Unilever, FCDO and EY share over a decade of public-private partnership insights in new playbook to accelerate impact

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, May 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Unilever, the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and EY have today released the TRANSFORM playbook, a practical 'how-to' guide for public, private and non-profit leaders seeking to build and manage successful public-private partnerships that accelerate impact.

Governments, businesses and NGOs are operating in an increasingly constrained and uncertain environment. The past decade has brought repeated global shocks, from the Covid-19 pandemic and climate-related disasters to geopolitical instability and unprecedented inflation. These pressures are challenging governments to deliver more with less, businesses to innovate and de-risk supply chains, and NGOs to compete for scarce funding even as needs increase. In this context, thoughtful public-private partnerships offer a route forward, allowing organisations to share risk, lower the cost of experimentation and respond to new opportunities in ways that strengthen outcomes for all.

The playbook titled 'How to collaborate for impact', captures lessons from more than a decade of experience supporting impact enterprises across Asia and Africa through TRANSFORM. Published as an open resource, the playbook is designed to help organisations apply and adapt proven approaches to collaboration and programme delivery, strengthening partnerships for lasting impact even in uncertain times. It brings together delivery principles, best practice and case studies, alongside insights from research and ecosystem partners including Acumen and the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship.

-- Rianne Buter, Unilever's VP of Sustainability, said:

"Through TRANSFORM, we've seen how well-designed public-private partnerships can unlock value for all involved. Working alongside the UK Government's FCDO, EY and impact enterprises has helped us to test new business models and explore innovations that can fit within our value chains, while contributing to our sustainability priorities on climate, plastics, nature and livelihoods."

Lessons for building effective impact partnerships

The resource is structured around eight core chapters, offering advice and case studies on how to make a clear case for collaboration and secure senior buy-in, establish strong partnership foundations, and identify and support enterprises in ways that reflect their needs and stage of growth. It also addresses the role of local leadership, the importance of combining flexible funding with business support, and how partnerships can help enterprises overcome barriers to commercial scale through supply chain integration. It concludes with lessons on adapting portfolios over time and sharing insights so others can build on what works.

Key insights include:

- Strong partnerships tend to work best when partners align early on a shared purpose, are clear about what each organisation contributes and gains, and put in place governance that balances accountability with flexibility.

- Impact enterprises can scale faster when flexible grant funding is combined with tailored business support, coaching, and access to corporate, investor and policy networks.

- Bringing enterprises into supply chains is more likely to succeed where programmes invest in enterprise readiness, identify internal corporate champions, and allow time to test proofs of concept rather than pushing prematurely for large contracts.

- Local leadership in sourcing and selection adds value when in-country teams are backed by clear criteria and strong communication and has been linked with more locally rooted enterprises being supported - 88% of those selected by TRANSFORM's local panels had at least one local founder, compared with 53% under global selection.

A legacy of learning as TRANSFORM concludes

TRANSFORM was established in 2015 with a clear ambition: to help impact entrepreneurs test and scale commercially self-sustaining and market driven solutions to global challenges.

Over nearly 11 years, TRANSFORM has supported 160 impact enterprise and research projects across 19 countries in Asia and Africa, reaching more than 20 million people, from business owners and workers to customers and communities, and beating original targets by a third. Examples of enterprise support and success include:

- In Africa, TRANSFORM supported Kasha to scale a confidential e-commerce platform for essential goods and stigmatised health products, improving affordability, expanding agent networks and integrating micro-credit services. Through the project, the platform served over 97,000 customers and built a network of more than 3,000 agents, 57% of whom are women.

- In Indonesia, Alner combined TRANSFORM grant funding with EY teams coaching and collaboration with Unilever brands to strengthen its model and scale low-tech refill solutions, growing from around 500 to more than 1,400 refill stations while generating insights on pricing, consumer behaviour and routes to market.

- In India, through its partnership with TRANSFORM, Atypical Advantage established an offline training academy preparing people with disabilities for work placements, training over 1,200 candidates and supporting 418 into roles across FMCG, automotive and semiconductor sectors.

-- David Woolnough, Deputy Director Research, Tech and Innovation at the UK’s FCDO, said:

“As a major development partner, we know we cannot succeed alone: we need the expertise and innovation of progressive public-private partnerships. By pooling our resources, networks and expertise with committed private sector allies, TRANSFORM has allowed us to support impact enterprises tackling complex challenges across Africa and Asia. And we’ve seen that when sectors work together over the long term, they can genuinely change millions of lives – a powerful lesson for anyone considering similar collaborations.”

Following the successful delivery of its intended outcomes, TRANSFORM concludes in 2026 with a strong legacy of more resilient enterprises and insights to inform future initiatives.

-- Gillian Hinde, EY Global Corporate Responsibility Leader, said:

“TRANSFORM shows what becomes possible when we combine public and private sector strengths to support market driven solutions. By backing impact entrepreneurs with real capital, real expertise and real routes to scale, collaborations like this can change systems and shape a better future for all. We hope TRANSFORM inspires many more bold, cross sector collaborations in the years ahead.”

The playbook was officially launched at the FCDO Global Partnership Conference (19-20 May) through a side event on activating local leadership with participation from enterprises Alner and Gwiji and senior TRANSFORM representatives.

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