

Alumni Conference Report: Private Sector Development in Times of Multiple Crises

Introduction

The Alumni Conference served as a platform for participants hailing from diverse developing economies, including regions like Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa. During this conference, these individuals shared their first-hand experiences and insights related to the paramount topic of private sector development, particularly in the face of multiple crises. The discussions were centered on the identification of common challenges, the exploration of potential solutions, and the meaningful connection of these issues to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Rodrigo Chicas

El Salvador's Educational Challenge: The first presenter, Rodrigo Chicas, shed light on El Salvador's daunting problem of limited access to higher education, revealing that a staggering 88.11% of the population is denied this opportunity.

Innovative Solution: In response to this challenge, Chicas put forth the idea that the country should invest more in education, especially in technical schools and the development on new technical careers, and their promotion. Currently technical studies are not so popular in the country, but in countries like Norway represent about the 40% of higher education enrollment (because of the short duration). Furthermore a firm in El Salvador called Applaudo is offshoring coding services, growing fast and requiring programming professionals.

The Challenge of Transformation: He emphasized the challenge of changing the mindset in a society where normally most of the college students, study 5 year careers, and the other part of the society has weak bases in school or think that studying a career doesn't pay well.

Global Opportunities: Chicas envisioned a remarkable opportunity – the potential to expand reach by offering technical studies in Programming, Data Science and related topics. This approach not only broadens the local market but extends internationally.

Ahmed Muhammad Naeem

Economic Blow: The second presenter, Ahmed Muhammad Naeem, highlighted the grave economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on his country. This catastrophe resulted in massive layoffs, particularly in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which struggled to survive. The overall resilience of SMEs remained alarmingly low.

Complex Challenges: Naeem discussed the formidable challenges faced by his country, including a shrinking job market, a dire need for improved infrastructure, and a reduction in public-private partnerships (PPPs).

Solutions on the Horizon: To address these issues, Naeem advocated for policy reforms and sustainable solutions. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of sharing research and expertise to promote resilience and recovery.

Digital Opportunities: Naeem identified digitalization as a key opportunity. Through digitalization, costs could be reduced, and borders could be crossed, offering potential solutions to many of the challenges encountered in his region.

Ssenteza Christine Nakato

Navigating Disruptions: Ssenteza Christine Nakato, who works at the Green SME (a non-governmental organization), discussed challenges brought about by epidemics, the pandemic, political instability, and social unrest. Additionally, she noted issues of exclusion and discrimination faced by certain groups.

Adapting Business Models: However, Nakato also highlighted an opportunity in the face of constant disruptions – the necessity for business models to adapt and change.

Digital Innovation: She further noted the potential for implementing eco-tourism online, leveraging the power of digitalization, and reaching a broader audience.

Inclusive Solutions: To tackle these challenges, Nakato underscored the importance of public-private partnerships for SMEs and encouraged the development of supply chains focusing on innovation, technology, and competitiveness. She emphasized the importance of gender inclusion in these efforts.

Gorkhali Sanjay Prasad

Employment Challenge: Gorkhali Sanjay Prasad reported that only 60% of the working population in his region was employed in formal jobs.

Complex Challenges: He attributed this to issues like informality, natural disasters, rising costs, disruptions in traditional business practices, and the low morale of the private sector.

Innovating for the Future: Prasad saw opportunities in innovation through the digitalization of processes and business models, especially as rising costs may encourage local production and consumption. He also highlighted the growing relevance of renewable energies.

Nguyen Thi Huong

Strategic Planning Dilemmas: Nguyen Thi Huong discussed the struggles of companies and organizations in managing their strategic planning.

Opportunities in Outsourcing: She saw an opportunity in marketing services outsourcing and adopting a B2B approach to streamline strategic planning.

Betancur Betancur David

Economic Challenges: Betancur Betancur David identified rising inflation, migration challenges, guerrilla conflicts, drug trafficking, and escalating costs as significant challenges in his region.

Harnessing Migrant Potential: To address these challenges, he suggested harnessing the economic potential of migrants for local economic development. Additionally, he proposed fostering the IT sector, supporting entrepreneurship, and emphasizing gender inclusion.

Vu Hoang Ha

Operational Challenges: Vu Hoang Ha faced challenges such as high operating costs, an influx of war refugees, and limited resources.

Labor Demand: Ha pointed out that the aging workforce had led to increased demand for labor, which could be leveraged as an opportunity.

Shared Challenges

The conference discussions highlighted several shared challenges among the presenters:

- **Opportunities for International Expansion:** All presenters recognized the potential for international market entry.
- **Need for Academic Collaboration:** Collaborative efforts with academia were identified as crucial for addressing various challenges.
- **Reduced Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Many regions expressed concerns about diminishing PPPs.
- **Widespread Informal Economy:** Participants recognized the prevalence of informal economies as a shared concern.
- **Limited Networking Opportunities:** Various barriers, including those related to technology, hindered networking opportunities.
- **Transparency and Clear Processes:** Ambiguity and a lack of clarity in processes were issues across the board.
- **Inclusion Challenges:** All presenters highlighted the challenges of providing equal opportunities for all segments of the population.
- **Limited Projections and Vision:** Presenters acknowledged the difficulty in forecasting future developments.
- **Digitalization Opportunities:** Despite challenges, everyone saw digitalization as a substantial opportunity, although its progress was slow in their home countries.

Potential Solutions

Across the presentations, potential solutions were discussed in various contexts, including:

- **Business Model Redesign:** Many presenters advocated for a redesign of traditional business models.
- **Goal-Oriented Management:** Emphasizing a focus on clear goals and objectives.
- **Research and Expertise Sharing:** Encouraging knowledge exchange.
- **Enhancing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Collaborative efforts between public and private sectors were highlighted as a solution.
- **Stress Management Measures:** Strategies for coping with high-stress environments.
- **Inclusion Initiatives:** Efforts to provide equal opportunities for all.

- **Development-Oriented Migration/Offshoring:** Leveraging the potential of migration for economic development.
- **Training and Skills Development:** Enhancing workforce skills and capabilities.
- **Professional Networking:** Encouraging connections and collaborations within the professional sphere.

Potential for Partnerships

In exploring solutions, there were also identified potential partnership opportunities:

- **IT Sector Capacity Building:** Collaborations to enhance the capacity of the IT sector.
- **Access to International Finance:** Opportunities to secure international financial support.
- **South-to-South Collaboration:** Collaborative efforts within developing regions.
- **Inclusive/Gender Capacity Development:** Initiatives for gender inclusivity and capacity development.

Linkages with SDGs

The presenters' experiences and solutions were linked to several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals): Collaboration in professional networks, PPPs, and expertise sharing align with this goal.

SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality): Development-oriented migration, business model redesign, and inclusion efforts contribute to reducing inequality.

SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Goal-oriented management and stress management measures have implications for health and well-being, as well as economic growth.

SDG 4 (Quality Education): Research and expertise sharing, as well as skills development, align with this education-focused goal.

All of these initiatives are united under the broader umbrella of **SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)**, underscoring the interconnectedness of the challenges and opportunities discussed in the conference with the overarching goal of promoting sustainable industry, innovation, and infrastructure for global development and prosperity.