



**IBLF**  
THE PRINCE OF WALES  
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS  
LEADERS FORUM

## **Facing the Facts**

Realities of Partnering in Practice

# Survey of Views and Experiences of Frontline Partnership Practitioners

September 2006



*I cannot stress how important I feel it is to create an even wider international network of skilled and qualified brokers, facilitators, social entrepreneurs and partnership champions.*

*Skilled partnership professionals are, in my view, the vital ingredient needed to ensure partnerships for sustainable development have maximum impact.\**



HRH, The Prince of Wales  
President  
International Business Leaders Forum



**the  
partnering  
initiative**

## About the IBLF

The Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1990 to promote responsible business leadership and partnerships for sustainable international development. With a membership of over 80 companies from around the world, IBLF works in more than 60 countries mobilising visionary leadership and engaging the capabilities of companies in creating innovative partnerships and sustainable development solutions.

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

## About The Partnering Initiative

The Partnering Initiative is a global programme of the IBLF in association with the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry. The Partnering Initiative focuses on advancing and disseminating cutting-edge knowledge and methodologies for effective cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development.

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

## Disclaimer

The views, observations, conclusions and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and the respondents to the survey and are intended to inform and stimulate debate. They do not necessarily represent the views or formal position of IBLF or its supporters or partners.

\*Front cover quote: HRH, The Prince of Wales speaking in a video message to The Partnering Event, Cambridge, September 25th 2006. The full message can be viewed at: <http://thepartneringinitiative.org/hrhvideo>

## About the Survey

The Partnering Initiative believes that partnership practitioners<sup>1</sup> are an important group of people, vital to the effective delivery of partnerships for sustainable development. As such it is critical that their voices, based on their experiences and the on-the-ground realities of partnering, be heard.

This survey was undertaken in preparation for, and to inform, The Partnering Event<sup>2</sup>, an international convocation of partnership practitioners held in Cambridge, UK, September 2006. It was designed to:

- Capture achievements of practitioners in their day to day partnering work
- Promote deeper understanding of challenges faced by practitioners from within their own organisations, their partnerships and the environment in which their partnerships are operating
- Assess the contribution made by the PCCP<sup>3</sup> and PBAS<sup>4</sup> courses to the professional development of those who have completed them
- Identify the changes needed to enable partnership practitioners to achieve their partnering goals more effectively

The results of the survey provided the basis for The Partnership Declaration<sup>5</sup>, a challenge to sector leaders, policy makers and donors to create the most effective partnership enabling environment. The Declaration is reproduced at the end of the survey.

The survey was designed, conducted and responses collated by Sehr Hussain Khaliq, Darian Stibbe and Ros Tennyson (The Partnering Initiative).

1. A partnership practitioner is defined here as an individual from any sector (public sector, business or civil society) who operates (full/part time, formally or informally) in the role of broker or manager of a cross-sector partnership for sustainable development.

2. The Partnering Event, September 24-26th, Cambridge, UK was convened by the International Business Leaders Forum, the Overseas Development Institute and the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry. It involved 130 partnership practitioners directly and a further 150 practitioners on-line.

3. The Post-graduate Certificate in Cross-sector Partnership (PCCP), run by the University of Cambridge in association with the International Business Leaders Forum

4. The Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme (PBAS), run by the Overseas Development Institute in partnership with the International Business Leaders Forum

5. See [www.ThePartnershipDeclaration.org](http://www.ThePartnershipDeclaration.org) for further details

## Survey Participants

The survey was sent to approximately 300 partnership practitioners around the world who had completed the Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme or Postgraduate Certificate in Cross-sector Partnership, or were otherwise associated with The Partnering Initiative.

56 practitioners responded, based in Africa, the Americas, Australia, Asia, Europe and the Former Soviet Union, with approximately 60% linked to partnerships that span more than one region.

Figure 1 shows the range of respondents by sector affiliation – with the majority from not-for-profit/intermediary organisations (35%) and businesses/business organisations (32%).

The sustainable development focus of the partnerships in which the respondents are engaged – many operating in several partnerships – fall broadly into the following categories:

*Employment and Entrepreneurship • Education • Environment • Human Rights, Women's Rights and Rights of Indigenous People • Institutional Development and Capacity-building • Peace and Security • Personal and Professional Development • Local and Regional Economic Development*

Figure 2 demonstrates the different roles (in most cases more than one) played by respondents in their partnerships.

An analysis of the survey responses suggests that partnering experiences, perceptions and challenges tend to be common across all sectors, cultures and roles.

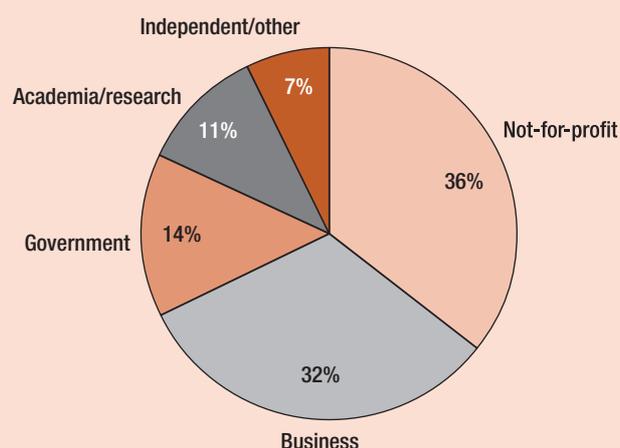
## Partnering Achievements

Practitioners were asked what in their view constituted **significant achievement** in their partnering work. Replies covered:

### Professional Development

- Personal and professional growth, recognition and job satisfaction
- Increasingly being seen as 'change agents' making an important contribution to society and to their organisations
- Gaining invaluable relationship-building skills and being able to facilitate complex interactions between very different players

**Figure 1: Sector Affiliations**



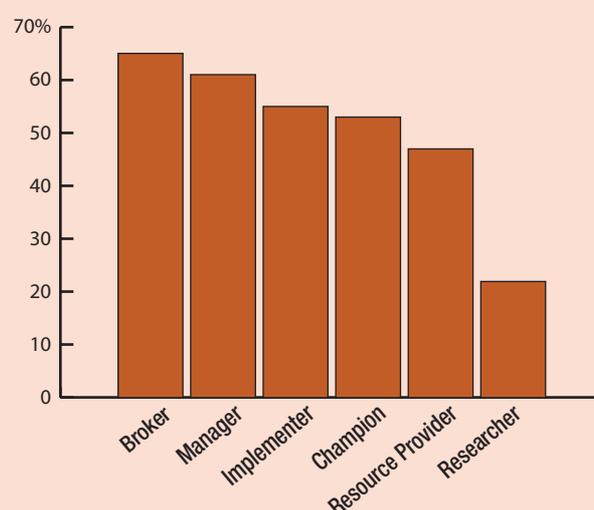
### Partnership Development

- Initiating new partnerships
- Pioneering radical and innovative responses to seemingly intractable challenges
- Procuring significant resources from new sources

### Partnership Management

- Increased confidence in developing appropriate processes for more effective partnering
- Building more robust partnerships capable of overcoming challenges and achieving sustained outcomes
- Developing a learning culture among partners and within partner organisations
- Keeping up the momentum beyond the initial 'honeymoon' period
- Managing a collaborative approach to developing exit and transition strategies

**Figure 2: Partnership Roles**



### Partnership Impact

- Making the partnership a 'success' from the perspective of beneficiaries, partners and other stakeholders
- Scaling up a partnership's impact and influence
- Producing tangible outputs / outcomes (sometimes against considerable odds)

### Systems and Policy Impact

- Transforming opinions and institutional practices
- Successfully promoting a partnering approach to key others (policy makers, donors, leaders)
- Contributing to creating an enabling environment for more effective partnering

### Partnering Challenges

Practitioners were asked what in their view constituted the **main challenges** they faced in their partnering work. Replies included:

#### Personal / Professional

- Limited partnering skills / competencies
- Limited experience in resource mobilisation
- Uncertainty about how to create and maintain partnership structures
- Lack of personal empowerment
- Difficulties in juggling different priorities
- Potential for personnel burn-out

#### Within Partner Organisations

- A lack of understanding about partnering and partnership potential
- Leadership shortcomings
- Low level of management 'buy in' to the partnership
- Human resource challenges
- Competing organisational priorities
- Inability to capture and communicate the benefits of partnering

#### Within the Partnerships

- Time constraints
- Partnership politics and hidden agendas
- Lack of commitment from partners
- Relationship and behavioural issues
- Too few colleagues with partnering skills

- Flawed decision-making processes
- Lack of clarity within the partnership structures and procedures

### Beyond the Partnerships

- General misunderstanding and misuse of the term 'partnership'
- Lack of dialogue with key external players
- Financial / resource constraints
- Unexpected external factors that impact the partnership
- Inadequacies in the public sector in its approach to partnering – whether in terms of active engagement or in creating a more enabling environment

### Factors Impacting the Effectiveness of Partnership Practitioners

The survey responses revealed that the work of partnership practitioners could be made more effective if:

- There were more **capacity-building opportunities** in order to develop individual and organisational partnering skills / capacity, understanding of partnering processes and greater skill at articulating the added value of partnerships for sustainable development
- There was better understanding by donors, managers and leaders of the need for, and a proper investment of, **time** required for the partnering process to ensure partnerships are responsible, rigorous and effective
- There was more support for the **role of business as partners** by building a culture in the corporate sector that goes beyond viewing partnering as a public relations tool
- Senior managers in all sectors could provide **greater leadership**
- The **role of the State was strengthened** by improving government understanding and commitment to partnership as a sustainable development paradigm; development of national policy frameworks that support partnering; partnership approaches being used to build greater democracy, better infrastructure and good governance
- There was a greater focus on creating more comprehensive and penetrating **communication strategies**
- There was more **serious and sophisticated media coverage** of partnership as an important sustainable development paradigm

- The work of partnership practitioners was more valued and respected

## The Status of Partnership as a Development Mechanism

Figure 3 illustrates the proportion of practitioners choosing each of five statements that best represented their personal views of partnerships as a mechanism for achieving sustainable development.

Respondents also volunteered the following:

*“Partnerships have opened up a new chapter in Development theory and will not wither away in time although much refinement will occur through a process of dynamic evolution.”*

*“There is no other way to operationalise sustainable development except through multi-stakeholder partnerships, whether in a developed country or a developing nation.”*

*“Partnership is an important tool but it is one of many. In the right situation and with the right kind of organisations, it can be very powerful and unlock a lot of potential but it is not a panacea.”*

Furthermore, respondents indicated what partnerships still need to demonstrate:

*“We need far more tangible evidence of what works and why and to demonstrate that the intangible benefits/outcomes of innovative collaboration may be significantly more far reaching than the tangible 'project' outputs.”*

*“There needs to be greater definition and a wider understanding of partnerships as an art and a science rather than being seen as just a 'good thing to do' or as a public relations selling point. In too many instances partnership seems to be just a buzzword.”*

## The Contribution of Professional Programmes to Partnering Practice

Respondents reported that participation in either the Postgraduate Certificate in Cross-sector Partnership or the Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme had provided:

### Figure 3: Views on Partnerships as a Sustainable Development Mechanism

Internationally recognised paradigm critical to sustainable development in 21st Century 31%

An important contribution to the sustainable development challenges we face 41%

Beginning to achieve some tangible results; has considerable potential 26%

Somewhat over-played with a lot still to prove 2%

A distraction from far more important issues (e.g. regulation and/or reform) (0%)

- **Validation of existing knowledge** and practice whilst also inspiring practitioners to adopt a more 'reflective' approach to their partnering work
- **Enhanced knowledge and interest** in the transformational potential of partnering, stakeholder engagement and community involvement in sustainable development
- **Opportunities to improve partnering skills** including brokering; capacity building; understanding underlying interests and other sectoral perspectives; communication; mentoring; relationship-building; networking; managing difficult people and situations; crisis management
- A range of **leading-edge tools, frameworks and processes**, as well as structured opportunities to learn from other practitioners – through a 'learning partnership', a mentee / mentor relationship or more informally
- **Improved professional status**, with most practitioners taking on new responsibilities including offering training or taking on more leadership roles within their organisations
- **Access to networks, peers and new colleagues**, thus reducing practitioners' sense of isolation, and providing a forum for further support, when facing partnering challenges

Several respondents also reported that their involvement with one or other of these programmes had led to a change in career or job. Interestingly, a significant number of those who had changed jobs had also changed sector. Virtually all respondents reported that their confidence had increased as well as their willingness to be bolder in their partnering work.

# THE PARTNERSHIP DECLARATION

## The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership Challenge

**Multi-stakeholder partnerships** are now a tried and tested approach to the intractable problems of poverty, environmental degradation and weak governance.

Their impact has been exciting, with clear benefits, but their full potential remains untapped. Multi-stakeholder partnerships could achieve *so much more* if corporate, NGO and public policy frameworks were more explicitly supportive.

This Partnership Declaration is a **call to action** to you as leaders and decision makers to:

***1. Revise existing policies to maximise the strategic value of multi-stakeholder partnerships.***

***2. Use your personal leadership to energise a culture of collaboration throughout your organisation and networks.***

***3. Adopt procurement procedures that stimulate, rather than inhibit, innovative partnerships.***

***4. Treat the governance of multi-stakeholder partnerships as seriously as you treat other important commitments.***

***5. Maximise the potential of your staff as partnership practitioners, for example, by revising staff appraisal criteria, investing in skills training and rewarding collaborative risk-taking.***

***6. Jointly measure qualitative as well as quantitative results, such as relationships, innovation, and new norms and practices.***

***7. Create a culture of good partnering behaviour by genuinely respecting the contribution of others.***

The initial experimentation phase for multi-stakeholder partnerships is over. Growing expertise and evidence can now be channelled more ambitiously to fulfil your organisation's primary purpose. Further commitments from leaders in all sectors can create a dramatic leap in our ability to meet sustainable development goals.

***Release the Power and Potential of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships***

## Background to the Declaration

This Declaration, the direct result of **The Partnering Event**<sup>1</sup>, is a call to action by an international group of 130 partnership professionals from all sectors and all continents.

We believe that multi-stakeholder partnerships have huge potential to create solutions to otherwise intractable local and global problems, including: continuing poverty, conflict and violence, social exclusion, inadequate public health services, environmental degradation and weak governance and accountability.

In our experience, when tailored to specific contexts and used carefully, partnerships can both drive innovative approaches and help each stakeholder group to fulfil its primary purpose.

### DEFINITION

Multi-stakeholder partnerships involve two or more organisations from across the public, private and civil society spheres that enter into a collaborative arrangement.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships move beyond unilateral actions and conventional contracts by pooling complementary resources and genuinely sharing the risks and benefits.

### Realising the Potential of Partnership

In many contexts, multi-stakeholder partnerships have now clearly moved beyond the experimental phase. With attention to the issues below, the potential of partnerships can be released.

Partnerships Require:	What Can Be Done
1) Flexible Public, Corporate and NGO Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Embed policies and procedures that realise the strategic value of multi-stakeholder partnerships</li> <li>➤ Systematically use partnership results to inform policy</li> </ul>
2) Supportive Organisational Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Position partnership as a valid way of enhancing core business</li> <li>➤ Build capacity to bridge the gap between partnership policy and operational practice</li> <li>➤ Ensure that organisational procedures do not inhibit partnership innovation</li> </ul>
3) Appropriate Resource Allocation and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Adopt more flexible tendering procedures that encourage multi-stakeholder approaches</li> <li>➤ Give proper weight to all partner contributions (beyond funding)</li> <li>➤ Encourage funders to engage as equal partners</li> </ul>
4) Sufficient Attention to Governance and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Specify and regularly review roles and responsibilities of partners</li> <li>➤ Create mechanisms to ensure mutual accountability and ownership of risks</li> <li>➤ Report successes <u>and</u> failures of partnership</li> </ul>
5) Sufficient Investment in the Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recognise that experienced practitioners can play an essential role in brokering partnerships</li> <li>➤ Invest in building the skills of key staff</li> <li>➤ Reward individuals for innovating and taking risks</li> </ul>
6) Clearly Defined Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Create evaluation frameworks from the outset, helping partners to clarify their aspirations and modify their methods as the partnership progresses</li> <li>➤ Take into account both qualitative and quantitative impacts</li> <li>➤ Use evaluators familiar with the challenge of working across stakeholder groups</li> </ul>
7) Improved Standards of Partnering Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Appreciate the organisational cultures and contexts in which different stakeholders operate</li> <li>➤ Recognise and respect the value of each partner's contribution</li> <li>➤ Share responsibilities, risks and rewards</li> </ul>

This Partnership Declaration is a call to action. To have your say and source the evidence, go to: <http://thepartnershipdeclaration.org>

<sup>1</sup> An event led by the International Business Leaders Forum, the Overseas Development Institute and the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry held in Cambridge, UK, 24-26<sup>th</sup> September 2006

**Published by:**  
International Business Leaders Forum  
15-16 Cornwall Terrace, London, NW1 4QP, UK  
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September 2006