

A REVIEW ON PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

In recent years 'partnerships' are increasingly being proposed as a tool for development in both developed and developing countries. The importance of partnerships was emphasized in the Millennium Development Declaration through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002 further endorsed the idea of partnerships. Partnerships in this paper are instruments that enable organizations with different skills and priorities to leverage increased impact through working together than would be possible by working alone. Despite their increasing prominence however, these partnerships are not without problems. Empirical analysis is beginning to confirm anecdotal evidence that such partnerships sometimes come under severe strain and indeed sometimes disintegrate in the face of seemingly insurmountable differences that in fact originate in relatively simple misunderstanding. One commonly suggested remedy for these disappointments is to improve the 'glue' that binds partners together – to develop more effective, more, accountable, and more predictable modes of working together.

Keywords: Partnership, Development, Memoranda, Individuals, Institutions

BACKGROUND

In corporate, public sector and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) literature, the term partnership is used to describe many different kinds of relationships. The lines are often blurred between the vast spectrum of sponsorship to contracts to arrangements based on mutual need.

Public pronouncements about partnership from officials of all sectors

repeatedly refer to phrases such as trust, common vision, and voluntary commitment. Although literature on partnerships has redressed many of these issues, the literature of partnerships often promotes that partnership (given the undeniably positive connotation of the word itself). These concepts are misleading at best and at worst do not actually apply to cross-sector partnership at all.

Partnership therefore, involves two or more organizations that enter into collaborative arrangement based on: synergistic goals and opportunities that address particular issues or deliver specified task that single organizations cannot accomplish on their own, and situations where individual organizations cannot purchase the appropriate resource or competencies purely through a market transaction.

While partnerships hold enormous promise, they are not the panacea to sustainable development as some contend. Rather if the foundations are solid and our expectations realistic about how challenging they are, they are serious tool in the tool box. Tools though only be needed to build project. Partnerships in and of themselves need not be sustainable; it is the activities or projects that organizations undertake together in partnership that hopefully will be.

Cross – sector partnerships are by their very nature unnatural relationships. They bring together very disparate groups (public, private, donor and civil society) to work jointly on a project. It is often suggested that a common vision, mission, goal or overarching objective is necessary to forge a team spirit and create common understanding that will hence forth provide the basis for an over-arching framework between partners.

DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS IN PARTNERSHIPS

Initiatives taken by individual ‘champions’ provide an important impetus to the formation of partnership. Through a combination of approaches, a champion

brings on board other external interest including possibly conflicting interests. A champion can create the momentum required for the formation of relationships with other institutions. In many cases, the strength of lead individuals within partner institutions clearly help to drive the process forward, supported by effective institutional back up.

In addition to providing leadership within a partnership, a champion also provides a focal point for external interests and identifies like-minded individuals in other related institutions. Champions help reduce the layers of management while increasing the capacity for fast track decision making.

The institutional arrangements of partnerships require some form of structured support to ensure that the replacement of a champion in a particular post does not render the relationship either untenable or dysfunctional. Relationships need to be robust enough to withstand the possibility of high individuals staff turn over. The institutional memory of these champions needs to be recorded and kept for open access to inform partner institutions more widely and to leave a clear ‘archive’ for their successors.

This suggests that there should be a natural progression from partnership arrangements between individuals representing organizations to partnership arrangements between institutions themselves.

However, skills alone will not always create a successfully partnership if one partner fails to effectively market the partnership internally and create a welcoming relationship with partner organizations. Reluctance on the part of staff or lack of commitment on the part of

the partnership designate provides clear indicators of challenges ahead. As obvious as this seems, this factor seems to be the often repeated difficulty for partnership approaches. It is therefore, necessary to look at the ability of each partner.

MEETING GOALS FOR PARTNERS

Reviewing the performance of partnerships involves two elements: an assessment of the results of the collaboration and an assessment of how the partners work. An assessment of the results (outputs) may be more straight forward and can draw on a wide variety of readily available assessment frameworks for project evaluation.

Various evaluation frameworks have been proposed for use with partnerships. These include the adaptation of organizational assessment models, cost-benefit analyses and project management tools, such as the logical framework matrix which integrates monitoring and evaluation with planning. The Specific Measurable Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART) criteria have also been put forward to analyze partnerships.

Each partnership has a specific though changing, context that determines its scope and direction. This context can be framed around three interlocking layers: the

- (i) The external environment (as reflected in financial, legal and institutional considerations) that shapes the scope and ambition of partnership.
- (ii) The organization environment (as reflected in each partners scope, mission, strategy and capacity) that dictates the resources the partners

put on the table, their analysis of the opportunity presented, and the level of risk they are willing to undertake; and

- (iii) The individual partner representatives' incentives and disincentives to engage (influenced by their own knowledge, beliefs, interest, position, accountabilities) that dictates the attention and value that they place on the partnership.

The context determines what drives partners to get involved in the first place. These drivers are then negotiated between the parties into desired targets reflected by proposed outputs, outcomes and impacts. The diversity amongst the partners (particularly if they come from different stakeholder groups) should ensure that on-going negotiations within the partnership cover a wide range of viewpoints.

Negotiated targets are then reflected in resource commitments made by each partner and contributions towards decision making. If all partners are actively and effectively meeting their resource commitments and contributing to decision – making, the partnership can thereby be deemed as effective as possible. A partnership will by definition not be successful if the drivers for partners to participate are not sufficiently met as this may result in unilateral decisions by one partner to alter its engagement.

HOW WILL DISPUTES BE RESOLVED?

Building on the need for good and regular communication, an explicit system of conflict resolution can positively impact on

the relationship. This occurs in the short term by raising the confidence of all partners and in the long term by mitigating the potentially damaging effects of unresolved disagreements.

Even with a working system of regular progress reporting and meetings, crises can arise. In the absence of a culture of regular communication and mutual problem solving, crises are almost inevitable. Some crises can be anticipated and may be dealt with by formal provisions in the paper work (MOU). Examples may include:

- (a) Agreed action or procedure in the event that anticipated resources do not materialize;
- (b) Agreed procedure for admitting new partners or for enabling partners to leave; and
- (c) Provision for any partner to call a high – level (management) meeting in the case of unanticipated shocks.

If regular reporting and meetings fail to anticipate and resolve a problem, a more formalized approach to resolving the dispute may be required. In the first instance, local practices and methods of dispute resolution should be considered. Conflict resolution practices from one culture may not work well when mechanically applied elsewhere. One or more of the following options, amended as required, may be appropriate:

- (i) Convening by a senior person or high levels of management.
- (ii) Convening by an outside neutral or respected authority.
- (iii) Mediation

- (iv) Independent fact finding and reporting on specific issues
- (v) Special audit or investigation procedures (e.g. financial conflict).

HOW DOES PARTNERSHIP CHANGE OR TERMINATE?

The most appropriate way to change or end a partnership arrangement will vary depending on the nature of the partnership and the legal context. When setting up any formal management arrangements and drafting paper work, partners should consider what will happen at the end of partnership. Disagreements about how to terminate a partnership can potentially damage what has until that point been a constructive and effective relationship. Sometimes, to avoid such disputes, partners may simply allow a partnership to lapse without a formal conclusion, but this too can result in later misunderstandings. Partners should consider the possibilities and proffered arrangements for modifying or ending the partnership at the start, bearing in mind that not all eventualities can be anticipated – it is the spirit and general mechanisms that will be important.

Some important changes that should be considered include:

- Adding new partners
- Changing direction toward new goals.
- Making new commitments and seeking appropriate funding for such.
- Changing structure
- Removing partners
- Increasing formality
- Terminating work and winding up.

The paper work (MOU) should set out the procedures for making changes to the partnership. This needs to cover minor changes (adjustments to the timescale, alterations in deliverables) and fundamental changes (new partners, partners leaving, significant alterations in scope, timescale and level of resources). The paper work should also describe the process by which a partner leaves the partnership and cover the consequences of this happening (does the name of the partnership have to change, what happens to resources held in common or already committed?).

Example clause regarding change of membership for use in memoranda or an exchange of letters:

“Other organizations may become parties to this non-binding MOU when a majority of members (name of alliance) so agree”

Example clause regarding term and termination:

“This Non-binding MOU becomes effective on the date of signature by all parties and continues until modified by mutual consent or

unless terminated with 60 days written notice by any party”.

“This MOU should be reviewed annually and amended or revised when required”

CONCLUSION

The paper outlines what paper work (MOU) can do for a partnership, discusses how it relates to and is dictated by the modes of operation of the partnership, and provide, some pointers towards issues that partners should address before formalizing their relationship. The discussion may give rise to even more questions, addressing these will ultimately strength the partnership even if it appears to delay the start of operations. Solutions will obviously be context driven and thus this paper has been cautious not to appear too prescriptive. Relationships that bring together vastly different organizations can be difficult and predicting at the start how the relationship will evolve is extremely challenging. On the other hand, recognizing the challenges and building both strength and flexibility into relationship through greater familiarity significantly increases the chances of success.

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