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**Partnership and social progress:  
Multi-stakeholder collaboration in context**

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**PhD (by Research Publications)  
The University of Edinburgh  
2017**



## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. I confirm that the work submitted is my own, except where work which has formed part of jointly-authored publications has been included. Permission has been obtained from all co-authors to use this work and appropriate credit is given within this thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

Leda Stott  
February 2017



## Abstract

'Partnership' has become a buzzword in development circles. The term is used to describe almost any relationship that pools the resources of different actors to address societal challenges and concerns. Because it encompasses such a broad range of perspectives, the contention of this thesis is that partnership can only be fully understood in relation to practice. A critical assessment of a selection of my research publications is used to explore how partnership is interpreted in different contexts, why and by whom, and to what extent it might offer possibilities for achieving social progress. This review finds that partnership can be construed as both a structure and a process, and as a means to an end and an end in itself. Attention thus needs to be given to its instrumental value as a development tool and to its intrinsic worth in cementing social capital. Consideration is given to connections between these different forms of partnership and other development 'solutions'; the complex interplay between external, organisational and individual drivers for multi-stakeholder collaboration, and evidence for the benefits of working in this way. This analysis reveals that it is hard to judge the effectiveness of partnership due to the complexity of different levels of interaction; lack of clarity on goals and motivations for partnering; and, because process-related results generally emerge in the long term, attribution is a challenge. It is thus suggested that assessments of partnership might more usefully focus on methodologies that enhance its potential to generate individual and societal value. The attributes of such 'transformational' arrangements, and how these compare with other collaborative connections, are examined using a typology that builds upon a transactional-transformational partnership continuum. Further investigation into the nature of stakeholder participation, and related power dynamics, indicates that partnership can both promote and embody social progress when participation is carefully facilitated by 'partnership brokers'; embedded in sociohistoric contexts, and based upon open-ended dialogue processes that seek to comprehend different points of view rather than change them. In order to explore this potential more fully, as well as continued research into particular partnership experiences and possible alternatives, more imaginative exchanges of knowledge about working in this way are recommended.



## Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank Carlos Mataix and the core team at the Technical University of Madrid's Innovation and Technology for Development Centre, and my companions at the Partnership Brokers Association; particularly Ros Tennyson who introduced me to this field some twenty years ago, and who has been an inspiration to partnership practitioners everywhere.

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## List of acronyms

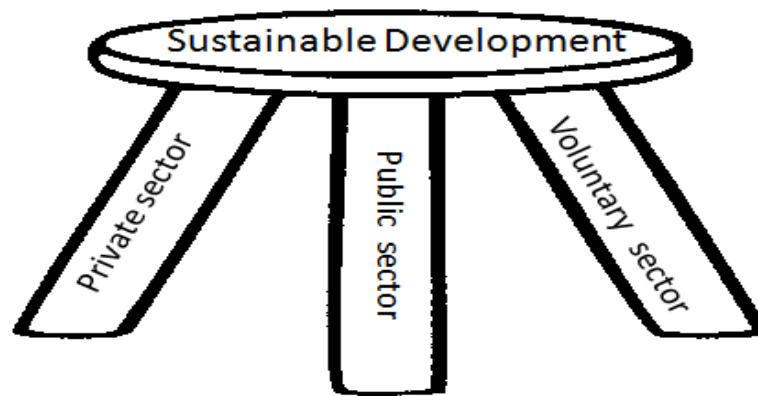
AECID	<i>Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo</i> (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development)
AMP	<i>Acciona Microenergía Perú</i>
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment (South Africa)
BPD	Building Partnerships for Development (in Water and Sanitation)
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
COP	Community of Practice on Partnership in the European Social Fund
CPI	Cambridge Programme for Industry
CPMR	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EC	European Commission
ECCP	European Code of Conduct on Partnership
EC-PREP	European Community Poverty Reduction Effectiveness Programme
ENNA	European Network of National Civil Society Associations
ERDF	European Regional and Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
EWS	eThekwini Water and Sanitation (South Africa)
GIZ	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i> (German Society for International Cooperation)
IBLF	International Business Leaders Forum
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INR	Institute for Natural Resources (South Africa)
LDC	Local Development Company (Ireland)
MDG	Millennium Development Goal

MSP	Multi-Stakeholder Partnership
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PABC	Pan African Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS
PBA	Partnership Brokers Association
PPP	Public Private Partnership
SASA	South African Sugar Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEED	Supporting Entrepreneurs for Environment and Development
SHS	Solar Home System
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise
SPDC	Shell Petroleum Development Company (Nigeria)
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
TEP	Territorial Employment Pact (Austria)
UEAPME	European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WDR	World Disasters Report
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
ZBCA	Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS

## Introduction

### Background to my work

Twenty years ago the term ‘partnership’ signified nothing more to me than a standard dictionary definition of a relationship between two people or a joint business venture.<sup>1</sup> Then, using the metaphor of a three-legged stool, a colleague introduced me to a new interpretation of the word: partnership as a ‘development solution’. Each leg of the stool, I was informed, represented the public, private and voluntary sectors respectively and, by sharing their different resources and competencies, sustainable development could be achieved more effectively and equitably than when each operated separately.



**Figure 1: Partnership as a three-legged stool**

This simplistic representation bemused me. As well as obvious questions about how and where different organisations, groups and individuals might (or might not) sit within each sector, I wondered about context. Surely the ability to achieve a cross-sector balance was dependent upon the environment in which a partnership was situated, including its history, political-economy and social circumstances; the

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<sup>1</sup> A dictionary consultation at the time defined partnership as: ‘1. the state of being a partner or partners; 2. a joint business, 3. a pair or group of partners.’ Partners were described as: ‘1. a person who shares or takes part with another or others, esp. in a business firm with shared risks and profits; 2. a companion in dancing; 3. a player (esp. one of two) on the same side in a game; 4. either member of a married couple, or of an unmarried couple living together’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990:868).

particular theme that was being addressed, and the nature of different stakeholder relationships?

The three-legged stool depiction of partnership was promoted by an organisation that advocated responsible private sector involvement in a post-Cold War ‘mixed economy model’ (Tennyson, 1994a:5).<sup>2</sup> Soon afterwards, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1996) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID, 1997) also spoke about partnership, this time with an appeal for more equitable North-South aid relations between ‘donors’ and ‘recipients’ (Maxwell and Riddell, 1998:259). This was followed by a call for sector wide approaches (SWAps) bringing together government, donors and other relevant stakeholders to develop coordinated approaches in areas such as agriculture, education and health (DFID, 2001).

I was keen to know more: Were these perspectives part of the same trend? Where else was the term partnership being applied and with what hopes, intentions and results? Where did partnership sit in relation to other concepts being posited as development solutions such as outsourcing, privatisation and managerialism or participatory, holistic and bottom-up options that included stakeholder participation and joined-up governance? And how might partnership be distinguished from other collaborative arrangements such as networks, alliances, associations, hubs and coalitions?

My research work in this field thus began with a quest to find out how partnership was understood and applied in different contexts, why and by whom, and how far it might offer genuine solutions to development challenges in practice. This research journey has involved examination of collaborative arrangements among a diverse range of social actors in countries in Africa, Europe and Latin America. The themes that these initiatives have sought to address include unemployment, social exclusion, gender inequality; and improvements and access to basic services such as education, health, and water and sanitation.

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<sup>2</sup> The International Business Leaders Forum (1990-2013) was an international network of business leaders working for ‘good corporate citizenship and sustainable development’.

The overarching backdrop for this exploration has been one of constant change. The tri-sector stool model in Figure 1 has long since been absorbed within a vast range of inter- and intra-organisational partnership arrangements seeking solutions to all manner of economic, social and environmental problems. Since 1992, three United Nations (UN) summits on sustainable development<sup>3</sup> have placed increasing emphasis on the need for partnership between ‘people, governments, civil society and the private sector’ (UN General Assembly, 2012:3). Partnership was posited as central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UN General Assembly, 2000:5)<sup>4</sup> and is currently listed as one of six ‘essential elements’ in the UN sustainable development agenda for 2030 (UN, 2014:20).<sup>5</sup>

As the groundswell of interest in partnership has grown, so have its critics. Some question the positioning of partnership as a ‘development panacea’ while others are concerned about the power exerted by ‘partners’ such as multinational corporations, international development agencies and English-speaking ‘northern experts’, and their failure to engage on equitable terms with ‘Southern’ or ‘local’ stakeholders (Eade, 2010:viii). While such arguments confirm a disjuncture between partnership rhetoric and reality, my research suggests that aspirations for what partnership might offer must nonetheless be taken seriously.<sup>6</sup> For many of the people I have worked with, partnership is viewed as offering important (and sometimes unique) possibilities for the achievement of positive social change. This conviction applies as much to those working collaboratively to improve the livelihoods of small-scale farmers in South Africa and Zambia, or ensure access to health and energy services in remote areas of Guatemala and Peru, as it does to those promoting multi-level governance and social inclusion in the European Union. Any assessment of the meaning and value of partnership must therefore engage with these ‘frontline’ perspectives.

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<sup>3</sup> Rio Earth Summit (1992), World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg (2002) and Rio+20 (2012).

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/global.shtml> (accessed January 12, 2017)

<sup>5</sup> The other elements are justice, people, planet, dignity and prosperity (UN, 2014:24).

<sup>6</sup> De Vries (2007:32) describes this as the need ‘to scrutinise the disjuncture between the desire for development and its banalisation in practice’.

## Critical review focus and approach

This critical review draws upon key findings in a selection of my research publications and analyses them in relation to wider academic and practitioner literature on partnership, and to my ongoing work. The overarching aim of the review is to explore the extent to which partnership might afford opportunities for achieving social progress in different contexts. Although much of my work has been conducted in the development field (particularly in relation to sustainable development), I prefer to use the term ‘social progress’ to describe the overarching goal of the partnership arrangements with which I have worked. As well as highlighting the social nature of these initiatives, this focus seems to better embrace the breadth of places and themes included my work, some of which are overlooked in standard interpretations of development.<sup>7</sup>

Social progress can broadly be defined as:

The capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens, establish the building blocks that allow citizens and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential (Social Progress Initiative).<sup>8</sup>

Thin (2002:83) suggests that the concept includes four mutually reinforcing components: social justice, solidarity, participation and security. These elements encompass a focus on human development and the expansion of capabilities that enable people to ‘live the lives they have reason to value’ (Sen, 1999:293);<sup>9</sup> fairness and the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for all; social capital and the value gained from participating in networks and relationships,<sup>10</sup> as well as livelihood security and safety from physical threats (Thin, 2002:83, 89).

As social progress clearly needs to be framed within a long-term perspective (Lempert, 2016), this review centres on the *potential* of partnership to promote

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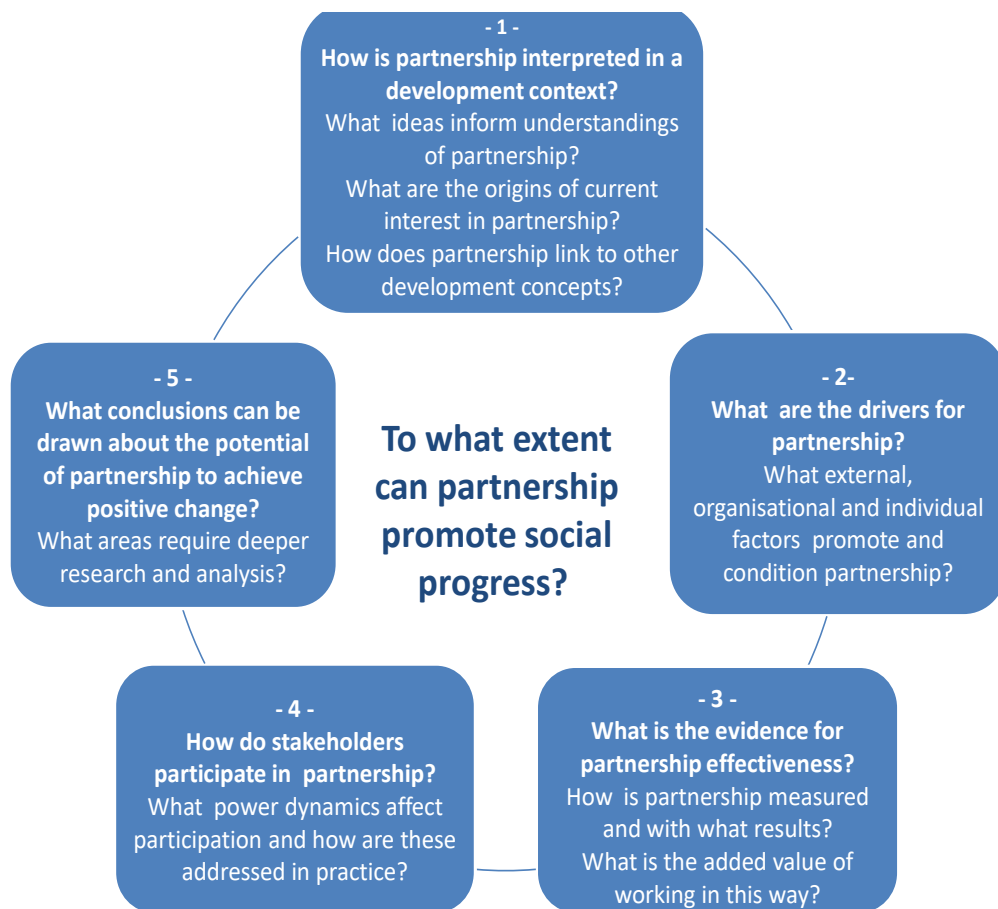
<sup>7</sup> For example the distinction between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries, and a sense that the study of development is largely concerned with challenges faced in the latter. For more on use of the term ‘development’, see Cornwall & Eade (2010) and Rist (2010).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.socialprogressimperative.org/faqs/> (accessed November 5, 2016)

<sup>9</sup> For Sen (1999:144) human development should ensure that: ‘The creation of social opportunities makes a direct contribution to the expansion of human capabilities and the quality of life.’

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/definition.html> (accessed January 12, 2017)

positive transformation. To do this it will consider how partnership is understood and driven in practice, and with what results (see Fig.2).



**Figure 2: Summary of review focus and questions**

A central argument of the review is that partnership can only be understood in relation to particular contextual challenges. Thus, rather than seeking to define the term, a discourse analysis approach is used to explore why, how and where partnership is used by individuals and organisations to solve social problems; what other concepts may be linked to it, and how this influences relationships, strategies and activities.

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:1) describe discourse analysis as ‘a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world).’ Based upon the premise that reality is socially constructed, it centres upon comprehending phenomena in relation to the use of language and social practices in specific historical, social and cultural contexts. According to Phillips and Hardy (2011:4), using discourse analysis for research involves looking at interrelated written, spoken or visual ‘texts’ which, in order to have meaning, need to be framed in relation to the ‘particular actors, relationships, and practices that characterize the situation under study’ (ibid). The suggestion here is that a broader understanding of partnership can best be obtained by exploring ‘multiple realities’ (Wiggins, 2009:428) through different viewpoints and forms of knowledge (Jørgensen and Phillips, ibid:4). The use of critical discourse theory, which expands notions of context to include power dynamics (Wiggins, 2009:429-30) is particularly pertinent for analysis of partnership rhetoric (Conrad, 2011:1).<sup>11</sup>

The review is intended for both academics and practitioners with an interest in partnership. Indeed, a central aim of my research on this topic has been to bring these two audiences together. I have thus sought to engage with some of the academic debates on partnership by linking them more firmly to the reality of practice. At the same time, efforts have been made to provide pointers for those who develop and manage partnership arrangements with a focus on assisting consideration of how far their efforts might promote social progress.

### **Research methodology**

The research publications that form the substance of the critical review include case studies (see Case Study Map), peer reviews, think pieces, guidelines and methodologies for assessing partnership arrangements (see Table 1).

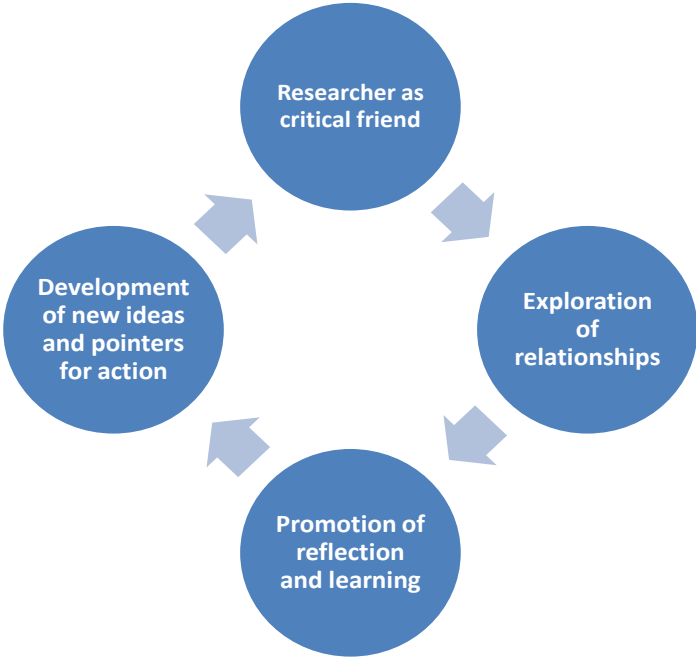
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<sup>11</sup> Conrad (2011:2-3) describes rhetoric as ‘...a complex process through which people develop and refine their beliefs, values and views of reality by communicating with others. In turn, they use rhetoric to persuade audiences to accept their ideas, their underlying values, and their modes of thinking.’

Research Publications	Details
Stott, L. (2006) Partnership case studies in context. <i>Research Paper</i> , London: The Partnering Initiative.	Paper for 'Making the Case: Using Partnership Case Studies as Tools for Change' Project with The Partnering Initiative, Alcan Prize for Sustainability, and Supporting Entrepreneurs for Environment and Development (SEED).
Caplan, K., Gomme, J., Mugabi, J. and Stott, L. (2007) <i>Assessing Partnership Performance: Understanding the Drivers for Success</i> , London: Building Partnerships for Development.	Research for Building Partnerships for Development (BPD) based on work with the World Bank Group. All authors contributed equally to the work.
Stott, L. (2007) Conflicting cultures: Lessons from a UN-Business Partnership. <i>Making a Difference, Exploring Issues in Partnering Practice Series</i> , London: International Business Leaders Forum.	Case study of a partnership between a UN Agency and multi-national corporation. Due to sensitivities about making the research public the case study was fictionalised but all testimonies are real.
Caplan, K. and Stott, L. (2008) Defining our terms and clarifying our language. In Svensson, L. and Nilsson, B. eds. <i>Partnership - As a Strategy for Social Innovation and Sustainable Change</i> , Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press.	Summary of ongoing research work on partnership terminology. Both authors contributed equally to the work.
Stott, L. (2008) <i>How European Social Fund Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies Support Partnership</i> , Brussels: European Commission.	Research and guidance on application of the 'partnership principle' in ESF Operational Programmes in EU Member States.
Rein, M. and Stott, L. (2009) Working together: Critical perspectives on six cross-sector partnerships in Southern Africa. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> 90, (1): 79-89.	Analysis of findings from six partnership case studies in South Africa and Zambia conducted for the European Community's Poverty Reduction Effectiveness Programme (EC-PREP).
Stott, L. (2009) Stakeholder engagement in partnerships. Who are the 'stakeholders' and how do we 'engage' with them? <i>BPD Research Series</i> , London: BPD.	Findings from research work with BPD on community and stakeholder engagement.
Stott, L. and Scoppetta, A. (2013a) Promoting local economic development through partnerships in Europe, <i>Skills@Work: Theory and Practice Journal</i> , 6: 2-12.	Analysis of EU multi-level partnership arrangements with findings from peer reviews in ESF Operational Programmes in Austria, Germany, Ireland and Sweden. Both authors contributed equally to the work.

**Table 1: Research publications used in review**

Much of the information for the publications listed in Table 1 was gathered using an approach that combined action research<sup>12</sup> and appreciative inquiry.<sup>13</sup> This methodology incorporates what Heron and Reason (2001:179) describe as ‘research conducted *with* rather than *on* people’. Here, the researcher assumes the role of a facilitator or ‘critical friend’ who explores relationships by asking questions that encourage dialogue and reflection. The expectation is that the learning derived from this process will generate pointers for action that improve the quality of relationships and activities (see Fig.3).



**Figure 3: Research approach**

Case studies afford a particularly useful way of looking at partnership as they enable the study of both collaborative processes and activities through diverse stakeholder perspectives in situ (Stott, 2006:3). This methodology was utilised to examine partnership arrangements in Southern Africa (Rein and Stott, 2009) and the UN-Business Partnership (Stott, 2007). It involved the use of qualitative research methods such as direct observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group

<sup>12</sup> See Reason (1988) and Reason & Bradbury (2001).  
<sup>13</sup> See Cooperrider & Whitney (2005) and Steel (2008).

discussions and stakeholder workshops. This data was further triangulated by drawing upon partnership documents, contextual reviews and academic sources (see Rein et al. 2005:15-20).

In addition to case studies, I have also used peer reviews to explore partnership in practice. With a focus on enhancing opportunities for mutual learning and exchange, this methodology was employed to research partnership approaches developed under the auspices of the European Social Fund (ESF) (Stott, 2008; Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a). In this case, the critical friend role was assumed by qualified peers from different EU Member States who, in a series of structured exchange visits, debated and reflected upon different forms of stakeholder collaboration to address unemployment and social exclusion.<sup>14</sup>

Both the case study and peer review methodologies incorporate a number of common elements. To facilitate a rounded examination of partnership they seek to engage with a wide number of viewpoints. They also involve a lengthy participatory review process in which research conclusions are deliberated upon by stakeholders in various iterations before being made public.<sup>15</sup> The ‘critical friend model’ is further applied here with the inclusion of a panel of ‘experts’ from different country and disciplinary perspectives who are invited to comment on emerging findings (Rein et al. 2005:20).

In order to conduct this critical review, I have drawn upon a broad range of secondary sources. This process has reinforced the fragmented nature of the literature on partnership. As well as straddling a variety of academic disciplines and fields (El Ansari, Phillips and Hammick, 2001:217; Dorado, Giles and Welch, 2009:370; Lotia and Hardy, 2009:3) there is an overwhelming amount of ‘grey literature’ on partnership that has not been considered in academic debates on the topic. This material encompasses information produced by partnership practitioners such as case

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<sup>14</sup> Full details of this peer review methodology can be found in Stott & Scoppetta (2011).

<sup>15</sup> In some cases a decision may be made not to share partnership review findings. This is in line with the premise that ‘partnership assessment is best initiated and conducted as a “conversation” owned first and foremost by the partners themselves’ (Caplan et al. 2007:4).

studies, reports, newsletters and website articles, all of which have been invaluable in reassessing my work. An important pointer for future research on partnership is that richer analysis may be enhanced through increased efforts to juxtapose academic and practitioner sources, and by drawing more fully upon the untapped reservoir of existing materials in specific subject areas.

**Original contribution**

Findings from the publications under review have provided insights into how partnership arrangements operate in particular contextual settings, as well as information on the challenges of working collaboratively. The partnership case study, peer review and evaluation methodologies have also offered new ways of conducting research in this field. Some of the key areas in which the original contribution of my work has been acknowledged are outlined in Table 2.

<b>Content</b>	<b>Process</b>
<b>Exploration of partnership terminology</b>	<b>Development of exchange forums on application of partnership in different contexts</b>
<b>Case studies and peer reviews of partnership in practice</b>	<b>Methodologies for exploring partnership through case studies and peer reviews</b>
<b>Exploration of drivers for partnership</b>	<b>Development of incentive-based evaluation methodology for partnership</b>
<b>Analysis of stakeholder and community engagement in partnership arrangements</b>	<b>Guidelines on the process of partnership building, including the use of a life cycle framework</b>

**Table 2: Original contributions of research**

This information has been used by those charged with devising and implementing partnership programmes and projects in a number of international agencies, government bodies, corporations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as by staff and students on the growing number of postgraduate modules on partnership (see Table 3).

<b>Input into policy frameworks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating Effectiveness and Efficiency of Partnerships, OECD Environment Policy Committee (2008)</li> <li>• Pan American Forum for Action on Non Communicable Diseases (2012)</li> <li>• European Code of Conduct on Partnership (2014)</li> </ul>
<b>Learning networks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community of Practice on Partnership in the European Social Fund (2007-11)</li> <li>• European Social Fund Transnational Network on Partnership (2015 to date)</li> </ul>
<b>Guidelines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership guides for EC EQUAL Programme (2004) and European Social Fund (2008)</li> <li>• Partnership guidelines to support certification for small-scale and developing world fisheries, Marine Stewardship Council (2010)</li> <li>• Partnering with Governments Navigator, GIZ and The Partnering Initiative (2010)</li> </ul>
<b>Postgraduate teaching modules</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postgraduate Certificate in Cross-sector Partnership, University of Cambridge (2002-8)</li> <li>• MA in Development and Emergency Practice, University of Oxford Brookes (2007-14)</li> <li>• Masters in Strategies and Technologies for Development, Technical University of Madrid and Complutense University of Madrid (2014 to date)</li> <li>• MA in Leadership, Local Government and Local Economic Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (2013-14)</li> <li>• MA in Urban Development and Resilience, Norwegian University of Science and Technology/NTNU (2015)</li> </ul>
<b>Training courses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnering Skills for Strategic Engagement, Courses for Regional Staff, United Nations System Staff College (2006-7)</li> <li>• Partnership Skills for Programme Staff and Regional Managers, Pan American Health Organisation/World Health Organisation (2011-12)</li> <li>• Competencies and skills for working in partnerships with the private sector, e-learning course for senior staff, Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AECID) (2013-14)</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Examples of where research work has been used**

## Review structure

In order to reinforce the importance of viewing partnership in context, the review begins with a map of case studies from my research that will be used as examples in the text. Chapter 1 then explores different understandings of partnership and how these have emerged and been framed over time. This is followed in Chapter 2 by an examination of partnership in relation to context, and the diverse external, organisational and individual variables that drive collaboration. Chapter 3 looks at partnership results and evidence for the added value of working in partnership, while Chapter 4 explores stakeholder participation and power dynamics in partnership practice. A concluding section summarises the key findings of the review and sets out areas for further research.



## Case Study Map

Name	Aim	Initiator	Stakeholders	How partnership is understood and promoted
<b>European Social Fund /European Commission</b>				
<b>European Social Fund (ESF)/ European Commission (EC)</b>	To generate smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the EU by creating more and better jobs, and a socially inclusive society.	ESF Managing Authorities/ Intermediate Bodies in EU Member States	Public authorities Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions) NGOs Umbrella organisations Academic institutions	The EU ‘partnership principle’ is a <b>process</b> of multi-stakeholder engagement in decision-making which promotes broad collective commitment and ownership of quality programmes.  As well as a process, partnership is also used to describe <b>mechanisms</b> in which representatives of different sectors of society work together to address issues such as unemployment and social exclusion. In these cases, partnerships are structures with specific aims, objectives and governance procedures, e.g. territorial pacts and local partnerships.
<b>Examples of partnership structures</b>				
<b>Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs)  Austria</b>	To better link employment policy with other policies and improve employment at regional and local levels.	Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour	Labour Market Service Federal Office of State Affairs Agriculture, Economic and Labour Chambers Local NGOs Gender mainstreaming experts Provincial government Federation of Industry Federation of Trade Unions Provincial school boards Educational institutions Municipalities	ESF regulations for the period 2007-13 referred to involvement of stakeholders in the governance mechanisms of Operational Programmes as well as provision of financial support to multi-actor projects (European Commission, 2006).

<b>Local Development Companies (LDCs)</b>  <b>Ireland</b>	To work with communities in order to promote local economic development, equality and social inclusion.	Department of Environment, Community and Local Government	Community, statutory and social partners	
<b>Structural Fund Partnerships and cooperation projects</b>  <b>Sweden</b>	To link regional growth with labour market policies in the eight regions of Sweden and support co-operation projects addressing employment and exclusion at national, regional and local levels.	Swedish ESF and European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF) Councils	Politicians and other stakeholders at national, regional and local levels	
<b>T model partnerships</b>  <b>Germany</b>	To establish <b>horizontal partnerships</b> at federal level to ensure joint planning and delivery, as well as <b>vertical multi-level partnerships</b> (initiated at federal level but addressing regional and local issues).	Federal ministries	Social partners Voluntary welfare organisations NGOs	

Stott, L. (2008) *How European Social Fund Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies Support Partnership*, Brussels: European Commission.  
 Stott, L. & Scoppetta A. (2013) Promoting Local Economic Development through partnerships in Europe. *Skills@Work: Theory and Practice Journal*, 6: 2-12.

## EC-Prep European Community Poverty Reduction Effectiveness Programme - Southern Africa

### Agriculture (Promoting small-scale farming)

<p><b>Chamba Valley Partnership</b></p> <p><b>Zambia</b></p>	<p>To increase small-scale farming income with support from government and NGOs for cultivation of quality local produce to supply supermarket.</p>	<p>Zambia Partnership Forum (NGO intermediary)</p>	<p>Chamba Valley Cooperative Society Shoprite Zambia Freshmark Zambia Seed Company (Zamseed) Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives</p>	<p>A mutually beneficial relationship to generate income for partners and create employment.</p>
<p><b>Small-scale Sugarcane Farming Communities Partnership</b></p> <p><b>South Africa</b></p>	<p>To develop local livelihoods among small-scale sugarcane growers through engagement with government agencies and Sugar Industry.</p>	<p>South African Sugar Association (SASA)</p>	<p>SASA Large-scale cane growers Small-scale cane growers co-operatives Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs District municipalities Traditional leaders</p>	<p>Way of promoting rural development and improvement in quality of life in rural sugarcane areas.</p> <p>Response to calls for business to address inequalities inherited from apartheid era, e.g. Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) regulations, as well as national and international Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) trends.</p>

### Health (Addressing HIV/AIDS)

<p><b>Amangwe Village</b></p> <p><b>South Africa</b></p>	<p>To promote a holistic health care centre to work with and for people living with HIV/AIDS.</p>	<p>Zululand Chamber of Business Foundation</p>	<p>Mondi BHP Billiton Aluminium Richards Bay Coal Terminal Richards Bay Minerals Depts. of Welfare, Education and Health Zululand Lifeline Empangeni Justice Centre Rotary Club of Richards Bay</p>	<p>Way of identifying new, innovative and coordinated opportunities for business sector to address HIV/AIDS.</p> <p>Lower productivity and loss of profits due to increased cases of HIV/AIDS among workforce encouraged businesses to work with government bodies and NGOs to share approaches for managing HIV/AIDS.</p>
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<b>Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (ZBCA)</b>  Zambia	To link businesses with NGOs and government agencies to tackle HIV/AIDS pandemic.	BP Zambia Plc Barclays Bank Standard Chartered Bank Zambia National Commercial Bank	54 companies and local NGOs such as: Africare Network of Zambia People living with HIV/AIDS and others.	Response to push by UNAIDS to increase capacity to respond effectively to HIV/AIDS epidemic at all levels through partnership between government, civil society and the private sector.
<b>Education (Improving Higher Education)</b>				
<b>Mthashana Further Education and Training College Partnership Programme</b>  South Africa	To develop partnership connections for learning and skills development in KwaZulu Natal.	South African Government	Mthashana Further Education and Training College National Business Initiative Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) ZENEX Foundation	Policy shift designed to improve development planning at municipal level and provide market-related educational opportunities by integrating entrepreneurial thinking with skills as basis for work competency, equity and growth.  Partnership promoted by staff in colleges as means of working more effectively with employers and wider community (learnerships).
<b>Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership</b>  Zambia	To engage businesses in improving educational infrastructure and teaching conditions.	Zambia Partnership Forum (NGO intermediary)	Copperbelt University Barclays Bank of Zambia BP Zambia Plc Chilanga Cement Plc NCC Phønix Contractors Intl. Nkumba Farms Unilever SEA ZESCO Ltd. Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation Ministry of Education	Way of working with partners, especially business, to address lack of resources needed for quality teaching and research.
<p>Rein, M., Stott, L., Yambayamba, E., Hardman, S. &amp; Reid, S. (2005) <i>Working Together, A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa</i>, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Programme for Industry.</p> <p>Rein, M. &amp; Stott, L. (2009) Working Together: Critical Perspectives on six cross-sector partnerships in Southern Africa. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> 90 (1): 79-89.</p>				

UN-Business Partnership				
<b>UN-Business Partnership</b>	To support primary education through improvements in basic infrastructure and trained human resources, and to overcome gender barriers impeding access to primary education.	Multinational company	UN Agency National NGO	UN Global Compact (2000) positioned private sector as a key partner for achievement of the MDGs. UN agencies and multinational corporations began to explore opportunities for active collaboration under umbrella term 'partnership'.
Stott, L. (2007) <i>Conflicting cultures: Lessons from a UN-Business Partnership. Making a Difference, Exploring Issues in Partnering Practice Series</i> , London: IBLF				
Partnerships for access to basic services in Latin America (and South Africa)				
<b>Luz en Casa Cajamarca Peru</b>	To supply electricity to isolated rural inhabitants through Solar Home Systems (SHS).	<i>Acciona Microenergía Perú</i> (Social enterprise)	Acciona Microenergy Foundation National and local public administration bodies Micro-businesses Photovoltaic Electrification Committees Rural Communities	Collaborative arrangements to pool expertise, resources and knowledge of different actors in the public, private and civil sectors, and incentivise vulnerable or marginalised populations to assume active roles in service provision.  Partnership viewed as a way of promoting innovation by:
<b>Inclusive Sanitation Markets Cochabamba Bolivia</b>	To find new ways for small enterprises to generate income from sanitation value chain.	Water for People (International NGO)	University of San Simón Micro-businesses Grassroots organisations Families Public administration bodies International development agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repositioning end user as an active agent in service provision.</li> <li>• Ensuring close and ongoing cooperation with public sector.</li> <li>• Generating new business models for covering service costs and related activities.</li> </ul>

<p><b>eHealth in rural areas</b></p> <p><b>Alta Verapaz Guatemala</b></p>	<p>To address high maternal and infant mortality rates among indigenous communities in remote rural areas using Information and Communication Technology (ICT).</p>	<p>TulaSalud (NGO)</p>	<p>Health Department of Alta Verapaz Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance Coban National School of Nursing Coban Hospital Tula Foundation</p>	
<p><b><i>Ciudad Saludable</i></b></p> <p><b>Lima Peru</b></p>	<p>To establish an integrated model for waste management.</p>	<p><i>Ciudad Saludable</i> (NGO)</p>	<p>Peru Waste Innovation Healthy Cities International Central and municipal governments Recyclers Donors Communities Businesses Educational institutions Media Social organisations</p>	
<p><b>Innovative partnerships in access to water and sanitation</b></p> <p><b>Durban South Africa</b></p>	<p>To extend water and sanitation service coverage and meet needs of different community groups.</p>	<p>eThekwini Water and Sanitation Services (Dept of Municipality)</p>	<p>University of Kwazulu-Natal Water Research Commission Water and sanitation firms Community representatives International donors</p>	

Stott, L. (2014) *Partnerships for Innovation in Access to Basic Services*, Washington: Multilateral Investment Fund/Inter-American Development Bank (MIF/IDB) and Madrid: Innovation and Technology Centre for Human Development/ Technical University of Madrid (itdUPM).

## Chapter 1: Naming and framing partnership

### The definition challenge

‘What is all this fuss about partnership?’ a Zambian businessman once asked me. ‘Doesn’t it just mean working together? And isn’t that what we’ve always done?’ His questions were a timely reminder of the confusion generated by widespread use of the term partnership and the fact that its meaning is open to debate.

The difficulty of arriving at a precise definition for partnership has been widely commented on in the literature relating to collaboration and development (eg Googins and Rochlin, 2000:131; Harrison, 2002:589; Mirafatab, 2004:92; Tomlinson, 2005:1169; Dickinson and Glasby, 2010:813; Pattberg and Widerberg, 2016:43). The looseness of the word, and its positive connotations, have meant that partnership has been used to encompass almost any form of development relationship and positioned as a panacea for solving all manner of societal concerns. This, as Macdonald and Chrisp observe (2005:307), clearly limits possibilities for critical analysis. To quote De Souza Briggs (2003:3):

First of all, who would want to be against ‘working in partnership,’ at least in principle? And second, is there any problem-solving that partnership doesn’t somehow describe or can’t be made to describe?

Partnership has been situated within a ‘feel-good’ development lexicon that invites automatic approval (Cornwall, 2010:6).<sup>16</sup> As noted by Standing (2010:64), ‘it has a nice cuddly sound to it.’ Such attractiveness has facilitated its adoption by a diverse range of development actors. However, as Tomlinson (2005:1170) observes, ‘the presentation of partnership as “good”, but unclear in its meaning, invites consideration of the question “good” in what way, and for whom?’

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<sup>16</sup> For Cornwall & Eade (2010) this lexicon is composed of ‘development buzzwords and fuzzwords’ such as partnership, development, empowerment, social capital, sustainability, capacity-building, and others.

The ‘slipperiness’ of the term partnership is viewed by Harrison (2002:590) as concealing ‘...the advancement of particular perspectives and worldviews.’ This is endorsed by Cornwall (2010:4) who includes partnership among a number of ‘loan-words’ from an ‘Anglo-dominated development discourse’ the use of which is made mandatory by external agencies. Cornwall (ibid:2) reinforces the fact that such buzzwords mask issues of influence and funding, power and control. She suggests that unpacking these ‘bland catch-all terms’ requires ‘disentanglement of the normative and the empirical, a focus on actual social practices rather than wishful thinking’ (ibid:14). This is all the more necessary with partnership because, as Harrison (2002:590) further notes, its use is bound up with the equally elastic concept of ‘participation’. She argues that, while both these terms may reflect laudable desires to promote bottom-up development processes they are not value free and ‘...the blanket use of participatory language may hide the complex interaction of history and individual positioning that make the meaning of participation so variable’ (ibid:593). Hodge and Greve (2007:553) endorse this by stressing that we need to be mindful of who is ‘pushing’ partnership, what their interests are, and the ‘payoffs’ they might expect to gain from it.

My work has reflected concern about the simplistic nature of partnership definitions (Caplan and Stott, 2008:23-4; Rein and Stott, 2009:80). Most describe little more than a relationship in which organisations pool their diverse resources, capitalise on synergies, and share risks and benefits in order to accomplish something that they could not do alone (eg DFID, 1998:2; Nelson and Zadek, 2000:14; UN General Assembly, 2006).<sup>17</sup> Drawing extensively upon work by Building Partnerships for Development (BPD),<sup>18</sup> we noted in Caplan and Stott (2008) that these descriptions gloss over the challenges that working in partnership involves and mask issues of power and control. Although horizontal decision-making processes are implied, differences among participating organisations, diverse obligations to partner and the prioritisation of financial contributions over other resource inputs are generally

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<sup>17</sup> Macdonald & Chrisp (2005:307) describe this logic as follows: ‘All organisations have strengths, but no organisation has all the strengths required to do everything’.

<sup>18</sup> Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation (BPD) was a non-profit charity that worked from 2002-14 to promote partnerships for water and sanitation services in under and poorly served communities, see: [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org) (accessed October 12, 2016).

unexplored. To prompt discussion around these issues, a clause developed by AccountAbility (2006:7) was added to standard definitions of partnership (in italics below) (Caplan et al. 2007:2; Caplan and Stott, 2008:24):

Partnerships involve two or more organisations that enter into a collaborative arrangement based on:

1. synergistic goals and opportunities that address particular issues or deliver specified tasks that single organisations cannot accomplish on their own as effectively; and
2. *whose individual organisations cannot purchase the appropriate resources or competencies purely through a market transaction.*

While acknowledging that this description required contextualisation, we suggested that a wide variety of partnership objectives could be encompassed within it. These ranged from the fulfilment of a concrete task to more systemic objectives aimed at changing regulatory standards, legal instruments or behaviours.

In order to begin to clarify how partnership might be distinguished from other collaborative forms such as networks and coalitions, we positioned it along a continuum between networks and joint ventures or new institutions (see Fig.4). In this schema, mutual commitments, obligations and accountabilities increase among the arrangements towards the right of the spectrum.



**Figure 4: Different forms of collaboration**  
Source: Adapted from Caplan & Stott (2008:26)

Although implicit in our thinking, greater emphasis on the dynamic nature of the different relationships outlined, and the fact that they may overlap and change over time, was clearly merited (Mandell and Steelman, 2003:204; Morse and McNamara, 2009:33). More importantly, our focus was primarily on the presentation of partnership as a development ‘tool’, and as a structural form rather than a process.

**Structure or process?**

An overview of my research work shows that partnership may be construed as both a structure and a process, and sometimes both (see Table 4 and Case Study Map).

Structure	Process
<u>European Social Fund / European Commission</u>	
Different social actors work together to address access to employment and social exclusion through structures with specific aims, objectives and governance procedures	Multi-stakeholder engagement in decision-making to promote collective commitment and ownership of quality programmes
<u>Chamba Valley Partnership (Zambia)</u> Relationship between a supermarket chain and local farmers to generate income and create employment	<u>Small-scale Sugarcane Farming Communities Partnership (South Africa)</u> Way of promoting development, empowerment and poverty alleviation in rural areas
<u>Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS</u> Multi-stakeholder mechanism to increase capacity for effective response to HIV/AIDS epidemic	<u>Amangwe Village Partnership (South Africa)</u> Way of identifying innovative and coordinated opportunities for business to work on HIV/AIDS
<u>Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership (Zambia)</u> Alliance between business and University of Zambia to provide resources for quality teaching and research	<u>Mthashana Further Education and Training College Partnership Programme (South Africa)</u> Means of integrating entrepreneurial thinking with skills-training as basis for work competency, equity and growth
<u>UN-Business Partnership</u> Task focused formation to support achievement of MDGs	
<u>Partnerships for access to basic services in Latin America (and South Africa)</u> Collaborative arrangements to pool different resources from public, private and civil sectors, and incentivise marginalised populations to assume active roles in service provision	

**Table 4: Examples of partnership structures and processes**

In the European Social Fund (ESF) for instance, as well as a collaborative structure for project delivery, partnership is also understood as a way of working cooperatively (Stott, 2008; Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a). The European Union’s (EU) ‘partnership principle’ outlines a process of multi-stakeholder engagement between different social actors and levels of government to support the effective delivery of European

Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) (Bauer, 2002:771-3). Here, partnership is central to a form of ‘multilevel governance’ which ostensibly enhances democracy by offering citizens the possibility of influencing political decision-making (Van den Brande, 2014:9). This view of partnership as a form of ‘social’ or ‘collaborative governance’ in which different actors work together to address societal problems is also posited by others (eg Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2004:253; Zadek, 2007; Crane, 2010), and is implicit in the broad call for ongoing development cooperation between North and South (Fowler, 2000b; 2000c; Hewitt, 2002; Bailey and Dolan, 2011:34).

The promotion of these two different modes of partnership is manifested in the case studies in South Africa and Zambia where efforts to support small-scale farming communities, address HIV/AIDS and improve higher education were pursued through both collaborative structures and processes (Rein and Stott, 2009). My more recent research in Latin America and South Africa (Stott, 2014)<sup>19</sup> suggests that these two modalities can also be combined. In these cases, the mechanisms established to ensure access to basic services were accompanied by processes that encouraged the continuous involvement of users in these new arrangements.

### **Means to an end or end in itself?**

Conceptualisation of partnership (as both a structure and process) in my work has largely centred upon its potential for the achievement of social goals and as a means to an end. However, use of the term as a way of promoting ongoing participation in political and social processes (see Table 4) suggests that less instrumental views of partnership are worth examining. Authors such as Eisler (1987; 2008; 2015), Leadbeater (2012) and Sennett (2013) believe that humans have an innate capacity for cooperation and partnership. Such thinking resonates with worldviews based on the ethics of reciprocity such as *ubuntu* or ‘humanism’ which have informed national

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<sup>19</sup> A case study research project carried out by the Innovation and Technology for Development Centre/Technical University of Madrid for the Multilateral Investment Fund at the Inter-American Development Bank Group. The detailed case studies by Egido (2014), Keatman (2014), Lumbreras & Fernández (2014), Martínez (2014) and Sánchez & Moreno (2014) can be found at: <http://www.itd.upm.es> (accessed January 17, 2017).

understandings of partnership in South Africa and Zambia respectively (Rein et al. 2005:28, 30).<sup>20</sup>

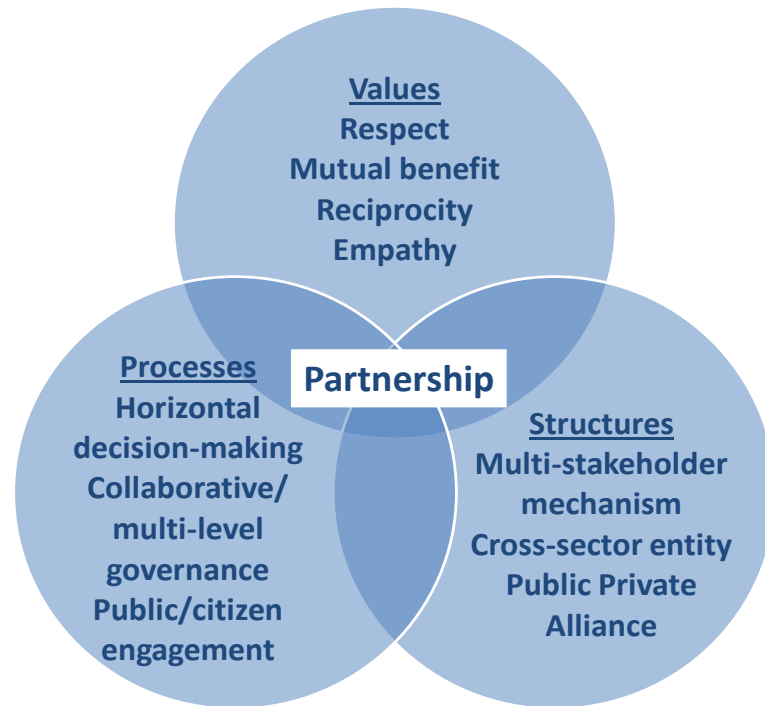
These perceptions focus on interdependence between people, rather than organisations, and engagement in a dynamic process of cooperation that has value in and of itself. They also suggest a relationship that, beyond a simple transaction, offers the possibility of a transformational bond that is developed over time. According to Sennett this connection relies on ‘dialogic deliberation’ which, rather than resolving differences by seeking common ground, celebrates open-ended conversations that assist comprehension of difference through listening ‘with attention and responsiveness to other people’ (Sennett, 2013:14). Eisler (2008; 2015) further contends that the building of a sustainable future depends on humankind’s ability to move towards a ‘partnership system’ founded upon ‘mutual respect, mutual accountability, and mutual benefit’ in which ‘hierarchies of actualization’ (rather than domination) ensure that power holders empower others (Eisler, 2015:6). A comparison of partnership’s instrumental and intrinsic value can be found in Table 5.

<b>Instrumental value</b>	<b>Intrinsic value</b>
<b>Partnership viewed as:</b>	
<b>A means to an end</b>	<b>An end in itself</b>
<b>Based on organisational relationships</b>	<b>Based on relationships between people</b>
<b>Aimed at achieving common ground</b>	<b>Living with disagreement</b>
<b>Based on horizontal decision-making arrangements</b>	<b>Based on constant renegotiations of power in decision-making arrangements</b>
<b>Transactional</b>	<b>Transformational</b>

**Table 5: Instrumental and intrinsic value of partnership**

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that these concepts have also been described as catch-all terms used to promote acceptance of particular policies and ideas, see Matolino & Kwindigwi (2013) on the use of *ubuntu* in South Africa, and Sekwat (2000) on Humanism in Zambia.

The diverse interpretations outlined above confirm that partnership encompasses ‘multiple interlacing facets’ (El Ansari, Phillips and Hammick, 2001:217) and may thus best be understood as an umbrella term for an assortment of structures, values and processes (see Fig.5).



**Figure 5: Different components of partnership**

Such a bundling of different perspectives raises important questions about how partnership has been presented and packaged in the development field. While some see it as reducing partnership to little more than ‘a mobilizing term’ (Utting and Zammit, 2009:40), others believe its essence has been usurped by a ‘managerialist and technocratic approach’ which privileges organisations over individuals and limits ‘democratic deliberation’ (Davies, 2002:202; Miraftab, 2004:97; Gold, Cressey and Leonard, 2007). To assess how far this is true, and to assist deeper comprehension of its application in practice, it is helpful to look at when and why partnership became a development buzzword and the debates that this has generated.

## Origins of current promotion of partnership

Although he was referring specifically to the Zambian context, the businessman who asked me whether working in partnership was not something that had always been done raised an important point. If, as both Sennett (2013:5) and Leadbeater (2012:26) contend, cooperation 'is written into who we are' then partnership is clearly not 'new'. As well as traditional forms of collaboration that draw upon its intrinsic worth such as *ubuntu* in South Africa (see above), more instrumental partnership and social dialogue processes have been used in Europe since the 1960s (Nelson and Zadek, 2000:11; Andersen and Mailand, 2002).<sup>21</sup> Maxwell and Riddell (1998:258-9) also note that partnership was mentioned in a call for aid relationships based on greater respect, quality and solidarity in the 1969 Pearson Report *Partners in Development* and the 1980 Brandt Report *North-South: A Programme for Survival*. So why has partnership been 'reinvented' in recent years?

Utting and Zammit (2009:42) believe that the current focus on partnership (and collaboration with the private sector) has emerged as, 'a logical response to structural changes in state-market-society relations that have occurred since the 1980s.' This view is endorsed in *Working Together* (Rein et al. 2005:4) where we noted that, as well as stimulating changes in sector roles and responsibilities, globalisation had also led to demands for the management of its negative consequences. The 'push' towards partnership was thus motivated by: a desire by business to gain public trust and investor confidence through corporate social responsibility (CSR) agendas and improved stakeholder engagement; public sector efforts to promote better governance through decentralisation and devolvement of power; and pressure from a growing non-profit sector to respond more effectively to issues such as environmental degradation, poverty and social exclusion. These changes, we argued, had precipitated an interest among both private and non-private actors in managing development issues through joint mechanisms for project delivery and collaborative governance processes (ibid).

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<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.etuc.org/european-social-dialogue> (accessed January 21, 2017)

While the essence of this analysis is echoed elsewhere (eg Googins and Rochlin, 2000:127-9; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2004:253; Tennyson; 2004:3; Mukherjee Reed and Reed, 2009:3-4; Utting and Zammit, 2009:41-3) it would clearly have been enriched by a more penetrating examination of the reasons given by different sector stakeholders for choosing to work collaboratively. Table 6 summarises some of the overarching motivations cited by those involved in the partnership arrangements that have been the subject of my work (see Case Study Map). These viewpoints suggest that, as well as instrumental reasons for collaboration, heightened interest in its intrinsic value may also have emerged as a result of the structural changes highlighted above.

<b>Reasons for working in partnership</b>	
<b>Access to resources</b>	<b>Diverse financial and in-kind resources to address particular challenges</b>
<b>Capacity-building</b>	<b>Opportunities to build strategic and operative capacity and skills</b>
<b>Coordination</b>	<b>Reach is improved and duplication avoided</b>
<b>Empowerment</b>	<b>Stronger voice for the disadvantaged or marginalised</b>
<b>Focus</b>	<b>Gaps, needs and priorities more clearly identified and targeted</b>
<b>Innovation</b>	<b>More creative and dynamic approaches to societal challenges</b>
<b>Legitimacy</b>	<b>Wider stakeholder mobilisation gives more democratic mandate</b>
<b>Social capital</b>	<b>Connections and relationships reinforce social fabric of society</b>
<b>Stability</b>	<b>Inclusion of different stakeholders contributes to integrated and cohesive society</b>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>Joint ownership and action promotes long-term, durable and positive change</b>

**Table 6: Reasons for working in partnership**  
**Source: Adapted from Stott (2008:19-23)**

Tennyson (2004:3) suggests that aspirations for partnership reflect the failure of traditional ‘single sector’ solutions to development problems as activities have been developed in isolation, different sectors have competed with one another, duplicated efforts and wasted resources. As single sector development approaches have

primarily been government-led, Utting and Zammit (2009:42) link this more directly to ‘state failure - the perceived or real inability of governments, particularly in developing countries, to be effective agents of regulation and development, and providers of essential goods and services.’ These viewpoints suggest that arguments positioning ‘managerialism’ and the ‘rolling back’ of the state as a core driver for partnership deserve a closer look.

From the 1980s the promotion of New Public Management (NPM) saw a growing number of governments adopt private sector systems and procedures, ostensibly to ensure greater effectiveness, efficiency and accountability (Brinkerhoff, 2002c:19; Davies, 2002:202; Mathur, 2003:11; Miraftab, 2004:93; Utting and Zammit, 2009:44). In response to concomitant cutbacks in state funding for NGOs, and what Heap (2000:556) describes as ‘the welfare state... giving way to business welfare’, both government and NGOs began to develop new forms of collaboration with the private sector. According to Davies (2002:201) such an ideological underpinning confirms that ‘...neoliberal common sense is inscribed in the rules of the partnership game.’

An additional body of work on partnership in the aid field also deserves attention here. In line with the changing global context outlined above, North-South partnerships have been promoted between development agencies and NGOs. As well as making aid delivery more efficient and effective, the rationale for this approach is the creation of locally-owned country development strategies (Abrahamsen, 2004:1455; Crawford, 2003:140). However, such arrangements, and their embracing of engagement with the private sector, have been widely criticised as being conducted on an unequal playing field in which ‘power’ rests with the ‘North’ and ‘Southern’ interests are marginalised (Maxwell and Riddell, 1998; Fowler, 2000b, 2000c; Crawford, 2003; Mercer, 2003; Abrahamsen, 2004; Lange and Tjomsland, 2014).<sup>22</sup> This focus on structural inequalities is endorsed in Rein et al. (2005:122-3) which, building upon my exploration of critical views of partnership (Stott, 2003;

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<sup>22</sup> As noted by Maxwell & Riddell (1998:257), Fowler (2000b:1) and Crawford (2003:140), this understanding of partnership is significantly different to the one posited in the Pearson (1969) and Brandt (1980) Reports.

2005), questions how far partnership can realistically be expected to address pressing development issues on a large-scale when structural inequalities relating to global economic and political power relations remain unchallenged.

Resurgence of interest in partnership has provoked a spirited debate about the interests and intentions of those promoting this way of working. In Rein et al. (2005:7) we suggested that these differences could be summarised as two contending views of partnership: promoting democracy through joint problem-solving and the integration of different interests in governance systems; and, conversely, undermining democracy by moving political decision-making away from elected to non-elected actors.<sup>23</sup> Within this contested territory much debate is centred upon the role of the private sector as a ‘development partner’ and the possibility that public policy processes may be steered towards the promotion of ‘market-friendly policies of deregulation’ (Miraftab, 2004:94).

Concerns about the role of the private sector in partnership arrangements are manifested most strongly in discussion of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). Questions have been raised about how far these relationships are ‘a mechanism for enabling multinationals to penetrate a particular social service’ (Standing, 2010:64) or, more radically, ‘the Trojan Horse of neoliberal development’ (Miraftab, 2004). For Caplan and I, PPPs, in which public sector agencies contract businesses to provide services or construct infrastructure, need to be distinguished from more flexible non-contractual Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) (Caplan and Stott, 2008:25) (See Table 7).<sup>24</sup> Although the terms are still used interchangeably (Bäckstrand and Kylsäter, 2014), this distinction between PPPs and MSPs has assisted development agencies such as GIZ to reclassify partnership, in this case by differentiating PPPs from wider development partnerships that involve the private sector and other players (Stott et al. 2011:8-9; Stott and MacCarthy, 2013:8).

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<sup>23</sup> For more on these debates see Slaughter (2004, 2005); Steets (2004, 2010); Bäckstrand (2006); Schäferhoff, Campe & Kaan (2007) and Andonova (2014).

<sup>24</sup> See also Romero’s definition of PPPs (Romero, 2015:11).

<b>Public Private Partnership (PPP)</b>	<b>Multi-Stakeholder Partnership (MSP)</b>
<b>Contract-based arrangement with clear vertical accountability structures</b>	<b>Generally less contractual agreement with emphasis on horizontal accountability</b>
<b>Clear targets, deliverables and timeframes</b>	<b>More flexibility around targets and deliverables with less determined timeframes</b>
<b>Works within legal and regulatory constructs</b>	<b>Partners operate within legal and regulatory constructs but partnership itself is unregulated</b>
<b>Limited stakeholder engagement</b>	<b>More extensive stakeholder engagement</b>

**Table 7: Distinction between PPPs and MSPs**  
**Source: Caplan & Stott (2008:25)**

As the term *Public Private Partnership* (my italics) also transmits a sense that such arrangements solely involve the public and private sectors, the distinction in Table 7 usefully reinforces the fact that partnership can embrace a wide spectrum of different actors and that private sector involvement is not a prerequisite (Mandell and Steelman, 2003:198; Selsky and Parker, 2005:854). Indeed, in surveys of transnational partnership arrangements developed after the 2002 World Sustainable Development Summit (WSSD) in Johannesburg, the absence of the business sector was notable (Bäckstrand, 2006:299; Bäckstrand and Kylsäter, 2014:337).<sup>25</sup> In view of the fact that much of the critique of partnership relates to the role played in these arrangements by large corporations, it also worth noting that private sector partners may include a diverse range of players, including small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), national businesses, social enterprises, chambers of commerce and business coalitions, among others (Miraftab,2004:92).<sup>26</sup> It is also true that other sector categories such as ‘government’ and ‘civil society’ encompass multiple players and levels, and that the rigidity of such classifications often means the

<sup>25</sup> Pattberg & Widerberg (2016:44) note that the limited involvement of business appears to challenge arguments that partnerships endorse the ‘privatization of governance’.

<sup>26</sup> Geddes (2000:797) argues that as the informal business sector is central to many local survival strategies it should also be more fully considered in partnership arrangements.

exclusion of important social actors such as trade unions, academic institutions, media organisations and others that do not fit neatly within them (Stott and Keatman, 2005:4).

### Alternatives to partnership

Against this background, a closer look at possible alternatives to partnership is instructive. In a recent survey among individuals working in partnership arrangements to support achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>27</sup> in different country and sector contexts (Tennyson et al. 2016:5), we asked respondents to suggest what these options might be.<sup>28</sup> Sixty percent of those who replied, felt that there was no alternative to working in partnership,<sup>29</sup> while the rest put forward options such as standard two-party contractual relationships, more traditional donor funding, ‘going it alone’ or ‘business as usual’ arrangements.<sup>30</sup> While details were lacking on how they might work, other alternatives included working through informal connections such as social movements and citizens’ initiatives.

Some respondents stressed that where the private sector was involved, stronger regulation or licensing regimes and efforts to ensure greater corporate accountability were alternatives to partnership. This proposition is endorsed by Richter (2004a:47) who notes that the public and private sectors have traditionally interacted with one another in a variety of other ways, from research collaboration to regulation. Richter’s work (Richter, 2002; 2004a; 2004b) forms part of a wider critique that calls for stronger public sector control of partnership arrangements (eg Buse and Waxman, 2001:752; Beisheim, 2012:6). These arguments further reinforce the importance of addressing structural or systems issues that impede change. However, as Poncelet (2001:21) argues, opportunities for debating more radical possibilities for transformation are limited by a prevailing ‘cultural model depicting partnerships as

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<sup>27</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015-30) <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/> (accessed October 4, 2016)

<sup>28</sup> The survey was sent to 1,300 Partnership Brokers Association (PBA) alumni and was available online for a two-week period. 140 responses were received from 61 countries across the world.

<sup>29</sup> As the respondents were graduates of the PBA scheme this is perhaps not surprising. However, further research is required as to why this response was made in so many different contexts.

<sup>30</sup> This latter choice was roundly criticised as likely to involve competition or duplication.

nonconflictual in orientation and a commonly held belief in the necessity of collaborative action.’

### The future of partnership

In spite of the centrality of partnership in current development discourse, the landscape in which it is situated is not a static one. As well as a more nuanced understanding of the capacities of different actors, particularly the private sector (Black and O’Bright, 2016:165), there is also ‘...evidence of a paradigm shift away from arm’s length, atomistic and transactional notions of exchange between organisational actors, towards an approach which foregrounds intense interaction, relationships and networks’ (Seitanidi and Ryan, 2007:256). This shift can be seen in the ‘innovative’ and ‘inclusive’ multi-stakeholder initiatives that have been positioned as part of a people-centred post-2015 development agenda (United Nations, 2014).<sup>31</sup> Such a tendency is also manifested in the emergence of a range of ‘new’ forms of collaboration in which citizens are active participants, including: Public Private People Partnerships (P4) which add a wider stakeholder element to traditional PPPs (Ng, Wong and Wong, 2013; Zhang, Zou and Kumaraswamy, 2015),<sup>32</sup> social innovation (Phills, Deiglmeier and Miller, 2008), collective impact (Kania and Kramer, 2011), co-production (Griffiths, 2016), co-creation (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2014), deliberative democracy (Ercan and Dryzek, 2015) and co-responsibility.<sup>33</sup>

While some of these concepts have been criticised as being overly simplistic and in need of deeper analysis (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2014; Wolff, 2016), and consideration also needs to be given to arguments for a return to ‘single-handed’ approaches,<sup>34</sup> they indicate that partnership is being reappraised and reformulated. By demonstrating that, ‘...people’s capacities for cooperation are far greater and

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<sup>31</sup> A call is made for ‘inclusive’ and ‘transformative’ partnerships ‘built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals: placing people and planet at the center’ (UN, 2014:24).

<sup>32</sup> The UN also refers to ‘principled and responsible public-private-people partnerships’ for achieving sustainable development (UN, 2014:24)

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.blog.urbact.eu/2012/07/what-is-co-responsibility/> (accessed August 25, 2016)

<sup>34</sup> Egels-Zandén & Wahlqvist (2007), for example, have used the term ‘post-partnerships’ to indicate a move by business away from ‘inefficient and unproductive collaboration’ to ‘single-handed’ corporate responsibility approaches.

more complex than institutions allow them to be' (Sennett, 2013:29), some of these trends also suggest a movement away from instrumental and managerial forms of cooperation. In this sense, our view that partnership may offer models of collaboration for people to seek innovative ways of supporting their own (and mutual) development is pertinent (Rein and Stott, 2009:86). This perception resonates closely with recent research findings from partnership initiatives in Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru and South Africa where diverse members of marginalised and vulnerable communities have played a central role in the design and maintenance of new models for basic services (Stott, 2014:32).

The country contexts mentioned above are appropriate to highlight here as, in order to comprehend partnership more fully, it is vital to consider the specific and dynamic contexts in which collaboration evolves. A belief that particular and interconnected contextual variables determine the nature and scope of partner relationships, and the drivers for participation in them, is at the heart of my research work and addressed specifically in Stott (2006) and Rein and Stott (2009). As El Ansari, Phillips and Hammick (2001:218) point out, revealing this 'chemistry' is essential to any genuine understanding of partnership.



## Chapter 2: Partnership in context

### Revealing the chemistry

In 2000, a small agricultural partnership was established in the Zambian village of Luangeni. Situated in the eastern province of Chipata, this rural community was angered by the opening of a branch of the South African supermarket chain, Shoprite, which, they said, had robbed them of their livelihoods. The village headman even implied that it would be good if the supermarket was set on fire so that, ‘...we can go on with our business of selling vegetables’ (Raworth and Wren-Lewis 2008:2). Learning that Shoprite would not accept locally produced vegetables because of their inferior quality, members of the Zambia Partnership Forum<sup>35</sup> proposed a collaborative initiative with the Luangeni community that involved a seed company, the Ministry of Agriculture and NGOs training local farmers to produce vegetables that could be marketed directly to Shoprite. An international donor also took an interest in the partnership and agreed to contribute funds to support its activities. Within a year, the average monthly income in Luangeni had increased from US\$2 to US\$48.55, community participants were able to pay for education and health services, and gender equality was promoted by actively encouraging the involvement of women farmers (Yambayamba, 2006:69).

The success of the Luangeni Partnership generated huge interest<sup>36</sup> and calls were made for its replication in other parts of Zambia where Shoprite operated, including Chamba Valley on the outskirts of the capital city, Lusaka. Here, however, the partnership failed to live up to expectations. In addition to funding constraints and a weaker case for business involvement due to the more stringent produce quality demands of urban customers, this lack of success also rested crucially on differences in the nature of the organisations and individuals involved, and the interaction between them (Rein and Stott, 2009:83).

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<sup>35</sup> The Forum for Business Leaders and Social Partners (Partnership Forum) was established in 1999 to promote corporate social responsibility and sustainable development in Zambia.

<sup>36</sup> The Partnership was showcased at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) (Yambayamba, 2006:72).

This story reinforces the importance of exploring partnership in relation to particular and changing contexts, and the need to analyse the distinct (and sometimes subtle) external, organisational and individual variables that might affect them, even when, as in this case, a collaborative initiative is developed in the same country to address the same problem. According to Pattberg and Widerberg (2016:49) contextualisation ‘increases the possibility for tailor-made solutions rather than a “one-size fits all” approach’ and can also assist in assessing whether partnership is in fact the most appropriate solution to a particular problem. El Ansari, Phillips and Hammick (2001:218) endorse this, suggesting that when considering partnership we should ask: ‘...how does this intervention make a difference in this particular situation? (rather than just asking does it work?) and why it might work over here and not over there?’

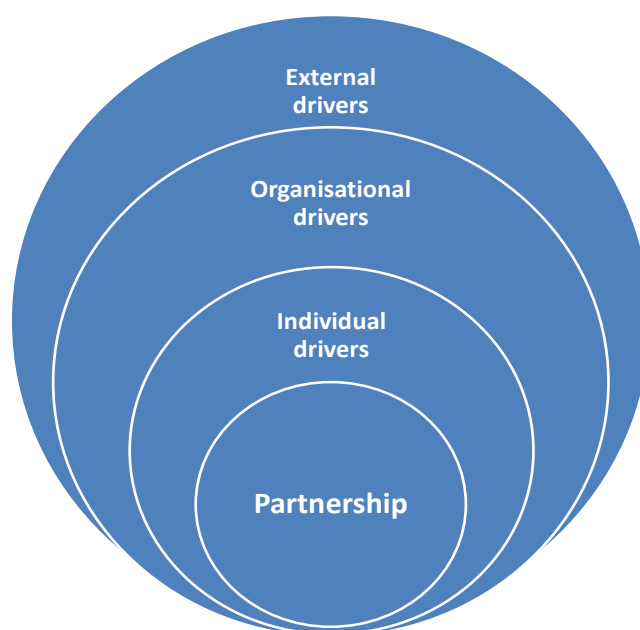
For Pattberg and Widerberg (2016:48-9) studying a partnership context involves looking at ‘meta-governance’ and the influence of global development goals; the socio-political and institutional context, and the nature of the particular problem that is being addressed. While these elements are implicit in the understanding of context used in this review, emphasis here is placed on sociohistoric factors. As well as incorporating a temporal dimension, this focus positions individual and organisational perspectives in a framework that explores the ‘...manner by which meaning, systems and discourses are formed, maintained, and transformed in particular social and historical contexts’ (Poncelet, 2001:15).

In order to explore the impact of contextual factors on partnership, the Case Study Map in this review provides information on a selection of collaborative initiatives that have been the subject of my research. As well as situating the arrangements geographically, the map provides information on the different partners involved and the issues and problems they sought to address. Kolk (2013:5) believes that such a ‘landscape’ offers insights into the complex and dynamic interactions that occur between the place, purpose and players involved in partnerships.

## Contextual drivers for partnership

While the importance of exploring the overarching context in which a partnership approach develops has been highlighted in the literature (eg Nelson and Zadek, 2000:33; Caplan et al. 2001:5; Harrison, 2002:588-9; Pattberg and Widerberg, 2016:48-9), the multiple levels that this embraces have received less attention. As Kolk (2013:9) notes, partnership interactions occur, ‘...not only at the macro level, e.g. from North to South, but also within partnering organisations (which can be located in several regions) and by individuals working for or affected by the organizations or the partnership.’

Kolk, Van Dolen and Vock (2010:123-4) recommend that partnership arrangements should be studied in relation to interactions between macro (societal), meso (inter-organisational) and micro (individual) levels. These levels correspond to those proposed in my work with Caplan et al. (2007:9-10) and in Stott (2009:2) which see partnership as being informed by external, organisational and individual drivers, the interplay between which define its nature and purpose (see Fig.6).



**Figure 6: Contextual drivers for partnership**

Building upon the assertion by Nelson and Zadek (2000:33) that partnership is motivated by ‘systemic drivers’ and ‘specific triggers’, we suggested that partnership drivers may be categorised as ‘pushes and pulls’ (Caplan et al. 2007:8). Partnership ‘pushes’ are the external, organisational and individual incentives that encourage actors to work together in partnership, while disincentives at these levels ‘pull’ against working in this way. Because partnership approaches are often mandated by national laws and organisational directives, we also highlighted the importance of obligations that promote partnership, with a further ‘push/pull’ factor being the nature of the sanctions imposed if this way of working is not adopted (see Table 8).

<p><b>Incentives</b></p> <p>Factors that motivate organisations / individuals to engage in partnership.</p>	<p><b>Disincentives</b></p> <p>Factors that discourage organisational / individual engagement in partnership.</p>
<p><b>Obligations</b></p> <p>Factors that force organisations / individuals to participate in partnership.</p>	<p><b>Sanctions</b></p> <p>Penalties incurred by organisations / individuals for non-participation in partnership.</p>

**Table 8: Partnership drivers**  
 Source: Adapted from Caplan & Stott (2008:34) and Caplan et al. (2007:8-9)

My research findings also suggest that a partnership approach is more likely to flourish where there is an ‘enabling environment’ with supportive legal and regulatory frameworks for working in collaboration, positive relationship histories between different sectors, and the existence of organisations or individuals capable of bringing different institutions together (Stott, 2008:33-7; Rein and Stott, 2009:81).<sup>37</sup> Where these factors are weak or absent it may be more difficult to work in partnership (see Fig.7).

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<sup>37</sup> This ‘partnership broker’ role is discussed in more detail below.



**Figure 7: Factors influencing an 'enabling environment' for partnership**  
 Source: Adapted from Stott (2008:33-7) and Rein & Stott (2009:81)

A key consideration here is the issue of time. As we noted in Rein et al. (2005:11), 'time-related constraints, exigencies and pressures can create different expectations and priorities, and thus effect and condition partnership development.' As well as organisational targets and deadlines, external events such as economic crises, political and social disturbances, or humanitarian emergencies will also determine whether or not the timing for developing a partnership arrangement is appropriate.

Viewed in this light, the division of drivers into 'positive pushes' and 'negative pulls' is somewhat artificial. The partnership initiatives addressing HIV/AIDS in South Africa and Zambia, for example, show that a crisis can provoke different sector organisations to work together to find solutions for addressing an urgent common problem. This is reinforced by the proliferation of partnership arrangements in the field of humanitarian action (IFRC, 2016:162-185),<sup>38</sup> and demands for more

<sup>38</sup> The 2016 World Disaster Report (WDR) reinforces the necessity of working in partnership due to the need for rapid, cross-sector and cohesive approaches to crisis situations (IFRC, 2016).

strategic and innovative collaborative arrangements to address the socio-economic consequences of the European financial crisis (Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a:5).

Googins and Rochlin observe (2000:137) that a range of ‘natural obstacles’ such as different sector languages, cultures, goal orientations and values may make partnership difficult to pursue. This is echoed by Newborne and Caplan (2006:6) who believe that emphasis should be placed on promoting awareness of these obstacles and how they might be addressed so that an ‘enabling space’ for collaborative innovation is obtained.<sup>39</sup> My research work on partnership in the European Social Fund (ESF) endorses this approach as a useful way of exploring what measures it may be necessary (or realistic) to undertake to support partnership approaches, and whether other avenues for addressing problems should be investigated (Stott, 2008:33).

As well as prompting reflection on a broader range of contextual variables, a review of the literature on the theme of partnership and context has raised several issues that I believe merit greater consideration in my work. The first is the importance of exploring the *dynamic* interaction and ‘trickle effects’ (Kolk, Van Dolen and Vock, 2010) between partnership drivers. The second relates to the different power dynamics that changing contextual interconnections encompass and the need to take ‘the a priori power asymmetry’ (Seitanidi and Ryan, 2007:255) into account. A third issue is the importance of acknowledging the existence of ‘soft’ or ‘lightweight’ motives for engaging in partnership. These might include ‘jumping on the bandwagon’, interest in the ‘feel good’ factor that may accrue from participating, or simple curiosity as to what might be on offer. These drivers are important to identify because they have implications for how well a partnership might work, particularly as we have argued that if the drivers for partners to participate are not sufficiently met partnership effectiveness will be limited (Caplan et al. 2007:5).

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<sup>39</sup> Newborne & Caplan (2006) suggest that partners might address obstacles by: influencing a blockage directly; circumventing by working round the obstacle, or redirecting by shifting the partnership focus.

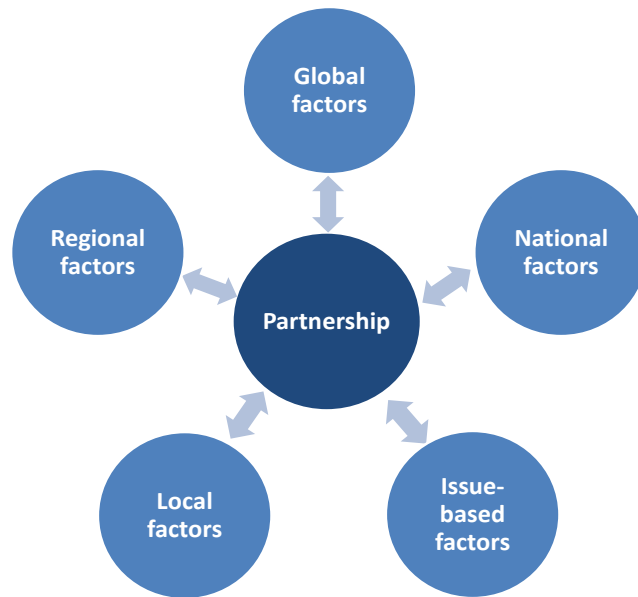
## External drivers

In the literature on partnership, the study of particular historical, cultural, social and political contexts is recommended (Harrison, 2002:607; Mandell and Steelman, 2003:212-13; Seitanidi and Ryan, 2007:255). We have suggested that financial and institutional aspects may be added to this (Caplan et al. 2007:9), as well as ‘particular economic, political, cultural and social conditions’ in different ‘regional, national and local environments’ (Rein and Stott, 2009:81). Additional variables might also include crisis or conflict situations (Tennyson et al. 2016:15) and settings where there are ‘weak governance and formal institutional voids, with a prevalence of informal institutions’ Kolk (2013:8). As noted by Pattberg and Widerberg (2016:48), external drivers also include global factors that drive the uptake of partnership in specific country contexts and localities. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example, have encouraged the establishment of partnership arrangements for achieving national development targets associated with the issues covered by the case studies informing this review.<sup>40</sup> These issue-based drivers are also important to consider in relation to specific contexts.

My research findings suggest that the interaction of the different factors outlined in Figure 8 plays a critical role in determining the adoption of particular partnership approaches. In South Africa, for example, partnership was favoured by positive government policies and a ‘push’ for the private sector to assume a role in post-apartheid reconstruction (Rein and Stott, 2009:81). In Zambia, while the prevalence of extreme poverty was a central driver, there was less interest from government in promoting legal regulations and norms for partnership. Regulatory pressure, however, did appear to have pushed the business sector to make a contribution to development projects (ibid). In both countries, although conditions varied, issue-based drivers such as the need to increase agricultural productivity, manage approaches to HIV/AIDS and improve higher educational opportunities were also important.

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<sup>40</sup> These include agriculture, education, employment, health, gender equality and access to basic services.



**Figure 8: External partnership drivers**

In EU Members States, ESF directives mandating the use of partnership mechanisms in order to receive funding for projects that promote employment and social inclusion have clearly created a partnership ‘push’ (Stott, 2008:17-18; Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a:3-4). This has been further endorsed by the adoption of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP) which establishes minimum partnership requirements for national authorities charged with disbursing European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) (Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a:5; European Commission, 2014). The UN-Business Partnership, meanwhile, was stimulated by the UN Global Compact (2000) which encouraged the private sector to sign up to a series of ethical principles and contribute to the MDGs (Stott, 2007:3). In the Latin American case studies, government policies endorsing new forms of service delivery also led to the development of partnership initiatives to provide basic services to marginalised populations (Stott, 2014:31).

Looking at my work with hindsight, I am aware that greater consideration of power dynamics in relation to motivations for the endorsement of ‘positive’ policy and regulatory frameworks is merited, alongside deeper examination of how global

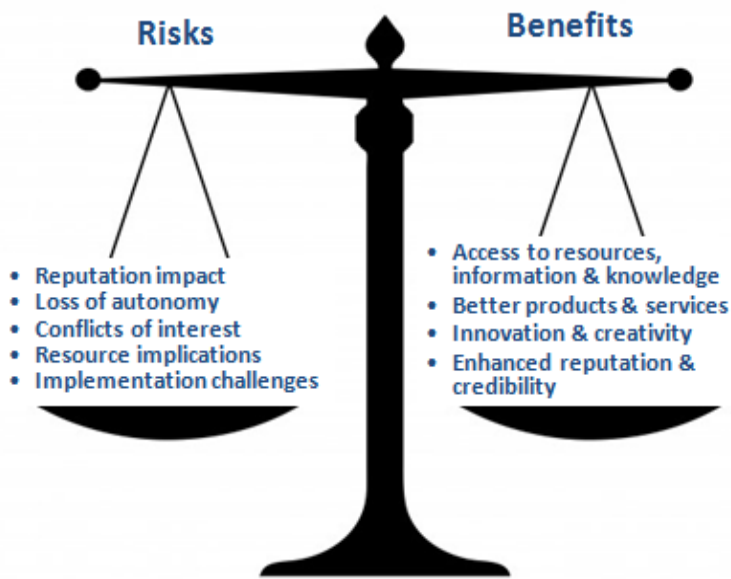
policy drivers are played out in national and local contexts. The ‘push’ for collaboration with the private sector by both international development agencies and national governments that we observed in South Africa and Zambia (Rein et al. 2005:27, 33) is an example of this. Meanwhile, because agencies such as the UN have been criticised for ceding decision-making powers to transnational corporations in partnership relationships (Bruno and Karliner, 2002; Zammit, 2003; Utting and Zammit, 2006b), and the EU’s promotion of local partnerships has been accused of enshrining ‘elitist, neocorporatist or neopluralist principles’ (Geddes, 2000:797), empirical studies that test out the reality of these accusations in concrete settings are much-needed. As these broad perceptions are intimately linked to power differentials among the actors involved (Brinkerhoff, 1999:61), such inquiries will need to explore organisational drivers for partnership.

### **Organisational drivers**

In Caplan et al. (2007:9) we noted that while external drivers are critical to determining the viability of partnership arrangements, different partner visions and missions also form part of the context for working in this way. Andersson et al. (2006:91) further observe that, ‘the potential that partnerships offer...is encompassed by the drive, energy, and ability to take action that stems from the explicit commitment of each of the partners.’ This commitment will derive from the fulfilment (or possible fulfilment) of both common *and* organisational interests. Potential partners thus need to be especially clear that the benefits of entering a partnership outweigh the risks.<sup>41</sup> Figure 9 highlights some of the generic organisational risks and benefits that potential partners are likely to consider.

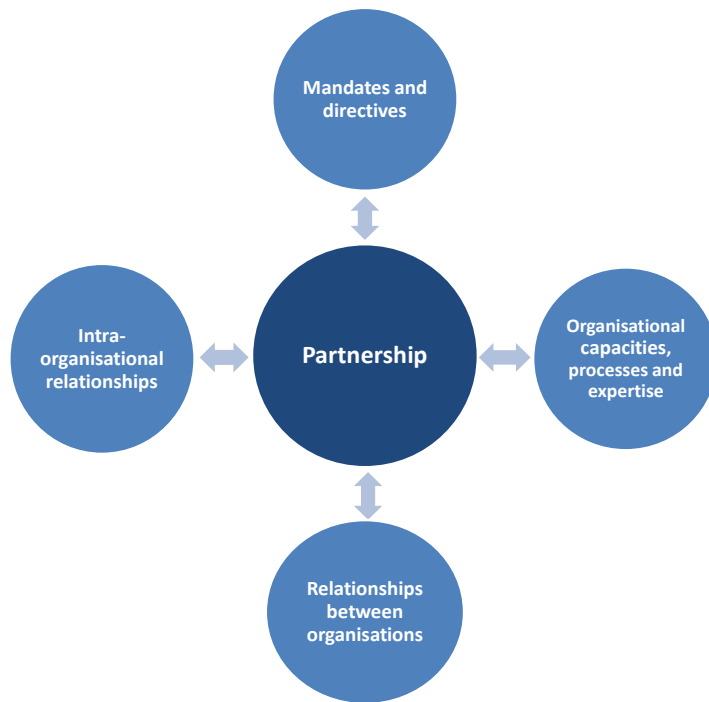
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<sup>41</sup> Otiso (2003:225) summarises this succinctly: ‘...each sector is drawn to the partnership by specific benefits that must exceed the cost of participation.’



**Figure 9: Risks and benefits of working in partnership**  
Source: Adapted from Tennyson (2004:10)

As well as looking at risks and benefits in relation to the complex sector systems within which organisations operate (Googins and Rochlin, 2000:137), attention also needs to be paid to ‘intra-organisational and inter-organisational contexts’ (Seitanidi and Ryan, 2007:256). Newborne and Caplan (2006:13-21) suggest that this kind of exploration might include questions relating to internal awareness about partnership arrangements and their potential; whether a legal mandate is required to work in partnership; the rapidity with which internal decisions are made; the degree of support from senior staff and, crucially, the availability of time and resources for partnering. Consideration of the state of relationships among potential partners and how far they are comfortable about working with one another may also be necessary. This is likely to involve reviewing organisational reputations, track records and previous partnership histories.



**Figure 10: Organisational partnership drivers**

To understand how some of the organisational drivers outlined in Figure 10 are manifested in practice, Table 9 looks at different partner incentives and disincentives in the Chamba Valley Partnership in Zambia. The Partnership aimed to increase small-scale farming income by supporting local farmers to supply the supermarket Shoprite (via its local subsidiary Freshmark) with quality fruit and vegetables.

While internal deliberations to decide whether organisations should enter a partnership are recommended, it is worth noting that in some contexts a decision to partner is taken because there is simply no other realistic alternative to working in this way. In the Chamba Valley Partnership, for example, the absence of both government and donor funding to support small-scale peri-urban farmers was the main reason why the collaboration was initiated.

Partners	Organisational drivers	
	Incentives	Disincentives
Chamba Valley Cooperative Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market access for fruit and vegetables</li> <li>• Accessible seed and extension services</li> <li>• Guaranteed income</li> <li>• Capacity-building opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scepticism about working with government due to historical lack of extension services</li> <li>• Working through Freshmark rather than directly with Shoprite</li> </ul>
Shoprite Zambia (South African supermarket chain)/ Freshmark (Subsidiary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure from government to obtain produce locally</li> <li>• Access to constant supply of produce</li> <li>• Reduction of costs on importation of produce from South Africa</li> <li>• Improvement of reputation and image</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Quality and consistency of local supplies</li> <li>○ Capacity for engaging with community</li> <li>○ Lack of real difference to profit margins</li> </ul> </li> <li>• No social investment push</li> </ul>
Ministry of Agriculture & Co-operatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model for community farming (replication of Luangeni Partnership)</li> <li>• Support from local farmers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial constraints</li> <li>• Lack of legal/regulatory framework</li> <li>• Time and human resource demands</li> </ul>
Zambia Seed Company (ZamSeed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guaranteed market for seed</li> <li>• Seedlings could be sold on to other customers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time and availability of staff to engage</li> </ul>
For all partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of trusted intermediary (Partnership Forum)</li> <li>• Positive experience of Luangeni Partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of experience of working in partnership</li> </ul>

**Table 9: Organisational drivers in Chamba Valley Partnership**  
Source: Adapted from Rein et al. (2005) and Rein and Stott (2009)

The Partnership Forum, although not a partner itself, was instrumental in establishing both the Chamba Valley Partnership and the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership (Rein and Stott, 2009:83). The existence of ‘trusted’ or ‘neutral’ ‘partnership brokers’ capable of bringing different sectors and organisations together in particular contexts is evidenced in all the case studies in my work and will be explored further in Chapter 4. It is of interest here because it raises questions about the role of external actors in creating a partnership ‘push’, particularly when this function is assumed by donor agencies. In the EU, for example, the ESF Managing Authorities responsible for distributing funds assume this intermediary role (Stott, 2008).<sup>42</sup> The Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (ZBCA),

<sup>42</sup> Managing Authorities may sometimes designate this function to ‘Intermediate Bodies’ specialising in particular programme fields.

meanwhile, was encouraged by UNAIDS (Rein et al. 2005:77) while the partnerships in the Latin American study were endorsed by the Inter-American Development Bank (Stott, 2014). As I noted in Stott (2009:5), external stakeholders who promote and contribute funds to support partnership arrangements often exert enormous influence on these relationships but bear far less risk than partners. Deeper understanding of the role played by an external intermediary, initiator or lead in the ‘push’ for a partnership approach, including analysis of their motivations for doing so, the power dynamics involved and how far this catalytic role distorts possibilities for finding other ways of addressing issues or problems, merits attention here.

Tomlinson (2005:1174) takes the theme of power in relation to organisational drivers a stage further by suggesting that, ‘power issues are inevitable because individual (organizational) self-interest and the pursuit of collaborative goals are not necessarily congruent.’ This notion is reinforced by Macdonald and Chrisp (2005:315) who believe that lack of transparency around this incongruence raises ethical concerns about the true purpose of partnership and the time and resources invested in its promotion. The existence of ‘covert’ motives for partnering such as ‘the pursuit of funding, credibility, or a licence to operate’ is also noted by Findlay Brookes, Visser and Wright (2007:5). These authors suggest that reluctance to share these interests is due to the fact that they may be substantially different to jointly proposed partnership outcomes (ibid).

The existence of tension around motives for partnering is well-illustrated in the UN-Business Partnership which was established to support primary education and gender equity (Stott, 2007). Here, the *given* organisational incentives for working in partnership are set out in Table 10. However, my research showed that these incentives were secondary to the *unstated* desire by the company to ensure long-term profit and effective brand reinforcement, and the UN agency’s need to attract corporate funding for its wider work. The fact that these ‘real’ incentives were never shared openly by the two partners was one of the reasons that the relationship failed (Stott, 2007:10).

UN Agency	Business
Fulfilment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2 & 3 - primary education for all and gender equity.	Corporate commitment to donating small percentage of pre-tax annual profits to communities around world.
Coverage of costs for project infrastructure, training and equipment.	CSR focus making strong stand against child labour.
More integrated approach to involvement in wider range of activities.	Community investment programme to support MDG 2.
Promotion of gender equity through special interventions encouraging female enrolment in primary education.	Commitment to developing strategic partnerships internationally.

**Table 10: Given organisational incentives for joining UN-Business Partnership**  
**Source: Adapted from Stott (2007:5)**

In my research work I have consistently stressed that partners should be open and explicit about their organisational incentives for working in partnership (Caplan et al. 2007:10; Caplan and Stott, 2008:33). Indeed, a recommendation in *Working Together* was that discussion of incentives should be carried out prior to the development of joint activities in order to avoid misunderstandings relating to ‘hidden agendas’ over time (Rein et al. 2005:126). Whilst recognising that this may not always be possible, clarity around genuine motivations for partnering can assist in deepening collaborative relationships. Googins and Rochlin (2000:142) endorse this compellingly:

If cross-sector partnerships are indeed appropriate for encouragement, each participant must have an understanding of how partnership will generate value for them... This calls for a new level of professionalization for those that might create and manage partnerships. Developing a value exchange relationship requires participants to engage in a more sophisticated level of analysis and due diligence.

The emphasis that these authors place on professionalization also highlights the central role that individuals play in partnership relationships.

## Individual drivers

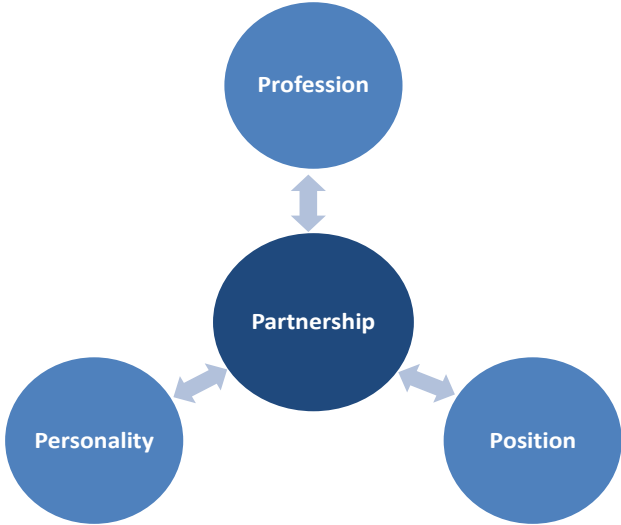
Although partnership arrangements are composed of organisations from different sectors, they are initiated and driven by individuals acting on their behalf (Caplan et al. 2007:10). Acknowledgement of individual interests and their interplay with organisational incentives has been noted by a number of writers (eg Woolley, 2002:198; Gazley, 2010:655; Waddock, 2010:9; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a:730; Kolk, 2013:13). However, as Kolk, Van Dolen and Vock (2010:128) indicate, these ‘micro level interactions’ (‘within and across organisations’) have not been adequately studied. Some of the areas that deserve further attention include possible conflicts between individual and organisational drivers for partnership, and how far individuals adequately represent or act on behalf of organisational interests. Analysis of ‘lightweight’ individual ‘whims’ for partnering and how they interact with organisational incentives are also relevant here. Battisti (2009:97) further stresses that individual ‘emotions and unconscious dynamics’ should be considered in partnership analysis, while Googins and Rochlin (2000:140) draw attention to the collaborative skills that individuals may require for working in partnership. This is endorsed by Tennyson (2005:9) who notes that the role played by individual partnership brokers, and the skills and competencies required for bringing different actors together, also need to be more deeply understood.

All six of the partnerships we researched in Southern Africa were started by individuals, ‘who discerned or realised a need within a given environment and went on to devise a strategy in which contextual drivers and triggers were central to the establishment of the partnerships’ (Rein et al. 2005:111). A similar situation was encountered in the UN-Business Partnership which was largely established by the Deputy Director of the business involved (Stott, 2007).<sup>43</sup> These individuals were usually highly respected figures who possessed good negotiation and communication skills, and prior experience of working in partnership.

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<sup>43</sup> The UN agency had no senior internal champion and personnel were divided between those who favoured the partnership because of possible access to funds and those against the idea because of reputational concerns.

In addition to the influence of professional identity on the take-up and shaping of partnership, as we noted in Caplan et al. (2007:10), both individual position and personal identities also have a bearing on this. Professional identities may, for example, encourage involvement in partnership in order to deepen knowledge and expertise; position identities may see opportunities to enhance status and career options, and personal identities to meet new people and expand networks (ibid).



**Figure 11: Individual partnership drivers**

The individual drivers outlined in Figure 11 can affect a partnership arrangement in different ways. Tennyson (2003:10) provides a nice illustration of this in a description of her attempts to decipher which ‘hat’ partner representatives were wearing during a partnership consortium meeting:

In chairing the Consortium meeting today - it felt as if I was actually managing 27 rather than 9 people. Whenever one person had a reaction to an important issue that was at odds with the rest of the group, I felt I had to ‘unpick’ whether their objection was arising from a difference of professional judgement or whether it was evidence of potentially serious organisational divergence or whether it was simply a personality clash with one or more of the others. Only when I felt that I had clearly ascertained from which of these perspectives they were speaking could I properly assess (on behalf of the group) how much their views should be allowed to sway the decision-making process.

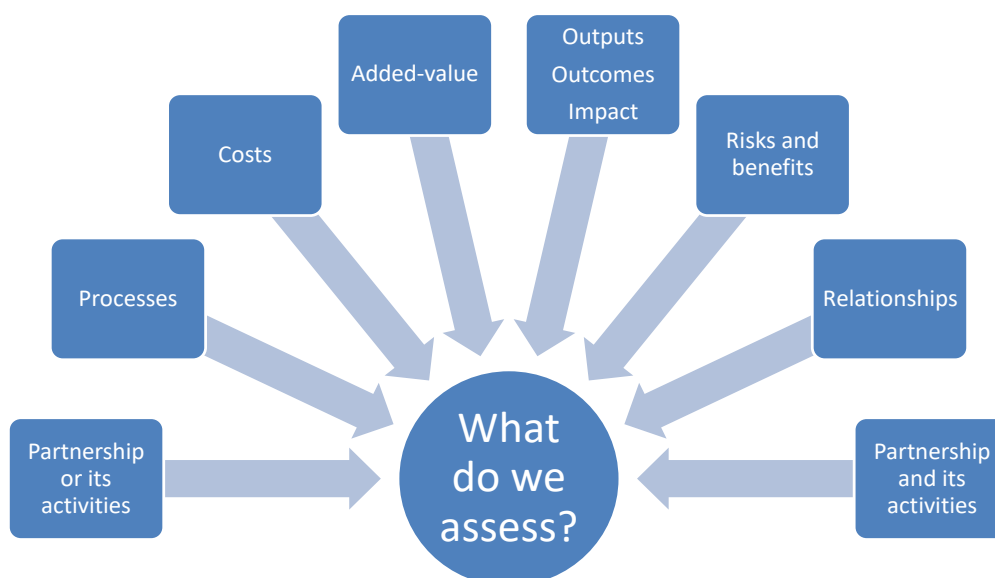
As well as endorsing the idea that partnership may promote social progress by offering opportunities for the expansion of human capabilities, the critical role played by individual drivers reinforces the centrality of people in partnership relationships. Although partnership is consistently portrayed as a form of organisational collaboration it is individual representatives who ultimately determine the objectives of different partnership arrangements and their levels of ambition. Indeed, as noted in our recent study on partnership in different contexts, ‘...it is the constant, on-going (and sometimes relentless) interplay between people and their contexts that can make or break collaborative efforts and, at their best, create the conditions for genuine transformation’ (Tennyson et al. 2016:28).



## Chapter 3: Evidence for partnership effectiveness

### The evaluation challenge

Sixteen years ago, El Ansari, Phillips and Hammick (2001) called for a better evidence base for the effectiveness of collaboration and partnerships. That this appeal is still valid suggests that gathering such evidence is problematic. As we noted in Caplan et al. (2007:3) and Rein and Stott (2009:85-6), different relationship levels in partnership arrangements make identification of exactly what to measure, and with what indicators, complex. The absence of useful systems for measuring partnership results thus has much to do with deciding exactly what needs to be assessed and why (Bezanson and Isenman, 2012:24; Van Tulder et al. 2016:3) (see Fig.12).



**Figure 12: The challenge of assessing partnership<sup>44</sup>**

Source: Adapted from Caplan et al. (2007:3)

<sup>44</sup> In Caplan et al. (2007:4) we noted that partnership evaluations may start from different angles, including assessments of: ‘added value’ over time (Mitchell, Shackleman & Warner, 2001; Warner, 2002); partner relationships and outcomes (Brinkerhoff, 2002); transaction-costs (Artz & Brush, 2000); accountability (Caplan, 2005), and changes in behaviour, relationships and activities (Earl, Carden & Smutylo, 2001).

In Caplan et al (2007:3) we stated that, ‘...tightly defined data measurements may miss broader external issues, such as social and environmental change, as well as those internal to the partnership around organisational change.’ We also highlighted concerns about attribution and the fact that outcomes often occur well after partnership arrangements have completed their work (Caplan et al. 2007:16-17). A further complication, as I have noted in Stott (2007:8), is that partners are likely to have different preferences regarding appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems. Assessing partnership results is thus aptly likened to measuring ‘a moving target’ (El Ansari, Phillips and Hammick, 2001:220; Kolk, Van Dolen and Vock, 2011:123).

Our research proposed assessment of both the outcomes of collaboration as well as how partners work together to achieve these (Caplan et al. 2007:3). We further suggested that partnership arrangements were more likely to be effective if clear organisational *and* individual benefits were derived from partnering (Caplan et al. 2007:5). This approach resonates with calls for consideration of how ‘partnerships can address the “social good” in many more subtle ways, as well [as] via stakeholder interactions that might trickle from one level to another’ (Kolk, Van Dolen and Volk, 2011:123). El Ansari and Phillips (2001:231) describe this as, ‘the “black box” where interactions between the diverse partners take place’. With these connections in mind, some of the outputs and outcomes that might demonstrate partnership effectiveness are outlined in Table 11.

Outputs Tangible and intangible results for:			Outcomes Changes as a result of achieving outputs for:		
Target group/s	Organisations	Individuals	Target group/s	Organisations	Individuals
Meeting goals and objectives	New 'markets' for products and services	Acquisition of knowledge / skills	Changes in practice, attitudes and behaviour	Policy impact / influence	New contacts/ opportunities
New / improved products and services	Transactional efficiency	Learning opportunities	Improved quality of life	More integrated approaches	Ability to influence organisation
Acquisition of new knowledge / skills	Improved reputation / public recognition	Improved performance	Greater confidence / stronger voice in political arena	Improved working relationships	Improved quality of life
	Acquisition of knowledge /skills	Effective use of time and resources		Heightened ability to fulfil mission	
	Networking and information exchange		Sustainable solutions to development challenges	Innovative ways of problem-solving	
	Access to funding / resources		Better ability to address risks		

**Table 11: Results that might demonstrate partnership effectiveness**

Attempting to appraise partnership in relation to the achievement of these different results is complicated by the fact that partnership goals are frequently unclear. Brinkerhoff (1999:61) observes that while the drawing up of 'compatible and convergent objectives' by partners is a logical starting point for any partnership, this is complicated by three key challenges:

First is the multiplicity of actors and their broad range of interests...Sometimes the compatibility of objectives is more apparent than real; over time, the hidden agendas often work at cross purposes with the ostensible ones....Second is the power differential among the various actors, which arises as a function of differences in resource levels, operational capacity, and political clout.... Third is the tendency for partners' objectives to shift and potentially diverge over time.

As noted in Chapter 2, because partners may not be upfront about their real reasons for partnering it is often the case that partnership goals are, on the one hand, unrealistic and over ambitious and, on the other, diluted to the 'lowest common denominator' which limits opportunities for achieving positive social change. This situation has contributed to the very patchy nature of partnership results and is compounded by the paucity of partnership monitoring and evaluation systems.

## Exploring the evidence

The fact that many partnerships have failed to live up to their expectations is noted by Tomlinson (2005:1169), Beisheim (2012:6) and Patscheke et al. (2014:2), the latter noting that, ‘the development field is littered with aspirational partnerships that fall short of executing their ambitious goals.’ This is reiterated by Pattberg and Widerberg (2016:44) who find that many of the partnerships developed after the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg<sup>45</sup> showed ‘limited overall effectiveness’ in relation to their stated goals and ambitions:

...on analyzing the sample of 340 partnerships after more than five years since inception, approximately 38 percent show low levels or no measurable output. *Moreover, roughly 42 percent (86) of the partnerships with measurable output engage in activities without direct relation to their publicly stated goals and ambitions.* Summing up, of these numbers, 211 partnerships are inactive, lack any outputs, *or fail to match their stated ambition with their observed activities* (my italics).

Among global partnerships, although some show success in ‘problem-solving’<sup>46</sup> (ibid), partly because of poor tracking systems, there appears to be little evidence of their ‘net added value’ compared to existing institutional arrangements for addressing development concerns (Bezanson and Isenman, 2012:24). With regard to Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), meanwhile, a recent study finds that, as well as being costly and risky, evidence of their impact on efficiency is limited (Romero, 2015:28-9).

Romero further affirms that many PPPs suffer from ‘low transparency and limited public scrutiny, which undermines democratic accountability’ (Romero, 2015:8). Pattberg and Widerberg (2016:44) also observe that partnerships are not delivering on governance objectives. In addition, continued marginalisation of key and relevant stakeholders is documented (Pattberg and Widerberg, 2016:44). According to Bäckstrand (2006:299):

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<sup>45</sup> In order to distinguish them from Type 1 arrangements promoted by governments, these arrangements were known as Type II partnerships or ‘voluntary’ coalitions among different actors to implement WSSD goals (Ivanova, 2002:14-15).

<sup>46</sup> For example the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) which offers funding for vaccines and health system strengthening support, and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) which certifies timber.

The broad picture is that the partnerships are North driven, sponsored primarily by international organizations and a handful of industrialized countries. There is both a lack of grassroots and local participation from the South as well as private sector involvement.

Notwithstanding the importance of these critiques, the criteria used to assess them give little or no attention to the ‘hidden’ or unexpected benefits of working in partnership. Such benefits may accrue even when partnership has been judged as ineffective or too costly. Huxham and Vangen (2004:200) note, for example, that rather than outputs, ‘collaborative advantage’ may be derived from the process of partnering and the development of relationships. This is endorsed by findings from the six Southern African partnerships we researched where, in spite of limited outcomes, the value of partnering appeared to lie in its potential for promoting wider connections and long-term change (Rein and Stott, 2009:86) (see Table 12).

Partnership		Results	
	Aim	Outcomes	Processes
Chamba Valley Partnership	To increase small-scale farming income by supplying supermarket chain with local produce	10 /98 farmers selling to Shoprite	Individual farmers had more capacity and confidence
Small-scale Sugarcane Farming Communities Partnership	To develop livelihoods of small-scale sugarcane growers	No data available	Integration of affected communities in political processes of post-apartheid South Africa
Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS	To link businesses with NGOs and government to tackle HIV/AIDS pandemic	Increase in membership. No figures for numbers of people being treated and supported	Wider awareness about HIV/AIDS and links with business coalitions in other African countries
Amangwe Village	To promote a holistic health care centre with and for people living with HIV/AIDS	Limited statistical data available	No data available
Mthashana FET College Partnership Programme	To develop learning and skills development	No data available	Slow embedding in government policy
Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership	To engage businesses in improving educational infrastructure and teaching conditions	Slight increase in award of scholarships Some environmental improvements	Awareness of role private sector might play to support education

**Table 12: Partnership results in Southern African case studies**  
Source: Adapted from Rein et al. (2005) and Rein & Stott (2009)

Although review procedures were largely absent or ad hoc, and data on the tangible impact of partnership activities was hard to identify, one of our key conclusions was that working in partnership provided openings for different stakeholders to express and draw attention to their needs and concerns (Rein and Stott, 2009:86). We noted that it was thus important to view the:

...potential long-term benefits which *working together* is capable of bringing both to a local community and to society at large. In this respect, partnerships are more to do with the provision of legitimate platforms for problem solving and access to a variety of resources and less about 'delivery' (Rein et al. 2005:123).

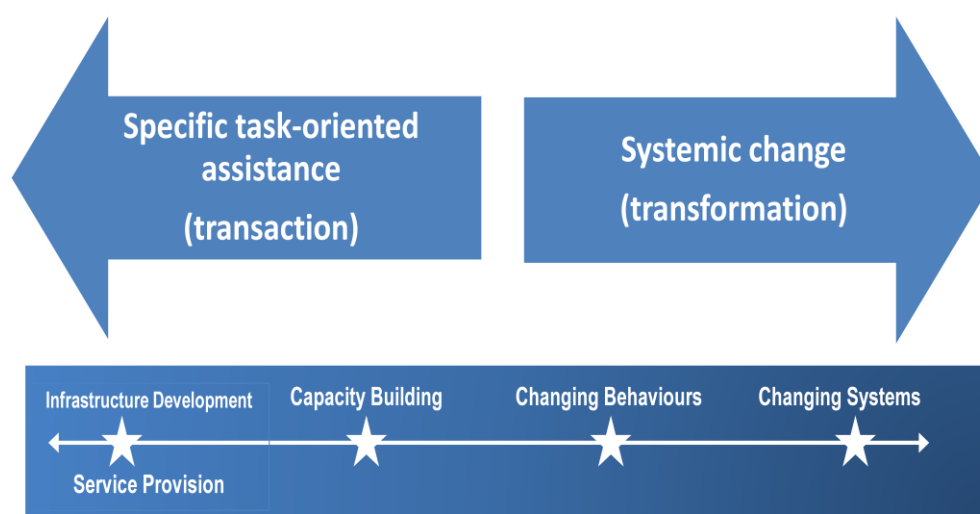
In the long term, sustainability of the more intangible benefits of working in partnership will depend on the identification of real-life changes that would not have happened, or would have happened only at greater cost or more slowly, without partnership.<sup>47</sup> While it is difficult to review the counterfactual, according to a number of representatives from ESF Managing Authorities, after over two decades of promoting the 'partnership principle', disadvantaged and marginalised groups had gained a stronger voice in the political arena (Stott, 2008: 22). Partnership arrangements in Austria, Germany, Ireland and Sweden also appear to have assisted integration of grassroots concerns in local development programmes (COP, 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2011; Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a:6-8), and 'multi-objective, multi-layered and multi-stakeholder' connections are seen as having contributed to 'innovative local development strategies and the breaking down of institutional and organisational barriers that impede improved approaches for dealing with complex problems on the ground' (Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a:11). Partnership relationships within, between and across different countries, regions, sectors and organisations in Europe are further viewed as reinforcing social capital and supporting positive change within organisations. One of the interviewees in the ESF study (Stott, 2008:20) described this process as one that included: '...dialogue, experience exchange and improvement of routines and processes in the organisations involved'.

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<sup>47</sup> As this kind of evidence often emerges after a partnership arrangement has ended this raises questions about how stakeholders track and record results when their work together is over.

## From transaction to transformation

The findings outlined above suggest that, rather than seeking to identify concrete outcomes and process results in the short term, we might need to explore the potential partnership offers for promoting changes in behaviour and new ways of working in the longer term. In Caplan and Stott (2008:24) we indicated that partnership objectives may range from the fulfilment of a specific task to changing rules and behaviours. These may be loosely plotted on a spectrum that distinguishes goals that focus on transactions from those that seek transformation (Fig.13).



**Figure 13: Spectrum of partnership objectives**

Source: Adapted from Caplan et al. (2007:2) and Caplan & Stott (2008:24)

According to Nowell (2009:209), relationships that promote systemic change will need to be stronger than those that focus on transactional goals. One of the reasons for this is that such relationships rest upon internal changes within partner organisations. In these arrangements, as partners perceive the value in working together (often after achieving some form of tangible change), their commitment and levels of ambition increase and internal changes begin to occur within their organisations in response to the learning gained through collaboration. This ‘mainstreaming’ process in which improved principles, strategies and practices are

integrated into the everyday work of organisations (European Commission, 2005:7)<sup>48</sup> has a systemic effect and moves partnership arrangements towards the transformation end of the spectrum. In this manner, as noted by Austin (2011), working in partnership creates value for both partners and wider society.

In an article on strategic collaboration between non-profit organisations and businesses, Austin (2000a:91) outlines a collaborative continuum consisting of three stages: philanthropic, transactional and integrative. In this continuum partners deepen their connection as they move towards integrative relationships where societal value is created by combining key distinctive competencies and resources. This framework has been built upon by Austin and Seitanidi (2012a) to create a ‘Value Creation Spectrum’ that adds a fourth stage of collaboration in which ‘the primary focus is the co-creation of transformational change at the societal level’ (ibid:736). The ‘Value Creation Spectrum’ resonates with the classification of UN-Business partnerships into a four stage continuum: from discrete philanthropic relationships to opportunistic and strategic collaborations, and finally to transformational partnerships that leverage the core competencies of all partners involved in order to restructure ‘the rules of the game’ (Global Compact LEAD Task Force’s 2011:9-11). These two continuums are combined below in Figure 14.



**Figure 14: Spectrum of partnership types**  
Sources: Adapted from Austin & Seitanidi (2012a) and Global Compact LEAD Task Force (2011)

<sup>48</sup> The EC promotes ‘vertical’ mainstreaming to ensure take up of partnership lessons and innovative practices in higher levels of organisational or political systems (Stott, 2008:78) and ‘horizontal’ mainstreaming which emphasises their transfer between organisations working in similar fields (European Commission, 2005).

The Global Compact LEAD Task Force (2011:10) positions ample stakeholder engagement as central to more transformational partnership arrangements. Austin and Seitanidi (2012a:744), meanwhile, believe that collaborative transformation should have an impact upon wider societal systems, as well as organisations and the people who work within them. They also note that this kind of transformation involves ‘shared learning about social needs and partners’ roles in meeting those needs’ (ibid:743).

This focus on learning and change is further explored by Buck Sutton and Obst (2011:xvii) who note that in transactional partnerships in the field of education, institutional partners remain largely ‘separate and unaffected’ by the relationship. Transformational collaborations, on the other hand, permeate organisations so that their different units are changed by working in partnership. This institutional change may encompass improvements in human resource development, engagement in more dynamic networks, better communication and opportunities for ‘getting out of the box’ (Tennyson, 2004:29). Buck Sutton and Obst (2011:xvii) conclude that as well as combining resources, transformational partnerships ‘view linkages as sources of institutional growth and collaborative learning.’



**Figure 15: Partnership and transformation**  
Source: Adapted from Zadek (cited in Tennyson, 2003:33)

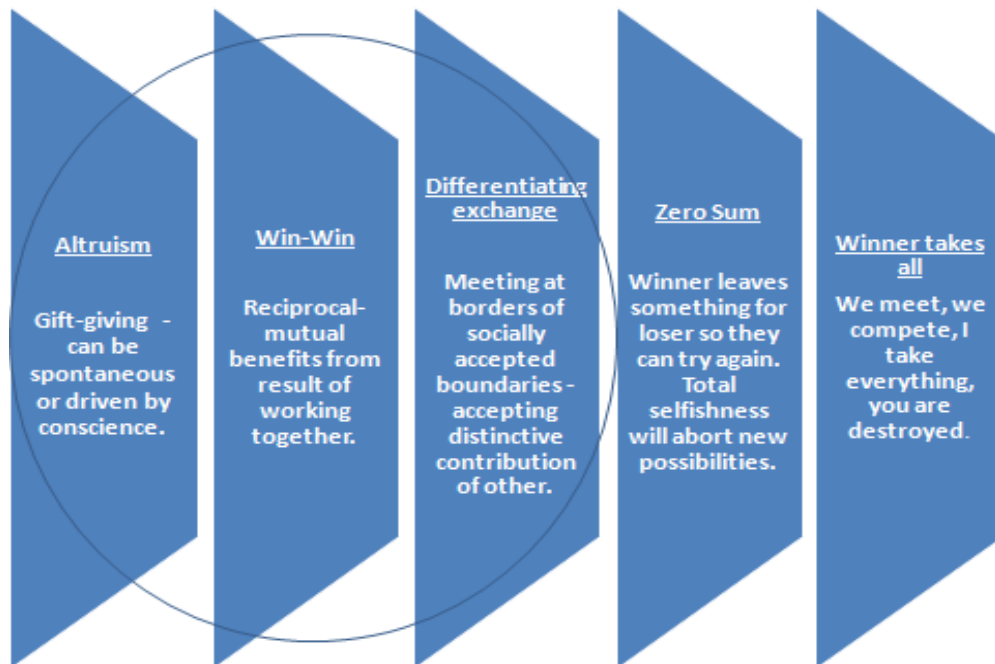
Figure 15 aims to capture the importance of learning and change within organisations as a result of working in partnership.<sup>49</sup> The suggestion here is that most partnership initiatives are likely to expend their efforts in achieving transactional type project activities. However, as partners work together and recognise the value that this adds to their organisations and to wider society, internal learning may occur. The section at the top of the pyramid is composed of arrangements that are able to change ways of doing things as a result of mainstreaming collaborative learning. According to Tennyson (2004:31) such transformation takes place when working in partnership has challenged ‘entrenched institutional/sectoral behaviour’ and its impacts are more than ‘transitory or superficial’. She further notes that this involves individual engagement and growth, ‘true collaboration transforms the individuals that engage in it consciously: partners help each other grow personally and professionally while accomplishing the objectives of the partnership’ (Tennyson, 2004:23).

### **Attributes of transformational partnership arrangements**

Many of the characteristics of transformational partnership outlined above resonate with the intrinsic qualities of cooperation mentioned by Leadbeater (2012) Sennett (2013) and Eisler (2015) (see Chapter 1, Table 5). Three of Sennett’s (2013:72-86) possible forms of exchange can also be equated with the philanthropic-transformation partnership continuum in Figure 14. Altruism, for example, overlaps neatly with the philanthropic category; win-win with integrative or strategic relationships; and differentiating exchange with more transformational connections (see Fig.16).

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<sup>49</sup> According to Tennyson (2003:33) this model is based on Simon Zadek’s suggestion of ‘three generations of partnership’.



**Figure 16: Sennett's spectrum of exchange**  
**Source: Adapted from Sennett (2013:72-86)**

Because transformational partnership depends upon the achievement of deeper levels of 'engagement' and internal learning, Sennett's (2013:78-83) call for 'dialogic' or 'differentiating' exchange is pertinent here. This form of collaboration, as noted in Chapter 1, is based upon recognition of the distinctive contribution of the actors involved, thus:

Though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of the other (ibid:19)

Sloan and Oliver (2013:1862) find that 'asking provocative questions, offering sensitive disclosures, opening the agenda to pursue spontaneous ideas, and valuing the other in attitudes and acts' can promote emotional engagement and build trust among partnership stakeholders. For Seitanidi and Crane (2009:422) relationships of trust between individuals demonstrate the depth of partnership 'embeddedness'.

By encouraging a focus 'outside oneself' Sennett (2013:22) believes that dialogic exchange can also promote empathy. This is endorsed by Leadbeater (2012:44) and

Eisler (2015:19) who regard empathy as central to genuine cooperation. Given the emphasis placed on full acknowledgement of the value of distinct competencies and resources in transformational partnership arrangements, and the need to understand different partner incentives for engaging in collaboration, Leadbeater's (2012:40) insistence on a connection that is 'real and personal' so that 'the people taking part are more able to put themselves in the other person's shoes' is particularly apposite here. This implies a focus on individuals as well as organisations, and the possibility that by improving quality of life a 'healthy' collaborative connection may be intrinsically good.

Implicit in these suggestions are positive notions of 'participation' and 'empowerment'. While these terms clearly resonate with the concept of transformational partnership, greater qualification of what they mean and how they might work in practice is required, particularly because, as highlighted in Chapter 1, their loose usage contributes to further obfuscation of the term partnership.<sup>50</sup> This theme will be given attention in Chapter 4, however, in order to add some rigour to the ingredients of transformational partnership, it is helpful here to emphasise the importance of *appropriate* stakeholder participation. This demands contextually relevant approaches that take cognisance of the diverse voices that inform particular partnership arrangements and give attention to the issue of accountability.

Zadek (2007:11) has argued that the transformational potential of partnership is directly linked to the extent to which accountable decision-making processes are in place that respond legitimately to stakeholder concerns. Caplan (2005:2) suggests that as well as being accountable to one another and to external stakeholders, partners will also operate within relevant regulatory frameworks (ibid:1). Because a strong criticism of partnership is that, under the guise of collaborative governance, the role of state actors is undermined or distorted (Schäferhoff, Campe and Kaan, 2007:13; Beisheim, 2012:6), close links to policy environments seem particularly important, especially when partnership goals relate to public service provision or the achievement of national development targets (Stott, 2010:10).

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<sup>50</sup> See also Cornwall & Brock (2005) and Cornwall (2008).

Although accountability is important, Eisler (2015:6) contends that flexible hierarchies are needed that provide space to inspire rather than control. In this regard, Leadbeater (2012:36-38) proposes frameworks for cooperative activities in which ‘people are able to rely on norms of reciprocity and peer-to-peer learning to enforce sanctions, rather than material incentives and abstract rules, both of which tend to undermine cooperation’ (ibid:44).<sup>51</sup> The need for a balance between accountability and space for innovation is echoed by Caplan (2003b) who contends that clarity around partnership systems, structures, roles and responsibilities must give room to accommodate change and allow for experimentation with new ways of doing things:

The ideal partnership would be framed as...maximising innovation and creativity whilst ensuring accountability, focusing on delivery whilst capturing lessons to influence the rules (ibid:4).

### **A revised partnership typology**

With these caveats in mind, an updated typology for exploring partnership arrangements in relation to their potential for transformation is offered in Table 13. This framework builds upon the typologies developed by Austin and Seitanidi (2012a) and the Global Compact LEAD Task Force (2011) by integrating some of the inherent qualities of cooperation described above, and giving attention to both social *and* human capital (the acquisition of skills, knowledge and opportunities that enhance the quality of individual lives).<sup>52</sup>

In this schema partnership arrangements are categorised as charitable, transactional, win-win and transformational. This representation is not arranged as a continuum as, although partnership arrangements may move between these classifications, the internal and external contextual variables that drive them suggest that they are unlikely to move in a linear manner. Indeed, partnerships may often move back and forth between these categories as they evolve.

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<sup>51</sup> Steets (2004:18) observes that ‘over bureaucratising’ partnerships risks minimising their attraction as alternatives to more rigid forms of governance.

<sup>52</sup> This description is broader than standard notions of human capital which view the acquisition of such competencies as simply enhancing individual productive capacity, see Sen (1999:292-7).

<b>Charitable</b> Altruistic/Philanthropic	<b>Transactional</b> Opportunistic	<b>Win-Win</b> Strategic/Integrative	<b>Transformational</b> Changing 'rules of game'
Donor-recipient relationship based on unilateral transfer of resources (usually financial)	Short-term/ad hoc relationship with reciprocal exchange of limited resources for specific activities	Mutual benefits for partners through use of competencies to develop partner and societal value	Recognition of diverse drivers and use of distinctive contributions to promote individual, partner and societal value
Multiplicity of contextual factors not fully taken into account	Attention given to context but difficulties in adapting to change	Embedded within particular and changing context	Adapts to change and is able to improve enabling environment
Limited or ad hoc consultation with stakeholders	Opportunistic cooperation with wider stakeholders	Seeks active engagement of wider stakeholders	Emphasis on tailored stakeholder engagement
Emphasis on public relations	Emphasis on outcomes	Emphasis on outcomes and processes	Integrates both outcomes and processes
Works within established systems where finding space for innovation is often a challenge	Difficult to balance accountability with innovation – often tends too much towards one or other	Attempts to secure space for innovation while also promoting accountability	Ensures space for innovation while working within clear accountability framework
Little change within partner organisations and weak connections with wider systems	Efforts to engage with wider systems but no long-term impact within partner organisations	Emphasis on shared learning with efforts to mainstream results	Learning internalised and results mainstreamed at partner and societal levels

**Table 13: Revised partnership typology**

Regular exploration of where different partnership arrangements sit in Table 13 may assist assessments of how far they are achieving value for society, partners and individuals, and if (or where) further action is needed to promote this. Examination of charitable and transactional collaborations, for example, may be used to investigate whether there is appetite for engaging in efforts to become more transformational and, if not, whether partners should continue to work in partnership. Such thinking is in line with our work on partnership evaluation (Caplan et al. 2007:7), where it was suggested that the validity of a partnership approach could be tested by asking whether results might be achieved more easily through alternatives such as single sector approaches. Our sense was that, due to time and resource implications, if a move towards transformation was not taking place there were serious questions about whether a collaborative relationship was worth pursuing. In

order to explore these questions and test the typology, Table 14 uses examples from the Case Study Map to illustrate the different partnership categories proposed.

Charitable	Transactional	Win-Win	Transformational
Amangwe Village (South Africa)	UN Business Partnership	Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS	Territorial Employment Pacts (Austria)
Relied largely on goodwill and dedication of stakeholders	Resource exchanges developed for specific activities	Defined core principles for working together	Emphasis on holistic solutions and systemic approach
No overarching structure	No internal impact on partners involved.	Formalisation of partner relationships in overarching agreement	Identification of synergies between different policy areas, geographical levels and stakeholders.
No sustainable financial model - reliant on ad hoc business contributions	Weak institutional buy-in , lack of staff engagement	Regular meetings among partners	Close ongoing work with stakeholders
High staff turnover	Lack of clarity on drivers	Learning links with other coalitions working on HIV/AIDS in Africa	Promotion of cross-project learning linkages
Lack of government engagement		Self-monitoring and evaluation processes	Integrated within overarching EU development strategy

**Table 14: Revised partnership typology with examples from research**

As the examples used in Table 14 are a snapshot of partnership arrangements at a particular time in the past, it is interesting to revisit these collaborations today and see whether they might be plotted differently. Although further research is required to confirm its status and activities, Amangwe Village now appears to be registered as an NGO.<sup>53</sup> This implies that, while it may still be engaged in partnership connections, it has elected to operate in a more traditional manner. The UN-Business Partnership, meanwhile, was disbanded due to lack of transparency over incentives, weak institutional buy-in and power dynamics (Stott, 2007). The fate of these charitable and transactional partnerships seems to endorse suggestions that

<sup>53</sup> See: <http://search.info4africa.org.za/Organisation?Id=79671> (accessed October 5, 2016)

partnership initiatives that are not able to move towards transformation may need to find alternative ways of working or disband.

The Zambia Business Council on HIV/AIDS (ZBCA) still exists. Although information is scant, it seems that the partnership was instrumental in endorsing the Pan African Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (PABC) in 2008.<sup>54</sup> The PABC's aims included: aligning business efforts to address HIV/AIDS; facilitating multi-sector efforts to prevent its spread; sharing information, and promoting research on HIV/AIDS across Africa. These connections imply that, at that time, the ZBCA continued to conserve its win-win partnership status and had the potential to move into the transformational category.

The Austrian Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) used to exemplify transformational partnership have become a model for addressing access to employment across Europe, and have motivated an enabling environment for working in this way at the levels of both policy and practice (COP, 2011; Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a:7).<sup>55</sup> They, in common with some of the other partnership arrangements developed under the ESF umbrella, demonstrate that partnership can become more dynamic and innovative over time, even when established in a top-down manner (Stott, 2008:40-41).

In my more recent research work, the collaborative initiatives developed to improve access to basic services in Latin America and South Africa could be categorised as transformational (Stott, 2014). In line with Figure 15, these models have worked in the short term to provide an early demonstration of tangible change, such as the provision of photovoltaic electricity in the *Luz en Casa* study (ibid:9-11). They have then ensured that new ways of doing things become part of organisational cultures. In the Guatemala case, for example, government agencies began to take over the health education activities and costs initially assumed by other partners (ibid:14). In

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.sabcoha.org/the-pan-african-business-coalition-on-hiv-aids-pabc/>  
(accessed October 5, 2016)

<sup>55</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/social/esf\\_projects\\_117/project.cfm?id=81andproject\\_lang=en](http://ec.europa.eu/social/esf_projects_117/project.cfm?id=81andproject_lang=en)  
(accessed October 5, 2016)

the longer term, partner relationships have influenced policy and, as shown in the cases of *Luz en Casa* and *Ciudad Saludable* in Peru, led to positive changes in regulatory frameworks for energy and waste management (ibid:10; 22). The learning gained through exchanges of knowledge and experience has also promoted a sense that the intrinsic value of partnership contributes to sustainable change (ibid:39).

Against a global context in which partnership is positioned as central to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2014; UN General Assembly, 2016) and promoted as offering solutions to ‘wicked problems’ (Dentoni, Bitzer & Pascucci, 2016:35-6),<sup>56</sup> the pressure for partnership arrangements to demonstrate results is high. However, attempting to gather the evidence for partnership effectiveness is an enormous challenge. As well as the complex nature of the relationships involved and lack of clarity around their goals, achieving change in attitudes and practice through partnership processes takes considerable time (Stott, 2008:32; 2014:37). The best way forward may thus be to concentrate on partnership review processes that support partners to explore the transformational potential of their collaboration with frank explorations of their incentives for working together, and reflection on their plans, strategies and relationships. This will necessarily require attention to issues of participation and power.

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<sup>56</sup> According to Dentoni, Bitzer & Pascucci (2016:35-6) these problems include issues ‘such as poverty, climate change, environmental degradation or food insecurity, have no closed-form definition, emerge from complex systems in which cause and effect relationships are either unknown or highly uncertain, and have multiple stakeholders with strongly held and conflicting values related to the problem.’



## Chapter 4: Partnership participation and power

### Participation in partnership

In a review of the corporate-community partnerships initiated by the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in the Niger Delta,<sup>57</sup> Macaulay (2005:27-8) describes some of the challenges encountered as: a generalised view among communities that the company was a resource provider rather than a partner; difficulties in forming stable relationships due to high community mobility rates, and the absence of partners with adequate capacity and local-level acceptance. He also notes:

The complexity and sensitivity of mainstreaming youth and gender issues in partnership negotiations (in a society which traditionally gives only *little* voice to children and women) without precipitating *unhelpful* socio-cultural disequilibrium (ibid:28).

This anecdote is a reminder that the partnership playing field is not a level one and that the notions of horizontal decision-making and power-sharing espoused by partnership are difficult to carry out in practice. As well as limited avenues for expressing their views, recognition of distinctive stakeholder contributions and concerns may be impeded by ‘powerful’ players ‘leading’ and speaking on behalf of others. Furthermore, attempts to change levels of participation can, as White (1996:6) notes, become a focus for struggle. To analyse the extent to which partnership might ‘transform,’ it is therefore fundamental to look more deeply at how (and to what extent) *different* stakeholders participate in partnership arrangements in practice. This inevitably involves exploring power dynamics.

Cornwall (2008:275) makes a useful distinction between ‘invited participation’ in which ‘spaces are created through invitations to participate’ (by an external agency) and ‘autonomous participation’ in which people create these spaces for themselves.

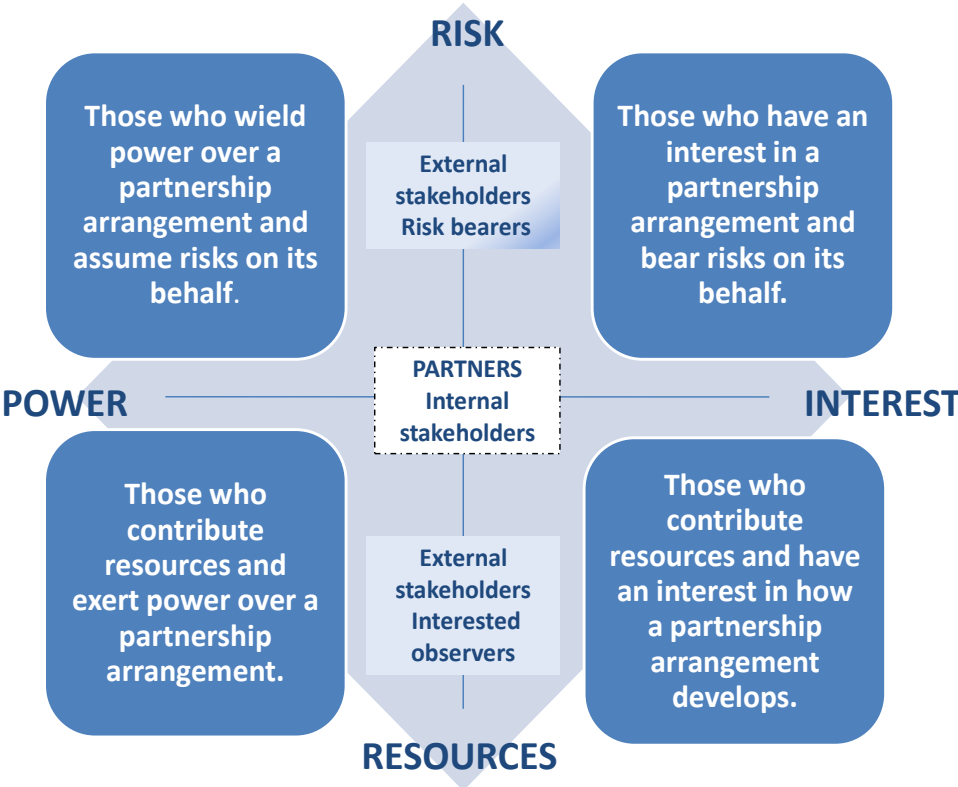
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<sup>57</sup> While the given rationale for these relationships was the company’s desire to address ‘socio-economic, political and environmental hazards’ (Macaulay, 2004:27) associated with oil and gas production, these relationships must be seen as part of SPDC’s efforts to repair the damage caused by the Shell-Ogoni conflict and the highly publicised deaths of Ken Saro Wiwa and Ogoni leaders in 1995 by Nigeria’s military government (see Boele, Fabig & Wheeler, 2001).

While ‘invited participation’ may be common in traditional projects and programmes, in theory it is ill-suited to the collective decision-making processes that partnership implies. However, due to the diverse nature of different partners and their representatives, as well as interactions with wider stakeholders, developing ‘autonomous’ partnership participation processes can be a challenge.

**Stakeholders and levels of power**

In my paper on stakeholder engagement in partnerships, I suggested that partners could be described as ‘internal stakeholders’ who contribute resources to a partnership arrangement, assume risks on its behalf and stand to gain benefits from it (Stott, 2009:2). ‘External stakeholders’, meanwhile, could be broadly divided into ‘interested observers’ who exert power and influence upon a partnership (such as donors), and ‘risk bearers’ who are influenced by a partnership (such as community members) (see Fig.17).



**Figure 17: Matrix for identifying partnership stakeholders**  
 Source: Adapted from Stott (2009:6)

In this categorisation emphasis was placed on the importance of understanding the nature of the risks that different partners carry on behalf of a partnership in relation to the resources they commit to it, particularly as financial resources appear to give certain stakeholders greater weight in partnership decision-making processes (ibid:6). However, the perception that resources define the nature of participation processes in partnership is challenged by Derkzen, Franklin and Bock (2008:459) who suggest that other overlapping modes of power such as ‘authority, inducement, coercion, seduction, manipulation, persuasion and negotiation’ may have greater influence on participation. Huxham and Vangen (2004:193) agree, noting that there are likely to be many shifting ‘points of power’ in partnership arrangements, including those at the ‘micro’ or personal level.<sup>58</sup> The implication here is that partnership arrangements should be seen as ‘distinctive “arenas of power” where the emphasis on participation and consensus shapes power relations in particular ways’ (Derkzen, Franklin and Bock, 2008:459).

Partnership processes, as I have noted (Stott, 2009:2), are conditioned by context and, as a result, stakeholder participation in them is likely to reflect wider societal power relations (White, 1996:12). Furthermore, ‘partnerships are not static and just as power is articulated as an infinite number of iterative steps, so too is partnership’ (Derkzen, Franklin and Bock, 2008:460). Because diverse stakeholders may have different interests in partnership at different times, efforts are required to ensure their *appropriate* participation during partnership development. This is described by Cornwall (2008:276) as ‘*optimum* participation: getting the balance between depth and inclusion right for the purpose at hand.’

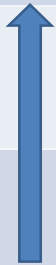
In her seminal work on citizen participation, Arnstein (1969:2-3) classifies ‘optimal’ participation as a state in which citizens are ‘empowered’ to lead and shape decision-making. Dismissing more passive participation processes such as consultation and information provision as ‘tokenism’, she suggests that partnership should enable citizens to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional ‘power holders’ in order to promote change (ibid:3). This view sits well with the idea that partnership should

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<sup>58</sup> According to Battisti (2009:96) power is closely linked to individual relational issues such as ‘control, fear or devaluation’.

directly involve all relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes so that they take ownership of collaborative outcomes (Ansell and Gash, 2007:546).<sup>59</sup>

In order to support a more nuanced view of partnership participation<sup>60</sup> and provide the basis for a practical assessment of engagement avenues for *particular* stakeholders, I suggested (Stott, 2008:29; 2009:7) that both internal and external stakeholders might participate in processes that range from a limited or passive association to a more dynamic connection in which the lead is taken in decision-making or the development of an activity (see Table 15).

<b>Stakeholders:</b>			
<b>4</b>	<b>STEER</b>	<b>Lead particular steps or partnership activities</b>	<b>Active</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>INFLUENCE</b>	<b>Participate directly in partnership decision-making, have a vote</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>ARE CONSULTED</b>	<b>Are involved in partnership discussions, able to express opinions and give feedback</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>ARE INFORMED</b>	<b>Receive information and are made aware of partnership work / activities</b>	<b>Passive</b>

**Table 15: Levels of stakeholder participation in partnership**  
**Source: Adapted from Stott (2008:29) and Stott (2009:7)**

My contention was that internal stakeholders, or partners, would be expected to engage in the more active levels of the scale (3 and 4) while external stakeholders might participate at different levels depending on their connection to a partnership initiative, their interest in it and the extent to which their involvement was sought (Stott, 2009:7-8). Although every effort should be made to ensure that they were not

<sup>59</sup> These perspectives have much in common with the arguments for ‘people-centred development’ put forward by authors such as Paolo Freire (1970) and Robert Chambers (1995; 1997).

<sup>60</sup> Beyond what Cornwall (2008:270) describes as an axis of ‘good’ to ‘bad’ forms of participation.

contrived as a substitute for authentic participation, I argued that the passive levels of the scale (1 and 2) were not necessarily less worthy and may sometimes be more appropriate for particular groups, contexts or phases of partnership development (Stott, 2008:29; 2009:8).

Revisiting this schema now, I am aware that it would benefit from further exploration of differentiations in partner (or internal stakeholder) participation, and how this compares to that of external stakeholders. The Chamba Valley and Small-scale Sugar Farming Communities Partnerships (see Case Study Map) have therefore been used to assess how far the different stakeholders involved might be classified as active or passive partnership players (see Table 16).

Stakeholders:		Chamba Valley Partnership	Small-scale Sugarcane Farming Communities Partnership
4	STEER	Partnership Forum (ES)	South African Sugar Association (P)
3	INFLUENCE	Shoprite /Freshmark (P)	Institute for Natural Resources (ES) Large-Scale Cane Growers (P)
2	ARE CONSULTED	Chamba Valley Cooperative Society (P/TG) Ministry of Agriculture & Cooperatives (P) Zamseed (P)	Small Cane Growers Co-operatives (P/TG) Department of Agriculture & Environmental Affairs (P) District Municipalities (P)
1	ARE INFORMED	Other communities (ES)	Traditional leaders (ES)
<p>P Partner (internal stakeholder) ES External stakeholder TG Target Group</p>			

**Table 16: Stakeholder participation in Chamba Valley & Small-scale Sugarcane Farming Communities Partnerships**  
Source: Adapted from Rein et al. (2005:35-55)

This exercise reinforces the perception expressed by some community partners that they had been ‘left out’ of the Chamba Valley Partnership (Rein and Stott, 2009:84).

It also confirms that the partnership was led and managed by an external player, the Partnership Forum, with the business partners Shoprite and Freshmark assuming greater weight in decision-making. In the Small-scale Sugar Farming Communities Partnership, meanwhile, the South African Sugar Association (SASA) clearly steered the partnership process and the small-scale cane growers at the centre of the initiative assumed a mainly passive role. In addition, although traditional leaders were highlighted as ‘influential’ stakeholders (and central to promoting community participation), an external stakeholder, the Institute for Natural Resources (INR), was tasked with articulating SASA’s community dialogue processes (ibid:54).<sup>61</sup>

These power dynamics suggest that resources such as money and influence have an important impact on partner participation. However, some caveats are necessary. The stakeholder relationships in Table 16 need to be viewed in relation to a particular phase of partnership development. At the time of the research, SASA was completing an extensive community scoping process with support from INR, the long-term aim of which was for small-scale cane growers to take ownership of the partnership process (Rein et al. 2005:54). In the Chamba Valley Partnership, although at a later stage in its development, the Partnership Forum was also involved in capacity-building community members to assume a greater role in activities (Rein and Stott, 2009:84). It is also worth noting that, even though the ‘community’ was generally referred to as a homogenous entity in both cases, it clearly contained a variety of different voices within it. In the Chamba Valley Partnership, for example, women farmers complained about being less well-informed than their male counterparts (ibid. 2009:84).

Although Shoprite and Freshmark appeared to have more power than other partners in the decision-making processes of the Chamba Valley Partnership, the reality was that they did not participate as actively as they might. This was partly due to the weak business case for working with small-scale farmers (Rein et al. 2005:44). However, there was a prevailing sense that it was the Partnership Forum that ‘managed and ran operations’ (ibid:42). Time factors also impeded greater

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<sup>61</sup> This contrasts with the Mthashana Further Education and Training College Partnership where traditional leaders were ‘primary’ stakeholders (Rein et al. 2005:101).

participation of business and government partners in both the Chamba Valley and Small-scale Sugar Farming Communities Partnerships (ibid:11).

Contextual factors that limit stakeholder inclusion, including the time needed to build relationships, have also been cited as challenges to participation in ESF partnerships (Stott, 2008:32; 2012:19; 2016:8). A number of recent studies further suggest that appropriate stakeholder representation in ESIF partnership arrangements is not always guaranteed and that weak participation channels limit opportunities for genuine stakeholder engagement and local-policy level connections (Stott, 2016:8).<sup>62</sup>

The partnership arrangements promoted by the ESF raise additional questions about the power of funding organisations and how donors such as international and regional development agencies, corporations and ‘northern NGOs’ determine the nature of partnership participation (Fowler, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Ashman, 2001; Crawford, 2003). Elbers and Schulpen (2011) find that, although attention has been drawn to the role played by such actors in transcribing local partner priorities and unilaterally establishing governance arrangements, more subtle forms of power asymmetry such as size, organisational capacity and institutional contexts may also influence partnership participation. In this regard it is interesting to see the strong objections of the business partner in the UN-Business Partnership to being treated as a ‘donor’<sup>63</sup> and their sense that the UN agency’s ‘bureaucratic and unadventurous’ internal processes impeded the partnership’s ability to move forward (Stott, 2007:10).

In Stott and Scoppetta (2013a:6) we found that many ESF Managing Authorities believed that their direction heightened levels of ambition as ‘top-down approaches go further in setting co-operation conditions than partners would voluntarily do.’ However, disquiet was also expressed about partnership participation becoming ‘a formal procedure’ rather than a dynamic and innovative means of contributing to

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<sup>62</sup> The following reports provide information on stakeholder recommendations for greater involvement in ESIF programmes: UEAPME (2012); ENNA (2013); CEMR (2013, 2014); CEE Bankwatch Network & Friends of the Earth (2015); CPMR (2015) and ETUC (2015).

<sup>63</sup> See also Jupp (2004) who asks whether donors can be partners who are valued for more than their financial support to collaborative initiatives.

social progress (Stott, 2008:24). We also learned that many ESF Managing Authorities found it hard to encourage creativity, local ownership and respect for the autonomy of different partners (Stott and Scopetta, 2013a:9-10).

### **Understanding incentives for participation**

Sennett (2013:234) asserts that, ‘the challenge of participation is to make it worth people’s time’. This suggests that the involvement of stakeholders in partnership processes necessarily requires understanding their drivers for participation. In line with our work in Caplan et al. (2007:8-10), and as outlined in Chapter 3, the premise here is that if individuals and groups are motivated to work collaboratively because their incentives or obligations for doing so are clear, they are likely to participate more enthusiastically. If, however, there are too many disincentives, stakeholders may remain detached and, in some cases, even seek to obstruct partnership activities (Stott, 2009:9).

To explore the importance of incentives in determining levels of partnership participation, different ‘points of power’ need to be further unpacked. To do this I have suggested that it may be useful to look at the visibility (and invisibility) of individuals, groups and organisations in partnership decision-making processes and activities, with recognition that these categories are multi-faceted (Stott, 2008:30; 2009:9-10). As noted above, and in Stott and Keatman (2005:5), the term ‘community’, for example, embraces a range of different voices and levels of power and it is often necessary to look beyond those who ‘speak’ on behalf of particular stakeholders, especially when they are vulnerable or marginalised community members who are often the most necessary to involve.

As the Chamba Valley Partnership and Niger Delta example at the start of this chapter confirm, some of the voices that may be difficult to hear are those of women and youth. These groups are, of course, composed of individuals whose identities may be cross-cut by issues such as ‘age, class, cultural beliefs, ethnicity, gender, rural/urban background, political affiliation and health status’ (Stott and Keatman, 2005:5) which may also change over time. Lister (2000:237) observes that similar

considerations need to be taken into account with regard to organisations as they embrace different individuals and personal relationships that require much greater consideration in partnership processes.

	Individuals/groups are:	Examples	Partners may need to:
I M P O S E D	<u>Unrecognised</u> Invisible and unacknowledged / Not been considered as stakeholder	Environmental / youth organisations, SMMEs (ESF Partnerships)	• Reassess partnership context
	<u>Disenfranchised</u> Have no say / Not been asked to participate in right way	People living with HIV/AIDS (Amangwe Village) NGO (UN-Business P-ship)	
	<u>Intimidated</u> Feel unwelcome, lack confidence	Women farmers (Chamba Valley Partnership)	• Review structures, channels and levels of engagement  • Examine operational culture, e.g. timing of activities
	<u>Stretched /under-resourced</u> Lack time, money, seniority	Government officials (Zambia partnerships)	
	<u>Distracted</u> Preoccupied by other issues/concerns	Shoprite Manager (Chamba Valley Partnership) Principal (Mthashana College Partnership)	
	<u>Indifferent</u> Benefits unclear /uncertain about whether efforts will yield results	Freshmark (Chamba Valley Partnership)	
S E L F - I M P O S E D	<u>Waiting</u> Need to be convinced participation is worthwhile	Small-scale sugar cane farmers (South Africa)	• Identify, clarify and review incentives for participation
	<u>Hostile</u> Seen as too risky / threatening to particular interests	UN Agency Country Rep (UN Business P-ship) / Ex-Principal (Mthashana College Partnership)	• Show early tangible results that might trigger participation
	<u>Weary</u> Tired of development initiatives that have little or no impact	Community representatives (Amangwe Village)	

**Table 17: Limitations on partnership participation**  
Source: Adapted from Stott (2008:30) and Stott (2009:10)

Table 17 provides examples of some of the (often overlapping) reasons for low or non-participation of different individuals and groups in partnership processes. These have been roughly grouped into positions that are ‘imposed’ and those that are ‘self-imposed’ because stakeholders have made a deliberate choice to exclude themselves

(Cornwall, 2008:279-80)<sup>64</sup>. Each stance has been illustrated with examples from my work with some general pointers for how they might be addressed.

The positions adopted in Table 17 are not static. Conflicting and changing loyalties and demands, and the contextual issues that cut across them will exert further influence on both the manner and depth of partnership participation (Stott, 2009:10). What they do show is that ‘the partnership context cannot be removed from its processes’ (Netshandama, 2010:80) and that participation is often limited by ‘pressing needs’ (ibid).

### **Capacity-building**

Efforts to increase stakeholder participation in partnership processes often focus on providing capacity-building to organisations that face financial, administrative and operational constraints. In the EU, for example, investing in social partner (trade unions and employer organisations) and NGO capacity so that their members can more deeply engage in partnership processes has been supported at national, regional and local levels (Stott, 2008:18; EESC, 2011:13-51). In Southern Africa meanwhile, as noted above, both SASA and the Partnership Forum worked to capacity-build community groups so that they could assume more active partnership roles (Rein and Stott, 2009:84).

In the ESF, capacity-building initiatives have been hampered by constraints in dealing with different levels of capacity, political interference and changes in policy agendas (Stott, 2008:59-60). Both here, and in the Southern African case studies, the time and resources needed for capacity-building, and how far this work might sidetrack attention from the main partnership agenda, were also highlighted (Stott, 2008:21; Rein and Stott, 2009:84;). At a deeper level, questions have been raised about who does the capacity-building and why. Lauten (2007), for example, notes that while partnership discourse centres on equality, capacity-building is mostly led by international agencies and northern NGOs who contribute short-term funding for

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<sup>64</sup> Many of these positions are also outlined by Cornwall (2008:279-80).

small-scale efforts that focus on narrow thematic functions, thus limiting possibilities for lasting change.

This is echoed by Benner et al. (2003:87) who stress that, ‘A significant part of capacity-building is also training and learning - training to operate in a partnership environment and learning how to interact with actors from other sectors’. Enhancing this ‘capacity to participate’ (El Ansari and Phillips 2001:234) will necessarily involve the sharing of different experiences of collaboration and demand deeper attention to individual (as well as organisational) knowledge of partnering.

### **Transformative participation**

In Rein et al. (2005) we describe a research visit to Mthashana Further Education College in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal during which the Principal explained that, prior to colonialism, rural livelihood issues were managed by adherence to the notion of *ubuntu*. He suggested that this form of ‘indigenous partnership,’ in which both tacit and explicit strategies informed value-driven social cohesion, could be drawn upon to encourage rural community participation in government-driven partnership arrangements (ibid:99). A similar story comes from an inner city partnership that supports community development in Dublin.<sup>65</sup> Here ‘restorative practice’ is used to build social capital through participatory learning and decision-making. This way of working is derived from the concept of ‘restorative justice’ which has its roots in Irish traditions and history and uses cooperative processes to repair the harm caused by crime (Leonard and Kenny, 2010:40).<sup>66</sup>

These experiences suggest that, rather than replicating ‘imposed’ or project-based models of stakeholder participation, partnership arrangements might draw upon relevant sociohistoric forms of collaboration. Other examples from my research work include the *izimbizo*<sup>67</sup> public consultation forums in South Africa (Stott, 2009:9) and

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<sup>65</sup> The Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Partnership, see: <http://www.ballyfermotpartnership.ie/> (accessed November 14, 2016) is an implementer of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) funded by the Irish Government and European Social Fund.

<sup>66</sup> For more on this concept see: <http://restorativejustice.org/> (accessed November 14, 2016)

<sup>67</sup> *Izimbizo* forums aim to provide a platform for the public to raise concerns with those in authority, see Kondlo (2010).

the use of local, cultural and political structures for managing basic services in Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru (Stott, 2014).<sup>68</sup> Traditions of collaboration and social dialogue have also been drawn upon in ESF partnership processes in countries such as Sweden where diverse partners are encouraged to assume responsibility for development (COP, 2009; Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a:8).<sup>69</sup>

The participation processes outlined above do not imply a return to some illusory golden age of collaboration. Rather, they have been drawn upon to support new ways of working that combine connections between specific localities and wider national and international frameworks and ideas. In Peru, for example, local Photovoltaic Electrification Committees in Cajamarca operate on similar lines to traditional organisational structures but now promote equitable gender representation (Stott, 2014:9). In Guatemala, the e-Health partnership has incorporated a powerful teenage education programme that supports young indigenous female leaders (ibid:13). These partnerships have also blended ICT advances with local knowledge to create appropriate service arrangements for different community groups (Stott, 2014:29). In Sweden, meanwhile, multi-actor cooperation projects addressing employment and social exclusion have incorporated cross-cutting issues such as gender mainstreaming and access for people living with disabilities (COP, 2009; Stott and Scoppetta, 2013a:8).

As well as being flexible enough to respond to contextual changes, these collaborative approaches encourage stakeholders to experiment with new ways of working. This includes an acceptance that ‘failure’ may be part of the learning necessary to promote positive change. In the eThekwini water and sanitation service model in South Africa, for example, partnerships between local government, academia, the private sector, donor agencies and community groups involve ongoing progressive reiterations (Stott, 2014:27). In ESF partnerships, meanwhile, creative processes in Austria and Germany ensure that learning from both successes *and*

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<sup>68</sup> See also use of the indigenous concept of *Dadirri* in Australia (Evans & Stott, 2008:15) and Onaolapo’s (2006:29) proposal for using customary associations as entry points for promoting partnership participation among communities in the Niger Delta.

<sup>69</sup> See also Nelson and Zadek (2000:11); Andersen and Mailand (2002:9)

failures is shared and fed back into practice (COP, 2010a; COP, 2011; Stott and Scoppetta, 2013b).

These approaches suggest that we might distinguish between ‘transactional’ and ‘transformative’ forms of partnership participation (Table 18). White (1996:8-9) describes transformative participation as enabling people to decide and act for themselves in a process that is both a means to an end and a ‘continuing dynamic.’ The implication here is that *transformative* participation in partnership is centred upon change within individuals that may lead to wider *transformation* within organisations and society at large.

Transactional participation	Transformative participation
Hierarchical , top-down	Horizontal – integrates top-down and bottom-up
‘One size fits all’ methodologies	Tailored for specific contexts
Standard application of latest approaches	Combines and adapts sociohistoric processes and structures
Little room for testing beyond pilot projects	Encourages constant experimentation
Clear targets and focus on accountability	Flexible approaches with room to change direction
Avoidance of conflict	Does not shy away from conflict
Ad hoc, time-bound and limited in scope	Open-ended and holistic
Limited use of learning	Actively promotes and shares learning
Facilitators that direct and manage	Facilitators that encourage and support

**Table 18: Transactional and transformative participation**

The fact that transformative participation in my research work appears to be so firmly linked to particular localities raises important questions for the vast number of global partnerships that operate across multiple levels and long distances. While further research is clearly needed to explore the nature of stakeholder participation in these arrangements, Patscheke et al. (2015) suggest that ‘a multi-layered backbone

structure' that integrates and mutually reinforces participation at local, regional and international levels may assist global partnerships to achieve transformational change.

Whatever their level of operation, an important role in promoting transformative participation is likely to be played by a 'partnership broker.'<sup>70</sup> These intermediaries or facilitators work from within and outside partnership arrangements to shape and manage collaborative processes (Tennyson, 2005:12). In my research work, a partnership broker function has been assumed by both individuals and organisations, and sometimes both, at different times (see Table 19).

Although not all the partnership brokers listed in Table 19 made connections that promoted transformative participation, some were able to do so. *Kooo*, Pobal and Gsub, for example, developed and reinforced ongoing linkages between policy and practice in ESF partnerships (Stott and Scoppetta, 2013b). The eThekweni Water and Sanitation Unit (EWS) in South Africa, TulaSalud in Guatemala and *Acciona Microenergía Perú* (AMP), and the individuals working within these organisations, initiated the local, national and international ties that supported collaborative efforts to improve access to basic services (Stott, 2014:30). This connecting ability is neatly captured in Leadbeater's (2014:144-5) notion of the 'rooted cosmopolitan' who 'creates new combinations of ideas drawn from a mix of the local and the cosmopolitan'.

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<sup>70</sup> This role has also been termed 'bridging agent' (Manning & Roessler, 2014) and 'boundary spanner' (Williams, 2010). For more on partnership brokers, see the Partnership Brokers Association <http://www.partnershipbrokers.org/> (accessed December 20, 2016)

	Individual operating from within a partner organisation	Partner organisation	Specialist unit /team within organisation
Internal	Rector, Mthashana College (South Africa)	Managing Authorities (ESF Partnerships)	Kooa coordination body set up by ESF Managing Authority (Austria)
	MAXLT Deputy Director (UN Business Partnership)	South African Sugar Association (Small-scale Sugar Cane Farming Communities Partnership)	eThekweni Water and Sanitation Unit (South Africa)
	Director, eThekweni Water and Sanitation Unit (South Africa)	eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality (South Africa) /Tula Salud (Guatemala)/ <i>Acciona Microenergía Perú</i>	
	Director, Partnership Forum (Zambia)	Partnership Forum (Zambia) NGO implementing partner (UN Business Partnership)	
External	Lecturer at University of KwaZulu Natal (South Africa)	Pobal (Ireland)/Gsub (Germany) (ESF Partnerships) UNAIDS (Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS) Institute of Natural Resources (Small-scale Sugar Cane Farming Communities Partnership)	Staff from UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) (Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS)
	Independent consultant	Independent organisation	Specialist unit /team from external organisation

**Table 19: Partnership broker roles in research work**

Netshandama (2010) observes that a commitment by partnership ‘facilitators’ to working ‘with’ rather than ‘for’ people is enhanced by long-term presence (ibid:80) and a rigorous appreciation of ethics and responsibilities (ibid:74). This is endorsed by staff at the partnership in Dublin mentioned above where the importance of principles such as ‘respect, dignity and equality’ was highlighted in their work with communities. Tennyson (2005) further notes that partnership broker skills include ‘active listening’ (ibid:35) and ‘reflection’(ibid:77-78). As noted in Chapter 3, these values and dialogic exchange processes are core elements of transformational partnership arrangements.

Many of these characteristics coincide with those advocated for ‘system leaders’ who promote collective leadership by helping people to see the larger system and build a shared understanding of complex problems; foster reflection and ‘more generative

conversations’, and move away from ‘reactive problem-solving to co-creating the future’ (Senge, Hamilton and Kania, 2015: 28-9). Scharmer and Kaufer (2013:12) further suggest that transforming society depends upon leaders capable of:

...experiencing the system from the perspective of the other players, particularly those who are most marginalized. The goal must be to co-sense, co-inspire, and co-create an emerging future for their system that values the well-being of all rather than just a few.

These perspectives are reflected in the positioning of ‘partnership brokering’ as a form of leadership (Crosby and Bryson, 2010:228; Brown, 2015:3),<sup>71</sup> and reinforced in Tennyson’s (2005:9) assertion that partnership brokers epitomise ‘servant leaders.’<sup>72</sup>

Transformative partnership participation will inevitably challenge existing power relations and may, as well as leading to unexpected results,<sup>73</sup> also generate conflict. This, according to White (1996:15), is a test of its worth: ‘The absence of conflict in many supposedly ‘participatory’ programmes is something that should raise our suspicions. Change hurts.’ Sennett (2013:155) further notes that ‘disruption’ can encourage ‘bonding’ as relationships are often strengthened after being tested.<sup>74</sup> Rather than avoiding or ‘delegitimizing’ confrontation (Poncelet, 2001), the suggestion here is that ‘productive conflict’ allows differences to surface and assumptions to be tested and challenged, and can thus establish the basis for transformational change.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Brown (2015:3) describes this as ‘cross-boundary leadership’ that promotes collective thinking and bridge-building while Crosby & Bryson (2010:228) refer to it as ‘integrative leadership’ across individual, group, organisational, and inter-organisational levels.

<sup>72</sup> The concept of servant-leadership was developed by Robert Greenleaf. See Greenleaf (1977) and <https://www.greenleaf.org/> (accessed November 19, 2016)

<sup>73</sup> According to White (1996:12) these might include cooption from ‘below’ or a particular group using participation for leverage or empowerment. Kapoor (2004:129) further notes that plurality may be stifled.

<sup>74</sup> This is endorsed by Sloan & Oliver (2013) who find that expressing negative emotions after a critical incident can cement relationships and enhance partnership participation.

<sup>75</sup> Derksen, Franklin & Bock (2008:459) view power struggles as a manifestation of low levels of inequality among partners and, in consequence, as a sign of a ‘healthy’ partnership.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and further research

In his novel *Land of Marvels*, Barry Unsworth (2010:45) writes, ‘When our grip on power is loosening, we fall back on what is second best, visions of cooperation and mutual benefit...’ Such a calculating view of collaboration does not sit well with the arguments expressed in this review; nor should it, for these are the thoughts of a Turkish Commissioner contemplating the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1914. While far removed from the focus of my work, as well as confirming that interpretations of partnership ‘reflect the position and power of the interpreter’ (Harrison, 2002:607), this citation provides a good illustration of why discourse analysis is a helpful way of exploring such a loose and all-embracing term.

I have argued that partnership is best understood as an umbrella word for an amalgamation of different perspectives, values and processes. In order to give the term meaning we thus need to explore how it is used in practice. In my research work, partnership has been construed as both a process and a structure, as a means to an end and an end in itself. It has also been applied simultaneously to approaches that maintain (and even endorse) unequal power relations as well as to more equitable connections that promote social progress. Building on a transactional-transformational continuum, these different collaborative arrangements have been loosely captured here in a typology that includes charitable, transactional, win-win connections and more transformational ‘relationships of meaning’ that create opportunities for human development and the generation of social capital.

In writing this piece of work some of the views expressed in my research publications have been challenged and refined. The insights gained from exploring intrinsic notions of cooperation have encouraged me to consider more fluid interpretations of partnership, including its framing as an iterative process that can enrich relationships through dialogic exchange and thus reinforce the social fabric of a healthy society. This thinking has been central to my attempts to better categorise and expand the attributes of transformational partnership.

Transformational partnership arrangements are not the ‘second best’ solutions ‘imposed’ by power holders that Unsworth’s quote suggests. Nor are they manifestations of what Cornwall (2008:271) calls the ‘nirvana of participation’: self-mobilisation. I now see them as spaces that offer the possibility of achieving positive change through a balance of ‘directed’ and ‘autonomous’ participation. The potential to transform appears to rest crucially upon sociohistoric embeddedness; the enlightened ‘leadership’ of individuals able to catalyse change in specific and changing contexts, and the ‘refreshment’ of cooperation by ‘engraining a habit, then examining and enlarging it consciously, then ingraining it again as unconscious behaviour’ (Sennett, 2013:90).

Because of a predominant focus on organisational relationships, the human element in partnership arrangements is often overlooked. Whilst I have consistently sought to capture the perspectives of individuals in my research work, like Waddock (2010), I now feel that further attention to the role they play in shaping collaborative initiatives is merited. If our recent argument that ‘the “interior condition” of those working in partnerships has a significant impact on the partnership’ (Tennyson et al. 2016:5) is correct, then individual personalities, positions and principles are central to partnership’s potential for transformation. Again and again in my work allusion has been made to those who have supported stakeholder relationships by adhering to, and promoting, values of empathy, respect and reciprocity. This suggests that:

Anything that is done ‘with’ others in a spirit of equality is, clearly, both collaborative and a matter of social justice, in the traditional sense that in its conduct and outcomes it should lead to a fairness both for individuals and for society as a whole (Griffiths, 2000:385).

Eisler (2002:xxi) believes that it is the combination of individual and collective actions that are the ‘sparks for systems transformation’. I would further suggest that it is the complex interplay between people, process and location that sits at the core of transformational partnership arrangements. This chemistry is captured in Hastings’ depiction of partnership as a space for ‘hot-housing social change’ by bringing together different perspectives, attitudes, sectors and cultures (1999:93). In an environment that cultivates dialogic exchange and does not shy away from

‘productive conflict’, people may develop ideas that are transformative and even ‘revolutionary’ (Poncelet, 2001:23).

Partnership must, as I have always argued, demonstrate some form of tangible change or improvement in peoples’ lives. However, capturing partnership results is complicated by the fact that goals are often unclear and attribution is a challenge. We may thus need to rethink our approaches to ‘measuring’ partnership by looking at how far individual and societal value can be encouraged by working in this way. This will involve sharing more honest assessments of organisational and individual drivers for partnering, as well as deeper consideration of the interfaces between these, so that collaborative relationships are enhanced. As well as its instrumental value as a development tool, this implies the need for deeper attention to the intrinsic worth of partnership, and how it may both promote and embody social progress.

Emphasis on both increased stakeholder participation and results-based evidence appear to be the driving forces behind the emergence of a growing number of new collaborative concepts and forms, including participatory design and planning approaches, and different modes of networked governance. These trends suggest that the term partnership is being reinterpreted and perhaps reinvented. This is not necessarily a bad thing, particularly when a buzzword has been ‘...banalised into simplistic technologies for the management of change’ (De Vries, 2001:30).

Whatever its future, in view of the status it has been granted in the UN’s sustainable development agenda for 2030 (UN, 2014; UN General Assembly, 2016), the indications are that partnership will be with us for some time. To go beyond simply ‘performing partnership’ (Mercer, 2003) so that collaborative efforts promote social progress, the detailed information on how partnership is played out in particular and changing contexts that I called for ten years ago is still relevant (Stott, 2006).

Possible research areas include follow-up on initiatives that have already been examined, including the case studies in my own work, further testing and refining of the partnership typology proposed in this review and exploration of some of the issues outlined in Table 20.

Possible research themes	Exploration of...
Intrinsic value of partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notions of intrinsic value of cooperation and the extent to which they have been drawn upon in partnership arrangements in particular contexts.</li> <li>• How perceptions of partnership's intrinsic and instrumental value might complement one another.</li> </ul>
Power relations and partnership participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donor roles in partnership arrangements with assessment of how traditional project/programme ways of working may be transcended.</li> <li>• Analysis of power dynamics and partnership participation using a gender lens.</li> <li>• How power-sharing might be promoted through accountability processes that also give room for innovation and experimentation.</li> <li>• Different forms of private sector participation in partnership with assessment of how these are similar or different to those involving large corporations.</li> <li>• Exploration of systemic constraints to partnership and whether accusations that partnership espouses and reinforces 'elitist, neocorporatist or neopluralist principles' (Geddes, 2000:797) can be verified in particular contexts.</li> <li>• Appropriate participation methodologies for the increasing number of long-distance partnering arrangements across different countries.</li> </ul>
The role of individuals in partnership arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How individuals influence organisational positions, activities and processes in partnership arrangements.</li> <li>• Analysis of opportunities that individuals may obtain from working in partnership in different contexts.</li> <li>• The role of partnership brokers in promoting transformational partnership in specific contexts.</li> <li>• The values espoused by key individuals and how far these have an impact on partnership processes and activities.</li> </ul>
Incentives and partnership performance	<p>Further testing and refining of our model for assessing partnership performance on the basis of incentives with case studies and reviews that assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links between partner relationships and results.</li> <li>• Impact of 'lightweight' incentives on partnership relationships and performance.</li> <li>• How interactions between drivers at individual, organisational and external levels work over time and what impact this has on partnership performance.</li> </ul>
Exits and endings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How partnerships end and why.</li> <li>• What is left behind after a partnership ends and how this 'evidence' might be tracked and captured.</li> <li>• Whether partnership arrangements can be revived and under what circumstances.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Alternatives to partnership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What alternatives exist, why and how they are selected and with what results.</b></li> <li>• <b>How these options compare to partnership arrangements.</b></li> <li>• <b>Whether informal connections such as social movements and citizens' initiatives offer alternatives to partnership.</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>The future of partnership</b></p>	<p><b>Emerging trends promoting stakeholder participation and new forms of governance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How they relate to different understandings of partnership.</b></li> <li>• <b>What processes they involve.</b></li> <li>• <b>What their potential is for transformation.</b></li> </ul>

**Table 20: Possible areas for future research**

In the introduction to this review I noted that although an enormous amount of research has been undertaken on diverse forms of collaboration to address social issues and challenges, much of it is difficult to locate because of its dispersed nature. Thus, as well as conducting new research using more diverse tools and methodologies, accessing existing information on partnership experiences through more dynamic and imaginative exchanges of learning is recommended. Such efforts will do much to assist further exploration of the realities beneath the rhetoric of partnership and contribute to a deeper understanding of how, and under what circumstances, working in this way might promote positive human and social change.



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## **Annex**

### **Research publications used in review**



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Leda Stott  
February 2017



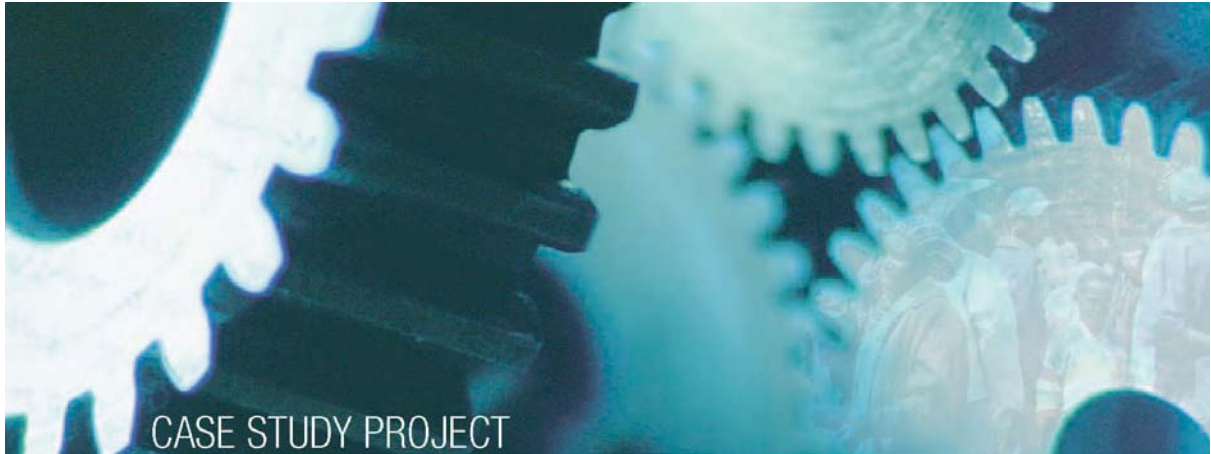
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The Partnering Initiative

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## **PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDIES IN CONTEXT**

**Leda Stott**

This essay is part of a series of papers commissioned by The Partnering Initiative through its Case Study Project to develop insights into the process of researching/writing partnership case studies as tools for change.

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## Scene Setting

There is a pressing need for more incisive information on if, how and in what circumstances, cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development work. As the partnership development paradigm grows in scale and importance, material that shares lessons about the processes involved in such collaboration is required by practitioners, planners and policy makers so that both its reach and capacity are improved. Case studies have real potential to fill gaps in our knowledge about how partnerships function and ensure that an understanding of what works, and what does not, is disseminated more widely. Opportunities for genuine learning to date have been minimal as most partnering case studies are, at best, too sector-focussed and, at worst, inadequate in coverage and style. New and more innovative research indicates that deeper investigation into partnerships relies upon the consideration of a number of key issues which, if taken carefully into account, can assist in generating a richer and more dynamic picture of partnerships that also serve as effective learning tools.

This essay outlines why more substantial material on partnerships in practice is so necessary and why the case study offers an excellent model for research into them. It provides an overview of partnering case studies to date, highlighting issues such as style, scope and accessibility. From this information a series of key issues that emerge when producing and sharing partnering case studies are extracted. These themes include matters relating to partnership context, research time spans, appropriate entry points and power dynamics as well as the role of the researcher and appropriate tools and methods for data collection and dissemination. A final section emphasises what kind of learning we might expect to gain when these topics are fully considered by partnership researchers.

## Why we need better partnership information

Cross-sector partnering is being promoted internationally as a vehicle for addressing development challenges. Recognising the possibilities of initiatives that are “imaginative, coherent and integrated enough to tackle the most intractable problems”<sup>1</sup>, international agencies such as the UN, the World Bank and the European Commission, as well as a growing number of businesses, government agencies and NGOs, have made partnerships central to their work.<sup>2</sup> Partnering, it seems, offers different organisations, groups and networks the prospect of joining forces to tackle development challenges while simultaneously reaping organisational benefits for partners that exceed the costs of their participation.<sup>3</sup>

As interest in cross-sector partnerships has increased over the last decade, so has the need for information that investigates these complex collaborations in a “more evidential” and “less anecdotal” manner.<sup>4</sup> This material is sought after by a range of different audiences, from policy makers and partnership practitioners to academic institutions and community groups, in order to assess and explore the realities and the usefulness of partnerships in addressing development

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<sup>1</sup> Tennyson (2004), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the UN’s Global Compact <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Portal/Default.asp?> (accessed June 3, 2005); UNDP Partnerships for Sustainable Development <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships.htm> (accessed October 10, 2005); World Bank Partnerships <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/OPPORTUNITIES/0,,contentMDK:20061765~menuPK:95667~pagePK:95645~piPK:95672~theSitePK:95480,00.html> (accessed October 10, 2005) and EC Partnerships [http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/body/theme/social/partnership\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/body/theme/social/partnership_en.htm) (accessed October 10, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Otiso, (2003), p. 225.

<sup>4</sup> El-Ansari et al. (2001) p.216.

concerns. The learning from different partnership experiences can then be integrated at the levels of both policy and practice to ensure that working in this way is effective, efficient and scaled up more vigorously.

Partnerships are evolving entities which, as they grow and develop, face both internal and external challenges that impact upon their value as a development model. Authors such as Tennyson have described some of the generic issues faced by partnerships as they navigate their way through a series of developmental phases.<sup>5</sup> There is, however, sparse documentary evidence of how these partnering processes have been played out in diverse contextual settings over time: How do partners work through different phases and find common ground? What issues and challenges do they confront? What tools and mechanisms are adopted to address them? How is the learning from this fed back into the partnership and beyond? These details are crucial to a more profound comprehension of partnering and they can only be obtained by researching partnerships more closely. As El-Ansari et al. point out, "With a social intervention as complex as collaboration, it is important to know more than whether it works if the evidence is to be of practical use.... In other words, *the chemistry* (my italics) needs to be revealed and this can only be done in the field."<sup>6</sup>

### **Partnerships and the case study model**

A case study approach offers an excellent model for deepening research into partnerships. In spite of arguments that general and reliable lessons cannot be made from this single focus approach and that findings may be biased by "intense exposure" to the research topic,<sup>7</sup> the case study model is, according to Tellis, "an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed."<sup>8</sup> It enables the detailed examination of a project in relation to its particular context through a range of data collection techniques such as observation, review and analysis of documents.<sup>9</sup> According to Yin, "In general case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context."<sup>10</sup>

Although qualitative and participatory research methods are at the core of case study work, the opportunity for integrating these with quantitative knowledge is also possible.<sup>11</sup> It is thus an approach that facilitates an exploration of the processes involved in a partnership's development, what works effectively and what does not, as well as an investigation of partnership outputs and outcomes, some of which may be unexpected. Tellis also observes that,

*Case studies are multi-perspectival analyses. This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This one aspect is a salient point in the characteristic that case studies possess. They give a voice to the powerless and voiceless.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Tennyson (1998), (2003) and (2004)

<sup>6</sup> El-Ansari et al. (2001) p.218.

<sup>7</sup> Tellis (1997a); Palmquist (1997)

<sup>8</sup> Tellis (1997b)

<sup>9</sup> Zwick & Brown (1994); Yin (1994)

<sup>10</sup> Yin (2003a) p.1.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Scholz & Tietje (2002)

<sup>12</sup> Tellis (1997b)

An action research methodology<sup>13</sup> is particularly appropriate for case study investigation into partnerships as it enables:

- An emphasis on understanding the context in which a partnership operates and how this evolves and interacts with its development over time;
- The reflection of multiple approaches and perspectives so that the varied views and opinions of different partners and stakeholders are explored;
- An 'interactive' rather than a 'detached' form of research with active engagement between 'the researcher' and 'the researched' in a cycle linking experience, reflection, learning and action;<sup>14</sup> and,
- The use of a wide range of data collection methods including qualitative approaches such as participant/direct observation; semi-structured or in-depth interviews; focused group discussions and workshops. These can be supplemented with wider sources such as literature, partnership documentation and statistical reviews.

Disseminating information about partnerships through case studies offers the possibility of reaching a wide audience as three different levels of data collection may be acquired and shared; at individual partnership project-level where development issues are identified; through groups or 'clusters' of case studies from which common themes may be extracted; and at macro-level, where strategic cross-cutting strands may assist decision-making at policy level.<sup>15</sup> In this way case studies can expand knowledge by assisting partners in their work; generate new partnership ventures and determine policy direction. As Palmquist neatly summarises, "Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research."<sup>16</sup>

### **Partnership case studies – the evidence to date**

Good quality and informative case studies that address the process of partnering are difficult to find. This is partly because partnerships are relatively new and extensive research into them has been limited. However, their investigation may also be daunting as researcher/s are confronted by an array of sectoral and organisational relationships and different levels of accountability towards partners, beneficiaries and donors.<sup>17</sup>

Much of the partnership case study material that has been produced to date has centred on private sector engagement, particularly that of large corporations, with other sectors. Snapshots of different projects have been offered with a view to promoting the case for business involvement in the development process.<sup>18</sup> This material is attractively presented and easily accessible and there is clear recognition of the value of sharing different partnership experiences. However, it tends to be anecdotal in nature with an emphasis on partnering outputs, rather than processes or outcomes. It also focuses primarily on 'success factors' in order to demonstrate what 'works', as opposed to analysis of what has not been effective and why. The extent of research engagement

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<sup>13</sup> For more on action research see Greenwood & Levin (1998) & Reason (1994)

<sup>14</sup> Zwick & Brown (1994) p.3.

<sup>15</sup> El Ansari et al. (2001) p. 219.

<sup>16</sup> Palmquist (1997)

<sup>17</sup> Vargas, (2002), p. 1542 & Tennyson (2003), p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> See for example the studies included in Nelson (1997); Forstater, M., MacDonald, J. & Raynard, P. (2002); SustainAbility, IFC & Ethos (2002); Business in the Community Partnership Academy case studies [http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/programme\\_directory/partnership\\_academy/casestudies.html](http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/programme_directory/partnership_academy/casestudies.html) (accessed October 11, 2005); World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) <http://www.wbcsd.org/templates/TemplateWBCSD5/layout.asp?type=p&MenuId=ODY&doOpen=1&ClickMenu=RightMenu> (accessed October 9, 2005)

with different partnerships is unclear. Much of the material appears to have been gathered from secondary sources or interviews with a limited number of partnership members. In addition, although the studies may catch a reader's interest, their journalistic style can be viewed as lacking in "substance and credibility".<sup>19</sup> Thus, while this material may usefully showcase partnerships for publicity purposes, it does not provide a complete picture of the dynamic nature of partnering and its full potential for wider impact.

A number of partnership case studies have also been compiled by academics.<sup>20</sup> They provide penetrating assessments of the usefulness of partnerships as a development model and raise a number of important issues relating to their growth. Most give a detailed examination of the particular context in which the partnership under study operates. This is extremely helpful in evaluating partnering prospects within a specific environment. Yakovleva and Alabaster<sup>21</sup>, for example, offer a case study of a partnership seeking to support community development in the diamond mining province of Sakha (Yakutia) in the Russian Federation. They examine issues relating to the organisation and structure of the partnership that are closely intertwined with economic and political changes affecting the mining sector. In a similar vein, Otiso's case study of an ongoing slum upgrading and service delivery project in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, captures some of the challenges relating to different sector incentives and engagement over time.<sup>22</sup>

Other academic case studies successfully pull out linkages between context and process issues in relation to power dynamics. Gender empowerment, for example, is investigated by Vargas in a case study in Costa Rica. She stresses that she has produced her study specifically "to take partnerships seriously" by analysing the roles that women might play within them in addressing sustainable development issues<sup>23</sup>. Meanwhile, Harrison<sup>24</sup> and Mercer<sup>25</sup> use case studies from Ethiopia and Tanzania respectively, to raise concerns about the gap between partnership theory and practice when international and local partners or beneficiaries "...are positioned within an asymmetrical framework of power relations."<sup>26</sup>

Although these studies have important learning implications for a variety of audiences, their perspectives are rooted in distinct academic disciplinary areas and published in specialised journals. As a result their accessibility to a wider audience, in terms of both style and circulation, is limited.<sup>27</sup> In the last five or six years, however, a number of institutions from, and with links to, international agencies have produced case studies that have examined partnerships with greater rigour and shared this work more widely. They have experimented with cross-disciplinary approaches and action research methodologies and sought to address the needs of specific sector audiences, policy makers and partnership practitioners, by targeting their findings and making them easily available.

In 1998 the World Bank established the Business Partners for Development (BPD) programme, a project-based initiative to study, support and promote strategic examples of cross-sector

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<sup>19</sup> Drescher Mayse (1994)

<sup>20</sup> See for example El-Ansari et al. (2004); Harrison (2002); Mercer (2003); Nhantumbo et al. (2001); Otiso (2003); Vargas (2002) and Yakovleva & Alabaster (2003)

<sup>21</sup> Yakovleva & Alabaster (2003)

<sup>22</sup> Otiso (2003)

<sup>23</sup> Vargas (2002) p.1555

<sup>24</sup> Harrison (2002)

<sup>25</sup> Mercer (2003)

<sup>26</sup> Mercer (2003) p.759

<sup>27</sup> Case studies written in an academic format can also be perceived as dry and difficult to retain an interest in. See Drescher Mayse (1994).

partnerships working for development. Its activities were divided into industry-based clusters and theme-based partnerships which included the Natural Resources Cluster, the Water and Sanitation Cluster, the Global Road Safety Partnership and the Global Partnership for Youth Development. Both the Natural Resources and Water and Sanitation Clusters conducted extensive research into partnerships. The case studies compiled by BPD Natural Resources cover partnerships in Azerbaijan, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Venezuela, Tanzania and Zambia. They were designed specifically to, “explore the role of tri-sector partnerships in providing answers to the unresolved social management and sustainable development challenges confronting non-renewable natural resource (oil, gas and mining) projects.”<sup>28</sup> Adopting a ‘learning by doing’ methodology, they sought to identify where partnerships might add-value and to share lessons on their impact.<sup>29</sup> The case studies, which are attractively presented and easily accessible electronically, provide comprehensive contextual overviews, particularly from the business point of view; information on how the partnerships were formed; the activities they have undertaken and their business and developmental impact to date. The lessons from these studies are explored in detail in the book *Putting Partnerships to Work: Strategic Alliances for Development between Government, the Private Sector and Civil Society* which seeks to look beyond ‘good partnership practice’ by examining positive outcomes as well as risks and costs when things have not worked.<sup>30</sup>

A further set of studies have been collated by BPD’s Water and Sanitation Cluster.<sup>31</sup> Lessons from different partnering experiences in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Haiti, Indonesia, Senegal and South Africa, are included in the report *Flexibility by Design: Lessons from Multi-Sector Partnerships in Water and Sanitation Projects* which assesses whether partnerships have provided the poor with improved water and sanitation services, as well as processes through which they have a sustainable voice.<sup>32</sup> This cluster eventually became Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation (BPD)<sup>33</sup>, an informal network promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships to improve access to safe water and effective sanitation for the poor, and it has continued to conduct case study reviews with a range of partnerships in different regions of the world. These *Partnership Analysis Reports* are primarily aimed at assisting partners to work through partnering issues and foster cross-project learning. BPD manages a process between researchers and projects in which the latter are, “...treated as the ultimate source of analysis rather than outside consultants looking in.”<sup>34</sup> Although impact analysis is covered, concentration has mostly been on, “...issues that different partners and the partnership as a whole need to focus on to maximise their relationships.”<sup>35</sup> The primary audience has been the partners themselves, for whom a confidential document is produced. Other audiences include partnership practitioners, policy and decision-makers who are provided with electronically available summary reports that draw together the lessons from the case studies researched.<sup>36</sup>

The case studies compiled for UNDP’s Public Private Partnerships for the Urban Environment (PPPUE)<sup>37</sup> also review a range of water and sanitation partnerships in Africa, Asia and Latin America through in-depth case studies based on interviews and document analyses. The main

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<sup>28</sup> See ODI BPD/NRC website <http://www.bpd-naturalresources.org/> (accessed October 25, 2005)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. <http://www.bpd-naturalresources.org/> (accessed October 25, 2005)

<sup>30</sup> Warner & Sullivan (2004) Preface p.11

<sup>31</sup> Caplan (2002) p.2.

<sup>32</sup> Caplan et al.(2001) p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> See [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org) (accessed October 5th, 2005)

<sup>34</sup> Caplan et al.(2002)

<sup>35</sup> Caplan et al.(supra)

<sup>36</sup> See Caplan et al. (2001)

<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.undp.org/ppp/gln/case.htm> (accessed October 6th 2005)

emphasis is on the role of the private sector in assisting the building of municipal capacity but attitudes and perceptions among the different partners and stakeholders are also examined, as well as some of the obstacles facing the partnerships as they have developed. Ample empirical information is provided so that the partnership is understood in relation to specific contextual issues. These studies have been included in a larger survey of partnerships from which key lessons have been distilled for the benefit of public sector audiences working to capacity-build municipalities to improve service provision.<sup>38</sup>

Another interesting series of case studies have been provided by Local Partnerships in Europe (LPE)<sup>39</sup>. Initiated by The Copenhagen Centre, an organisation led and financed by the Danish public sector, LPE was a three-year project that began in 2000. It aimed to provide guidance to European governments and policy planners by testing out the assumption that new social partnerships were a better solution than other options to social and labour market inclusion. Adopting an action research methodology, with outside researchers working directly with local partnership practitioners, it focussed specifically on understanding partnership process development. As this work progressed the six partnerships studied were able to dialogue with one another as well as engage in critical analysis and debate with the case study researchers. In this way the project provided an opportunity for mutual learning experiences.<sup>40</sup> A book summarising the learning from this project and reports compiled at different stages of its development are available in both hard copy and electronic formats.<sup>41</sup>

A similar form of interaction was promoted in a shorter 3-month learning project with the European Commission's EQUAL Development and Transnational Partnerships which work to prevent discrimination in the labour market.<sup>42</sup> Based on eight case studies from widely different partnerships across Europe, the project aimed to identify and explore preliminary learning experiences about partnerships, assess what had worked and what had not, and then make recommendations for other EQUAL partnerships. The research was conducted through document analysis, a questionnaire, individual and group interviews and the establishment of a Partnership Learning Group in which partner representatives were encouraged to share and reflect upon the issues and challenges they faced as they worked through different partnering processes. The material gathered has been worked into an easily accessible electronic guidebook.<sup>43</sup>

EC-PREP, a research collaboration between the European Commission and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded a two-year academia-led research project to examine the phenomenon of cross-sector partnership and its impact on poverty eradication.<sup>44</sup> Through case studies, it aimed to capture and disseminate lessons from six partnerships in Zambia and South Africa which could be of use to others in establishing and adapting similar models. Data was collected through a literature review, observation, site visits, interviews and focus groups meetings. The bulk of this work was carried out by country resident research teams working in close consultation with the various members of the partnerships under study. Research findings were reviewed and shared with partner representatives and an external panel of 'critical friends' from different academic disciplines and countries. The resulting information has

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<sup>38</sup> Plummer (2003)

<sup>39</sup> Kjaer (2003)

<sup>40</sup> Kjaer (2003) pp103-106.

<sup>41</sup> See <http://www.copenhagencentre.org/sw1236.asp> (accessed October 12, 2005)

<sup>42</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/about/index\\_en.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/about/index_en.cfm) (accessed October 12, 2005)

<sup>43</sup> EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/partnerguide-lo\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/data/document/partnerguide-lo_en.pdf) (accessed October 12, 2005)

<sup>44</sup> Rein et al. (2005)

been targeted at different audiences through a detailed book *Working Together, A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa*.<sup>45</sup>

Other case studies, both completed and in progress, have also begun to analyse the manner in which partnerships work more deeply and disseminate this more effectively.<sup>46</sup> The material garnered from this research offers a colourful patchwork of different partnering experiences with important lessons for those who wish to develop, improve and expand this way of working. At the same time the creative use of such studies as learning tools is growing as information and training materials are being developed from them. A particular example of this is provided by Tennyson in *Institutionalising Partnerships*. Here the author draws on meeting notes, documents and her own 'off the record' logbooks to explore three partnerships with which she has been involved; an initiating partnership, a partnership delivery mechanism and a learning partnership.<sup>47</sup> These experiences neatly illustrate some of the issues that arise in relation to people, procedures, productivity and progress during the process of partnership institutionalisation and serve as an effective prompt for generic learning.<sup>48</sup>

### **Emerging issues for partnership case study research**

The case study projects outlined above highlight a number of issues that need to be taken into account when carrying out research among multiple groups from different organisational and cultural backgrounds. These include:

#### Understanding the context

The importance of studying a partnership's context has been emphasised by a number of writers and researchers.<sup>49</sup> All stress that partnerships are conditioned by the particular environments in which they operate. Within these contexts the existence of "systemic drivers" and "specific triggers" can positively influence partnership development while their absence can limit such potential.<sup>50</sup> Studying a partnership's historical, political, socio-economic and cultural environment and the relationship between context, partnership, processes and outcomes enables us to question, "...how does this intervention make a difference in this particular situation? (rather than just asking does it work?) and why it might work over here and not over there."<sup>51</sup> This emphasis is further reinforced by Harrison, who suggests that partnership effectiveness is "closely related to a nuanced understanding of both social and political context."<sup>52</sup>

#### Considering time

Limitations of time will always condition case study research and decisions thus need to be made about how best to work within a particular time span.<sup>53</sup> Tennyson has shown that each developmental phase of a partnership has distinctive features that will inevitably impact the

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<sup>45</sup> Rein et al. (2005)

<sup>46</sup> See for example The Seed Initiative (Supporting Entrepreneurs in Environment and Development) <http://seedinit.org/>; OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), <http://www.oecd.org/> (accessed October 12, 2005) and the Civil Society Partnership Programme of ODI (Overseas Development Institute) <http://www.odi.org.uk/cspp/Index.html> (accessed November 16, 2005)

<sup>47</sup> Tennyson (2003)

<sup>48</sup> Tennyson (2003) p.7

<sup>49</sup> See for example Caplan et al. (2001) p.5., Kjaer (2003) p.33; Nelson & Zadek (2000), p.33. and Rein et al. (2005) p.8.

<sup>50</sup> Nelson & Zadek (2000), p.33; Kjaer (2003) p.33.

<sup>51</sup> El-Ansari (2001) p.218.

<sup>52</sup> Harrison (2002), p. 607.

<sup>53</sup> Stake (1995) p.4.

research process.<sup>54</sup> It is therefore important to make careful choices about when in the lifetime of a partnership evidence is collected and how often. This is further complicated by the overlapping of different partnership development phases and the fact that their progression may not always be linear or cyclical.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, an understanding of how perspectives may change over time is vitally important as, “Viewed chronologically...today’s barriers and obstacles...if challenged and crossed, become tomorrow’s positive outcomes.”<sup>56</sup>

#### Locating the right ‘entry point’

Determining both where and how the case study research process commences can be testing. Different research entry points, as discussed above, will depend upon the phase of a partnership’s development as well as the length of time the partnership has been operating. A range of internal and external drivers will also influence options here. The wider context may, for example, determine when the case study begins as may the different requirements and perspectives of the researcher/s, partners and stakeholders and audience/s. Research design approaches therefore need to assess entry points carefully with thorough deliberation on how to begin working with different groups and the use of appropriate ‘participatory’ tools and methods.

#### Finding the ‘right’ researcher/s

The role of the researcher is pivotal to the case study process. Important considerations include whether researchers are internal or external to the partnership, and how ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ they might be, as well as whether an individual or research team should be used. While the different knowledge and expertise bases of a team may enhance the research process it may also be unwieldy to work in this way and more intrusive to the partnership. Whatever choices are made, a key tenet for all case study researchers is that they are open to learning from those with whom they are working, “...we enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn.”<sup>57</sup> Such a stance encourages the development of a reciprocal learning process between ‘the researcher’ and ‘the researched’.

#### Drawing on different disciplines

Case study researchers can come from a range of disciplinary and professional backgrounds and it is important to consider the impact that these may have on partnership case study research in more detail. El-Ansari et al. note that public health partnership research crosses disciplines such as, “organisational management, health promotion, psychology, public health, sociology and public administration.”<sup>58</sup> They suggest that a cross-disciplinary and “eclectic” approach, with the combining of different perspectives and viewpoints, can facilitate a more rounded exploration of partnering.<sup>59</sup> Such a strategy involves “mixed-methods investigations and observational studies” that take diverse standpoints into account in order to obtain an overall picture.<sup>60</sup>

#### Using appropriate methods and tools

Case studies require the careful collection of data which then needs to be organised, analysed and disseminated. A shared understanding between the researcher/s, the partners and stakeholders of what the case study will cover, who it is for and how the data will be used is crucial.<sup>61</sup> Because partnerships are not static entities, the information-gathering process needs to

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<sup>54</sup> Tennyson (2004) p.4

<sup>55</sup> Tennyson (2004) p.4; Stott & Keatman (2005) p.8.

<sup>56</sup> El-Ansari et al. p. 218.

<sup>57</sup> Stake (1995) p.1.

<sup>58</sup> El Ansari et al. (2001) p. 217.

<sup>59</sup> El-Ansari et al. (supra) p. 223.

<sup>60</sup> El Ansari et al (supra) p. 223.

<sup>61</sup> Rein et al. (2005) p.12.

be flexible enough to capture elements of a partnership that change as well as those that remain constant.<sup>62</sup> Deciding which data collection and review methodologies are best suited to particular groups is important, as is an assurance of confidentiality for those who may have controversial or critical views and be afraid to speak out. This is linked to the need to look out for perspectives that may be marginalised, or even excluded, due to power imbalances. To quote El-Ansari et al. again, “Only through the purposeful combination of tools and measures and by examining the questions that are being left out can the evidence-base of collaboration be enriched and the practice of and partnerships be taken forward.”<sup>63</sup>

### Unpacking power relations

An awareness of power relations and dynamics is important when considering appropriate case study research methods. Conflicting and changing loyalties and demands can influence both the manner and the extent of a partnership’s accountability to its partners and stakeholders. In consequence a researcher needs to be attentive to the visibility, or invisibility, of different individuals and groups, assess what power hierarchies are in place and when, and examine whether issues such as gender, religion, race etc might limit or augment involvement in the research process.<sup>64</sup> Use of language is also important when analysing power relations. Harrison, for example, suggests that “...the blanket use of participatory language may hide the complex interaction of history and individual positioning that make the meaning of participation so variable.”<sup>65</sup>

### Targeting the case study audience/s

Tailoring case study data effectively and taking into account sectoral, contextual and cultural variables are vital if partnering knowledge and skills are to be spread and sharpened. In order to ensure that the information collated and disseminated is ‘fit for purpose’ the learning needs of different audiences need to be carefully identified. Tennyson usefully distinguishes between ‘internal’ audiences, such as partnership beneficiaries, partner representatives and staff from partner organisations, and ‘external audiences’ that encompass donors, policy makers, the media and members of the general public.<sup>66</sup> Each of these groups will have different preferences for the format and presentation of partnership case studies. So, for example, “An external donor will expect a formal report. The public will welcome a story with a personal dimension. Policymakers will like statistics. Potential partners will want to know how current partners have benefited from their involvement.”<sup>67</sup> Selecting the ‘right’ presentation and dissemination options for each of these audiences will ultimately inform the effectiveness of the case study as a learning vehicle.<sup>68</sup>

## **Taking the issues on board**

An effective case study can be an invaluable tool for learning and change within the partnership itself. It presents the opportunity for a genuine exploration of the various skills, mechanisms and tools employed to deal with the range of issues and concerns that emerge during a partnership’s lifetime while also permitting greater scrutiny of the external issues that influence its development. Case studies, when carefully crafted, may thus contribute to significant change at the levels of

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<sup>62</sup> Stott (2004) and see also Rein et al. (2005) p.12.

<sup>63</sup> El Ansari et al (supra) p. 224

<sup>64</sup> See Stott & Keatman (2005) for discussion of community engagement in partnerships.

<sup>65</sup> Harrison (2002), p. 593.

<sup>66</sup> Tennyson (2004) p.35.

<sup>67</sup> Tennyson (2004) p.35.

<sup>68</sup> See Drescher Mayse (1994)

both policy and practice. Their impact may be both vertical; moving between individual, organisation and policy levels; and, horizontal; within, between and across organisations.

## **Conclusion**

It is suggested here that carefully researched case studies can promote a stronger understanding of partnerships. In enabling an investigation of what is involved in the process of partnering as well as what has worked and what has not, case studies are able to facilitate important data on how these complex entities are built, managed, reviewed, revised and sustained. Capturing the richness and complexity of the partnering process is not an easy task. In his book, *InterViews*, Kvale suggests two metaphors for the research interviewer that are apt for partnership case study research<sup>69</sup>; that of 'the miner', who strips away at different surface levels, digging ever more deeply in order to extract the valuable material waiting to be uncovered below; and that of the 'the traveller' who gathers information on a journey through unknown lands in order to relate a story upon returning home. The story may not only pass on new knowledge but also encourage the traveller to reflect and change. It is the skilful blending of these two research approaches that will support both deeper exploration of partnerships and wider sharing of the learning from them. This is essential if the validity of cross-sector partnering as a development approach and its potential for engendering both systemic and systematic change is to be truly understood and, ultimately, enhanced.

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<sup>69</sup> Kvale (1996) pp3-4.

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## Assessing Partnership Performance: **Understanding the Drivers for Success**

**Authors:** Ken Caplan, Joe Gomme,  
Josses Mugabi and Leda Stott

October 2007

Building Partnerships for Development  
[www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org)

# Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation (BPD)

In operation since 1998, the broad mission of **Building Partnerships for Development (BPD)** is to promote more effective delivery of safe water and sanitation services for poor communities in developing countries through multi-stakeholder partnership approaches. Created expressly to assist partnership practitioners to deliver on their goals, BPD has generated a wealth of learning on how and under what circumstances partnerships can make the greatest contribution to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) around water and sanitation.

BPD was originally established (as *Business Partners for Development*) to test and promote a triangular approach to service delivery by incorporating the strengths of the public, private and civil society sectors as legs of a three-legged stool. As the organisation and the sector have evolved, it has become clear that standardising this model would be inappropriate as the contexts in which different partnerships operate are too unique.

Another key finding was that partnership practitioners tend to dedicate too little time to building the space within which their partnerships are meant to operate. **BPD would argue that the scope, purpose, structure and resource requirements of partnerships need to be more rigorously negotiated.** BPD is a learning network dedicated to developing

and refining a set of tools that creates the space for and facilitates these conversations. It does this in three interlinking ways involving:

1. **Research and Analysis** - Action research programmes aimed at engaging and influencing policymakers and practitioners in how different institutional arrangements add value;
2. **Building Better Partnerships** - Direct support to partnership projects to assist in building more effective relationships; and
3. **Broader Influencing** - Dissemination of BPD-generated learning (training courses, publications and attendance at international events), and BPD as a facilitator that designs forums and spaces through which practitioners and policymakers can learn and influence each other.

Registered with the Charity Commission in the United Kingdom, BPD is an independent institution governed by a 13-person multi-stakeholder Board of Directors that is evenly split among the public, private and civil society sectors.<sup>1</sup> BPD is currently run by a small team of four full-time and one part-time staff hosted by WaterAid in London.

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<sup>1</sup> Four seats on the Board of Directors are dedicated to each sector with the 13<sup>th</sup> seat dedicated to an "other" category that includes academics, professional associations, consultants, etc.

# Assessing Partnership Performance:

## Understanding the Drivers for Success

Authors: Ken Caplan, Joe Gomme, Josses Mugabi and Leda Stott

October 2007

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# Assessing Partnership Performance: Understanding the Drivers for Success

## A note on this document

BPD believes that **the scope, purpose, structure and resource requirements of partnerships need to be more rigorously negotiated**. This document forms the third in a BPD series on partnership process, building on the guidance in *The Partnership Paperchase* (around partnership agreements) and *Creating the Space to Innovate* (aimed at unpacking what enables partnerships to succeed). Each of these documents is aimed at enhancing the conversation between partners to allow their collaborative efforts to be more robustly designed.

Written with practitioners in mind, *Assessing Partnership Performance: Understanding the drivers for success* attempts to provide easy to access guidance on what to look for when reviewing partnership progress. The table of contents hopefully provides a logical guide to the text while the text box and graphics (initially found after section 1.3) provide a quick summary of what we believe a partnership assessment should aim to understand.

## Section 1. SETTING THE SCENE

### 1.1. The Context

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are being widely promoted as mechanisms to deliver development goals such as improving access to water and sanitation services for the poor. Whilst we understand more and more about how to structure partnerships, assessment frameworks of these collaborative ventures have largely been focussed on tangible project outputs rather than a review of the true effectiveness of the partnership. Given that partnerships require significant time and resources to develop and maintain, understanding how to maximise their effectiveness becomes critical. If senior policymakers are to continue to advocate the use of partnerships to address development challenges, practitioners need to make the case more clearly and systematically of the value and validity of the partnership approaches they are undertaking

**Although this document may be of interest to researchers and evaluators from various disciplines, its primary aim is to aid partnership practitioners in answering the question of whether working in collaboration is, or was, the best way to achieve their aims.** For us, partnership assessment is less about passing judgements and more about designing a conversation between the partners that allows them to: 1) redress internal imbalances that inhibit effectiveness, and 2) respond to external shifts that present either opportunities or challenges to the partnership.

Whilst it is relatively easy to determine the specific outputs of a partnership, in many instances, these outputs could have also been delivered via simpler mechanisms, such as through a contractual arrangement. Similarly the difficulty with focusing on outcomes and impacts is that often these occur well after the partnership has completed its work. The premise of this paper is that the fundamental building blocks of partnership revolve around the diverse motives (or “drivers”) that bring partners together to help them meet their own and wider aims. Partnerships, therefore, must be assessed differently from projects: thus rather than focussing on the outputs achieved, the drivers are the starting point of our analysis.

Bringing together expertise focusing on the three themes of partnership, monitoring and evaluation, and water and sanitation, we have sought to strengthen our understanding of how an assessment framework can best reflect what really happens in partnerships.

## **1.2. Defining partnership**

Admittedly the term partnership elicits much confusion. It is often used to describe widely different constructs from loose networks and alliances to more institutionalised joint ventures. Commonly used definitions tend to be too simplistic. They refer to their voluntary nature, shared or pooling of resources, capitalising on synergies, etc. Such definitions tend to mask the various obligations to participate, the overemphasis placed on financial contributions above other kinds of resource contributions, and the distinct “cultural” differences between organisations that make partnership processes so challenging. Clearly partnerships involve some form of horizontal decision-making processes (i.e. shared power), valued contribution of different kinds of resources (beyond financing), and flexibility to adapt the objectives and activities as circumstances dictate. We must be somewhat careful in that in many countries, the term partnership refers to a legal, contractual construct. We are not using the term in this way.

For the purposes of this exercise, BPD’s definition has been adapted from one created by AccountAbility (an organisation based in London):<sup>2</sup>

**Partnerships involve two or more organisations that enter into a collaborative arrangement based on:**

- 1) synergistic goals and opportunities that address particular issues or deliver specified tasks that single organisations cannot accomplish on their own as effectively, and**
- 2) situations where individual organisations cannot purchase the appropriate resources or competencies purely through a market transaction.**

Within this definition, partnerships may have a wide variety of objectives along a spectrum from the more specific task-orientation (such as the installation of 500 water connections) to the more systemic aimed at changing rules (e.g. the development of new regulatory standards) or behaviours (like a national/global hygiene promotion programme). Part 1 of the definition is fairly common. Part 2 introduces a more interesting element as it invites discussion around power and mutual need, funder and recipient relationships, and the “value” of the variety of resources that are brought to the table.

The adjacent figure 1 summarises some of BPD’s more generic findings around partnerships in the water and sanitation sector. It is in the context of these findings and the definition above that this document is placed. *(For an explanation of these*

### Partnerships in Practice

- Partnerships are rarely simple and often involve an understated and unresolved competition between partners.
- Partnerships must be tailor-made (though partnership processes can be somewhat standardised).
- Partnerships (between institutions) are rarely trust-based, though must be based on respect of partner contributions.
- Whether there is a choice of partner or not needs to be better understood. The term “voluntary” can be misleading.
- **The overarching mission of the partnership needs to be agreed. Partners will rarely share a common vision though of how to get there.**
- Partnerships are not meant to be permanent but a transitional mechanism until practices become institutionalised or transactions-based.

**Figure 1**

<sup>2</sup> See AccountAbility at [www.accountability21.net](http://www.accountability21.net)

points and further analysis, please refer to the accompanying practitioner note entitled “Taking the mythology out of partnerships: A view from the ground up” available at [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org).) Though each of the points in the slide have implications for partnership assessment, the most important for our purposes is that which refers to the fact that partners will rarely share a common vision of how to achieve the partnership’s mission or goal. This underlying tension can either encourage a partnership to explore new innovations that were hitherto unthinkable, or can completely undermine partners’ ability to work together.

### 1.3. Partnership Assessment Tools

Reviewing the performance of partnerships involves two elements: an assessment of the results of the collaboration and an assessment of how the partners work together. An assessment of the results (outputs) may be more straightforward and can draw on a wide variety of readily available assessment frameworks for *project* evaluation.<sup>3</sup> This document focuses more specifically on assessing whether partnership as an approach

best meets the goals of the partners.

Various evaluation frameworks have been proposed for use with partnerships. These include the adaptation of organisational assessment models,<sup>4</sup> cost-benefit analyses<sup>5</sup> and project management tools, such as the Logical Framework Matrix which integrates monitoring and evaluation with planning.<sup>6</sup> Business-developed Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART) criteria have also been put forward to analyse partnerships. Although these approaches contain elements that are helpful, they may be more appropriate



Figure 2

for less complex interventions. Partnerships are often established as a temporary measure, engaging in activities at a multiplicity of levels and across a variety of different organisational structures. Tightly defined data measurements may miss broader external issues, such as social and environmental change, as well as those internal to the partnership around organisational change.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: 1) Baker, J.L. (2000) *Evaluating the Impact of Development Projects on Poverty: A Handbook for Practitioners*, Directions in Development, The World Bank, Washington, DC; 2) Prennushi, G., G. Rubio, and K. Subbarao. (2000) 'Monitoring and Evaluation' in *Sourcebook for Poverty Reduction Strategies*, World Bank, Washington, DC; 3) UNDP (2002) *UN Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluation for Results*, UNDP Evaluation Office, New York; and 4) the websites of the Performance Resource Assessment Centre (PARC) [www.parcinfo.org](http://www.parcinfo.org); International Development Research Centre (IDRC) [www.idrc.ca](http://www.idrc.ca) and Eldis [www.eldis.org/](http://www.eldis.org/)

<sup>4</sup> See Lusthaus, C., M.H. Adrien, G. Anderson, F. Carden, and G. Plinio Montalván. (2002) *Organizational Assessment – A Framework for Improving Performance*, IDRC/IDB.

<sup>5</sup> See Acutt, N., R. Hamman, A. Carter, and P. Kapelus. (2001) *Towards Evidence of the Costs and Benefits of Tri-Sector Partnerships*, Working Paper No.10 / May, [www.odi.org.uk/bpd-naturalresources/media/pdf/working/work10.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/bpd-naturalresources/media/pdf/working/work10.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See European Commission (2002) *Project Cycle Management Handbook*, EuropeAid pp 27-32

In recent years a number of *partnership* assessment frameworks have emerged that are specifically aimed at assessing the rather unique characteristics of partnerships. These include models that:

- *measure a partnership's 'added value' by looking at the benefits that have been derived by different partners over time,*<sup>7</sup>
- *assess evolving partner relationships and their outcomes,*<sup>8</sup>
- *investigate the transaction-costs involved in partnerships,*<sup>9</sup>
- *examine partnerships in relation to accountability to better understand their responsiveness, transparency and compliance,*<sup>10</sup> and
- *use outcome-mapping to focus on change in behaviours, relationships, actions, and/or activities of the people and organisations with whom a partnership works rather than assessing its products.*<sup>11</sup>

This wide array of different tools reaffirms the fact that partnerships are complex and evaluating them can potentially start from a number of angles as Figure 2 above suggests.

The guidance offered throughout this document starts from the premise that **partnership assessment is best initiated and conducted as a “conversation” owned first and foremost by the partners themselves.** Whilst many of the assessment frameworks and tools noted above could usefully support this conversation, we have approached the question from a different angle, which is presented in the following box:

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<sup>7</sup> See Mitchell, J., J. Shankleman and M. Warner. (2001) '*Measuring the "Added Value" of Tri-Sector Partnerships*', Working Paper No.14 / October, and M. Warner, (2002) '*Monitoring Tri-Sector Partnerships*', Working Paper No. 13, [www.odi.org.uk/bpd-naturalresources/html/pub\\_working.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/bpd-naturalresources/html/pub_working.html)

<sup>8</sup> See Brinkerhoff, J.M. (2002) 'Assessing and improving partnership relationships and outcomes: a proposed framework', *Evaluation and Program Planning* 25, Elsevier, pp 215-231.

<sup>9</sup> See Artz, K.W. and T.H. Brush, (2000) 'Asset Specificity, Uncertainty and Relational Norms – An examination of co-ordination costs in collaborative strategic alliances' *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, Vol. 42, pp 337-362.

<sup>10</sup> See Caplan, K. (2005) Partnership Accountability – Unpacking the Concept, *Practitioner Note Series*, BPD Water and Sanitation, London (available at [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org))

<sup>11</sup> See Earl, S., F. Carden, and T. Smutylo. (2001) *Outcome Mapping, Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*, International Development Research Centre [www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9330-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9330-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)

### **A New Logic for Partnership Assessment: A Quick Explanation**

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

1. The external environment (as reflected in financial, legal and institutional considerations) that shapes the scope and ambition of the partnership.
2. The organisational environment (as reflected in each partner's 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.
3. The individual partner representative's incentives and disincentives to engage (influenced by their own knowledge, beliefs, interests, position, accountabilities, etc.) 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.

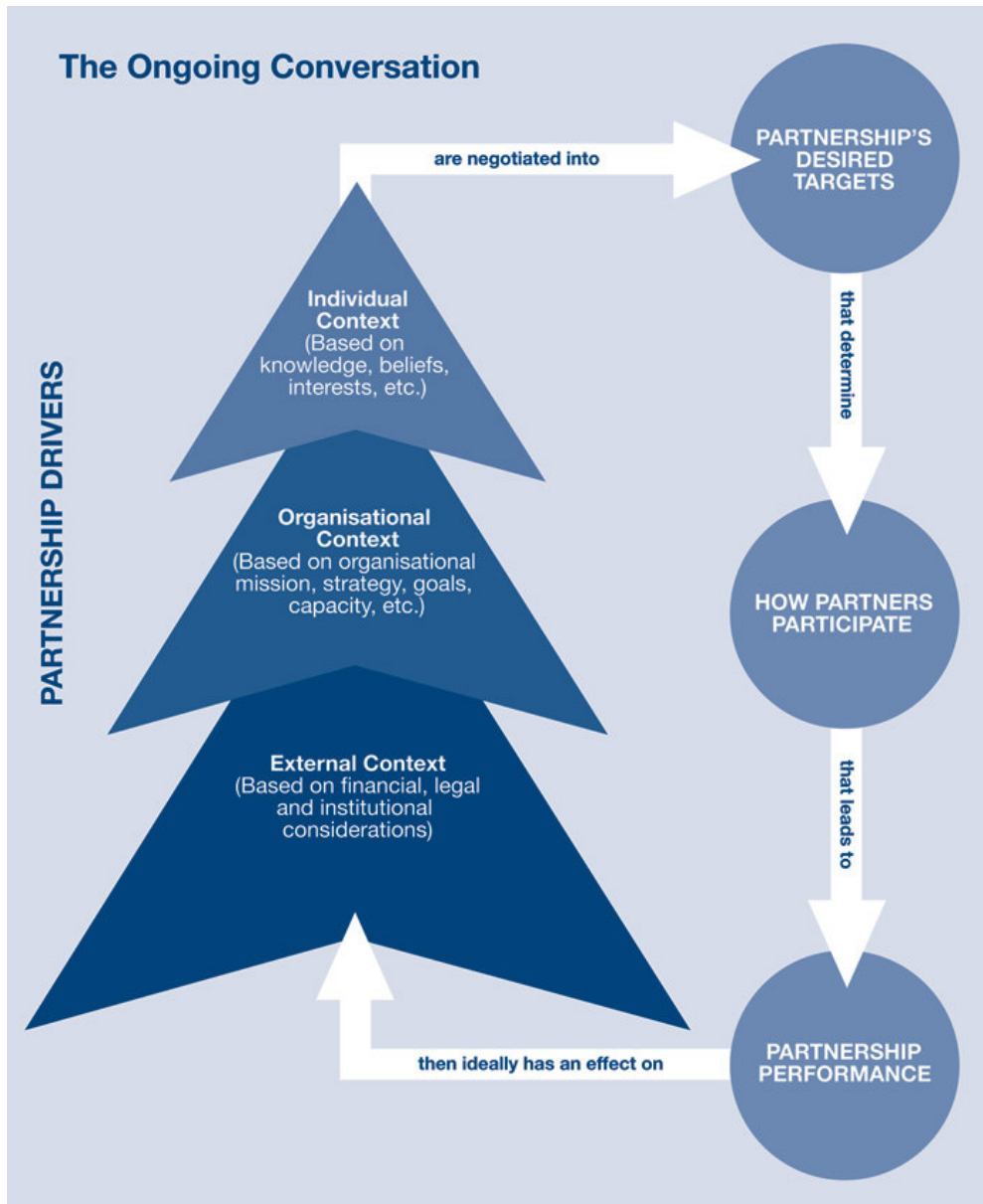
**Negotiated targets are then reflected in resource commitments made by each partner and contributions towards decision-making.**

**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.**

There will always be some external stakeholders who will try to hold the partners accountable for more than what their drivers will actually allow them to contribute. However, while a partnership can be criticised for identifying the wrong problem, not being ambitious enough, or not being inclusive enough - it cannot be deemed ineffective for not delivering on targets that partners themselves have not identified, negotiated and agreed upon.

With this framework (represented in **Figure 3** overleaf) as the basis for analysis, the following sections of this document go into some detail about:

- **Why we should assess a partnership's effectiveness (Section 2),**
- **What might go into such an assessment (Section 3),**
- **How such an assessment could be pursued (Section 4), and**
- **How to feed the learning back into the partnership (Section 5).**



**Figure 3**

Ultimately, the knowledge derived from this process will enable partners to make decisions about their role in a partnership and whether they:

- are satisfied with the partnership's progress;
- have concerns but will settle for what the partnership offers;
- are dissatisfied and wish to re-negotiate the terms of their engagement; or
- see no further benefits in remaining as a partner and seek to exit the partnership.

## Section 2. WHY ASSESS A PARTNERSHIP'S PERFORMANCE?

The scarcity and anecdotal nature of material that assesses the value of partnerships to date has reinforced the need for approaches that more carefully review their contribution. Because partnerships are increasingly being promoted as vehicles for addressing development challenges, our understanding about how they function and what works and what does not must be enhanced and the findings shared.

Evaluation of development interventions is important to the work of international agencies and government bodies and consequently includes demands for the assessment of partnership initiatives, particularly where donor funding has been granted to support them.<sup>12</sup> To promote organisational accountability, different sector partners are also under both internal and external pressure to justify their engagement in, and value derived from, working in partnerships.<sup>13</sup> These different demands have broadened the call for the monitoring and evaluation of not just the project activities of partnerships but of the partnerships themselves.

Assessments should be designed according to the expected use of findings and the intended audiences. A broad spectrum of assessment is possible ranging from periodic "health checks" to more formalised verification efforts (usually post-completion).

**"Health checks" (referred to as tracking, monitoring, formative evaluation, etc.) ask "Are we making progress as a partnership?"** They enable partners to assess the costs and benefits of their participation in relation to individual objectives and contributions, examine how well partnership structures and systems are working and gauge whether expected milestones are being reached. This approach allows for conflicts and difficulties to be corrected before they become debilitating and can improve the co-ordination within the partnership, promote its capacity and encourage internal motivation. It can also be a helpful vehicle for joint recognition of successes and failures that lead to decisions about future planning.

**More formalised end-of-project assessment (otherwise known as summative evaluation) asks, "Could we have achieved this result on our own?" and "If not, could we have paid someone else to achieve this same result?"** Such an assessment involves making judgements on the validity of the partnership approach towards effectively and efficiently meeting the partnership's objectives (as evidenced by analysis of outputs and outcomes). It seeks information to justify whether this way of working<sup>14</sup> is worth pursuing in view of time and resource implications and thus appropriate for replication or scaling up. More exhaustive and carried out less often than a health check, it serves as a basis for re-focussing partnership objectives in response to internal and external changes that may occur over time. At the policy level, assessments of this type can provide evidence for establishing whether, and to what extent, partnerships are useful vehicles for development work and inform decisions about whether they should be more widely promoted.

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<sup>12</sup> See for example the World Bank [www.worldbank.org/ieg](http://www.worldbank.org/ieg), UNDP [www.undp.org/eo](http://www.undp.org/eo), the European Commission [europa.eu.int/comm/budget/evaluation/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/budget/evaluation/index_en.htm), and the UK Department for International Development [www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/evaluation.asp](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/evaluation.asp)

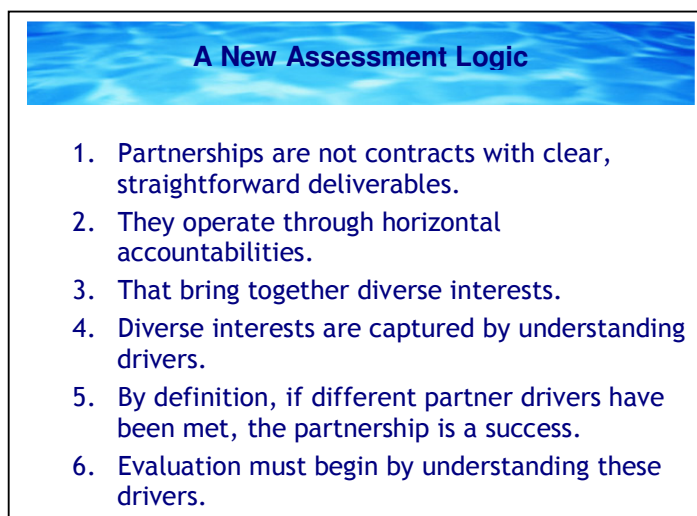
<sup>13</sup> See Partnership Governance and Accountability - [www.accountability.org.uk/research/](http://www.accountability.org.uk/research/)

<sup>14</sup> As opposed to single sector, more transactions-based or other alternative approaches.

To ensure engagement and commitment from all relevant parties, the purpose of the assessment must be clearly understood and explicitly endorsed by all partners. With this in mind, partners should anticipate that an assessment may result in:

- 1) a partner(s) revisiting the rationale for their involvement in the partnership;
- 2) an indication that other partners may be needed to achieve the partnership's objectives;
- 3) a redirection of the partnership away from current objectives, a shift to more specific objectives or a move toward more ambitious aims;
- 4) a recognition that the partnership is achieving its aims and thereby can go on to tackle other problems or can end; and/or
- 5) a recognition that the partnership is not working or is unlikely to work and therefore should end.

Assessments should provide information on what works and what does not at different stages of a partnership's development. Lessons learned may relate to a particular theme or activity or to wider issues and influences. Internally, individual practitioners and organisations should be able to use the learning to refine their decision-making and practice around whether and how to engage in partnerships. Externally, learning from assessment efforts can help us to understand, and make the case for, when partnerships are appropriate and when they are not – how they might be used to deliver on development goals by incentivising stakeholders differently and/or how they can influence and effect change at the policy level.



**Figure 4**

### **Section 3. WHAT TO ASSESS?**

Performance hinges upon the right partnership construct for the context, the willingness and ability of partners to deliver on commitments, and how partners reach decisions about how to allocate resources or focus their activities.

#### ***3.1. Unpacking the drivers to partner***

Drivers are those “pushes and pulls” that determine or necessitate certain behaviour or actions. Drivers include:

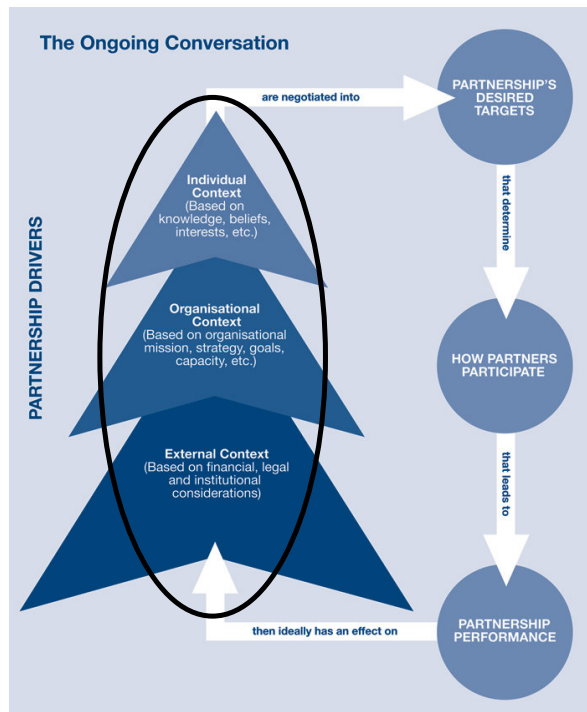
- Incentives that motivate partners to engage in the partnership. (Disincentives discourage engagement, suggesting that participating in the partnership would result in inappropriately allocated resources or foregone opportunities.)
- Obligations that force individuals or organisations to participate in certain processes, to provide certain inputs or produce certain outputs. Not doing so would result in some kind of sanction or penalty.

The external, organisational and individual context should logically suggest the drivers for each partner to participate.<sup>15</sup> As these drivers are changing constantly, they require constant review to see how they may be influencing participation.

**The External Context** – Partnerships and their activities are not created in a vacuum but must be framed around the specific contexts in which they operate. Understanding how a partnership’s processes and outcomes relate to its particular setting is necessary if we are to obtain information about how and why a partnership may work in a given situation and why it may or may not work elsewhere. The influences of socio-economic, political, financial and institutional aspects as well as the physical or geographical setting upon its development, performance and impact are therefore of great importance.

Effective partnerships will understand this context thoroughly and seek to follow closely how the situation changes over time. Opening questions to assist this process could include the following:

- What institutions set the rules and regulate the activities around which the partnership is organised? How effective are they?
- What kinds of approaches are feasible in the setting and which have been tried before?
- What are the prevailing political attitudes within each major stakeholder group around the problem to be addressed and towards the activities or approaches around which the partnership is organised?



- How has the economic context dictated resource allocations and thus the preoccupations and priorities of different stakeholder groups (around, for example, the use of different technologies, the expansion of services, etc.)?

All of these elements are dynamic, though some may change more rapidly than others. Thus a baseline should provide a point of reference for later assessments. If there are contextual changes, have they been reflected in the objectives, activities or approaches of the partnership?

**Organisational Drivers** – The different visions and missions of each of the partners also form part of the context for the partnership. Indeed the rationale for multi-stakeholder partnership is to bring together diverse types of organisation with different skills and resources. The specific dynamics of each will determine their incentives and obligations to partner. If the partners fail to understand each other in these terms, they are likely to misinterpret each other’s motivations and actions.

Examples of drivers (provided in Section 3.3) will vary from one partner to another. Overarching questions for each partner organisation could include:

<sup>15</sup> Please refer to Newborne, P. and K. Caplan, *Creating Space for Innovation: Understanding enablers for multi-sector partnerships*, BPD: London, 2006 (available at [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org)) for related analysis framed more around what constrains or enables partnerships to deliver.

- What is our analysis of the problem that needs to be addressed?
- What are we trying to achieve within this context? What would success look like for our organisation? What kinds of changes would we like to see happen in our organisation, our partners, overall? Could we achieve these aims alone?
- Can our organisation realistically influence the wider context? Do we already have or can we generate approaches that can help us?
- Are we certain that the costs outweigh the benefits of participating? What are our make-or-break points or non-negotiables that if not met would force us to leave the partnership? (Why did we originally get involved? Does that rationale still exist? If not, what has changed?)
- Are we comfortable working with (and being seen to be working with) our partners?

An assessment of the drivers for different partner organisations will reveal where different views and needs exist (a discussion that is often insufficiently pursued). With more detail provided in Section 5.3, this discussion should allow partners to express whether they are satisfied, settling, seeking to renegotiate or seeking to exit.

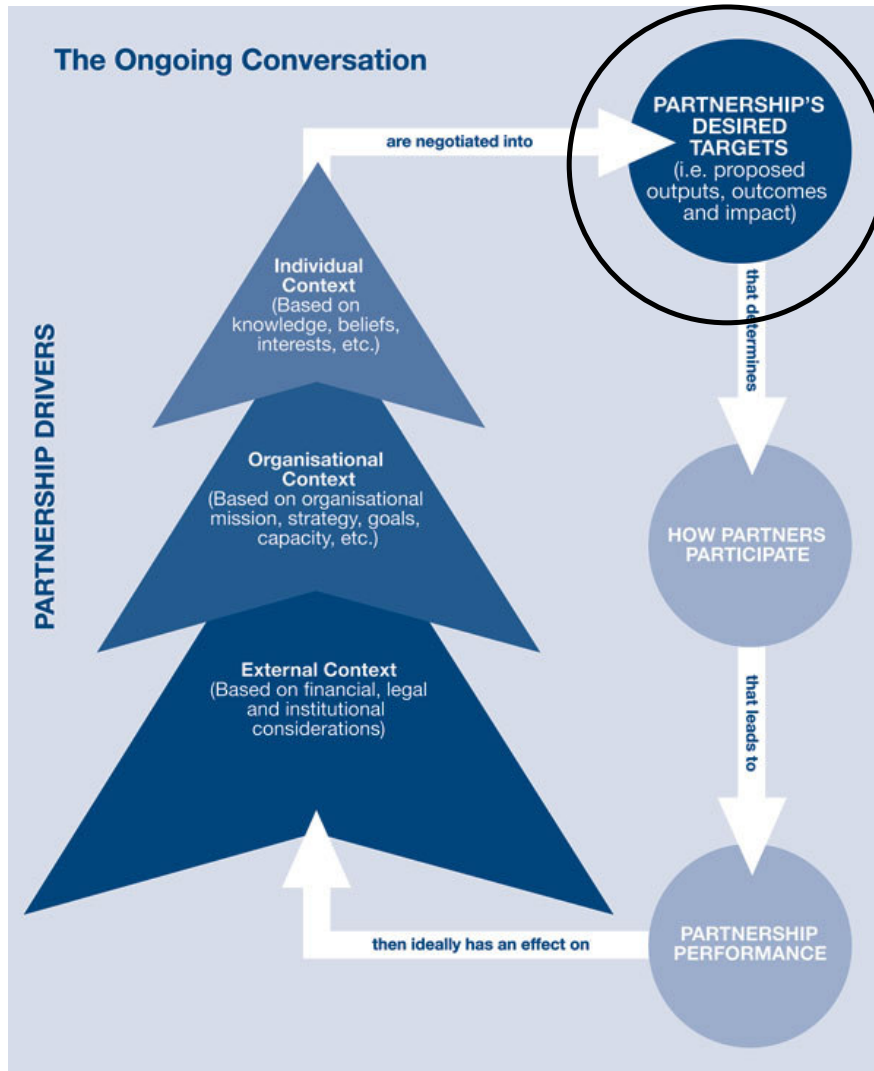
Depending on the relationships that have been established between partners, **organisations may have significant reservations about revealing the factors that motivate them** in any detail. How deeply they can be discussed with an assessor and how openly they can be shared with other partners and stakeholders will vary according to circumstance. For example, it may be difficult for some organisations to be transparent about their long-term goals or their internal processes. Setting out the boundaries and expectations for transparency should ideally occur early on in the partnership, particularly with an eye to any implications that these boundaries may create in the future. If such boundaries are not already articulated by the partnership, then an assessment process should seek to create them. (See Section 4.3 for further discussion).

**Individual Drivers** – Partnerships are operated and maintained by individual representatives who bring with them a number of identities, including at least their professional identity (e.g. as an engineer, public health professional, etc.), their position identity (which designates certain levels of authority within their own organisation) and their personal identity. Each of these will influence how they interact with the partnership.<sup>16</sup> For example, in a positive light, their professional identity could motivate them to get involved in a partnership because they want to keep up with trends in their area of work. Their position identity could motivate them to get involved in a partnership because they want to enhance their career. Their personal identity could incentivise them to get involved in a partnership because they are keen to meet new people, learn new things, make a difference, broaden their networks, etc. The drivers for why individuals are at the table will influence their behaviour in, and contribution to, a partnership. Difficult as it may be, assessment processes need also to get at this more individual level to understand why certain elements of a partnership are working or not. This also proves important when there are staffing changes expected that might change the dynamics.

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<sup>16</sup> The authors are indebted to Ros Tennyson of The Partnering Initiative and the International Business Leaders Forum for this insight.

### 3.2. Moving from Drivers to Negotiated Targets



An assessment process needs to reconfirm how the partnership fits into its broader context. The analysis of the context and definition of the scope of the partnership are negotiated and translated into a set of proposed outputs and outcomes. Typical questions to gain this understanding might include:

- What is the partnership trying to achieve?
- What does success look like for the partnership? How would we know if we had achieved it? What would suggest it is not working?
- What kind of changes would we see? Where or within which institutions?

The contribution that each partner is willing to make is

then matched up against these expected results. Discussed in more detail in Sections 3.3 and 3.4, such resource commitments (time, money, etc.) will be based on partner incentives and obligations.

There should, however, also be enough flexibility to investigate unanticipated outcomes and consequences. Such unintended results often yield information that reinforces the value of a partnership and offers new dimensions and incentives for working together. Outcome mapping should be helpful here.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.3. Unpacking partner participation

Partners participate in partnerships in two primary ways – by making and delivering on their commitments to the partnership and by engaging in the on-going decision-making processes of the partnership.

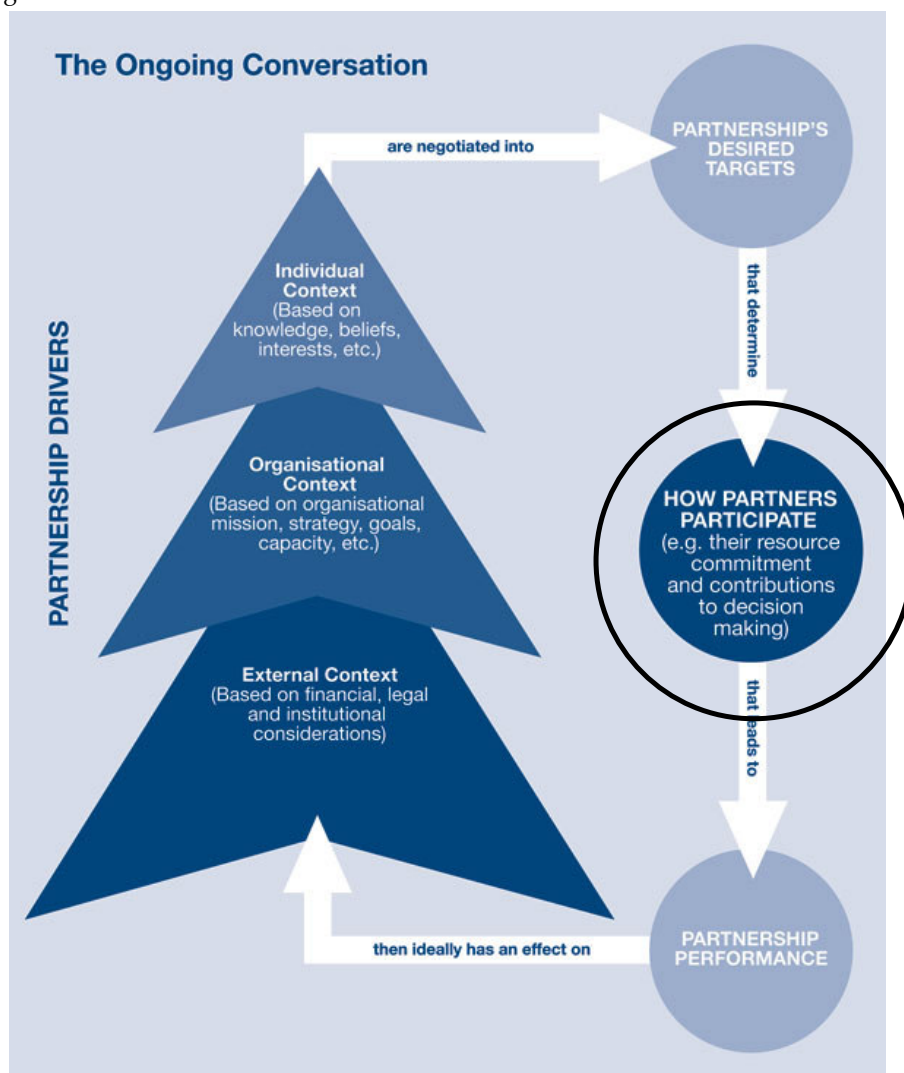
<sup>17</sup> See Earl, Carden and Smutylo, (2001).

### Are partners delivering on commitments?

To respond to this question, we need to measure partner commitments and how well they fulfil those commitments. These commitments are made at an organisational level but are fulfilled by individuals and can take the form of time, energy, equipment, materials, funding, work space, etc. Individual drivers to participate are not always the same as those of an organisation. In some cases, the organisational drivers to participate may be quite high while the individual drivers are low. In other cases, individuals may be highly motivated but their organisations are slow to see the incentives for

participating or understand the sanctions for not participating. By identifying situations where an individual is “out of step” with her/his organisation, we can pinpoint when a representative may have difficulty in obtaining institutional buy-in for the partnership or when the individual is blocking or slowing the organisation’s active participation.<sup>18</sup>

An assessment of drivers may also allow organisations (and partnerships) to find ways of adjusting the incentives and obligations in order to promote greater participation. For example, if it becomes apparent that a partner has many obligations towards the partnership but few incentives (or sanctions), it may be necessary to review organisational targets to assess whether changes could be made either to the partner’s level of involvement or, if possible, greater incentives could be created for the organisation to participate in the partnership more deeply.



The table below provides lines of inquiry to assess whether sufficient resources have been committed and then delivered to achieve the aims of the partnership. The left hand column provides possible organisational and individual drivers to deliver on their commitments. Different drivers may elicit different interactions in (or expectations from) the partnership which could explain certain enabling or disabling behaviours. The right

<sup>18</sup> The processes by which individuals engage their own institutions are also important to understand – certainly some approaches are more effective than others. See Newborne and Caplan (2006) for more.

hand column offers leading questions that can guide the discussion (either in a group discussion or an interview process).

**TABLE 3a – Are partners delivering on commitments?**

	<b>A Range of Drivers - “Although I/we have less control over how they are used than in other ways of working, committing resources to the partnership and delivering on those commitments...”</b>	<b>Possible Lines of Inquiry</b>
<b>Organisational</b>	<p>...enhances the organisation’s reputation (including by forging greater understanding of our work by others)</p> <p>...provides new opportunities for learning and enhances the organisation’s skills</p> <p>...provides new “markets” for our products and services</p> <p>...provides new funding sources or other resources for our activities</p> <p>...allows us to enhance our operational efficiency and effectiveness</p> <p>...allows us to meet our targets, meet the needs of our constituencies and achieve our mission (and/or to stay in compliance, and/or avoid any financial or other penalties)</p> <p>...is an effective use of our time and resources</p>	<p>Are organisational commitments clear with action plans for organisations / teams?</p> <p>Have organisations met their commitments?</p> <p>Can we prove that the partnership has generated more efficient ways of meeting our own targets?</p> <p>Are there other alternatives that allow us to receive these same organisational benefits?</p> <p>Are commitments for partner organisations a diversion from priorities or do they directly contribute to meeting priorities?</p> <p>Is there sufficient recognition of our organisational contribution (between the partners and by external stakeholders)?</p> <p>What happens if our organisation does not meet our commitments?</p>
<b>Individual</b>	<p>...enhances my status (or does not hurt my reputation)</p> <p>...provides new channels for me to exert influence (my voice is heard)</p> <p>...provides different perspectives to my work and new opportunities for learning</p> <p>...helps me meet my annual targets (or helps me avoid a poor performance appraisal)</p> <p>...has led to the development of new contacts and relationships</p> <p>...provides me with new skills (that allows me to be more effective at my job or seek a more senior position)</p> <p>...helps me channel my time and resources more effectively</p> <p>...is an effective use of my time and resources</p>	<p>Are individual commitments clear? Are they being met?</p> <p>Are individuals at the right level representing each organisation? (Do they have sufficient authority to make commitments on behalf of their organisation?)</p> <p>Are the right individuals attending regularly?</p> <p>Do individuals have sufficient space in their work schedule and support from their organisation to meet their commitments?</p> <p>Is there sufficient recognition of individual’s time and commitment?</p> <p>What happens if individuals do not meet their commitments?</p> <p>How has the partnership influenced the way individuals do their work?</p>

**Do partners have sufficient incentives to contribute to decision-making?**

The overarching assumption here is that greater partner involvement in decision-making results in better ideas and greater buy-in. Partners will thus want to understand whether decision-making within the partnership 1) allocates resources effectively and efficiently; and 2) accommodates changes in the context. Whether partners feel that they have an appropriate say in the way decisions are taken will influence the way they deliver on

their commitments. The challenge here is to successfully capture the partnership’s evolving working arrangements, while at the same time looking at how partner relationships might be optimised in order to enhance participation and thus improve performance. Without an understanding of the processes involved, it is not possible to say to what extent a partnership is living up to its potential, or what factors are causing success or failure.

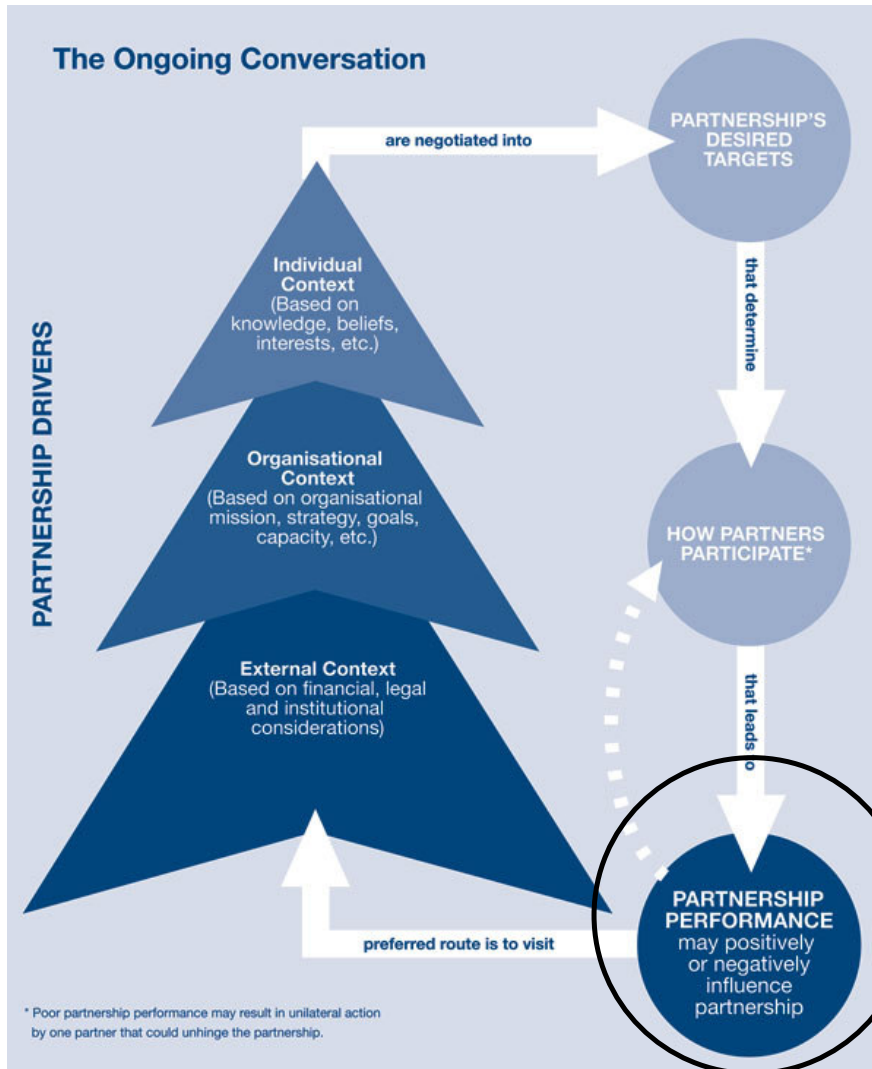
**TABLE 3b – Do partners have sufficient incentives or obligations to contribute to decision-making?**

	A Range of Drivers - “Contributing to decision-making in the partnership allows me / us...”	Possible Lines of Inquiry
<b>Organisational</b>	<p>...to create new opportunities for the organisation (funding, markets, projects, skillsets, etc.)</p> <p>...to influence the way resources may be allocated to our organisation</p> <p>...to influence the way resources are committed in our organisation</p> <p>...to ensure that the decisions taken by the partnership incorporate an understanding of the organisations’ risks (regarding reputation, financial, etc.)</p> <p>...to help us maintain our profile in the partnership</p>	<p>Are there clear rules governing decision-making within the partnership?</p> <p>Is the Chair of the meetings sufficiently neutral?</p> <p>Are meetings held frequently enough?</p> <p>Does each partner understand the risks (and benefits) for their partners?</p> <p>Do organisations use power relationships (through connections, financial contributions, etc.) in the interest of their own position and status or to benefit the partnership more broadly?</p> <p>Do partners have influence in decision-making roughly equivalent to the risk presented to their organisation?</p> <p>Are organisations comfortable with the amount of control they have over how resources (their own and others) are allocated in the partnership?</p> <p>Are clear systems in place to address grievances between partners?</p>
<b>Individual</b>	<p>...to influence learning</p> <p>...to influence the style and structure of the partnership</p> <p>...to create new opportunities for me (and thereby new or different rewards) for learning and staying informed, for recognition, for contributing my skills and knowledge</p> <p>...to avoid certain conflicts primarily by representing the risks that certain decisions might have on me</p> <p>...to influence decisions that impact on my own workload and/or personal targets</p>	<p>Are decision-making processes clear with sufficient information provided?</p> <p>Are attitudes towards partners supportive to joint decision-making?</p> <p>Are there barriers to contributing to decision-making (associated costs, timing of meetings, agenda setting, chairing styles, document preparation, etc.)?</p> <p>Do individuals use power relationships (connections, financial contributions, etc.) in the interest of their own position and status, the position and status of their organisation, or to benefit the partnership more broadly?</p> <p>Are individuals comfortable with the amount of control they have over how resources (their own and others) are allocated in the partnership?</p>

An initial (baseline) set of indicators developed from the drivers in these tables can be used for rapid reviews (e.g. as part of a “health check”), either by a single partner or for the whole partnership. Equally they will be useful in a broader verifying evaluation to give partners feedback on how they might more effectively participate in a follow-on or new partnership.

### 3.4. Unpacking partnership performance

An assessment of partnership effectiveness and efficiency is critical to any performance assessment. *Partnership effectiveness is about whether the partnership gets the results it was hoping for.* Such effectiveness is dictated by whether the partners analysed the problem correctly and put forward the right response to meet that problem.



*Partnership efficiency is the ability to make good use of members' financial resources, non-financial resources and time.* Assessing the efficiency of a partnership relationship is primarily based on the cost (actual or opportunity) of achieving results. However, since achievement of results is also affected by the external environment in which the partnership operates, efficiency can also be viewed in terms of the partnership's capacity to influence positively and strategically those external factors that affect its ability to perform. Thus, efficiency has both internal and external measures. Internal measures relate to how well the partnership uses resources (inputs) and external measures relate to how well the partnership interacts with its external environment.<sup>19</sup> **Table 3c** (overleaf) gives some of the key considerations or questions and the relevant

prompts for unpacking this further. In cases of performance below expectation, the table below may reveal where the contextual factors hinder, or internal drivers are not sufficiently strong enough to promote, greater performance.

<sup>19</sup> See Caplan, K (2005) for a related discussion on accountability in partnerships.

**Table 3c: Measures of Partnership Responsiveness and Efficiency**

Indicator(s)	Corresponding prompts - “What drives the partnership to...”
The partnership management team optimises and allocates members’ resources and contributions to achieve partnership objectives and goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...use partners’ financial resources efficiently and effectively?</li> <li>• ...use partners’ non-financial resources (e.g. time, skills, expertise, information, data, connections, influence, equipment, etc.) efficiently and effectively?</li> </ul>
Management maintains direct contact with: 1) the beneficiaries of the partnership’s products and services, and 2) other important external entities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...initiate and maintain relationships with key contacts outside of the partnership? Who is responsible for keeping in touch with them? How and how often?</li> </ul>
The partnership’s management team stays well informed about the external policy, legal, financial and regulatory issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...understand and prioritise the key external influences on the partnership?<sup>20</sup></li> <li>• ...analyse what changes have occurred in policy, legal, financial and regulatory areas in recent years, and what role the partnership played in these changes?</li> </ul>
Specific strategies are formulated to influence policies, legislation and other activities to: 1) obtain necessary approvals and resources <sup>21</sup> , and 2) feed learning into wider systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...create specific strategies to influence key external institutions? What are the objectives of these strategies? How do strategies to influence outside factors relate to work programmes and /or goals?</li> </ul>
As appropriate, programmes are developed to influence the public in support of the partnership goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...inform the “public” about their activities? To what extent have partnership public information programmes created or supported its image? What type of public image is it trying to create?</li> </ul>

Relating back to the organisational and individual incentives to participate, greater satisfaction levels may drive further contributions that could, in turn, stimulate greater impact. Alternatively, insufficient satisfaction with the partnership may have the opposite effect and result in a partner unilaterally deciding to reduce their commitments. If this happens without full discussion by the partners, the partnership is almost certainly destined to fail. An assessment process should therefore determine not only how well the partners know the various contexts in which they are operating, but also how concretely they follow dialogue processes laid out in the graphic above. The dotted line from Partnership Performance back to How Partners Participate represents how a partner(s) might unbalance the partnership by failing to frame their own actions in an on-going wider discussion amongst partners around the context and desired targets. This indicator, more than any other, suggests a failure of the partners to act effectively as a partnership.

### 3.5. A note on attribution

A key task is ascertaining if, and to what extent, a partnership is responsible for a particular outcome. Establishing a causal link poses difficulties because partners often undertake diverse activities in varied and complex contexts where other development

<sup>20</sup> See Newborne & Caplan, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> See Tremolet, S. and S. Browning. *The interface between Regulatory Frameworks and Partnerships*, BPD Practitioner Note Series: London, March 2002 (available on [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org)) for further analysis.

interventions may also be taking place. Outcomes may therefore be attributable to a combination of different factors. In addition, where results are 'distant' and have occurred some time after a partnership has completed its work, or are devolved in form, making a direct connection between the two may be complicated because of other possible intervening influences.

#### Donors and Funders as Partners?

Donors often wield significant power and influence on partnerships well beyond their risk levels, using their financial role to leverage actions they want to see happen. At the same time, often partners do not draw in donors in ways that would more effectively capitalise on their knowledge, experiences or convening power. Funders can thus be "devalued" in relation to what they could bring to the table beyond the financial resources. Given the large number of initiatives in which they may be involved, some greater clarity should be sought at the outset of ways beyond the financial that these organisations can contribute.

Partner organisations should start with a more thorough and honest assessment of the risks that the proposed partnership presents to their organisation. Partners may be unwilling to reveal such difficulties whilst at the same time trying to convince the donor that the effort is worth funding. Procurement rules generally do not support partnership innovation but seek the greatest possible certainty that objectives will be met. This may distort the more honest conversations that would lead to the donor providing greater support to mitigate different risks.

To address the question of attribution, assessment processes could focus on a 'plausible' rather than 'direct' connection between intervention and impact. Being reasonably positive of an association between the two requires careful triangulation of findings. Useful tools for this include The Ripple Model<sup>22</sup>, where impact is viewed as spreading out from individual to organisational and ultimately wider behavioural change, and Outcome Mapping in which the evaluation focus is upon behavioural and attitudinal changes among the people involved in a development intervention as opposed to a direct impact assessment.<sup>23</sup>

## Section 4. HOW TO ASSESS PARTNERSHIPS?

Having discussed *what to assess*, we now turn to the actual practice of conducting an assessment. Key decisions that partners need to make in planning for an assessment should begin with who should participate and how they should be involved.

### 4.1. Who should participate in the assessment?

Partnerships require the engagement and consensus of a wide range of players and there is therefore an expectation that assessment processes should be as participatory as possible and 'owned' by all involved.<sup>24</sup> The standard response suggests that, "the greater the involvement of partners and stakeholders, the greater the effectiveness of the assessment: 'inclusivity' is a must."<sup>25</sup> However, there is little guidance available as to what such 'inclusivity' actually means in practice, which individual

partners and stakeholders should participate and to what extent. Although the buy-in of all the parties is important, there may be differing levels of commitment to, and interest in, the assessment. In addition, decisions about the degree of the engagement of different

<sup>22</sup> Hailey, J. and R. James. (2003) "NGO Capacity Building: The Challenge of Impact Assessment", *Paper presented to the New Directions in Impact Assessment for Development Methods & Practice Conference*, IDPM University of Manchester.

<sup>23</sup> Outcome mapping has been developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). See [www.crdi.ca/en/ev-28377-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.crdi.ca/en/ev-28377-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html) (accessed May 16, 2006); IDRC (2003) "Addressing the question of attribution in evaluation", *Evaluation Highlight* (March), [www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/10893810041Highlight\\_1.pdf](http://www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/10893810041Highlight_1.pdf) (accessed May 17, 2006) and Iverson, A. (2003) *Attribution and Aid Evaluation In International Development: A Literature Review*, Evaluation Unit, IDRC (May) [www.idrc.ca/en/ev-32055-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-32055-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html) (accessed May 17, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> See for example Tennyson, R. (2004) *The Partnering Toolbook*, IBLF and GAIN p33.

<sup>25</sup> Comment from participant at BPD / World Bank Workshop, *Partnership Review and Evaluation: Creating Practitioner-Friendly Frameworks*, 9-10 March 2006, Washington.

interest groups will need to be weighed against factors such as the time and resources available.

The issue of who participates in an assessment is complicated by the distinction between who are *partners* and who are external *stakeholders*.

**Partners**, by definition, make substantive contributions to the partnership. Receiving a benefit from the partnership may not automatically qualify an organisation as a partner. Similarly contributing financial resources, as a donor for example, does not automatically qualify an organisation as a partner unless other critical resources (convening power and leverage, technical skills, etc.) are also contributed. Partnerships are established in part to share risks. Whilst there might be some risks to a donor in providing financial support to a partnership through its accountability to the public purse, this generally bears very little resemblance to the nature of risk for the implementing partners.

As noted above, the interests of the individuals representing each organisation and those of their organisation may be somewhat different. Assessment processes should find ways to ensure that the views put forward accurately portray, and are legitimised by, their respective institutions. Where possible, seeking the views of other members of each partner organisation helps to qualify the stance adopted by a partner representative. Where there are clear differences of opinion, an assessment process will need to find ways to explore possible reasons for this.

The term *stakeholder* is less easy to define and is generally (and unhelpfully) used to refer to groups who may be affected, influenced by or concerned with the work of the partnership.<sup>26</sup> Clearer distinctions between those stakeholders that may exert an **influence upon** the partnership (for example, the media, the regulator, academics, etc.) and those that are **influenced by** it are essential. The former generally bear very little risk if the partnership fails but the latter may ultimately bear a great deal of risk. The critical aspect of these distinctions is to determine whose risks matter most and whose opinion should carry more weight.

Ultimately different voices should be considered by an evaluation but their opinions should be understood in the context in which they are offered. Resource mapping would be an ideal tool to determine what each group contributes to the partnership, what risks they are presented with in providing those resources, and what relationship those resources have to their core business. Ideally partners might create a resource map that shows the nature of the contribution for each group (including funding, convening power, information, data collection, technical support, logistical and administrative support, dissemination skills, etc.).<sup>27</sup>

Figure 5

**Balance of Power – Who participates?**

Non-participation or low participation could suggest that partners are:

- **Indifferent** - if so, need to review incentives
- **Intimidated** - review partnership culture
- **Disenfranchised** - review governance structures
- **Incapable** - review implicit criteria for participating (time commitments, etc.)
- **Waiting** - need to anticipate triggers for participation

*We need to understand why certain partners are “weak”*

<sup>26</sup> The term “Boundary Partners” has also been coined to describe “those individuals, groups and organisations with whom the program interacts directly and with whom the program anticipates opportunities for influence”. See Earl, S., F. Carden & T. Smutylo. (2001) “Outcome mapping: building learning and reflection into development programs”, IDRC.

<sup>27</sup> BPD is in the process of developing a guidance note on resource mapping.

An assessment of this nature may reveal that over time more partners are needed in the partnership, that partners need to consult more regularly with the risk bearers, and facilitators need to find ways to counter-balance the power of those that have “too much” influence. Partnership evaluators must be sensitive to the voice and presence of those who may be marginalised or excluded when conducting their work. (Figure 5 provides some clues to analysing the “weak partner”.) This involves assessors regularly checking their own assumptions while examining which partners and stakeholders appear to dominate in decision-making processes and whether this is related to particular inputs such as money or political patronage. Community and gender issues may also need to be explored as well as others that pertain to particular partnership contexts such as ethnicity, educational background, race, age or religion.

#### **4.2. How should partners and stakeholders be involved?**

The degree of both partner and stakeholder engagement in an assessment process will usually be determined by their ability and willingness to devote time and resources to the exercise. Once these boundaries have been ascertained, some decision can be made about the depth of the exercise for each of the partners and the extent of the involvement of different groups. All partners should be fully informed about the assessment and its purposes and understand how the information will be collected and used.

Having prioritised the involvement of different groups in the process, stakeholders may then be:

- Informed – notified that an assessment is taking place
- Consulted – asked to express opinions about the partnership for consideration
- Involved in the process – invited to take part in the discussions around assessment parameters
- Integrated into the design – assist with terms of reference, the management of the assessment and the analysis of the findings

In planning the assessment, partners should use the results of resource mapping to openly discuss potential roles and implications both for the assessment process itself but also more strategically for the dissemination and buy-in to possible findings. In agreeing the purpose of the assessment for each stakeholder group, trigger questions could include:

- How are they expecting to be involved?
- What new information are they likely to bring to the assessment?
- What is the best way to channel their views?
- How is the partnership likely to be affected by their participation? Does it create expectations, generate new buy-in, or otherwise?

These issues will, to a large extent, be determined by who initiates the assessment and why. If a partnership review is something that all partners agree upon, either because it is clearly scheduled into their plans and agreements or because they share the view that it is the ‘right’ time to carry this out, they may be expected to participate fully in the process. If, however, it is felt that the assessment has been ‘imposed’ in some way, for example, to satisfy one partner’s own internal requirements, engagement will almost certainly be more limited and may even have negative repercussions for the partnership as a whole. Along with resentment about demands on partner time and resources, there may be concern that findings will only be relevant to one party or may not be shared or fed back effectively into the partnership. Donor evaluation requirements can also create

tensions as they may force an assessment at the wrong time or be tied to continued funding arrangements which could distort the manner in which partners contribute to the assessment.

### **4.3. How should information be collected and organised?**

Our emphasis on the drivers to partner is aimed at narrowing the focus of the assessment, enhancing the conversation that occurs between the partners, and providing critical information to understand the effectiveness and efficiency of the relationships.

*Assessors need to be aware, however, that merely by asking the questions, they may be feeding in ideas that have the potential to influence how partners relate to each other.* With this in mind, processes and indicators of assessment need to be carefully agreed towards the outset.

Indicators provide the information that expresses what we wish to know as measurable or observable evidence. Because different partners and stakeholders may have particular ideas about measurement indicators, it is important that they are clearly understood.

This necessitates setting adequate time aside for dialogue to ensure that the indicators selected are meaningful and relevant to those involved.

The information needed may be obvious and straightforward, for example, the amount of money committed to the partnership versus the amount actually contributed. In other cases, the desired information may be more qualitative: for example, the quality of engagement on certain decisions taken by the partnership. In such cases, several indicators may be necessary. In Section 3, we offered some prompts that should elicit information to help determine whether commitments and contributions of different partners are being met and made. These lists are by no means exhaustive; rather, they are intended to act as triggers for a more in-depth discussion by the partners and other stakeholders. Each prompt can be used to develop appropriate indicators.

Once decisions about indicators have been made, the next step is to think about which sources are most likely to yield the information needed and which methods are most appropriate for collecting it. A range of traditional social science data collection methods can be used for partnerships.<sup>28</sup> The data gathering process involves careful planning to identify sources and appropriate collection methods for each data source selected. Key sources of information that may be collected for partnership assessments are provided in the table below. The actual choice of tools will be largely influenced by cost, time required to obtain the information, and feasibility of the method. Due consideration should be given to credibility of the resulting data and how it may be perceived by different audiences. The goal should be to obtain trustworthy, authentic and credible evidence.

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<sup>28</sup> See for example: Taylor-Powell, E. and S. Steele. (1996). *Collecting Evaluation Data: An Overview of Sources and Methods*. *Program Development and Evaluation*. University of Wisconsin, USA. – a good overview of methods with particular relevance to evaluation. See also Taylor-Powell, E. and C. Hermann. (2000). *Collecting Evaluation Data: Surveys*. *Program Development and Evaluation*. University of Wisconsin, USA, and Taylor-Powell, E. (1998). *Questionnaire Design: Asking Questions with a Purpose*. *Program Development and Evaluation*. University of Wisconsin – useful for basic guidance on designing questionnaires and conducting surveys in the context of evaluation. All available online: [www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evaldocs.html](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evaldocs.html) [accessed 17 May 06].

**Table 4a: Partnership Data Collection Methods<sup>29</sup>**

SOURCE	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Surveys, questionnaires <sup>30</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anonymous</li> <li>• Easy to compare</li> <li>• Inexpensive</li> <li>• Provide lots of data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impersonal</li> <li>• Wording can create bias</li> <li>• May not give the 'full' story</li> </ul>
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give good depth and range</li> <li>• Enable personal connection</li> <li>• Allow flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take time</li> <li>• Difficult to analyse and compare</li> <li>• Can be costly</li> <li>• Interviewer can bias responses</li> </ul>
Review of documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides comprehensive and historical information</li> <li>• Readily available</li> <li>• Few biases</li> <li>• Does not interrupt routines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes time</li> <li>• Information may be incomplete and / or biased</li> <li>• Inflexible</li> <li>• Need to be clear about information required</li> </ul>
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership processes can be witnessed in action</li> <li>• Can adapt to events as they occur</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to interpret</li> <li>• Evaluator can influence behaviour</li> </ul>
Focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quick and reliable way to get basic impressions</li> <li>• Can obtain wide range and depth of information in short time</li> <li>• Provides key information about specific partnership issues/concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not be representative</li> <li>• Biased voices need to be carefully managed</li> <li>• Requires good facilitation generally</li> <li>• Difficult to analyse responses</li> <li>• Can be hard to schedule</li> </ul>
Case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide good overview</li> <li>• Depict specific partnership experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject to the particular slant of the author(s)</li> <li>• Time-consuming to collect</li> <li>• Often written for specific audiences</li> </ul>

Completeness and validity of assessments can be improved by **triangulation**, i.e. mixing methods/data sources to cross-reference the findings to ensure greater accuracy. Triangulation is based on the notion that each data collection method has its own biases and deficiencies and using different methods and sources of information allows for a more valid assessment. Once the findings have been gathered, they need to be prioritised, carefully analysed and, crucially, reviewed by those involved so that inputs and conclusions can be checked and revised. Bearing in mind that feedback is important to ensure accuracy and reliability, careful thought needs to be given to who should and who realistically can participate at this point.

Early in the process, partners should also discuss what their approach should be if there are disagreements about the findings. There may be occasions when one or more of the

<sup>29</sup> Adapted from McNamara, C. Overview of Basic Methods to Collect Information [www.mapnp.org/library/research/overview.htm](http://www.mapnp.org/library/research/overview.htm) (accessed 3 August 2006)

<sup>30</sup> Surveys might attempt to reveal "facts" or perceptions; they might involve scalable feedback (answers on a scale of, say, 1 to 5) or open text feedback.

partners may disagree with the assessor, in which case the assessor's job is to facilitate a discussion between the partners around how the findings are interpreted.

Naturally some individuals may be reluctant to give information that they feel will be made public, 'offend' other partners or appear to contradict organisational viewpoints. This is frequently an issue when working with those who may feel unable to be candid because of funding or power relations. Assessment processes should try to ensure that 'different' or critical views that individuals may be wary about sharing can be shared. To ensure that controversial viewpoints can be aired, an assessment process must reinforce the principle of confidentiality and the protection of anonymity for all who request it. This may require the signing of a written agreement, adopting Chatham House rules<sup>31</sup>, or other mechanisms. A good facilitator should be able to draw out those controversial areas that are hampering the effectiveness of the partnership.

Related to the issue of confidentiality, it may also be worth considering under what circumstances sub-groups of partners may have side meetings. A rule may be suggested that partners can have side meetings when the area of discussion clearly does not involve all parties, but under the caveat that their discussion is framed in the spirit of what would be in the best interests of the partnership rather than only one or two of the partners.

#### **4.4. When should an assessment be conducted?**

Assessing partnerships has been aptly described as 'measuring a moving target'.<sup>32</sup> Partnerships and partner organisations are evolving entities that face internal and external influences. A primary challenge is to ensure that agreed measurement indicators are solid enough to encompass elements likely to remain stable, while simultaneously flexible enough to allow for change in the approaches, perspectives and strategies of both the partnership and individual partners. To address this, partners are encouraged to refer back to most recent assessment findings on a regular basis to determine where circumstances may have changed. The initial analysis on the context and the drivers to participate provides a good baseline that should be expected to change over time. Again, as **Table 4a** suggests, the goal is to create a conversation between partners that allows the partnership to adapt as circumstances dictate.

This conversation should also include some review of the unexpected (positive and negative) outcomes of the partnership that might warrant a rethink in terms of strategy, resource allocation, inclusion, etc.

The appropriate time for assessing a partnership depends on a number of factors, including the purpose of the assessment and the partnership's stage of development. Constraints on the availability of time, funding or other resources to carry out the assessment will also mean that choices about when in the lifetime of a partnership they might be conducted are important. Different partner timeframes such as business planning timetables, public sector electoral terms and donor funding schedules may pre-determine these plans. To ensure that no partner feels disadvantaged by the choices made, different interests need to be aired so that consensus can be reached on the appropriate time for an assessment.

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<sup>31</sup> "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed."

<sup>32</sup> El-Ansari et al. (2001) 'Collaboration and partnerships: developing the evidence base' *Health and Social Care in the Community* (9) 4 p220

At the initial stage of developing a partnership, individual partners may wish to examine the *potential* for the partnership to help them fulfil their own organisational goals. At this stage an assessment of the logic of the partnership will be useful.

During consolidation and implementation, it may be desirable to monitor or track the contributions of different partners, the effectiveness of partnership processes and the progress made towards using planned resources and achieving planned outcomes. These “health checks” are usually informal and internal and are undertaken at regular intervals when progress reviews and reports are needed. Typically this may be every 6-12 months and could take the form of a partnership review.

A deeper evaluation might be a bi-annual exercise, when a more formal review of the project’s progress against objectives and inputs is required. This provides an opportunity for realigning objectives and activities and taking into account any changes in the external constraints and opportunities that affect the project. This form of evaluation may assist in forging a future path for a partnership (e.g. by identifying new partners, new sources of funding, etc.) or creating a more purposeful and strategic exit.

#### **4.5. Who carries out the assessment?**

Whereas the actual conduct will vary in different contexts, maximising the opportunity presented by a partnership assessment should be every partner’s responsibility as part of the learning process. Setting the purpose, direction and expectations should be a group process that is negotiated among the partnership members. The primary decision is whether to adopt an internal or external approach (i.e. will we use staff of the partnership or partner organisations, or will we use someone from outside the partnership?). Each has its advantages and disadvantages.

An **internal assessment** is designed and conducted by a team or an individual with direct connection to either the partnership or one of the partner organisations. Because of this connection, the review would start off with a base of useful knowledge and relationships. A disadvantage of an internal review is that it may be subject to bias and the risk that outside funding organisations and community members may *feel* that the team is biased and the results may thus lose credibility. Whether this is important or not depends on the main audience. Another concern is that internal staff may not have the skills necessary to conduct a valid and reliable assessment.

An **external assessment** is designed and conducted by a team or an individual with no direct connection to the partnership or its partner organisations. This means that external evaluators will usually face the initial obstacle of having to understand the partnership’s history and complexity. External evaluators bring skills, knowledge and dedicated time. External evaluators can also offer a more objective view of the partnership and its activities as they may see the ‘bigger picture’ more clearly than someone associated with the partnership, and, in theory at least, have no predetermined point of view or expectations. Ultimately an external evaluator must be a skilled facilitator who can guide a conversation either between the partners or between the partners and external audiences.<sup>33</sup>

Decisions about whether to use internal or external evaluators will depend on the goals of the assessment and the resources available. An internal process may be preferable for

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<sup>33</sup> Such facilitation may initially involve being a conduit through which partners can talk to each other. Gradually this role should evolve whereby the facilitator provides prompts with the partners addressing their conversation to each other.

a health check while an external evaluation may be more appropriate for a wider exercise. A mix of the two strategies which combines both perspectives is also a possibility. A team with both internal and external members may be chosen, or an internal evaluator(s) may work with an external consultant acting as a coach or critical friend to the process to help design or facilitate the assessment.<sup>34</sup> They may even be called on to mediate in the case of different interpretations of the findings. In this case the consultant may provide advice or assistance on developing a participatory review process and/or conduct particular assessment tasks. Central to whatever choice is made, however, is the need to ensure that the team and all partnership members communicate regularly and openly about the expectations, design and implementation of the assessment.

**Table 4b: Checklist for choosing an evaluator<sup>35</sup>**

Internal Evaluator	External Evaluator
Do they have adequate expertise and knowledge?	What is the nature and extent of their previous evaluation experience?
Have all partners given their approval and endorsement for their role? Do they believe that they will be 'objective' enough?	Do they have a broad-based understanding of issues relating to the partnership's goals and mission?
Are there areas where they may be partisan or biased towards particular partners/approaches?	Are they familiar with the context of the partnership and sensitive to power issues that might influence it?
Will they relate freely and fairly to all partners and relevant actors?	Have they been fully informed about the nature and purpose of the partnership?
Will they be constrained by organisational responsibilities?	Are their costs acceptable and affordable?
Do they have adequate time for the exercise?	Can their time be controlled and accounted for?
Can they be trusted with 'confidential information' about other partners?	Are they able to communicate clearly and use language adequately and sensitively?
Will they be comfortable in eliciting, sharing and addressing 'difficult' issues?	Are they willing to share and facilitate information and feedback? Can they do this well?
Can they manage feedback responsibly and sensitively?	Do they have the ability to 'arbitrate' and act as a critical friend when necessary?
Will they share findings openly and transparently with all partners?	Can they link the partnership with wider knowledge, networks and information resources so that further learning is developed?

## **Section 5. INTERPRETING AND USING ASSESSMENT FINDINGS**

This section highlights some of the key considerations in interpreting and communicating evaluation information.

### **5.1. Interpreting the Findings**

Numbers and narrative statements collected from an assessment do not speak for themselves. They need to be interpreted for and with the partners. To ensure a balanced

<sup>34</sup> See Brinkerhoff (2002).

<sup>35</sup> See IRDC(2004) 'Selecting or managing an evaluation consultant or team' [www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/115645009918Guideline.pdf](http://www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/115645009918Guideline.pdf)

analysis, various methods and techniques may be used.<sup>36</sup> The main consideration here is that the information should be presented in a form in which intended users can digest it and relate it simply to the questions it is supposed to answer.<sup>37</sup> Because the same information may be interpreted differently, it is helpful to look at it from various viewpoints to consider how it may be received and understood. Opportunities for discussion around the findings in which different interpretations are shared will also be necessary. If undertaken effectively, the learning opportunities offered by joint consideration of different interpretations and perspectives can prompt partners to question their assumptions and search for deeper insights as well as assist in ensuring ownership of conclusions across the partnership. As noted above, the establishment of guidelines in the case of disagreements between partners or evaluators with regard to the findings is also worth considering. The evaluator should have the appropriate credibility and skills to facilitate this discussion as this is where real opportunities for determining ways to improve the partnership can be unearthed.

## **5.2. Communicating the Findings**

For the partnership as a whole, the findings should provide a clearer understanding of how the partnership can be 1) revised and improved, 2) supported for continuation or expansion, and 3) promoted more broadly. Feeding back the results of an assessment process provides concrete information on what the partnership is doing, how it is functioning, and what effect it is or is not having. This makes it possible for issues to be raised so that various audiences increase their understanding of the partnership work. For individual partner representatives, communicating the findings to their own organisations can help to justify continued participation in the partnership and promote greater institutional buy-in for it.

Beyond the immediate and obvious audience, decisions need to be made about how far assessment findings remain within the partnership itself and what it is acceptable to share more publicly. The following key questions may help decide:

- With whom are we obliged to share this information?
- Who might want to receive this information?
- Who would we like to receive this information about our partnership?
- Who needs to know about our work for it to be successful in the long-term?
- What information should go to each partner / person and how?

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<sup>36</sup> A range of useful texts are available for this including: Neuendorf, K.A. (2002). *The content analysis guide book*. London. Sage Publications – good text for guidance on analysing documentation and other existing information that the partnership has collected. See also: Taylor-Powell, E. (1996): *Analysing quantitative data*. Madison. Cooperative Extension Publishing, University of Wisconsin – a short practitioner note on analysing quantitative data from an evaluation. Available online at [http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/pdfs/G3658\\_6.PDF](http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/pdfs/G3658_6.PDF) [accessed 17 May 2006]; Taylor-Powell, E. and M. Renner. (2003). *Analysing qualitative data*. Madison. Cooperative Extension Publishing, University of Wisconsin – another short practitioner note on analysing qualitative data. Available on line at: [http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/pdfs/G3658\\_12.PDF](http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/pdfs/G3658_12.PDF) [accessed 17 May 2006]; Leahy, J. (2004). *Using excel for analysing survey questionnaires*. – a useful note on how to use simple excel spreadsheets for analysing data from questionnaires – excellent for those unfamiliar with sophisticated statistical software. Also available on-line at: <https://cecommerce.uwex.edu/pdfs/G3658-14.PDF>

<sup>37</sup> See for example: Minter, E. and M. Michaud. (2003). *Using graphics to report evaluation results*. Madison. Cooperative Extension Publishing. University of Wisconsin. Available online at: [www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/G3658\\_132.pdf](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/G3658_132.pdf)

It is worthwhile considering the following cardinal rules of communication planning:

- Know your audience
- Know what information each audience cares about most and balance that with what you want them to hear
- Be timely
- Fit the communication format to each audience

To ensure that assessment information serves its purpose and promotes further learning, selecting appropriate presentation and dissemination options for each of the audiences identified is vital. Table 5a gives examples of dissemination options that may be used for different audiences. 'Internal' audiences, such as partnership beneficiaries, partner representatives and staff from partner organisations, and 'external audiences' such as special interest (advocacy) groups, donors, policymakers, the media and members of the general public will have different preferences for the format and presentation of this material. For example, "An external donor will expect a formal report. The public will welcome a story with a personal dimension. Policymakers will like statistics. Potential partners will want to know how current partners have benefited from their involvement."<sup>38</sup> At the same time, effective and tailored sharing of the findings internally is fundamental to the promotion of institutional buy-in for the partnership.

It is worth stating that *greater candour and integrity around the findings can only help put the partnership on a more honest footing, helping to communicate the challenges that the partnership is facing and thereby to manage the expectations around what the partnership can achieve*. This may require greater flexibility and magnanimity from donors and other external stakeholders if the partnership does not always go to plan. This can only help partnerships in general to overcome the general hype that has surrounded them particularly with the emphasis on multi-stakeholder partnerships after the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002, Johannesburg).

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<sup>38</sup> Tennyson, R. (2004) *The Partnering Toolbook*, IBLF, London & GAIN, Geneva, p.35.

**Table 5a: Communicating Evaluation Information**

Audience	What they may want to know	Possible communication channels	Possible communication formats
Partner representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interpretation of the results</li> <li>➤ Progress and achievements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Special activities for dissemination (e.g. workshops, retreats)</li> <li>➤ Briefings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Meetings</li> <li>➤ Face-to-face presentation</li> <li>➤ Slide shows</li> </ul>
Partner organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Progress and achievements</li> <li>➤ Proposed changes in direction</li> <li>➤ Problems encountered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formal reporting</li> <li>➤ Internal dissemination events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formal report</li> <li>➤ Briefing paper</li> <li>➤ Narrated slide shows</li> <li>➤ Letters and memos</li> </ul>
Respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Concerns and ideas reflected in the final report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formal reporting</li> <li>➤ Group discussion meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formal report</li> <li>➤ Slide show</li> <li>➤ Face-to-face presentation</li> </ul>
Funders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Progress and achievements, effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Invite funders to attend assessment dissemination events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Briefing papers or reports</li> <li>➤ Slide shows</li> <li>➤ Short video</li> <li>➤ Attractive newsletter</li> <li>➤ Websites</li> </ul>
Community and other interest groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Partnership relationships and achievements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Data summaries sent to key decision-makers, legislators, etc.</li> <li>➤ Targeted media release</li> <li>➤ Display at public sites</li> <li>➤ Special newsletter or brochure</li> <li>➤ Journal article</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Posters</li> <li>➤ Media articles</li> <li>➤ Video recordings</li> <li>➤ Pictures</li> </ul>

### **5.3. Acting on the Findings**

Beyond simply answering assessment questions, we need to think carefully about what a partnership and its members will do as a result of the insights and learning that emerge from the exercise. How will the learning be utilised and acted upon by the partnership, its members and other wider audiences? As outlined earlier (see Section 3.1 on organisational drivers), a review process should assist partners to take decisions based on whether they:

- **are satisfied** and thereby will remain in the partnership (or even seek more from it);
- **have minor concerns** and thereby will stay with the partnership but may wish to take action to address these;
- **are dissatisfied** and thereby may stay with the partnership but seek to renegotiate the terms of their engagement or the objectives and activities of the partnership; or
- **are completely discontented** and thus will look for ways to exit the partnership as they see no value in remaining in it.

Beyond the action that partners may take in response to “health checks” or wider reviews, an effective assessment can be an invaluable tool for learning and change both within and outside the partnership. **Table 5b** (overleaf) lists some of the learning possibilities that may be derived at these different levels and the action that may result from these.

**Table 5b: Partnership Assessment – Learning and Action Opportunities**

Level	Learning	Action
<b>INDIVIDUAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of skills and knowledge gaps</li> <li>• Reinforcement of representational role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek skills training / Capacity-building</li> <li>• Seek role /responsibility changes</li> </ul>
<b>ORGANISATIONAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of new or different role(s)</li> <li>• Greater awareness about partnership</li> <li>• Greater recognition of other partner’s incentives and contributions</li> <li>• Justification for involvement in partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take on new/different responsibilities</li> <li>• Seek further resources to contribute</li> <li>• Promote internal capacity-building initiatives</li> <li>• Re-negotiate role/contribution</li> </ul>
<b>PARTNERSHIP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearer vision and sense of purpose</li> <li>• Need for improved accountability</li> <li>• Identification of key gaps and ‘blockage’ points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop improved structures and systems</li> <li>• Promote greater accountability (transparency, compliance and response)</li> <li>• Develop more innovative plans</li> <li>• Use information as baseline for future evaluations</li> <li>• Re-negotiate partnership agreements</li> <li>• Create information and marketing tools</li> </ul>
<b>WIDER LEVELS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deeper understanding and knowledge of partnerships</li> <li>• Identification of key challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate improved knowledge sharing about partnerships</li> <li>• Create greater institutionalisation</li> <li>• Generate more funding for partnerships</li> <li>• Generate policy impacts with new legislation</li> <li>• Promote greater support for partnership approaches</li> <li>• Allows comparative analysis with other development programmes</li> </ul>

## FINAL THOUGHTS

BPD is increasingly asked both 1) to provide guidance to partnership practitioners on how best to conduct assessments of their partnerships and 2) to conduct assessments as a neutral facilitator in the water and sanitation sector. Whilst this document has been a long time in gestation, we are clearly only just at the beginning of understanding how partnership constructs can best be assessed. We have tried through this document to provide some guidance but recognise that we have provided neither a specific methodology for conducting assessments nor sufficient reference to tools that can be applied to make the assessment process as meaningful and appropriate as possible. We thereby request your views on how our evolving approach to partnership assessments, using the drivers as the basis for analysis, can best be applied in practice.

Given the importance placed on partnership constructs to deliver on sustainable development goals and the time, energy and funding put into them, practitioners are beholden to articulate the effectiveness of their partnerships more concisely. Such assessments need to provide clear evidence that a partnership is a more appropriate and

worthwhile choice than alternative means like a contract or transaction, which might present more straightforward ways of achieving the same outputs.

We believe that the partnership assessment process should be treated as a learning journey with an emphasis on constantly improving the ability of partners to work together effectively. Giving consideration to partnership drivers is central to this. Without a clear understanding of the incentives and obligations for partners to meet their commitments and contribute to decision-making, it is highly unlikely that a partnership will perform effectively and fulfil the potential that collaborative working offers.

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## **ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT**

### ***Our target audience***

Time and again practitioners with whom BPD works have requested guidance on how to review and evaluate their partnership. Whilst there is much guidance on evaluating outputs, practitioners find it difficult and often inconclusive to clearly gauge how effective and efficient are the processes of the partnerships in which they are engaged.

BPD’s aim through this work is to provide partnership practitioners with guidance that is simple enough to apply but comprehensive enough to tell them whether the effort was worth it or not. The document is designed to prompt partnership practitioners into discussion, particularly around areas that partners should agree at the outset and then review on a regular basis.

Whilst hopefully helpful to partnership practitioners themselves, there is also a growing pool of evaluators charged with assessing how a partnership is performing. Again such evaluations cannot be conducted along the lines of a standard project or programme evaluation as partnerships are different constructs involving greater interdependence between partners. The aim is to provide such evaluators with different ways of approaching the task they have been brought in to do.

### ***About the methodology***

A four-person team was formed to look at the issues around partnership evaluation in some depth. The team consisted of individuals with considerable partnership experience, but whose jobs may be described primarily as partnership analysts and water and sanitation specialists.

In the time available, this study used relatively rapid research methodologies including:

- a detailed review of the literature;
- a workshop in Washington with 20 participants to refine the concepts;
- a two hour session during an international partnership event with approximately 50-60 experienced partnership professionals to review and refine the findings; and
- circulation of this document in draft to a small peer-review group with feedback via e-mail and phone.

The team’s starting point was to ask the following questions:

- 1) Why evaluate partnerships?
- 2) What should be evaluated?
- 3) How should the partnership be evaluated?
- 4) When should the partnership be evaluated?
- 5) By whom should the partnership be evaluated?

Although our initial responses to many of these questions were along the lines of “it depends on the partnership and the purpose of the partnership,” they became significantly more nuanced as our conversation progressed. The task has not been simple and straightforward.

### ***About the authors***

**Ken Caplan** is the Director of BPD, a small not-for-profit organisation that works with and supports responsible partnerships between different sectors to help meet the Millennium Development Goals around water and sanitation. Through BPD, Ken has worked with a broad range of partnership projects and programmes. From 2001-2005, Ken also served as a tutor on the University of Cambridge Post-Graduate Certificate in Cross-Sector Partnership course and a mentor on the Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme (run by the Overseas Development Institute and the International Business Leaders Forum). Prior to moving to the UK in 1998, Ken worked in Thailand and Vietnam for 8 years with both donors and NGOs on issues including urban infrastructure, social inclusion, and partnerships around labour standards.

**Joe Gomme** has worked for twenty years in the water and sanitation sector in Asia, Europe, South America and Africa. He has set up and managed a range of projects and programmes, both in developing countries and in the UK, and has spent several years working to develop partnerships in water and sanitation, variously between NGOs, local and central government, private operators and community-based organisations. In June 2002 he completed three years as WaterAid’s first Representative in Madagascar, where he helped build an innovative programme with local NGOs and government organisations, focussed on the integration of sanitation and hygiene promotion with water supply projects and on the development of community-based users’ group networks. Since then he has worked as a freelance consultant, producing several pieces of work on programme design, evaluation and impact assessment.

**Josses Mugabi** is a Civil Engineer with six years experience in developing, designing and managing water and sanitation projects/programmes in East, Central and Western Africa. He has worked with different international relief and development agencies in Sudan, Sierra Leone, DR Congo, and Uganda. Josses is currently a PhD research scholar at the Water, Engineering and Development Centre, Loughborough University (UK). His primary research interests are in the field of consumer behaviour in relation to water use and payment for water services in developing countries. Josses has also recently joined the World Bank Energy and Water Department as a junior water and sanitation specialist, working on capacity building for urban WSS reform, public-private partnerships, and multi-sectoral project support activities.

**Leda Stott** is an independent consultant specialising in cross-sector partnerships and development issues. Over the last ten years she has designed, developed and evaluated partnership programmes with international and government agencies, businesses and NGOs in Africa, Europe and Latin America. She has also conducted training activities in partnering skills with organisations such as BPD, the European Commission’s EQUAL programme and Partners in Action (a collaboration between The Partnering Initiative and the UN System Staff College). Leda is the editor of the journal *Partnership Matters: Current Issues in Cross-Sector Collaboration* and works as a tutor on the Postgraduate Certificate in Cross-sector Partnership (PCCP) at the University of Cambridge as well as a mentor with the Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme (PBAS).

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Acknowledgements:

The Partnering Initiative

<http://thepartneringinitiative.org/>





## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Exploring Issues in Partnering Practice

# CONFLICTING CULTURES

## Lessons from a UN-Business Partnership

“We clearly live in different worlds and work in very different ways, but I do not feel that our approaches to the partnership were that different.”

UN Agency Representative

“We are completely different. We got on well, but ultimately the cultural gaps between our two organisations made the kind of partnership we wanted impossible.”

Business Representative

## About The Partnering Initiative

The Partnering Initiative is a Global Programme of the International Business Leaders Forum in association with the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry. Its approach combines thought leadership, cutting-edge action research, professional learning and development and the creation of innovative joint ventures to push the boundaries of the knowledge and practice of partnerships for sustainable development. The Initiative works with all sectors on strategies, case studies, skills training, partnership evaluation and organisational change.

[www.ThePartneringInitiative.org](http://www.ThePartneringInitiative.org)



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## ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper provides a fictionalised account of a real partnership between a UN agency and a multi-national company. The two organisations were prompted to work together in order to achieve the mutually reinforcing objectives of promoting primary school attendance and gender parity whilst also working against child labour in a developing country in Asia. These objectives were wholly in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

In spite of great optimism at the start of the relationship and the exemplary dedication of a core group of staff in both institutions, the partnership, as originally conceived, was unable to maintain its creative momentum and the partners eventually felt they had no choice but to adopt a more conventional focus for their collaborative activities.

This case study seeks to explore what key relationship factors impacted the partnership's development and contributed to its inability to work in the hoped-for manner. It draws closely upon the testimonies of those involved in the actual partnership to convey the genuine frustration experienced on both sides in trying to synchronise two radically different organisational cultures.

In documenting these points of view, *Conflicting Cultures: Lessons from a UN-Business partnership* seeks to analyse what went wrong rather than apportion any blame for failure to progress. It concludes by asking the question 'What might have made a difference?' in order to establish whether there are transferable lessons that could assist others in avoiding or overcoming similar difficulties.

Whilst most of the paper is constructed as closely as possible around the experiences and views of those consulted, any analysis of, or deductions from these are entirely those of the author.

**Leda Stott**

Senior Associate, The Partnering Initiative

## INTRODUCTION

“Creating wealth, which is business expertise, and promoting human security in the broadest sense, the UN’s main concern, are mutually reinforcing goals. Thriving markets and human security go hand in hand. A world of hunger, poverty and injustices is one in which markets, peace and freedom will never take root.”<sup>1</sup>

During the 1990s the United Nations (UN) increasingly advocated the deeper cooperation of states and international agencies with other sectors of society in order to achieve more sustainable development. The positive role that the private sector might play in supporting this goal prompted the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, to launch the Global Compact programme in 1999. Its aim was to encourage businesses to confront the challenges of globalisation by signing up to ten universal principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption<sup>2</sup>. Less than a year later the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were signed by 189 heads of state, under the auspices of the UN with a focus on reaching a series of poverty reduction targets by 2015.<sup>3</sup>

The role of the private sector, including commercial enterprises, business associations, industry coalitions and corporate foundations<sup>4</sup>, was highlighted as an important element in working towards the achievement of these goals. A common agenda, it was suggested, could be developed with business playing a vital part in supporting development by fostering in-

### Millennium Development Goals

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

1. Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary General, Speech at World Economic Forum 1998, quoted in Nelson, J. (2002) Building Partnerships, Cooperation between the United Nations system and the private sector, United Nations Publications, New York, p2

2. <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/>

3. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

4. See Nelson (supra) for a useful definition of what the term ‘private sector’ incorporates

### The 10 Global Compact Principles

1. Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and
2. make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.
3. Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
4. the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
5. the effective abolition of child labour; and
6. the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.
7. Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
8. undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and
9. encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.
10. Businesses should work against all forms of corruption, including extortion and bribery.

vestment, promoting a sound environment for its activities, managing its direct costs and risks and promoting new business opportunities.<sup>5</sup> As a result, a number of UN agencies and multinational corporations began to explore opportunities for active collaboration under the umbrella term ‘partnership’.

While recognising that there would be challenges, supporters of UN-Business partnerships had high expectations and bold claims were made for them:

“Despite the operational and strategic obstacles of new types of partnership, these multi-stakeholder and cross-sector approaches to problem-solving offer one of our greatest hopes for meeting, together, the challenges of the twenty first century.”<sup>6</sup>

Such thinking, however, was not embraced by all. Detractors suggested that corporations could now ‘bluewash’ themselves with the UN flag while continuing ‘business as usual’<sup>7</sup>. At the same time many within the private sector felt that they were being used merely to fill resource gaps and fund social programmes that should properly be the responsibility of governments. As partnerships between the UN and business grew so did opposition to such connections.

5. Nelson (supra) pp36-37

6. Ibid. p315

7. See for example Bruno, K. & Karliner, J. (2000) Tangled Up in Blue, Corporate Partnerships at the United Nations, TRAC, CorpWatch, San Francisco; Stott, L.(2003) Listening to the critics: Can we learn from arguments against partnerships with business? BPD, London; Nelson, J (supra) p34. Utting, P. (2001) UN-business partnerships: whose agenda counts? Third World Network, July 27th and (2003) The Global Compact: Why All the Fuss? UN Chronicle No.1

### Primary Education and Child Labour

“A child who is educated is more empowered to escape from poverty. A key factor contributing to MDG 2 is the elimination of child labour, a major impediment to universal primary and other education. Children who work full time cannot attend school. The educational achievement of children who combine work and school often suffers, and they tend to drop out of school to take up full-time work... History has shown how instrumental education has been in eradicating child labour, building a skilled workforce and promoting development. MDG 2 cannot be achieved without the... elimination of child labour.”

Decent Work and the Millennium Development Goals, ILO Fact Sheet

Lack of detailed information on the nature, quality and impact of UN-Business partnerships has continued to contribute to the polarisation of opinions about them. As Utting and Zammit observe, ‘although there has been a rapid scaling-up of partnerships, relatively little is known about their contribution to basic UN goals associated with inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. While considerable effort has gone into advocating partnerships, far less attention has been paid to developing the analytical tools and capacities needed to adequately assess their development impacts and implications and to draw lessons for the way ahead.’<sup>8</sup>

**“A partnership should be entered between parties that share the same goals. Global corporations do not share the same goals as the United Nations. Therefore, we believe that ‘partnership’ is the wrong relationship between the UN and business.”<sup>9</sup>**

It is our view that there is also a need for case study material that examines the actual process of working together and how the challenges of building partnerships between entirely different institutional types are addressed. This paper attempts to offer a preliminary exploration of this theme by examining a UN-Business partnership that was established to promote primary education in a developing country in Asia, in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

The ‘raw material’ for this research was not easy to obtain. The emphasis of much information on cross-sector partnerships has been on positive stories and there are enormous sensitivities about going public and airing differences that may disrupt on-going work or suggest that such connections have ‘failed’.

8. Utting, P. & Zammit, A. (2006) Beyond Pragmatism, Appraising UN-Business Partnerships, Markets, Business and Regulation, Paper No. 1, UNRISD and Copenhagen Business School

9. Alliance for a Corporate-Free UN

As a result, the case study outlined here has been fictionalised and the identity of the partners, the focus, context and organisations involved in it completely disguised.<sup>10</sup>

The testimonies used, however, are real and, demonstrating a blend of both the predictable and the surprising, provide an invaluable insight into the intricacy of building effective UN-Business partnerships. They reinforce the fact that such collaborations are considerably more complex than many of the simple ‘for’ and ‘against’ perspectives suggest. We believe that our findings reinforce the call for deeper study of international agency and private sector collaboration. In this way we will go some way to obtaining a clearer understanding of the difficulties faced by such diverse partners when working together and how these might be overcome in order to maximise the impact of a cross-sector approach towards sustainable development.

## THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW PARTNERSHIP

In 2003 a new partnership was developed between UNCOP, a UN Agency, and MAXLT, a multi-national company. The initial connection was stimulated by MAXLT’s Deputy CEO who, keen for MAXLT to make a strong public stand on the issue of child labour, approached UNCOP with the idea of developing a partnership to support primary education in an Asian country where it had a supply chain connection. UNCOP’s new Private Sector Linkage Representative responded positively to this suggestion.

A small group of staff from the headquarters of MAXLT and UNCOP then met to discuss how they might take things forward. The meeting was a positive one. As one of the MAXLT representatives recalled, “...conversations began about developing a partnership that was something far beyond the usual ‘cheque book’ philanthropy – something innovative and impactful, where we could learn and mainstream.” From such conversations the idea of building a partnership to promote and enhance primary education in the chosen country emerged.

The UN’s 2001 Human Development Report classified the country as one of Low Human Development. High poverty levels meant that child labour was widespread and primary education attendance, though free, was limited. Of those attending primary school, girls represented less than 40% in many areas, with lower enrolment and a higher dropout rate than that of boys. A decision was made to focus

10. In our view the identities of the parties are actually immaterial; the purpose is to unravel a story that had potential to contribute significantly to the MDGs and explore why it proved so difficult for this to be realised.

### Incentives for each partner to work together

MAXLT	UNCPP
Corporate commitment to donating small percentage of pre-tax annual profits to communities around world	Fulfilment of MDGs 2 & 3* - primary education for all and gender equity, especially in areas with competing resource priorities
CSR focus on making strong stand against child labour	Keen to cover education programme infrastructure, training and equipment costs
Community investment programme to support the MDG objective of universal primary education by 2015	Involvement in a more integrated approach and a far wider range of activities
Commitment to developing strategic partnerships internationally	Promotion of gender equity through special interventions encouraging female enrolment in primary education

\*MDG 2: Achieving universal primary education - Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

MDG 3: Promoting gender parity - Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

project activities in one peri-urban community during an initial 12-month pilot phase. Once the approach had been tested and the learning from it mainstreamed, the idea was that this could then be developed into a more long-term project in other areas of the country.

The excitement at the start of the partnership was palpable. The partnership ‘team’ (composed of two representatives from each partner organisation) worked closely to create a shared partnership vision and align their strategic objectives. This involved clearly identifying each organisations core competencies and goals. Recognising that there would be challenges in relation to their different cultures, languages and styles, the team was also in agreement that structures needed to be created to ensure that the partnership and its project activities were managed effectively.

The partnership had three central aims:

- **To improve basic infrastructure:** Constructing new school facilities, providing desks, school materials, uniforms and equipment.
- **To improve trained human resources:** Training teachers and increasing staff.
- **To change attitudes and overcome some of the cultural barriers impeding access to primary education:** Generate excitement, interest and support for primary education through awareness-raising campaigns within the community.

To supervise the partnership and its activities, an Advisory Board composed of six senior managers was proposed. It was agreed that the position of Chairperson would rotate between UNCPC and MAXLT, that decision-making would be consensus-

based and consultation with broader groups of stakeholders would be conducted where needed. A Joint Committee was to manage project activities and a Project Coordinator was appointed to oversee implementation on the ground. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of transparency and the creation of learning opportunities for all partners.

Both cash and in-kind resources were ‘mapped’ by the partners. MAXLT agreed to provide a financial contribution and assistance with project management. It also discussed the idea of providing volunteers from a selection of educational institutions with which it worked to support local project activities. UNCPC, meanwhile, offered to supply logistical support on the ground, project delivery oversight and the management of a third-party evaluation process.

### EARLY DIFFERENCES

The partnership faced immediate and early differences over a number of issues which were to erupt throughout its lifespan and have a profound impact upon its development. These differences centred around:

#### Conflicting styles and cultures

**“UNCPC is not used to working with corporate partners, let alone starting a new direction with big, brash MAXLT.”**

MAXLT representative

MAXLT was fast, go-ahead and confident of its brand. It had an unconventional way of working which was reflected in modern office surroundings and flexible hours. Staff were encouraged to use vi-

### Marking the difference - communication issues

The issue of developing a communication strategy for the partnership evidenced differences in three core areas:

#### 1. Focus

MAXLT's partnership staff had a particular interest in internal communication in order to promote staff engagement and a deeper understanding of partnering generally. They also wanted to publicise the partnership externally among media groups, NGOs and their key CSR stakeholders. UNCPP was keen on a communication strategy that would encourage other corporate players to 'fund' and support their programmes. They were, however, cautious about criticism of their corporate links and were concerned about transmitting this message as carefully as possible.

#### 2. Content

Both partners were keen to focus on the positive benefits of primary education on eradicating child labour. MAXLT felt this could best be done via the transmission of a clear and simple message which was exciting and visually rewarding. UNCPP felt it was important to share details of an array of factors that demonstrated solid results. These included education metrics, school attendance, improved quality of education, teacher ratios per pupil and gender ratios of teachers and pupils.

#### 3. Style

UNCPP had a detailed and scrupulous way of reporting, particularly in relation to private sector linkages that might be seen as controversial. This entailed methodical listing of 'donations', delivery agencies and target populations and the provision of statistical information through regular reports. MAXLT was keen to focus on a wider and less-detailed approach which brought in new ideas. It suggested bringing innovation to the partnership through a staff placement scheme which would promote personal and professional development and ultimately establish a pool of ambassadors to inspire and motivate primary education links.

sioning processes and creative spaces to develop ideas. In addition, streamlined managerial and administrative procedures that avoided too much hierarchical intervention meant that decisions were made rapidly with an expectation that they would be acted upon immediately. UNCPP, by contrast, worked in a more conventional and bureaucratic manner. Their personnel carried out duties within a carefully monitored system based upon procedural guidelines that had evolved over decades. Work was also undertaken across multiple layers within both headquarters and field operations. As a result decision-making was slow and there was hesitancy about making quick choices and assessments without careful consultation and sign-off. MAXLT was particularly frustrated by the time required for fund dissemination on the ground due to lengthy spending authorisation requirements. "For us," explained one of their staff, "time IS an issue."

### The focus of the partnership

As well as the common goal of promoting primary education, the representatives from the two partner organisations saw their collaboration as fulfilling other distinct but complementary objectives: UNCPP to promote the pressing MDG target of achieving gender parity in education by 2005 with the development of opportunities for girls to attend school, and MAXLT to reinforce its position against child labour through the promotion of primary education. Tensions soon developed with regard to these different focus areas. UNCPP felt that MAXLT was over-concerned with a desire to publicly demonstrate its stance on child labour while UNCPP was perceived by MAXLT to be focussing primarily on the gender equity issue. UNCPP felt that MAXLT did not fully grasp that this was a core element of the promotion of primary education and central to achieving an early MDG target. An initial outlay of funds for setting up facilities for girls in schools and recruiting more women teachers was agreed but, according to one of UNCPP's representatives: "...it seemed the staff we worked with had a hard time selling back into MAXLT why they were focussing solely on getting girls into school."

### Money matters

**"Partnership is not sponsorship. It involves the transfer of skills and expertise and places value on resources beyond cash."**

MAXLT representative

Both partners had difficulties in relation to the financial resource implications of the partnership. MAXLT felt strongly that UNCPP's financial approval systems required simplification so that project funding could be released more rapidly. The UNCPP representatives working on the partnership were aware of this frustration but noted that MAXLT itself was significantly late in making their financial contribution to the partnership. It arrived months after it was promised and well into UNCPP's fiscal year when it was hard to slot in newly received funds.

At another level, UNCPP's on-going search for 'corporate partners'<sup>11</sup> to leverage funds for its programmes and plug resource gaps in its work, meant that many of its staff regarded MAXLT, much to its dislike, as little more than a sponsor rather than a partner with other resources to offer. This perception was not helped by the fact that the possible involvement of volunteers through the company failed to materialise. According to UNCPP staff this was because MAXLT was unable to put in the time required to manage such an exchange programme.<sup>12</sup> They

11. MAXLT felt that this was simply a synonym for 'donors'

12. It was also clear that UNCPP was not keen on the idea of having such volunteers in the field with concerns over the real added-value to their work.

generally felt that although MAXLT was keen to use its core competencies more strategically, the time required for working on this meant that it ended up giving only financial support. As a result, *“There was little recognition by colleagues and programme staff that MAXLT had much to contribute to field activities other than cash.”*<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, the language used by both organisations as they sought to cement the partnership did little to detract from this view. UNCPP asserted publicly that, *“We hope that collaboration with MAXLT in assisting children to attend school will be fruitful in meeting the resource gaps in our current programme.”*<sup>14</sup> The ensuing partnership agreement was described as a ‘contract’, thus, perhaps unintentionally, reinforcing its financial character. A final project document, signed up to by both partners, also included a statement that described MAXLT’s financial contribution as a ‘donation’.<sup>15</sup>

### Involvement of other partners

*“We never managed to get other corporate partners on board as we were always concerned about MAXLT’s position on whether they wanted to be the only partner or whether they were happy to be involved in a bigger goal which then required that we bring in others.”*

UNCPP representative

Resource issues were also linked to another point of tension concerning the possibility of including additional corporate partners in the partnership’s activities. UNCPP was keen to encourage other companies to take on distinct areas of its broader educational programme through both donations and other interventions. MAXLT was less happy with this idea. Although it had promised at the outset to find other corporate partners to support UNCPP’s work, it nonetheless wished to carve out a distinct and flagship role for the partnership which clearly distinguished its involvement as more than a simple project ‘funder’. It did not therefore take kindly to the idea of what it perceived as a possible ‘basket approach’ by UNCPP that drew on funding contributions from different corporations for its wider activities.

It was also clear from the start that the partners would need support on the ground to develop project activities as neither partner had the appropriate skills, time or staff to take this on. A well-reputed international NGO with a branch in the country, considerable experience in the promotion of educational programmes and excellent links with the community agreed to assist the partners to develop their work.

13. UNCPP representative

14. Quote from Project Description document (2003)

15. Ibid.

Their role was of crucial importance in guiding project activities and keeping things on track. However, in spite of being referred to continually by the partners as ‘our broker’ or ‘the implementing partner’, the NGO was neither accorded full partner status nor engaged more centrally in the partnership’s structure and deliberations.

### Staff engagement

*“Within UNCPP sceptical colleagues included those who were reticent to work with MAXLT because they saw it as a ‘bad’ company, while others were sceptical of the need to invest so much time and involve senior directors for a rather low contribution as compared to any government contribution.”*

UNCPP representative

The partnership was developed by two key individuals from each organisation who were each supported by unit managers from their respective departments. This team of four was instrumental in developing project activities and making the partnership work. Without their time and effort the partnership would never have got off the ground. However both pairs operated in relative isolation within their institutions and this meant that there were issues about *“getting everyone on board that needed - or thought they needed - to be involved.”*<sup>16</sup>

MAXLT was fortunate in that its Deputy CEO was an active champion of the partnership. Indeed it was as a result of his original approach that the partnership had been seeded at all. However, although MAXLT’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) department, from whom the partnership staff were drawn, had considerable partnering experience and there was undoubted interest in their work, they nonetheless found that there was limited understanding of their development focus among fellow employees. Some MAXLT staff admitted, for example, that they had never even heard of UNCPP or its work.

UNCPP did not have a senior internal champion. Personnel were generally divided between those who welcomed the engagement with MAXLT as what one observer described as a ‘cash cow’ and little more, and those who saw the relationship as a dangerous precedent with business playing too great a role in the development of UN programmes at the expense of the credibility of the institution. The fact that the partnership had emerged from a fund-raising unit within its headquarters meant that spreading the wider concept of a partnership and engaging other staff at wider departmental levels and field offices was also a huge challenge. UNCPP’s country representative was particularly sceptical of the long-term feasibility of the project and, although she pressed

16. UNCPP representative

hard for a holistic approach to the project, she was also obstructive in ways that appeared to simply relate to power struggles with her own HQ.

### Monitoring and evaluation

Differences in focus were manifested in diverse approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Both partners were in agreement that the development impacts of their work needed to be carefully appraised. However, MAXLT's CSR Director, who had substantial experience of working across sectors, was also anxious to ensure that the partnering relationship and its added value to both organisations would be part of any review process and that learning would be fed back into each institution to enable the partnering relationship to become mainstreamed within them both. In order to do this MAXLT placed considerable emphasis on obtaining specific reports and visual documentation that showed how their contribution was making a difference. This was often, as one of UNCIPP's staff recognised, a frustrating experience, *"Getting the kind of information they wanted from the field about the impact of the partnership was extremely challenging."*

UNCIPP had a more conventional view of the monitoring and evaluation process and, in accord with organisational guidelines, was concerned primarily with obtaining statistical data at pre-established intervals in order to demonstrate project impact. While reluctantly accepting this proposal, MAXLT nonetheless insisted that a more flexible internal review and evaluation process was also necessary in order to capture wider elements of the partnering relationship.

## THE UNFOLDING STORY

*"The MAXLT people were always ready to find solutions. They were willing to compromise and clearly were able to appreciate the partner's point of view, even if it was not aligned with their own views. MAXLT obviously had their own interests which needed to be met, but they were willing to understand and explore the interests and underlying issues on their partners' side and to contribute positively to resolving challenges that came up. I would say that truly this is the mark of a good partner. They were not only concerned with what was happening within their own organisation, but were keen to try to assist us to build the organisational buy-in for the partnership. At the time, I felt that support was useful, but possibly it let MAXLT see too much 'behind-the-scenes' at UNCIPP."*

UNCIPP representative

The partnership achieved its twelve-month pilot phase at the end of 2004. During this time it became clear that the Advisory Board structure was unsustainable. The Board was expected to take major decisions, such as whom to approach as new partners and how to deal with changes in the direction of the project activities, but its members did not have the time to get involved in this way and it proved virtually impossible to arrange meetings. As things turned out most decisions were taken after exchanges of correspondence and phone discussions between the core partnership staff group in each organisation.

The project team visited the community in which the partnership activities were undertaken on several occasions. They were pleased with early results that gave strong indications that the self-esteem of children, particularly girls, had gained from the project's work. The wider community also appeared to be benefiting – a number of new parent-teacher associations had emerged and there was appreciation for the many new recruits who had joined the teaching ranks through the project. Teachers were additionally pleased that better school facilities were available and expressed the hope that attendance levels would further increase. However, they also pointed out that there was a continuing need for training, salary increases and more equipment.

The partnership was showing benefits in several other ways; individuals working for the NGO and for UNCIPP on the ground were becoming increasingly committed to the project. Indeed, one member of UNCIPP's staff had even requested a transfer to the field education unit in order to assist its development in a more focussed way. The visiting project team members from both partner organisations also became more inspired and motivated by their exchanges during this time. They recognised that the project had achieved some impressive early results and that the raised expectations meant that their continued collaboration was important. They also noted that changes needed to be made in order to deepen its potential. As a result an agreement was made to develop and expand the partnership project over a further three-year period.

In order to address the changes that the partnership project required to be ready to scale up as creatively as possible, MAXLT facilitated a three-way meeting between themselves, UNCIPP and the NGO 'implementing partner'. Participants were asked to develop a 'Wish List' of what they would like to see the partnership prioritising in the coming three years. Staff from all three organisations responded enthusiastically to produce a list of exciting future possibilities. These included: providing school uniforms to all primary school children in the community; ensuring greater availability of equipment, materials and child-friendly spaces; promoting more positive role mod-

els; further upgrading school facilities; increasing school enrolment; getting better-pay for teachers; engaging government agencies in the partnership and developing community micro-credit and income-generating activities.

The optimism that grew from these positive projections reinvigorated the project team enormously. In recognition of the fact that both key partners shared high levels of enthusiasm at this time, MAXLT's CSR Director felt confident enough to suggest that some of the difficulties that the partnership had encountered might be tackled before things continued further. In a carefully crafted approach that emphasised the complementary nature of each organisation's skills, competencies and credibility to influence change, she suggested that the partnership project now depended upon the refining of their partnering relationship and the resolving of differences over contrasting priorities, timelines and decision styles. A partnership broker's assistance was proposed in order to 'break' the issues open and assist the partnership to maintain freshness and momentum.<sup>17</sup>

The CSR Director proposed that a well-known international partnership organisation work with UNCPP and the NGO 'implementing partner' to facilitate a conversation about how their partnering challenges might be tackled. This organisation would then convene a meeting of all partners to take things forward. She stressed that for MAXLT timing was of the essence and anticipated the joint meeting taking place within a six week period. Although there was some concern from UNCPP that the MAXLT representatives were less open about their own internal challenges and their stance was slightly directive, they agreed to this proposal and an initial meeting with the international organisation was arranged. In the event, however, this did not lead to a wider dialogue as a number of changes overtook events and the partnering relationship between the two organisations was forced to change direction completely.

## THE IMPACT OF CHANGE

The changes that impacted the partnership were both internal and external in nature. Externally, the country in which the project was being undertaken underwent presidential elections that brought increased uncertainty together with the eruption of sporadic violence in the community in which the partnership was working. At the same time the region was hit by the severe and unexpected consequences of heavy rains and flooding which meant that basic survival issues became the priority. As a

17. "A partnership broker operates as an active intermediary between different organisations and sectors (public, private and civil society) that aims to collaborate as partners in a sustainable development initiative." Tennyson, R. (2005) *The Brokering Guidebook*, IBLF, London p8

### MAXLT's proposal for change

"We are concerned that we are now well into the first year of our 3-year commitment and we have made little progress in terms of evolving the partnership. As you know this is of key interest to us. Unless we can do this we will only achieve a small part of what we could potentially achieve. Part of partnership is about learning and challenging each other as partners. We feel that we have come to the stage of needing to challenge you with regard to some real or perceived internal system issues that in our perception are slowing (and in the worst case scenario will prevent us) from getting to our agreed end point in two and a half years' time.

It should be said that this is by no means a criticism, but rather a reflection of what it takes to work in cross-sectoral partnerships. In our experience of other partnerships it is perfectly normal. This is a completely new area for UNCPP who are working in corporate "partnership" rather than just looking for corporates to bring money into budgets. So, we should feel comfortable about addressing this and we would like to address it. We would therefore like to give you some insight into what we perceive to be some of your challenges with a view to exploring how we can assist you to overcome them. We regard them as the biggest threat to our collaboration and think that they require immediate attention. They include:

1. Finance systems and funding streams
2. Proposed new structures involving other corporations
3. Over-complicated systems and lines of communication
4. Involvement of implementing partners, specifically the NGO link
5. Methods of evaluation in order to move beyond conventional data collection to a learning evaluation on 'impact' and partnership."

Letter from MAXLT CSR Director

result, the NGO 'implementing partner' had to prioritise emergency and conflict resolution issues and the partnership project was forced off their agenda.

Staff changes within all the organisations involved in the partnership also took place. The NGO underwent a restructuring process with changes in its international focus and the appointment of new staff in the region. At MAXLT the CSR Director went on maternity leave and was replaced by someone who felt that the partnership was not making enough progress in comparison to other partnerships with which the company was involved. Meanwhile both members of the partnership's staff at UNCPP headquarters left the organisation: one on a year's sabbatical and the other permanently. At field level UNCPP's country representative, who was awaiting promotion and a move to headquarters, became even more reluctant to take things forward, stalling on contact with the international broker organisation and on all other communication and meeting plans.

The four staff, who had formed the initial partnership 'team', were deeply disappointed. There was a feeling of disbelief that with all the dedication, hard work and good will, the partnership as originally envisaged had failed. The two organisations and the new levels of personnel who were engaged with the project were effectively forced to either abandon the partnership completely or find new ways of working together. Rather than disband completely they chose the latter option by reverting to a more conventional project grant way of working. A unique opportunity to develop a highly original UNCPP/private company partnership connection was thus thwarted.

## WHAT WENT WRONG?

The reasons why the partnership between UNCPP and MAXLT did not work are clearly complex and relate to the interaction of particular individual, organisational and contextual factors. However, it is possible to extract some key issues which appear to have contributed to the breakdown of the original partnership arrangement. Key issues include:

### Lack of clarity on drivers

**"I do feel that we never had a clear understanding of what MAXLT wanted to achieve for the company. Clearly that should have been put on the table."**

UNCPP representative

The partners were aware of their different motivations for working together and strove to create a partnership that would cater to both. However, not enough attention was paid to promoting in-depth discussion and understanding of the core drivers for engagement<sup>18</sup>; MAXLT's long-term profit motive and desire for effective brand reinforcement and UNCPP's need to attract wider corporate funding for its on-going development work. These incentives were never fully explored together in a way that might have engendered deeper comprehension between partners. As a result the partnership was impacted negatively and a key opportunity for mainstreaming it within the two institutions, with considerable potential for greater benefits and 'added value', was lost.

### Contrasting organisational cultures

**"While we had some similarities, our organisations were very different and understanding these differences was vital to ensuring**

18. BPD defines drivers as the 'pushes and pulls' that determine or necessitate certain behaviour or actions including incentives which motivate partnership engagement; sanctions or negative consequences/penalties for failure to participate; obligations to provide certain inputs and outputs and participate in partnering processes (Caplan, K., Presentation at The Partnering Event, September 2006, Cambridge, UK)

**that the project and partnership remained fresh and robust."**

MAXLT representative

The two partners could not have been more different in their organisational behaviour and styles. UNCPP saw the company as big, self-confident and somewhat pushy, unnerving it by encouraging new ways of working which threatened its cautious and careful approach to project development and management. MAXLT perceived UNCPP's response as bureaucratic and unadventurous and resented what it saw as a failure to evolve the relationship which they saw as essential for mainstreaming and institutionalising the partnership. In spite of recognition of these differences, no attempt was made to establish how this organisational diversity could be positively capitalised upon and learned from.

### Money and power dynamics

**"I don't believe that it is appropriate to expect the UN or any NGO for that matter to be able to simply start an activity the day after funds arrive. Clearly, companies are more flexible and more easily re-route funds to new promising ventures at the expense of existing products/services, but it also doesn't happen overnight."**

UNCPP representative

The synchronisation of fiscal years between the two organisations posed a real challenge. Both partners had annual budgets and planned their activities well in advance, making commitments to roll-out programmes and products.

UNCPP admitted that its financial systems were difficult to work with but also felt that MAXLT needed to understand that they were dealing with a complicated and well-developed programme planned and budgeted well in advance of the fiscal year.

MAXLT also objected strongly to being considered a 'donor' and rightly indicated that its engagement amounted to a great deal more than simple funding. UNCPP staff, however, spent much of their time working out how best to allocate MAXLT's financial contribution. This emphasis on cash, consciously or unconsciously, raised more subtle questions about power and perceptions of MAXLT as the driver of the relationship that were never clearly addressed. Unpacking this was a delicate matter as this statement from one of UNCPP's staff demonstrates: *"It was very much a 'donor' attitude – let us help you fix your problems so that our money is well spent. However, I never felt they (MAXLT) attempted to drive the agenda of the partnership. It was definitely a collaborative effort with a wish to marry interests on both sides and find common ground..."*

### Weak institutional buy-in

The partnership's over-reliance on the work of the two staff members from each institution was problematic. As one staff member put it, *"On both sides, it was individuals that were peripheral to the core business of each organisation who were pulling at straws to bring the two sides together."*<sup>19</sup> An absence of greater organisational awareness-building about the partnership, and partnering generally, meant that efforts to engage more staff in the project activities and take on wider ownership roles were unsuccessful. Giving time was recognised as being central to working towards institutional buy-in and this was in short supply. As a MAXLT representative noted, *"Time, time, time and lots of time is key to institutionalising..."*

Championed by their Deputy CEO, MAXLT did try to encourage employee engagement in the partnership through staff volunteering and the development of an intranet site about its activities. The hope of a more dynamic exchange, however, was largely 'blocked' by UNCPP's cumbersome procedural practices which mean that prompt and focussed information which could have been used to inspire internal involvement was not forthcoming. Within UNCPP staff hierarchies meant that getting senior management buy-in was difficult. In addition, opportunities for encouraging them to see MAXLT as more than just a donor were not actively promoted. Such exchanges, when they happened, appeared to have real potential, *"I believe that the participation of MAXLT's Deputy CEO in an agency meeting gave pause to management and encouraged them to think out of the box with regard to how business partners could assist us in the future."*<sup>20</sup>

### Failure to more actively engage other potential partners

Aside from the debate about engaging more corporate partners, the partnership might have studied the more active involvement of partners with other perspectives, skills and resources. The engagement of the NGO 'implementing partner' as a genuine third partner, at both international and field level, could perhaps have assisted in diffusing some of the bilateral tensions between the two original partners with its more flexible methods of working and its international partnering experience. As things stood, the NGO's position of being contracted to work 'for' the partnership rather than being brought on board as an active and committed equal player led to their marginalisation within the partnership.

Because of their profile, national-level contact with government agencies concerned with primary edu-

cation could have been more deeply developed and possibilities for bringing local government offices in as another partner might have been looked into. As the partnership project grew there may also have been room to include other NGOs and local organisations with an educational focus as well as greater input from community members themselves. It is likely this would have had the added benefit of developing a more replicable model of cross-sector collaboration and more strategic influence in the region and beyond.

### Absence of an intermediary

In view of the differences between the two partners and an early realisation of the divisions that these were creating, the services of a partnership broker / intermediary to assist the two partners in addressing the challenges of working together may have been helpful. Ideally, an early external brokering input that explored diversity, helped to bridge gaps and cement relationships could then have been brought in at key moments during the partnership's development in order to assist with future transitions and challenges. MAXLT's CSR Director began to realise that this was necessary and made efforts to engage an organisation in this capacity but this came at too late a stage in the partnership's development.

### Flexibility and change

The partners were not able to respond to, or manage, change flexibly. Many predictable changes such as staff departures and arrivals, which are a regular feature of organisational life, and external contextual indicators, were not taken into account to the extent that they might have been. The fact that the partnership had no 'exit' or 'moving on' strategy and did not discuss 'ground rules' for dealing with expected and unexpected change in the early stages of partnership-building contributed to this lack of flexibility. The result was that when faced with change or challenge, the partners found it impossible to address these innovatively and confidently.

This case study uncovers some of the difficulties encountered by those partnering across two radically different types of organisation. It demonstrates the importance of looking at such interactions in relation to a wide range of complex variables such as: contextual dynamics; the management of change; clarity about core drivers and incentives for working together; the roles of individual staff members in driving and developing the partnering process together with consideration of the unique nature of different organisational perspectives and behaviours.

19. UNCPP representative

20. UNCPP representative

## WHAT MIGHT HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE?

“I believe that if the partnership ‘failed’ it was due to UNCAPP’s inability to deliver in the field and also to archaic and bureaucratic procedures i.e. spending authorisations and too much involvement of controlling mechanisms...this is something that we need to address internally.”

UNCAPP representative

“In our view, the partnership between MAXLT and UNCAPP needed to evolve in order for the project to become properly mainstreamed and institutionalised. An innovative and on-going review mechanism was needed for this.”

MAXLT representative

This investigation has been a form of retrospective ‘review’ and it has revealed many of the generalisations and commonly held stereotypes that both supporters and detractors of UN-Business partnerships use to sustain their arguments. It is clear, however, that there were a range of options for overcoming the difficulties encountered that might have been considered and adopted. These included more thoughtful planning; awareness-raising and relationship-building activities as well as the possible use of an external intermediary or broker.

“Expectations could have been managed better. More clearly separating the partnership from the project would have assisted with this.”

MAXLT representative

“Internally, we never discussed the role of each unit involved. Starting afresh, I would ensure that a strong UNCAPP cross-functional team was built and that each person understood their role in shaping and nurturing the partnership.”

UNCAPP representative

“We should have worked harder to get internal buy-in at all levels of the company.”

MAXLT representative

“There was always an issue about whether this was a company project or a broader project in which MAXLT was one of the partners. I think this issue was never clarified, and if I had to start over, this would have to be made clear.”

UNCAPP representative

There was, and still is, a huge commitment to the shared goals and the project from both organisations and, with hindsight, those involved in the partnership’s development have clear ideas about what might have made things work better. These are outlined below and show a perhaps surprising similarity and coherence. The suggestions put forward emerge from actual disappointments and frustrations and are important because, as practitioners who worked hard to develop a successful UN-Business partnering relationship, they provide key pointers for those involved in such cross-sector collaborations.

“Our ultimate objective is to create models for this kind of work that can be scaled-up. It is vital for MAXLT to have a strategy that ensures that all the work, investment and potential do not die when we move on and that it can live beyond MAXLT.”

MAXLT representative

“I think that the different ways of working led to frustration and also therefore to the slow disintegration of the partnership. Had we delivered exciting results and related back to MAXLT how the lives of children were being impacted, I believe we could have overcome the challenges of different work approaches.”

UNCAPP representative

This case study, we believe, demonstrates the importance of collating and sharing more thorough documentation of cross-sector partnerships, drawing on the testimonies of individuals such as those who have been willing to share their stories here. It is only in this way that such collaborations are likely to be more fully understood and their solidity as vehicles for the promotion of sustainable development agendas genuinely explored and significantly improved.

Caplan, K. & Stott, L. (2008) Defining our terms and clarifying our language. In: Svensson, L. & Nilsson, B. eds. *Partnership - As a Strategy for Social Innovation and Sustainable change*, Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press, 23-35.

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<http://www.santerus.se>

Ken Caplan



### 3. Defining our terms and clarifying our language

This chapter explores both the concept of partnership and the terminology that is being used in connection with it. Through such an examination we hope to promote a clearer understanding of what a partnership is as well as draw attention to some of the issues and challenges that are embedded in the use of much 'partnering language'. Our premise is that greater clarity and rigour in the use of partnership definitions and terms is important in order to ensure that these forms of collaboration are made more effective at both individual and organisational levels and thus have greater potential to promote sustainable change and innovation.

#### 3.1 What is a 'partnership'?

The term partnership elicits much confusion. It is often used to describe widely different constructs ranging from loose networks and alliances to more institutionalised joint ventures. Their branding as 'partnerships' appears to be based upon the fact that they involve some form of combined activity that is mutually beneficial to those involved, often with reference to such characteristics as the voluntary nature of their collaboration, the pooling of resources, the sharing of risks and benefits and capitalising on synergies. Some examples include:

Partnerships are of a voluntary, 'self-organizing' nature; they are based on mutual respect and shared responsibility of the partners involved ... (UN Dept of Economic and Social Affairs 2006)

Partnership involves an agreement to work together to fulfil an obligation or undertake a specific task by committing resources and sharing the risks as well as the benefits. (DFID, p. 2)

Partnership is a cross sector collaboration in which organisations work together in a transparent, equitable and mutually beneficial way. The partners agree to commit resources, share the risks as well as the benefits to work together towards a sustainable development goal. (IBLF 2006)

People and organisations from some combination of public, business and civil constituencies who engage in voluntary, mutually beneficial, innovative relationships to address common societal aims through combining their resources and competencies. (Nelson & Zadek 2000, p. 14)

It is our contention that these commonly used definitions are too simplistic. They tend to mask the various obligations to participate, the over-emphasis placed on financial contributions above other kinds of resource contributions, and the distinct differences between organisations that make partnership processes so challenging. Clearly partnerships involve some form of horizontal decision-making processes (i.e. shared power), valued contribution of different kinds of resources (beyond financing), and flexibility to adapt the objectives and activities as circumstances dictate. We must be somewhat careful, however, in that in many countries, the term partnership refers to a legal, contractual construct.

The following definition serves as a useful starting point in assisting us to gain a clearer understanding of what a partnership is.

Partnerships involve two or more organisations that enter into a collaborative arrangement based on:

- 1) synergistic goals and opportunities that address particular issues or deliver specified tasks that single organisations cannot accomplish on their own as effectively, and
- 2) whose individual organisations *cannot* purchase the appropriate resources or competencies *purely* through a market transaction.<sup>1</sup>

Within this description, partnership may have a wide variety of objectives along a spectrum from a specific task-orientation (the installation of 500 water connections, the building of a hospital or clinic or the provision of training opportunities to targeted groups) to more systemic objectives that are aimed at changing rules (the development of new regulatory standards, guidelines or legal instruments) or behaviours (a national education or health promotion programme or awareness-raising on issues of social

<sup>1</sup> This definition is used by the organisation Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation (BPD) [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org) and is based upon one developed by the London based organisation AccountAbility [www.accountability.org.uk](http://www.accountability.org.uk)

concern). The first part of the definition is fairly common. The second part offers a more interesting element as it raises issues around power and mutual need, donor/funder and recipient relationships, and the value of the variety of resources that are brought to the table.

### 3.2 Public-Private Partnerships and Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Encompassed by the partnership definition above we are likely to find a range of multi-stakeholder relationships,<sup>2</sup> including what are commonly called Public-Private Partnership arrangements. Multi Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs), however, are different from Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in a few key ways (see Table 1). PPPs tend to involve a legally binding contract with evident vertical accountability structures based on a relationship generally between two signatories. MSPs involve less transactions-based relationships with more of an emphasis on horizontal accountability. Targets, deliverables and timeframes are generally more clearly defined in PPPs whereas MSPs usually have similar, and sometimes additionally ambitious, but more flexible goals in these areas. PPPs operate under a clear legal and/or regulatory construct while, though the partners themselves may be regulated, MSPs themselves are not regulated and more often than not have no legal identity. It is this last set of factors that makes accountability more difficult to pin down.

*Table 1. Distinctions between PPPs and MSPs. Source: BPD Water and Sanitation*

<i>Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)</i>	<i>Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs)</i>
Contracts or transactions-based arrangement (with clear vertical accountability structures)	Less emphasis on transactions with significantly more emphasis on horizontal accountability among the partner institutions <sup>3</sup>
Specific performance targets / deliverables and timeframes	Greater flexibility around targets, deliverables and timeframes as they are expected to emerge or evolve organically based on processes with stakeholders
Operate within legal / regulatory constructs	Partners operate within legal / regulatory construct but partnership is unregulated
Limited stakeholder consultation – clearly proscribed in the agreement	Extensive stakeholder ‘engagement’ considered a critical success factor

<sup>2</sup> These include partnerships described as: cross-sector, inter-sectoral, multi-sector, multi-partite and tri-sector.

<sup>3</sup> The one caveat is that often the funder or financier has the hierarchical edge and may use this power in the partnership to their advantage.

### 3.3 The nature of the relationship

We see partnerships somewhere along a continuum between networks and joint ventures.

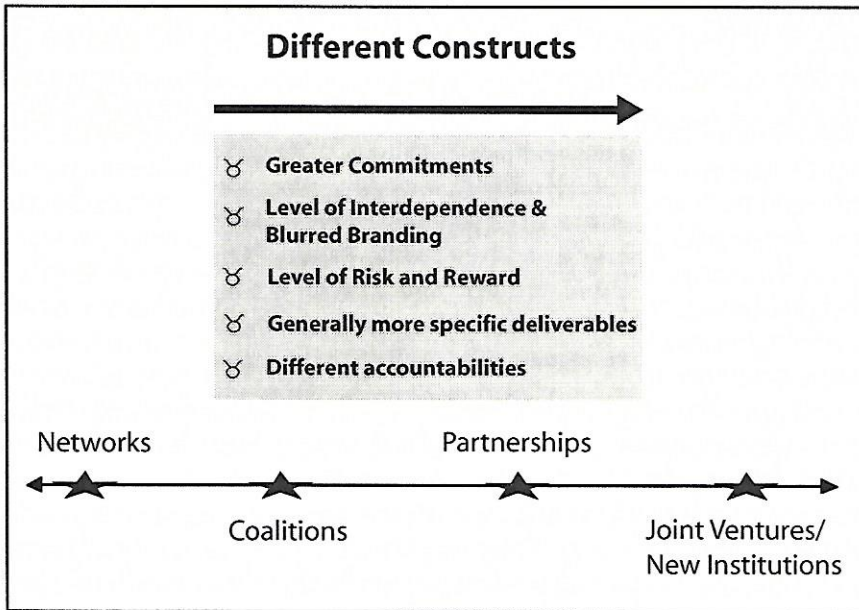


Figure 1. Spectrum of engagement. Source: BPD Water and Sanitation

As Figure 1 shows, networks are generally less rigid arrangements with presumably less risk, looser aims, and lower commitment levels, and with accountabilities between the participating organisations at a minimum. Joint ventures are where participating organisations' identities are largely subsumed under a new institution, accountabilities are high, both between partners and externally, and generally oriented around contractual relationships with clients and customers. Partnerships, as defined above, involve a mix of these characteristics. It is also important to note that partnerships, in this sense, are not designed to exist permanently but instead serve as transitional mechanisms until practices become more institutionalised or transactions-based.

### 3.4 The language of partnerships

As well as clarification around what partnerships are, we also need to address the issue of the language that we use in relation to them. The word 'partnership' itself evokes 'a certain simplicity and harmony' (Caplan 2006, p. 11) and glosses over the many challenges that creating and developing partnerships involves. At the same time partnership literature is peppered with 'participatory language' (Harrison 2002, p. 593) urging engagement, empowerment and inclusion and the development of partnering relationships that are trust-based, transparent and equitable. The generalised and positive tone of this terminology creates false expectations. It 'conceptualises collaborative processes as inherently nonconfrontational' (Poncelet 2001, p. 22) and runs the risk of enabling their easy dismissal by sceptics of partnerships as 'fuzzy' at best and, at worst, 'delegitimising' more adversarial methods for achieving radical and innovative change. Thus, as Poncelet warns, '... partnerships are ultimately constrained by the very discourses and practices that they tend to privilege' (ibid, p. 23).

The view that partnership language is shaped by, and promotes, particular worldviews and cultural perspectives is important as it masks deep-seated issues of power and control. An underlying assumption is that the terminology used is understood by all involved in the building of a partnership (Vargas 2002, p. 1549, Rein et al. 2005, pp. 10–11). The concepts implied by 'partnership participation', however, may be interpreted in different ways in different contexts and by different audiences. As a result, '... the blanket use of participatory language may hide the complex interaction of history and individual positioning that make the meaning of participation so variable' (Harrison 2002, p. 593).

Partnerships require the commitment and consensus of a wide range of players. In order to bind them together, calls for 'inclusivity' with the full and equal 'participation' of partners and the active 'engagement' of stakeholders are understandable. However, within both these groups there are likely to be differing levels of commitment to, and interest in, a partnership's work. These will relate to the wider context in which the partnership is situated, the nature and scope of the partnership and the importance the partnership plays in delivering different partner and stakeholder goals. In addition, the degree of participation of different interest groups will be conditioned by factors such as time, resources and convenience.

### 3.5 Voluntary participation?

The premise that partnerships involve the coming together of different partners on a voluntary basis, without any statutory or legal requirement to do so, is widely promulgated. As Caplan observes (2003, pp. 33–34), the use of the expression ‘voluntary’ implies either a ‘willingness’ or an ‘option’ to partner (or not) and thus skims over the fact that partnership-building necessitates hard work and commitment. The term ‘voluntary’ belies the fact that partners must need each other to ensure meaningful collaboration. Whether there is a choice to partner or not, and with whom, needs to be better understood. In many cases, the issue of choice is masked by a sense of obligation on the part of a partner to at least *have to be seen* to be at the table or not to want to relinquish decision-making on issues that affect them without their participation. In addition the different reasons for partners to work together and the risks and rewards for them in doing so also need to be analysed. Different partners, it is to be assumed, are likely to be valued quite differently by both partners and external stakeholders.

### 3.6 Partners and stakeholders

Notions of partnership ‘participation’ and ‘engagement’ are complicated by the distinction between partners and stakeholders, especially because this is often based upon different perceptions of a particular organisation’s role in relation to a partnership. *Partners* make substantive contributions to a partnership and have usually signed up to a partnering relationship. In this sense contributing financial resources, as a donor for example, does not automatically qualify an organisation as a partner unless other critical resources (convening power and leverage, technical skills, etc.) are also put into the partnership. Partnerships are established in part to share risks. Whilst there might be some risks to a donor in providing financial support to a partnership, this generally, though not always, bears very little resemblance to the nature of risk for the implementing partners. Similarly, receiving a benefit from the partnership may not automatically qualify an organisation as a partner. This does not relate to the bearing of risk, as discussed below, but rather to how integrated they are in the design and implementation of the partnership. It is important to note that this involvement may change over time as, through the process of partnering, organisations may become more active in the partnership.

The term *partner* also needs to be understood at two levels: that of the individual representing a partner organisation and that of the organisations themselves. Although presumably overlapping, the interests of the

individuals and those of their organisations may be somewhat different. However, while it would appear that the notion of ‘individual interest’ runs counter to the essence of a partnership, individual interests and concerns are a critical aspect of partnerships. Partnership efforts are initiated and fundamentally driven by the interests of individual members and their parent organisations or constituencies. Indeed, for a partnership to emerge in the first place participants must believe that working together will serve their own interests. Recognition of individual interests, and attention to understanding these, is therefore important when unpacking participation issues.

Stakeholders are also widely mentioned in relation to partnership participation. Failure to incorporate key stakeholders into partnership decision-making and communication processes is often highlighted as a key barrier to partnership development (see for example Yakovleva & Alabasterb 2003). The term *stakeholder* is not easy to define and is generally unhelpful as it is used to refer to groups who may be affected, influenced by, or concerned with the work of the partnership.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, it is important to make clearer distinctions between those stakeholders that may exert an *influence upon* the partnership (for example, the media, government authorities, regulators, academics, etc.) and those that are *influenced by* it. Needless to say, these two groups are not equal. The former bears very little risk if the partnership fails but the latter may ultimately bear a great deal of risk. Different terminology that more accurately reflects their relationship to the partnership would be helpful. This might distinguish between ‘*interested observers*’ (those that exert an influence upon the partnership) and ‘*risk bearers*’ (those that are influenced by the partnership). The critical aspect of these distinctions is to determine whose risks matter most and whose opinion carries more weight. Given also that few players could genuinely be described as neutral, we need to understand the politics that drive interested observers to seek to influence a partnership. We also need to be aware that risk bearers who do *not* contribute to the partnership will not have the same incentives to want to see the partnership succeed.

Both resources and/or clarifying both resource input and/or degree of participation is a useful way of exploring definitions of partners and stakeholders. Ultimately different voices should be considered but their opinions should be understood in the context in which they are offered. It is also important to remember that relationships may change over the

4 The term ‘Boundary Partners’ has also been used to describe ‘those individuals, groups and organisations with whom the program interacts directly and with whom the program anticipates opportunities for influence’ (Earl et al. 2001).

lifetime of a partnership. Conflicting and changing loyalties and demands, and the contextual issues that cut across these, can thus influence both the manner and depth of participation.

### 3.7 Resource inputs

Financial resources are usually prioritised within a partnership and often carry the most ‘weight’, giving those that contribute them a particularly powerful partnering role, whether or not this is openly acknowledged. However, a range of other important non-cash resources are also vital to a partnership’s effectiveness. Table 2 outlines some of these resource contributions in more detail.

*Table 2. Partnership resource inputs*

<i>People</i>	Qualified and experienced personnel with appropriate knowledge bases for partnership activities
<i>Skills/expertise</i>	Technical and ‘soft’ skills – communication, advocacy, mediation and capacity-building abilities
<i>Relationships</i>	Contacts with policy makers, wider networks, media, stakeholder groups etc.
<i>Knowledge</i>	Contextual information, trends, market analysis
<i>Equipment</i>	Computers, furniture, stationary, transport
<i>Physical space</i>	For partnership office, meetings, events etc.
<i>Products</i>	Project-related items/commodities produced by partner organisations
<i>Reputation</i>	Convening power and leverage
<i>Finance</i>	Funds, grants

Examining different partner inputs and assessing their value can assist in determining partner status as well as identify whether a stakeholder is an ‘interested observer’ or ‘risk bearer’ as outlined above.

### 3.8 Degree of participation

Participation and engagement can encompass a range of options for partners and stakeholders. These range from a limited or passive connection with the partnership, in which they might receive information or be involved in discussions, to a more active connection where they might initiate or take the lead in a decision or course of action.

*Table 3. General levels of partnership participation*

4	CONTROL	Initiates or leads particular steps or activities
3	INFLUENCE	Participates directly in decision-making, has a vote
2	CONSULTED	Involved in discussion, able to express opinions & give feedback
1	INFORMED	Receives information

Drawing on work by Stott and Keatman (2005), Table 3 offers a limited dissection of possible participation levels. The categories outlined in the table obviously contain many variances within them which warrant further unpacking. Our aim, however, is simply to emphasise that ‘participation’ involves a range of different options which require examining in relation to different partnership interest groups. By exploring how particular partners or stakeholders are involved in a partnership we can more clearly understand their relationship to it.

### 3.9 Empowerment

Assessing resource inputs and the degree to which individuals and organisations are informed /consulted or how far they influence/control, enables deeper analysis of power relations in specific partnership contexts, processes and strategies. It can also show us whether different partners or stakeholders have been ‘empowered’ by taking on more active roles, growing in confidence and more strongly asserting themselves through their contribution or involvement in the partnership. ‘Empowerment’ is frequently outlined as a desirable partnership requirement as it promotes the voice and presence of those who may otherwise be marginalised or excluded. In the generalised labelling of such target groups, however, we often ignore the divisions and differences that they may comprise. So, for example, when calls are made for the empowerment of small partner

organisations or women stakeholders, analysis of exactly *which* particular organisations or groups of women we are talking about, when and why, is necessary.

In order to more deeply address the issue of empowerment, the visibility, and invisibility, of both individuals and organisations connected to the partnership need to be understood. This may involve regularly checking the assumptions of partner representatives as well as examining which particular individuals in partner and stakeholder groups appear to dominate in decision-making processes, which do not, and why. Power relationships within a partnership are often a reflection of wider socio-economic and contextual divisions as well as cross-cutting issues such as gender, ethnicity, educational or political background, race, age or religion. In all cases it is therefore worth investigating why a particular attitude may be adopted; what this stance might suggest in relation to questions of power, and how it might best be addressed.

Both the positive and negative effects of empowerment also need to be considered. Positive effects may include the growth of an organisation's capacity, reach and skills or the increase in confidence and voice of a hitherto marginalised stakeholder group. On the negative side, the notion of 'participation as empowerment' can, as Kapoor (2002, 2004) makes clear, quite easily slide into 'participation as power'. Viewed in this way, an emphasis on empowerment may stifle plurality, conform to bureaucratic and/or organisational needs and, ultimately allow vested interest groups, be they internal or external, to control a partnership and become its prime beneficiaries (ibid. and see also Rein et al. 2005, p. 10).

### 3.10 Transparency

In order to ensure equitable relationships, partnership transparency is often called for. Power dynamics, however, can limit the effectiveness of this. In certain contexts or situations, for example, partners may feel threatened by what they are expected to share and how 'honest' they are required to be in relation to their motivations for engaging in the partnership and their expectations of it. They may also be concerned about divulging details of their own internal organisational processes to other partners. While partners may agree that sharing information about activities related to the partnership is desirable, in reality there will probably always be 'hidden agendas'.

'Hidden agendas' often centre around unstated or unresolved competition between partners. Although partnership language centres on the

contribution of each partner's core competencies to the partnership, which then complement those of others, competition often exists over ideas, ownership, constituencies or other issues. Calls for transparency and clear divisions of labour mask competition among the individuals and institutions who enter into partnership relationships.

It is also important to acknowledge that while the overarching mission of the partnership will probably revolve around a common goal agreed to by all partners, it is highly unlikely that partners will share a common vision of how to get there. Each might have different perceptions about what would best meet, say, the needs of a community or target group with whom they are working. Whilst every partner will be in favour of ensuring that the goal is reached, views around choices for achieving it are likely to be different. These different interpretations can make transparency less than straightforward.

### 3.11 Trust

Linked to transparency is the issue of trust which is regularly highlighted as a key ingredient for partnership success. A distinction needs to be made here between trust between individuals and trust between institutions. Individuals may come to trust each other but partner organisations that come from different sectors and have different interests, are unlikely to have trust-based connections. It is more realistic to expect, and aim for, partners to respect different contributions, with confidence in the processes of the partnership and an understanding that their interests, concerns and grievances will be heard within it. It is also worth pointing out that where there is an option to choose a partner, the opportunity to emphasise trust is greater. Where choices are limited, however, this is more difficult. In the latter case a focus on ensuring that there is an understanding for what partner organisations can deliver, or delivering what they said they would deliver, may be more important.

### 3.12 Partnership drivers

The rationale for partnership is to bring together diverse types of organisation, with different skills and resources, to address a particular issue or task. Different organisational dynamics and *raison d'être* are thus central to partnership and if partners fail to understand each other in these terms, they are likely to misinterpret each other's motivations and actions. Each

partner, be they an individual or organisational representative, will enter a partnership and adopt a particular stance because of:

- Incentives: that motivate engagement for the furthering of partnership processes or objectives
- Sanctions: negative consequences or penalties for failure to participate in the partnership
- Obligations: commitments to provide certain inputs and outputs and participate in certain partnering processes

These ‘pushes’ and ‘pulls’, which are driven and conditioned by particular operational contexts, are at the heart of comprehending partnerships. The unique and complex interrelationship between a partnership and its specific setting is further complicated by the changing nature of organisational and individual behaviours, biases and interests.

Partnerships are rarely as simple as the language suggests. They bring together individuals and organisations whose perspectives and positions are often in conflict. In addition, partnership governance and accountabilities, as well as commitments and deliverables, are not static. To ensure that partnerships work effectively *and* produce results, a clear understanding of changing contextual issues and partnership drivers is required. Recognition that the process of partnership-building faces many challenges and requires time, energy and commitment is also vital. Franker appraisals of what partnerships are, how they work and our expectations of them will help to ensure that the possibilities they offer for sustainable change and innovation are taken seriously. A more careful and studied use of partnership terminology is central to this.

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**GUIDEBOOK**

# **HOW ESF MANAGING AUTHORITIES AND INTERMEDIATE BODIES SUPPORT PARTNERSHIP**



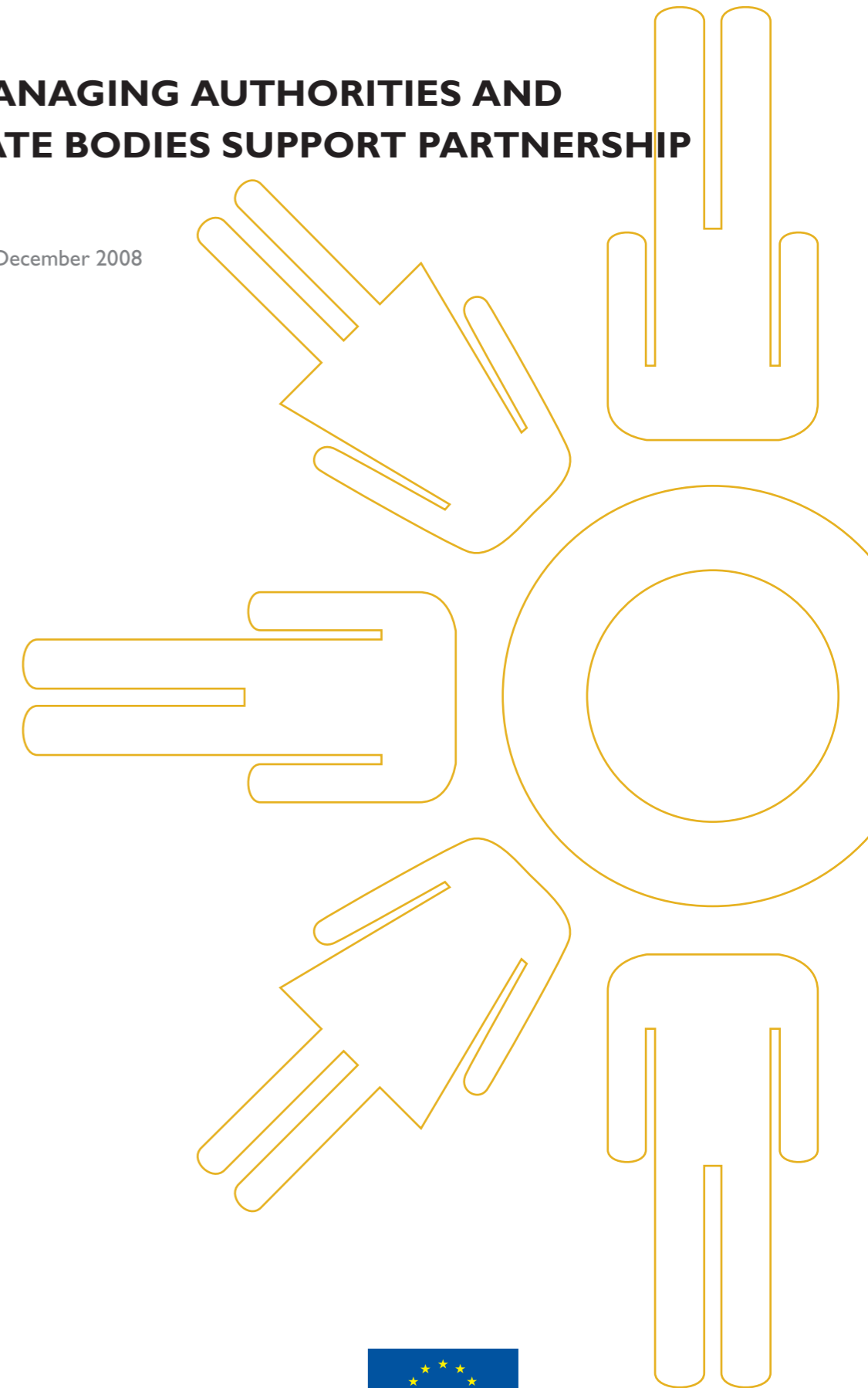
Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF



**GUIDEBOOK**

**HOW ESF MANAGING AUTHORITIES AND INTERMEDIATE BODIES SUPPORT PARTNERSHIP**

Manuscript completed in December 2008



Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF



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## PREFACE

In 2006 the Managing Authority of Flanders in Belgium, together with Managing Authorities in Portugal, Austria, Czech Republic and Malta, decided to set up a “Community of Practice” on partnership in the European Social Fund (ESF).

The need for this Community arose, on the one hand, from the desire to capitalise on the vast experience concerning working in partnership gained in the EQUAL programme, and, on the other hand, the need to take into account the emphasis placed on partnership in the ESF regulation for the new structural funds period. This regulation refers both to the involvement of stakeholders, including social partners, in the governance mechanisms of Operational Programmes, as well as the provision of financial support to multi-actor projects. In addition, the regulation encourages convergence regions to build social partner capacity through ESF projects in order to ensure an effective governance system at national, regional and/or local level.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are commonly defined as “groups of people who share a passion for something that they know how to do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better”. The knowledge gained and shared between 2006 and 2008 by members of the Community from all over the European Union, is presented in this guidebook.

It is hoped that Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies and other stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of European Social Fund programmes will find it a helpful tool to realise their commitment to partnership, as envisaged in the ESF regulation.

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## GLOSSARY

<b>CoP</b>	Community of Practice
<b>DP</b>	Development Partnership
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>ESP</b>	Economic and Social Partners
<b>ETG</b>	European Thematic Group
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>LSP</b>	Local Strategic Partnership
<b>MA</b>	Managing Authority
<b>OP</b>	Operational Programme
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NSRF</b>	National Strategic Reference Framework
<b>NTN</b>	National Thematic Network
<b>NUTS</b>	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
<b>PA</b>	Public Administration
<b>ROP</b>	Regional Operational Partnership
<b>RSP</b>	Regional Skills Partnership
<b>RTC</b>	Regional Tripartite Committee
<b>SFP</b>	Structural Fund Partnership
<b>TA</b>	Technical Assistance
<b>TEP</b>	Territorial Employment Pact



## INTRODUCTION

In order to deliver the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, the European Union has placed great emphasis on partnership with Member States and social partners, “to facilitate and speed up delivery of the reforms needed to boost growth and employment.”<sup>1</sup> The EU’s Cohesion Policy tasks the Structural Funds with encouraging partnerships between different sectors and regions to promote economic growth, social inclusion and employment opportunities. Within this framework European Social Fund (ESF) regulations regarding partnership refer both to the involvement of stakeholders, including social partners,<sup>2</sup> in the governance mechanisms of Operational Programmes, as well as the provision of financial support to multi-actor projects. For convergence regions,<sup>3</sup> social partner capacity, seen as critical for ensuring an effective governance system at national, regional and/or local level, can also be built through projects.<sup>4</sup>

Incorporating these two concepts of partnership into ESF Operational Programmes across the European Union is a challenging process. Many Member States have limited experience of working in partnership, while those with a stronger history of collaboration note that partnering is not without difficulties and requires a considerable investment of time and energy. In both cases, promoting a deeper understanding of the overall rationale and added-value of working in partnership is perceived to be important.

The purpose of the guidebook is primarily to assist ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies to promote and support partnership in Operational Programmes. However, in addition to these audiences, the guide is intended to be of use to governance bodies involved in OP decision-making processes, such as Evaluation, Monitoring or Steering Committees, as well as those coordinating and building partnerships at project level. It is also hoped that the information outlined will be of interest to decision-makers and assist their thinking with regard to appropriate policy support for partnership approaches.

The guide draws on the work of the Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF (see Annex I) which has sought to examine and share information on partnership in the Operational Programmes of different Member States. While country contexts undoubtedly differ, generic success factors for endorsing partnership have been identified and the lessons from these diverse experiences not only provide examples of how partnership can be promoted and reinforced in line with ESF regulations (as both a governance mechanism and in relation to projects), but also in finding solutions to address the challenges encountered in working collaboratively.

<sup>1</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Working Together for Growth and Jobs, A New Start for the Lisbon Strategy*, Brussels, 2005, p.14.

<sup>2</sup> Social partners are management and worker representatives (employers’ organisations and trade unions).

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of funding, the European Union has been divided into competitiveness regions, regions that are phasing out from the funds and convergence regions which are fully eligible for funding. See [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/policy/region/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/region/index_en.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999, Official Journal of the EU, L 210, Volume 49, 31 July 2006 pp 12- 19

The guide is divided into two main sections:

### The Rationale for Partnership

This part of the guide aims to provide a clear understanding of why the partnership principle is being promoted in the ESF and what its added value is. The rationale for partnership is situated within the wider policy framework adopted by the European Union which promotes partnership as a central delivery mechanism for the Lisbon Strategy. The reason for a focus on partnership within Structural Funds is explored by drawing out ten key and interlinking areas where partnering can assist in supporting Europe's employment, growth and social exclusion challenges: providing focus, coordination, access to resources, social capital, innovation, capacity-building, empowerment, legitimacy, stability and sustainability. Illustrations of each of these factors are provided with examples from different Member States. In addition a series of cautions and considerations are presented with the aim of drawing attention to the difficulties that may arise within each of these categories. In this way it is hoped that Managing Authorities will gain a deeper awareness of why working in partnership is so important while also reflecting upon, and seeking solutions to, the partnership implementation challenges that they may be confronted with.

### The Key Success Factor Framework

The second section of the guide offers practical advice on how partnership can be encouraged throughout the Operational Programme cycle at both programme and project level. Overarching pointers that need to be taken into account throughout this cycle include: **accountability**, in order to ensure that Operational Programmes and partnership projects are held to account, can give an account of their activities and progress, and take into account the needs and concerns of stakeholders; **participation and engagement** so that relevant stakeholders are appropriately involved; **skills-building** to equip those developing partnerships to work effectively with different stakeholders; and an **appreciation of time** with the development of mechanisms to assist effective time-management during the process of partnership-building. A detailed framework is then provided that shares a series of factors that have been successfully used in different Member States to promote partnership during each distinct phase of the programme cycle:

- ✓ **Operational Programme Analysis and Design** – carrying out a contextual analysis, promoting an enabling environment, identifying synergies with other programmes, and encouraging stakeholder engagement in the analysis and design process.
- ✓ **Operation Programme Delivery Planning** – integrating stakeholders into programme procedures and setting up mechanisms for stakeholder involvement in projects.
- ✓ **Calls For and Appraisal Of Proposals** – supporting incorporation of partnership in project proposals and assessing partnership rationale and implementation mechanisms.

- ✓ **Animation during Project Implementation** – providing ongoing support to partnership projects and building the capacity of stakeholders to actively participate in programme governance.
- ✓ **Monitoring and Evaluation** – Reporting on the status of partnership projects, promoting participatory evaluation at both programme and project level, and systematically feeding back lessons about partnership into practice.

At each stage of the cycle examples of practices that have worked successfully to endorse partnership in different Member States are given. A series of partnership pointers and tips from programme and project representatives, individual experts, NGO and social partner groupings are also provided.

The final section of the guide includes a list of references relating to partnership from both within the European Community and from external individuals and organisations. The annexes supply details of the work of the Community of Practice (CoP) on Partnership in the ESF, the templates employed by the CoP to obtain information on partnership implementation and good practices in Member States, and a selection of tables with information on how partnership has been approached in ESF Operational Programmes across 18 Member States.

*“... European Social Fund (ESF) regulations regarding partnership refer both to the involvement of stakeholders, including social partners, in the governance mechanisms of Operational Programmes, as well as the provision of financial support to multi-actor projects.”*



## THE RATIONALE FOR PARTNERSHIP

*“Why work in partnership? Why invest in bringing partners together when it might be far simpler to proceed alone?”<sup>5</sup>*

The central justification for working in partnership is that by drawing upon the resources and competencies of different social actors a common goal can be achieved in a more effective, legitimate and sustainable manner than when each operates separately.<sup>6</sup> Partnership has been endorsed as particularly appropriate for addressing the complex and multi-faceted issues that Europe’s employment, social inclusion and human resource development policies are faced with which are “... too complex and interdependent for any one institution to effectively respond to alone.”<sup>7</sup> The collective effort of different stakeholders is regarded by the European Union (EU) as central to the achievement of targets for the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.<sup>8</sup> In line with this thinking, the partnership principle is promoted as “fundamental to the implementation of European Cohesion Policy”<sup>9</sup> and the work of the Structural Funds where it is seen as, “... enhancing legitimacy, greater coordination, guaranteed transparency, and better absorption of funds through improved selection of projects and dissemination of information to potential project promoters.”<sup>10</sup>

European Commission Regulations on Structural Funds position partnerships as central to the work of the European Social Fund (ESF):

*With a view to better anticipating and managing change and increasing economic growth, employment opportunities for both women and men, and quality and productivity at work under the Regional competitiveness and employment and Convergence objectives, assistance from the ESF should focus, in particular, on improving the adaptability of workers and enterprises, enhancing human capital and access to employment and participation in the labour market, reinforcing the social inclusion of disadvantaged people, combating discrimination, encouraging economically inactive persons to enter the labour market and **promoting partnerships for reform.**<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, *The principle of partnership in the new ESF programmes (2007-13), A Framework for Programming, Unit B4 June 2006*

<sup>6</sup> Tennyson, R. *The Partnering Toolkit, IBLF and GAIN, 2004* p.5.

<sup>7</sup> *The principle of partnership in the new ESF programmes (2007-13) (supra).*

<sup>8</sup> *The Lisbon Growth and Jobs objectives are: total (public and private) investment of 3% of Europe’s GDP in research and development by 2010 and an employment rate (the proportion of Europe’s working age population in employment) of 70% by the same date. Funds are thus to be spent on procuring works, goods and services from all over the EU. EU 15 Member States are committed to earmarking for growth and jobs objectives at least 60% of Structural Funds Investment in convergence regions and 75% in regions under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective. See: [http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/faqs/background/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/faqs/background/index_en.htm) (accessed November 12, 2008) and Commission of the European Communities, *Working Together for Growth and Jobs, A New Start for the Lisbon Strategy, Brussels, 2005, p.14.**

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, *Partnership in the 2000-2006 Programming Period, Analysis of the implementation of the partnership principle, Discussion Paper of DG Regio, November 2005, p. 3.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999, Official Journal of the European Union, L 210/12, July 3, 2006

The regulations make a distinction between two forms of partnership:

1. Partnership as a governance mechanism

*The Member States shall ensure the involvement of the social partners and adequate consultation and participation of other stakeholders, at the appropriate territorial level, in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of ESF support. (ESF Reg., Art. 5)*

2. Partnership in relation to projects

*... promoting partnerships, pacts and initiatives through networking of relevant stakeholders, such as the social partners and non-governmental organisations, at the transnational, national, regional and local levels in order to mobilise for reforms in the field of employment and labour market inclusiveness. (ESF Reg., Art. 3).*

Special attention is also given to projects that increase the capacity of social partners to work in partnership:

*Under the Convergence objective, an appropriate amount of ESF resources shall be allocated to capacity-building, which shall include training, networking measures, strengthening the social dialogue and activities jointly undertaken by the social partners, in particular as regards adaptability of workers and enterprises. (ESF Reg., Art. 5).*

*“The collective effort of different stakeholders is regarded by the European Union (EU) as central to the achievement of targets for the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.”*

Working in partnership is not an easy option. Combining diverse organisational approaches, resources and styles can be extremely difficult and requires a considerable investment of time and energy. In addition, partnership as a model for addressing social issues has come under increasing scrutiny with calls for greater evidence of its accountability and impact. In order to raise awareness about partnering challenges and encourage those involved in developing ESF Operational Programmes to identify possible ways of addressing these, a series of cautions and considerations have also been provided in relation to each of the points below.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> In order to understand the thinking behind these concepts and embed a deeper understanding of why partnering is being so strongly promoted, members of the Community of Practice on Partnership (CoP) in the ESF explored the rationale for partnership in Structural Fund programmes. An expert panel then discussed, added to and validated the work carried out by CoP members. The many interrelated issues that emerged from this exercise were grouped under ten key headings. These are outlined in the table below with specific examples from the ESF Operational Programmes of different Member States (see Annex 3 and <http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/223>).

RATIONALE FOR PARTNERING	EXAMPLES	CAUTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p><b>FOCUS</b></p> <p>By harnessing the perspectives and resources of different societal actors, we are able to more clearly identify gaps, needs and priorities relating to Europe’s employment, social inclusion and human resource development challenges, and develop targeted approaches to address them.</p> <p><i>“Working in partnership shows us more clearly where the gaps are and how we can address them better.”</i></p> <p>ZDENEK FOLTYN MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS CZECH REPUBLIC</p>	<p>In <b>Sweden</b> focus is achieved through strong regional and political Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) in which politicians work alongside social partners, NGOs and representatives of the public and private sectors. SFPs act as selection boards for multi-stakeholder cooperation projects that best match the priorities of both ESF and ERDF plans.</p>	<p>Because different societal actors have diverse goals and agendas, which will vary according to the context of each Member State, agreeing on a focus and ensuring that action is targeted towards this, is not easy.</p> <p>Partnership programmes and projects must devote adequate time and energy to developing an agreed vision, and then an action plan for delivery.</p>
<p><b>COORDINATION</b></p> <p>Working in partnership can improve and synchronise policy coordination, targeting and adaptation of programmes and projects to local conditions so that reach is improved and duplication avoided.</p> <p><i>“The partnership model assists a better use of synergies and helps to establish a common ground between actors responsible for labour market policy.”</i></p> <p>ANETTE SCOPETTA TEP CO-ORDINATION UNIT (K000) AUSTRIA</p>	<p>In <b>Austria</b> Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) aim to better link employment policy with other policies in order to support employment policy objectives through improved coordination at regional and local levels.</p> <p>In <b>Romania</b> partnership is an instrument for planning at regional level and delivery at county and local levels and is viewed as assisting an integrated and decentralised approach to deliver employment and social inclusion policies.</p>	<p>The enemies of effective coordination include fixed ideas, a tradition of ‘silo working’, and too much haste in building a partnership and its strategy.</p> <p>Synchronisation and avoidance of duplication rest on robust preparatory work. This includes an assessment of prior partnership experiences, the identification of synergies with different actors, as well as linkages with relevant existing programmes and initiatives. Such analysis should lead to conscious decisions about how to build on what currently exists rather than on the often destructive efforts of creating new activities in a vacuum.</p>

<p><b>ACCESS TO RESOURCES</b></p> <p>A range of diverse resources from different stakeholders can be accessed in order to address particular problems and challenges.</p> <p><i>“Partnership is centred on a rational division of work based on each partner’s respective comparative advantages.”</i></p> <p>MARIA DO CARMO NUNES EQUAL PROGRAMME PORTUGAL</p>	<p>In the <b>Czech Republic</b> project partnerships are particularly encouraged to draw on the specific organisational experiences and know-how of their members in a given regional or thematic field in order to use resources in a complementary way.</p>	<p>Combining different stakeholder resources is often conducted rapidly without an assessment of their suitability for a chosen goal and/or analysis of how they best complement other inputs.</p> <p>Detailed ‘resource mapping’ of both financial and in-kind resources can assist in verifying the specific added value that different resources bring to a proposed programme or project. Using a tool for this and developing protocols which set out the inputs that partners will make, alongside the outcomes from which they will benefit, are also helpful.<sup>13</sup></p>
<p><b>SOCIAL CAPITAL</b></p> <p>Connections and relationships across different countries, regions, sectors and organisations can reinforce social networks while also promoting a deeper shared understanding of the value and importance of other sectors and their role in society.</p> <p><i>“Cooperation will lead to dialogue, experience exchange and improvement of routines and processes in the organisations involved.”</i></p> <p>LENA ROGELAND EQUAL NATIONAL THEMATIC GROUP ON PARTNERSHIP SWEDEN</p>	<p>In the <b>Netherlands</b> partnership assists and reinforces a strong ‘partnership’ tradition related to social dialogue and links among social partners, municipalities and ministries, and a long history of programme and project development that builds upon pre-existing collaboration.</p> <p>In <b>Estonia</b> linkages with umbrella organisations<sup>14</sup> representing social partners and NGOs are seen as guaranteeing solid connections with target groups while also ensuring that programme managers responsible for ESF implementation have grassroots feedback to inform their work.</p>	<p>Contextual issues particular to different Member States can impact on the different types and levels of relationships, and the connections between them. In addition, both time and the solid and consistent organisational interaction that builds mutual respect and trust among societal actors are often overlooked.</p> <p>Crucial for promoting partnership is the need to find ways of moving beyond individuals representing organisations to wider institutional connections and buy-in. Ultimately social capital will only be created when empathy is derived from unpacking what drives different individuals and institutions to behave as they do in the specific contexts in which they operate.</p>

<p><b>INNOVATION</b></p> <p>More creative, new and dynamic approaches to societal challenges are engendered by sharing diverse perspectives, ideas and resources.</p> <p><i>“Partnerships are primarily about the development of new approaches.”</i></p> <p>BENEDICT WAUTERS ESF AGENCY FLANDERS</p>	<p>Partnership projects in <b>Portugal</b> are oriented towards developing new and integrated approaches with a view to influencing social cohesion policies in favour of vulnerable groups.</p>	<p>Space for the development of new approaches can be limited by obstacles at organisational (e.g. lack of internal buy-in) and inter-organisational levels (e.g. misunderstandings between partners), as well as in relation to the wider context (e.g. legal and institutional frameworks that limit the development of partnership approaches).</p> <p>It is helpful to identify potential blockages to partnership innovation at the levels mentioned above and make decisions about whether it is possible to influence, circumvent or redirect them.</p>
<p><b>CAPACITY-BUILDING</b></p> <p>Beyond simple accessing of resources, working in partnership with different actors can also enhance the opportunities for building and improving strategic and operative capacity in order to overcome resources / size / skills limitations.</p> <p><i>“Partnership promotes more effective social and civil dialogue through capacity-building civil society and social partners.”</i></p> <p>ALISON MIZZI PLANNING &amp; PRIORITIES COORDINATION DIVISION OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER MALTA</p>	<p>In <b>Malta</b> the limited administrative capacity of social partners and civil society organisations is being addressed through a focus area of the ESF OP which deals with the promotion of more effective social and civil dialogue.</p> <p>In <b>Estonia</b> one of the OPs offers institutions representing employees the possibility of enhancing their capacity as a partner for governmental institutions.</p>	<p>Capacity-building those actors who may not easily be able to participate in partnership programmes and projects demands time, commitment and resources. It also relies upon a clear awareness of the importance of offering training and support facilities for working in partnership.</p> <p>Programmes or institutions will benefit by developing an action plan for capacity-building, and integrating this to form part of a partnership learning culture.</p>

<sup>13</sup> See *Building a Resource Map* in Tennyson, R. *The Partnering Toolbook, 2004* (IBLF & GAIN) p.13

<sup>14</sup> An umbrella organisation is an association of institutions with a common interest that work together to coordinate activities or pool resources.

<p><b>EMPOWERMENT</b></p> <p>Improved capacity and direct engagement with target groups should enable those who are disadvantaged/marginalised to have a stronger voice in the political arena and take a more proactive role in addressing issues that affect them.</p> <p><i>“Partnerships promote empowerment of actors, the increase of trustful relationships as well as the competencies for working together.”</i></p> <p>CRISTINA IOVA ESF MANAGING AUTHORITY ROMANIA</p>	<p>In <b>Italy</b> the principle of empowerment is centred on the active involvement of all stakeholders, including final beneficiaries, and is promoted at all partnership levels.</p> <p>In <b>Greece</b> partnership is viewed as the best way of encouraging the participation of the highest possible number of actors to reinforce inclusion and mediation processes with respect to an increasingly heterogeneous and constantly changing social fabric.</p>	<p>Empowerment is often diluted by lack of genuine stakeholder engagement or, conversely, by expending time and resources in conducting wide participatory exercises when simpler response mechanisms and/or more focussed approaches would work equally well.</p> <p>Finding the best channels for different groups to participate in decisions that concern their lives, and understanding the reasons for none or low participation, both from and within different groups, can help to identify where a stronger or more representative voice might be encouraged. It should also be understood that a responsive approach to problem-solving may not always involve extensive participation as channels for proper suggestions /grievance mechanisms such as public hearings, help desks, etc can be more efficient and effective.</p>
<p><b>LEGITIMACY</b></p> <p>Wider stakeholder mobilisation can give a more democratic policy ‘mandate’ as involvement and support of organisations that are ‘trusted’ by society can increase public acceptance of necessary reforms while at the same time encourage more responsive policy approaches to problem-solving.</p> <p><i>“Partnership offers a new multi-level model of governance.”</i></p> <p>PAOLA ANDREANI INSTITUTE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORKERS VOCATIONAL TRAINING (ISFOL) ITALY</p>	<p>In <b>Lithuania</b> and the <b>Netherlands</b> partnership is regarded as encouraging wider involvement in policy-shaping and decision-making processes at both policy and project level.</p> <p>In <b>Hungary</b> one of the OPs focuses on supporting partnership between the administration and social partners in order to strengthen participatory democracy and improve social outcomes at both local and regional levels.</p>	<p>Partnership can sometimes undermine democracy if decisions are apparently taken by an elite group whose legitimacy is not clear. Collaborative governance approaches can also be cumbersome to develop and maintain.</p> <p>It is important that partnership is firmly anchored in the democratic process and that accountability is clearly demonstrated in both stakeholder relationships and decision-making procedures.</p>

<p><b>STABILITY</b></p> <p>The inclusion of civil society concerns in strategic planning exercises, stimulation of corporate involvement in local projects and greater satisfaction with public policy, can contribute to a more integrated and cohesive society.</p> <p><i>“Partnership is a cooperation model which promotes democracy and equality by giving an added value to existing practices and policies and going further to improve quality of life and social cohesion.”</i></p> <p>RANIA OIKONOMOU CIP EQUAL GREECE</p>	<p>In <b>Ireland</b> partnership promotion in the ESF mirrors the country’s social partnership model which is an established and accepted form of governance and participation. Social partners and NGOs are familiar with working within this structure and understand how to participate in a meaningful and constructive manner.</p>	<p>There is concern that partnerships co-opt and divide civil society groups by diluting their mandate and encouraging them to adopt less confrontational demands for change. In addition, if expectations are raised and responses are inadequate this may lead to frustration and disappointment and thus reduce, rather than assist, stability and cohesion.</p> <p>It is important to ensure that civil society concerns have been genuinely taken on board and responded to in a systematic and accountable manner as it is the predictability of an institutionalised process which leads to stability.</p>
<p><b>SUSTAINABILITY</b></p> <p>By promoting societal engagement, joint ownership and mutual benefit, working in collaboration can promote long-term, durable and positive change that addresses social problems in an accountable way and integrates learning within, between and across different actors in society.</p> <p><i>“Partnership is a learning process in which the knowledge and experience accumulated generates new collective knowledge and experience that is incorporated into ongoing policy developments.”</i></p> <p>MARIA RAUCH ESF PARTNERSHIP EXPERT</p>	<p>In <b>Austria</b> evaluations show that TEPs have proved their added value by adapting measures to local circumstances and target groups; increasing the involvement of actors in labour market and employment policy; successfully linking policy areas at regional, sub-regional and local levels and contributing to the better coherence of objectives related to labour market and economic policies; improving effectiveness, efficiency and transparency in labour market policy through the use of continuous and systematic procedures; and securing financial support for the regions.</p>	<p>Weak evaluation and mainstreaming processes that do not share lessons that demonstrate the added value of partnership reduce the possibility of lasting long-term change.</p> <p>Effective monitoring and evaluation systems showing the added benefit of working in partnership need to be put in place. The lessons from these processes also require appropriate dissemination and action in order to impact policy changes and ensure the development of appropriate strategies for the future.</p>

Most Member States see partnership as developing positive new and integrated approaches that promote social cohesion and endorse all ten of the factors outlined above (see Annex 3, Table 10). However, a range of drawbacks to promoting partnership have also been identified (see Annex 3, Table 11). Some of these relate to particular historical and social contexts and the impact of these on the development of partnerships, while others concern the time investment required to start up and build collaborative relationships. The difficulties of ensuring engagement at particular levels are also highlighted, particularly where social partners and civil society organisations lack capacity. In some countries too, there is disquiet about the possibility that partnership implementation may become “a formal procedure” rather than a dynamic and innovative contribution to achieving the Lisbon objectives and creating durable change.

The following chapter offers a framework for addressing some of these challenges at both programme and project level.



## THE KEY SUCCESS FACTOR FRAMEWORK

*“Successful partnership promotion depends upon creating the right environment at programme level.”<sup>15</sup>*

### The programme cycle

Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies have a key role to play in promoting and supporting partnerships. Ensuring sustainability and long-term impact depends upon developing linkages within, between and across different institutional levels. Programme work provides the essential link between policy and project levels and ideally placed to share learning about partnership that will influence policy changes.<sup>16</sup>



*The policy, programme and project cycles*

<sup>15</sup> Comment from partnership project interviewee, June 2008

<sup>16</sup> See European Commission, Sourcebook on Sound Planning of ESF programmes, 2006

For the purpose of this guide, this framework has been reduced to only five phases:

1. Operational Programme Analysis and Design
2. Operational Programme Delivery Planning
3. Calls For and Appraisal Of Proposals
4. Animation during Project Implementation
5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Each of these phases has been carefully analysed across a selection of Member States in order to identify ways in which partnership can be endorsed at distinct points in the development of Operational Programmes, and provide examples that demonstrate successful practice in doing so. This information forms the Key Success Factor Framework.

In pursuing this methodology a number of important provisos are necessary to bear in mind:

- ✓ Partnership needs to be understood at two levels; as a governance mechanism and as a project methodology.
- ✓ All partnership approaches are conditioned by particular environments and need to be viewed in relation to these specific and dynamic contexts.
- ✓ The phases outlined interlink and overlap, particularly monitoring and evaluation processes which are implicit throughout the programme cycle.
- ✓ Although the good practice examples shared here have been used to illustrate specific success factors, they may also be applied at other stages of the programme cycle.

### Overarching pointers

Four overarching and mutually reinforcing issues are useful to bear in mind throughout the programme cycle as they can contribute to the development of successful partnership approaches at both governance and project level. These are:

**Accountability:** Ensuring that Operational Programmes and projects have standards and guidelines that hold them to account, can give an account of their activities and progress, and demonstrate that they take into account the needs and concerns of stakeholders.

**Participation and engagement:** Ensuring that all relevant stakeholders participate appropriately during the different phases of the programme cycle, and engagement options are also promoted and shared at project level.

**Skills-building:** Ensuring that those developing partnerships at programme or project level have (or can obtain) the necessary skills for working with different stakeholders.

**Appreciation of time:** Ensuring that the time needed to develop partnership is acknowledged and that ways are developed to assist effective time-management during the process of partnership-building.

### Accountability

Accountability is a central component of good governance<sup>17</sup> which has been identified as vital to Structural Fund provision.<sup>18</sup> In this context the basic premise of good governance is that institutions and actors involved in ESF programmes and projects should ensure that decision-making and implementation are conducted in an open, inclusive and responsible manner. They can check that their partnership approaches at both programme and project level are accountable by ensuring they respond both internally and externally to the three key components of accountability: being held to account, giving an account and taking account.<sup>19</sup>

ACCOUNTABILITY			
	Being held to account	Giving an account	Taking account
General meaning	Stakeholders know what is required of them to achieve objectives. Clear standards and commitments are in place to which stakeholders must adhere.	Accessible information and documentation exists on decisions and related actions, performance and expected outcomes.	Stakeholder feedback is carefully considered and the reasons why a particular decision or action has been taken can be publicly demonstrated.
Action at governance level	The OP has outlined how their approach to partnership should be judged in relation to ESF regulations.	Appropriate mechanisms have been put in place by the OP to ensure that information on decision-making, finances and monitoring and evaluation is accessible.	The existence of channels for stakeholders to ask questions, make suggestions, state grievances etc. and hear how these have been taken into consideration and/or had an impact on the functioning or activities of the OP.
Action at project level	Projects are encouraged to abide by clear rules and procedures and clarify roles and responsibilities. Project partners sign up to clear standards and commitments.	The OP supports projects with clear and accessible guidance and advice and promotes the importance of transparent information-sharing among project partners.	The OP ensures that information on projects is publicly available. It also encourages partners to demonstrate how they have taken target group concerns on board and why particular decisions/actions have been taken.

**Keep accountability in mind at all stages of your work!**

### Participation and Engagement

Both participation and engagement of stakeholders are central to partnership. Here participation describes the simple act of sharing in partnership activities, while engagement is a generic term that describes the broad range of stakeholder interactions with an Operational Programme or partnership project. The involvement of different stakeholders will vary, and require adjustment, according to time, context, the nature of particular groups and the programme/ project development phase. Engagement may range from a limited or passive association to a more dynamic connection in which the lead is taken in a decision or activity. A broad range of possible stakeholder engagement levels in different OP and project phases are identified below.

STAKEHOLDERS:		
4	STEER	Lead particular steps or activities in the work of the OP or project
3	INFLUENCE	Participate directly in decision-making in the OP or project, have a vote
2	ARE CONSULTED	Involved in discussion about the OP or project and able to express opinions & give feedback
1	ARE INFORMED	Receive information about the OP or project and are made aware of its work/activities

The categories portrayed above are not static and within each there are enormous degrees of variance. In addition, the passive levels (1 and 2) are not necessarily less worthy than the more active ones (3 and 4). What is important is to ensure that the most appropriate mechanisms are tailored appropriately for the contribution of different groups and that the chosen engagement option is not contrived as a substitute for genuine participation. Accusations of manipulation can be made when engagement focuses on simply ticking boxes or rubber-stamping desired objectives without giving stakeholders real legitimacy or providing guarantees that their contribution will be heeded.

When working in partnership, organisational commitment, as opposed to just that of individuals, is crucial. Change is only

*“... the basic premise of good governance is that institutions and actors involved in ESF programmes and projects should ensure that decision-making and implementation are conducted in an open, inclusive and responsible manner.”*

<sup>17</sup> See Commission of the European Communities, *European Governance, A White Paper*, Brussels, 25.7.2001, COM(2001) 428 Final. The European Commission's White Paper on European Governance suggests that openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence are key elements of good governance.

<sup>18</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999, Official Journal of the European Union, L 210/12, July 3, 2006

<sup>19</sup> Caplan, K. *Partnership Accountability: Unpacking the Concept*, BPD, June 2005

likely to take place when institutions, as opposed to ‘personalities’, are fully involved in partnership programmes and projects. Organisational representatives should have a clear ‘licence to operate’ and this mandate needs to be checked regularly. At the same time efforts should be made to find ways to promote internal buy-in and promote active institutional ownership of partnership activities. This centres on a clear organisational understanding of why working in partnership is important, confidence in the solutions that partnership can bring, and the capacity to implement partnering in policies and practices.

Central to institutional buy-in, and improved stakeholder engagement generally, is openness to investigating both the visibility and invisibility, of individuals, groups and organisations in partnership activities. This involves looking beyond those who apparently ‘speak’ on behalf of particular stakeholders, to those who do not. The latter are often important representatives of target groups, or the most vulnerable or excluded members of them, and thus the most necessary to involve. The table below offers a checklist of some of the reasons why there may be low or non-engagement among stakeholders and suggests possible options for addressing them.<sup>20</sup>

Low or non-participation could suggest that individuals/groups are:	In which case the programme or project may need to:
<b>Disenfranchised</b> Have no ‘say’ or not asked to participate in right way	Reassess channels of engagement
<b>Indifferent</b> Benefits are unclear and / there may be a weariness towards efforts that, from past experience, are unlikely to yield results	Identify, clarify and review incentives for participation among these individuals/groups
<b>Intimidated</b> Feel unwelcome, lack confidence	Examine operational culture in order to find ways to encourage them
<b>Under-resourced</b> Lack time, money, seniority, educational levels etc.	Examine implicit criteria for participating e.g. timing of activities, resources and capacity-building needs.
<b>Unrecognised</b> Invisible and unacknowledged, have not even been considered	Revise approach and activities in order to incorporate ‘missing’ stakeholders
<b>Waiting</b> Need to be convinced that participation is worthwhile	Anticipate triggers for participation through focussed consultation and / achievement of early tangible results

**Broad stakeholder engagement should be followed by efforts to deepen and improve its quality!**

### Skills-building

Working in partnership and managing relationships across different sectors requires particular skills. As well as technical and programme management skills, a range of ‘soft’ skills such as interpersonal and relationship-building abilities are valuable for working in partnership. Different skills are naturally required at different phases of programme and project development but we may generally find that those necessary throughout include:

KEY SKILLS	
<b>ADVOCACY</b>	Raising awareness about the rationale for partnership and why this is a useful way of working in the ESF – transmitting this to stakeholders at both programme and project level.
<b>BROKERING</b>	Bringing stakeholders and partners together by acting as an intermediary or facilitator, especially in the early stages of developing programmes and projects.
<b>CAPACITY-BUILDING</b>	Supporting the development of skills for working in partnership at both programme and project level, especially for those who lack capacity to work in this way.
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	Ability to engage stakeholders and partners at programme and project level, and share information through oral and written channels of communication.
<b>LEADERSHIP</b>	Championing and promoting partnership with flexibility, insight, sensitivity to different audiences and strong convening skills.
<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	Sound administration, coordination and planning skills.
<b>MONITORING &amp; EVALUATION</b>	Assessing both programme and project work to ensure that it is meeting objectives, reviewing, revising and assessing partnership approaches and their impact.
<b>NEGOTIATION</b>	Being equipped to dialogue, balance and facilitate different interests and experiences on an equitable basis and mediate where there is conflict.
<b>NETWORKING</b>	Developing and maintaining learning networks between individuals and organisations where experiences and practices can be shared.

**Find ways of integrating partnership into routine skills training!**

<sup>20</sup> Drawn from Stott, L. & Keatman, T. *Tools for Community Engagement in Partnership*, BPD, 2005.

*“When working in partnership, organisational commitment, as opposed to just that of individuals, is crucial.”*

#### Appreciation of time

Time is often mentioned as the key challenge in developing partnerships. Working in collaboration can be slow and add an extra resource burden to individuals and organisations already busy with other day-to-day activities. This is particularly the case at the start of a programme or project when the mechanisms for working in partnership have not yet been developed or institutionalised.

Although the time factor is always an issue those with a long partnership trajectory stress that this can be addressed somewhat by ensuring that:

- ✓ Clear, simple and accessible guidelines are in place with advice on rules and procedures for working in partnership.
- ✓ The incentives of different stakeholders and partners for working together are clearly identified and aligned.
- ✓ Roles and responsibilities are clearly established and information about these is disseminated appropriately.
- ✓ Quick milestones are achieved jointly that demonstrate the added value of partnership.

The building of trust that emerges from the process of working together can also limit time issues as partners and stakeholders learn to respect and rely up one another. This has a “self-sustaining effect”<sup>21</sup> that enables smoother and more efficient collaboration.

**Spend time building good relationships – it will reduce the burden later!**

21 Geddes, M.N. comment at Expert Workshop, London October 29th, 2008

## The framework

### I. Operational Programme Analysis and Design

*“Partnerships and their activities are not created in a vacuum but must be framed around the specific contexts in which they operate.”<sup>22</sup>*

In order to prepare the foundations for developing an OP, a thorough analysis of the particular context in which it will operate is important. Such a study will assist in identification of key target groups and relevant stakeholders, and ascertain where partnership solutions may yield added value to particular policy areas. At the same time the existence of both positive and negative triggers and drivers for/against partnership can be recognised and work undertaken to promote an ‘enabling environment’ by making use of those that favour a partnership approach, or, alternatively, dealing with those that may impede this. Stakeholder identification and engagement are central to this process as the participation of different social actors in the analysis, design and writing of the Operational Programme document can ensure that it is appropriate in terms of focus and scope.

#### I.1 CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Conduct a careful study of your particular country context with identification of key target groups for programmes and clarification of their needs in order to identify major policy areas where partnership solutions can yield added value.

Partnership approaches in the Operational Programmes of different Member States are governed by particular and changing country contexts. Good practice rests on ensuring that chosen partnership options, numbers, size and scope are both ‘fit for purpose’ in relation to the needs of target groups and flexible enough to respond to change (See Annex 3, Tables 1, 2 and 3 for information on numbers, geographical and thematic focus of OPs in different Member States). A thorough background study may involve review of:

- ✓ The country’s geographical/ historical/social/political/economic/cultural situation
- ✓ The urgency of need among different target groups
- ✓ Positive/negative government policies and legal/regulatory frameworks that might impact programmes
- ✓ The nature and extent of previous partnership activities in addressing social challenges
- ✓ The existence of reputable intermediary organisations who can work across different sectors
- ✓ Availability of skilled individuals capable of working with different stakeholders

22 Caplan, K, Gomme, J., Mugabi, J. & Stott, L. *Assessing Partnership Performance: Understanding the drivers for success*, BPD, London, 2007

## CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS IN AUSTRIA

In Austria a system of Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) was established country-wide in the late 1990s to develop and co-fund projects at regional, sub-regional and local levels in order to link policy areas and reach out to those on the margins of the labour market and bring them into the mainstream. TEPs now assist in the implementation of the ESF Operational Programme for Employment (2007-2013) with a focus on Priority 3b which calls for innovative projects for the integration of persons distant from the labour market.

Contextual analysis showed that 6% of the Austrian population are poor and 13.2% are in danger of becoming poor (Sozialbericht 2003/2004). The reasons for poverty relate to a number of factors such as discontinuation in employment; vulnerable job positions where the unskilled labour force faces higher risks of becoming poor; atypical employment in which social security is marginal (15% of independent workers are poor, part-time workers) and a gender gap whereby the income of women is below that of males and 87% of female workers work part-time. Responsibility for supporting those within this target group lies with the Labour Market Service, Regional Governments, Cities and Municipalities. Good cooperation between these institutions is vital for improved assistance in dealing with their personal, social and labour market problems. Although these institutions already work together within the TEPs, contextual analysis demonstrated that this cooperation required deepening for this specific target group. The overall strategic aim of Priority 3b is thus centred on improving integration of marginalised groups into the labour market through testing and developing innovative measures, and improved cooperation of institutions.

At the end of 2007 the first call for proposals was launched for projects at the interface of labour market and social policy with the target group defined as beneficiaries of social welfare and those without financial support. It was agreed that only TEPs could apply and that all partners should agree on the project focus based on a joint analysis, strategy and implementation plan. In addition funding would only be given to innovative projects and measures. These could include both new projects and projects adapted from EQUAL Development Partnerships.

Quality criteria for Priority 3b were established by the TEPs with the nation-wide TEP Coordination Unit (Kooo). In terms of TEP structure this means that the TEP should be responsible for the overall project so that all relevant partners are integrated, that the action space of TEPs is enlarged, that institutional, financial, legal and economic barriers are overcome and communication gaps minimised. With regard to project implementation criteria are established for the overall strategy as well as for the quality of activities, sustainability and monitoring and evaluation.

This involves a focus on the following areas:

- **System development** e.g. improved interface between labour market and social policy.
- **Structural innovations** e.g. single dedicated support points like one-stop shops for target groups.
- **Implementation of holistic approaches for solving problems** e.g. integration chains and mixtures of activities and target groups.

Demand-oriented integration has been central to a partnership in Vienna that consists of 8 strategic, 12 operative and 3 financing partners. The target group is youth, migrants, social welfare beneficiaries and drug addicts for whom 11 coordinated measures have been devised including support in finding employment, social worker assistance, social advice, counselling, crisis intervention, housing and health measures. The target group is thus supported cohesively through a holistic bundle of innovative measures and cooperation is promoted between actors.

In using TEPs and enlarging the scope of their activities by making good use of their unique collaborative position, Priority 3b assists in closing gaps and mobilising reforms in social and labour market policies; implementing innovative measures and improving the situation of the poorest.

### Co-ordination Unit of Austrian TEPs, Kooo

<http://www.pakte.at> <http://www.zsi.at>  
<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/363>

*“... the existence of both positive and negative triggers and drivers for/ against partnership can be recognised and work undertaken to promote an ‘enabling environment’ by making use of those that favour a partnership approach, or, alternatively, dealing with those that may impede this.”*

## OTHER EXAMPLES

In **Romania** the ESF Managing Authority was responsible for conducting a contextual analysis prior to the country's accession to the EU. As well as providing the basis for negotiation, this document served as the key programming document for the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and Operational Programme. The analysis showed high levels of poverty, especially in non-urban areas; the urgent need for creating social inclusion mechanisms for disadvantaged groups; and a requirement for the improvement of active labour market policies. As well as the need to work in partnership with the most relevant policy actors for the programming exercise at national level, it was clear that partnership mechanisms at regional and local levels were needed to capacity-build actors for decision-making and action in order to address the diversity of regional and local problems.

Within this framework a background analysis regarding employment and social inclusion in each region was conducted via meetings and discussions with all relevant actors at regional and county levels. In the North East region, for example, more than 200 actors were involved. In addition to baseline information the analysis also identified local initiatives that operated as existing and potential partnerships. This allowed the elaboration of a Regional Employment and Social Inclusion Action Plan for each region alongside the construction of a partnership model with strong support from an enlarged network of regional and local actors.

The Regional Pacts for Employment and Social Inclusion model also includes Technical Secretariats that provide support to the Pacts. Because the Operational Programme was finalised in parallel with the development of the partnership model it was possible to include a key priority area for funding the Technical Secretariats across the whole country and the creation of an enabling framework for partnership projects.

<http://www.fseromania.ro/>

## KEY POINTERS

Invest time in conducting a thorough contextual analysis.  
Use this study as an opportunity to deepen and reinforce the rationale for working in partnership.

*Keep open the possibility of changing objectives during the design process!*

1.2 PROMOTING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT<sup>23</sup>

Find ways to reduce barriers to partnership implementation outside ESF Operational Programmes by pressing for positive government policies and supportive legal and administrative frameworks, addressing regulatory issues such as tendering requirements, promoting good cross-sectoral relations and a culture of cooperation, working with intermediary organisations capable of bringing different institutions together, and providing opportunities for increasing partnership skills and expertise.

A contextual analysis (see 1.1 above) can help identify where there are openings and/or blockages that assist and/or limit a partnership approach in different Member States. In this way partnership 'enablers' and 'disenablers' can be identified relating to the policy/legal environment; sector relationships; and the internal cohesion of the programme delivery agency itself. It is worth noting that sometimes an apparent challenge can actually serve to stimulate partnering e.g. a particular incident or crisis can provoke different sectors to work together systematically to address an urgent resulting need. In any case the following questions are worth asking:

*"... sometimes an apparent challenge can actually serve to stimulate partnering ..."*

- ✓ **Programme consistency:** Is partnership fully understood and endorsed by programme managers? Is there a sufficient partnership expertise and skills base? Are senior staff supportive of working in partnership?
- ✓ **Relationships between sectors:** Are sectoral relationships positive/negative? What is the history of cross-sector collaboration? Can positive experiences be built upon and integrated into the design of the OP?
- ✓ **Wider environment:** How far does the legal/regulatory environment favour or impede working in partnership? Is the overall policy context favourable / restricting to multi-stakeholder collaboration?

If obstacles to partnership are identified at these different levels, decisions need to be made about whether programme managers should address them by seeking to:

- ✓ **Influence or overcome** – address and change the blockage directly e.g. by appealing to policy decision-makers in order to make legal changes that assist partnership promotion or working to address lack of skills, knowledge and expertise so that a partnership programme is able to develop more effectively.

<sup>23</sup> This section draws extensively from Newborne, P. & Caplan, K. *Creating Space for Innovation*, BPD, London, 2006, which also provides a useful discussion tool for exploring and addressing challenges to partnership innovation. See [http://www.bpd-waterandsanitation.org/bpd/web/d/doc\\_113.pdf](http://www.bpd-waterandsanitation.org/bpd/web/d/doc_113.pdf)

- ✓ **Circumvent** – move around the obstacle by finding innovative ways of addressing it e.g. working around legal and regulatory impediments and/or enlisting the support of other organisations to push through partnership activities alongside the ESF.
- ✓ **Redirect** – shift the partnership focus e.g. by using a different approach or location.

#### ADDRESSING LEGAL IMPEDIMENTS TO PARTNERSHIP IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

In the Czech Republic, in line with EU legislative requirements, partnership is promoted at both programme and project levels. At programme level the concept is well established and relevant stakeholders are involved in the preparation of the OPs and compose membership of Monitoring Committees. At project level, however, legislative drawbacks were encountered in 2004-6 when it was discovered that partnership was not defined in relevant national legislation and public procurement regulations applied to partners as they could be considered as 'suppliers'. This had a major impact on the EQUAL programme by endangering the implementation of partnership projects.

In order to address the situation the Managing Authority worked to put the Amendment of the Act on Budgetary Rules (no. 218/2000) in place. This means that although partnership was still not legally defined it could nonetheless be supported. In order to further assist this, sample contracts between project promoters and partners were published on the web alongside typical examples of partners and suppliers in ESF projects.

In the programming period (2007-13), although there are no extra points for working in partnership, it is encouraged and supported. Guidance to applicants centres on ensuring that partnership is not obligatory (unless specified in the call); that it must not replace the provision of routine administrative work on the project and the provision of standard services or delivery of goods, and must not be used to bypass public procurement law.

Two types of projects exist: Non-financial partnerships which are individual projects based on public procurement prepared and implemented by the state administration at ministerial or regional level, and financial partnerships for grant projects in which partners are specified in the application and agreements are signed between the project promoter and partners within 2 months of receiving the grant decision. These agreements include definition of roles, activities, a budget breakdown, rights and obligations. In essence, partners have to fulfil the same eligibility criteria as the project promoter, but only the project promoter (one institution) can be the grant recipient.

The partnership project application must also include a clear description of the added value it can bring. The application is then assessed carefully in order to ensure that projects with 'hidden suppliers' are excluded and the partnership is not 'artificial'.

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic  
<http://www.esfcr.cz>  
<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/257>

#### OTHER EXAMPLES

In Austria and Ireland intermediary organisations exist that have assisted in the promotion of an enabling environment for partnership. In Ireland Pobal's work has assisted in promoting cross-sector collaboration as an established and accepted form of governance and participation, while in Austria the TEP Coordination Unit, Kooo, has assisted the involvement of actors in labour market and employment policy and successfully linked these policy areas at regional, sub-regional and local levels.  
<http://www.pakte.at> <http://www.zsi.at>  
<http://www.pobal.ie>

In Greece facilitation of the EQUAL programme was enabled by the implementation of a law which regulated the legal status of Development Partnerships. This law assisted in the promotion of social cohesion and multi-sectoral involvement in decision-making procedures.  
<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/235>  
<http://www.equal-greece.gr>

In Portugal a postgraduate Partnership Project Management course was developed with a special focus on managers and technicians of EQUAL Development Partnerships. The purpose of the course was to develop personal, interpersonal and technical skills to achieve effective partnership project management.  
<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/237>  
<http://www.equal.pt>

#### KEY POINTERS

- Conduct an assessment of the factors that both favour and obstruct working in partnership at different levels.
- Build upon partnership 'enablers'.
- Prioritise 'disenablers' and spend time addressing them.

*Find innovative ways to address contextual challenges!*

## I.3 IDENTIFICATION OF SYNERGIES

Make connections to key existing national/regional/local programmes, structures and strategies related to the focus areas of your programme.

*“ ... it is useful to coordinate with established structures and traditions of social dialogue ... ”*

Intrinsic to the promotion of an enabling environment is the identification of existing partnership synergies which can be built upon to inform the work of an OP. Here it is useful to coordinate with established structures and traditions of social dialogue in the wider context, as well as previous partnership experiences and programmes in similar areas developed by other funding agencies. Attention has been drawn by social partners to the importance of ensuring synergies between the ESF and other financial instruments used to support social partner activities such as the three autonomous budget headings exclusively dedicated to the support of European social dialogue, and the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity

– PROGRESS.<sup>24</sup> Complementing the work of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can also assist a more harmonious development approach that reinforces existing social connections and avoids funding duplication. At project level it is also important that the OP supports a multi-dimensional approach that integrates partnership as a solution for addressing problems where necessary and appropriate. Links should therefore also be sought in line with findings from the contextual analysis (see I.1. above) e.g. in the case of Austria where criteria have been developed to ascertain clearly where partnership is needed.

## COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Austria** the Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) link employment policy with other policies in order to improve the employment situation at regional and local level. The partnerships balance the interests of partners and elaborate linkages between institutions in order to find joint solutions and promote synergies between national and regional programmes such as the ESF OP Employment Austria (2007-2013) and regional ERDF OPs.

<http://www.pakte.at> <http://www.zsi.at>

In **England (UK)** the OP has sought to complement and add value to existing regional structures and strategies, rather than create new ones, by giving a leading role to Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) which have brought key regional planning and funding stakeholders together to address skills and employment priorities within each region of the country.

<http://www.esf.gov.uk/>

In **Italy** many of the 21 Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) work with Regional Tripartite Committees (RTCs). The RTCs are made up of representatives from social partners and employers' associations and act as coordination bodies in which training system and employment policies that fall under the remit of regional government are proposed, assessed and evaluated.

<http://www.lavoro.gov.it/lavoro> <http://www.isfol.it>

In the **Netherlands** the OP reinforces existing partnership arrangements between municipalities, national employment centres (CWI) and the national executive body for employee insurances (UWV) which exist outside the ESF, are promoted by law and are fairly institutionalised. They have also provided incentives and co-funding to complement sector funds run by social partners for (vocational) education and training of employees that were set up long before the ESF.

<http://www.agentschapszw.nl>

## KEY POINTERS

Use the process of identifying synergies to minimise duplication and build upon progress to date.

Carefully examine Structural Fund connections e.g. between ESF and ERDF.

*Build creatively and strategically upon what is already there!*

<sup>24</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/esf/docs/tp\\_complementarity\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/docs/tp_complementarity_en.pdf) (accessed December 3, 2008)

## I.4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN THE OP ANALYSIS AND DESIGN PROCESS

Clearly identify stakeholders and encourage them to participate in the analysis, design and writing of the Operational Programme document.

*“... it is useful to think beyond traditional partners and look imaginatively at the possibility of involving wider connections from other key groups ...”*

The contextual analysis will reveal which key stakeholders are important to involve in the Operational Programme analysis and design process. ESF regulations emphasise the need to draw upon the knowledge and expertise of key players such as social partners, government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The importance of different social actors and the contribution that they can make will differ in each Member State. In all cases, it is useful to think beyond traditional partners and look imaginatively at the possibility of involving wider connections from other key groups such as academic institutions and think tanks, business coalitions, chambers of commerce, workers education associations and

training bodies, and different civil society, voluntary or community organisations. Wider NGO connections have been highlighted as something that programmes could promote more actively.<sup>25</sup> Opportunities for this exist through links to more diverse networks and umbrella organisations that have close ties with target groups. Target groups can provide relevant and useful input into the writing of the OP document if given encouragement and the right channels for this. Ultimately the cultivation of these associations will assist better absorption of funds and ensure an improved selection of projects. Appropriate options for the involvement of different stakeholder groups in the OP design process will need to be carefully considered in relation to time, resources and context and may include meetings, consultations, surveys and workshops.

#### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN OP ANALYSIS AND DESIGN HUNGARY

In Hungary about 4000 partner organisations, including trade unions, employee interest groups and non-governmental organisations, representatives of business, education and science, were invited to advise on the direction of the OPs. The general public was also able to access and comment on the OP via a webpage and workshops were organised to discuss draft versions with relevant professional and social partners and ministerial representatives.

Each of the programming documents (including Operational Programmes, Action Plans and calls for applications) are open to the public for debate via internet for at least a two week period before final approval. Opinions can be given on a dedicated website (<http://www.nfu.hu/partnerseg>) by registered users, either as individuals or as organisational representatives.

Apart from the internet-based discussion, key relevant stakeholders (including umbrella organisations) were contacted directly for their opinions on the OPs. All feedback is answered by the Managing Authority, in many cases in cooperation with line Ministries and the documents in question are then modified if the comments are approved. In case of rejection, justification is given to explain why such a decision has been made.

This approach appears to have been judged favourably as all relevant stakeholders are involved in the drafting of interventions. Documents are thus prepared, and decisions made, based upon information that guarantees greater acceptance by wider society while at the same time ensuring transparency. Disadvantages include the time-consuming nature of this type of dialogue and the administrative capacity required, especially at the introductory phase. In addition, sometimes good ideas are rejected due to lack of resources or no close relation to the overall objectives.



Website with list of partnerships and links to information and discussion pages

Those wishing to apply a similar system should consider the availability of human resources for professionally processing the opinions given, the need to clearly define objectives when using the consultation tool and elements of the document that might particularly benefit with input from a wider audience.

#### National Development Agency, Managing Authority for Human Resource Programmes

<http://www.nfu.hu>

<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/361>

<sup>25</sup> See for example Greening Regional Development Programmes Network (GRDPN) Partnership as a tool to green Regional Development Programmes, Experience and Recommendations, GRDP, Exeter, UK, 2006; Harvey, B. The Illusion of Inclusion, Access by NGOs to the Structural Funds in the new member states of central and eastern Europe, Report for the European Citizen Action Service, July 2004

## OTHER EXAMPLES

In **England, UK** a formal country-wide consultation was conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions over a 3-month period. This exercise involved a wide range of different sector organisations including local authorities, regional and sub-regional partnerships and networks, voluntary and community organisations, private enterprises and higher education institutions, whose responses were used to make appropriate adjustments to the OP.

<http://www.esf.gov.uk>

In **Malta** stakeholder engagement in the analysis and design process for the ESF OP formed part of the overarching National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) consultation process which went through different layers of partner involvement. It included the setting up of four working groups on a number of priority areas, the organisation of a national SWOT workshop, and a number of public dialogues to which stakeholders and the general public were invited. Following inter-governmental discussion, the first draft of the OPs was published for public consultation through a press conference and formally presented for comments to the Malta Council for Social and Economic Development, a tri-partite consultative and advisory body on matters of economic and social policy representing the interests of government, unions and employers.

<http://www.ppcd.gov.mt>

## KEY POINTERS

Draw upon the mandate and expertise of NGOs and social partners.<sup>26</sup>

Acknowledge the diversity of the NGO sector and seek input from more than just 'traditional' partners.

Ensure that the timing is right and that the consultation process is clear to the stakeholders involved.

Allow sufficient time for stakeholder feedback.

Share consultation outcomes e.g. through a workshop/report/website.

**Systemise the consultation process!**

<sup>26</sup> NGO pointers throughout text are drawn from Fazi, E. *Putting Partnership in Practice: An NGO Perspective on the Key Success Factors*, EAPN, CoP Presentation, Vienna, 20th February, 2008

## 2. Operational Programme Delivery Planning

***“If stakeholders have influence on – rather than simply information about – the programming, they can input by bringing in the practical aspects of project implementation.”<sup>27</sup>***

The promotion of partnership at the delivery planning stage of the OP is focussed primarily on ensuring that the stakeholders identified in the analysis and design stage are firmly integrated into OP systems and decision-making processes. In order to ensure that stakeholder engagement is robust the identification and development of appropriate support structures that operate alongside ESF programmes may be required. At the same time clear frameworks and guidelines for participation are vital. Dedicating time to addressing stakeholder engagement systematically is a worthwhile investment as, if conducted carefully and methodically, it can impact positively on the ongoing work of the OP.

## 2.1 INTEGRATING STAKEHOLDERS INTO PROGRAMME PROCEDURES

Integrate relevant stakeholders into programme monitoring and decision-making procedures.

The systematic involvement of relevant stakeholders, including those from other programme/structures where synergies have been identified, is a useful way of strengthening the OP. This involves finding ways to ensure that appropriate representatives are involved in programme monitoring and decision-making procedures e.g. through Monitoring Committees.

***“Dedicating time to addressing stakeholder engagement systematically is a worthwhile investment ...”***

<sup>27</sup> *Greening Regional Development Programmes Network (GRDPN) Partnership as a tool to green Regional Development Programmes, Experience and Recommendations*, GRDP, Exeter, UK, 2006 p.5.

### COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Sweden** Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) act as selection groups which give priority to project proposals that best match regional ESF plans. The SFPs are established by a law that stipulates their composition and tasks. Municipal and regional politicians must form more than 50% of SFP membership. The chairperson is appointed by government and selects the remaining members from social partners, NGOs and public authorities such as county councils, administrative and labour boards. In the northern part of Sweden the Sami Parliament are also represented. The SFPs create synergy and cooperation between the ESF and ERDF and, because they are politically-rooted, give a mandate to implement contributions for the labour market in the region.

<http://www.esf.se>

In **Estonia** special Monitoring/Steering Committees have been established to approve, monitor and review measures and/or activities. The Committees include partners at both OP and priority axis levels and the majority of places are reserved for social partners. Committee members are usually from umbrella organisations whose strong grassroots connections ensure a good two-way information flow between final beneficiaries, target groups and the ministries responsible for ESF implementation.

<http://www.hm.ee>

In **Romania** integration of stakeholders is promoted at regional, county and local level through analysis and design of Employment and Social Inclusion Pacts. More than 50 working groups have worked to identify and select ideas for projects.

<http://www.fseromania.ro>

#### KEY POINTERS

Ensure widespread participation in Monitoring Committees.  
Ensure that the selection process for stakeholder input into programme procedures is transparent.

*Have clear rules for appropriate stakeholder engagement!*

### 2.2 SETTING UP MECHANISMS FOR STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN PROJECTS

Put mechanisms in place for stakeholder involvement in project planning and implementation processes and ensure that adequate time is dedicated to establishing partnership before delivery.

It is important that uniform and accountable mechanisms for stakeholder involvement in projects are developed e.g. through application forms, selection criteria, financial rules and reporting requirements. The careful elaboration of such mechanisms is helpful in ensuring that adequate time is dedicated to establishing partnership before delivery (see Annex 3: Tables 4 and 5 for information on partnership formalisation and partnership in application forms in different Member States).

#### PROMOTING PARTNERSHIP THROUGH APPLICATION FORMS IN FLANDERS

In Flanders (Belgium) the application forms for project proposals encourage partnerships in two ways:

First, the results based management philosophy behind the application form encourages project applicants to think in a holistic way (using a comprehensive problem analysis) about the issues they want to resolve and about what they want to achieve for a target group. This promotes the use of partnerships composed of relevant stakeholders when it becomes clear that no single actor is able to understand and/or tackle all the issues affecting the target group. The methodology then facilitates the reaching of a common understanding and consensus among stakeholders;

Second, the form also incorporates explicit questions regarding stakeholder involvement: it requests the identification of stakeholders and an explanation of why and how they are (or are not) involved in planning, implementation and evaluation. Next to this, the form also asks applicants to elaborate partnership management arrangements (identifying roles and responsibilities, tasks etc).

The application form is supported by a guide containing practical tools to help promoters provide high quality answers to the questions. All questions have a tool connected to them. The provision of these tools is intended to allow wide participation of stakeholders in the project formulation process by demystifying what makes a good proposal. The guide therefore also makes clear how the information in the proposal is used for appraisal.

Implementation of such an application system requires commitment from top management. The bottom-up philosophy (stakeholders coming together to figure

out a solution to a complex web of issues for the benefit of a target group) and results-oriented nature of the system can be quite revolutionary, especially in top-down cultures or where most attention goes to checking inputs rather than results, and can create negative reactions from programme personnel and stakeholders. This requires an unwavering leadership. It is also vital that programme personnel involved in appraisal of proposals have analytical minds and focus on results instead of simply complying with financial/audit rules. In this regard performance of personnel in the knowledge and use of the system should be incorporated into training and recruitment and be a key discussion item in annual personnel reviews. Programme level stakeholders should also receive training to understand what 'results oriented' means and why it is useful, while guides, experts, training and a dedicated help-desk should be put at the disposal of both projects and programme personnel. Finally, the objectives of the OP should themselves be formulated in terms of benefits for target groups in order to provide a good starting point for results oriented calls.

The system is transferable but is designed to work as a bottom-up approach to using the ESF. The call focuses on a single objective (linked closely to the OP) and then lets the stakeholders on the ground who are closest to the issues come up with a solution. The system does not work well with a top-down approach where the call itself already dictates what projects should be doing in terms of activities. Obviously implementing such a system has its challenges because it requires adjusting to new ways of working. However, as a project manager who has undertaken training in the new proposal methodology states, "This requires a serious switch in our thinking. But it also is part of becoming a more professional organisation."

#### ESF Agency Flanders

<http://www.esf-agentschap.be>

<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/271>

#### OTHER EXAMPLES

In **England, UK** ESF funds are distributed through 'Co-financing Organisations' that are able to bring together ESF and domestic funding for employment and skills and complement domestic programmes by contracting organisations or 'providers' that deliver ESF projects on the ground. Small community grants are made available to support the participation of voluntary and community organisations in the OP which would otherwise not have been able to become involved.

<http://www.esf.gov.uk/>

In the **Czech Republic** and **Hungary** the Managing Authority has provided a standard contract to ensure that partnerships are in compliance with the legal framework.

<http://www.esfcr.cz>

<http://www.hefop.hu> <http://www.nfu.hu>

<http://www.equalhungary.hu>

#### KEY POINTERS

Make relevant documentation on OP delivery planning available to relevant stakeholders in advance.  
Ensure that OP staff understand and have appropriate skills for chosen stakeholder engagement strategy.

*Invest time in developing a clear understanding of the added value of working in partnership!*

#### 2.3 DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Use dedicated partnership support structures alongside the programme to provide assistance, resources and advice on partnership coordination, management and development.

In a number of Member States organisations exist to promote and support partnership nationally. Many of these bodies have a long history that can reinforce and assist the development of partnership in ESF OPs at both governance and project levels. Some countries have found it necessary to invest in the establishment of such structures in order to assist their work. In both cases the support function offered by these bodies can play a vital role.

#### POBAL: SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIP IN IRELAND

Pobal is a company that was established by the Irish Government in agreement with the EU in 1992. It has responsibility for the national management, coordination and support of partnerships. In addition, it manages several other programmes on behalf of government (e.g. include the Community Services Programme, Equality for Women Measure, Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, National Childcare Investment Programme and Rural Transport Programme), a number of which are EU funded.

Pobal operates under company law and legal requirements that apply to public bodies. Its role in relation to partnerships includes developmental and technical support, appraisal of plans based on clear criteria and guidelines (which it publishes),

allocation of budgets, financial, performance management and audit functions, evaluation and research. It also identifies best practice and informs policy on the basis of analysis of the lessons learned through the work of the bodies funded.

The role of an intermediary such as Pobal is important to the establishment and development of partnership. An intermediary is well placed to provide overall coherence and coordination to a partnership's work and to facilitate the aligning of 'top-down' national/OP requirements with bottom-up responses. It can also provide tools and support to enable high-level goals to be operationalised in order to meet local/county level needs. National reporting and accountability requirements imply the development of, and training in, procedures and guidelines. The intermediary is a key consultative and facilitative 'space' that enables policy and procedures to become a reality, while also providing sufficient flexibility to unlock local commitment and ownership.

Pobal recognises that partnership support needs to be strategic with due regard to the evolving policy and institutional environment, and to the challenges facing partnership organisations at the different stages in their development. In the Irish context, in the early period, this involved training and guidelines regarding the management and control systems expected, setting high standards in HR practice and good governance. It also involved advice on the 'how to' in the establishment of partnership structures, including methodologies likely to be successful in engaging participation of key stakeholder groups. It required skills in deepening partnership processes and building commitment to the principles and focus of the work.

Later stages of partnership have benefited from specialist expertise with respect to programme content areas. Pobal's formal links to government departments through, for example, seconded staff, assist in advancing alignment between the work of partnerships and state agencies, and the development of framework and protocol agreements. In its programme management work Pobal is ready, if appropriate, to take corrective or remedial action where a partnership is not functioning optimally or where there are issues of concern. In this regard, a key need is the ability to take the necessary steps on the basis of clearly publicised and understood criteria and procedures.

A challenging review and learning culture has been promoted with the implementation of case study and research strategies. Utilising the knowledge gained through an analysis of partnership work, Pobal is able to comment authoritatively and objectively on the impacts, the successes and lessons learned. Effective links with partnerships, state agencies and other bodies have also enabled Pobal to contribute positively to the policy evolution process.

#### **Pobal**

<http://www.pobal.ie>

<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/236>

## OTHER EXAMPLES

In **Austria** partnership projects are provided with support, advice, information and exchanges through a neutral intermediary body, the Co-ordination Unit of Austrian Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) or "Kooo".

<http://www.pakte.at> <http://www.zsi.at>

<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/241>

In **Romania** Technical Secretariats are regional structures created to support the Regional Pacts for Employment and Social Inclusion in general management, logistics, creation of baseline information, project development, fund-raising and the development of the skills and competencies of partnership members. The pact structure integrates a policy level regional partnership with operational county partnerships. These structures are in place through ESF funded projects (a special priority area in the Human Resources Development OP) and their creation was supported by the Pacts and the Managing Authority of the Human Resources Development OP. The development of partnership skills and competencies is being assisted by Technical Assistance projects (funded by PHARE) and will run until November 2009. This preparation also seeks to develop sustainability over the three years of the first funded project. In Romania the principle of partnership is also strongly encouraged and supported in other ways e.g. in November 2008 the MA held a workshop to encourage relevant national institutions to initiate Communities of Practice around the horizontal priorities of the Programme. These structures will cross-cut with the geographical partnerships and assist in creating a wider partnership learning environment.

<http://www.fseromania.ro>

## KEY POINTERS

Use a partnership support structure to promote partnership development by:

- raising awareness about the added value of working in partnership
- assisting with dissemination exchange on particular partnership experiences
- producing targeted information in relation to specific partnering issues and challenges

*Draw on the experience and knowledge of intermediary organisations!*

### 3. Calls For and Appraisal Of Proposals

**“At this stage partnership projects need reassurance from Managing Authorities that the application and appraisal process is safe and just.”<sup>28</sup>**

The OP analysis, design and planning stages are followed by calls for proposals which are then subject to an appraisal process that judges whether a proposal merits funding. Attention at this stage is primarily focussed on using the mechanisms for stakeholder engagement in projects (outlined in 2.2. above) and ensuring that they are acted upon. This involves ensuring that the concept of partnering is clearly incorporated in proposals and that criteria for assessing why a partnership approach has been adopted and how it will be implemented are effectively used. In addition to checking that partnership has been integrated into proposals during the appraisal period, efforts can also be made to draw upon the expertise of suitably qualified stakeholders to assess applications and make a fair and balanced judgement as to their quality and relevance.

#### 3.1 ACTIVELY SUPPORTING INCORPORATION OF PARTNERSHIP IN PROJECT PROPOSALS

Actively provide clear advice and information to project promoters on how to incorporate working in partnership into a proposal.

**“Attention at this stage is primarily focussed on using the mechanisms for stakeholder engagement in projects and ensuring that they are acted upon.”**

The integration of partnership in funding proposals can be actively promoted by MAs and Intermediate Bodies. This support can be offered through information sessions, training, helplines, other meeting opportunities and the use of dedicated web-based information systems. It is important that such information is shared systematically and includes specific assistance on how to deal with finances when working in partnership as this is an area that partnership projects have found particularly challenging.

#### COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Austria** project applications for “Integration of marginalised people into the labour market” (Priority 3b) are only eligible if delivered and implemented by Austrian partnerships or TEPs. Kooo, the Austrian-wide TEP Co-ordination Unit, supports development and implementation of projects via specific activities such as jointly developed quality criteria (by the TEPs and the ESF Managing Authority in preparation for the call), the “3b Learning cycle” process (during implementation), and ongoing individual partnership advice (for both project development and implementation).  
<http://www.pakte.at> <http://www.zsi.at>

28 Comment from partnership project interviewee, June 2008

In **Romania** a Technical Secretariat provides training and coaching for all actors to support partnership consolidation, development and management tasks. In order to address a poor collaborative culture and lack of experience of working in partnership, training sessions have also been organised for project promoters in all 8 regions of Romania. The aim is to ensure the quality and quantity of projects by informing project promoters about calls and application procedures, supporting them in the elaboration of solid project proposals and increasing their knowledge of project management. The training is also expected to increase competencies for working in partnership by providing good practice examples that emphasise the benefits and skills required for working in this way.

<http://www.fseromania.ro>

#### KEY POINTERS

Provide active support for partnership project preparation and appraisal. Clearly demonstrate that partnership information is judged seriously in application and assessment processes.

Monitor and evaluate how well partnership criteria in applications are working.

**Streamline partnership application advice and ensure that it is clear and simple!**

#### 3.2 ASSESSING PARTNERSHIP RATIONALE AND IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS

Rigorously assess the rationale for setting up a partnership and the appropriateness of the proposed implementation mechanism in project proposals so that the partnership is likely to add value and be executed well.

This involves using appraisal procedures (as set out in 2.2 above) for reviewing how partnership is addressed in a project application, with criteria for assessing what the added value of working in partnership brings to a project. It is vitally important that project applicants understand that such assessment mechanisms will be acted upon and are thus encouraged to think carefully about how partnering enables them to reach their goals and meet the needs of target groups. Examining how the project will work in partnership, including the delivery mechanisms to be adopted and the division of roles and responsibilities, will also inform judgement about whether the partnership project will be well-executed.

### COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Flanders (Belgium)** the assessment criteria for project proposals incorporate explicit questions regarding stakeholder involvement and partnership added value as well as roles and responsibilities. (See 2.2 above).

<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/271>

In **Hungary** the mechanism for project implementation has to be presented in application forms details of tasks and responsibilities and a correlating budget breakdown. In the project plan all forms of cooperation should be presented, including working groups, common internet sites and managerial meetings on project implementation. Based on this information assessors and decision making committees have the opportunity to examine the added value of partnership to a given project. In essence, partners have to fulfil the same eligibility criteria as the project promoter.

<http://www.hefop.hu> <http://www.nfu.hu>

In **Ireland** Pobal undertakes a rigorous assessment of strategic plans and particularly the capacity of a local partnership to effectively implement the plan. This includes an examination of the previous partnership track record, organisational and staffing composition and structure, as well as proposed strategies and methodologies.

<http://www.pobal.ie>

### KEY POINTERS

Spend time raising awareness about the added value of working in partnership at project level.  
Ensure that information about incorporating partnership into project proposals is clear and accessible.

*Spend time in assessing the extent to which applicants genuinely seek to work in partnership!*

### 3.3 DRAWING UPON THE EXPERTISE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN ASSESSING PROPOSALS

Ensure that relevant stakeholder expertise is integrated into drawing up calls for, and appraisal of, proposals while guarding against conflicts of interest.

The partnership principle can be further endorsed at programme level by making good use of stakeholder expertise during project appraisal processes. The participation of suitably qualified and experienced stakeholders with knowledge of relevant issues and target groups is a useful way of ensuring that project proposals are rigorously assessed. However, it is also important that such involvement is accountable and that conflicts of interest are avoided. This requires incorporating clear selection and review procedures for the evaluation of appraisals.

### COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In the **Czech Republic** relevant stakeholders are involved in preparation of individual grant schemes in the form of submitting comments or discussing the schemes in expert working groups. The detailed composition of stakeholders involved differs according to the content of the scheme. For project evaluators in the Human Resources and Employment OP, there is a database where anyone fulfilling the given criteria (prior experience, expertise in the relevant area, education etc.) can register on-line. After this registration the person is offered a general training for project evaluators. The training culminates in a test that includes a trial evaluation of a project. If the test is passed successfully, the person becomes a project evaluator and can be contacted by a body launching calls (generally intermediary bodies or the Managing Authority). The evaluator then has to pass a specific training for each individual call after which s/he can evaluate projects. The database enables on-line working with the evaluators and new functionalities will include random choice of evaluators and their scoring by the bodies launching the calls. The projects that receive a score of at least 65 out of a 100 from the evaluators can afterwards be approved by the Selection Committee. The composition of Selection Committees differs according to the content of the grant schemes, but generally includes deputies of social partners, NGOs, regions, ministries, labour offices etc.

<http://www.esfcr.cz>

In **Slovakia** participation of social partners and regional and local government authorities is being applied to all implementation phases of the OP Education, including evaluation and selection of submitted grant applications. To ensure fairness project evaluator selection is based on prior experience, impartiality, expertise and equal opportunity principles. Evaluators are provided with training and projects selected by them are approved by a Selection Committee with representation from the education sector, self-governing regions, social partners and civil society.

<http://www.esf.gov.sk>

## KEY POINTERS

Develop accountable appraisal systems for proposals.  
Invest in training programmes for proposal evaluators.

*Be transparent about appraisal procedures!*

## 4. Animation during Implementation

*“Rather than merely issuing policies and enforcing rules, MAs and Intermediate Bodies should be forthcoming with joint solutions to problems and difficulties.”<sup>29</sup>*

As projects are being implemented it is important that they have access to, and are provided with, adequate support from programme staff. Working in partnership is not an easy process, particularly at the start of a project. Apart from the time involved in developing appropriate structures and procedures for working together, combining different organisational styles and perspectives can create challenges and even conflict. Managing Authorities and Intermediary Bodies can assist in overcoming difficulties by offering advice and guidance to projects in the form of information resources, personal contact and partnership skills training. In addition, those partners who may not have adequate expertise or resources can be encouraged to work in partnership through the provision of capacity-building opportunities.

## 4.1 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT TO PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

Give projects continuous proactive support on working in partnership throughout the different phases of their project cycle.

Support for projects to work in partnerships goes beyond supporting the writing of a proposal (see 3.1 above) e.g. through ongoing provision of partnership information materials and guidance, access to partnership tools, partnership skills-training opportunities and participation in COPs. Rather than simply waiting for projects to make contact when partnering challenges arise it is useful to provide information in advance and to be proactive in offering advice so that an accessible relationship is developed. This may require having dedicated staff responsible for different elements of partnership projects, information systems and training sessions. The more systemised and less ad hoc that this partnership support is the better as projects are then able to pursue their work with confidence and an assurance that they will have assistance as and when required. This is particularly important for issues related to finance as many partnership projects are uncertain about how to ensure they are abiding by financial regulations.

*“Support for projects to work in partnerships goes beyond supporting the writing of a proposal ...”*

<sup>29</sup> Comment from partnership project interviewee, June 2008

## COUNTRY EXAMPLES

In **Austria** the nationwide TEP Co-ordination Unit (Kooo) serves to support the various projects carried out by Austrian partnerships and their partner institutions as well as to cultivate, implement and further develop TEPs. Joint activities are set up by Kooo together with TEPs, thereby providing a framework for multilateral advice between partnerships, as well as between TEPs and actors at national level. <http://www.pakte.at> <http://www.zsi.at>

In **Ireland** Pobal provides partnerships with developmental and technical assistance as well as guidance on organisational management and governance and specialist training around specific issues. This can include provision of information material on programme target groups, feedback on performance and strategies, or training inputs and discussions designed to address specific areas of challenge within the work. A liaison system in which 12 officers service approximately 70 partnerships between them, attending board and management meetings, also provides useful support to projects as they develop. In addition, events are organised as required at regional and national levels for key partnership staff and board members. <http://www.pobal.ie>

In **Portugal** during the EQUAL programme constant support was provided to projects through seminars, guides, workshops, visits and the allocation of a monitoring 'tutor' to each project. Managing Authority personnel developed an accessible and proactive style with warm personal connections to project partners and this, alongside opportunities for meeting together, mainly through EQUAL thematic networks, has helped to build and reinforce partnership skills and create a collaborative culture which strongly contributes to improved partnership work and innovation. <http://www.equal.pt>

## KEY POINTERS

Encourage a strong shared partnering culture among ESF promoters.  
Look innovatively at the opportunities and methods for encouraging this.

*Be proactive and coordinated in project support!*

## 4.2 OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAPACITY-BUILDING OF PROGRAMME LEVEL PARTNERS

Build the capacity of stakeholders to actively participate in programme governance.

Many stakeholders refrain from working in partnership or linking up with other social actors because they feel that they do not have the skills, knowledge or resources to engage in this form of interaction. Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies can do much to assist with this by offering partnership capacity-building opportunities to equip such stakeholders to work collaboratively at governance level with greater confidence and understanding. Capacity-building opportunities can be provided through dedicated workshops and training sessions to specific groups.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PARTNERS IN ITALY

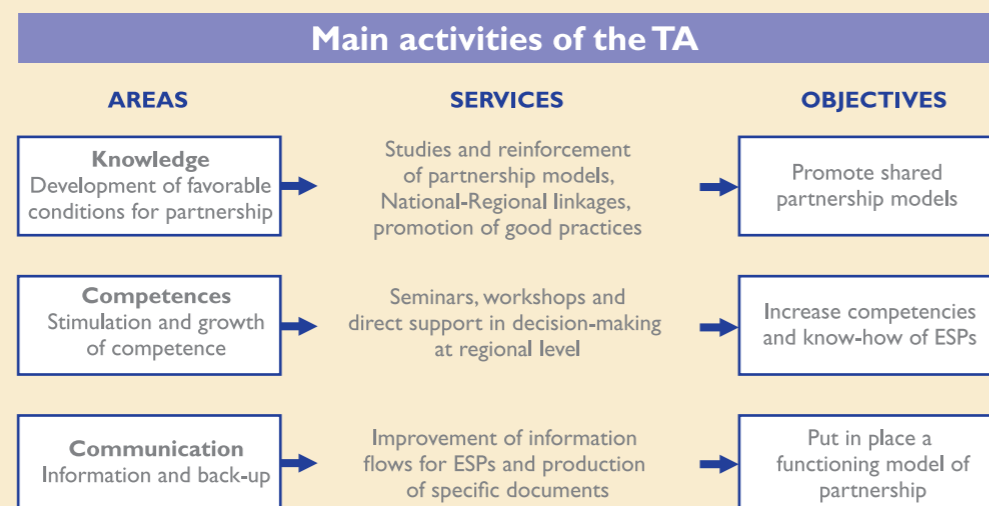
In southern Italy a Technical Assistance (TA) structure has been established at national and regional level to offer partnership support to Economic and Social Partners (ESP) by hosting planning meetings, workshops on key themes, documentation for improving ESP activity and direct support to ESPs through focussed analyses and studies.

In 2003 it was recognised that the integration of ESPs in programming was very weak, especially at regional level. This was manifested in the poor contribution of ESPs in decision-making; weak dialogue between the Public Administration (PA) and ESPs; potential conflicts of interest and unrepresentative agreements; lack of continuity in programme engagement and gaps between programmes and territories. The negative effects on a development strategy oriented towards developing local resources were clearly apparent.

In order to address this situation a TA to ESPs was established in 2005 with the aim of supporting ESPs to participate in regional and sectoral programmes. It was agreed that this would be a pilot programme until June 2008 and, if successful, would be replicated in the new programming period.

In order to promote coherence the National Managing Authorities of the ESF launched a tender calling for the management of the TA. This was won by Iseri Europa, an Economic Research and Consultancy organisation specialising in European Regional Policies. A Steering Committee, including the National Managing Authority for Objective 1 Regions and ESP representatives was then established to control the activities of TA based on six-month plans. The President is an ESP representative and ESPs have the majority on the Steering Committee.

The main objectives of the TA are to: promote a stable and organised relationship between PAs and ESPs; increase the skills of ESPs in Structural Fund procedures and rules; support the ESPs in territorial animation and transmission of knowledge; and define and introduce a new and more efficient partnership model.



The TA makes use of a range of tools including: partnership meetings between the ESPs and Managing Authority in order to plan activities on the basis of their needs and objectives; workshops with presentations and discussion on critical themes; summary reports of interventions and documents oriented towards improving ESPs knowledge and activities e.g. on state aid, evaluation, use of national resources, etc. and direct support to ESPs with specific analyses and dossier preparation before a meeting or for supporting an ESP proposal for funding.

Results have shown that there has been constant and direct involvement of about 200-250 representatives of ESPs and about 15-20 regional and national departments. There has also been a general improvement in relationships between the PAs and ESPs and increased participation of weaker ESPs (third sector, environmental and equal opportunity associations) in programme development. Knowledge has been shared widely through documents and guides and Social and Economic partnership has, as a result, been an important focus for discussion. In addition, this new partnership model that the TA has promoted has been adopted in the 2007-13 National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF).

Setting up the TA has not been easy. Political influence, tackling different capacity levels, a high number of often conflicting relationships, and continuous changes in the PA agenda have made TA development difficult but it has nonetheless proved useful and the experience will continue. It has shown that partnership needs a systematic framework that connects political and technical levels and promotes territorial dissemination of the value of partnership. It is also important to recognise that although ESPs need support they do not have to become “experts”, they simply need

access to relevant information via instruments adapted to their context and habits (i.e. ESPs are not habitual web users).

The TA experience is transferable but, according to Ismeri Europa, requires careful adaptation to the context. In countries where partnership working is embedded it can facilitate and improve partnership results while in situations where there is less experience of working in collaboration it can promote more continuous relationships and introduce a method for integrating partnership into the programme cycle. TA staff essentially have to work as facilitators and adapt flexibly to the changing needs of the different actors.

#### Ismeri Europa

<http://www.ismerieuropa.com> <http://www.partenariato.org>  
<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/240>

#### OTHER EXAMPLES

In **Malta** the limited administrative capacity of social partners and civil society organisations is being addressed through the focus area of intervention under Priority Axis 4 of the ESF OP which deals with the promotion of more effective social and civil dialogue in Malta. To further facilitate participation of social partners, a series of presentations have been provided to social partners and NGOs on issues related to Structural Funds.

<http://www.ppcd.gov.mt>

In **Slovakia** a possible model for that could be developed using ESF technical assistance was offered by a PHARE funded project in the accession year of 2004. This technical assistance project provided training to all members of Monitoring Committees and stakeholders on the role of these structures and their importance for good programme development. Legal issues and the composition and roles of structures were covered with practical examples from other Member States and in some cases team-building schemes were used to foster the better joint working of different actors.

#### KEY POINTERS

Providing targeted capacity-building opportunities for ‘weaker’ stakeholders with:

- Information on the ESF and other funds
- Financial and project management training
- Networking opportunities

*Use technical assistance to strengthen the ability of stakeholders to take part in programmes and projects!*

## 5. Monitoring and Evaluation

**“Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of partnerships will enhance our knowledge about working collaboratively and inform decisions on the potential of partnerships for replication and scale-up at the levels of both policy and practice.”<sup>30</sup>**

Monitoring and evaluation of partnership at both programme and project level are implicit throughout the programme cycle and should not be viewed as an add-on at the end of the process. At programme level tracking how far stakeholders are engaged in the OPs work and making adjustments for this is important while at project level monitoring will focus on assessing the status of the partnership and dealing with problems that may arise as it develops. Partnership can be promoted in evaluation by ensuring that stakeholders actively participate in both programme and project partnership reviews. It is also vital that efforts are placed on ensuring that the learning from monitoring and evaluation processes, especially concerning the added value of partnership, is shared at both project and programme level so that working in partnership is improved and reinforced, and relevant lessons are extracted which can be fed back into ongoing practice.

### 5.1. REPORTING ON THE STATUS OF PARTNERSHIP AT PROJECT LEVEL

Pay attention to the status of the partnership at project level so that problems are identified in time and resolved satisfactorily.

Programme and project managers need to ensure that some form of tracking process is in place to see if partners are working as planned at project level and/or if there are challenges that need addressing such as conflicts, drop-outs, dominating partners etc. Lack of attention to such issues can impede the smooth development of partnering activities so visits, meetings and workshops may be required to identify and assist with solutions to them. It is important that monitoring is systematic and that the processes for it are clearly understood and communicated to projects. If time and resources are scarce, a useful way of addressing issues is to provide opportunities for bringing projects together, either physically, through dedicated meetings and workshops, or virtually, via e-mail or web-based discussion platforms, to share progress and discuss challenges together.

<sup>30</sup> Caplan, K, Gomme, J., Mugabi, J. & Stott, L. (2007) *Assessing Partnership Performance: Understanding the drivers for success*, BPD, London, 2007

## THE ESF INFORMATION SYSTEM IN PORTUGAL

In Portugal partnership reporting has been assisted by the development of an internet-based project management information system. Through this platform materials such as lists of candidates, visits, declarations of expenses etc. are made available to both the Managing Authority and project partners. All ESF grant recipients can register on the system and access and disseminate information easily. The system's transparency has reinforced confidence between both partners and the Managing Authority.

All the information included in the application form for funding is accessible to members for consultation but it can only be edited/ filled in by the appropriate representative of the Partnership. The application form includes the same information about each one of the organisation's members, this includes: identification and the CV of the person responsible of the project for each organisation, members' contributions to each activity of the project and a detailed budget from each member. The system shares Partnership Development Agreements which clarify the responsibilities of each partner and how the decision-making process works. The application form for funding is validated electronically by all partners and only the "acceptance plan" of the funding is signed on paper after approval. For the rest, paper forms have been totally eliminated.

The Information System for Partnerships provides added value to partnership projects because it:

- Enables formalisation of the application for the Partnership
- Allows transparency and the sharing of information between all partners, and between partners and the Managing Authority, as well as enables partners to monitor physical and financial data such as payment authorisations, expenses statements, physical information, visits, etc.
- Ensures accountability regarding compliance with funding rules, especially with regard to the "verification" and "validation" of the legal situation of each partner
- Simplifies communication between the Managing Authority and the Partnership projects as access to the same information limits the number of requests for information and clarification
- Enables more rigorous procedures with electronic validations and automatised operations substituting paper use, allowing for less errors in applications, and resulting in benefits in terms of time, resources and quality of work
- Allows public access to information about different approved and developed projects

**EQUAL Portugal**  
<http://www.equal.pt>

**KEY POINTERS**

Develop consistent 'tracking' procedures.  
Ensure a focus on partnership in project monitoring and reporting.  
Share resources and tools on the process of working in partnership.

*Conduct regular health checks on partnership projects!*

## 5.2. PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

Ensure that there is clear stakeholder participation in evaluation of partnership interventions at both programme and project level.

*“... it is important that evaluation explores what the added value of partnership has been for partners, stakeholders and target groups.”*

Evaluation or assessment of the performance and effectiveness of partnership at both programme and project level is important to undertake in order to demonstrate results for target groups and inform future practice. If evaluation is conducted as a collaborative process its purpose, direction and expectations can be negotiated among relevant stakeholders and enable learning for all involved. Participatory evaluation is helpful in reinforcing and promoting partnership and can be done through self-evaluation methods or employing an external evaluator. A mixture of both internal and external evaluation can also be used e.g. peer reviews. In order to promote partnership more deeply it is important that evaluation explores what the added value of partnership has been for partners, stakeholders and target groups.

**PARTNERSHIP PEER REVIEWS IN ENGLAND**

In England (UK) 'Peer Review Quality Statements' were developed for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). The peer review tool was established to help partnerships undertake a self-assessment with peers in a constructive and supportive environment. The reviews were conducted by teams drawn from a number of LSPs and each lasted one day. LSP members, such as local authority members and officers, public, private voluntary and community sector stakeholders worked together in a panel that visited a particular partnership as "critical friends"

in order to explore their performance. They used quality statements as a guide to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership which were grouped into "strategic", "inclusive", "action-focused", "performance managed", "efficient" and "learning and development" characteristics. The process offered an excellent learning opportunity for all involved and also developed informal networks between partnerships.

**Warwick Consortium Research on Local Strategic Partnerships**  
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wbs/research/lgc/research/consortium/lsp/>

**OTHER EXAMPLES**

In **Flanders** (Belgium) EQUAL partnerships were offered a standardised questionnaire to score projects on key implementation issues as well as results. Each partner was encouraged to use this tool for discussion by exploring divergences in scores.  
<http://www.esf-agentschap.be>

In **Portugal** the EQUAL DP self-evaluation exercises promoted by Programme Management reinforced both partnership internal cohesion and dynamics as well as collective participation and learning through sharing of contributions from different members.  
<http://www.equal.pt>

**KEY POINTERS**

Use a mixture of internal and external evaluation methods.  
Draw on, and encourage, diverse stakeholder opinions to deepen partnership evaluation.

*Make evaluation processes interesting and engaging so that they promote learning!*

## 5.3 FEEDING BACK SYSTEMATICALLY INTO PRACTICE

Promote and encourage ongoing learning from partnership successes and failures at both programme and project level and ensure that lessons from these are acted upon.

*“... the needs of different audiences at programme and project levels need to be carefully identified.”*

Material that shares lessons about partnership is required by practitioners, planners and policy makers in order to improve the way partnerships are promoted and supported. Partnership tools, tips, guidelines, case studies and policy recommendations can all assist with filling gaps in our knowledge about how partnerships function and ensure a clearer understanding of what works, and what does not. As well as collecting this material it is important to ensure that it is appropriately disseminated and acted upon. Tailoring data effectively and taking into account sectoral, contextual and cultural variables are vital if partnering knowledge and skills are to be spread and sharpened. In order to ensure that learning information is ‘fit for purpose’ the needs of different audiences at programme and project levels need to be carefully identified. A useful distinction can be made between ‘internal’ audiences, such as partnership beneficiaries, partner representatives and staff from partner organisations/programmes, and ‘external audiences’ that encompass funders, policy makers, the media and members of the general public.<sup>31</sup> Feeding partnership learning effectively back into practice depends upon the selection of the ‘right’ information format for these different groups.

#### THE NATIONAL THEMATIC GROUP (NTG) ON PARTNERSHIP IN SWEDEN

In **Sweden** the National Thematic Group on Partnership, supported by the Swedish ESF Council, was established to gather and disseminate experiences from the EQUAL programme. It now works to share knowledge about partnerships more widely through interactive research, regular work group meetings, participation in conferences, the development of papers and publications, as well as a web page.

31 Tennyson, R. *The Partnering Toolbook*, IBLF & GAIN, 2004 p.35.



The website of the NTG on Partnership

The NTG is composed of: a Secretary responsible for coordination; a Research Team composed of a research leader and a PhD student; and a working group with representation from 10 EQUAL DPs, DP coordinators, partners, evaluators and the ESF Council.

Close contact with the Swedish ESF-council, at both leadership and employee level, ensures that NTG experiences are taken into consideration at OP level e.g. dialogue has taken place with programme writers and OP research is integrated into all the work of the NTG Partnership.

The activities of the NTG include:

- **Working group meetings** – six meetings are held each year in order to share information about partnership. During the meetings planned activities enable an organised exchange of knowledge and ensure joint analysis of research material. A principle of openness and honesty is promoted during which different opinions are equally valued.
- **Participation in conferences and meetings** – the NTG arranges and participates in conferences and meetings involving the ESF Council, DPs and other organisations working in the same thematic areas. This work is conducted flexibly and is based upon demand and practical relevance.
- **Research** – research is conducted using interactive methodologies that combine informal contact, interviews and questionnaires. This approach ensures that research has both practical and immediate relevance.
- **Developing papers and publications** – including field survey reports, inquiry reports, an “Idea Book” and conference magazines which create an interest in partnership.
- **Web page** – where access to information about Partnership and the work of the NTG is shared ([www.ntg-partnerskap.se](http://www.ntg-partnerskap.se))

The NTG bases its success on an active working secretary, interested participants, informal discussion with a broad range of stakeholders, and the ability to combine concrete results that are useful for both participants and wider society, all of which promote a culture of active learning.

#### National Thematic Group on Partnership

<http://www.ntg-partnerskap.se>

<http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/242>

#### OTHER EXAMPLES

In Austria the intermediary body Kooo uses a well-established information network to respond to, share and balance information between TEPs and the ESF Managing Authority. The network makes use of an online restricted access platform to share learning between TEPs with downloadable documents such as partnership contracts, rules of procedure, programmes, application forms, progress reports and case studies which revolve around 'story-telling'. All available documents are filled in on an ongoing basis. In addition Kooo has also developed a method for learning from failures through a "TEP Open Reflection Cycle" which seeks to develop and build upon trust between actors.

<http://www.pakte.at> <http://www.zsi.at>

#### KEY POINTERS

Develop information links with wider networks and institutions that promote partnership.

Find ways of sharing and learning from failures as well as successes.

*Use the learning from partnership experiences to inform future practice!*



## REFERENCES

### Key websites

- Community of Practice on Partnerships in the ESF  
<http://partnership.esflive.eu>
- European Social Fund  
[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/esf/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/index_en.htm)

### European Commission Publications

- *Complementarity and Consistency with other EU Financial Instruments, European Social Fund support to social partners in the 2007-2013 period*  
[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/esf/docs/tp\\_complementarity\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/docs/tp_complementarity_en.pdf)
- *EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships Learning from the experience of EQUAL partnerships, 2004*  
[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/partnerguidelo\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/partnerguidelo_en.pdf)
- *European Governance, A White Paper, Brussels, 25.7.2001, COM (2001) 428 Final*  
[http://ec.europa.eu/governance/white\\_paper/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/governance/white_paper/index_en.htm)
- *Governance and partnership at a national, regional and project basis in the field of regional policy 2008/2064(INI)*  
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2008-0492&language=EN>
- *Partnership Development Toolkit, A partnership oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation guide for facilitators of EQUAL Development and Transnational Partnerships, 2005*  
[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/pdtoolkit\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/pdtoolkit_en.pdf)
- *Partnership in Cohesion Policy, European Social Fund support to social partners in the 2007-2013 period*  
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## ANNEXES

### Annex I: The Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF

The contents of this guidebook have been developed from the work of the Community of Practice (CoP) on Partnership in the European Social Fund (ESF).<sup>32</sup> The CoP was formed in 2006 by the European Commission and the EQUAL Managing Authorities of Austria, Czech Republic, Flanders, Malta and Portugal. Its aims were to capitalise on the experience of partnership in the EQUAL Programme<sup>33</sup> and to take into account the emphasis placed on partnership in ESF regulation for the new Structural Funds period.

Etienne Wenger, who coined the term “communities of practice”, describes them as, “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”<sup>34</sup> The CoP’s mission is to stimulate more creative partnership thinking and implementation in the Structural Funds, especially in the ESF, by convincing programme managers of the importance of partnership, and enabling them to provide high quality support to partnerships in a Structural Fund context. CoP members include representatives from the Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies of ESF Operational Programmes. In addition experts, project managers and partnership coordinators and managers from other European funds who possess the necessary expertise, and are committed to supporting partnerships, are also able to join. Important linkages have also been established with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).

Since its inception the activities of the CoP on Partnership have included:

- ✓ **The development of a web platform** for information exchange and discussion Community of Practice on Partnerships in the ESF <http://partnership.esflive.eu>
- ✓ **Regular bi-monthly basecamp meetings** in different Member States during which key issues, challenges and practices relating to programme support for partnership have been shared and discussed. <http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/148>
- ✓ **A Partnership Exchange Event** in Malta in January 2008 which enabled participants from different Member States to showcase successful practices and debate and discuss some of the issues involved in promoting partnership. <http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/226>

<sup>32</sup> Full details can be found on the CoP website: <http://partnership.esflive.eu/>

<sup>33</sup> Working in partnership has been central to the ESF-funded EQUAL Programme (2001-8) which sought to find new and innovative ways of addressing discrimination and inequality in the European labour market. In EQUAL, Development Partnerships (DPs) brought together a range of actors such as local and regional authorities, training bodies, public employment services, NGOs, enterprises and social partners, and stimulated cooperation at various local, regional, national and transnational levels.

<sup>34</sup> Wenger, E. (2004). Communities of practice: A brief introduction <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm> (accessed June 30, 2007)

- ✓ **A study visit programme** involving an exchange between a small team of CoP Premium members and a selected ESF Managing Authority or Intermediate Body in order to share viewpoints and information on partnership in particular country settings. Interviews with relevant stakeholders at programme and project level prior to a workshop and site visit in which findings and recommendations are shared. The first study visit took place in Flanders (Belgium) in November 2008.

These activities have resulted in a range of outputs, including:

- ✓ **Compilation and analysis of country fiches** – responding to a series of questions about how partnership has been approached in 18 Member States (Austria, Flanders (Belgium), Czech Republic, England (UK), Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden) and analysing the information gathered from these (See Annex 2). <http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/223>
- ✓ **A Key Success Factor Framework** – outlining how MAs and Intermediate Bodies can support the development of effective partnerships at different stages of the OP cycle (see Annex 3). <http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/224>
- ✓ **Collection of good practices** – provision of information on particular tools and practices that have been used in different Member States to support and promote partnership (See Annex 4). <http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/254>

In order to develop the guidebook, the information derived from these sources has been further supplemented by:

- ✓ **Desk-based research** – identifying and collating appropriate tools, practices resources and tips from different Member States and wider partnership sources.
- ✓ **Interviews** – face-to-face and telephone interviews with CoP members from Austria, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Sweden (July-September 2007); OP Managers from Bulgaria, England, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and the Netherlands (July-September 2008); and Project Coordinators from Austria, Ireland, Portugal and Sweden (July-September 2008). Interviews were semi-structured and sought to identify challenges and good practices when promoting partnerships at programme level.
- ✓ **Expert input** – a small group of partnership experts offered comments and insights on the content of the guide with a view to ensuring appropriate focus and cover at a workshop in London in October 2008 and in follow-up from this.
- ✓ **Discussion and revision among members of the CoP** – Premium members shared information, provided contacts and discussed and revised the content of the guidebook throughout the process of its development.

## Annex 2: Partnership Country Fiche Template

How many OPs are there in your Member State? Do they have very different provisions in terms of partnership?
Does partnership have a geographical focus in your Member State's OP(s)? If so, national, regional, sub-regional e.g. county, district, group of municipalities, municipality, etc.?
Is partnership linked to specific thematic issues / objectives (incl. possible targeting of specific groups / links with policy) in the OP(s)?
Please specify further what is understood as "partnership" in the OP(s) in your Member State? (See Note 1)
What requirements are there for partnerships to become formally established in your OP's? (e.g. they need to: write a declaration with intent to work together, prepare a more detailed partnership agreement detailing tasks/roles, launch a call for tenders to acquire partners through contracts or join up in a separate legal entity)
What specific questions regarding partnership are asked in (previous/current) ESF application forms?
Types of organisations typically involved in partnership (e.g. social partners, NGOs, companies, academia, etc.) in the OP(s)
If partnerships are embedded within existing national, regional or local structures, how are these different levels linked to each other and how does this facilitate mainstreaming in the OP(s)? (See Note 2)
How do the choices of the OPs in terms of partnership address the EC regulation? (See Note 3)
Are there major differences with how partnership was organised in the past OP(s)? Why was the choice made to change? Did EQUAL have influence on this choice and, if yes, how?
What are the strong points of the way the OP(s) organise(s) partnership?
What are the draw-backs of the way the OP(s) organise(s) partnership?
What measures, if any, are being taken to build on the strong points and reduce the draw-backs in the OP(s)?
Contact name
Contact address
Contact email, phone, fax

**Note 1**

- ✓ function of partnership within the OP: ranging from implementation of activities on the ground (e.g. through projects) to high level strategic decision making (e.g. in monitoring committee etc.)
- ✓ stability of partnership: ranging from supporting ad hoc, task oriented partnerships to permanent, institutionalised partnerships
- ✓ importance of ESF funding for partnership: highly dependent to small influence
- ✓ mainly cross-sector partnerships or within a sector
- ✓ mainly cross-(sub)regional partnerships or within a (sub)region
- ✓ highly formalised (e.g. legally binding agreements) to informal
- ✓ etc. ...

**Note 2**

Mainstreaming refers here to vertical mainstreaming where lessons learnt and good practice need to be taken up by higher levels of the organisational or political system.

**Note 3**

Art. 3: promoting partnerships, pacts and initiatives through networking of relevant stakeholders, such as the social partners and non-governmental organisations, at the transnational, national, regional and local levels in order to mobilise for reforms in the field of employment and labour market inclusiveness.

**Art. 5:**

1. The ESF shall promote good governance and partnership. Its support shall be designed and implemented at the appropriate territorial level taking into account the national, regional and local level according to the institutional arrangements specific to each Member State.
2. The Member States shall ensure the involvement of the social partners and adequate consultation and participation of other stakeholders, at the appropriate territorial level, in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of ESF support.
3. The managing authority of each operational programme shall encourage adequate participation of the social partners in actions funded under Article 3. Under the Convergence objective, an appropriate amount of ESF resources shall be allocated to capacity-building, which shall include training, networking measures, strengthening the social dialogue and activities jointly undertaken by the social partners, in particular as regards adaptability of workers and enterprises referred to in Article 3(1)(a).
4. The managing authority of each operational programme shall encourage adequate participation and access by nongovernmental organisations to the funded activities, notably in the domains of social inclusion, gender equality and equal opportunities.

**Annex 3: Country Tables on Partnership****Table 1: OP numbers**

	NUMBER OF ESF OPS				
	1	2	3	4	5 and above
Austria		✓			
Czech Rep.			✓		
England (UK)	✓				
Estonia			✓		
Flanders (Bel.)	✓				
Germany					18 (1 national, 16 State/Länder, 1 regional)
Greece					8 (3 sectoral, 5 regional with flexibility to implement ESF-funded activities)
Hungary		✓			
Ireland	✓				
Italy					24 (3 national, 21 regional)
Lithuania				✓	
Malta	✓				
Netherlands	✓				
Poland	✓				
Portugal	✓				
Romania		✓			
Spain					22 (3 national, 19 regional)
Sweden	✓				

**Table 2: Geographical focus of OPs**

	LOCAL	REGIONAL	NATIONAL
Austria		✓	✓
Czech Rep.		✓	✓
England (UK)		✓	✓
Estonia			✓
Flanders (Bel.)		✓	
Germany	✓	✓	
Greece			
Hungary	✓		
Italy		✓	
Lithuania			✓
Malta			✓
Netherlands			✓
Portugal			✓
Romania		✓	
Spain		✓	
Sweden		✓	

Table 3: Thematic links of OPs

	Employment & labour market access	Social cohesion	Skills supply & vocational training	Equal Opportunities	Transnational & cross-border co-operation
Austria	✓	✓		✓	
Czech Rep.	✓	✓		✓	✓
Estonia	✓		✓		
Flanders (Bel.)*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Germany	✓	✓	✓		
Greece	✓		✓		
Hungary	✓	✓			
Ireland		✓			
Italy	✓		✓	✓	
Netherlands	✓		✓		
Poland		✓			
Portugal	✓		✓		
Romania	✓	✓			
Spain	✓	✓		✓ (Planned)	
Sweden	✓	✓	✓		✓

\* No specific link of partnership with any theme except innovation. However, partnership is supported as a cross-cutting theme.

Table 4: Partnership formalisation

	INFORMAL		FORMAL	
	Co-operation agreements Declarations/ statements of intent/ commitments to work together	Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) Covering work programmes, roles and responsibilities, codes of conduct, rules and procedures, written charters, association guidelines	Legally-binding partnership contracts Between all partners/ bi-lateral	Legal requirements in national law Entity formation Explicit partner roles No. of partners
Austria		✓	✓	
Czech Rep.		✓	✓	
Estonia	✓			
Flanders (Bel.)	✓ (in proposal)	✓ (after approval)		
Germany		✓		
Hungary	✓		✓	
Ireland				✓
Italy		✓		
Lithuania	✓	✓		
Malta	✓			
Poland	✓ (most likely option)			
Portugal				✓ if p-ship option chosen)

Romania	✓			
Spain	✓ (at start)	✓		
Sweden				✓ (for SFPs)

Table 5: Partnership and application forms

	Specific questions asked in application form	Additional materials required to support application e.g. activity plans, stakeholder analysis, detailed budget breakdowns	No specific questions asked	Forms not yet available
Austria	✓	✓		
Czech Rep.	✓			
England (UK)			✓	
Estonia	✓	✓		
Flanders (Bel.)	✓	✓		
Germany	✓			
Greece				✓
Hungary	✓	✓		
Italy	✓			
Lithuania	✓			
Malta	✓			
Netherlands	✓			
Poland			✓	
Portugal	✓	✓		
Romania	✓			
Spain				✓
Sweden	✓			

Table 6: How OPs promote linkages and mainstreaming

	INTERMEDIARY SUPPORT STRUCTURES	USING MONITORING AND EVALUATION
Austria	✓	✓
Czech Rep.		✓
England (UK)	✓	
Estonia		✓
Flanders (Bel.)	✓	
Germany	✓	
Greece		✓
Italy	✓	
Poland	✓	✓
Spain	✓	✓
Sweden		✓

Table 7: EC regulation and main OP focus

Examples:	Stakeholder engagement in preparation, implementation and monitoring of ESF support (art. 5)	Strengthening the capacity of social partners (art 3+5 for convergence obj.)	Partnerships, pacts, networking (art. 3)
Austria			✓
Czech Rep.		✓	✓
Estonia	✓	✓	
Flanders (Bel.)	✓		
Germany		✓	✓
Greece	✓		
Hungary	✓	✓	
Italy		✓	✓
Lithuania	✓		✓
Malta		✓	
Portugal			✓
Romania		✓	
Spain			✓

Table 8: Differences between past and present approaches

	STRONG DIFFERENCE	MINIMAL DIFFERENCE	UNSURE/ UNDECIDED
Austria		✓	
Czech Rep.		✓	
England (UK)		✓	
Flanders (Bel.)		✓	
Germany	✓		
Greece			✓
Hungary		✓	
Italy			✓
Lithuania	✓		
Malta	✓		
Poland	✓		
Portugal	✓		
Spain	✓		
Sweden	✓		

Table 9: The impact of EQUAL on development of new OPs

	STRONG	MINIMAL	UNSURE/ UNDECIDED
Austria		✓	
Czech Rep.		✓	
England (UK)	✓		
Flanders (Bel.)		✓	
Germany	✓		
Greece	✓		
Hungary	✓		
Italy	✓		
Lithuania	✓		
Malta		✓	
Netherlands	✓		
Portugal		✓	
Spain	✓		
Sweden	✓		

Table 10: Perceptions of the value-add of partnership in OP approaches

	Focus	Coordination	Resource use	Social capital	Innovation	Capacity-building	Empowerment & inclusion	Legitimacy	Stability	Sustainability
Austria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Czech Rep.		✓					✓	✓		
England (UK)	✓	✓								
Estonia						✓	✓			
Flanders (Bel.)	✓			✓	✓		✓			
Germany	✓	✓								
Greece		✓			✓				✓	
Hungary								✓		
Ireland							✓	✓		✓
Italy	✓	✓			✓		✓			
Lithuania							✓	✓		
Malta	✓					✓				
Netherlands				✓						✓
Poland				✓	✓	✓	✓			
Portugal	✓				✓					
Romania				✓	✓	✓	✓			
Spain		✓								
Sweden		✓						✓		

Table II: Perceptions of drawbacks to partnership in OP approaches

	Time	Top-down approach/bureaucratic	Legal environment	Conflicts of interest	Lack of representation engagement/skills / capacity	No clear design
Austria					✓	
Czech Rep.			✓			
Flanders (Bel.)	✓					
Germany					✓	
Greece						✓
Hungary					✓	
Ireland					✓	
Italy		✓		✓	✓	
Lithuania					✓	
Malta	✓				✓	
Netherlands	✓					
Portugal						✓
Romania	✓	✓				
Sweden	✓					

Table I2: Measures adopted to address challenges

	Strengthening application, monitoring and evaluation processes	Addressing legal impediments	Technical assistance, capacity-building and advice	Awareness-raising activities
Austria			✓	
Czech Rep.		✓		
Estonia	✓		✓	
Flanders (Bel.)	✓		✓	
Hungary			✓	
Ireland	✓			
Italy	✓		✓	✓
Lithuania	✓			
Malta	✓		✓	✓
Romania			✓	
Sweden			✓	

## Annex 4: Partnership Good Practice Template

## PARTNERSHIP IN THE ESF PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

Name of practice:

Stage of use: Add X to the table where applicable

OP Analysis and design	
OP Delivery planning	
Call for and appraisal of proposals	
Animation during Implementation	
Monitoring and Evaluation	

Partnership success factors that are addressed:

Author:

Country:

Summary: Brief description of tool – 100 words max.

Please focus on explaining how the practice addresses Key Success Factors at Programme Level chosen earlier.

Format and language:

Testimonies from users:

Brief accounts of how it has worked in practice, strong and weak points etc. from the point of view of users (Managing Authorities, partnership managers, final beneficiaries, etc.)

Implementation guidance

List and explain crucial steps to take or pitfalls to avoid when setting up a similar practice elsewhere (e.g. 10 tips).

Discuss transferability: are aspects of the practice closely tied to its original context (region, country, organisation, thematic issue...)? If so, what additional tips can be given to address this specificity when trying to implement the practice outside of this context.

Contact person for more information:

Name: .....

Organisation: .....

E-mail: .....

Telephone: .....

Web address: .....

Skype Address: .....

**GUIDEBOOK**

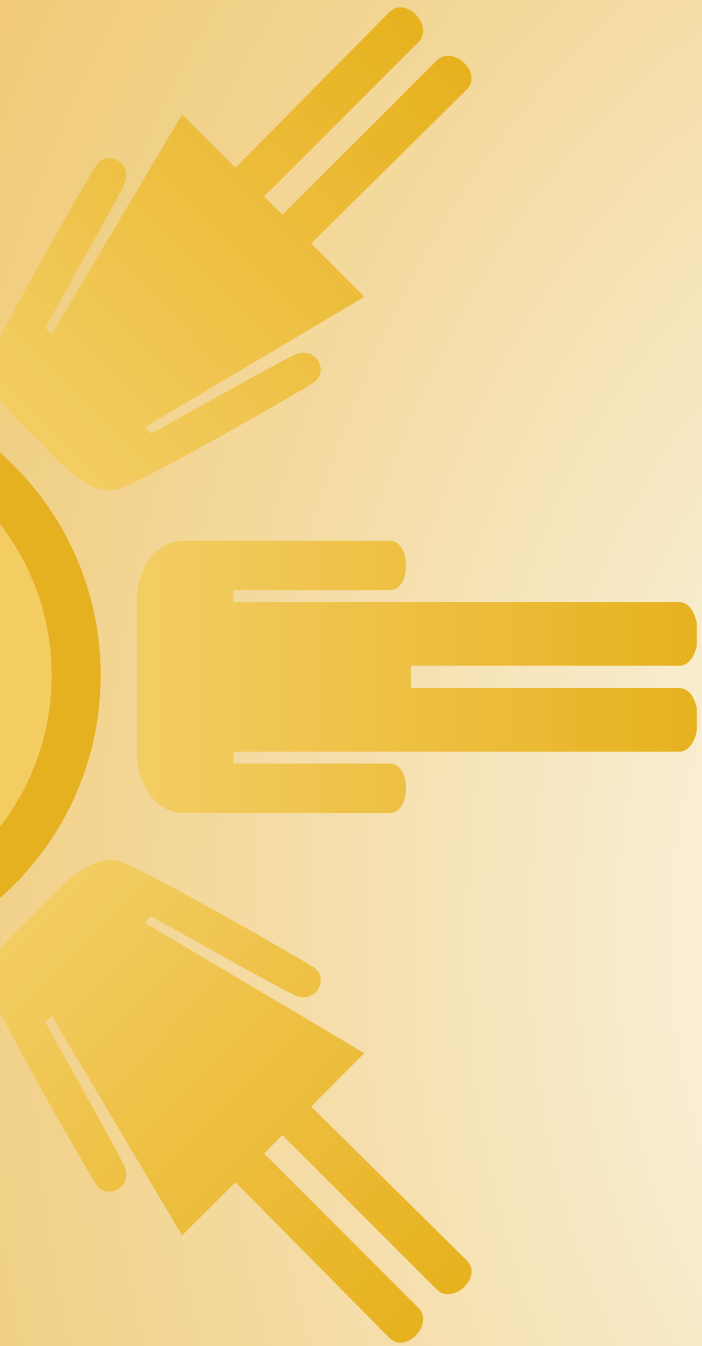
**HOW ESF MANAGING AUTHORITIES AND  
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Melanie Rein



# Working Together: Critical Perspectives on Six Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa

Melanie Rein  
Leda Stott

**ABSTRACT.** This paper examines six cross-sector partnerships in South Africa and Zambia. These partnerships were part of a research study undertaken between 2003 and 2005 and were selected because of their potential to contribute to poverty reduction in their respective countries. This paper examines the context in which the partnerships were established, their governance and accountability mechanisms and the engagement and participation of the partners and the intended beneficiaries in the partnerships. We argue that a partnership approach which has proven successful in one context can be used as a valuable learning resource. However, a partnership's work, which includes all aspects of the partnership and its activities, cannot necessarily be transferred directly to another partnership without a thorough and locally informed analysis of the context in which it is implemented. In addition, we suggest that it is difficult to assess whether the good intentions behind partnerships were translated into real benefits for target groups as effective monitoring and evaluation procedures were not in place in the partnerships studied. Similarly, the absence of regularised governance and accountability systems in partnerships made it difficult to support partner and beneficiary participation and engagement. We conclude that there is a need to move beyond a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to partnerships and that partnership replication should focus more strongly on the transfer of learning about partnership processes instead of simply copying partnership activities. Moreover, the development of stronger mechanisms for assessing and ensuring accountability towards both partners and intended beneficiaries is required if partnerships are to meet their intended objectives.

**KEY WORDS:** cross-sector partnerships, critical perspectives, South Africa, Zambia

## Introduction and background

During the last decade, a "partnership boom" has occurred (Zadek et al., 2001, p. 23) Partnership has

been described as: 'the development approach of our time' (Kjaer, 2003, p. 13), 'the mantra for the new millennium' (Tennyson, 1998, p. 3), and 'a new and innovative type of environmental governance' (Witte et al., 2003, p. 2). From its endorsement as an approach towards achieving environmental and developmental change at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (Tennyson, 1998, p. 4, 2004, p. 3), partnership has been promoted by large numbers of corporations, governments, international agencies and non-governmental organisations as the most effective way of working towards the achievement of sustainable development.<sup>1</sup> According to Zadek (2003, p. 9), it is a movement which came of age 10 years after Rio, at the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, where Kofi Annan declared that:

The Summit represents a major leap forward in the development of partnerships with the UN, Governments, business and civil society coming together to increase the pool of resources to tackle global problems on a global scale.<sup>2</sup>

Although some work has been undertaken in the study of partnerships, there is not yet a significant body of critical analysis on their impact. However, at the most fundamental level, the effect these partnerships have on those who are most directly and immediately involved in them is of paramount importance since they provide the partnerships with their very *raison d'être*.

We shall attempt to make a contribution towards filling this gap in the literature by discussing insights from six partnerships in Zambia and South Africa, examining the context in which the partnerships were established; their governance and accountability mechanisms; and the engagement and participation

of the partners and the intended beneficiaries in the partnerships. It is important to emphasise that our fieldwork was conducted between 2003 and 2005, that our findings relate to that specific period in time and that none of the partnerships had completed their work during the time our study was undertaken. Partnerships are not static entities, they move through different phases<sup>3</sup> and internal and external changes will inevitably have had an impact on their development since the time of the study.

Another issue that merits highlighting relates to the co-operation of those involved in the partnerships studied. As Stott (2007, p. 4) has observed, the “raw material” for critical partnership research is not always easy to obtain as “...the emphasis of much information on cross-sector partnerships has been on positive stories and there are enormous sensitivities about going public and airing differences that may disrupt on-going work or suggest that such connections have ‘failed’”. The willingness of partners and stakeholders to share information openly, accept critical questions, and learn from the research findings was fundamental to our work and testament to a genuine commitment to develop and improve their partnering activities. In this respect, our approach was to explore promising practice in dialogue with partnership participants rather than prove impact.

Two major components of the research were: firstly, to identify and examine the complexities of the interrelationship between the different partners involved in the cross-sector partnerships studied; and secondly, to understand whether the cross-sector partnerships were meeting their own objectives and targets in relation to poverty reduction. These partnerships addressed development issues in the areas of agriculture, health and education.

Of these six partnerships, two can be considered major case studies. The first of these was the *Chamba Valley Partnership Project* in Zambia, which aimed to increase small-scale farming income through a partnership in which a farming co-operative was developed with some government support, to grow fruit and vegetables in order to supply the private supermarket chain, Shoprite. The second was *Amangwe Village*, a holistic health care centre set up through a partnership mechanism by the Zululand Chamber of Business Foundation in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, which worked with and for people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

The other four case studies were small in nature. The first of these, the *Small-scale Sugarcane Farming Communities’ Partnership* focused on the development of livelihoods among the small-scale sugarcane growers in South Africa through engagement with government agencies and the Sugar Industry. The *Mthashana Further Education and Training College Partnership Programme* in South Africa, under government direction, worked to develop partnerships for learning and skills development in KwaZulu Natal. The *Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership* was promoted by the Partnership Forum<sup>4</sup> in Zambia to engage businesses in improving educational infrastructure and teaching conditions. The *Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS* linked businesses together with NGOs and government agencies to tackle the HIV/AIDS pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

Each of the case studies addressed partnering in different ways. What worked well and what did not; the manner in which each partnership dealt with challenges during particular phases and how they moved between one phase and another were seen as important in determining the effects for partners, beneficiaries and the wider society.<sup>6</sup>

While the partnerships developed and moved through different phases and processes, they also intersected with a wide variety of crosscutting factors that were important in determining their wider effects. We identified these as: (1) the *context* in which a partnership is operating; (2) partnership *governance, accountability and organisation* and (3) partnership *monitoring and evaluation* processes. We shall consider each of these factors in turn using insights from the six partnerships studied.

## Context

There has been a tendency within the literature on partnerships to portray these forms of collaboration as a kind of magic bullet capable of providing solutions to diverse development problems across a variety of settings through win-win situations where all stakeholders benefit. Our starting point for this analysis is that partnerships may work for some stakeholders, in some places, in some situations, some of the time. In fact, the manner in which a partnership unfolds is directly related both to the context in which it is situated and the ability of

partnership participants to find appropriate responses to the challenges that arise in this given context. Contextual factors include a wide range of variables, such as: regional, national and local environments; economic, political, cultural and social conditions; linkage with international bodies and with networks promoting partnerships; the presence or absence of intermediary organisations and/or key individuals capable of bringing different institutions together; and specific 'drivers' (i.e. factors arising out of wider contexts) that exert directionality and impetus towards partnership solutions. All these factors interlink and overlap in complex and dynamic ways; and they inevitably have effects on the emergence and development of partnerships. As a result, during the course of our study, we found that what worked well in a partnership approach in South Africa might not work in Zambia and vice-versa.

In South Africa, an 'enabling environment' for cross-sector collaboration was clearly favoured by government policies.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, partnerships had been promoted widely in a number of sectors, including the three 'thematic areas' of health, agriculture and education that provided subjects for our case study research. However, this favourable attitude to partnerships has to be understood in the light of the broader socio-economic inequalities inherited from the apartheid period which created a 'push' for the private sector to assume its part of the responsibility for the reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>8</sup> Combined with the international trend towards corporate social responsibility this is an important factor in explaining why the member companies of the Zululand Chamber of Business Foundation were involved in addressing social issues such as the Amangwe Village project. The involvement of the South African Sugar Association in the Small-scale Farming Communities' Partnership offered a similar case of a private sector actor responding to calls for it to adopt a role in addressing inequalities inherited from the apartheid era.<sup>9</sup>

The apartheid era in South Africa witnessed the emergence of a strong and highly articulate civil society. Since the end of apartheid, however, numerous NGOs and community organisations had seen their roles taken over by government and funding re-directed to the public sector. This led many of them to take an interest in partnership approaches to development where they could make

use of their skills and knowledge when co-operating with private or public sector actors.

In Zambia, a very different context was apparent. Here, the prevalence of extreme poverty and the change from heavy state involvement to the privatisation reforms of the 1990s were the most significant contextual issues. The steep decline in the wealth of the country plunged thousands of Zambians into poverty and became the main driver for the Zambian partnerships we studied. However, regulatory pressure on business also appeared to provide incentives for the private sector to make a contribution to development projects. For example in the Chamba Valley case study, the private sector partner, Shoprite, indicated that their assistance to local farmers in Zambia had occurred in response to government demands that the company should invest more substantially in the country. Contrary to South Africa, NGOs had a lower profile and were less well organised in Zambia; yet there was a growing realisation in the Zambian NGO sector that NGOs needed to build capacity and make their voices heard through links with other sectors of society. This was particularly the case for NGOs working in the area of HIV/AIDS.

Recognising these contextual differences provides an important check against imparting partnership models from one context to another without considering the key differences that play a role in determining their outcomes.<sup>10</sup> For example, the Chamba Valley Partnership Project in Lusaka was based upon the Luangeni Partnership in Eastern Zambia in which a large number of farmers provided produce to Shoprite with spin-offs for the community at large.<sup>11</sup> However, the transfer of this model to the Chamba Valley was hampered by difficulties in shifting a partnership model from a rural environment to a peri-urban setting and the challenges of involving different partners with differential access to resources. Replication or, rather, adaptation, while not the primary force behind the development of Amangwe Village in South Africa, played a role in the development of this partnership project since it was at least partially based on the Zululand Chamber of Business Foundation's previous experience with developing a contractors' village. While the development of Amangwe Village provided a base for the partnership's activities, the wider intention of creating a holistic community health care centre for

HIV patients had, at the time of the study, not necessarily been achieved. There is evidence to suggest that the Chamba Valley and Amangwe partnerships did not fully take into account the multiplicity of contextual factors that influenced their development.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the assumption that previously 'successful' models could be replicated or adapted to other contexts might be the very reason that early contextual scoping was quite limited.

### **Governance and accountability**

The governance and accountability mechanisms of a partnership and its projects have a strong influence on its ability to reach its intended objectives. In our study we set out to explore (1) the degree to which partnership systems and structures were transparent; (2) whether decision-making processes were based on consensus-building; (3) how far the partnership was accountable to both the partners and the beneficiaries and (4) how successfully the partnership worked within the wider policy and regulatory systems.

Partnerships with a large number of private sector partners such as the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership, the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS and Amangwe Village undoubtedly benefited from increased resources. Nevertheless, the presence of many private sector partners tended to create a more 'hands-off' approach towards the partnership, and structures that could encourage deeper relationship-building were not developed. The Mthashana College Further Education and Training Partnership Programme in South Africa also showed that involving a large number of partners from varying sectors may create problems in the initiation of a partnership. Here, it was difficult to attract and maintain the participation of appropriate partners because of the large number of stakeholders identified by government.

None of the partnerships, apart from the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, had defined core principles for working together. The lack of such principles had to do with the way in which the partnerships were established: a sense of urgency combined with the need and injunction to 'get on with the job' appeared to be so prevalent during the set-up and start-up phases that, little time, if any, was

spent on clarifying mutual aims and objectives, getting to know one another more deeply, or negotiating guidelines on how partners would work together. The absence of partnership goals and mission statements manifested itself later in the varying interpretations by each partner of what the partnerships actually intended to achieve.

Formalised partnering agreements are frequently advocated as being necessary to ensure accountability in partnerships, firstly, of partners to each other and, secondly, of partners in relation to meeting their obligations regarding the implementation of project activities (Evans et al., 2004). Such an agreement may take the form of a legal contract, a less formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or an informal agreement to co-operate. Irrespective of the level of formality, developing such an agreement is often perceived as the starting point for working together as the process binds partners to specific aims and objectives and also helps to define the roles and responsibilities of each partnership participant. In the case of the Amangwe Village, organisations initially received verbal invitations to join the partnership, whereas written agreements existed only in the form of proposals for the funding of specific projects. The Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership had no collective MoU to guide its operations and only one written agreement with a private sector partner. The Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, acting as the umbrella body for its members, did formalise its relationship with the implementing partners through a MoU. The Chamba Valley Partnership Project was the only partnership with an agreement that was signed by *all* partners, even though, interestingly, the signings did not take place at a joint meeting, and some partners were unaware who else had signed it. All the Chamba Valley Partnership Project partners considered that the agreement lacked detail, and that a revised version including additional information on the roles and responsibilities of participants as well as communication and evaluation processes should be produced. Indeed, some of the Chamba Valley Partnership Project partners believed that existing working relationships could only evolve into a properly constituted partnership on the basis of a revised agreement. This last point also raises questions about how effective a written document really is in regulating relationships, and which other

measures might be needed to make a partnership more effective, particularly in relation to improving communication and transparency. As Evans et al. (2004) emphasise, 'paperwork' is only one aspect of a healthy collaborative relationship: it cannot be a substitute for other aspects such as good communication, aligned goals, transparency and parallel commitments.

Where there were clear divisions between the partnerships and the partnership projects, there were also two differing types of management structures, one of which covered the partnership and the other which managed its projects. In the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership, the management of the Partnership and the financial management of its projects were both undertaken by a broker,<sup>13</sup> the Partnership Forum, while project management for particular building works was devolved to the relevant departments within the universities. However, where partnership and project converged, as with the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, the distinction between the management structures relevant to each of these components inevitably became blurred and overlapped.

At the same time, none of the partnerships with established organisational structures had provisions for collective decision-making processes. Thus, a sense of team-working and consensus-building was largely absent. Relationships tended to be managed bilaterally or through a broker and, as a result, participation of partnership members was limited.<sup>14</sup>

The absence of widespread stakeholder involvement in partnership structures was also apparent. In the case of Amangwe Village, this derived from both the extent and the type of community involvement when clarifying and defining the original parameters of the project work, whereas, in the case of the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, respondents' statements indicated that some community partners considered themselves to be marginalised from the workings of the partnership.

In both the Chamba Valley Partnership Project and the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership, the lack of structured planning frameworks and targets for the project work of the partnerships contributed to difficulties as the partnerships developed. In this connection, it is interesting to note that none of the partnerships studied here possessed a well-defined conflict resolution mechanism.

The growing sense of frustration shown by the Chamba Valley Co-operative members *vis-à-vis* the perceived shortcomings of the partnership, for example, provided a clear indication of where such systems may be of considerable value during partnership implementation.

Strong and transparent internal communication strategies had not been institutionalised in most of the partnerships studied. This had clear implications for their work. In the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, for example, the absence of an effective communication system meant that its partners did not meet regularly to review progress. Among respondents at Amangwe Village, there was a realisation that better communication channels within the Partnership were required; and, indeed, a number of initiatives were started in order to foster a more participatory approach for all partners. Even at the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, where regular meetings were held to manage different aspects of the implementing partners' work, the partners still felt a need to meet with greater frequency.

By means of reports, media coverage and links with international agencies and bodies, external communication with both stakeholders and the general public was generally better than internal communication. This wider dissemination of information about the partnerships and their work had been instrumental in raising awareness, obtaining resources and developing stronger policy linkages. Nonetheless, the view was consistently expressed by respondents that communication with government needed to be more strategic and that this involved identifying and working with the 'right' people, with whose help or intervention issues could be resolved more effectively and swiftly.

### **Engagement and participation**

Our analysis suggests that stakeholder participation took place in a variety of ways within the partnerships studied. As the ultimate aim of most of the partnerships, whether stated or implicit, was to 'serve the community', it follows logically that the community should itself have had a role to play both in ensuring the effective targeting of the partnerships' projects and in the advocacy and promotion of wider sustainable change.

In this connection, a central concern is whose interests participatory processes really serve? Do they serve the interests of project partners to implement their own development priorities using the jargon of 'participation' as a means of rubber-stamping a process whose outcome they have already pre-determined? Or do they serve the interests of communities by empowering them, facilitating collective community action and negotiating access to resources that would otherwise not be available? The range of possibilities for community involvement in partnerships is varied. It can be broken down along a rough scale in which, at one end, its members play a passive role and have little opportunity for involvement or voice, to, at the other end, a situation in which their active engagement is fundamental to partnering and where there are opportunities for them to initiate a particular course of action or take a lead in it.<sup>15</sup> It is also important to note that 'the community' rarely speaks with a unified voice. Hence, developing and maintaining community engagement is not an easy task. Local power brokers may manipulate participatory processes to exclude marginalised groups and present their own views as those of the whole community's. For these reasons, both the criteria and modes of selection of representatives from the community to work with a partnership are matters that require careful attention.

In the partnerships studied, it was often necessary to build capacity for community participation with considerable care. The South African Sugar Association spent over a year working through a lengthy scoping exercise with small-scale sugarcane farming communities, by means of community dialogue and workshops, in order to build social and political capital and gain support for its partnering initiatives. In the case of the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, dialogue of a similar kind emerged, at a later stage, through the Partnership Forum. However, scoping exercises for partnerships have potential drawbacks. They may, if not skilfully managed, lead community representatives to understand partnerships as 'accessing' rather than 'sharing' resources. In our study, there were indications that some community representatives were eager to assert that the community as a whole supported the idea of working in partnership in order to obtain such resources. As previously argued, even when a development approach is deemed 'participatory', "local

power brokers are often able to silence and sideline marginalised groups, especially women" (Parpart, 2001, p. 5). An indication of this may be that women interviewed in the Chamba Valley community felt less well informed than their male counterparts about the aims and objectives of the partnership.<sup>16</sup>

A more exhaustive needs analysis, on the other hand, may lead to the build-up of such high expectations that a partnership may in practice turn out to be a disappointment for the local community, especially in its earliest stages, arousing criticism and resistance from the community rather than positive engagement. The expectation raised by the Chamba Valley Partnership Project in a neighbouring community was an example of this. Similarly, in the Amangwe Village Partnership project, there was ongoing concern about whether the community was being 'heard'.<sup>17</sup> It is a moot point whether the Partnership fully recognised the potential constraints that its practices had on the ability and, indeed, the willingness of the community to participate.

We also examined gender aspects of the partnerships as it is widely recognised that sustainable development relies on the empowerment and engagement of women.<sup>18</sup> By researching who is involved in partnerships, particularly at community level, and where, how and to what extent women contribute or do not contribute, more concentrated and proactive efforts may be set in motion to engage women in partnership activities (Grieco and Araba Apt, 1998; Vargas, 2002, p. 1555).<sup>19</sup>

The thematic issues covered by our six case studies demonstrate the potential for addressing women's participation in partnerships. Women farmers, for instance, have been marginalised by agricultural development policies, despite the fact that they are an integral part of the African farming structure and combine domestic work with subsistence agriculture, especially food crop production (Grieco and Araba Apt, 1998). Almost 57% of those infected by HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa are women; and three out of four young people, between the ages of 15 and 24, who are likely to be infected with HIV, are female.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, girls are more likely to drop out of school and to receive less education than boys because of discrimination, education expenses and household duties.<sup>21</sup>

On a positive note the six partnerships studied had either directly or indirectly addressed the issue of

gender at both partnership and project level. For example, in the Amangwe Village and Mthashana College partnerships, women played key managerial roles, while both the Chamba Valley Partnership Project and the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS stressed that, not only was gender a key issue for them, but they recognised that greater efforts were needed to encourage women to participate more fully in their work. In the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership, the University of Zambia acknowledged that, in view of national policy directives aimed at increasing women's enrolment at the University, gender would play an increasingly important role in their partnership.

### Monitoring and evaluation

Few, if any, of the partnerships had regularised evaluation procedures built into their management systems and projects. This made it difficult for the partnerships to obtain a sufficiently balanced and integrated set of perspectives on the effectiveness of the partnerships and their projects. In fact, neither the strengths nor the weaknesses of the partnerships appeared to have been fully appreciated by partners or intended beneficiaries.

The Partnership Forum carried out *ad hoc* monitoring of the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, suggesting that its impact was quite limited, with only 10 farmers out of a possible 98 actually selling to Shoprite. This limited data cannot be used to suggest that the partnership itself was not 'successful': while there were serious problems in relation to this partnership meeting its stated objectives, there was scope for individual farmers to grow their business in a sustainable way due to their membership of the co-operative. However, without regular evaluation and reviewing processes, it was not possible for the management and directorate of the Partnership to obtain a better understanding of how the partnership affected the farmers and how it could be improved over time.

The Zambian Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, which linked businesses and NGOs in order to combat the HIV-AIDS pandemic, was the only partnership to have a self-monitoring and evaluation process incorporated into its projects. However, as

Coalition staff acknowledged, this process was not widely undertaken and did not involve all members. Although defining an evaluation strategy was part of the Coalition's plans for the future, the evaluation parameters had not yet been devised in-depth at the time we conducted our study. Some individual company members had devised cost-benefit analyses that allowed them to assess the financial savings generated from their involvement in the Partnership but these models had not yet been applied to all member organisations. We were also not able to establish how many patients had been treated or supported as part of the Coalition's projects and it was not clear whether these figures were known to the Coalition members.

The Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership was able to provide tentative statistical evidence of those students who had been directly affected by the Partnership (e.g. through the provision of scholarships and environmental improvements). However, longer-term evaluation would need to be undertaken to achieve a fuller understanding of the wider potential of the types of partnerships set up under this scheme.

In terms of partnership trajectories, very little attention had been paid to planning for what might happen after a partnership had completed its project work. The issue of whether a partnership might disband, evolve into a different structure or move on into a different area, will ultimately depend upon how effective its work is felt to be by partners and stakeholders. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems could make a contribution to policy-making by helping to shape the best alternatives for such long-term outcomes and eventualities.

While there now seems to be widespread agreement in the partnership literature on the need for evaluation and impact assessment of partnerships, our research shows that these review mechanisms were either absent or limited in the partnerships studied. Although the reasons for these limited evaluation processes were manifold, the research identified a need to move beyond the rhetorical support for impact assessment to a more sympathetic approach including regular reviews together with evaluation plans built into both partnership processes and their projects. The complex dynamic between a partnership and its projects needs to be taken into account along with the option that each component

should have its own separate review and evaluation process, in addition to combined procedures. In this context, it is necessary to assess what the outputs and outcomes of a partnership's work have been at a number of different levels. Finally, evaluation processes need to be sensitively designed in order to be attuned to the context of the specific partnership and its projects. In these ways, evaluation can be seen by all concerned to be a helpful learning and developmental activity rather than as a tool for mere measurement and judgement, a view which is likely to add to increased burdens, tensions and pressures that may arise in situations where the partnership is facing a crisis.

### Conclusion and recommendations

We have argued in this article that attention should be paid to the context in which partnerships take place. One of the undoubted dangers of the fashionable status that partnership currently enjoys is the assumption that there is a model of partnership which can be applied to each and every situation. Our research suggests that partnerships need to be built very carefully both on established good practice and on the constraints of local conditions. With regard to the former, there is considerable material in the existing literature which catalogues good partnership practice. With regard to the latter, however, our research suggests an additional generalisation: that a detailed and attentive consideration of context is likely to have constructive and beneficial effects both on partnership practice and on policy-making.

There is a real danger when replicating partnership models and projects that certain factors may not be taken into account. What has proven successful in one context can be valuable both as a learning resource and as an inspiration, but cannot necessarily be transferred directly, in the same form, to a new context, without a thorough and locally informed analysis of the new environment. It needs to be borne in mind that replication need not necessarily imply the 'copying' of *activities*, but rather the copying of successful process and understanding; in other words, it is the *learning* that is transferred.

Our research showed that the collaboration of institutions from different sectors enabled resources to be directed to key development concerns, such as

the provision of education, health care and economic development. In some instances, such provision could be seen to be filling a gap created by government inaction or resource shortage, whereas, in others, it served to establish innovative ways of meeting the needs of developing commercial markets.

Monitoring and evaluation processes were mostly absent in the partnerships we investigated, making it difficult to assess whether the good intentions behind the partnerships were translated into real benefits for both partners and intended beneficiaries. At the same time, exit strategies had not been agreed upon in any of the partnerships. Further work needs to be done to support and improve the capacity of cross-sector partnerships to identify, monitor and evaluate their own objectives and impacts even if this is not a problem-free exercise in itself (see Utting and Zammit and Lund-Thomsen in this special issue).

The potential value of partnerships lies in their ability to deliver tangible improvements in social services or economic goods and the opportunities they can give to relatively weak or disadvantaged sections of the community. At the same time partnerships can draw attention to a community's concerns and problems and build dialogue with other groups and institutions which may offer complementary objectives and resources. Partnerships may also offer models of collaboration which can inspire other groups to 'find a voice' and to seek innovative ways of working together to support their own (and mutual) development. However, there is still a need to address the question of who actually represents a given community in participatory partnership processes and whose voices/concerns are promoted/marginalised in the name of participation. Local power brokers are often able to manipulate participatory processes in ways that favour their particular interests while partnership participation may lead to unrealistic expectations on the part of a community in terms of the benefits the partnership will bring with it. Particular attention has to be paid to where, how and to what extent different categories of women, participate in partnership decision-making processes. Nevertheless, with regard to the partnerships we studied, we were encouraged by the attention given to addressing gender concerns in the partnerships.

Finally in terms of governance and accountability processes, the partnership literature recommends clear boundaries, together with robust and transparent structures and sound systems of communication, to not only support the functioning of a partnership and maintain partner engagement but also to potentially facilitate conflict resolution and avoid the marginalisation of partnership participants. Members of the partnerships we studied struggled to define core principles for working together, establish collective decision-making processes and devise transparent internal communication strategies. While the development of stronger mechanisms for assessing and ensuring accountability towards both partners and intended beneficiaries is clearly important if partnerships are to meet their intended objectives, the gap between the literature and the actual experience of ground-level implementation also points to the need for more rigorous investigation into the barriers that thwart such a process and how they might be overcome. We believe that a more informed understanding of the contextual reality in which partnerships operate is crucial to this.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For example: the Department for International Development's White Paper (November 1997); the UN's Global Compact; the World Bank's Business Partners for Development (BPD) initiative (see Business Partners for Development 1998–2001 (2002); the International Business Leaders Forum as well as the global partnership promoted to achieve the Millennium Development Goals [*the World Bank Group, the Millennium Development Goals* (2004) <http://www.developmentgoals.org/>, accessed 20 June 2005].

<sup>2</sup> See United Nations Development Programme, 2002, Johannesburg Summit Promotes Partnerships for Development. (<http://www.undp.org/dpa/frontpage/archive/2002/september/5sept02/>, accessed 23 November 2004).

<sup>3</sup> These phases have been broadly defined as *scoping; initiating; implementing; consolidating* and *sustaining/terminating*. When examining the partnerships it was considered appropriate and relevant to 'situate' them in relation to the phase and process that they were going through at the time. It was not our expectation that the partnerships would follow any particular 'progression model'. See Rein et al. (2005, p. 8) and Stott and Keatman (2005, p. 2).

<sup>4</sup> The Partnership Forum, or Forum for Business Leaders and their Social Partners, is a cross-sector grouping that seeks to bring different sector organisations together in Zambia to address development challenges.

<sup>5</sup> See Rein et al. (2005) for a more in-depth description of these partnerships.

<sup>6</sup> The time-consuming nature of the work involved within each of these phases is often underestimated, particularly when it comes to consolidating relationships, structures and systems, and engaging partners and stakeholders. In many cases, the lack of adequate time to dedicate to particular phases combines with a lack of awareness both of the time-frames needed by different partners and of the factors creating pressures on them. Not surprisingly, this combination tends to have a detrimental effect on the ongoing effectiveness of the partnership.

<sup>7</sup> See Rein et al. (2005, p. 52).

<sup>8</sup> Drivers for this 'push' have been attributed to a necessary 'payback' by business for its role in supporting apartheid and to business conforming to growing national and international trends that push for such an approach. A more cynical argument is that such an interest is simply 'greenwashing' which distracts "the gullible into believing that business has a serious sustainability agenda" (Fig, (2005, p. 617). See also Discussion in Rein et al. (2005, p. 27).

<sup>9</sup> Governmental pressure and policy might also be considered as important drivers for supporting the partnership with small-scale cane growers.

<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, we should also recognise that there were some similarities in South Africa and Zambia with regard to the key drivers behind the initiation of the partnerships studied. The role of government, both national and local, was crucial in a number of ways, especially in relation to explaining how difficulties can occur in the implementation of projects when partnerships are initiated from the top-down and undertaken on a large scale (The Mthashana FET College Partnership and Small-scale Farming Communities' Partnership). A related issue is that a number of organisations had been motivated (from within) or prompted (from without) to set up and engage in partnerships either in order to fill a 'gap' left open by government or to provide services and support in crisis situations – or both (Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership in Zambia and Amangwe Village in South Africa). In South Africa and Zambia private sector involvement was augmented by the increasing presence of large multinational and trans-national companies (in the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS and the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnerships).

An international crisis was also a strong catalyst for collaboration and this was evidenced by the HIV/AIDS pandemic (in the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS and Amangwe Village partnerships).

<sup>11</sup> See Rein et al. (2005, pp. 37–38).

<sup>12</sup> We have to acknowledge that it is far easier to make analytical and judgemental observations from the safe and comfortable seat of an outsider's perspective. The decision-maker working in the thick of events has no such luxury. Thinking fast, and on one's feet, is often the prime requirement, especially when measures need to be taken during a crisis.

<sup>13</sup> "A partnership broker operates as an active go-between or intermediary between different organisations and sectors (public, private and civil society) that aim to collaborate as partners in a sustainable development initiative" (Tennyson 2005, p. 8).

<sup>14</sup> See Rein et al. (2005, p. 3).

<sup>15</sup> See Stott and Keatman (2005, p. 7, 2006, p. 21).

<sup>16</sup> See Rein et al. (2005, p. 10). Kapoor (2004, p. 63) asserts that "Rhetorical devices – sensationalist arguments, technical or esoteric language, misrepresentation of evidence, loud or aggressive speech – can all unduly sway opinion or silence and intimidate participants..." Parpart indicates that women's schedules and agendas can also militate against their engagement (Parpart, 2001, p. 5).

<sup>17</sup> See Rein et al. (2005, p. 43).

<sup>18</sup> See for example Boserup (1970); Elson (1991); World Bank Group: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/MDG/gdmis.do> (accessed 4 May 2005); and United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE): WomenWatch (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>, accessed 4 May 2005).

<sup>19</sup> It is also important to reinforce here that this requires considerable skill and the need for what, Parpart describes as, "techniques for analyzing the way global and national political and economic structures and practices intersect with and affect local power structures, particularly gender inequality" (Parpart, 2001, p. 6).

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)/World Health Organization (WHO), 2004, Women and Aids: An Extract from the AIDS Epidemic up date December 2004, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva, p. 1. ([http://www.unaids.org/NetTools/Misc/DocInfo.aspx?href=http://gva-doc-owl/WEBcontent/Documents/pub/GCWA/JC986-EpiExtract\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/NetTools/Misc/DocInfo.aspx?href=http://gva-doc-owl/WEBcontent/Documents/pub/GCWA/JC986-EpiExtract_en.pdf), accessed 4 June 2005).

<sup>21</sup> See World Bank Group: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger (<http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/MDG/gdmis.do>, accessed 4 May 2005).

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Building Partnerships for Development

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# Stakeholder Engagement in Partnerships:

Who are the 'stakeholders' and how do we 'engage' with them?<sup>1</sup>

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Date: May 2009

*As partnerships require the commitment and consensus of a wide range of players the emphasis on 'stakeholder engagement' in much of the corresponding literature is logical.<sup>2</sup> However, while the idea is promoted as desirable and, in many cases necessary, a clear understanding of who partnership 'stakeholders' are, and how they might be appropriately 'engaged' in partnering activities is often absent. Unpacking what we mean by 'stakeholder engagement' is not easy. The expression is loose and all-embracing and, as such, finds a comfortable fit in the 'participatory language'<sup>3</sup> that is used in relation to partnerships; a language which, because of its general and positive nature, tends to gloss over the many challenges that partnership-building involves.<sup>4</sup> In the interests of achieving greater clarity in our use of such terminology, this paper attempts to define and explore the meaning of 'stakeholder engagement' in relation to partnerships. By providing a range of discussion tools it is hoped that such an inquiry will also assist deliberations around partner identification and selection; assessment of internal and external relationships; and examination of diverse and changing positions as a partnership develops.<sup>5</sup>*

## Defining a partnership stakeholder

The term 'stakeholder' refers to an individual or entity with a 'stake' in something. Dictionary definitions provide us with: one who holds the bets or stakes in a wager, game or contest; one who has a share, investment or interest in the success or failure of a project, industry or enterprise; and one who has control of money or property to which rival claims are made.<sup>6</sup> Implicit in these meanings are notions of power, interest, risk and benefit which, if applied to a partnering context, suggest that partnership stakeholders might be:

- Those individuals, groups, organisations and/or networks that have the power to influence a partnership and/or an interest in it; and,
- Those who may assume or bear risks for a partnership and/or stand to gain benefits from it.

These definitions are explored here in greater detail using a selection of matrices and pointers that have been developed for identifying and prioritising stakeholders in other fields. Before proceeding, however, it is worthwhile highlighting two underlying themes that are central to the arguments put forward in this paper. Firstly, that, in spite of frequent differentiation, partners are also stakeholders; and, secondly, that particular organisational and individual drivers will prompt diverse stakeholder positions over the lifetime of a partnership.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper builds upon materials from Caplan et al. (2007), Caplan & Stott (2008) and Stott & Keatman (2005 and 2006). For more information see the BPD Research Series. See [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org).

<sup>2</sup> See for example AccountAbility <http://www.accountability21.net/>, Tennyson (2004), Yakovleva & Alabaster (2003)

<sup>3</sup> Harrison (2002) p.593.

<sup>4</sup> See Caplan & Stott (2008) p.27.

<sup>5</sup> In a partnership, which aims to incorporate different sectors of society in its work, it may be helpful to structure stakeholder identification in terms of sectors. See [http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy\\_Impact/Stakeholder\\_analysis.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy_Impact/Stakeholder_analysis.html) (accessed 10.03.2009)

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/stakeholder> and <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stakeholder> (both accessed 10.03.2009) and The Dictionary of Sustainable Management <http://www.sustainabilitydictionary.com/s/stakeholders.php> (accessed 10.03.2009)

### Partners and stakeholders

A distinction is often made in partnership literature between ‘partners’ and wider ‘stakeholders’.<sup>7</sup> As partners are obviously also stakeholders it may thus be helpful to distinguish between internal and external stakeholders. Internal/primary stakeholders can be classified as recognised signed-up ‘implementing’ partners who have clearly agreed to contribute resources to a partnership, carry out concrete tasks on its behalf, and assume a level of risk in order to obtain benefits through working in this way. External/secondary stakeholders meanwhile are non-partners who, in line with their different priorities and concerns, may either exert an influence upon a partnership, or be influenced by it. They may also bear risks and access partnering benefits but not, we would assume, to the same degree as partners. As the discussion that follows suggests, however, these categorisations are not always straightforward and often require further analysis.

#### Defining Partnership

Partnerships involve two or more organisations that enter into a collaborative arrangement based on: (i) synergistic goals and opportunities that address particular issues or deliver specified tasks that single organisations cannot accomplish on their own as effectively; and (ii) situations where individual organisations cannot purchase the appropriate resources or competencies purely through a market transaction.

Sources: BPD and AccountAbility

### Partnership drivers

The central rationale for partnership is to assemble diverse types of organisational skills and resources in order to attend to an issue or task. Different organisational *raison d’être* are therefore central to partnering.<sup>8</sup> Each stakeholder, be they internal or external, individual or organisational, can thus be expected to adopt particular stances because of the incentives that motivate their engagement and/or disincentives that demotivate their collaboration. Obligations to participate in partnering processes and/or the sanctions or negative consequences for failure to do so are also important to consider. These drivers are central to determining stakeholder positions in relation to partnerships.

### Identifying and prioritising partnership stakeholders

In order to deepen our understanding of who partnership stakeholders might be, and how they could most appropriately be involved with a partnership, a series of discussion tools are offered below. These are intended as triggers for conversation and debate about different stakeholder positions during a partnership’s development. They may be used in a variety of ways: for internal assessments of partner standpoints and/or explorations of wider relationships; by external stakeholders wishing to analyse partnership connections and possibilities for involvement; and by partnership researchers, reviewers and evaluators studying broader stakeholder situations and standpoints.

#### The importance of context

The engagement of stakeholders is conditioned by the context in which a partnership operates. Explorations of relevant connections and choices of who to involve need to be considered in relation to the particular historical / social / political / economic situation in which a partnership is being developed. In addition, it is likely that in many circumstances there may be little room for choice about who a partnership works with. It is also vital to remember that contexts are not static and that positions and interests, as well as perceptions of partnership risks and benefits, may change over time.

Sources: Tennyson (2005) p.9 and Caplan & Stott (2008) p. 30.

### Power and interest

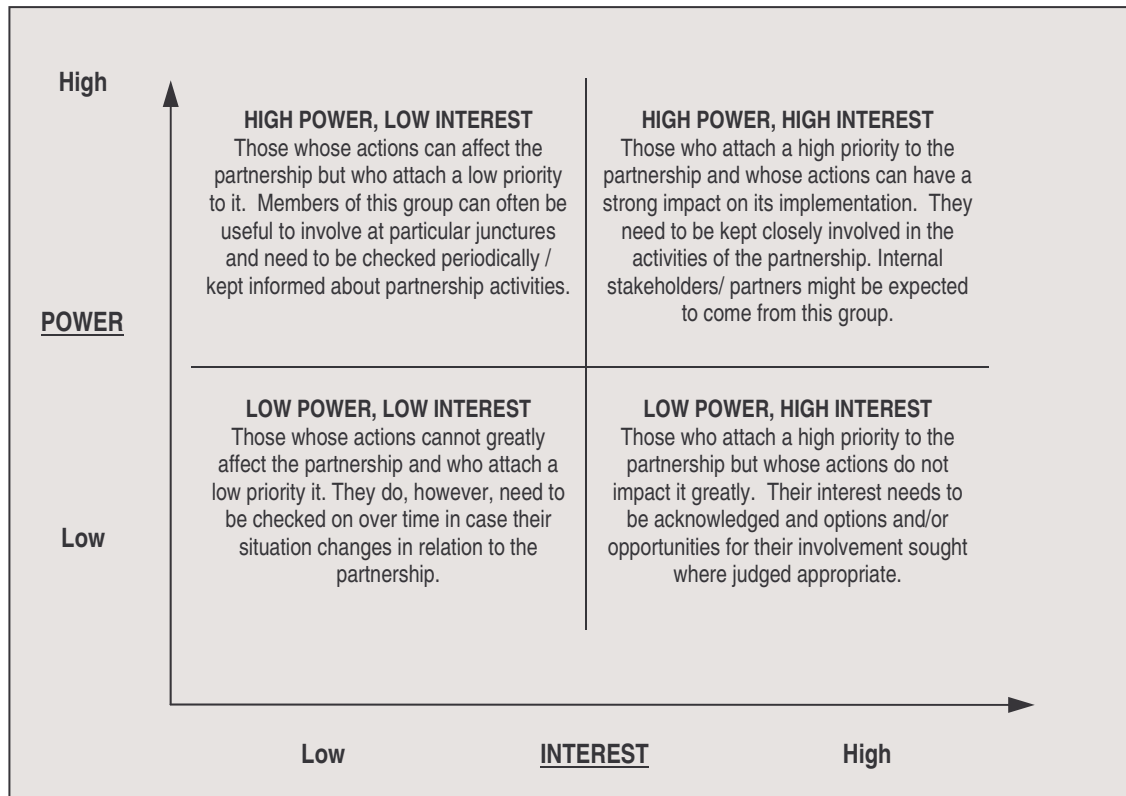
A commonly used stakeholder engagement matrix adopts power and interest axes against which to analyse stakeholders.<sup>9</sup> In a partnership context power might be interpreted as the degree of importance, prominence or influence that different parties exert on a partnership, an identification

7 See for example Tennyson (2004) p.15 and p.26.

8 See Caplan & Stott (2008) p.33 and Caplan et al. (2007) pp.8-10.

9 See for example <http://www.synesthesia.co.uk/msp/2006/05/09/the-stakeholder-powerimpact-matrix-in-practice/> [http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM\\_07.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_07.htm), ODI Stakeholder Analysis [http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy\\_Impact/Stakeholder\\_analysis.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy_Impact/Stakeholder_analysis.html) (all accessed 10-03-2009)

of which assists scrutiny of how far they can further or impede its work.<sup>10</sup> Interest would relate to the extent to which parties may be affected by a partnership and its activities, and give insights into whose views or concerns need to be taken into account as a partnership develops. Plotting different stakeholders within these categories can also reveal stakeholder interrelationships, alliances and/or antagonistic positions towards a partnership and may be particularly useful in encouraging exchange among partners about how to appropriately ‘manage’ different parties (See Fig 1).<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 1: Applying power/interest matrixes to partnership stakeholders**

The power/interest matrix is helpful when undertaking an initial analysis of potential partnership players. Partners might be expected to come from the top right hand area of the quadrant as those who have both high power and high interest in a partnership. Interest is clearly linked to partnership drivers (see above) as we would expect those with weak incentives and low obligations not to be particularly attracted to the idea of working in partnership. However, external stakeholders such as donors, policymakers, opinion leaders, and organised pressure groups representing target constituencies, may also fall into this category. These groups require careful attention and options for their involvement in a partnership need to be methodically considered.

According to the European Commission (2007), stakeholders who are perceived as highly important (powerful) but not positively interested in an initiative, should be closely managed with the aim of increasing their level of interest or minimising their interference. It is suggested that,

‘...it is helpful to determine the benefits that the project can offer to them, and identify how those benefits can be sold to the stakeholder. It may also mean compelling them (e.g. by exerting authority).’<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> European Commission (2007) p24;  
[http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy\\_Impact/Stakeholder\\_analysis.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy_Impact/Stakeholder_analysis.html); Stakeholder Analysis, Winning support for your projects [http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM\\_07.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_07.htm); and <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/PoliticalEconomy/stakeholderanalysis.htm> (accessed 10.03.2009)

<sup>11</sup> European Commission (2007) p23.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.25.

As well as further reinforcing the importance of drivers, this statement also draws on the notion of a partnership stakeholder as a party that stands to gain benefits from the collaboration (discussed below). Adequate acknowledgement of those who fall into the category of high interest/low power, meanwhile, is essential as it may be necessary to encourage their further involvement in a partnership. Internally small and under-resourced partners may fall into this group, while external stakeholders might include target groups and/beneficiaries who are perceived as fragile in nature. Discussion on how to position such groups closer to the centre of the matrix may include an assessment of where capacity-building efforts that encourage skills, resource and confidence-building are necessary. Naturally, the time and resources that such interventions may entail, and how far it is in a partnership's interest to engage in such support processes, will also need to be considered, particularly as these efforts may distract from the main partnership agenda. The last group of stakeholders, who are neither positively interested nor particularly powerful, should be checked upon from time to time in case their position in relation to the partnership changes.<sup>13</sup>

The matrix above can also be used as a monitoring device. Partners, for example, may want to verify their situation at particular junctures by conducting a self-assessment, or discussing perceptions of different partner positions. If a partner does not see themselves fitting comfortably in the high power/high interest box, questions might be asked about why this is so, and what might be done to change the situation. In relation to a decline in interest, it may be necessary to re-visit the particular incentives of an organisation in order to prompt a deeper connection to the partnership. A sense of not having power in a partnership, meanwhile, might suggest that there are inequities among partners which require attention. Solutions here could focus on capacity-building smaller or weaker partners and/or more open consideration of power dynamics may be necessary. The interest or power of external stakeholders can also change as a partnership develops and partners may need to accommodate this, perhaps by including them as partners or finding channels for working with them in a closer manner.

### *Risks and benefits*

As well as encompassing power and interest, the word 'stakeholder' also implies the achievement of a potential benefit if a project or venture goes well, and/or an assumption of risk by making, or bearing, a commitment in pursuit of such benefit/s.<sup>14</sup> Post, Preston and Sachs (2002), for example, define corporate stakeholders as:

'.....the individuals and constituencies that contribute, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to its wealth-creating capacity and activities, and that are therefore its *potential beneficiaries and/or risk bearers*' (my italics).<sup>15</sup>

Partnership is often referred to as a relationship in which members share risks and benefits in pursuit of a common goal.<sup>16</sup> Once again this concept links to the importance of investigating drivers and analysing the balance between incentives (potential benefits) and disincentives (risks) to partner. Tennyson (2004) suggests that partnership can offer common benefits such as professional development, better access to information and different networks, greater 'reach', improved operational efficiency, more appropriate and effective products and services, greater innovation, enhanced credibility and increased access to resources; as well as the satisfaction of

### **Individuals and organisations**

Although partnerships are composed of organisational and institutional members from different sectors, they are initiated and driven by individuals acting on their behalf. Personal interest and commitment to a partnership may vary while individuals may often not fully represent/act on behalf of institutional interests and, in some cases, may not even be fully mandated to do so. As partnerships develop, organisational, as opposed to individual commitment, is crucial. Individuals partner representatives thus need to have a clear 'licence to operate' and speak authoritatively on their organisation's behalf. Such mandates need to be checked regularly. If authority appears limited, the partnership needs to find ways to deal with this. Similarly, partners may have to ensure that the mandate of external stakeholder representatives is legitimate and clear.

*Source: Caplan et al: (2007) p.10.*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

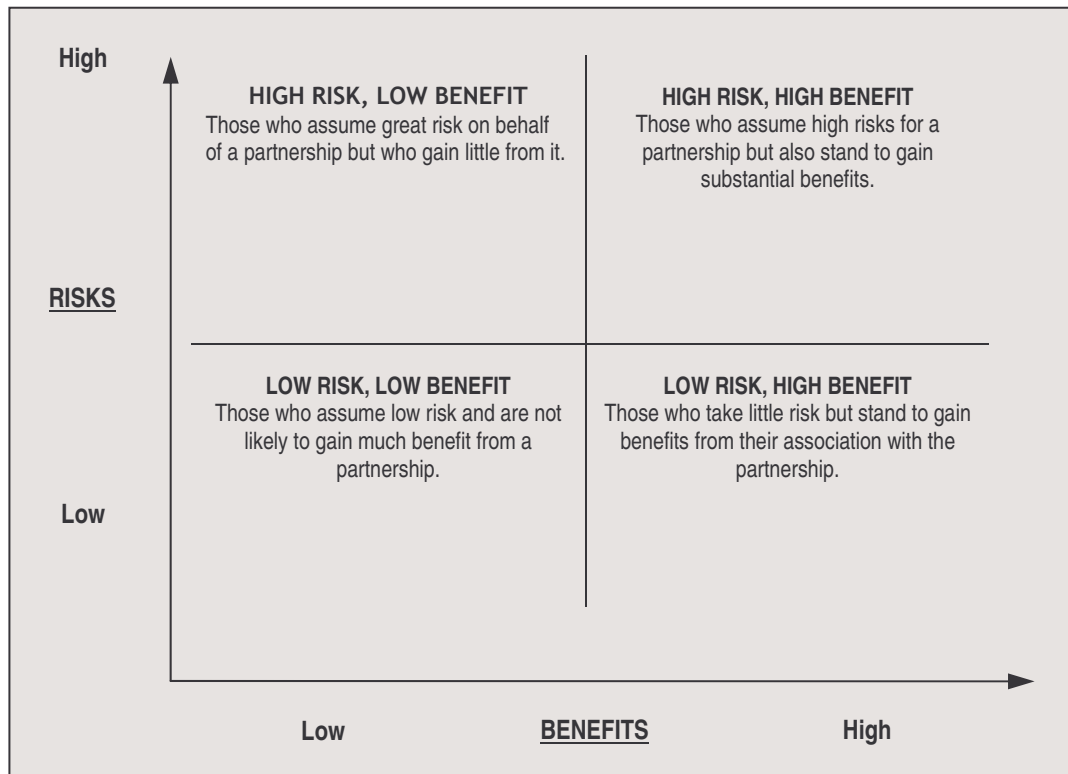
<sup>14</sup> See the definition of 'stake' as something, esp. money, bet, as in a wager, game, or contest OR a reward given a winner, as in a race; prize <http://www.yourdictionary.com/stake> (accessed 28.08.2008)

<sup>15</sup> Post, Preston & Sachs (2002) p.19.

<sup>16</sup> DFID Business Partnership Unit, (undated), Tennyson, R. (1998) p7; Tennyson & Wilde (2000), p.12.

particular individual and organisational incentives. These, however, need to be considered in relation to the risks that partnership might pose in terms of reputation impact, loss of autonomy, conflicts of interest, drain on resources and implementation challenges.<sup>17</sup>

The matrix below allows us to explore partnership stakeholders from the perspective of risk and benefits (See Fig.2). Here we can examine whether partnership stakeholders are primarily potential beneficiaries, standing to gain from a partnership, or risk bearers who stand to lose from it.<sup>18</sup> We can also further explore differences between internal and external stakeholders. We might expect partners, for instance, to bear substantial risks on behalf of a partnership in order to achieve both common and individual benefits from it. Among partners the tool can also be helpful in exploring where there may be a sense of unequal risk/benefit balances and provide an opportunity for clarifying how this might be addressed.



**Figure 2: Prioritising external stakeholders by risks and benefits**

Perceptions of where target groups and donors are positioned can also be explored. Although target groups might theoretically stand to gain a great deal if a partnership succeeds, and may also bear enormous risks on its behalf, they are not usually considered as partners in their own right.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, donors, who are frequently categorised as partners, often assume considerably lower risks than other ‘implementing partners’ and may thus be placed in the low risk, high benefit area. In this connection, it is worth noting that although receiving a benefit from a partnership does not automatically qualify an organisation as a partner, this might not relate to risk-bearing but rather to how far they are integrated in the design and implementation of a partnership. Other groups may support high risks on behalf of a partnership which they are less able to control and from which benefits are uncertain. This category might include target groups/ community beneficiaries who take on extra work and activities for a partnership without clear recognition of the possible benefits.

<sup>17</sup> Tennyson (2004) p.10.

<sup>18</sup> Caplan et al. (2007) p.19.

<sup>19</sup> While an assumption is often made that such groups are adequately represented by NGOs, concern has been raised about the ‘voice accountability’ of these groups (Slim, 2001), and whether or not they are accurately able to speak on behalf of those whose interests they claim to stand for (ibid & see also Fowler, 2000). Such legitimacy, as highlighted later in this paper, is often further complicated by power dynamics within target groups and the possibility that particular voices within them dominate and prevail over others.

*Risk-bearing and resource inputs*

Examining stakeholder inputs and assessing them in relation to risk-bearing may be of additional use. Financial resources are often prioritised within a partnership and carry the most ‘weight’, giving those that contribute them a particularly powerful partnering role, whether or not this is openly acknowledged. However, the risks of partners or donors who make cash contributions may not be the same as those of partners who devote unpaid staff time and commitment to a partnership. Appreciation of this, and some form of dialogue around the equitable valuing of different risks and resources (see Table 1) may thus be important for the development of solid partnering relationships.

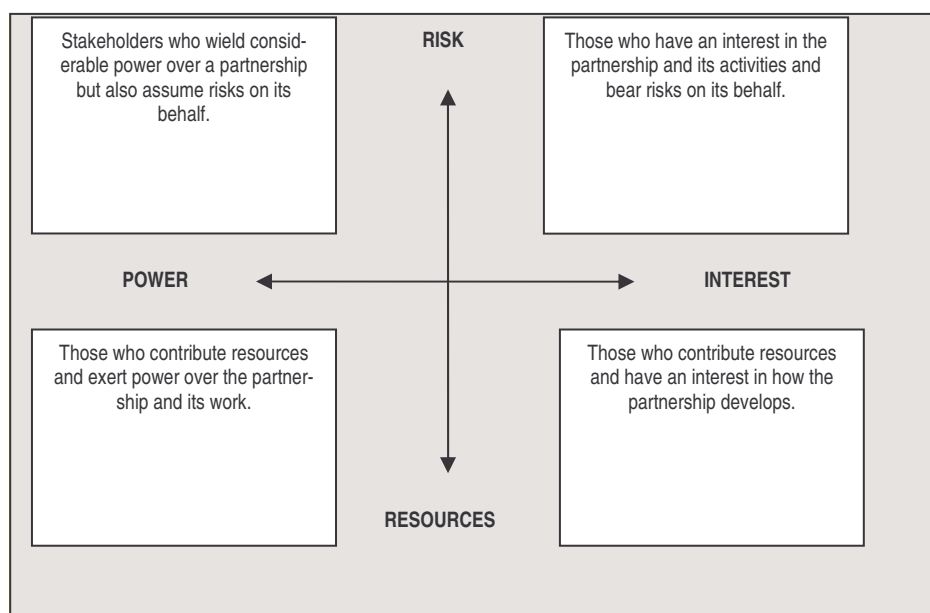
<b>Equipment</b>	Computers, furniture, stationary, transport
<b>Finance</b>	Funds, grants
<b>Knowledge</b>	Contextual information, trends, market analysis
<b>People</b>	Qualified and experienced personnel with appropriate knowledge bases for partnership activities
<b>Physical space</b>	For partnership office, meetings, events etc.
<b>Products</b>	Project-related items/commodities produced by partner organisations
<b>Relationships</b>	Contacts with policy makers, wider networks, media, stakeholder groups etc.
<b>Reputation</b>	Convening power and leverage
<b>Skills/expertise</b>	Technical and ‘soft’ skills - communication, advocacy, mediation and capacity-building abilities

**Table 1: Partnership resource inputs**

Exploring risks and resources can also assist in determining partner status. Contributing financial resources, such as a donor or funding agency, may not be enough to meet the criteria for being a partner unless greater ‘risk’ is assumed with the input of other critical resources. We also need to be aware that risk bearers who do not contribute to a partnership will not have the same incentives to see a partnership succeed as those who do.

*Power/ interest and risks/ resources*

A discussion tool that overlays a power/interest axis and a risk/resource axis enables us to obtain further insights into partnership stakeholders. This can be used to facilitate discussion around perceptions of where different players are positioned over time and promote dialogue around necessary role modifications. Such conversations can also stimulate a review of the value of different relationships to a partnership in the light of changes in their contributions to it, or assumptions of new and greater risks on its behalf (see Fig 3).



**Figure 3: Matrix for identifying and prioritising partnership stakeholders**

### Phases of partnership development

As partnerships develop and change over time, it is important to examine and review stakeholder engagement in relation to the five broad phases of partnership development outlined below (in which monitoring and evaluation are implicit throughout).

1. **Scoping:** researching the contextual case for partnership, selecting partners by identifying and exploring incentives for working together.
2. **Initiating:** agreeing on core objectives and goals, different roles and responsibilities and appropriate partnership mechanisms.
3. **Implementing:** promoting accountable structures and procedures and ensuring appropriate engagement of partners and external stakeholders.
4. **Consolidating:** ensuring ‘mainstreaming’ of work within, between and across institutions, linking practice and policy levels.
5. **Sustaining/terminating:** agreeing on an appropriate conclusion to partnership or developing further work.

Source: Adapted from Stott & Keatman (2005) p.2

While internal stakeholders/partners may attach different weights to the matrix pointers, we would assume that they would be positioned near to the centre of the framework where interest and power, risk-bearing and resource commitments are most closely aligned. If this is not so, discussion about how to change this and whether the greater risk supported by particular partners requires adjustments and allowances may be useful e.g. should heavier bearing of risk permit greater influence in decision-making processes? Should those who do not assume the same risks as other partners take on additional responsibilities or commit more resources?

External/secondary stakeholders, who are likely to be found further from the centre of the matrix, can be grouped into high influencers or power brokers who will probably bear little risk if a partnership fails, and those with less power and influence who may ultimately bear a great deal more risk. Looking at a partnership’s target group/s is instructive here as they often fall into this latter category and require particular attention with regard to ‘engagement’.

Ultimately the idea is not just to recognise the resources that are put on the table but also to appreciate the different risks that a partnership imposes upon different stakeholders.

### Exploring ‘Engagement’

The concept of ‘engagement’, in common with terms such as ‘involvement’ and ‘participation’, is another elastic expression. According to the dictionary, ‘engagement’ is about taking part and/or sharing in the activities of a group. It also implies a moral commitment or binding promise. In a partnership context, engagement may best be understood by identifying in what ways different stakeholders might most appropriately take part in its work. This may vary, and require adjustment, according to time, context and partnership development stage.

#### *Ascertaining appropriate levels of engagement*

There is little material in the literature on partnership regarding how decisions should be made about the nature and degree of stakeholder participation. The extent of the involvement of different stakeholder groups in a partnership and its activities will, it may be assumed, relate to the perceived risks/benefits and power/interest factors outlined above. Participation may thus range anywhere between a limited or passive association to a more dynamic connection with a partnership in which the lead is taken in a decision or activity (see Table 2).

4	<b>STEERS</b>	Initiates or leads particular steps or activities
3	<b>INFLUENCES</b>	Participates directly in decision-making, has a vote
2	<b>CONSULTED</b>	Involved in discussion, able to express opinions & give feedback
1	<b>INFORMED</b>	Receives information

**Table 2: Levels of stakeholder engagement in partnerships**

These categories may be further broken down into the broad options identified below (Table 3). There are obviously many variances in these categories as different stakeholder groups will inevitably have divergent views and competing interests which will in turn be conditioned by specific, and changing, contexts. The scale represented does, however, provide the basis for a useful assessment of where engagement avenues for particular stakeholders can be built into partnership mechanisms, as well as where there may be possible gaps, concerns and options for

greater/lesser participation. A partner would expect to participate at the higher end of the scale. External stakeholders, meanwhile, may be ‘engaged’ at different levels depending on their connection to a partnership, their interest in it and the extent to which their involvement is sought in its work.<sup>20</sup>

<b>8</b>	<b>Steers</b> Directs / manages partnership
<b>7</b>	<b>Initiates action</b> Develops/manages particular steps /action points/plans
<b>6</b>	<b>Participates in decision-making</b> Is directly involved in decision-making and ‘has a vote’
<b>5</b>	<b>Able to influence</b> Participates marginally in decision-making processes
<b>4</b>	<b>Involved in feedback loop</b> Regularly shares opinions / feedback on partnership
<b>3</b>	<b>Consulted</b> Able to express opinions and give feedback to partnership
<b>2</b>	<b>Informed</b> Receives information / messages from partnership
<b>1</b>	<b>Access to basic communication channels</b> Grievance / complaints mechanisms regarding partnership & its activities are available
<b>0</b>	<b>No involvement</b> No channels available for opinion

**Table 3: Levels of stakeholder engagement in partnerships**

The lower more passive levels in Table 3 may not necessarily be less worthy than those at the top, particularly with regard to the contribution of external stakeholders. What is important is to ensure that the most appropriate tools, practices and mechanisms for engagement are used for specific contexts, purposes and phases of a partnership’s lifetime. Clearly, the chosen engagement option should not be contrived as a substitute for genuine participation. Accusations of ‘manipulation’ can be made when engagement focuses on simply ticking boxes or rubber stamping desired objectives without really involving stakeholders. A partnership may also be dismissed as ‘tokenistic’ if stakeholder engagement is ‘allowed’ but has no power or legitimacy, and when there is no guarantee that a stakeholder’s voice will be heeded by a partnership.<sup>21</sup> Thus, if a basic communication channel (Level 1) is perceived as suitable, the emphasis might be on making it as accessible as possible; if the choice is to ‘inform’ (Level 2) efforts might focus on guaranteeing a good two-way information flow. With a consultation exercise (Level 3), on the other hand, prominence might be given to ensuring that clear information on the process for opinion gathering, and feedback on the results of this, is provided.

### *Engagement options*

Availability of time and resources for chosen engagement options is crucial. While a range of different options may be employed (see Table 4) all need requisite planning and preparation.

<sup>20</sup> The issue of what different stakeholders are offered and what they seek in terms of ‘engagement’ is interesting to explore here. Donors, for example, may wish to be simply kept informed about a partnership’s progress but their power, based on expectations of what they may or may not want, and the possibility that funding may be withdrawn or not renewed, is often all pervasive and can be exerted without discussion about when/where it may be appropriate. In a different sense, an emphasis on offering target groups active participation may not always be necessary, welcome or possible (see Table 5. below).

<sup>21</sup> See Arnstein (1969)

Where more in-depth engagement is considered necessary, careful budgeting for the costs and management of participatory forums and processes and capacity-building for them is important.

Discussion groups	Action Research
Focus groups	Participatory rapid appraisal
Interviews	Capacity building and support
Meetings (large and small)	Community animation & visioning
Surveys	Participatory Evaluation
	Participatory Budgeting
Campaigns and awareness-raising events	Needs analysis/assessment
Consultative Forums	PPRA methodology (social mapping)
Public Forums /events	
Steering Committees	Cultural events
Community conferences/ seminars	Educational programmes
Open house/space events	Media – videos, radios, newspapers, newsletters, pamphlets
Community Advisory Panels	Theatre / role-play
Citizen panels	Graphic recording
Local contact points / advice bureaux, branch offices, libraries	Interactive displays
Government networks	Story dialogue

**Table 4: Possible options for engaging stakeholders** <sup>22</sup>

Ensuring that chosen options are suited to contextual and cultural circumstances is also crucial to the effective promotion of partnerships. This can also elicit new and innovative ‘stakeholder engagement’ methodologies. Evans (2008), for example, describes three methods central to her partnership work with communities in Australia: the Indigenous Australian concept of *Dadirri*; dreaming the partnership, and the praxis approach.<sup>23</sup> Other options that have been suggested by partnership practitioners include public and consultative forums such as *Izimbizo* in South Africa, and strategic avenues such as the UNDP Civic Dialogue for Democratic Governance Project in Jamaica.<sup>24</sup>

**Power dynamics**

The visibility, and invisibility, of both individuals and organisations connected to a partnership need to be understood when exploring ‘engagement’. Power relationships within a partnership are often a reflection of wider socio-economic and contextual divisions, as well as cross-cutting issues such as gender, ethnicity, educational or political background, race, age or religion etc. If a partnership’s aim is to promote social inclusion, ensuring that those who may be marginalised or excluded have a voice is important. This involves looking beyond individuals and organisations who apparently ‘speak’ on behalf of a partner or stakeholder group, to those who do not. The over-valuing of, for example, a partner’s financial input or an external stakeholder’s public influence can, consciously or unconsciously, often grant them more power and voice in a partnership than smaller partners from, say, the non-governmental sector, whose resources may not be as highly ‘valued’. The same can be true of individual partner representatives who are valued more highly than others because of perceptions of their status.

*Source: Caplan & Stott (2008) p.32.*

*Motivating Engagement*

As observed earlier, involving stakeholders in a partnership necessarily requires understanding their drivers for ‘engaging’. If individuals and groups are motivated to work with a partnership because the incentives/obligations for doing so are clear, they are likely to participate within it more fully. If there are disincentives, however, stakeholders may remain detached and, in some cases, even seek to obstruct partnership activities. In order to assess incentives it is therefore useful to conduct a regular check on how

22 Drawn from list compiled by participants at BPD Workshop on *Community Engagement in Partnerships*, London, November, 2005

23 Evans describes three methods central to her work as a creative cultural partnership broker in Australia: The Indigenous Australian concept of *Dadirri*; dreaming the partnership, and the praxis approach (see Evans & Stott, 2008).

24 The *Izimbizo* programme in South Africa aims to ‘take Government to the people’ by giving the public access to those in authority and a platform for raising their concerns. See <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/main.asp?include=izimbizo/main.html> (accessed March 12, 2009). For more information on the UNDP Civic Dialogue for Democratic Governance Project in Jamaica see Brown (2004)

far a partnership is actually responding to the interests of both partners and wider stakeholders. Table 5 offers a checklist of possible, and often overlapping, reasons for low or non-engagement and some options for addressing these.

Low or non-participation could suggest that individuals/groups are:	In which case a partnership may need to:
<b>Indifferent</b> Benefits are unclear and / or there may be disinterest in efforts perceived as unlikely to yield results	Identify, clarify and review incentives for participation among these individuals/groups
<b>Intimidated</b> Feel unwelcome, lack confidence	Examine operational culture in order to find ways to encourage them
<b>Disenfranchised</b> Have no 'say' and have not been asked to participate in right way	Reassess partnership structures and channels of engagement
<b>Unrecognised</b> Invisible and unacknowledged, have not even been considered	Revise approach and activities in order to incorporate 'missing' stakeholders
<b>Under-resourced</b> Lack time, money, seniority, educational levels etc.	Examine implicit criteria for participating e.g. timing of activities, resources and capacity-building needs.
<b>Waiting</b> Need to be convinced that participation is worthwhile	Anticipate triggers for participation through focused consultation and /or early tangible results
<b>Distracted</b> Preoccupied by more important issues/concerns	Review focus of partnership and how far it is a real priority / explore immediate context to see what is distracting
<b>Hostile</b> Unhappy with the idea of the partnership because it is seen as too risky or threatening to particular interests	Explore the historical context and related power dynamics to identify blockages and see if they can be addressed
<b>Weary</b> Tired of 'development' initiatives that have had little or no impact and of being 'researched' / 'sensitised'	Change approach, explore incentives for participation and find ways of ensuring these groups have genuine 'voice'

Table 5: Reasons for low and non-engagement in partnerships <sup>25</sup>

The role that an intermediary or facilitator can play in motivating ways to bring in and enhance those whose voices may be 'unheard' is instructive here. A recent study focussing on partnering with fragile community groups in Mexico, Russia and Vietnam, suggests that drawing on the catalytic role of individuals who are able to promote awareness, consensus and mutual trust is vital.<sup>26</sup> The importance of this function is reinforced by Tennyson (2005) who states that a trusted 'partnership broker', acting as a go-between between different stakeholders, is invariably at the heart of successful partnering.<sup>27</sup>

Consideration of different stakeholder views is undoubtedly important for partnerships but their opinions should be understood in the context in which they are offered.<sup>28</sup> It is also vital to remember that standpoints are likely to change over the lifetime of a partnership. Conflicting and changing loyalties and demands, and the contextual issues that cut across these, can exert an enormous influence on both the manner and depth of participation. An appreciation of both the positive and negative effects of different levels of engagement is also a useful exercise. Positive effects may include the growth of a partner organisation's capacity, reach and skills, or the increase in confidence and voice of a hitherto marginalised stakeholder group. On the negative side, however, an over emphasis on participation of particular stakeholders may stifle

25 Adapted from Stott & Keatman (2005) with helpful contributions from Ken Caplan (BPD, UK), Kay O'Regan (Earth-watch Institute, UK), Anette Scoppetta (Centre for Social Innovation/ZSI, Austria) and Colleen Hayward (Kulunga Research Network, Australia).

26 Bok et al (2008)

27 Tennyson (2005) p.8.

28 See Caplan et al. (2007) p.18.

plurality by making ‘engagement’ a bureaucratic process or a simple box-ticking exercise designed to fulfil organisational reporting requirements. It may also allow certain groups, be they internal or external, to control a partnership or become its prime beneficiaries.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has sought to define and explore the term ‘stakeholder engagement’ in relation to partnerships. By offering some discussion matrices for assessing stakeholders in terms of their power, interest and risks, benefits and resource inputs, it suggests that we may be able to more easily identify potential partners, ascertain levels of interest among players, and look at how we might need to work with different groups. As both internal stakeholders and external stakeholders are likely to manifest varying levels of attention and commitment to a partnership over time, a monitoring process that checks on the link between the interest and involvement of different partnership players is proposed. Attitudes and positions will be conditioned by a partnership’s purpose and scope, its operational environment, the phase of development in which it is working, and the availability of time and resources to support its activities. The ability to respond flexibly to different stakeholder incentives within particular and dynamic contexts should therefore be central to choices around appropriate forms of partnership ‘engagement’.

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*Please note that the opinions expressed herein are those of the author and not necessarily those of BPD or its members.*

*Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation (BPD) is a not-for-profit membership organisation that supports public, civil society and private sector decision-makers and practitioners engaged in partnerships that provide water and sanitation services in poor communities. Active since 1998, BPD focuses on how best to structure, manage and assess such multi-stakeholder collaborative arrangements.*

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# PROMOTING LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MULTI-LEVEL PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS IN EUROPE

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of how Local Economic Development (LED) is promoted through partnership in Europe. Endorsed by European Union Structural Funds as well as other agencies and support structures, partnership is viewed as an important vehicle for addressing unemployment and social exclusion, promoting social innovation and improving governance. Within this context, emphasis is placed upon the integration of LED within regional and national partnership strategies, which are illustrated by the different multi-level arrangements in place in Austria, Ireland, Germany and Sweden. Although diverse in nature, several common issues can be identified across these models that enhance LED: active engagement of local stakeholders, use of an intermediary to assist relationship-building, balancing accountability with flexibility and review and exchange of learning from the experience of working collaboratively.

**Keywords:** Employment, Europe, Governance, Local Economic Development, Partnerships, Social Inclusion

## **INTRODUCTION**

Local development is intrinsically associated with a multidimensional concept of change bringing together economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions; with innovation across and in the spaces between these dimensions. It may be seen as a method which helps improving quality of life, supporting or accelerating empowerment of ordinary people, developing or preserving local assets, overcoming market failures, strengthening cohesion, and defining and delivering grass-root development projects. (European Commission, 2010:10)

This paper shares emerging lessons from Europe on the promotion of partnerships for Local Economic Development (LED) and the multi-level linkages necessary to support them. Drawing primarily upon information from the Community of Practice on Partnership in the European Social Fund (COP)<sup>1,2</sup> and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Local Economic and Employment Development Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance (OECD LEED Forum),<sup>3</sup> the authors provide an overview of the rationale for the 'partnership principle' in Europe and its implementation via Structural Funds and other bodies. This is followed by an analysis of arrangements that promote co-operation between actors at local, regional, national and transnational levels, with examples from four European Union (EU) Member States. A set of common issues is identified across the models that assist integrated approaches to the multi-dimensional problems faced at local level. The paper concludes by reinforcing the importance of coordinated development strategies that take local needs and capacities into account.

## **THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE IN EUROPE**

Partnerships have become increasingly common as a governance tool to: link up policies at the local level; connect local actors with other governance levels; stimulate initiatives; increase effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources; enhance policy outcomes; and develop strong capacities at a local level. (Vienna Action Statement OECD, 2010:1)

Partnership has emerged as a central priority in the socio-economic development strategy of the EU. The European Commission, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee have published a number of resolutions, opinions and white papers that call for the strengthening of the 'partnership principle' in the implementation of Structural Funds.<sup>4</sup> The partnership principle is centred upon the premise that issues such as employment and social inclusion are too complex for single institutions to resolve on their own, and that co-operation between public authorities, social partners and, more recently, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations, is necessary for job creation, competitiveness, economic growth, improved quality of life and sustainable development.<sup>5</sup>

According to the European Commission (2009:xix), the implementation of the partnership principle,

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<sup>1</sup> A transnational network of ESF Managing Authorities which operated between 2007 and 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF (COP) Available at <http://partnership.esflive.eu/> Accessed 7 February 2014.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/forumpartnerships.htm>

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, European Economic and Social Committee (2010).

<sup>5</sup> See <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=54>

... has contributed to progress towards the reduction of inequalities and discrimination; it has contributed to innovation, especially as ways of working together have sometimes been profoundly changed, and transfer of knowledge and experience took place between partners. It has contributed to transfer and mainstreaming, especially as partners became able to speak a common voice in key policy areas and therefore to influence policy. (European Commission, 2009:xix)

The encouraging nature of these findings explains why partnership has been proactively promoted in the EU, and why the Commission believes that it is central to the achievement of the five EU 2020 targets (European Union, 2011:11).<sup>6</sup>

As well as Structural Funds such as the European Social Fund (ESF)<sup>7</sup> and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF),<sup>8</sup> the partnership principle is also supported by a range of initiatives working outside these regulatory bodies, including the OECD LEED Forum, and different national, sub-regional and local programmes for growth and employment. The OECD LEED Forum, for example, supports partnerships that are: (i) multi-level – with partnership decision-making involving stakeholders from national, regional and local levels; (ii) multi-sectoral – involving stakeholders representing various policy areas and economic sectors/branches, and governmental as well as non-governmental actors interested in improving co-ordination between the labour market, education, and economic and social policies at a local and regional level; and 3) (iii) multi-dimensional – applying integrated approaches to multi-dimensional problems (OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance).

In the ESF, regulations for the 2007-13 planning period stipulate both the involvement of diverse groups of stakeholders in the governance mechanisms of Operational Programmes (OPs), and the provision of financial support for multi-actor projects (European Commission, 2006b). OPs are thus tasked with ensuring broad consultation, oversight of their programmes by multi-stakeholder Monitoring Committees, and delivery through initiatives involving national, regional and local authorities, educational and training institutions, NGOs and the voluntary sector, as well as social partners such as trade unions and work councils, industry and professional associations, and individual companies. In the draft ESF regulations for 2014-20, emphasis on partnership is reinforced by calls for the mobilisation of regional and local stakeholders to achieve the Europe 2020 Strategy and its headline targets.<sup>9</sup> In the ERDF, meanwhile, partnerships are promoted '... among all the relevant territorial and socio-economic partners, and in particular regional and local authorities, as well as any other appropriate body during the various stages of implementation of the operational programmes co-financed by the ERDF' (European Commission, 2006a).

Partnerships have also been set up to reduce territorial imbalances between and within regions, rural and urban areas. In the 2007-13 planning period, partnerships between different stakeholders were supported through the European Territorial Co-operation objective in: 53 cross-border co-operation programmes along internal EU borders; 13 transnational co-operation programmes covering larger areas such as the Baltic Sea, Alpine and Mediterranean regions; an interregional co-operation programme and three networking programmes covering all EU Member States.<sup>10</sup> Territorial cohesion is promoted by EDRF-funded programmes such as the European Grouping for Territorial Co-operation (EGTC) and the new Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) initiative in

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<sup>6</sup> The five targets for the EU in 2020 are: Employment (75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed); R&D (3% of the EU's GDP to be invested in R&D); Climate change and energy sustainability (greenhouse gas emissions 20%, or even 30%, if the conditions are right, lower than 1990, 20% of energy from renewables, 20% increase in energy efficiency); Education (Reducing the rates of early school leaving below 10%, at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds completing third level education); and, Fighting poverty and social exclusion (at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion). See: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index_en.htm) and [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)

<sup>7</sup> See <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=45&langId=en>

<sup>8</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/the\\_funds/regional/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/the_funds/regional/index_en.cfm)

<sup>9</sup> See <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=62&langId=en>

<sup>10</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/co-operate/co-operation/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/co-operate/co-operation/index_en.cfm)

which four EU Funds are working together to support bottom-up local development strategies.<sup>11</sup> Cohesion policy also encourages regions and cities from different EU Member States to work together and learn from each other through joint programmes, projects and networks.<sup>12</sup>

The European Commission's guidance principles for 2014-20 offer advice on how to organise participation of relevant partners in the different implementation stages of the EU Common Strategic Framework Funds (European Commission, 2012b). The principles are intended to provide the basis for a European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP), which will establish minimum requirements for national authorities and ensure high quality involvement of all partners. An increasing focus on the potential of partnership to foster social innovation and good governance is also emerging. The 2011 Communiqué on Partnerships in the ESF, for example, observed that: '[p]artnerships should be used to foster social innovation, stimulate change and mobilise reforms' (COP, 2011a).

The need to work in more strategic and innovative collaborative arrangements has been reinforced by the depth of the socio-economic crisis that Europe currently faces. LED, labour market and social policy are confronted with particular challenges that clearly cannot be met by a few institutions working on their own. These challenges include: the concentration of unemployment among target groups such as young people, older persons and migrants; gender segregation in the labour market; and shifts between industries, economic sectors and regions (European Commission, 2012a). Partnership, as a means of assisting integrated approaches to complex problems on the ground, is thus acknowledged as being more necessary than ever and reflected in calls for stronger involvement of local and sub-national levels in collaborative arrangements (European Union, 2011:11).

## **MULTI-LEVEL PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS**

Local development may be seen as part of a multi-level territorial policy which makes room for an articulation between i) a strategic regional level (regional development programmes) and ii) a more operational level where projects are implemented by partnerships. (European Commission 2010:28)

The European Commission has emphasised that the achievement of EU 2020 goals requires the active involvement of stakeholders across all the geographical levels of the EU (European Union, 2012:17-18). Delivery of EU policies, it is urged, should involve: the local level (municipalities, neighbourhoods, and districts, etc.), the regional level (counties, federal regions, etc.), the national level (EU Member States) and the EU-level (all Member States). However, in practice, policy objectives are often unaligned and local voices are not integrated into EU policies. To address this situation, the Committee of the Regions has set up a Monitoring Platform to help mobilise and involve regional and local authorities in debate at the EU level.<sup>13</sup>

Partnerships clearly have much to offer this geographical linking process. In addition to supporting the integration of stakeholders' views into policy design and implementation, partnerships often implement multi-level arrangements involving two or more geographical regions. By matching and clarifying the demands of different levels and closely integrating local activities within regional and national level strategies, partnerships are well-placed to make connections between policy and practice, and ensure that policy objectives are aligned between all levels of governance.

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/clld/>

<sup>12</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/what/future/proposals\\_2014\\_2020\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/proposals_2014_2020_en.cfm)

<sup>13</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/what/europe2020/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/europe2020/index_en.cfm)

As Table 1 demonstrates, a range of different partnership connections exist. (Solid connections between different geographic levels are indicated in light grey.) These linkages may be forged formally, through contracts and institutional avenues, as well as informally, through dialogue and communication channels between bodies at different levels.

**Table 1: Commonly practiced multi-level partnership arrangements**

EU-Level (EU)	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU
National level (N)	N	N	N	N	N	N
Regional level (R)	R	R	R	R	R	R
Local level (L)	L	L	L	L	L	L

At best, policy objectives are aligned between all levels of governance (type c). These arrangements are often created when area-based partnerships are funded by both the EU and national means, in compliance with the co-funding requirement stipulated in the principle of subsidiarity within the Structural Funds.<sup>14</sup>

In only a small number of Member States have territorial partnerships been established through a bottom-up process and then linked to national programmes and strategies. In consequence, grassroots initiatives often lack connection to policies, programmes and strategies at the national and EU-levels (types a and b). Although one of the main concerns about using a bottom-up approach is that projects may not be in line with national frameworks (COP, 2012:17-18), evidence suggests that following through on locally promoted approaches enables coherence with real needs, deeper stakeholder engagement and increased possibilities for long-lasting change and sustainability. At the same time, clearer roles, tasks and functions are made possible since they are defined by all partners from the start (ibid). Examples of type b arrangements also comprise national programmes entirely funded by national means. Even though policies are aligned with regard to EU objectives and priorities, Member States in these cases often provide support to partnership actions from national budgets with the intention of reducing administrative burdens.<sup>15</sup>

Other multi-level arrangements refer to actions initiated from the top down that do not link to the local level (types d, e and f). These may fail because they leave out key implementation actors and considerations from the ground. The perceived advantages of a top-down approach relate to time considerations, common rules and clear structures for working together, as well as better linkages to national resource planning (COP, 2012:17-18). The provision of a strong framework for action and the assumption that, 'top-down approaches go further in setting co-operation conditions than partners would voluntarily do' are additional advantages. However, there is also recognition that top-down approaches may be detached from realities of target groups with reduced commitment from local partners, a tendency to become bureaucratic and 'less freedom and space' to develop activities (COP, 2010a).

Partnerships are clearly better able to contribute to local development if strong multi-level arrangements are in place that guarantee the integration of grassroots concerns and viewpoints. The OECD confirms that government must ensure, '... effectively-functioning channels of communication within multi-level governance arrangements that are open to inputs from the bottom up' (OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance, 2010:3). As top-down approaches appear to be regarded as simpler and more straightforward to develop (COP, 2012:18), EU Member States should thus make efforts to design policy frameworks that enable ample space for integrating local voices

<sup>14</sup> See [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/institutional\\_affairs/treaties/lisbon\\_treaty/ai0017\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/lisbon_treaty/ai0017_en.htm)

<sup>15</sup> See for example the Perspective 50plus partnerships for older workers in Germany which have been set up beyond the Structural Funds, <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/37729545.pdf>

in setting objectives for local development strategies. At the same time, as countries in Europe strive to lead their economies out of the recession and into sustained economic recovery, against a context of tight budgets, LED should be linked to a common strategy with clearer prioritisation and stronger collaboration across different policy areas (OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance, 2010:2). In order to foster LED via area-based partnerships local level concerns must additionally be incorporated throughout relevant programme cycles.

## MULTI-LEVEL PARTNERSHIP APPROACHES IN PRACTICE

The key features of four partnership models in Austria, Germany, Ireland and Sweden have been outlined here in order to illustrate how different multi-level collaborative approaches are used to promote LED in Europe (see Table 2 below). Tailored to specific and dynamic country contexts, each model has sought to enhance local level participation, promote social innovation and ensure that policy objectives are aligned between different levels of governance (see type c arrangements, Figure 1).

**Table 2. Key multi-level features of partnership models implemented within selected EU Member States**

Country	Partnership model	Key multi-level features <sup>16</sup>
Austria	Territorial Employment Pacts	<p>First implemented in 1999, TEPs are regional partnerships contracted by government in the 9 regions of Austria to better link employment policy with other policies in order to improve the employment situation at regional and local levels. Some partnerships, operating under the umbrella of the provincial TEP, have also been set up at a local level.</p> <p>Recognised as an EU best practice, TEPs have always engaged in multi-level exchange. The co-ordination unit 'Kooo' was established by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection to support countrywide TEP processes and ensure regular knowledge transfer regarding the practical application of political decisions.</p> <p>In 2004, following the establishment of the OECD LEED Forum in Vienna, TEPs intensified their co-operation with partners in other countries (eg the 'Centropre project', between the Vienna TEP and public authorities in Győr (Hungary) and Bratislava (Slovak Republic)). The activities of these partnerships demonstrate commitment to joint project development and cross-border transfer of expertise.</p>
Germany	'T model' of horizontal and vertical partnerships	<p>The German partnership approach is multi-objective, multi-layered and multi-stakeholder. The National Strategic Reference Framework for the Structural Funds in Germany (2007-2013) seeks to promote synergies between the ESF and the ERDF, to ensure a strong focus on key priority areas, as well as to work at both national (federal) and regional levels.</p> <p>The partnership principle is being implemented by a number of federal programmes and initiatives in what can be described as a 'T model', incorporating so-called 'horizontal' and 'vertical' partnerships. Horizontal partnerships work at federal level with the involvement of five federal ministries to ensure joint planning and delivery during the whole programme cycle, with key stakeholders such as social partners, voluntary welfare organisations, NGOs and others. Vertical partnerships operate as multi-level partnerships initiated at federal level but addressing regional and local levels. These include projects such as 'Perspective 50plus' and the 'Local Empowerment Programme'.</p>

<sup>16</sup> See Community of Practice on Partnerships in the ESF (COP), Partnership Practices, Effects and Opportunities (PEO) Key Lesson Reports from Austria (2011b), Germany (2010b), Ireland (2010c) and Sweden (2009).

Ireland	Local Development Companies	<p>Ireland's long history of working in partnership has ensured the integration of 'local voices' in policy delivery through a cascade system of connections between national, regional and local levels. The partnership approach is often implemented through devolution of funding and service delivery to local partnership and community structures.</p> <p>Local Development Companies (LDCs) are local area partnerships established as independent companies limited by guarantee without share capital and have a clear framework within which to develop their activities. LDCs are funded by the National Exchequer, via the National Development Plan, through the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, the NGO Pobal and other sources.</p>
Sweden	Regional Structural Fund Partnerships and co-operation projects	<p>A rich tradition of co-operation in Sweden has been used to encourage diverse partners to drive and take responsibility for development. In order to link regional growth with labour market policies, a joint organisational approach was adopted for the implementation of the 2007-2013 Structural Funds with the ESF and ERDF working together through Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) in the eight regions of Sweden.</p> <p>SFPs are established by a law that stipulates their composition and tasks. They include politicians (who must form at least 50% of their membership) and other stakeholders, and are responsible for programme design, selection and funding of 'co-operation projects' that operate at national, regional and local levels. These multi-actor projects address employment and exclusion issues and are expected to work actively to promote gender mainstreaming, accessibility for people with disabilities and other cross-cutting issues, as well as to co-operate with projects and organisations in other Member States.</p>

While the partnership models outlined above are clearly diverse in nature, four cross-cutting issues can be identified that play a crucial role in reinforcing LED through multi-level linkages. They include:

- Concerted efforts to ensure local target group engagement
- The work of partnership brokers to support and give voice to local concerns
- Enabling space for local level input by balancing partnership accountability and flexibility
- Using review processes to share experiences and promote learning.

### Local target group engagement

The European Economic and Social Committee (2010) stresses that efficient implementation of actions depends on good governance and strong partnerships between all relevant territorial and socio-economic actors, in particular social partners and stakeholders such as NGOs. While social partners and NGOs are frequently involved in programme design and implementation, direct target group engagement in formally established Structural Fund Boards such as Monitoring Committees is missing. As LED activities frequently fail if designed at a distance, be it at a regional distance or a problem distance, in isolation and without the collaboration of local actors (see, for instance: Hoskins and Kerr, 2012:8; EQUAL Managing Authorities of Belgium, Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, 2006:2), an important task is to ensure that local actors and target groups are clearly positioned in partnership frameworks and focus areas. Valuing local know-how and expertise and including this in ongoing partnership processes ensures grassroots engagement in resolving societal problems and balances demands for geographical scale with local ownership. Partnerships that work directly with the target groups (sometimes via NGOs or intermediary 'broker' organisations) on a day-to-day basis can also integrate lessons into ongoing programmes.

The Irish model is centred upon unlocking local commitment and empowerment (COP, 2008:50-51; COP, 2010c; COP, 2012:19). In Germany, the Perspective 50plus project and the Local Empowerment Programme actively seek to connect at the local level. The Local Empowerment Programme, for example, was developed with the Federal Ministry of Senior Citizens, Women and Youth to work closely with people wishing to develop micro-level projects who have largely been overlooked within the framework of traditional interventions (COP, 2010b:10). In Austria, meanwhile, careful contextual analysis to assess how to bring marginalised groups into the labour market was based upon findings showing that institutional co-operation and the testing and development of innovative measures needed deepening (COP, 2008:35; COP, 2012:26). In Sweden, the promotion of political involvement in SFPs is viewed as endorsing their mandate to implement labour market changes. However, it is also recognised that a deeper partnership culture will be obtained through stronger links between SFPs and local co-operation projects (COP, 2009:10).

### **The role of partnership brokers**

The models show that broker organisations play a vital intermediary role in integrating local concerns into partnership arrangements and enhancing top-down/bottom-up connections. In Austria, the independent organisation Kooo, which acts as a 'neutral' coordination body for the TEPs, has played a central part in assisting TEPs to better align objectives between local, sub-regional, regional, national and transnational levels (COP, 2011b:4-5). In Sweden, Thematic Groups which operate as units in academic institutions and ministries, national agencies and multi-sector forums have provided local co-operation projects with a structured support process to ensure the integration of cross-cutting issues into their work (Stott and Scoppetta, 2013).<sup>17</sup> In Germany, Gsub, one of the main intermediary bodies contracted by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, supports regional projects that promote local employment pacts (ibid), while in Ireland, the non-profit organisation, Pobal, plays a significant role in developing local capacity and support structures (COP, 2010c:5; COP, 2012:20; Stott and Scoppetta, 2013). The strategic assistance provided by these broker organisations also gives partnership stakeholders at different levels an understanding of 'the bigger picture' and clarity around the links between policy and practice in relation to EU Structural Funds. As a result of the broker's liaison role, national requirements are translated and made sense of at regional and local levels, and programme roll-out is given coherence (Stott and Scoppetta, 2013).

### **Balancing accountability and flexibility**

As highlighted above, a tendency towards highly formal top-down approaches in partnership promotion is identifiable in most EU Member States (COP, 2012:17-18). Clearly the security of operating within a defined framework, with firm direction and guidance on appropriate approaches, is important to partnership stakeholders, particularly where financial management requires careful supervision. In Structural Fund programmes such as those administered by the ESF, for example, partnerships are commonly initiated through a top-down process. While this 'formal' approach is seen as providing clear structural procedures for local development, there is nonetheless a constant tension between ensuring that clear rules and procedures are in place to reinforce accountability and the need to find the space for creativity, local ownership and respect for the autonomy of different partners. In many Member States, even though the merits of a bottom-up approach are recognised, incorporating this focus into established top-down agendas has proved challenging. To address this situation, the Irish model has

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<sup>17</sup> The Thematic Groups include Youth; Workplace Learning and Labour Market Transition; Inclusion in Working Life; Equality and Entrepreneurship.

incorporated the concept of 'Accountable Autonomy', which enables partner organisations to balance commitments to communities with full accountability to funders. Needs are met locally while responding to national policies and priorities, thus maximising impact and minimising waste and duplication (COP, 2010c:8; COP, 2012:19). In Germany, strong efforts have been made to ensure that partnership programmes are kept flexible and non-bureaucratic by using simple indicators to measure achievements (Stott and Scoppetta, 2013). In the Austrian case, an emphasis on innovation and ongoing evaluation processes are endorsed as ways of breaking down institutional silos, keeping structures dynamic and encouraging mutually reinforcing top-down/ bottom-up connections (COP, 2011b:11). In Sweden, there is acknowledgement of the need to balance accountability, in terms of priorities, funding cycles and reporting, with a flexibility that allows for holistic and creative project approaches at the local level (COP, 2009:10).

## Review and exchange

Monitoring and evaluation systems that demonstrate the added value of working in partnership for partners, stakeholders and target groups can highlight and address gaps in the integration of local feedback into regional and national level reviews. In Sweden, where partnership arrangements are centred upon the promotion of learning environments, innovative activities and the achievement of strategic impact, an ongoing evaluation system has been adopted for both SFPs and co-operation projects from the start of their work. This system has enabled the identification of problems and challenges, as well as ways of addressing them, as they arise (COP, 2009:10). In Ireland a live IT, planning and monitoring system requires LDCs to input data on their progress at regular intervals and to allow corrective or remedial action to be taken to facilitate optimal partnership performance (COP, 2010c:8; COP 2012:20).

Efforts that link learning from review and assessment back into practice are also central to positioning the local level in wider frameworks. In the models shared here, great emphasis is placed on mutual learning through networking and exchange processes across projects and programmes at different geographical levels, often with the support of broker organisations (Stott and Scoppetta, 2013). In Sweden, as well as support for Strategic Impact and Learning (SPeL),<sup>18</sup> the Thematic Groups mentioned above, as well as other organisations that promote gender mainstreaming and accessibility, engage regularly with projects to ensure that positive results are fed back into practice (COP, 2010:8; COP, 2012:21). In Ireland, Pobal has been able to draw upon a challenging review and learning culture based upon strong case study and research strategies to assist effective partnership links to the policy evolution process (COP, 2009:8; COP 2012:21). In the cases of Austria and Germany, the knowledge gained through partnership analysis allows shared learning from successes and failures. In both these models, the broker organisations, Koo and Gsub, have played a central role in ensuring a 'safe space' for dialogue and exchange that stimulates deeper learning about local needs and their assimilation into wider partnership frameworks (Stott and Scoppetta, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined some of the key lessons that have emerged in Europe with regard to the promotion of partnerships that support LED through an exploration of

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<sup>18</sup> SPeL focuses on methodological support for projects, the stimulation of regional learning and additional dissemination of results

multi-level arrangements in four Member States. In order to assist mainstreaming and improve the impact of partnerships on policy, linkages and connections across local, regional, national and transitional levels clearly need to be further developed. This relies upon stronger integration of local needs and capacities in programme design and implementation, and greater awareness of the importance of developing joined-up local development strategies. As stakeholders at all levels can make an important contribution to improved LED, both EU and national level policymakers need to make greater efforts to draw up frameworks together with actors at local and regional levels and enable programme adjustments from the start. Local and regional stakeholders, meanwhile, should team up with partners from other economic sectors, government agencies and civil society organisations to solve complex problems jointly. In addition, all actors must be prepared to share lessons in order to align policies between spatial levels, make better use of synergies between programmes and avoid the duplication of failures.

Partnerships in Europe have made impressive contributions to the development of innovative local development strategies and the breaking down of institutional and organisational barriers that impede improved approaches for dealing with complex problems on the ground. To further enhance their potential for positive change, particularly in face of the current socio-economic crisis in Europe, stronger action is required to ensure that partnerships further integrate local voices throughout programme cycles and policy frameworks encourage robust co-operation across all levels of governance.

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