, when measuring the impact of a water project, increased droughts can mean that overall water levels decrease in spite of the intervention, but there is an opportunity to measure how much worse it would have been without the project.

“We need to find a common language between business and science. Science is complicated and slow, so new measures take time to prove, and many internal experts are cautious about committing to a metric if it could be contradicted by another scientist tomorrow.” (From an NGO)

Matching the focus on sustained impact, there is increasing interest in measuring the long-term outcomes of projects, such as sustained improvements in water retention and biodiversity beyond the period when the project is actively being worked on. However, finding ways to fund ongoing monitoring for ten years after project completion is an area that needs to be better planned and reviewed as approaches to measurement continue to improve.

What next: Future-proofing and innovating for impact in a changing world

Use technology to improve measurement and prediction

Many measurements today involve estimates, but with cheaper and more easily accessible technology like satellite imaging for water basins, drone surveillance, and soil moisture meters such as those deployed in the previously mentioned A.C.Q.U.A 2 project in Sicily, it will be possible to create more accurate, affordable data streams. Artificial Intelligence tools will also help predict instead of just measuring issues, for example, calculating and modelling water quality indexes, as highlighted in the recent meta-study in the [Water Quality Research journal](#). This will help partnerships pre-empt and adapt, not just report at the end, so data streams drive decision-making, not just reporting.

Streamline reporting to focus on what is necessary and drives action

The focus on high-quality, auditable data that meet higher reporting standards and answers greater scepticism can lead to more resources being spent on reporting, not action. Together, businesses and NGOs need to redefine what is essential in internal reporting between NGOs and businesses, avoiding long reports that are not consistently read and used, or data that are not applied to make decisions or for external reporting requirements. Given the growing volumes of data and reports, streamlining key data into common online platforms can be an efficient way to collect auditable data, saving time and energy from emailing, and drawing data out of different reporting formats.

“It is important that measurement becomes a positive feedback loop for learning, not just reporting for reporting’s sake. The EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive has created the expectation that reporting is a product in itself.” (From an external expert)

Use measurement to unlock new forms of funding

Higher-quality data may be more complex to gather, but it can also unlock new tools like results-based financing where funding can be linked to monetised impacts delivered, helping to build a stronger business case for additional investment.

SUCCESS CHECKLIST

Actions to accelerate high-impact partnerships

The summary implications of each success factor are shared below to help you identify what you are already delivering and where you can level up the partnership, whether you are starting out or reviewing next steps.



Trusted

- ☒ Explore formal partnership agreements, like partnership charters, to establish the objectives of the partnership, the roles and responsibilities, the measures of success, the governance and guidelines for external engagement and communication, etc. For example, see the Partnering Agreement Template in [The SDG Partnership Guidebook](#).
- ☒ Have initial face-to-face meetings to build personal understanding and regular check-ins to evaluate partnership progress and ongoing learnings.
- ☒ Ensure there is regular feedback on the shared goals and partnership impact within each organisation to maintain wider trust and buy-in on the partnership.
- ☒ Explore opportunities for neutral moderation and formal relationship-building for larger partnerships.
- ☒ Explore how to share details on supply chains and business models to clarify areas of potential collaboration with current and future partners.



Value creation-oriented

- ☒ Map the material issues for each organisation and identify overlaps.
- ☒ Map the opportunities for value creation; what new value is created by the two organisations coming together, e.g., access to all necessary stakeholder groups, shared learning, shared risk? How does the partnership deliver value for the core objectives of each organisation? What benefits can be measured? For example, see the Value Assessment Framework in [The SDG Partnership Guidebook](#).
- ☒ Identify what additional functions could learn from or help enhance the partnership, e.g., supply chain, R&D, strategy.
- ☒ Clarify decision criteria for what each partner needs in order to begin or scale up projects.
- ☒ Explore how to integrate partnership projects and learnings into the company value chain and where it can build resilience.
- ☒ Explore new models to measure and deliver value such as nature, carbon, and water credits, and results-based financing.
- ☒ Explore opportunities for larger or experienced NGOs to act as best practice convenors for wider coalitions, or to standardise best practice in similar projects.



Systemic

- ☒ Map core and potential stakeholders – both those who will be affected and those who could help scale the results, e.g., peers across industries. For example, see the stakeholder mapping template from [The SDG Partnership Guidebook](#).
- ☒ Design the partnership so it can create a proof-of-concept that can unlock wider funding sources, e.g., public-private partnerships.
- ☒ Explore the potential for advocacy on policy needed to unlock faster change.
- ☒ Ensure you allocate sufficient time and resources in bigger partnerships for the trust-building and coordination, agreeing on key questions, including any compromises or trade-offs between partner goals.
- ☒ Explore how the partnership can be turned into a scalable model that can be replicated by other organisations beyond the initial partnerships.
- ☒ Explore opportunities to engage consumers and citizens beyond those directly affected.
- ☒ Identify how to empower wider communities and stakeholders to take their own action, not just engage them on the results of the partnership.



Sustained

- ☒ Prioritise opportunities for longer-term partnerships, both multi-year projects and ongoing relationships across smaller strategically aligned projects.
- ☒ Use longer-term commitments to build trust within the partnership and with the wider range of stakeholders.
- ☒ Identify the innovations and investments that are possible with longer-term partnerships to underline the business case and value creation opportunities.
- ☒ Create plans for how the project will be sustained beyond the agreed partnership project, e.g., are the community solutions self-sustaining?
- ☒ Explore where and how creating sustained partnerships can help navigate global funding volatility.
- ☒ Explore where you can prioritise scaling up existing projects for sustained impact over starting new pilot projects.





Capability-building

- ✓ Create open discussion on where capability building is valued to ensure effort is most efficient and identify quick wins, e.g., training in partnership skills.
- ✓ Consider how to share business expertise in external communications to amplify wider stakeholder buy-in.
- ✓ Explore how to bring partners into other conversations with industry, governments, etc., to accelerate learning and create opportunities for new partnerships.
- ✓ Explore how NGOs can upskill corporate teams in technical issue areas that can then be applied within the business.
- ✓ Explore where logistical expertise from the business can be used to inform development and delivery of shared projects.
- ✓ Explore how to share best practices in rapidly evolving AI applications for process improvement and addressing issues.



Adaptive and innovative

- ✓ Create regular check-ins to test progress and opportunities for innovation, for example, using the Partnership Health Check template from [The SDG Partnership Guidebook](#).
- ✓ Monitor external shifts that can impact the ability of the partnership to deliver, e.g., increased risk of droughts. Create proactive risk management plans.
- ✓ Explore how to reduce the cost and risk of innovation, e.g., through cross-industry partnerships.
- ✓ Explore both technology-driven innovation and innovation in social engagement or nature-based solutions.
- ✓ Identify where business-NGO partnerships can rapidly experiment to create the innovations that public sector collaborations can then scale.
- ✓ Explore partnerships with startups and impact investors to identify new solutions.
- ✓ Manage expectations on how quickly the value of new innovations can be demonstrated to ensure they are not dismissed before they have a chance to deliver.





Measured

- ✓ Clarify from the start any data needed for external reporting, including any requirements for auditing and the upskilling needed.
- ✓ Explore how to innovate metrics to better capture impact on complex topics, e.g., quality of life and biodiversity.
- ✓ Explore how to measure the financial impact of projects on human, social, and environmental capital, in addition to business model resilience to support business case development.
- ✓ Ensure metrics reported can be understood by key audiences, e.g., how to combine audited technical figures with the storytelling of what this means.
- ✓ Identify how to fund any long-term measurement and monitoring needed beyond project completion.
- ✓ Explore how new technologies can both automate and predict measurement so it becomes more useful in guiding ongoing project delivery.
- ✓ Streamline internal reporting to save time and focus on audit requirements, e.g., standard formats, common technology platforms, etc.

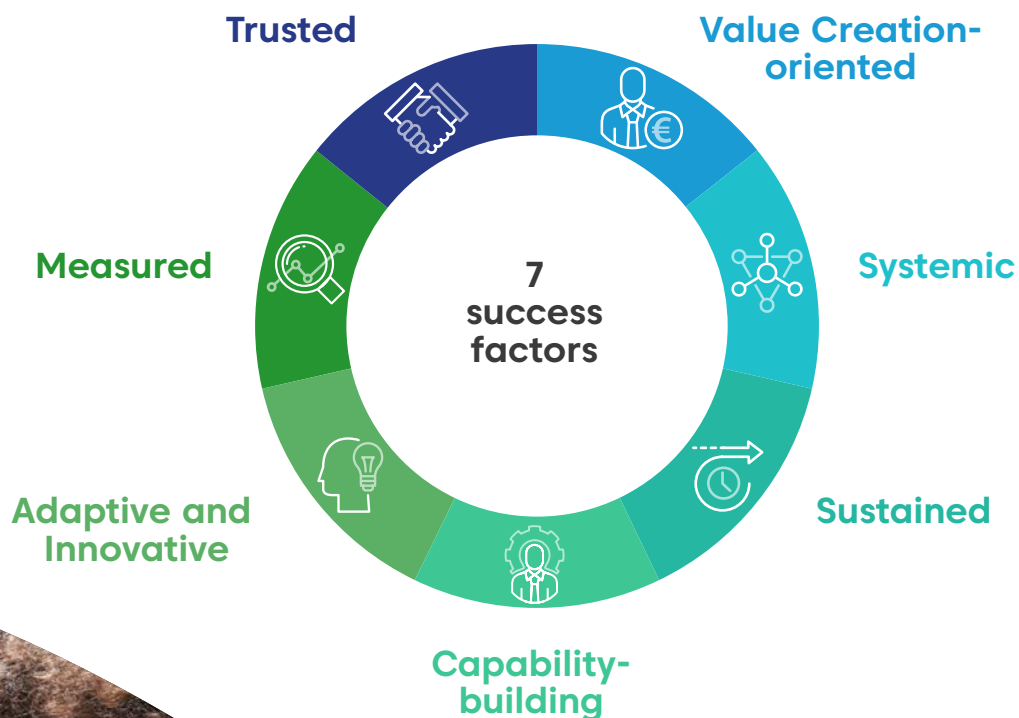


CONCLUSION

The opportunity and need for scalable, impactful Business-NGO partnerships

These seven key success factors to creating higher-impact partnerships give us all the opportunity to improve and innovate. Looking forward, Coca-Cola Europe and GlobeScan believe partnerships will become even more important for delivering impact. As environmental impacts grow and inequality threatens progress, partnerships can help mobilise society to understand and act, fuelling new innovative solutions. Partnerships can help demonstrate and justify to different stakeholder groups the value of bold action – positive impact for communities, the bottom line of businesses and government budgets. And as the scale of challenges makes some people feel overwhelmed and question the ability of businesses and NGOs to make progress, trusted partnerships with demonstrated impact can rebuild faith in the meaningful solutions that can be delivered at scale now.

We hope that the lessons shared from these experts will help inspire and sharpen your partnerships and we encourage you to test the findings and get in touch when you have new ideas and innovations to share and scale, as we are keen to keep progressing. Now is the perfect time for businesses and NGOs to step up, because we can all deliver much more by working together.



PARTNERS AND CONTACTS

Experts* Interviewed

Name	Title	Organisation
Afonso do Ó	Freshwater and Climate Risks Consultant	WWF Portugal
Alexandros Kandarakis	Head of Communications	GWP Mediterranean
Alexis Morgan	Global Water Stewardship Lead	WWF
Andreas Beckmann	Regional CEO	WWF Central Eastern Europe
Andy Bray	General Manager	Calder Rivers Trust
Antonino Cancelliere	Professor of Hydraulic, Maritime Structures and Hydrology	University of Catania
Baudouin Oldenhove	Marketing Responsible	Natagora
Catarina Barata	Corporate Relations Coordinator	WWF/ANP
Christian Pirzer	Managing Director	Endeva
Darian Stibbe	Executive Director	The Partnering Initiative
David Grayson	Professor Emeritus of Corporate Responsibility	Cranfield School of Management
Erica Pann	Executive Director	Beverage Industry Environmental Roundtable
Filip Hebbrecht	Business Relationship Manager	Natuurpunt
Jan Bos	Programme Manager	Natuurmonumenten
Manuel Sapiano	CEO	The Energy and Water Agency Malta
Maria Manuela Oliveira	Water Coordinator	WWF Portugal
Nikos Skondras	Senior Programme Officer	GWP Mediterranean
Rikkert van Erp	Senior Account Manager Business Engagement	WWF Netherlands
Srđan Ossowski-Janjušić	Head of Development, Corporate Partnerships & Philanthropy	Caritas Austria
Tamás Gruber	Freshwater Programme Manager	WWF Hungary
Uros Delic	Corporate Engagement Manager	WWF Adria
Wouter van Dun	Product Owner Recreation & Partnership Manager	Natuurmonumenten
Zuzana Sedlakova	Corporate Engagement Coordinator	WWF Slovakia

* The experts interviewed are speaking in a personal capacity and do not represent the views of their respective organisations.

Coca-Cola System and Value Chain Stakeholders Interviewed

Name	Title	Organisation
Galya Tsonkova	Head of Sustainability, Governance, Reporting & Nature Programmes	Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Company
Julien Coignac	CSR Director	Cristal Union
Meltem Tol	Sustainability Senior Director PACS, Eurasia & Middle East	The Coca-Cola Company
Therese Noorlander	Sustainability Director Industry	Grundfos
Venkat Iyer	Senior Director for Climate Resilience	The Coca-Cola Company
Willibald Kaltenbrunner	Managing Director	EY Denkstatt

We'd like to thank all again who generously shared their insights for this report, including those who are not listed above, where their organisational policies do not support public attribution.



About Coca-Cola Europe

Coca-Cola Europe represents the European subsidiaries of The Coca-Cola Company.

The Coca-Cola Company (NYSE: KO) is a total beverage company with products sold in more than 200 countries and territories. We sell multiple billion-dollar brands across several beverage categories worldwide. Our portfolio of sparkling soft drink brands includes Coca-Cola, Sprite and Fanta. Our water, sports, coffee and tea brands include Dasani, smartwater, vitaminwater, Topo Chico, BODYARMOR, Powerade, Costa, Georgia, Fuze Tea, Gold Peak and Ayataka. Our juice, value-added dairy and plant-based beverage brands include Minute Maid, Simply, innocent, Del Valle, fairlife and AdeS. We're constantly transforming our portfolio, from reducing sugar in our drinks to bringing innovative new products to market. Our company's purpose is to refresh the world and make a difference.

We seek to positively impact people's lives and communities through water replenishment, packaging recycling and improved sourcing practices across our supply chain. We have been locally producing in Europe since 1919 and we run operations alongside our bottling partners from Antwerp to Zagreb. With our bottling partners, we directly employ 39,000 colleagues and support another 783,000 jobs across our value chain in Europe⁽¹⁾.

For more information, please visit: www.coca-cola.eu



About GlobeScan

GlobeScan is a global insights and advisory firm specializing in trust, sustainability, and engagement. We equip clients with insights to navigate shifting societal and stakeholder expectations, crafting evidence-based strategies that reduce risks and create value for their organizations and society. Our purpose is to co-create a sustainable and equitable future. Established in 1987, we have offices in Cape Town, Hong Kong, Hyderabad, London, Paris, San Francisco, São Paulo, Singapore, and Toronto. GlobeScan is a participant of the UN Global Compact and a Certified B Corporation.

www.globescan.com

Contact

Jan Burger, Senior Director, Water and Nature,
Coca-Cola Europe

janburger@coca-cola.com

Pendragon Stuart, Director, GlobeScan

pendragon.stuart@globescan.com

Media Contact

Violetta Scola, Senior Communications Manager,
Coca-Cola Europe

vscola@coca-cola.com

Stacy Rowland, Director, Marketing and
Communications, GlobeScan

stacy.rowland@globescan.com

Lead Coca-Cola authors: Wouter Vermeulen, Jan Burger and Sofia Kilifi

Lead GlobeScan authors: Pendragon Stuart, Perrine Bouhana and Curran Cunningham

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Coca-Cola Services sa/nv, chaussée de Mons 1424, 1070 Brussels, Belgium.

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⁽¹⁾ Numbers reflect total European operations in 41 markets.