PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

CURRENT ISSUES IN CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

ISSUE 2: 2004
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We are delighted to welcome you to the second edition of Partnership Matters, the annual journal that examines current thinking and practice in cross-sector partnerships by drawing on the work of those involved in the Post-graduate Certificate in Cross-Sector Partnerships (PCCP).

PCCP is now well into its third successful year and clearly on the map as making a significant contribution to the development of leading edge thinking in this field. It brings together participants from every continent and from the different sectors (business and business organisations; international agencies, governments and public sector services; academic institutions and a wide range of civil society organisations including NGOs, religious organisations and trade unions). The course is designed to build on the diversity of their cross-sectoral and cross-cultural partnership experiences by encouraging participants to work and learn together. It draws on a variety of academic disciplines to explore the realities and potential of cross-sector collaboration.

The University of Cambridge awards credit to those participants who complete the course successfully. This credit is equivalent to one third of a Masters degree and may be transferable to programmes at other universities through the Credit Accumulation Transfer Scheme. Dr. Janice Stargadt, the University Moderator for the course carries final responsibility for ensuring the continuing academic rigour of the work. Janice acknowledges the innovative nature of this programme and has said: “the challenge for the course participants is to transform their experience into knowledge”.

This annual journal has been created to honour the work and the learning of the course participants as they play their parts in this transformation process. All the participants are in some sense partnership pioneers in their organisations, sectors, countries and/or communities, and for this reason it seems right to share (if only in small part) the excitement of their discoveries and the sense they have of being at the forefront of developments in partnership theory and practice.

Since the planning phase of the course (during 2001), there has been a sea change in the status of cross-sector partnering. As Simon Zadek wrote so succinctly in his article for Partnership Matters last year, the partnership movement has come of age:

*It is an exciting and also a somewhat eerie moment when a movement comes of age. What was considered absurd, naïve or just plain silly becomes ‘the obvious’. What seemed unlikely or impossible becomes normal, and even passé. Scant resources skinned from innocent budgets turn into billion dollar, (too often one-eyed) programmes. What passed as experiments become the ‘real thing’...”

Nowhere was this ‘coming of age’ more apparent than at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD, 2002, Johannesburg). There, partnerships for development were presented as the norm and it was evident that cross-sector collaboration was already becoming mainstreamed within the organisational cultures of many of the world’s largest corporations and several governments (North and South). International agencies are promoting the paradigm more and more vigorously and several major NGOs are now finding it genuinely possible to collaborate with those very institutions whose behaviour (or neglect) they also continue to challenge without compromising either their professional or sectoral integrity.

In parallel to this practical manifestation of partnerships, the body of literature on partnerships grows apace.
Almost daily a new book, manual or issue-paper is circulated through the electronic networks that have done so much to make partnership experience and knowledge quickly and globally available. There is a proliferation of good practice award schemes for partnership initiatives and – perhaps more importantly – there is an increasing focus on practice-based research that attempts to find out if such initiatives are truly more effective than traditional single-sector approaches. All this can only be good for both deepening understanding of, and pushing for greater value from, the partnership approach.

Against this background, the lessons learned from the on-the-ground partnership experiences of the PCCP course participants are of real importance in furthering our understanding of such collaboration and in sharing information about specific partnership successes, challenges and failures. Our focus here is to capture some of those lessons and perspectives and share them.

In this issue we start with a summary of the keynote speech given to Cohort Three (in March 2004) by Simon Zadek, Chief Executive of AccountAbility. Here he further explores the territory he marked out in his article Partnership Futures in the 2003 edition of Partnership Matters.

He elaborates on two possible future scenarios for partnerships. The first, ‘Grey Dawn’, sees partnerships being subsumed by personal, political and commercial interests; whereas the second, ‘Civil Governance’, offers some suggestions about how civil society relations with the UN could evolve in the future, with partnerships playing a central and positive role. Zadek suggests that working systematically through such projections can help us to reveal the relationship between systemic change and the specific point of desired intervention and, in so doing, provide us with the possibility of working in the present more effectively and with renewed energy and vision.

Then follow five brief summaries of final projects submitted by PCCP participants in Cohort Two (March to December, 2003). The final project is one of three written pieces of work submitted for assessment as part of the course requirement. It takes the form of a five thousand-word paper on a topic chosen by the individual in close consultation with his/her tutor. The intention is to provide an opportunity towards the end of the course for participants to focus on their own area of interest and expertise and to place their work within a conceptual framework of partnership thinking as well as in relation to their particular organisational and contextual challenges. Inevitably a summary can never do full justice to their work – and to indicate that what is presented here is merely the tip of the iceberg, we have positioned these pieces as ‘Thinking in Progress’.

In his final project, Brian Allum of RWE Thames Water examined the contribution of local partnership experience to the development of global solutions in the area of water and sanitation services. Here, he suggests that the long-term commitment and support of the private sector at both local and international levels is needed to provide an effective and sustainable means of promoting access to water and wastewater services to the urban poor and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for water and wastewater.

Magda Guness-Verdickt of UNDP Mauritius explored the new role of UNDP officers acting increasingly as partnership brokers in different parts of the world. Is this an appropriate role for the UNDP? How successfully do these individuals fulfil the role at this time? How and why do they ‘fall short of Utopia’ and what can be done to build confidence, competencies and capacities for this important responsibility?

In another exploration of the changing role of donors, Susan Jupp of the Geneva-based Global Forum for Health Research, reflected on whether donors are simply partners who provide funding. Are donors always seen as the most important and influential among the partners because of their funding? Should donors be considered as partners at all? In her paper, she suggests what donors might do to redress any actual or perceived imbalances by adequately recognising the many non-financial types of contribution to a successful partnership.

Should the WWF build on its current experience of corporate relationships to create a sugar and freshwater partnership? This was the topic examined by
Richard Perkins of WWF-UK. In this extract, he asks whether the WWF should engage in such a partnership and, if so, with whom they should partner and what tools they might best use to achieve the partnership’s objectives.

Bérangère Magarinos, former manager of the Global Learning Network on Partnership at the UNSSC and now Partnership Specialist with Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), looked at the possibility of using e-learning as a tool for spreading partnership knowledge. She believes that an interactive internet-based learning platform could be highly effective in promoting learning and change in this area if creatively developed and utilised well.

A central part of the design of PCCP involves the participants working together on a research project over a six-month period. They are invited to form a ‘learning partnership’ with their own partnering experiences as the raw material for informing their enquiry and action research. The groups are pre-assigned, thereby ensuring a rich cultural and sectoral mix. In view of the importance of this work and the time dedicated to it by course participants, we have this year decided to give an overview of the findings of the report produced by one of the ‘learning partnerships’ from Cohort Two.

The group we feature here called itself The Wild Vision Learning Partnership and the group members reported a pretty feisty learning experience. They consisted of: Adrian Godfrey of CISCO Systems; Katie Huane of the East of England Development Agency (EEDA); Luan Lying from the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) China office; Benoît Witchalls from BP and Egbert Yambyamba from the Partnership Forum in Zambia. Drawing on the widely contrasting settings in which each of these people work, their challenge was to explore what (if any) common ground there might be between their very different partnerships. The simple rule being that whilst members of the group were encouraged to read as widely as possible around the subject, they were only allowed to use their own actual experience as the basis for drawing any conclusions.

Although the group’s findings may seem obvious ‘truisms’, such a conclusion fails to acknowledge the very interesting fact that five independent-minded people working for completely different types of organisation in four different continents were actually able to find genuine common ground and to agree upon a number of core principles and processes which, in their collective view, are of critical importance to successful partnering. In other words, this is the kind of real research that endorses the working assumption that there are some partnering ‘truths’ that are genuinely global even though each and every partnership is entirely unique and specific to its own set of circumstances.

Learning about partnerships comes not just from examples of collaborations that have worked but also from those that have not. Indeed, acknowledgement and understanding of ‘mistakes’ and ‘failures’ and ensuring that other partnerships learn from these is important in identifying ‘success’ factors. Leda Stott, one of the course tutors, draws from a ‘trigger paper’ produced for Cohort One, to provide a case study of a failed partnership in order to encourage the reader to reflect on a series of crucial issues that need to be taken into account when building a partnership.

This issue of Partnership Matters ends with Viewpoint, an opportunity for the expression of an individual’s thoughts on a specific topic. Cohort Two of PCCP included two representatives from the Trade Union movement: one from Romania (nominated by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) and the other from the UK-based trade union UNISON. Trade union involvement in the partnership experiment has all too often been overlooked, and we are delighted that Steve Bloomfield of UNISON uses this opportunity to examine the meaning of the term ‘partnership’ from a trade union perspective. He proposes that the term must be given a specific set of characteristics that clearly distinguish it from other forms of collaboration in order to avoid the risk of its devaluation when used for relationships such as Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) that are clearly – in his view – quite different.

The partnership paradigm may be becoming more common as a vehicle for delivering sustainable development initiatives, but of course that does not mean that...
the case for such collaborative approaches has been definitively made, nor does it mean that partnership approaches are valid in all circumstances. It also does not mean that all partnerships are de facto a good thing.

PCCP seeks to provide a structured forum for raising and addressing critical questions and, by doing so, to develop a cadre of key individuals (the course ‘graduates’) who excel both in thinking about and developing good practice in partnering. They come on the course as pioneers in their settings and we hope they leave the course increasingly confident in their abilities and well equipped to face the challenges that invariably come their way – from whatever direction.

Finally to some important expressions of gratitude...

First, to Leda Stott, whose first-hand experience of partnerships in both Africa and Europe combined with her unique blend of consistence and persistence make her the best possible editor for a publication of this kind. She and her fellow tutors Ken Caplan (Director, BPD: Water and Sanitation) and Louise Kjaer (formerly from The Copenhagen Centre, now with the Denmark-based consultancy company COWI), provide a level and quality of ‘coaching’ that each cohort of participants benefit from and enormously appreciate. In 2005, their ranks will be swelled with one or two new tutors drawn from appropriately qualified course alumni – another exciting development.

Second, to Melanie Rein, who acted as a tutor to Cohort One of PCCP and the following year worked hard with the team to clarify the formal assessment processes. In the current year she acted as one of the Course Directors until her decision to return to independent research and consulting work. In this role, she will continue to lead on the research aspects of The Partnering Initiative (see below). We look forward to featuring the DFID-funded research project that she is currently managing on behalf of the initiative (examining the outcomes from partnership initiatives in southern Africa) in next year’s edition of Partnership Matters. We are especially pleased to note that two of the co-researchers (from South Africa and Zambia) are graduates of PCCP (from Cohorts One and Two, respectively).

Third, our warmest thanks go to Simon Zadek, whose name has featured strongly in the first two issues of Partnership Matters. Rightly so, for Simon has been a friend to PCCP from its earliest development phase. He is just the kind of friend one really wants – always willing to challenge us from his own leadership position in this field whilst at all times firmly believing that this course is ahead of the evidence and of real global significance. For the past two years Simon has acted as the external examiner for PCCP though he has now had to withdraw from this role due to pressure from his other work commitments. Hopefully, he ‘retires’ knowing that he has played a major part in ensuring the course has achieved the rigour and status it has in such a short time. We welcome Gill Coleman, from the University of Bath, as his replacement in the external examining role and are delighted to know that Simon is keen to continue to act as an Advisor to PCCP over the coming years.

PCCP has benefited from a set of early institutional relationships that gave the programme both a firm financial foundation as well as a practical reality check / feedback loop from some of those at the forefront of cross-sector partnering. UNDP, Care International, Rio Tinto, Shell and Thames Water all gave the initiative their early support and four of the five have funded a number of participants through the course each year. Particular mention should be made of the commitment of all three of the corporations to fund additional places on the course for some of their key non-corporate partners. Their funding has meant that by the end of Year Three (December 2004), nine NGO representatives, one trade unionist and four key individuals from the public sector, for whom it would otherwise have been financially difficult, will have been enabled to participate. The continuing inputs, active support and palpable enthusiasm of all these associate organisations are invaluable.

PCCP could not have gone from infancy to (comparative) maturity so fast without the staunch support of a number of institutions. The founding partners – University of Cambridge Programme for Industry (CPI), The Copenhagen Centre (TCC) and The Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) – worked together...
extremely well (and hard) over three years to harness the unique set of competencies and connections each of them brought to the partnership. Since Autumn 2003, however, The Copenhagen Centre – with a change of leadership and direction – has decided that the relationship between TCC, CPI and IBLF should now be more focussed on common areas of research in the future. We wish the new Director well in building on TCC’s impressive track record and in developing the organisation in new ways in the future. We are also keen to put on record our recognition of the important and impressive contribution to PCCP made on behalf of The Copenhagen Centre by Louise Kjaer since 2001, who continues to serve as Senior Adviser since January 2004. CPI and IBLF have formed a new partnership with a considerably expanded portfolio of activities. Both organisations remain committed to evolution and change: to learning what is needed and to being flexible enough to respond appropriately as the world of partnering becomes on the one hand more sophisticated whilst on the other risks leaving people, organisations and even nations behind. To ensure that we keep ahead, but not at the expense of becoming elite, we have widened our remit – under the title of The Partnering Initiative. The activities will include:

- Undertaking original practice-based research activities;

- Making a number of important academic linkages (these include early conversations with the Open University, UK; Deakin University, Australia; University of Natal, South Africa and Duke University in the USA);

- The development of further specialist short courses;

- Professional practice development (most notably the IBLF’s collaboration with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to develop the already well-established Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme, PBAS); and

- A widening range of advisory activities and commissioned work.

We hope you enjoy reading this publication and that it enhances your own partnership work – whether at policy or operational levels, for both are critical. We also welcome further enquiries about any aspect of TPI which is dedicated to working with colleagues and organisations all over the world to develop the ‘art and science’ of cross-sector partnering.

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THE PARTNERING INITIATIVE
KEYNOTE
Civil Governance and Partnerships
Inventing Tomorrow’s History

By Simon Zadek

John Maynard Keynes famously argued that what stops us in creating positive futures is not a shortage of good ideas, but our inability to let go of the past. We are heavily vested in particular ways of thinking about partnerships – what defines them, what makes them work (and for who), and on what basis they are seen as legitimate actors in creating development, commercial or other outcomes. Similarly for our thinking about civil society: who is by definition included and what is not, the basis of their legitimacy and the manner in which they bring about change.

An earlier version of this paper was originally prepared on request by the UN to consider the particular connection between the future role of civil society organisations in the UN and the phenomenon of ‘partnerships’.

In recognising the need to get over the sort of inertia that Keynes refers to, the approach taken was to set out two scenarios of how the links between partnerships and UN relations with civil society might be viewed from someone looking back from the year 2020. These scenarios are not meant to provide answers, they are not predictions or proposals. Rather, their function is to challenge the assumptions that guide our thinking and actions on this matter, and so allow us to reflect more openly on the available challenges and options.

The first scenario, Grey Dawn, is broadly negative and undesirable, whilst the second, Civil Governance, contains some of the possible strands of how we might wish civil society relations with the UN to evolve in the future. The reflections emerging from this approach suggest that how the UN handles its future partnerships with non-state actors will be crucial in determining how it relates to civil society, in that:

1. Partnerships with non-state actors will increasingly impact the core of the UN’s future governance arrangements, moving beyond today’s risky adventures formed for resourcing, operational or opportunist convenience.

2. Civil society’s future engagement with the UN therefore has to be understood and designed as part of a wider design of the role of other non-state actors in the UN.

3. Civil society organisations in the UN may in the future have greater decision-making power, which will only be possible if the basis of their selection is reassessed along with the basis on which those selected can be held to account.

The ability and willingness of civil society organisations to evolve their own governance and accountability will be a crucial factor in determining their future relationship between the UN.

This paper was presented and debated at a workshop convened by the UN in early February. If its purpose was to provoke debate, it succeeded. If it aimed to catalyse innovative thinking on the part of the participants struggling with the challenge of defining how the UN should relate to civil society in the future, I hope that it served its purpose in whetting the appetite for radical changes aimed at reinvigorating the UN.

On this, I have set out below some of the views emerging from the workshop:

1. Scenarios encourage one to start an assessment of options focused on issues and outcomes, essentially a performance model, rather than one focused from the outset on processes and rights. The former tends to deliver more useful results.

2. Context counts, and in fact it is unhelpful to present options
on the matter of the UN
and civil society without
explaining how they arise
from context. Added to this
is that context can have
unexpected results, such as
the emergence of new and
exciting resourcing strategies
and governance outcomes
as a result of constraints of
traditional sources of funding
resulting from a failing
multilateralist agenda.

3. The need to consider the UN-
civil society relationship as
part of the wider issue of the
UN and non-state actors is not
just a definitional issue, but
one of intertwined
connectivity – they cannot be
understood or usefully
changed without them being
handled as one.

4. The question of UN-civil society
relations should not be
understood as a question of how
best to enable access to civil
society organisations, or how to
bring them into partnership, but
rather how best the UN can
reach out to a changing world
and participate in it on terms
that make sense of its mandate.
Many relations will not concern
partnerships for development
but in development, and the
UN will need to build such
partnerships recognising such
diverse interests and securing
the development outcomes in
that context.

5. The UN’s legitimacy will
depend on its extension of
rights to civil society and
other non-state actors to
complement its base of inter-
state relations and rights.

6. Diversified resourcing is key to
thinking about the future, and
resourcing that supports
development, not necessarily
the UN. This goes back to (2)
where changing context and
resourcing collapse must be
allowed to drive innovation in
resource generation and
management.

7. These developments point to a
reduced operational role for
the UN, but not to a ‘retreat to
normative framework’ because
that brings other dangers. The
key is not convening or
operational, but how best the
UN can optimise its leverage
for development and security.

But this paper raises a far bigger
question than the future of civil
society relations with the UN and
the related role of partnerships.
It raises the question of the place
of partnerships in the future
governance of our communities
and societies, and indeed their
relationship to global
governance. We are all clear
that many current governance
arrangements do not work.
The international governance
architecture, in particular,
appears woefully inadequate to
the immense task of enabling
peace and prosperity for all in an
increasingly inter-dependent
world. Partnerships are more
than ‘alliances for operational
convenience’. They can be
understood as evolving, organic
governance frameworks, often
thematically (e.g. community
development, global warming,
health, human rights, labour
standards) applied to specific
groups. But are they destined to
become stable, permanent
governance fixtures? And if so,
on what basis and on whose
terms? And how do they relate to
each other? Some seek to
reinvigorate and reinvent our
Bretton Woods institutions in
pursuit of effective global
governance. But are we in
practice seeking a new civil
governance emerging in
partnership form?

This paper did not set out to
address such complex questions.
But it nevertheless stumbled
across them, and in trying to
point out ways forward for a
smaller (although also very
important) question, might
incidentally serve to illuminate
ways of thinking about the bigger
challenge.

Partnerships & Development

August 2002, some 60,000 people
packed their bags to join in the
World Summit on Sustainable
Development.\footnote{Winter in
Johannesburg. Its antecedents in
Monterrey, Beijing, Copenhagen
and Rio, just to name a few, have
all played crucial roles in driving
forward progressive agendas.
Beyond the events’ themes, such
summits generate change by
ushering in new players and
processes into the development
process. Such Summits validate
new players and processes by re-
framing the challenge, re-assessing
lessons from the past, and offering
visions of how things can be
different in the future.

The Johannesburg Summit was
more than anything about
partnerships. Just as Rio was as
much about legitimising the role
of NGOs in global governance as
it was about the environment,}
Johannesburg was about the legitimacy of the role of business in development, working with public bodies and civil society organisations. Partnerships were simultaneously the Summit’s silver bullet and bête noire. But the outcome, for better or worse (or both) was to usher in an era of ‘partnerships for development’, underpinned variously by missionary zeal, market-related, fiscal or statutory reasons.

But the dye had in practice already been cast, and the Summit was more the ‘blessing on the cake’. History may well point to an event two years earlier on July 26th 2000 in New York as best marking the day the roles of non-state actors in global governance were irrevocably changed.

On that day, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, flanked by the world’s most senior global civil servants, hosted the inauguration of the Global Compact. The name plaques announcing those in attendance highlighted the significance of the moment. Arrayed around one of the UN’s semi-circular chambers in New York were a powerful blend of businesses, NGOs and labour organisations – the architects of tomorrow’s world. Present of course were the most well-known corporate giants, including BP, the Ford Motor Corporation, Rio Tinto, Shell and Unilever; some of the newly emerging corporate Titans, such as the Brazilian communications corporation, Globo, the Indian conglomerate, Tata, and the South African utilities company, Eskom. Also in attendance were businesses both traditional and new-found partners; including the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Human Rights Watch and the World Wide Fund for Nature. For the record, lining the back of the chamber in unmarked seats were representatives of many sovereign nations, unusually uncomfortable spectators of what was to come.

The Global Compact is one of a growing number of recently established partnerships that are seeking to redefine the terms on which non-state actors join with the UN and other public bodies in seeking to deliver public goods more effectively. These partnerships, whilst diverse in scope and form, in the main share two core aims:

- To harness the competencies of business and civil society in pursuit of local and global public goods.
- To establish new governance arrangements over the growing political and economic power of non-state actors.

These two objectives are clearly uncomfortable bedfellows. Yet they are the hallmark of today’s governance challenge – where increased expectations of what responsibilities business and civil society can and should shoulder go hand in hand with a growing and visible unease about the manifest inadequacy of existing governance systems to accommodate these changing roles.

It is easy to criticise partnerships by pointing to examples of green and blue wash, and to reveal the real power imbalances between different ‘partners in development’. But it is important to recognise that these critics are more than balanced by those who welcome partnerships. Brazil’s recent publication of its statutory framework for public-private partnerships signals their core role in Lula da Silva’s development strategy as does Mandela’s ever-closer relationship with the international business community in furthering his campaign against HIV/AIDS. Kofi Annan has been very clear on this issue:

“When I speak about civil society, I don’t mean only non-governmental organisations, though they are a very important part of it. I also mean universities, foundations, labour unions and – yes – private corporations.”

The dilemma is that today’s partnerships are little more than a glimmer of what is to come. For this reason, one cannot usefully assess partnership futures on the basis of their current performance. Instead, we need to more directly imagine the future to better understand how partnerships can or should fit into tomorrow’s governance framework. A ‘back-casting’ perspective would look back on tomorrow’s events, say from the year 2020. From such a standpoint, what might happen in the years following the Johannesburg Summit would be facts at your fingertips, allowing you to judge the how partnerships had fared in practice.

**Scenario 1: Grey Dawn**

Looking back from 2020, the last two decades have been marked by the establishment of public-private partnerships as the development vehicle preferred by state and most non-state actors. Thousands were created in the
first years following the Summit, rapidly becoming the entry-condition for accessing public funds for development. UN agencies were rewarded in the form of member state funding, media, and internal recognition for the volume of partnerships. Competition for engagement with top companies became fierce with firms becoming overwhelmed by the multiple uncoordinated overtures from what they thought was only one international organisation, rather than a system of numerous agencies.

Achieving scale meant bigger, not only more. Ever-larger and more ambitious partnerships were created, involving the world’s largest corporations joined at the hip with under-resourced governments, multilaterals and civil society partners. Global partnerships became complex, multi-billion dollar enterprises with staff and offices sprawling across the continents. Partnerships increasingly became contract-based commercial arrangements, exporting the experience in Europe and elsewhere of delivering public service through public-private partnerships funded through long-term guarantees of public sector financial subventions.1

Most partnerships, particularly the larger ones, suffered the same fate as their public sector predecessors. Personal, political and commercial interests replaced earlier innovation based on social entrepreneurship. Cultures of low performance set in, driven by the high transaction costs and long start up times endemic to partnerships, a lack of focus and, increasingly, straightforward corruption. Public demand for greater accountability shifted their focus from business to partnerships, and from partnerships to their constituent partners, notably public bodies and civil society organisations. Calls for greater statutory regulation moved beyond business transparency and foreign direct liability as the first cycle of lawsuits emerged targeted at partnerships over their alleged misdemeanours. Partnerships began to appear as contingent liabilities rather than assets on company balance sheets as the risks increasingly outweighed the potential financial gains."

By now, 2020, despondency has set in on the part of those who advocated partnerships, and frustration and anger by those who were more sceptical from the outset. The partnership approach has suffered the same ignominious fate as its antecedent, easy-win ‘silver bullets’ for development, nationalisation in the 1960s, and privatisation in the 1990s. We are once again facing the question of how best we can organise and finance effective development. But history cannot be reversed. Our infatuation with partnerships over the years following the Johannesburg Summit impacted profoundly on the governance of our public institutions. The gap between de jure (what it says in the book) and de facto (reality on the ground) governance has never been greater. The UN General Assembly still exists but its relevance has steadily declined, symbolised by its lack of visibility to all but the many officials that service their endless debates and their, largely unheard and un-enforced, resolutions. Real decisions that direct the will of leaders and the world’s resources happen elsewhere, across the higher-level partnerships, Global Policy Networks (GPNs). These GPNs emerged during the decades following the Summit to cope with topics as diverse as HIV/AIDS and conflict diamonds, water resource rights and emission trading.

The upsurge in civil society engagement in such GPNs did not deliver the expected democratic dividend. The very idea of ‘civil society organisations’ has become a misnomer through their steady corporatisation. Their growing leverage through access to the UN and other bodies in practice de-linked them from their much-proclaimed constituencies, and made them dependent on business and politically-vested funders, leaving an air of sameness around the board tables of most multi-stakeholder processes and institutions. Civil society’s increasing involvement in such partnerships left them open to challenge. From the Republican right came attacks building on the early work of the American Enterprise Institute. From the progressive end of the scale came the more considered calls for NGOs to consider their position.12 But repeated attempts over two decades to reinvigorate the basis on which NGOs could be held to account have failed, because NGOs simply would not accept the need for a maturing of their basis of accountability to their constituencies.13
Similarly for the UN. Two decades of intensive partnering has had its toll on its claims to independence as it has become embedded within networks of public and private institutions delivering complex blends of public and private goods. Its ‘terms of engagement’ in partnerships were constantly revised, but somehow never really grappled with the realities of the impact of its engagement with business and civil society on its operations, governance and legitimacy. Kofi Annan was the last Secretary General to truly represent the spirit of the UN’s founders as his successors found themselves running an increasingly compromised institution in hock to both political and business interests through their newly embedded relationships with business and special-interest non-profit organisations.

The Bottom Line

But of course this is 2004, not 2020. None of this has really happened, although it might. The history of partnerships lies in the future, waiting to be invented, by us. The first scenario (although undoubtedly over-simplified) throws light on possible futures for partnerships that can guide today’s policy decisions.

1. Today’s ‘partnerships’ are prototypes for tomorrow’s governance arrangements and programmatic delivery vehicles that need to embrace:
   a. A rights-based approach to interpreting the universal values stewarded by the UN, with;
   b. Multi-stakeholder and market-based approaches to mobilise and direct resources in seeking to realise these values in practice.

2. Tomorrow’s partnerships must be based on more meaningful accountability than has been achieved to date, including the accountability of the partners themselves. Today’s models of public sector bureaucratic and electoral-based accountability, business-based fiduciary duty or civil forms of participation and network-based legitimacy are visibly inadequate.
   a. Far greater attention paid to how business accountability has to evolve to make performance more pro-development. In particular, today’s statutory basis and interpretation of businesses’ fiduciary duty is simply not consistent with business as a ‘partner in development’
   b. An acceptance of the need for accountability of civil society organisations to evolve in line with their growing governance roles and access to resources.
   c. A profound shift in our understanding of public accountability. The bureaucratic and political approach to hierarchical accountability common to most public institutions simply will not work in tomorrow’s more complex blend of governance and operational models for delivering public goods.

3. Reinventing the basis on which civil society should engage with the UN:
   a. Has to be framed in terms of the rights and responsibilities of civil society organisations as participants in the UN’s governance.
   b. Cannot be dealt with separately, as it has in the past, from dealing with the same issue for other non-state actors, notably the business community.
   c. Must effectively and efficiently connect the hierarchy of governance from UN policy through to partnership accountability.

4. Civil society organisations’ that wish to be part of a new governance compact covering policy development and resource allocation should demonstrate an adequate basis of accountability to the poor and marginalised.

With this bottom line in mind, we can redevelop our backcasting from 2020.

Scenario 2: Civil Governance

Looking back from 2020, and contrary to the expectations of many, the decades following the Johannesburg Summit demonstrated our collective ability to confound the doomsayers, and evolve
significant social innovations to address our changing environment and needs.

Seeking to cope with a growing resource deficit, the UN accelerated its engagement with better resourced and networked business, public bodies and civil society organisations. Such partnerships were envisaged as complementing the UN’s core development expertise. But it soon became clear that such non-state actors were able to internalise such expertise, so reducing their need for any UN operational involvement.

The UN was in a sense returning to its roots. Rather than seeking to manage a sprawling global empire of thematic programmes, it began to focus again on its unique ability to convene the world’s governing institutions to deliberate on, develop and enforce a framework of universally accepted values.

But the growing importance of partnerships created a governance challenge quite unlike the UN’s older style projects and programmes. Partnerships involved institutions with attitudes and influence, and the ability to withdraw support. Many of the UN’s newfound partners were not content to work within the confines of one partnership, but increasingly demanded a greater say in how the UN itself made decisions.

The upturn of this development was the UN Governance Convention of 2009, which set out the basis on which non-state actors could be incorporated into the UN’s governance. Now is not the time to recall the tortuous negotiation process and the host of subsidiary clauses that continue to make it difficult to effectively implement this crucial part of the deal. But the basics were as follows. The Convention, building on important early work at the now-defunct World Social Forum, established a second UN Chamber, aptly named the Civil Chamber.

The Chamber was intended as, and remains, essentially a powerful dialogue partner to the General Assembly. It provides focused debate, and can table amendments to, and resist for a period of time the will of the General Assembly. It thereby plays a powerful ‘ombudsman’ role in the UN at the highest level, challenging and bringing into international debate aspects of sovereign state policy and practice. Since its establishment, the Civil Chamber has of course been testing the boundaries of its mandate, and it seems likely going forward that its executive power is likely to grow.

The Civil Chamber is currently made up of 832 elected organisational members, including NGOs, religious and labour organisations, and businesses. At one stage it looked as if there would be fixed numbers for each organisational category. But by then the distinctions were not clear-cut, and so the Civil Governance Code was agreed in Ulaan Baatar in 2011. This Code established eligibility to the UN’s Civil Chamber based on how an organisation was governed, rather than its functions or activities. Core was the requirement that an organisation establish a Civil Council to oversee strategy elected by a (non-paying) membership made up of impacted stakeholders.

The Code was quickly adopted by a first rash of organisations wishing to make themselves eligible for the Civil Chamber. The unexpected level of take-up by businesses was helped, undoubtedly, by tempting tax incentives hitherto unavailable to commercial organisations. More surprisingly was the subsequent acceleration in take-up by many organisations, previously uninterested, in being nominated to the Chamber. This followed the publication of a study by the UN/World Bank’s joint Civil Governance Unit, which observed that organisations operating under Civil Councils performed materially better than previously, and also better than others operating with traditional governance frameworks.

The Civil Chamber emerged from the recognition of the legitimacy of other routes along which the voices of people should be heard. This recognition was grounded in experiences of building and running operational and global policy partnerships. But just as the early partnership experience was shifting the UN’s approach to its own governance, it was also feeding back to impact on partnerships themselves.

As the numbers and scale of partnerships increased following the Johannesburg Summit, the terms on which they operated became increasingly subject to legally-binding contract, and therefore also to the courts. What had started as open development
partnerships became closed to stakeholders, often even to the very basics of civil inspection. With growing proportions of both public funds and private investments being channelled through such partnerships, there was growing concern at these developments.

The tipping point came in 2006, when a rash of court cases were initiated by Chinese human rights lawyers on behalf of community groups in Germany who had been denied access to water under the control of a public-private partnership. The success of the legal action, and the subsequent bankruptcy of several of the partnering business and civil organisations, created panic amongst the now hundreds of thousands of commercial and non-profit organisations involved in comparable partnerships. A high-level roundtable of some of the world’s leading partnerships was hastily called which, dominated by lawyers, called for legislation to establish a new legal form limiting partner liability.

The UN, by now dependent on partnerships for its arms and legs, stepped in, and brokered a deal which became known as the Global Partnership Convention. Under this Convention, a new, international legal status was created for partnerships giving them (and partners) limited liability. Mirroring the recently completed debates about the UN’s Civil Chamber, it was agreed that this status would only be available to these partnerships that conformed to a three-pronged model of governance.

- That the partnership adopted the Compact’s eleven UN Principles as a legal element of its own constituency.
- That the partnership conformed to a series of accountability measures covering transparency and access to its governance process for its own stakeholders, and in particular committed to a civil reporting standard.\textsuperscript{20}
- That the partnerships Boards incorporated at least one, certified non-executive Director, whose task it would be to publicly report, annually, on the partnership’s adherence to the terms of its protected status.

A new institution was created under the UN that provided regulatory oversight to this new agreement, which included establishing and monitoring the basis on which non-executive Directors were trained and certified, who by the time of writing this in 2020 numbered over 140,000 people.

Predictions in the early years of this millennium of the demise of the UN have therefore proved utterly wrong. Three extraordinary social innovations, the UN Civil Chamber, the related Civil Governance Code, and the Global Partnership Convention, have together reinvigorated the UN’s legitimacy and effectiveness. One more thing: of course we should have realised that these innovations would migrate towards each other, creating yet further, unexpected developments in global governance. Partnerships adhering to the terms of the Convention quickly realised that they in fact complied with the terms of the Civil Governance Code, making them eligible for nomination to the Civil Chamber. They made very presentable candidates, being able to demonstrate more than others their multi-dimensional constituencies. Following the most recent elections in 2018, almost one third of the Chamber’s members are in fact partnerships, and there is every sign that this will grow further in the future. As the Civil Chamber approaches its tenth birthday, we are seeing the ascendance of civil partnerships in the governance of the UN, and more broadly our global community.

End piece

Evolving tomorrow’s relationship between civil society and the UN is a complex, multi-faceted challenge. Aspects of this relationship can be consciously redesigned as a self-contained exercise. But this brief paper suggests that the important changes to this relationship cannot be self-contained in this way. They will be intertwined with the UN’s broader evolution, and indeed with changes in the governance of development that go beyond the operations of the UN.

Designing change in the context of such dynamic complexity is common to all of today’s major challenges. Normal problem-solving techniques and processes can be less helpful in such situations, since the inter-dependency between different issues can easily lead to what the Chilean economist, Manfred
Max-Neef, refers to as a state of ‘perplexity’, where we become so embedded in the present that we cannot see productive strategies for moving forward. Common in this situation is stalemate between major vested interests, and ‘prisoner's dilemmas’ where difficulties in mobilising collective action impede the adoption of strategies that all parties know to be correct. Typically, outcomes in such circumstances are incremental and inadequate.

Scenarios are intended to help in overcoming such ‘perplexity’. They are not predictions, although to be effective they need to describe futures that stakeholders view to be possible. Their intention is to reveal the relationship between systemic change and the specific point of desired intervention. When effective, they illuminate the present in ways that create energy, agency and focus for change.

The particular scenarios set out above, Grey Dawn and Civil Governance, are hopefully a useful starting point. What this would mean is that they are discussed, probed, changed or, better still, rejected and replaced with other, improved scenarios. In this way, they would contribute to a process of radical design that locates changes in policy and practice in an appreciation of how these will play out in, and impact on the dynamic environment in which we all live.

NOTES

1 An earlier version of this was prepared as a Background Paper for the Secretary-General’s Panel of Eminent Persons on Civil Society and UN Relationships. It has benefited from the views of many people, including Gavin Andersson, David Bonbright, John Clark, Jonathan Cohen, and Carmen Malena. Responsibility for the paper remains with the author. Comments are welcome to the author at simon@accountability.org.uk.


3 The International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio.

4 This section is drawn from Zadek, S. (2002) Third Generation Corporate Citizenship, Foreign Policy Centre/AccountAbility, London.
5 The heads of the ILO, UNDP, UNEP, and the UNHRC.

An initiative involving the business community, and civil society and labour organisations to further the realisation of the core UN conventions and declarations covering labour standards, human rights and the environment; www.unglobalcompact.org.


9 This might be looked at together with other back-casting pieces, such as Zadek, S. (1999) ‘Looking Back from 2050’. in European Review of Business Ethics July 1999 – Vol. 8 No 3.


11 You will recall the onset of this when the French water utilities giant, Suez, withdrew from its water management contract in Buenos Aires in the early years of the millennium because of mounting losses linked to foreign exchange losses.


15 There are of course more detailed criteria underlying this arrangement, notably that the right to vote was linked to the length of time that one had been an active member, and that the Council ‘seats’ were divided into different constituencies.

17 UN/World Bank (2011) Performance-based Civil Governance: the Evidence, Civil Governance Unit, Ulaan Baatar.

18 See AccountAbilities www.conversations-with-disbelievers.net for reports and case studies on this topic.


20 UN (2009) Treatise for the Establishment of a Second UN Assembly (‘Civil Chamber’), UN, San Jose.

THINKING IN PROGRESS...
Donors as Partners

By Susan Jupp

All partners are donors but are all donors partners? This question, posed by Ros Tennyson during a seminar in the Cambridge course on cross-sector partnerships, is at the origin of these reflections. They consider the question of donor relations within a partnership.

Are donors simply partners who provide funding? Are they partners at all, or partners in a different, special category? Are they considered the most important and influential among partners? What needs to be done, in a successful partnership, to recognise adequately other types of contribution?

My particular interest in donor partners is in the context of the organisation for which I work – the Global Forum for Health Research – which describes itself as a ‘partnership organisation’. How can such an agency work to build the best possible sustainable relationships with its partners, both financial supporters and others, as represented on its Foundation Council, where the challenge is to add value to the work of the organisation, hence adding value to the contributions of these partners?

Building donor partnerships

A literature review produced little published work on the topic of donors as partners, apart from a report prepared for the Soros Foundations Network by Terrice Bassler and Mabel Wisse Smit: Building donor partnerships.

Bassler and Smit defined a ‘donor partnership’ as one created ‘when two or more individuals or organisations find it in their common interest to work together toward a specific outcome.’ Examples of partnership arrangements cited include:
- Seed funding and pilot projects
- Programme replication and expansion
- Matching partnerships: pooling funds, parallel funding, in-kind matching, fund-raising challenges
- Collaborative programme design and implementation
- Comprehensive programme strategy and multi-donor financing
- NGO working alliances (based on a shared belief that the effort of the whole is greater and stronger than the efforts of many separate parts).

In effect, and interestingly, they use the term synonymously with ‘partnership’, emphasising the varied contributions of all true partners.

‘Partners can bring different things to their partnership. These might be funds, goods, services, technical assistance, technology transfer, training opportunities, implementation capacity, legitimacy, publicity, access or information. Partners do not always bring equal things and equal shares. Often they contribute complementary resources to the partnership, depending on their capacity and strengths.’

Working in partnership

Is there evidence that donors (those who provide financial support) are more influential than other partners around the table? Because of the power of the funding they bring, they could even appear intimidating towards other partners.

Donors are certainly solicited specifically, for example when a partnership is created. In addition to financial support, they can contribute:
- Leverage (of additional funds, influence)
- Profile for the partnership
- Experience as a donor with other partnerships (e.g. in making possible other synergetic opportunities, sharing lessons, increasing efficiency and effectiveness of
partnership, developing and disseminating good practices).

If the donor becomes a partner, the hope is that funding might be more sustainable; but there should be other benefits. Provision of any of these additional types of resources would be extremely valuable:

- Monitoring and evaluation expertise
- Administration and personnel loan
- Human resources skills transfer
- Technical assistance network (e.g. in country)
- Communication and information sharing
- Outreach to other similar bodies on behalf of the funded organisation.

If a donor organisation requires that some funding be used for a specific project or purpose (i.e. provides ‘earmarked’ funds), this expression of direct interest in the agenda of the organisation could conflict with views of other members of the board or foundation council. But if it is recognised that all partners are looking for specific results in common with or in addition to the partnership’s own stated goals, financial influence should not be more telling than other sorts of contributions.

Increased involvement of a donor as a partner, it is also feared, might lead to micro-management and/or an increase in already often cumbersome reporting requirements. There is increased requirement for measurement of outcome, even return on ‘investment’ on the part of donors. Donors could also become actively involved in monitoring and evaluation, which could be built in to activities right from the beginning.

On the other hand, with a partnership structure, ‘recipient partners’ might be able – for example, by requesting support for specific projects – to influence the way in which donors work and what they fund or, through debate and discussion, open up new areas of interest for the donor.

There is certainly evidence from the field of health research, for example, that donors are very interested in working together more closely, to exchange information and build data that would finally lead to more informed priority-setting.

The case of the Global Forum for Health Research

The Global Forum describes itself as a partnership organisation, on the grounds that it considers anyone working for the same central objective to be a ‘partner’.

Its highest governing body, the Foundation Council, can be considered as an expression of that partnership, where members contribute their different skills, expertise and resources.

The Global Forum for Health Research was established as a Swiss foundation in June 1998. Its Statutes describes the objectives of the organisation:

‘The overall objective of the Foundation is to bring partners together to help focus research efforts on the health problems of the poor through an improvement in the allocation of research funds, support of better priority-setting processes and methodologies, promotion of relevant research, support for concerted efforts in health research and dissemination of the research findings.’

One specific objective is: ‘to support concerted efforts in pursuit of the Foundation’s global objective between various actors in the health research field (governments, multilateral development agencies, bilateral development agencies, foundations, international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), women’s organisations, research-oriented bodies, private commercial enterprises).’

Members of the Foundation Council are selected from the ‘constituencies’ in the above list, to which a ‘media’ constituency has been added in recognition of the influence and importance of this group of actors.

As of December 2003, the Council had four representatives of government/policy-makers, four representatives of multilateral agencies, four representatives of bilateral agencies, two of women’s organisations, two of NGOs, one of research institutions/universities, and one representative each of industry and the media. All continents were represented and the male:female ratio was eleven:nine; the chair was male and the vice-chair female.

It is generally agreed that the partnership represented by the Foundation Council has been successful over the past six years. How much is due to composition, how much to the personalities involved, and how much to the
fact that some were the key people involved in decisions leading to the establishment of the organisation and hence ideal to steer it through its first phase of existence? What lessons can be drawn that will assist in the renewal process?

From a limited review – including surveys of donor publications and website contents as well as personal interviews – it would seem that the majority of the Global Forum’s donors are organisations that use the word ‘partnership’ to describe areas of their work and in particular their work with the Global Forum.

Some conclusions

The involvement of donors in today’s partnerships is complex – probably because the landscape is rapidly evolving, behaviour is changing, and organisations and individuals are learning from others’ recent experience as they try to put together new successful ventures.

In the case of the Global Forum for Health Research, donors on the whole feel themselves to be partners (some describe themselves as ‘founding partners’). There is a large amount of personal involvement and commitment. Donors are well informed about the principles and practices of the organisation and in particular about its management of funds. Membership of the Council ensures voice, recognition and visibility for the donor. For the Global Forum, it ensures full transparency and accountability in a very straightforward fashion.

How well such a Council works together is the sum of many factors including: the personalities involved, their interest and commitment, the time they have to offer, the chemistry of the group and the role of the Chair. On the part of the agency, its preparation of Council documentation and meetings, the whole communication process, the investment in its relationship with the Council and the working relationship of the chief executive with the Chair all contribute to success.

The question of regular attendance at meetings and/or regular alternates is crucial. The partnership can weaken if the process of information and inclusion is disrupted. Regular information and contact between meetings is important: a private group mailing list, for instance, or an intranet to which everyone can contribute can help create a sense of community. Management of the partnership probably merits more staff time than it currently has.

The key to greater involvement in other ways than financial is to find synergies. Probably the easiest thing for a partner to provide is money. Probably the most difficult thing to ask for is time. But some small actions on the part of partners, within their key competencies or knowledge range (which changes for each one, hence the strength of the partnership) can produce immensely satisfying, rapid and even cost-free results.

Simon Zadek describes some innovative partnership attempts as ‘an early and often immature element of tomorrow’s business success story’ and continues, encouragingly, ‘But it is the longer term vision and potential from such investments that endow such partnerships with strategic significance.’

Vis-à-vis influential and powerful donors (and even sometimes other board partners), the executive of a small organisation can feel in a position of weakness. How can a small agency demonstrate its value so as to become a more acceptable partner? How can it better access resources other than financial ones?

I would suggest:

• Work through any sense of unease or indebtedness towards donors; the exchange should be two-way.
• Creatively stimulate all major partners to bring contributions beyond money.
• Devote resources to building the best possible governance partnership.
• Devote resources to partnership with this governing body.
• Pay attention to full recognition of partners’ contributions.
• Stimulate broader partnerships via networks and generous exchange with a broad range of stakeholders.
I am grateful to Ros Tennyson for a first expression of this idea during the Cambridge course on cross-sector partnerships (2003).


Drew describes the inequality of power which may exist within a partnership. “The term ‘partnership’ is only used by the powerful ‘partner’ to describe the relationship, whereas the weaker ‘partner’ describes the more powerful as their donor.” Thus bilateral agencies regard Northern NGOs as partners with Northern NGOs viewing them as donors. Drew, R. (2002) ‘Learning in partnership: what constitutes learning in the context of south-north partnership’. A discussion paper jointly commissioned by BOND and the Exchange Programme, December.

See, for example, in the Annual Report 2002-2003 of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the description of the way the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation conducts outreach to other foundations by sharing information and nurturing opportunities for partnerships (page 45).


The new organisation Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) has the same tenet. GAIN however calls such supporters ‘allies’ – possibly a more exact term.

These constituencies correspond quite closely to the types of partners discussed by Bassler and Smit (op. cit). The list of partner attributes and partners resources is interesting and useful.


The 21st century NGO in the market for change (SustainAbility 2003) has a particularly interesting section on governance, drawing attention to ‘tensions’ that an NGO board now faces: accountability and transparency, on one side, and funding and standards, on the other. Board competence needs to take such demands into account.

A survey of institutional documentation of Global Forum donors in 2003 (website and annual reports) was moderately successful in finding public and visible references to the Global Forum. References were mostly several layers down from the home page, within the specific health section.

As the renewal of its Foundation Council takes place at the end of 2004, a challenge for the Global Forum is to assess how well the constituencies defined in 1998 correspond to the groups of partners it needs to involve in its activities today.
Falling Short of Utopia?
UNDP in the Role of Partnership Broker

By Magda Gunessee-Verdickt

This project explores the factors that inhibit UNDP from being a truly effective partnership broker and examines which additional issues should be addressed to confront this. It concludes with a series of recommendations to promote UNDP as a key international partnership broker of the future.

UNDP formulates, implements and manages a wide range of development projects. It also has responsibility for coordinating all UN Agencies in a given country and is the scorekeeper for the Millennium Development Goals in its 132 Country Offices around the world. In the last ten years UNDP has espoused a partnership-oriented approach to development:

‘Partnerships have the potential to complement the Organisation’s efforts to achieve its objectives, while at the same time contributing to its renewal by introducing new methods of work. United Nations organisations are still learning how best to utilise the potential benefits of partnerships. Efforts are under way to scale up promising approaches and to learn from experience gained so far.’

In view of this approach the importance of being an effective partnership broker is crucial to UNDP and yet it is the author’s belief that this potential is, as yet, unfulfilled. To investigate this the following hypotheses were formulated:
1. UNDP has the legitimacy to be a partnership broker
2. UNDP has the accountability to be a partnership broker
3. UNDP has the capacity to be a partnership broker
4. UNDP has the skills to be a partnership broker
5. UNDP is an effective partnership broker.

These were tested through a literature review; direct observation of what is actually being ‘brokered’ by UNDP, both generally and in a Country Office; in-depth interviews with international and national staff from within UN/UNDP who know the organisation well; and a survey of twenty respondents, conducted at the end of 2003, from a wide range of sectors and levels who are either external or internal clients of the organisation.

Understanding of partnership and partnership brokering

Responses demonstrated a fairly good sense of what true partnership meant. Half of the respondents considered that transparency, equity, legitimacy, neutrality, accountability and capacity (technical and financial) were important characteristics of a partnership brokering organisation. The other half of respondents added ‘soft’ skills such as negotiation, mediation and facilitation skills, listening and communication skills, creative and motivational power, networking skills, trust and commitment. A few respondents picked up on the issues of risk-taking and sharing and only one highlighted the issue of personal modesty. In general it can be said that most understood that good partnership brokering is not only a science, but also equally an art, and that it requires a balancing act between the two.

UNDP and the UN

Feedback was gathered on whether respondents thought that it would be possible (or desirable) to separate the UNDP from the UN in the context of partnership building. The majority were adamant that UNDP should not be separate, but some indicated that more ‘demarcation’ would ‘enable UNDP field offices to use its human and financial resources more effectively’ and allow a degree of autonomy ‘given the complexity of the UN System’. However, most answers were in line with a new ‘multi-
stakeholder, synergistic operational paradigm that is enhancing the organisation’s efficiency and its capacity to achieve its goals’. Uncertainties regarding the ‘tension between the role of UN as a neutral partnership development “broker” and a partner in implementation’ were identified as being important to address in the future. Overall most respondents understood that UNDP has a ‘development role within the United Nations’, and that ‘it is important for the whole United Nations to engage in partnership building as a new way of working’.

Hypothesis 1: UNDP has the legitimacy to be a partnership broker

Most respondents agreed with this hypothesis and cited UNDP’s association with the UN’s global legitimacy as an international body; its position as a trusted partner of governments; its impartiality, neutrality and good track record and the fact that UNDP is a convener of key actors in development. One respondent however warned that UNDP should not engage in commercial activities in order to maintain this legitimacy.

Hypothesis 2: UNDP has the accountability to be a partnership broker

Although this was mainly accepted there were clear differences between international/national UNDP staff vis-à-vis the national counterparts and programme/project coordinators. The latter were of the opinion that UNDP has the accountability to be a partnership broker, having the necessary internal and external control procedures, its accountability as a UN organisation to member states and its constant monitoring mechanisms of targets, deliverables, indicators and funds with all stakeholders. Only one person from this group felt that the internal system could be more transparent. However, the former, interestingly composed of groups from inside the organisation, felt that UNDP ‘was not yet where it should be, neither at the individual nor at the corporate level’, and that its ‘accountability was limited, due to lengthy and complicated procedures which should be made much simpler in order to convince the partners to let them be accountable through the same monitoring mechanisms’, which are too cumbersome. It was, however, indicated that this depends on the country and its relationship with government and UNDP’s track record. One interviewee mentioned that when things go wrong with the partnership, the organisation is not accountable, and referred to the necessity of sharing risks and benefits by monitoring both partnership conditions as well as progress towards outputs.

Hypotheses 3 and 4: UNDP has the capacity to be a partnership broker and UNDP has the skills to be a partnership broker

The findings from respondents to hypotheses 3 and 4 have been inserted into the table opposite.

Hypothesis 5: UNDP is an effective partnership broker

This was rejected by just over half of the respondents though some of these partly accepted that UNDP was an effective partnership broker. Respondents expressed that UNDP has many assets and qualities ‘but that often partnership brokering is too different from UNDP’s core activities. Change of this nature needs to come from the top down and have the support of high level officials if employees in country offices are expected to follow it’. Most of the reasons that were expressed for why UNDP was still not an effective partnership broker were the same as those mentioned in the table.

Conclusion

The sample group accepted that UNDP has the legitimacy and the accountability to be a partnership broker but found that it currently has neither the capacity nor the skills to fulfil this role. The concluding hypothesis could be neither confirmed nor rejected but the overall impression was that of an organisation genuinely seeking to change direction towards more partnership brokering.

Recommendations:

1. UNDP culture should be aligned with the new paradigm of partnership brokering

This requires better leadership and buy-in from top level officials to ensure all staff are made aware of partnership brokering and there is facilitation.
### UNDP has the capacity to be a Partnership Broker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accept hypothesis (7)</th>
<th>Reject hypothesis (13)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDP has experience at national, regional and international levels</td>
<td>Building partnerships is not recognised as a full-time job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP has human, technical and financial resources</td>
<td>Recruitment should concentrate on creating pool of dedicated partnership brokering staff; new profiles are needed; should not be ‘one more’ task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive recruitment ensures staff quality</td>
<td>Technical and financial resources lacking; more resources needed to be an effective broker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP has successfully involved Govt, NGOs and private sector in environmental projects</td>
<td>A partnership culture should be promoted and mainstreamed amongst programme staff with skills applied in new ways; change is needed from programme to partnership objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP can mobilise through UN</td>
<td>No in-house technical capacity to monitor achievements; this should be built by using local consultants to coordinate and monitor; knowledge management should increase at both individual &amp; organisational levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP has proved to mobilise support from all the sectors</td>
<td>Not enough leverage to mobilise additional resources for development projects from other aid agencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### UNDP has the skills to be a Partnership Broker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accept hypothesis (5)</th>
<th>Reject hypothesis (15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDP has been involved in a number of social and economic projects</td>
<td>UNDP has skills in some areas /countries/regions but not in all; varies between Country Offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP has the vision, willingness &amp; influence to advocate and lobby</td>
<td>Partnership-building skills with private sector should be sharpened: understanding its language, negotiation, sales, presentation &amp; ‘human’ skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP has staff of great quality, but most are specialists/ development experts – not managers...</td>
<td>...and lack most of key managerial skills needed to run efficient partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP has the skills but ...</td>
<td>Required skills can be fostered through specialised staff training programmes of current staff and looking for these qualities when recruiting; skills development needed to make staff more visionary and proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP is a trailblazing organisation with cutting-edge information and technology ...</td>
<td>...needs to reach a larger audience both among public officers as well as CBOL. UNDP often perceived as organisation which gives aid/funds for scholarships/ study tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP, but ...</td>
<td>... but needs investment in human resources, additional training to become more outward-looking and reaching out. Refresher workshops are needed to energise staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutrality, dedication, visionary, credibility are present among the staff at UNDP, but ...</td>
<td>...there is a need for specific additional skills in management of human relationships and in conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better system of reporting on use of partners’ resources</td>
<td>Brokering skills are important and will lead to more interaction with the private sector, who come to the table with different agendas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures too time consuming, complex &amp; lengthy- not well adapted to promote UNDP as effective partnership broker</td>
<td>Bureaucracy too heavy, limited staff and motivation; UNDP needs to be more pro-active and involved more in specific focused areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of activities is too broad</td>
<td>Depends on Resident Representative; role needs to be championed by leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and streamlining of the partnership building process by senior staff. Staff empowerment and an open attitude towards experimentation are also required to enable the taking of acceptable risks and to learn from mistakes.

2. Prioritisation of capacities and skills needed for effective partnership brokering
Recognition of partnership brokering as a full time job and professionalisation of partnership-building skills are needed with incentives and/or rewards for brokering successful partnerships to encourage pro-activeness. Training in brokering skills (including soft skills) should be provided with the promotion of awareness-raising activities with the private sector and the maintaining of relations with potential partners made a priority.

3. Alignment of procedures and mechanisms with partnership broker role
Heavy bureaucracy and lengthy and complex procedures should be gradually phased out and replaced by cost-effective procedures adapted to partnership brokering with an emphasis on good tracking, monitoring and evaluation and the reinforcement of transparency, partnership-reporting and accountability.

4. Wider support for UNDP’s broker role from UN System and UN Country Teams
Integration of partnership building should be made in all key aspects of United Nations operations, especially at the country level with UNDP advocating and communicating its new role as a partnership broker more actively both within, and outside, the UN system.

5. Support from UNDP for governments as partnership brokers
UNDP should assist governments to develop partnership-brokering skills as they are key partners and are ideally placed to foster the systems of accountability that will be needed to strengthen the legitimacy of partnerships.

6. Increased coordination of UNDP practices with other donors for partnership brokering
As partnerships are central to working towards the Millennium Development Goals, a cohesive cooperation plan with coordinating agencies/ministries/organisations should be operationalised. Strategic alliances should be established with the main donor agencies in order to involve them in the design of development projects and there should be a more systematic and coordinated approach to developing effective cooperation with non-state actors such as the private sector.

7. Increase of donor support to UNDP for effective partnership brokering
In order to provide financial capacity for effective partnership brokering there should be an active follow-up to the Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey in 2002.
work closely with UNDP in one or several areas of its mandate. They were invited to complete a semi-structured questionnaire.

* While carrying out the survey and the interviews, correspondents were first asked to think on the desirable characteristics of an effective partnership broker as an individual and subsequently as an organisation, and were confronted with the definitions of ‘partnership’ and ‘broker’ as per the definitions in Tennyson, R. and Wilde, L. (2000) The Guiding Hand, IBLF & UNSSC. The definition of partnership is: A partnership is an alliance between organisations from two or more sectors that commit themselves to working together to undertake a sustainable development project. Such a partnership undertakes to share risks and benefits, review the relationship regularly and revise the partnership as necessary. The definition of a broker is: A broker acts as an intermediary between different parties, but in an active rather than a passive way, to interpret one party to the other or to negotiate some kind of agreement or ‘deal’.

7 Tennyson, R. & Wilde, L. (supra).
8 Report of the Secretary General, 2003 (supra).
10 Community Based Organisations.
11 Report of the Secretary General, 2003 (supra).
Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor: The Private Sector and Sustainable Provision

By Brian Allum

This paper aims to unravel some of the myths and truths of private sector involvement in what is still a predominantly public sector activity, with a particular emphasis on the sustainable provision of services to the urban poor.

It tests the thesis that the long-term commitment and support of the private sector at both local and international levels is required to provide an effective and sustainable means of promoting access to water and wastewater services to the urban poor, and without this support, the scaling-up of localised activity, and with it the potential for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for water and wastewater, will be strictly limited.

The MDGs for water and wastewater equate to providing water supply services to an additional 280,000 people and sanitation facilities to an additional 384,000 people each and every day until 2015. All of these people are poor. There is a widespread and growing belief that these targets will not be achieved through the current and planned programmes utilising the largely independent activity of the public sector, the private sector, NGOs, and local communities.

RWE-Thames Water is working with other sectors to develop a ‘new international partnership’. This will bring together the combined forces of the private/NGO sectors and provide an alternative model for the development of local multi-sector partnerships to assist in the alleviation of poverty. The development of the new international partnership is in the formative phase, and this research will support its development.

Islands of success from private sector operations

Whilst there was found to be some specific measures being implemented to improve water and sanitation provision to unserved low-income areas by the private sector, there is generally an absence of a universal pro-poor focus.

In RWE-Thames Water’s operations in Jakarta (Indonesia), Bangalore (India) and Santiago (Chile) there are benefits accruing to the urban poor sector, including public health and economic improvements, greater water availability for those relying on public standpipes, and direct means-tested subsidies encouraged by regulation and government support. There are similar pro-poor arrangements and benefits accruing in other major operations where the private sector is involved, such as in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Cartagena (Colombia) and in La Paz and El Alto (Bolivia). However, the operational role of the private sector has been largely restricted to a number of major urban centres and in these situations has been focussed largely at improving services to already served, predominantly middle-income sectors, using a relatively fixed model of delivery that does not adapt well to the local circumstances of low-income areas.

Despite some recorded criticisms and shortcomings, these measures represent some improvement over failing public sector operations and provide some encouragement that the private sector can be effectively engaged in addressing the needs of low-income users.

Key constraints within municipal operations

Most public sector operations are failing to provide the range and quality of services required for the urban poor. The causes of this failure are widespread and generally specific to a local
situation. However, there are generally recognised to be four key constraints that are more generic, and more strategic and institutional in nature:

**Capacity building** – Lack of capacity (human, technical and financial resources) is judged to be the single largest constraint to the provision of improved water and wastewater services to the urban poor. Even where this exists many government authorities lack the capacity to address the issues of those living in poverty.

**Regulation for the poor** – Infrastructure regulatory bodies do not generally have a clear pro-poor remit nor do they possess the capacity to understand the demands of poor customers. In addition the extent and scale of robust regulatory frameworks (maximising cost recovery and minimising subsidies) is extremely limited.

**Financing and affordability** – Poorer people generally see water as a relatively inelastic good and are prepared to pay for it, as borne out by the many examples of people paying multiples of the municipal rates for water from alternative suppliers. However, the inadequate development of tariff structures and appropriate financing mechanisms constrains sector reforms.

**Community management** – Community management (where services are tailored to local conditions and demands) is increasingly accepted as an appropriate model for providing sustainable water supply and sanitation services for rural, urban and peri-urban communities. However, this is a learning point that most of the official development agencies have failed to act on.

**Local to global solutions**

**Sustainability** – Low-income groups need reliable sustainable systems, with low capital and low maintenance requirements. NGO and CBO groups can provide a valuable contribution in the assessment of demand and the strategies for implementation. The private sector can significantly add value to the operation by using measures such as improving technical competence to provide solutions to fit local circumstances; by improving process and network efficiency; by improving management capability to realise increased revenues and, where necessary, the leveraging of additional funding.

**Governance** – There is need for the greater involvement of community organisations in shaping policy and practice, and this can be effected through strong local partnerships. The private sector can help to improve poor governance by encouraging and fostering institutional reform.

**Scaling-up** – Since successful projects are largely tailored to local circumstances, they rely on a large amount of local resources and on the communication of collective learning. Both of these are critical factors in moving to scale. The private sector has an important role to play in mobilising and leveraging resources, in gathering and communicating the collective learning, and in taking a central advocacy role.

**A crisis of social responsibility**

‘A variety of human societies around the world have evolved sophisticated systems of water distribution which combine water conservation with an automatic respect for fairness and reciprocity. We are faced not with a technical problem, but with a crisis of social responsibility’

This analysis sums up a recurring theme in the research – that the issues we face today are largely political and social in nature.

It is concluded that a change of approach is required to address these identified issues, and there is evidence that through the MDGs this is taking place, with a commitment by international agencies and some national governments to face the challenges, leading to much more focussed attention on poverty alleviation.

However much more needs to be done and it is concluded that this will require large scale support and commitment from the private sector at both national and international levels, through the action of strong local partnerships working within clear local institutional frameworks.
NOTES

1 Small and medium scale and/or informal operators are not considered to be within the scope of this research, which is limited to formal (often multinational) private companies. This last category is subsequently referred to as the private sector.


5 Including water shortages, population growth, poor operational and financial management, corruption, inadequate funding and insufficient attention to low-income sectors.


Sweeter Partnerships? An NGO’s engagement in the sugar sector

By Richard Perkins

Why work on sugar?

Freshwater and other environmental impacts of sugar production are of concern to WWF as it seeks to achieve its global mission, because the way sugar is grown affects people and nature. As a result WWF’s International Living Waters programme has set as one objective reducing the impact of sugar on freshwater. This paper summarises some key questions relating to WWF’s international engagement in this area.

WWF’s experience of international partnerships

Involvement in the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) have given WWF substantial partnership management experience. WWF and partners have set up a Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil involving all the market chain links for palm oil. In addition, Jason Clay’s shrimp and salmon aquaculture experience is highly relevant to the development of work on sugar.

Should WWF engage at the international level on sugar?

Sugar is an internationally traded commodity. For producers to gain preferential market access or a price premium in export markets from the achievement of higher environmental or social standards, international coverage is required. The objective that started WWF’s work on thirsty crops stated that WWF would work on internationally traded crops. This implies using the power of international markets to help catalyse change to benefit the environment.

Work in the two focal regions of Southern Africa and South Asia will be greatly magnified by engagement at the international level. Sugar industry and WWF partners in these regions look to WWF to provide a lead at an international level. Sugar Initiative has a strong internal champion in the Living Waters Programme Director.

What objectives should the WWF Sugar Initiative have for an international sugar partnership?

The WWF Living Waters Programme objectives are focused on sugar and freshwater use. Clay’s has emphasised the huge impact of agricultural effluents, including those from sugar growing and processing, on down-stream biodiversity. WWF’s objective should be to ensure the partnership leads to measurable improvements in the state of priority freshwater ecosystems. WWF should be flexible about how the partnership achieves this objective.
In what sort of international partnership should the Sugar Initiative engage?

One of the major problems facing international partnerships is the proliferation of initiatives and the consequent lack of sufficient critical mass of any one initiative to bring about change. A second problem is that organisations that are left out may well set up competing initiatives to undermine an existing partnership. A third is that a partnership set up on too narrow a basis may miss issues or misinterpret the appropriate solutions needed because it lacks sufficient breadth of expertise.

Clay suggests that we identify some of the major players in the sector and use them to iteratively and inter-subjectively establish a core group of about fifty. This group can then establish what the major issues are for the commodity and the sustainability performance standards and management systems necessary to address them. The advantages of such an approach are that, provided the desired means are widely agreed on, it should prevent the establishment of multiple and competing sustainability standards within a sector and also give credibility to the eventual outcome. The disadvantage of Clay’s approach is that it appears highly daunting, time-consuming and resource demanding.

Who should the WWF Sugar Initiative partner with internationally?

WWF-US is already working closely with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in a Better Management Practices and Agribusiness Commodities programme that includes sugar in its short list of commodities. Meanwhile the IISD/UNCTAD Sustainable Commodities Initiative has very similar aims and strategies to the WWF Sugar Initiative. One can conclude that there should be consultation between the Sugar Initiative, the IFC/WWF-US commodities programme and the IISD initiative, to remove duplication between initiatives and prevent the fragmentation problems referred to in the preceding section. Partnership with these international initiatives would maximise resources and appeal to donors and companies.

Stott lists criteria for selecting partners that could usefully be applied in the current case. These are reliability, reputation, capacity, relevance/context, sustainability, accountability, legitimacy and commitment. The Sugar Initiative should use these criteria to assess the benefits of partnership with each.

Should WWF partner with Netafim?

WWF chose to work on sugar because water withdrawals for irrigation for sugar production are highly relative to other crops in a number of key basins. This led naturally to the consideration of better irrigation practices, as a means to reduce impacts of sugar on priority freshwater ecosystems. It was this fact that inspired the exploration of common ground with a major global manufacturer of irrigation equipment, Netafim. The Sugar Initiative should identify with Netafim how it can contribute to a larger partnership of the type proposed and undertaken by Clay.

What tools might a sugar partnership use to achieve its objectives?

Engage major global institutions: The partnership could enlist the support of the International Sugar Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organisations in drawing together the major global players in the sugar sector.

What could a sustainable sugar production and marketing initiative consist of? In order to market sugar as sustainable, producers need to have in place a code of sustainable practice that can be audited. Both the environmental management and the environmental performance of sugar production can be accredited. Environmental management systems do not guarantee that any particular standard of environmental performance has been reached or that the company’s activity is sustainable, though they are a valuable means towards bringing environmental issues under systematic management. Within a sugar production and marketing initiative, WWF needs to identify the performance levels that it wants farmers to achieve and to find some way of connecting farm performance levels to environmental outcomes at the landscape and catchment scale. The onus for setting environmental performance standards lies with environmental organisations, which want to see particular levels of performance
achieved. This points to the need for WWF to establish internal agreement on the process for setting performance standards in agriculture.

How to communicate with international partners?

Various sources\(^1\) stress the importance of transparency in dealing with all stakeholders. It is important to allow for the possibility of informed engagement by publishing all significant proposals on a publicly-accessible, widely-publicised, purpose-dedicated, independent website.

Conclusion

It is recommended that WWF should forge an international partnership on sugar. It should evaluate the possibility of partnership using the principles listed by Stott\(^1\) and, whatever collaboration emerges, should draw together a key group of stakeholders who communicate electronically during this process with a wider set of players. At the same time, WWF should make environmental outcomes in the wider catchment its primary objective, ensuring that in any sustainable sugar production and marketing initiative, measurable standards are set at farm level which relate to environmental performance at the catchment level. WWF should also work to harmonise the processes that it uses to establish performance standards in agriculture across different commodities.

NOTES

1. WWF is described as the world’s largest independent conservation organisation, operating in more than 96 countries with more than 5 million supporters.
2. WWF’s mission is to stop the degradation of the planet’s natural resources and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by: – conserving the world’s biodiversity – ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable – promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.
4. Clay, J. (2003) Dr Jason Clay is Vice President of the Center for Conservation Innovation (CCI) at WWF-US. Details of his work on shrimp aquaculture can be found on: http://www.enaca.org
6. As has been the case with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and its competitor the Pan European Forest Certification Scheme (PEFC).
7. Clay (supra).
11. IFC/WWF have decided to engage directly with major companies involved in sugar (June 2004).
13. Stott (supra).
E-Learning: The Solution to the Partnership Learning Challenge?

By Bérangère Magarinos

“The ability to learn about learning and develop the learning process is the critical issue of the twenty first century.”

Defining learning

‘Learning is both the biggest breakthrough in business and management thinking of the last few decades and is, most importantly, sustainable.’

Learning is about being competitive, being able to respond to the challenges of a constantly changing environment and about being more efficient in discovering creative solutions to global problems. As Garratt notes: “In the eighties ‘learning’ was not an issue for corporate nor national debate. This was well before the notion that the twenty-first century would be about the knowledge economy. Indeed in those days the legal term for intellectual property was intangible assets”. Since then, however, it seems that everybody in business and in the public sector has put in place learning strategies to increase efficiency and staff performance. Cross has developed four principles for adult learning. These principles should be seen as a broad framework for this paper:

- Adult learning programmes should capitalise on the experience of the participants
- Adult learning programmes should adapt to the limitations associated with the participants’ ages
- Adults should be challenged to move to increasingly advanced stages of personal development
- Adults should have as much choice as possible in the availability and organisation of learning programmes.

Learning about partnership

Partnership work affords unique opportunities for mutual learning and interaction through formal staff exchanges, secondment, and apprentice systems. These types of mutual learning are particularly relevant to partnership work, given that so much of it entails learning by doing.

Based on my practice of learning and training on partnerships I have defined a list of learning objectives:

- Share learning experiences on partnerships across sectors and across countries
- Discuss and improve the documentation of partnerships lessons learned
- Inspire partnership beginners with concrete examples
- Use collaborative learning tools to identify new partnership opportunities
- Offer a space for professionals to test working in partnership by experimenting with partnership tensions and assessing satisfaction through a simulated scenario
- Create an environment where one can make mistakes and learn from them.

Partnership is a constantly evolving field of knowledge and from that perspective it is desirable to create a dynamic learning environment including face-to-face workshops and coaching sessions. E-learning has not been explored yet in the field of partnership and this paper therefore seeks to examine what is feasible or not using this method.

Suggestions for e-learning tools on partnerships

‘Good cooks do not become good cooks by learning the rules of..."
First of all, any big institution such as the United Nations (UN) system, for instance, should reflect on the opportunity of creating an active community of practice of partnership practitioners who should be able to share experiences online. A community of practice of UN/Business focal points from all UN agencies does exist. A virtual space should be created for that community to share documents, contacts, experiences and ideas. Such a platform would allow UN staff involved in partnerships to interact socially and professionally online. It would also provide a starting point for beginners often left alone. The UN is currently developing partnership knowledge and losing it because it is not recorded nor shared and it is not made available. The platform would be a simple and quick way to start organising knowledge at a minimum cost.

Besides collaborative learning tools a more structured approached to e-learning can be taken with the creation of a course that should create a simulation environment. Schank advises course designers to base any simulation on a list of behaviours that will have the highest impact on people’s success on the job. On the basis of my own partnership experience, as well as on the basis of the reflections conducted in Cambridge, I would suggest that the behaviours that will have the highest impact on people’s success to conduct partnerships are capacity to:

- Share power
- Manage conflict
- Manage cultural diversity in the sense of ‘sectoral’ diversity
- Build understanding, not consensus, to a view of creating mutuality
- Think creatively about contributions offered and expected
- Integrate change back to one’s institution
- Move out of the comfort zone

Incentives for using e-learning tools should be developed

Great tools can be developed but in the UN, and maybe in any big institution, it has to be supported by a cultural change. The success of an e-learning approach in the UN will mean much more then the capacity to distribute online information around the world. It will mean a fundamental change of the organisational culture.

I believe that some efficient UN/business partnerships may help the UN to understand better the importance of learning and change and the benefit that can be gained. Around the world I have seen many change agents building innovative partnerships and shaking the UN culture by taking risks. Most of the partnership brokers in the field are working in isolation without any support. For that reason e-learning would be a great tool for them. Even more importantly they could all benefit from a learning platform to ask questions and discuss ideas with their colleagues in other countries who may be struggling with similar partnership dilemmas.

Professionals put in charge of partnership work should be seen as the real UN reformers. All of them are carrying an incredible wealth of partnership knowledge that is almost never shared. I hope that it will become possible to make their contribution more broadly available across the UN system and outside in order to ensure that their knowledge and experiences contribute to the evolution of the partnership paradigm.

NOTES

7 ibid: 95.
Findings from a Learning Partnership

By Adrian Godfrey, Katie Huane, Luan Liying, Benoît Witchalls & Egbert Yambayamba

‘Wild Vision’ formed as a ‘Learning Partnership’ in March 2003 to provide a vehicle through which the coalface reality of the partnership process could be both analysed and experienced. This reflexive partnership brought together experience and insights from five individuals representing five diverse cross sector partnerships. They vary in structure from loose relationships to binding agreements, in scale from local to global alliances and in purpose from building relationships in local villages to establishing international policy. What holds them all together, however, is their determination, ambition and innovation as they each grapple in their own way with the shared ultimate goal of sustainability.

Those partnerships were:

- **World Health Academy** (Adrian Godfrey – Cisco Systems). Pioneered in Egypt, this partnership aims to be the pilot to a global programme of health reform by creating an e-enabled health reference system for teachers, school children and youth aged between twelve to eighteen years.

- **Luangeni project** (Egbert Yambayamba – The Partnership Forum). Based in Zambia this partnership is between a new supermarket, local food producers and the Zambian ministry of Agriculture, the collective aims are to build capacity within the local community to create wealth at a household level through growing and marketing horticultural products and selling them through the supermarket.

- **Training of the Chinese Businesses and Business Associations on Compliance of Intellectual Property Rights Laws and Regulations** (CIPRLR) (Luan Liying – UNDP China Office). Convened by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), its aims are to assist China in developing its capacity in Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), laws and regulations.

- **Integrating Environmental and Social Impact Assessments into New Oil and Gas Project Developments** (IESIA) (Benoît Witchalls – BP). A partnership between Oil and Gas companies aimed at capturing better value in delivering social and environmental performance. For its success the partnership will require input from all the sectors.

- **Driving forward Creativity in the East** (Creativity in the East) (Katie Huane – East of England Development Agency). The motivation behind this project is to increase economic development within the east of England and to coordinate and improve public sector support mechanisms for small and medium enterprises for the creative industries sector of that region.

A ‘pro-forma’ was developed to help in the collection of data from each partnership member in a common format to help with the analysis. Some key areas started to emerge from comparing the pro-formas:

- The motivation for organisations to be involved in partnerships at a generic level appears to be similar. In all instances there is the need for there to be a ‘gain’ or a number of ‘gains’ for an organisation to be motivated to be involved in the partnership.

- Within the majority of the partnerships explored in this report there is one particular organisation that is acting in the capacity of partnership broker. It is apparent however, that in almost all instances the most neutrally based
• While financial risks are, perhaps, the most obvious risks shared, credibility and reputation also feature highly as key shared risks in partnership activity.

• While partnership building is exciting, it was identified in the five partnerships that several obstacles exist. These include the following:
  - Limited capacity in terms of human resource. Generally, partnerships are championed by just a handful of individuals who, sooner or later, get overwhelmed by the amount of work they must do.
  - Lack of commitment from higher levels of management and other stakeholders.
  - Complex situations and decision-making processes.
  - Large numbers of partners and agendas involved.

A consistent set of principles therefore started to emerge, which are considered to be fundamental to partnership success, borne out through the Learning Partnership itself.

The key partnership principles in practice

Clear Leadership and support from senior management is essential to get a partnership off the ground and give it the capacity for continuance. Within the ‘Wild Vision’ partnership this also held true. Leaders within the group naturally emerged and ensured that the group was effectively steered and kept on track through the initial planning process.

Communication is the cornerstone of any cross sector partnership and a major challenge to success, not only from an organisational point of view, but from a cultural point of view. The degree to which communication plays a role in the success or failure of a partnership cannot be understated. Communication plays a major role in the cohesiveness of groups. Again the experience of the Learning Partnership reinforced these conclusions. Without the continuous clarification of understanding, which occurred throughout the research programme, it is likely that individual group members would have taken away different and varied meanings from discussions.

Without common vision and mutual benefit it is unlikely that a cross sector partnership will succeed for it will be unsatisfactory for some of the key players and will therefore be unsustainable. This was identifiable in every one of the five partnership projects examined and particularly so in the Learning Partnership. After extensive discussions in the initial planning stages the partners were all clear as to the project goals. The common vision from the outset provided the direction around which all further planning took place.

Commitment and flexibility are the driving forces behind the continuous development process of any cross sector partnership. Partnerships take time, courage, determination and patience and are rarely ‘quick-fix’ solutions. Success depends on their ability to adapt to change. Committed individuals are often the initiators of cross sector partnerships, but the establishment of organisational or institutional commitment is an important evolutionary stage. Commitment can be translated to mean resource allocation particularly financially, but may equally mean human resource, skills support, time or simple endorsement from respected champions. All of these elements were seen to be present in the five partnerships considered and even more so within the Learning Partnership where personal commitment to ensure the successful completion of the course and organisational commitment through the funding and support for individuals to gain the qualification were apparent.

Pragmatism and Patience are virtues! The pressure to deliver should not overwhelm the partnership. The process of building partnerships takes time and it is necessary that partners are realistic and practical in their achievement of objectives. Throughout the partnerships actively researched this was found to be an underlying principle that was seen as a positive benefit.

Conclusions

Whilst the aim of the research project was to produce a report identifying key partnership principles and good practice, the
very act of participation in the Learning Partnership qualified and substantiated the conclusions drawn.

NOTES


4 ibid.

Learning from a Failed Partnership

By Leda Stott

This article, which is based upon an amalgamation of several real local partnership studies, charts the progress of a business coalition established to work with other sectors and promote economic and social development in a developing country. Over a five-year period the organisation failed to make any kind of national impact or develop any meaningful form of cross-sector linkage in spite of having the potential to do so. A close examination of the complexities of the country’s political-economy, the manner in which the institution was created, its relationships with external organisations and the individuals involved in its management, demonstrate some of the challenges involved in building cross-sector partnerships and the need to address these carefully if any kind of success is to be achieved.

The context

Our country is a former colony, widely regarded as having a promising future at independence in spite of a protracted nationalist struggle and a legacy of deep ethnic and regional division. The post-colonial government inherited a diversified economy with good infrastructure but over time the country suffered drought, food shortages, a growing budget deficit, high inflation, unemployment and price increases. These problems were compounded by public sector mismanagement, arbitrary changes in legislation and spells of political unrest, which led to reductions in foreign investment and an increase in poverty. Over a quarter of the population were based in or around towns where the majority of the urban poor worked in the informal economy.

The formal business sector was broadly divided into three groups: companies owned and run by descendants of colonial settlers; branches of multi-nationals managed mainly by this group and a handful of contracted expatriates; and emerging locally-owned companies. The emphasis of government was on enhancing economic opportunities for the latter through a policy of ‘indigenisation’. To this end it had helped set up several national organisations to promote ‘indigenous small business development’. Though the relationship between the public and more established private sector was strained there was nonetheless potential for collaboration and several large companies had developed linkage programmes with these government-backed organisations. Such activities were supported by a number of NGOs and international agencies as a way of assisting community development and reducing poverty.

The external trigger

The impetus behind the establishment of a new ‘Business Coalition for Development’ was external. An international charity was keen to begin to work in the continent following the success of its project activities in Europe. Its approach was based on a model considered adaptable to developing countries in which businesses were encouraged to form national coalitions and work with other sectors of society to tackle pressing social issues. A chance connection at an international conference between one of the country’s business leaders and the charity’s director led to a decision to choose the country to pilot its new venture. Because the charity had so little experience outside Europe it appointed a consultant, who was familiar with the region, to explore the possibilities of establishing a business coalition there.

The consultant spent three weeks in the country’s capital city and met a range of business leaders, mainly from multi-nationals...
working there, whom he perceived to be the backbone of the country’s resource base. While acknowledging that there were acute divisions within the business world, especially between descendents of colonial settlers and indigenous groups, the consultant felt that there was general acceptance of the idea of encouraging cross-sector dialogue as part of an emerging sense of ‘corporate social responsibility’. Job creation through support for small, medium and micro enterprise (SMME) development was identified as the key focus area for concerted private sector action.

**The establishment of the Business Coalition**

The consultant’s efforts culminated in the agreement of a group of thirty directors from leading companies to set up a business coalition with the aim of contributing to economic and social development by supporting the growth of SMMEs. This would be done by proactively sharing its business knowledge and skills with other sectors and supporting linkages between large and small companies.

The Business Coalition’s mission statement echoed that of its founder in its desire to promote concerted business involvement in the development process through partnerships with other sectors of society. It was agreed that the Coalition be resourced through a small membership fee, governed by an annually-elected Executive Board and managed by a Director with a strong local profile who had been selected by the consultant following recommendations from a number of the business leaders he had spoken to.

The Business Coalition held its inaugural meeting in a former ‘colonial club’ which had opened its doors to indigenous businessmen with some reluctance while women were still permitted entry only as ‘special guests’. An Executive Board was elected that included a Chairperson and seven other members, including the Director whose position was endorsed at this time. All were males of colonial descent apart from one expatriate and two well-known indigenous businessmen. No agreement or Memorandum of Understanding was signed, no business plan was put forward and no discussion was held on the appointment of administrative staff or premises from which to operate. It was, however, agreed that lunchtime meetings would take place in the same venue every two months and that a quarterly newsletter would be put together by the Director outlining the community projects of the Coalition’s members. In the meantime the Executive Board would think through possible activities that the Coalition could develop to support SMMEs.

**First reactions**

The immediate reaction to the establishment of the Business Coalition was a series of hostile articles in the largely government-owned press suggesting that the organisation had ‘colonial overtones’ and appeared to be working to protect the interests of ‘big business’ rather than promoting indigenous business development. Support for SMMEs, it was stated, should be encouraged with bodies already set up for this purpose. In response to this the directors of several leading international companies with offices in the country who had initially expressed an interest in the Coalition politely distanced themselves from it, while the majority of those from indigenous companies expressed scepticism about its possibilities.

**Early development**

During its first two years the Business Coalition retained its thirty members and its Executive Board was re-elected unanimously. It held bi-monthly lunchtime meetings in ‘the club’, occasionally offering a presentation from one of the companies on a particular project or feedback on an overseas visit. These occasions were welcomed by members as good ‘networking’ opportunities. A modest newsletter containing member company profiles and reports on a selection of business-community projects was circulated amongst the group. Meanwhile the Director worked with two other members of the Executive Board to develop a scheme in which small groups of students from high schools in the city centre were invited to visit selected member companies on short visits for a tour and discussion session. The idea behind this was that such a ‘taster’ would motivate student
interest in the private sector and encourage the possibility of their establishing an SMME in future.

External involvement

In the early years of the Coalition’s existence the Director maintained periodic contact with different members of the international charity’s staff. The Coalition also welcomed a visiting representative, who had been invited to present a paper at an aid agency seminar in the country, to make a short speech at one of their lunchtime meetings.

Following restructuring at the offices of the international charity and the arrival of new staff with wider international development experience, the organisation’s approach to working outside Europe began to change direction. It now focussed on extensive research work; the adoption of a more flexible business coalition model that could be adapted elsewhere; and the consolidation of stronger international linkages. A Country Manager was appointed who began to liaise with the Coalition more regularly and, concerned that it was not fulfilling its potential, suggested the appointment of an able country-based expatriate with project planning skills as a Development Manager who would be able to assist the Coalition with its work. This idea was accepted and a well-qualified expert nominated for the role. Her part-time involvement was paid for by the international charity.

New developments and responses

The new Development Manager immediately drew up a business plan for the Coalition that outlined key areas for the development of activities; prepared a funding proposal for the scaling up of the work in order to cover staff, equipment and training costs; and began to travel around the country in order to recruit more members, with a strong emphasis on engaging indigenous business representatives. She also set up meetings with government bodies, NGOs and local offices of international agencies to discuss areas of mutual interest and possibilities for working together.

These activities raised the profile of the Coalition both nationally and internationally. Several new members joined and the Ambassador of the Development Manager’s country, with whom she had strong connections and whose government had recently set out a new and forthright approach to development issues, offered the possibility of supporting the Coalition with funding for a new SMME development programme.

Reactions from within the Coalition to the central planks of the new programme were somewhat less enthusiastic. Collaboration with other sectors

The Development Manager felt that it was particularly important to collaborate with government and key civil society organisations as the economic situation appeared to be worsening and political unrest and hostility towards the private sector were increasing. The possibility of strategic cross-sector dialogue led by the Business Coalition with the international backing and support of its founder, as a way of creating a ‘space’ to air concerns and reduce tensions was suggested. The Director of the Coalition was uncomfortable with this approach. Business and government, he insisted, traditionally solved problems with ‘quiet discussions behind closed doors’ and certainly did not need to involve NGO groups in this dialogue. The idea was not discussed with the Executive Board and no further action was taken.

Promotion of indigenous business involvement

The Development Manager saw involvement of more local company members as crucial to improving the Coalition’s standing in the country, particularly with regard to favourable relations with the public sector and impacting a wider audience for its work. Proposals were made to:

- Invite locally-managed companies to share information about their work
- Encourage a key indigenous business leader to stand as Chairperson in the forthcoming Executive Board elections
- Select administrative staff from indigenous groups with skills development training offered if necessary
- Change the venue for meetings.
The existing Chairperson insisted on standing for re-election and a potential replacement withdrew his candidature in order not to ‘aggravate the situation’. The Coalition’s Director insisted that it was not necessary to recruit local staff as tasks could be carried out perfectly well by occasional helpers and ‘Executive Board wives’ who would work on a voluntary basis. Meetings continued to take place at ‘the club’.

Stronger structure and programme of activities

The business plan included an assessment of costs for the funding of a small local office with two full-time staff; a Manager and an administrative assistant, and the provision of equipment and training. In addition, a more focussed programme of activities was drawn up that proposed:

- Drafting a solid SMME promotion programme with the involvement of other sectors and related to linkages along business supply chains
- Broadening the company-school visits initiative to include students from the more deprived areas of the capital city.
- Redesigning the Coalition newsletter, adding an international component and circulating it more widely

The Coalition’s Director was reluctant to develop a fully-fledged office. He explained that he did not see the benefits of applying for the legal status that such an office might require and that the running costs might necessitate increasing the membership fee which would be unpopular. Nor did the idea of requesting external funding to assist appeal to him as this would require financial management and raised issues of accountability that the Coalition was not yet ready to take on. It would, he believed, be better to keep things loose and rely on voluntary help for administrative tasks. He did, however, agree that an SMME programme needed developing and that the newsletter might be redesigned and promised that these issues would be discussed by the Executive Board. With regard to the company-school initiative, he implied that students from the more deprived areas of the capital city might have language problems and find the visits taxing. The Development Manager suggested that indigenous company staff members make presentations in their own language with the additional advantage of offering role models to less-privileged pupils. One visit took place but was not repeated.

Development of a national remit

In order to expand its activities and to help cement regional ties, the Development Manager suggested that the Coalition proactively expand its remit beyond the capital city with the establishment of links with company member offices in other towns as well as contacts with regional government representatives and other interested stakeholders. The idea of establishing small regional teams was also floated. The Director of the Coalition felt that this was over-ambitious and work in the capital should be consolidated first. The regional teams were never set up and further contact through members in other areas was eventually abandoned due to ‘little interest’.

Stronger signs of dissent

A year later, at a meeting of the Coalition’s Executive Board, a decision was made to sack the Development Manager. Upon receiving this news, the international charity’s Country Manager made contact with the Coalition to ask why this has happened and was told that the Development Manager’s efforts had created ‘too high a profile for them’ and were ‘too internationally focussed’. The Coalition would prefer to remain small and low key, particularly in view of the fact that government hostility towards the private sector appeared to be stronger than ever. Shortly afterwards one of the indigenous businessmen resigned from the Executive Board of the Coalition.

External pressure

The Country Manager paid an immediate visit to the country to assess the situation and, following a series of consultations with Coalition members as well as other key business leaders, government and international agency representatives, arrived at the conclusion that, although the Development Manager had gone, the Business Coalition still had potential and that it was worth persisting in trying to ‘coach
them round’. Three key proposals were put to their Director for discussion with the Executive Board:

- Draw up a series of activities for an effective SMME programme
- Appoint an indigenous programme manager to run this
- Appoint an indigenous Chairperson to reflect a symbolic change in the organisation.

The final push

Six months later the three proposals remained unaddressed by the Coalition. In desperation the Country Manager made contact with the Embassy office that had earlier viewed collaboration so favourably. Working with a Project Manager there, a ‘last try’ was made to get the Coalition to focus on a single activity; participation in an international programme that funded concrete SMME development projects which would be shared and exchanged as learning models. This was deemed an appropriate way of getting the Coalition to broaden its base, work more coherently across sectors and allow external monitoring and development of its activities. The Embassy was even willing to provide the Coalition with the services of two local consultants to assist with the writing of the SMME development proposal.

In spite of the Country Manager urging the Coalition’s Director to take advantage of this opportunity, no progress was made. This led the foreign embassy to question the international charity’s capacity to manage relations with the Coalition and a hint that they might be reluctant to liaise with them elsewhere if this was an example of their choice of local affiliate. At the same time wider feedback from outside the country indicated that its relationship with the Coalition had become a liability for the international charity.

The end of the affair

After several months without contact, the Director of the Business Coalition wrote a short letter to the international charity’s Country Manager stating that the Executive Board had been unhappy with the idea of the SMME proposal as they did not have the capacity to undertake this and preferred to concentrate on their company-school visit initiative instead. He also said that the Chairperson had once again refused to stand down and there was no objection to this by other Executive Board members. In addition, they did not want to change the nature of their organisation by recruiting local staff. After a discussion of the situation within the international charity, a decision was made to terminate the relationship with the Business Coalition.

Following this break, the Coalition continued to hold occasional lunchtime meetings at ‘the club’ and carry out its company-school visit initiative. Though it did not develop strong formal relationships or programmes with other sectors or expand its remit nationally, its continued existence pointed to some success as a business network in the capital city. Meanwhile the country’s political and economic situation worsened and increased tension between the public and private sectors made efforts to develop cross-sector partnership activities extremely difficult. According to one local observer, the business community had lost a unique chance to contribute positively to the development of the country. ‘The irony is that it is the private sector which must change in order for government to change.’

Endnote

During the 1980s the failure of many aid-funded development projects was attributed to weaknesses in ‘coordination, ownership and dependence’ – donor organisations co-ordinated projects poorly and were frequently unaware of local realities; project ownership was external and/or lacking in stakeholder involvement and, lastly, rather than create independence, dependence on overseas aid was reinforced. As well as avoiding these same pitfalls, cross-sector partnerships, as can be seen by this case study, additionally need to address a range of challenges particular to the process of partnership-building. Some of the most important of these have been outlined in the Business Partners for Development publication ‘Flexibility by Design’ and include, the need to understand
partnerships in their particular context; to build on existing assets and fill gaps; to understand partner incentives and conflicts and; crucially, to allow for transformation, modification and capacity building. As the authors emphasise, the issue of flexibility is key. Without an ability to adapt, sometimes quite radically, to changing internal and/or external circumstances, it is probable that a similar fate to the one described here awaits a vast number of partnerships. A key task for those involved in cross-sector collaboration is to become more adept at learning from such failures.

NOTES

1 See for example Wangwe, S. (1998) ‘Foreign Aid, Debt And Development In Sub-Saharan Africa’, Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) Tanzania, Dar es Salaam;

VIEWPOINT
When is a ‘Partnership’ not a Partnership?

By Steve Bloomfield

In the UK the term ‘partnership’ has been overused and devalued in the process. Attachment of the term ‘partnership’, appears to lend a spurious credibility to what would otherwise be an inconsequential grouping. An analysis of the most promoted examples, such as Public Private Partnerships, show that they are a commercial contract between a public authority and a private company for the provision of goods and services, not a partnership. Similarly many business led ‘partnerships’ are just examples of ‘who pays the piper, calls the tune’. A business may decide to embark on a project but realise that to successfully achieve its objectives it requires the cooperation and support of local people and NGOs. So it may choose to fund a partnership involving participants from stakeholder groups, NGOs and individual sympathisers, to achieve its objectives.

Although there was little public awareness of ‘partnership’ as an accepted organisational model prior to the 1990s in the UK, there were already many forms of involvement and engagement in the worlds of business and government. For example the relations between employees and employers in the context of collective bargaining can be seen to represent some of the characteristics of partnership. Part of my experience as a trade union official includes collective bargaining at both local and national levels covering both the public and private sectors. This has enabled me to observe the key characteristics of collective bargaining.

• Both the employees and the employers are represented on some form of joint committee or body; the former by trade unions (at least in workplaces and industries where unions are recognised for the purposes of collective bargaining) and the latter by managers or associations of employers with their own representatives. Therefore there are at least two parties.
• There is a common interest in the remuneration and organisational aspects of the business.
• There is a desire by both parties to engage in consultation and negotiation about common interests.
• The bargaining process and its institutions, such as a national joint negotiating council, are seen as a means to an end, merely the venue for dialogue, with little or no intrinsic value.

However, despite these quite compelling partnership features, there are other features of collective bargaining that do not conform to ‘partnership’.

• The nature of the relationship between employees and employers is basically conflictual in that the aims and objectives of both parties often are at odds with one another, e.g. concerning a pay claim.
• The forum for dialogue (the joint committee or council) is often the battlefield on which struggles between the parties are fought out.
• While the subject matter may be a common one the aims of both parties are likely to be different.
• Both parties have a need to promote their self-image to those they are accountable to, in preference to the status of the ‘institution’ itself.
• Attitudes displayed tend to be more about winning and losing, than about involvement in the decision making process. The employers often have the balance of power in their favour and seek to defend their plans and intentions while the trade unions feel
defensive and/or aggressive on behalf of their members.

It therefore seems that in a traditional collective bargaining context there are some important features of partnership absent, most notably a ‘common interest’ shared by all parties.3

In some ways it is easier to identify what are not partnerships. My personal excluders would be:

• Any relationship that is commercial in nature – if a relationship is commercial in nature it will usually be framed in the context of a legally binding contract that spells out what the obligations of each party are including the costs. The nature of such a relationship is time limited and bound by the contract. It would be difficult to see such a relationship as conforming to the essential nature of a partnership.

• Any relationship that is for the provision and receipt of goods and services at market rates – this would also be governed by a contract and is a commercial relationship.

• Any relationship that is led and controlled by one or more parties intent on proceeding with a plan – in a case where one or more parties (usually businesses) wish to proceed with a project and to do so requires cooperation and outside support, often with inducements to lubricate the process of dialogue and cooperation. This type of engagement is probably a marginal example and could conceivably operate as a partnership. However, it does not fit well with the principles of partnership. It begs a question about whether the partnership would be abandoned if the lead partner failed to get their way.

• Any relationship that is entered into for explicit self interest (as opposed to consequential effects that may benefit a party’s reputation or public standing) – where a group of representatives decide to get together to promote their own business interests, maybe through a trade association, then such a grouping tends to be internally rather than externally focused. Consequently it is unlikely to qualify as a partnership.

The essential elements of a partnership might thus include:

• That the members of the partnership share a common set of objectives

• That each partner is mutually dependent upon the other for the successful achievement of the objectives

• That there are clear lines of accountability for each partner to the constituency they represent

• That the risks of participation are broadly spread among the partners

• That the objectives are by their nature external to any individual partner’s organisation and could not be achieved alone.

In conclusion it seems to me that for the concept of partnership to be fully and properly exploited it needs to be given a unique set of characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of grouping. To avoid the risk of devaluing such a concept the term partnership should not be used for relationships that are clearly something else.

NOTES

1 Two reports published by UNISON (2002) illustrate these features PFI – Failing our Future and Understanding PFI – An Essential School Governor’s Guide. www.unison.org.uk

2 In the worst examples company managers have been convicted of bribery and corruption to secure cooperation with the company’s plans, see World Commission on Dams (2002 Online) Dams and Development www.dams.org

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