

Article

Ethical Partnership between Representatives of Institutions in the Implementation of Sustainable Development Projects

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ABSTRACT

Agenda 2030 underscores the necessity of a long-term perspective in project implementation and emphasises the facilitation of effective partnerships among diverse institutions based on their characteristics, cumulative experiences, and resource constraints. The study consists of two stages. The first stage involves a literature analysis, using Scopus, Web of Science, and the KnowSDGs web platform. The second stage covers the visualisation of interactions between leading institutions for the implementation of sustainable development projects. Colour coding was used to visualise the components of the ethical partnership model. The paper underlines central sustainable development values such as justice, responsibility, freedom, dignity, democracy, life, quality of life, safety, and environmental stewardship. Ethical leadership alleviates societal tensions and fosters a culture of ethical collaboration, thereby facilitating the realisation of SDGs across economic, social, and environmental domains. To execute sustainable development projects, ethically grounded partnerships are formed among institutional representatives. The emergence of such ethical partnerships is a distinct goal and a means of achieving sustainable development objectives. The efficacy of ethical partnerships lies in upholding institutional ethics, supporting one another across management levels, and exemplifying ethical values in forging new partnerships. The proposed ethical partnership model offers specialists a blueprint for cultivating sustainable intersectoral partnerships rooted in shared values to alleviate society's scepticism towards institutional endeavours in sustainable development.

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KEYWORDS: sustainable development; partnership; ethical partnership; leadership; social change; sustainable project

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) represent a global vision for future society, acknowledging the impact of contemporary human activities on the quality of life of generations to come. Partnerships that arise to achieve SDGs aim to improve life through the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. This article proposes an approach to foster effective intersectoral partnerships that involves observing general ethical norms that are comprehensible and acceptable across all spheres of society.

Previous research demonstrates that most often, in the context of sustainable development, scientists consider partnerships from two points of view: (1) as a sustainable development goal (SDG 17), and (2) as a specific tool for achieving SDGs in various sectors. Most researchers consider a systemic understanding of sustainable development goals through partner networks [1,2]. Researchers view partnerships as a foundation for societal efforts to achieve SDGs [3–6]. Partners should focus on obtaining economic results and creating social benefits for future generations, which requires partners to comply with ethical standards when making managerial decisions [7,8].

In intersectoral partnerships, each institution represents a sector leader with appropriate powers and is responsible for coordinating and implementing sustainable development projects. The complexity of leaders' decision-making and the implementation of managerial decisions are related to the specifics of the activity of each institution. Therefore, cooperation requires transparency and fairness among those involved in implementing such projects [9,10].

Ethical partnerships are essential in achieving SDGs and ensuring that cooperation is effective, fair, and inclusive, meeting both human and environmental needs [11]. Through such partnerships, it is possible to ensure that all stakeholders adhere to high standards, including transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights. Ethical partnerships emphasise joint responsibility, inclusiveness, and blurring boundaries between stakeholders such as businesses, the state, and non-governmental organisations [12]. Thanks to ethical partnerships, it becomes possible to attract resources and expertise to solve the complex challenges of sustainable development. Community-led initiatives play a critical role in achieving SDGs through local action and partnerships [13]. These initiatives often operate in local networks, promoting sustainable practices, influencing local governance, and demonstrating proactive and creative ways to achieve SDGs. Successful partnerships require effective leadership and a willingness to invest time, innovate, and be creative. Partnerships should complement each other, avoid duplication, and be consistent with national and international governance frameworks. Clear goals, transparency, and accountability are necessary to achieve ethical partnerships.

This study aims to find effective forms of cooperation between institutional representatives from the main spheres of society to implement sustainable development projects. The research addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the significance of partnerships as tools for achieving sustainable development goals, and how does including partnership as SDG 17 contribute to sustainable development?

RQ2. What are the unique characteristics of intersectoral partnerships when implementing the central development strategy?

RQ3. What are the key leadership features and their role in equitable decision-making for implementing sustainable development projects?

RQ4. What are the prerequisites for effective collaboration among leading institutions in implementing projects for the sustainable development of communities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical partnership is essential for implementing sustainable development projects and ensuring that cooperation is fair, inclusive, and responsible to society and the environment. All participants in the process, including companies, government bodies, public organisations, and the local population, should participate in decision-making and work together to achieve common goals. Ethical partnership also considers future generations' needs and interests, emphasising its long-term orientation and sustainability. In an ethical partnership, mutual trust, transparency, and open communication are required to build positive and stable relationships between participants. Ethical partnership is the basis for creating effective and sustainable cooperation mechanisms that contribute to the sustainable development of society [14–16].

Several critical theoretical approaches can be used to investigate ethical partnerships in the context of implementing sustainable development projects. The theory of interested parties (stakeholder theory) emphasises the importance of considering the interests of all parties interested in the decision-making process [17,18]. This approach includes shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and the environment. In the context of sustainable development, this theory emphasises the need for an ethical attitude towards all participants in the partnership. According to corporate social responsibility (CSR) theory, companies must comply with the law and voluntarily undertake social responsibility obligations [19,20]. That is, companies should actively promote sustainable development through their partnerships. The theory of sustainable development considers sustainable development as a process that satisfies the current generation's needs without jeopardising future generations' ability to satisfy their needs [21,22]. This theory emphasises the need for ethical partnerships that consider the long-term environmental and social impacts of projects.

This study investigates ethical partnerships between institutional representatives for implementing sustainable development projects through three theories: stakeholder theory, CSR theory, and sustainable development theory. Each theory reflects key aspects of ethical partnership and its impacts on sustainable development, so we used all three theories to determine the criteria for selecting research results. Stakeholder theory is particularly relevant to the study of ethical partnerships in sustainable development projects since it emphasises the importance of considering all stakeholders' interests and influences. This theory promotes an ethical approach to decision-making, ensuring the interests of all parties are taken into account rather than prioritising the needs of one group.

In sustainable development, stakeholder theory aligns with values such as equity, accountability, and inclusiveness. It supports the idea that ethical leadership and partnership can ease societal tensions and foster a culture of ethical cooperation, thereby contributing to achieving SDGs in the economic, social, and environmental spheres. By adopting this theory, this research aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how cross-sectoral partnerships can be structured and managed to ensure equity, transparency, and mutual benefit. This approach is critical to achieving balanced and ethical partnerships that can address the complex challenges of sustainable development and contribute to the long-term well-being of society.

In summary, ethical partnerships play a critical role in implementing sustainable development projects. Applying stakeholder theory, CSR theory, and sustainable development theory can help build fair, inclusive, and responsible relationships between participants. This study emphasises the need for various actors' participation, considering future generations' needs, and strengthening mutual trust and transparency since ethical partnerships are vital for creating effective and sustainable cooperation mechanisms to achieve sustainable development and preserve natural resources.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research consists of two stages. In the first stage, we conducted a literature analysis using Scopus, Web of Science, and the web platform KnowSDGs (Knowledge Base for the Sustainable Development Goals). These databases were chosen for the following reasons. Scopus is one of the largest databases of scientific works and citations of peer-reviewed literature, covering various scientific disciplines [23,24]. Web of Science is a well-known scientific resource that provides access to many high-quality peer-reviewed journals, so it was used to ensure the representativeness and reliability of selected studies [25,26]. KnowSDGs is a specialised web platform dedicated to SDGs. It provides comprehensive information, resources, and tools to support the understanding, monitoring, and implementation of SDGs [27,28]. The platform aims to facilitate

collaboration among stakeholders, including governments, organisations, and individuals, to drive sustainable development initiatives effectively. Using analysis, synthesis, and empirical methods, we discovered patterns of interaction between partnership and leadership.

In the second stage of the research, we graphically visualised the processes of interaction between representatives of leading institutions involved in the implementation of sustainable development projects. We used colour coding [29,30] to visually represent key components to create a balanced model for ethical partnership.

The research approach has limitations, including the following: coverage of not all existing views on sustainable development, the subjective bias of the authors, and the limited time lag of the studies selected for analysis. To overcome these limitations, we included a more comprehensive range of studies and articles covering different aspects and periods. Several approaches were used to overcome the authors' personal biases. First, we applied transparent and objective criteria for including and excluding sources for analysis. Second, the literature selection process was documented in detail, including discussion and reasons for choosing or rejecting studies, providing transparent documentation to support the decisions made. Moreover, the authors' different scientific backgrounds ensured balance in judgment and the minimisation of individual prejudices.

RESULTS

The concept of sustainable development as a harmonious process of social development within environmental limits began in 1972. Sustainable development is essential for society in social, economic, and environmental aspects [31,32]. Sustainable development reflects an effort to balance economic growth, environmental integrity, and social well-being [2].

The United Nations (UN) is the leading responsible institution that supports and implements the concept of sustainable development throughout the world. Several documents have been published to support the step-by-step achievement of sustainable development within specified periods. The report derived from the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972 emphasises the need to maintain a balance between economic development (reducing poverty) and environmental protection (improving the ecological conditions of soil and water) [33]. The Our Common Future document, better known as the Brundtland Report 1987, defines the concept of sustainable development for the first time as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [34]. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992 [35] imposes the duty to preserve the environment and emphasises the need to develop partnerships between the public and private sectors and society. The report prepared by the IAEG-SDG Interlinkages Workstream

states interactions between the social, economic, environmental, and institutional domains [36].

Table 1. Sustainable development goals by period [37,38].

Period	Goals
2000–2015	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
	Achieve universal primary education
	Promote gender equality and empower women
	Reduce child mortality
	Improve maternal health
	Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
	Ensure environmental sustainability
	Global partnership for development
2015–2030	No poverty
	Zero hunger
	Good health and well-being
	Quality education
	Gender equality
	Clean water and sanitation
	Affordable and clean energy
	Decent work and economic growth
	Industry, innovation and infrastructure
	Reduced inequalities
	Sustainable cities and communities
	Responsible consumption and production
	Climate action
	Life below water
	Life on land
	Peace, justice and strong institutions
	Partnerships for the goals

Table 1 provides a chronological overview of sustainable development goals addressing societal challenges. All SDGs are interconnected due to the human-oriented nature of the concept of sustainable development. From 2000 to 2015, the UN identified eight directions for developing society; from 2015 to 2030, the UN expanded this list to 17 SDGs. These goals can be grouped in different ways:

1. By aspect: economy (goals 8–10 and 12), society (goals 1, 3–5, 11, and 16), environment (goals 2, 6, 7, and 13–15), and governance (goal 17) [39]. Similarly, Ali Karnib notes four dimensions (society, economy, environment, and management) for SDGs [40].
2. Using the classification of the Stockholm Resilience Centre, which studies the dynamic processes between man and the planet: economic dimension (goals 8–10 and 12), social dimension (goals 1–5, 7, 11, and 16), ecological dimension (goals 6 and 13–15), and other (goal 17) [41].

Ukrainian experts in entrepreneurship and export support this classification [42].

Based on the classifications above, SDG 17 is interconnected with other SDGs and serves as a tool for their implementation (Figure 1).

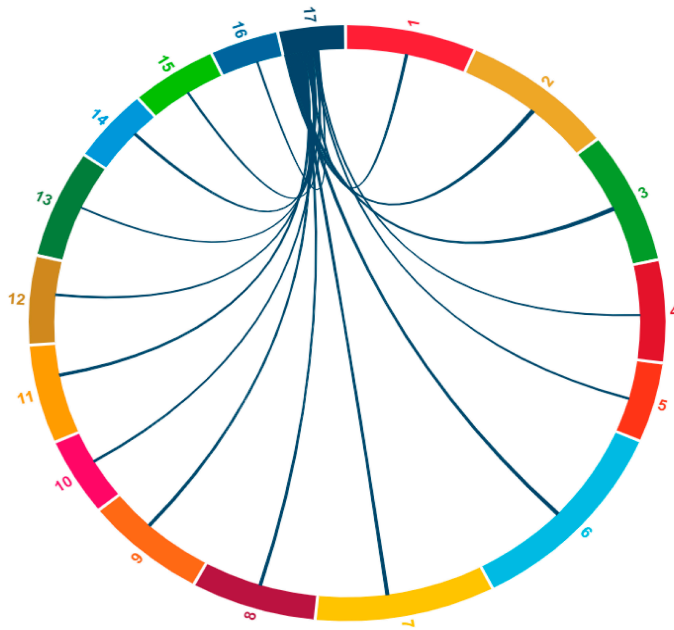


Figure 1. Relationships between SDG 17 and other SDGs [43].

SDG 17 (partnership) plays a unique role in supporting sustainable development as it is a prerequisite for effectively implementing all SDGs. In the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly [44], an integrated approach was indicated for all new sustainable development goals involving close interconnections and many cross-cutting elements. The Sustainable Development Agenda involves the active participation of governments, the private sector, and civil society, as well as partnerships between them to mobilise available resources to achieve the set goals. These partnerships should effectively combine economic, social, and environmental needs and responsibilities [45]. During the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, participants emphasised that cross-sectoral industry partnerships are the primary tool for implementing SDGs. This emphasises the comprehensive involvement needed to distribute resources among all spheres of society [46].

In the report commissioned by the European Environment Agency, experts noted the equal importance of economic, social, and environmental goals. This approach creates challenges and opportunities for comprehensively implementing SDGs [47]. Therefore, it is necessary to forecast and influence the synergistic effect of initiating and implementing sustainable development projects. Critical components for the effective, efficient, and consistent implementation of SDGs are resource provision,

effective management systems, institutions, and partnerships between them [6].

Government, communities, and businesses must be involved to achieve SDGs [48]. The task of the government is to create the conditions for transforming SDGs into specific national and local goals that can be approved at the legislative level. It should be a roadmap for the organisation of activities at all levels of government, starting with the national government and ending with local authorities. One example of implementing this approach is the creation of national commissions to adapt SDGs to the specifics of a country and take responsibility for their implementation [49,50].

Implementing projects to achieve SDGs requires financial support, which is usually provided by businesses. In implementing SDGs, businesses should have an economic effect that does not undermine the ecological basis of the state. This requires awareness of the values of each area and strategic vision in management. In addition, businesses influence the external environment by interacting with the wider business environment [51].

In achieving SDGs, the main challenge for institutions is finding optimal management solutions that contribute towards achieving all goals. The optimal use of resources requires introducing innovations [5], justifying the chosen leadership style, and reducing social tensions in society. Thus, partnerships for sustainable development, like the very concept of sustainable development, are three-dimensional and involve all components' mutual influence and interaction. This structure provides both threats and opportunities to achieve SDGs (Figure 2).

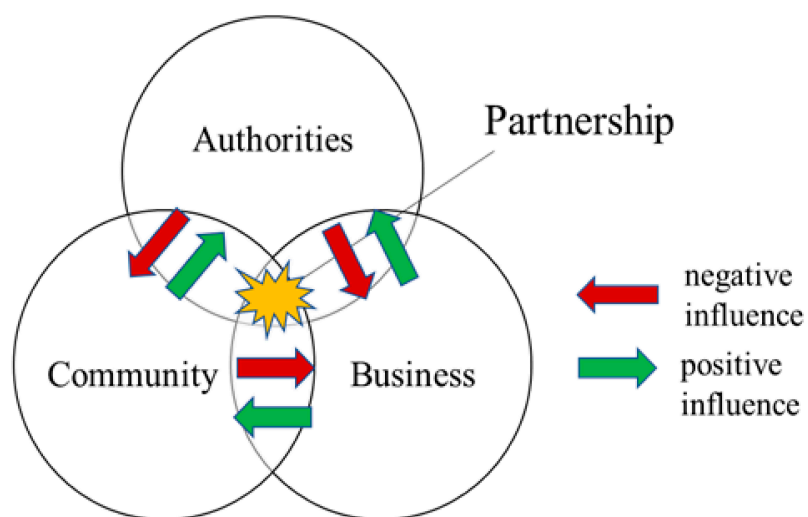


Figure 2. Interplays between core institutional partnerships for sustainable development.

Balanced development across the three pillars of sustainable development requires partnership between the key institutions, including government, community, and businesses. The nature of this partnership significantly influences the attainment of SDGs. Given the complexity of

intersectoral partnerships, the representatives of each institution must adhere to ethical standards that accommodate the interests of all stakeholders. According Ryan et al. (2023) the morality and materiality inherent in places repeatedly reset the reference points for partners [52]. Typically, dialogue entails debates, the effectiveness of which depends on the quality of the argumentation of the parties involved. Partners should possess expertise in their respective fields [53] and adhere to the rules of ethical partnership and the principle of justice.

It is worth noting that many factors negatively affect ethical partnerships. The main ones include the insufficient level of transparency in decision-making, the asymmetric influence of power between partners, and the uneven distribution of resources. When information about one partner's activities, goals, and financial status is withheld or incomplete, other partners may feel cheated or limited in their ability to make informed decisions. Both regular public reporting on project progress and open access to information for all participants, especially in early project stages, are recommended to avoid such situations. Asymmetric power influences between organisations, governments, and communities can also hinder effective partnerships. When one party has significantly more influence or access to resources, this can cause conflicts and dissatisfaction among partners. To avoid this, it is necessary to ensure equal access to resources and information for all partners and create conditions for equal dialogue and joint decision-making.

Another problem that can arise is the uneven and unequal distribution of resources and opportunities between partners. If one party benefits more or has more power to influence the course of the project, this can cause imbalance and conflict within the partnership. It is essential to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of resources so that all partners have equal opportunities to contribute, make decisions, and benefit from joint activities.

To mitigate the described problems, it is also possible to involve external experts and facilitators who can help resolve conflicts and promote transparent and equal dialogue between partners. It is necessary to develop clear rules and protocols of cooperation to support transparency, the fair allocation of resources, and effective decision-making.

An ethical partnership between institutions is an effective tool for implementing SDGs as it minimises intersectoral imbalance. Researchers [47] note that partnership implies the existence of connections and agreements from political, philosophical, and ethical points of view. In [54], the authors note an example of a successful partnership between government, businesses, and citizens for implementing sustainable agriculture, transport, and trade development projects. Ethical partnerships entail direct engagement between institutions through appointed representatives who oversee the implementation of management decisions. These representatives are leaders in their

respective institutions and bear responsibility for implementing collaborative projects. Therefore, leadership and ethical intersectoral partnerships are prerequisites for achieving SDGs.

Leadership in Managerial Decisions for Implementing Sustainable Development Projects

Sustainable development as a long-term process requires effective management and support at the legislative level. Sustainable development theory focuses on the coordinated development of the economy, society, and the environment. It has entered the political agenda, meaning that the concept of sustainable development has become an integral part of the activities of governments and organisations [22]. Political and institutional relations are a particularly important dimension for achieving SDGs [55,56]. The effectiveness of political-institutional relations that arise during the implementation of SDGs depends on the effectiveness of the management decisions made and the chosen leadership style.

Leadership is the art of persuading a team of followers to achieve the goals set by the leader. Leaders differ in their leadership style, which is formed by personal characteristics [57]. As a process, leadership combines the influence of the leader and their skills in forming an effective team using followers' motivation to achieve the goals set by the organisation [58]. Achieving SDGs is a complex challenge for society. It, therefore, requires leaders to apply approaches not only to obtain financial results, power, and influence but also to create social benefits [7]. Ethical decision-making by leaders ensures not only the satisfaction of current social needs but also reduces the risk of not meeting the needs of future generations [59]. The wise use of available resources now helps ensure a dignified existence for future generations [8]. An ethical leadership style is a model for forming an organisational culture with moral values and supporting ethical decision-making for sustainable development. There is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and organisational effectiveness in ensuring sustainable organisational development [60]. The main principles of ethical leadership are respect, service, justice, honesty, and community [61]. Adherence to these principles ensures a stable result for the leader's management decisions. Conversely, the lack of ethics in management decision-making leads to long-term organisational losses [62]. Examples of unethical leadership include the economic collapse in the 2000s and the economic scandals involving the embezzlement of public resources in the United States [63].

Modelling Ethical Partnerships to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals

To understand the formation of an ethical partnership for achieving sustainable development goals, we examined three critical elements of this process: the role of ethical leaders, the significance of ethical leadership consistency, and the creation of a balanced model of ethical

partnership. We used colour coding in Figures 3–5 to indicate the main participants of an ethical partnership. The leading institutions and their representatives are marked as follows: authorities in green, business in yellow, community in grey, and leaders in red.

The role of ethical leaders

Ethical leaders are pivotal in cultivating an ethical environment and achieving SDGs. Ethical leaders demonstrate high moral standards and integrity in their actions and interactions. Ethical actions and decisions affect the formation of the ethical environment in which people work and live. The proposed model (Figure 3) visualises the formation of ethical leadership as a basis for ethical partnership in the context of achieving SDGs. Intersectoral partnerships involve interactions between representatives of three institutions: authorities, businesses, and the community. Usually, such partnerships take into account any experiences from previous cooperations, providing advantages and disadvantages for the representatives of institutions as well as an understanding of possible results.

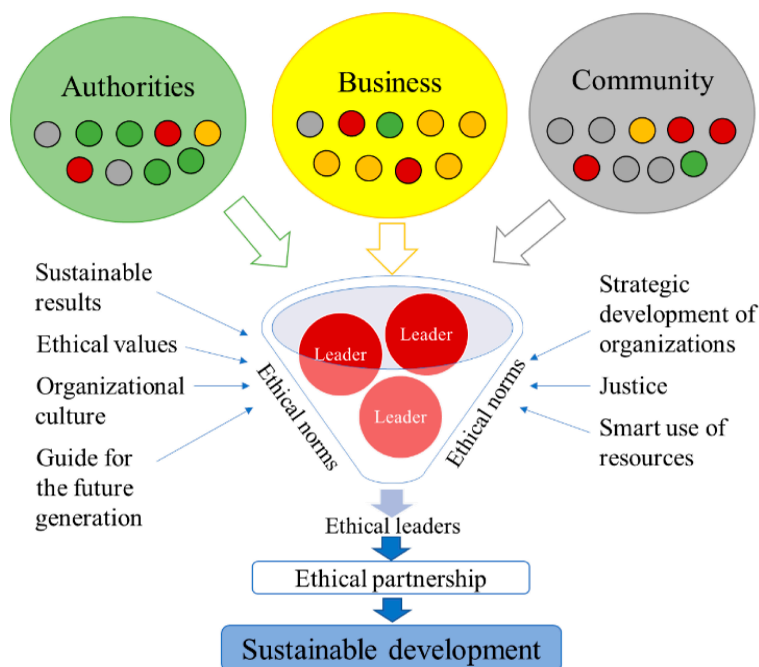


Figure 3. Ethical leaders in the implementation of sustainable development projects (authorities in green, business in yellow, community in grey, and leaders in red).

The significance of ethical leadership consistency

The consistency of ethical leadership across strategic, tactical, and operational decision-making levels is essential for achieving SDGs. Key elements in implementing sustainable development projects are support and lobbying by ethical leaders concerning the necessary management decisions at each organisational level (Figure 4). Such mutual support also allows for monitoring the transparency and fairness of the activities of all

involved parties from various sectors of society. This level of ethical leadership allows for the effective management of sustainable development projects in the intersectoral space.

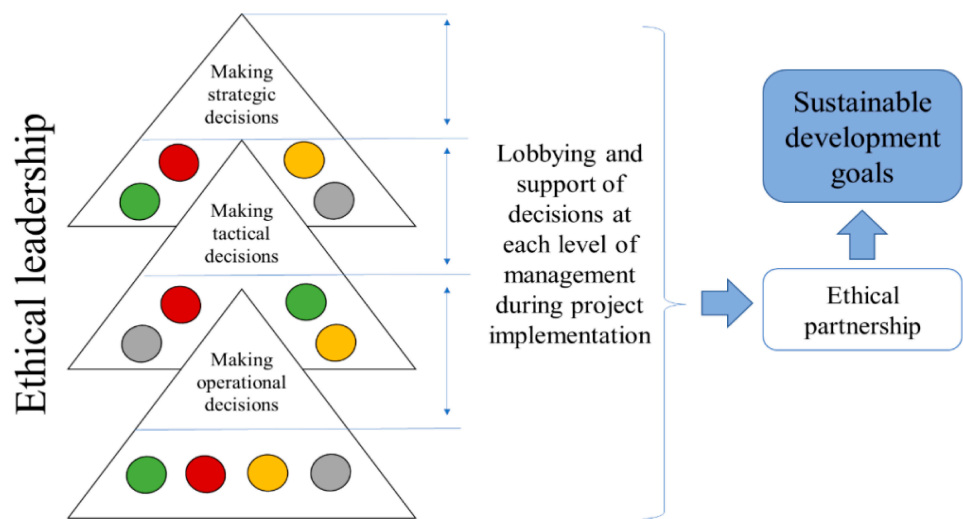


Figure 4. Levels of ethical leadership in the implementation of sustainable development projects (authorities in green, business in yellow, community in grey, and leaders in red).

Creating a balanced model of ethical partnership

This is a fundamental tool for achieving SDGs. The model entails stakeholder collaboration based on mutual respect, trust, and understanding. By embracing the proposed model, parties can maximise synergies and leverage resources to achieve joint sustainable outcomes (Figure 5).

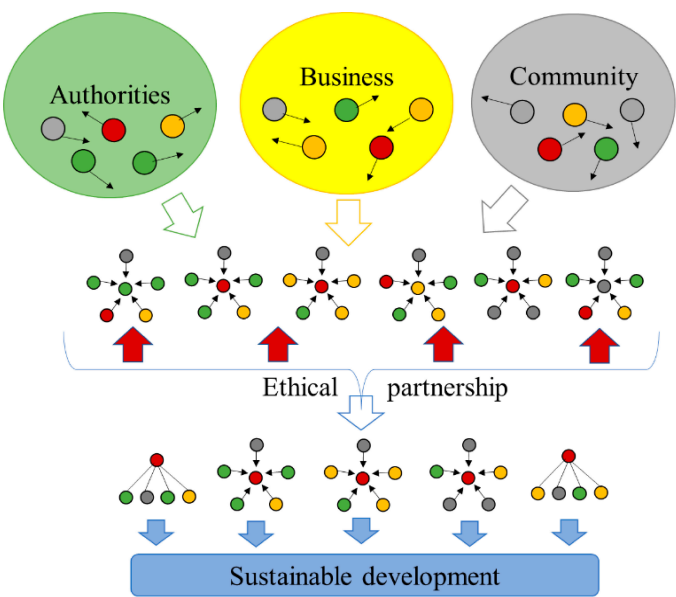


Figure 5. A balanced model of ethical partnership in the implementation of sustainable development projects (authorities in green, business in yellow, community in grey, and leaders in red).

Ethical partnership involves cooperation between critical institutions based on mutual respect, trust, and understanding. Ethical leaders are essential in creating and maintaining an ethical partnership. Such leaders form ethical strategies and standards and contribute to resolving ethical conflicts. Ethical leaders demonstrate the ability to be fair, compassionate, and responsible in their actions. That is, they promote the development of trust and mutual understanding between all parties involved in the partnership and contribute to building sustainable relationships based on ethical principles. Given the special attention paid by society to this issue and the complexity and specifics of sustainable development projects, a necessary condition is transparency in the decisions made by institutions [50,64,65]. Researchers [9] emphasise the importance of ensuring representation from each sector while adhering to ethical standards and integrating them into national programs to achieve SDGs.

DISCUSSION

Many researchers emphasise the importance of partnership as a critical element for achieving sustainable development goals. Our findings are consistent with the assertion [66] that effective cross-sector partnerships are necessary to address modern society's complex challenges. The uniqueness of our research lies in the detailed analysis of the ethical aspects of partnerships. We found that compliance with ethical standards while implementing sustainable development projects creates long-term and effective partnerships. This is supported by successful projects where businesses take on social functions that go beyond the normal conduct of business, thus supporting SDGs.

The UN SDGs are integrated into national programmes, where responsible institutions implement specific projects outlined in these programs. Each sector has its vision and priorities for such projects. The development of one sector will inevitably affect all others within the framework of sustainable development goals. Intersectoral initiatives for implementing sustainable development projects require special attention. These initiatives must align with societal expectations for collaborative efforts, which are characterised by transparency and fairness, thus embodying the principles of ethical partnership and contributing significantly to achieving SDGs.

The responsibility of ethical leaders across institutions is to unify partners towards a common goal. This entails forming a project team comprising leaders from diverse fields of expertise, thus fostering collaboration and ensuring collective progress towards the set goal. For example, successful projects in the private sector leverage their access to innovations to actively address economic, environmental, and social challenges [10,65–67]. In such partnerships for sustainable development, businesses assume social responsibilities extending beyond conventional business practices [67]. An ethical partnership

creates prerequisites for establishing positive cooperation between all sectors of society to achieve SDGs [10,68]. The concept of sustainable development is a widely acknowledged trajectory for development in numerous countries worldwide. To achieve these global goals, governments create national development programmes to improve the lives of every member of society. Scientists explore opportunities for the effective implementation of SDGs at all levels of government and organisations [69,70].

Concerning the formation of SDGs, we uncovered a consistent pattern regarding the inclusion and delineation of partnerships as both a distinct objective and a means of achieving sustainable development goals. According to Agenda 2030 [44], until 2030, there is a need to focus on the long-term perspective when implementing sustainable development projects. This necessitates the promotion and facilitation of effective partnerships between institutions, considering their characteristics, experience, and resources. Solving one problem in one area will likely impact other sectors, serving as both a support and a potential obstacle to achieving progress in other sectors [71].

The concept of sustainable development emphasises the different values of institutions that work on implementing national programmes to achieve SDGs. The central values are justice, responsibility, freedom, dignity, democracy, life, quality of life, safety, and the environment [72]. The present study suggests using ethical norms that are understandable and acceptable to representatives of all institutions as prerequisites for the formation of effective long-term intersectoral partnerships. These representatives should be leaders in their institutions [73] to influence the adoption and implementation of management decisions in sustainable development projects.

CONCLUSION

Ethical partnership is a prerequisite for leaders to effectively collaborate on achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs). Other essential conditions include transparency and the reasoning of the decisions made by institutions. In this context, ethical leaders can reduce societal tension and contribute to creating ethical partnerships.

Colour coding was used to visualise the components of the proposed ethical partnership model. This method made it possible to visually present the components of the partnership process, which can be a valuable tool for further research and the practical implementation of projects. Our results emphasise the need for a systematic approach to analysing and implementing SDGs. It is essential to consider the specifics and experience of each partner involved in a project to optimise cooperation.

Ethical partnership contributes to realising SDGs across the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It facilitates the implementation and adherence to institutional ethical standards, fostering mutual support and transparency at all levels of management. Upholding values and

ethical conduct sets a precedent for establishing new partnerships with integrity and purpose. Experts can use the model proposed by the authors to establish sustainable intersectoral partnerships, fostering a value-oriented approach to implementing projects for sustainable development. The proposed models help minimise society's negative attitude towards the activities of institutions that are active participants in realising SDGs.

In conclusion, our study contributes to the theory and practice of sustainable development by proposing new approaches to forming cross-sectoral partnerships and emphasising the importance of ethical norms in this process. This opens new opportunities for further research and practical applications of our findings in empirical sustainable development projects.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Our study has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, we analysed only studies retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, and the KnowSDGs platform; this may have led to omitting key studies published in other databases. To overcome this limitation, we recommend using a more comprehensive range of databases in future studies.

Second, our analysis was based on analysis, synthesis, and empirical methods, which can be subjective. To reduce the influence of subjectivity, we individually selected relevant studies, then defined standard selection criteria and conducted a joint thorough analysis of the selected studies.

Third, our study is limited to a specific period, which may not reflect recent trends or discoveries in sustainable development. Future studies should consider a more extended period and constantly update the literature database.

For further research, we recommend studying the influence of cultural and regional characteristics on the formation and effectiveness of cross-sectoral partnerships. It is also essential to explore the interaction between different types of partners (government institutions, businesses, and public organisations) in the context of achieving SDGs. Future research could also include analysing specific examples of successful sustainable development projects to identify critical factors of their success. This will enable more detailed and practically oriented recommendations for implementing similar projects in different conditions.

Our study emphasises the importance of ethical norms and a systemic approach to achieving SDGs. Building on our study, further research may explore the network dynamics among leaders forged during collaborative efforts among institutional partners for implementing sustainable development projects. This could include exploring diverse approaches and methods for ethical leadership and intersectoral partnerships across levels.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The study dataset is available from the authors upon reasonable request.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AY and IB designed the study. BK, IB, AY and OK analysed and interpreted the data. OK, IB, AY and BK wrote the paper with input from all authors.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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