

Linda Benraïs, Adjunct Professor at Essec, Director of Governance and Conflict Resolution Programs at IRENE, Paris, and Research Associate, LSE IDEAS

Establishing sustainable partnerships in response to COVID-19

The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of solidarity and encouraging dialogue between civil society government and business on how to respond to the crisis in the immediate term, as well as for achieving better SDG and ESG long-term outcomes? What are the first lessons learned and emerging good business practices that can shape future 'COVID-19' partnerships? Some examples from French companies are instructive:

Schneider Electric¹, a large multinational company in the supply and automation of digital solutions, is attentive to the vulnerabilities surrounding its value chain and has committed to making these vulnerabilities visible and improving crisis resilience. It has set up a "[Tomorrow Rising Fund](#)" with some 400 partners in 60 countries working to help young people return to school. In addition, it aims to provide food, protect the elderly while working on the development of educational programmes.

For Veolia², another large transnational company in services such as water management, waste management and energy services, the emphasis is on ethical [commitments](#) that should be at the heart of partnerships, which go well beyond compliance and should also not be locked into excessive procedures.

For Total³, a major energy company in the production and marketing of fuels, natural gas and low-carbon electricity, one example of how companies can measure their social commitment is the way they manage community dissent, such as the number of complaints they receive; the follow-up of these complaints, for example by setting up mechanisms that allow local communities to follow a process to file a complaint and then resolve it through dialogue and amicable conflict resolution in compliance with environmental and social [standards](#).

Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have been mixed, combining philanthropy and short-term assistance with engagements that seek to improve long-term human security conditions. From this pandemic, a solidarity is gradually emerging between the State, businesses and civil society, with the concern to protect the most vulnerable at the heart of its priorities. A new form of governance based on strong ethical issues is also taking shape via partnerships that focus on competitiveness and are centered on a genuine, inclusive and action-oriented communication strategy. Partnerships are also a way to bring multilateral initiatives to the local level and to connect different levels of policy and action.

¹ <https://www.se.com>

² <https://www.veolia.com>

³ <https://www.total.com/group>