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Entrepreneurship Diplomacy, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Developing Soft Power ^[1]

Whether intentionally or not, when an entrepreneur founds a venture that responds to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), they are engaging in public diplomacy.

How so?

For investors and customers, the founding team is as important as the product or service being offered. Investors look beyond the strength of the idea alone to the ability of the founders to turn that idea into impactful results: do they have a proven track record, the right credentials? Have they demonstrated grit along their journey, and can they work as a team? For consumers, many of whom are increasingly interested in the ethos and impact of what they are purchasing, the founding team is inextricably linked to the end product, how it came to be and what it stands for (or is perceived to stand for).

The opportunity then is twofold.

First, there is a public diplomacy opportunity for start-up founders to draw on the elements of their country's national brand, to sharpen the appeal of their business. For example, this might be a Fijian entrepreneur explaining the link between her own government's strong position on the importance of action on climate (goals 7 and 13), and the alignment to her product offering. Or a Swiss founder highlighting the neutrality of his country and the perspective this offers when explaining his work on a venture linked to strong institutions and partnerships (goals 16 and 17).

Second, the opportunity exists for a government to support and utilize start-ups addressing the UNSDGs in their own country, to multiply their country's impact towards the goals. Through the public and private sector working together in this way, the country's national brand, that mix of values, achievements and aspirations that its projects, will be enhanced.

In sum, this is start-up founders considering national brand, using it to enhance the perception of their venture, and in doing so, creating a virtuous cycle through public diplomacy that contributes to their nation's soft power. Their government, by working with them and considering their own objectives, hastens the pace at which the virtuous cycle is operating.

Now, there is a third opportunity for policymakers considering international strategy, which is to engage in Entrepreneurship Diplomacy.

Entrepreneurship Diplomacy sees the government of *Country A* supporting the development of the conditions for entrepreneurship in *Country B*, to achieve their foreign policy goals in diplomacy and international development.

Let us now consider our “Social Entrepreneurship, UNSDG, national brand” virtuous cycle again. *Country A* has been supporting and aligning with start-ups within its borders, that are addressing the UNSDGs, and *Country A*’s national brand has benefited. Next, *Country A* begins supporting and aligning with UNSDG-focused start-ups outside of its borders (in *Country B* and *Country C*). In doing so, it can strengthen the fabric of its ties to these countries at both a government and a citizen level, and it can further its contribution to the UNSDGs. As a result, its national brand will benefit, potentially resulting in greater partnerships between the start-up ecosystems of the countries involved and successful, scalable start-ups wishing to open in *Country A*.

Quite the amplifier to soft power, achieved through public diplomacy and government action in unison.
