Reid S. and Rein M. (2008) 'Working Together: A critical analysis of cross sector partnerships in Southern Africa' in Hout W. (ed.) *EU Development Policy and Poverty Reduction,* **Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing**

Introduction

The research on which this chapter is based, *Working Together: A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa* (Rein et al 2005, henceforward referred to as *Working Together*), offers a critical examination of the phenomenon of cross-sector partnerships and their impact on poverty eradication, through the analysis of six case studies, three from Zambia and three from South Africa.[1]   Cross-sector partnerships are of particular interest to research, firstly because of the role they play in development; and, secondly, because of the complex dynamics which operate both within the partnerships themselves and between the partnerships and the projects they help to shape. Drawing on these case studies and on relevant literature from a number of disciplines, this chapter highlights the issues raised by the research and provides an overview of the conclusions and findings, with particular reference to international policy-making.

The central problem addressed by *Working Together* is whether the creation of cross-sector partnerships is an effective mechanism for delivering projects which will contribute to poverty eradication. Substantial claims have been made by some within the development field for the role of partnership as the vehicle for delivering development strategies. Certainly, since the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg) the principle of private, public and not-for-profit sectors

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[1] The report is coauthored by Rein M., Stott, L., Yambayamba, K., Hardman, S., & Reid, S. It is published by University of Cambridge Programme for Industry.

coming together to tackle poverty eradication has become firmly established. This principle is the current credo not just of the United Nations but of many governments in both the developed and the developing worlds. As a result, significant resources are now being channelled into establishing partnership arrangements both internationally and at national and local levels. In *Working Together*, the authors' primary concern was with the absence of solid evidence to support this global enthusiasm and with the need for sound research to complement the overwhelmingly anecdotal, descriptive evidence which informs most practice. A secondary concern was to begin to build more sophisticated insight into how these collaborations work, not just as project organisations but as examples of social and institutional dynamics: understanding the *process* of partnership is a central part of understanding the *results* of partnership.

These motivating concerns were focused into a series of specific research questions for the studies carried out in southern Africa. First and foremost was whether partnerships and their projects could be seen to be contributing to poverty reduction in three areas vital for the development of southern Africa: health, agriculture and education. To this end, two partnerships (one South African and one Zambian) were selected from each of these sectors. The selection of case studies also took into consideration the different stages through which partnerships can pass; so a range of partnerships was included to represent those in both the early and more mature stages of development. The combination of these three basic variables (economic sector, country, stage of maturity) helped to ensure that the research could draw conclusions from a rich sample of partnership projects.

The second research question was whether there were specific models of cross-sector partnership that appeared more effective than others. To this end, the researchers directed considerable attention to exploring the formal structure, informal processes and personal interactions involved in each of the cases. To explore this aspect more effectively within the resources available, it was decided to investigate two projects in greater detail. These were the Chamba Valley Partnership in Zambia and the Amangwe Village Partnership in South Africa.

Underpinning the aims and objectives of the research is the understanding that cross-sector partnerships have been developed for the purpose of addressing development challenges and alleviating a number of development problems in a sustainable way. The research has produced descriptive case studies, analysis and evidence-based conclusions which can potentially inform policy-making at national and international levels.

Research context

As yet, there is no coherent body of knowledge or recognised set of theoretical frameworks in which to locate research on the question of cross-sector partnership. Its development as a policy tool has resulted in its appearance in many fields of activity: economic development, social inclusion and environmental protection, to name but a few. Consequently, accounts of specific partnerships have been published within a variety of disciplines: for example, in development studies, management, health and community studies, sustainable development, and international relations. Very often such accounts, by virtue of their frames of reference, inevitably show limited awareness of comparable work in other disciplines.

This particular research project emerged from concerns with international policy on poverty relief but the authors have sought to review material from a range of disciplines where this might inform an understanding of the effectiveness of cross-sector partnership. Much of the available work is best regarded as practitioner scholarship rather than formal academic research and has tended to focus on descriptive or evaluative accounts of partnerships in action. However, several sophisticated practitioners have developed conceptual models for analysing partnerships as well as practical tools to inform partnership working. Recent years have also witnessed the emergence of academic critiques of partnership, aimed at countering the enthusiastic rhetoric of some political advocates.

The effect of cross-sector partnership on development policy certainly reflects in part the acknowledged failure of successive waves of political initiatives. The apparent inability of Western-led policy to resolve issues of poverty, poor health, environmental degradation and conflict in developing countries has stimulated a search for new approaches and solutions. The emergence of collaborations across sectors has therefore been seized upon as evidence that the means exist to deliver development without excessive dependence on government funding and with co-operation between sectors which might previously have been rivals. The UN Secretary-General put this succinctly at the World Summit in Johannesburg:

> Today, there is growing recognition that lasting and effective
> answers can only be found if business joins in partnership and
> works together with other actors including government and civil

society and of course trade unions …   We now understand that both business and society stand to benefit from working together. And more and more we are realizing that it is only by mobilizing the corporate sector that we can make significant progress.

(Kofi Annan, UN Press Release 2002)

Such enthusiasm at the level of international policy was fuelled not only by the recognition of earlier failures but by the growing evidence of projects delivering practical value at local level.   Long-running initiatives such as the Business Partners for Development project (see Business Partners for Development 2001, 2002) appeared to provide a template for business, since NGOs and the state sector were willing and able to pool their resources in the cause of development. Such projects also began to generate a literature of case studies and narratives (for example, Caplan et al 2001, Kjaer 2003i) which could both inspire and inform practice in other contexts. Major companies provided further evidence through their annual reports, bearing accounts of innovative collaborations with the NGOs who had once been their fiercest critics.[2]

In parallel with these international development initiatives, the rhetoric of partnership began to take hold within many national economies. Western governments, prompted primarily by the desire to reduce the role of government, began to seek ways of delivering policy in partnership with private enterprise. In the UK, this involved a new twist on the more direct policy of privatisation of public assets, which had been espoused by the Conservative governments of the 1980s and early '90s. In place of

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[2] See, for example the BP Annual Report 2002, p. 21-22

the uncritical disposal of state assets to private ownership came a policy of inviting private sector intervention into services and projects which had once been the exclusive preserve of government. Although 'Third Way' thinking remained controversial, one of its consequences was the acceptance in mainstream political thinking of the notion that major social, economic and environmental projects can – and should – be delivered by different sectors and actors working in partnership (Giddens, 1998, 2000).[3]

At the time of writing this chapter, we can therefore observe the concurrence of a number of national and international trends which have contributed to the elevation of cross-sector partnership to its present prominence. However, that process of elevation has not been without its critics. Scepticism about the value or consequences of cross-sector partnership has taken three main forms. Firstly, there are those who have seen in partnership a new form of cultural colonialism through which Western interests continue to impose their cultural concepts and political and ideological worldview on developing countries. For example, Williams views partnerships as not just enabling continued intervention by the West into the developing world but as introducing a new set of actors, notably the NGO community, who become competitors for resources with local governments (Williams 1998). It is also argued, that the *apparently* egalitarian nature of partnership masks a set of value assumptions which, in Harrison's words, "…at its most insidious level reflects the advancement of particular perspectives and worldviews" (Harrison, 2002, p. 590). Such value assumptions derive, in Poncelet's view, from a tradition that promotes non-

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[3] For a radical critique of Giddens see Callinicos 1999

confrontational behaviour over radicalism and thus risks de-legitimising more conflictual but more radical forms of engagement (Poncelet, 2001).

Furthermore, not surprisingly, a number of critics have seen that this arena of debate has been driven primarily by the interests of big business. Fig argues: "Business is powerful enough to construct discourses of its own… It has used important global moments (Rio, WSSD) to set up irresistible notions of partnership, accommodation, win-win situations, synthesis and compromise." (Fig, 2005, p. 615). Thus, according to this viewpoint, partnership can be mobilised as a powerful conceptual construct to limit the breadth of discussion and, implicitly, to promote values favourable to the continuation of 'business as usual'. In promoting partnership as a collaborative enterprise, corporations can weaken the oppositional power both of organised labour (Utting, 2000; Frank, 2000) and of radical NGOs (Richter, 2002; Rundall, 2000; Bruno and Karliner, 2002). For such critics, the paradigm of partnership remains one which flourishes as long as it does not challenge fundamental relations of power between the sectors.

A third strand of criticism focuses on the impact which partnerships may have on the role of the state. As Kjaer points out, while partnerships may be regarded as "part of an ongoing democratic development" (Kjaer, 2003ii) they may equally be seen as transferring decision-making and resources from the elected government to temporary, unelected bodies, which often lack clear systems of either governance or accountability. Slaughter pursues this line of critique, arguing that, although "…it is both possible and necessary for these various actors to work together on common problems", it is essential that corporates and NGOs continue to represent their

particular constituencies and do not take on the responsibilities or powers which should be the exclusive preserve of elected governments. "We need global rules without centralised power but with government actors who can be held to account through a variety of political mechanisms." (Slaughter, 2004 p.10)

Elsewhere, other writers have also warned of the potential of partnerships to undermine the authority of the state through the gradual replacement of public service provision with provision through the private sector, civil society or external agencies (Rundall, 2000; Buse and Waxman, 2001). For such commentators, the fear is not just that these new actors may be unaccountable but that their actions will ultimately be driven by the overwhelming influence of the global business community.

While the emergence of a robust critique of cross-sector partnerships has been a welcome counter-balance to the often uncritical endorsement of partnerships by governments and international agencies, criticism itself needs to be tempered by a realistic appraisal of the achievements of actual partnership projects at the level of service delivery. Although Zadek is right to say that "one cannot usefully assess partnership futures on the basis of their current performance" (Zadek, 2004, p. 13), there nevertheless still exists a significant body of case material describing cross-sector partnerships in action. This material, combined with the direct personal experience of some practitioners has enabled several, for example, Tennyson (1998, 2004 & 2005) to begin confidently to not only map the workings of the partnership model but also to draw up reliable guidance on how best to establish, organise and govern effective partnerships.

Nevertheless, the ability to measure the effectiveness of partnerships in terms of their results has been limited not just by the relative lack of evidence but also by the difficulty of defining exactly what is to be measured and how. This dilemma is expressed by a number of commentators, including Caplan, Tennyson and Stott, each of whom emphasises the organic nature of partnerships and the necessity of regarding partnership arrangements as processes rather than entities (Caplan, 2001; Tennyson, 2004; Stott, 2004). In this view, effectiveness in one element of partnership (e.g. establishing a broad coalition of stakeholders) may be offset by deficiencies in another (e.g. creating effective communication between partners): each element will then influence the effectiveness of the partnership as a whole in achieving its stated goals or outputs. Such issues are clearly mirrored in the research on which this chapter is based.

The authors have written elsewhere (Rein and Reid 2005) of the need to conceptualise the evaluation of partnership as an iterative, or formative, process in which evaluation constitutes part of the partnership process itself and which might focus on any or all of three types of evaluation:

- evaluation of the outputs or impact of the partnership (intended or unintended)
- evaluation of the process of the partnership as a complex interaction
- evaluation of the distinctive value of partnership, in comparison with delivering the same outputs by another process.

Working Together summarised below, was strongly influenced, first, by the existing practitioner literature; second, by some of the analytical models developed out of it (e.g. Stott and Keatman's 5 phases model of partnership evolution); and, third, by the

awareness that partnership may in itself be a contested concept which carries with it a risk of implicit value-judgement and the shadow of cultural colonialism.

The main aim of *Working Together* was to inform policy-makers about the realities of cross-sector partnerships, and thus to enhance their ability to make decisions on the basis of evidence rather than aspiration. Influenced by the existing body of data, the researchers avoided using either a rigid definition or a fixed model of cross-sector partnership.   Instead, the actual selection of partnerships and the research methodology adopted were designed to allow for exploration of the different forms and phases of cross-sector collaborations. Similarly, guided by prior research, the authors expected that the partners themselves might have divergent understandings of, and attitudes to, the collaboration in which they were involved.

Research Design

The research design was determined by a combination of theoretical influences and practical considerations. There is an interesting challenge to finding and providing *evidence* of the success of cross-sector partnerships: as indicated above the very complexity of such partnerships entails crossing interdisciplinary boundaries in the social sciences. Moreover, the influences on cross-sector partnerships are both external (political, economic and social) and internal (partner expectations, partnership dynamics and the interactions between individual actors). *Working Together* was designed to include an examination of these influences and their effects on the partnerships.

As outlined in the Introduction to this chapter, *Working Together* adopted a case study approach to exploring two main hypotheses:

i.   that cross-sector partnerships have an impact on poverty eradication

ii.   that there are particular models of cross-sector partnerships which are more successful than others.

A case study methodology was seen as essential if the researchers were to be able to describe and analyse various partnerships that could be taken to be representative of initiatives in different sectors and regions of southern Africa. Case studies also permitted the researchers to map some of the complexity of the relationships and organisational dynamics observed in these partnerships. El Ansari et al.'s work on partnership evaluation (El Ansari et al., 2001, p.223) and the work of Yin (2003) on research methodology both highlight the value of a case study approach in situations where context is paramount and the variables influencing outcomes are multiple and complex.

The identification of six case studies was influenced by two needs: firstly, to include a range of sectors (education, agriculture and health) in two contrasting countries (South Africa and Zambia); and, secondly, to analyse partnerships which were at varying stages of development and achievement. The final selection was also determined by issues of access and thus relied on close co-operation with the African research partners who had established links with the partnerships.

The existence of these links was, in the main, a positive factor in the selection process, as it permitted an ongoing dialogue with the partnerships, which facilitated feedback to the researchers as their work progressed. The creation of this feedback loop was central to ensuring that the views of the partnership actors themselves would influence the final case study drafts and thus, in turn, enable value to be delivered to the partnerships through reliable research findings. The authors, however, acknowledge the potential for bias in using this procedure but sought to mitigate this by the final selection of cases being decided by the two researchers who were not connected to any of the partnerships.

As the research used a case study approach, it incorporated a number of distinct and interrelated methods. These were: an extensive literature review covering both the cross-sector partnership literature and development issues specific to the countries and sectors under study; interviews with key members of each partnership as well as the recipients of a partnership's services; focus group meetings with community groups where the partnerships were operating; direct observations of the partnerships 'in the field' by local researchers; and site visits by the whole research team to the six partnerships under study. In writing up the case studies, the researchers invited corrections and feedback from the partnerships themselves and these contributed to a continuing critical dialogue within the research team, aided by consultation with a panel of 'critical friends', senior academics who provided advice and guidance on the research as well as acting as a sounding board for the research team.

Finally, considerable attention was paid to the ethical implications of this research design. A number of organisations[4] and papers (Brown et al., 2004; Benatar, 2002, p.1132; Jentsch & Pilley, 2003; and Brown et al, 2004) have drawn attention to the ethical questions involved in undertaking research across borders, where cultural and economic differences implicitly affect the researchers' discourse and ultimately the findings of the research. While the use of a collaborative enquiry model has been seen to redress some of the power issues involved in research, there has also been debate about its use in developing countries and regions. Again, the research design for this study emphasised transparency of action and information, so that all stakeholders, including the research 'subjects' had access to the methods and data as well as the ability to critique them.

The nature of the data generated was varied, incorporating background economic and demographic data; activity and impact data from individual partnerships; and qualitative data from interviews, observations and focus groups. The researchers sought to draw on this rich source, in order to generate a description and analysis which would provide a better 'picture' of partnerships in action in southern Africa.

Main research findings

In this section, the main findings from the six case studies presented in *Working Together*, are summarised under seven thematic headings. The policy implications and main recommendations from the research are then presented in the final section below. However, within the constraints of this chapter, the authors provide only a

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[4] See the website *Developing a Framework for Social Science Research Ethics*, a project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) at http://www.york.ac.uk/res/ref/ (accessed December 2, 2004) and The Centre for Social Science research (CSSR) website, http://www.cssr.uct.ac.za/about_cssr.html (accessed December 2, 2004).

limited account of the data that emerged from the six case studies. Furthermore, full details of the difficult and complex circumstances within which these partnerships work have not been addressed in this chapter, even though such difficulties and complexities are implicit in the following discussion. A full account of the research, including contextual background and detailed case studies, is of course available within *Working Together* itself (Rein, et al 2005).

i) *Context*

Earlier commentators, e.g. Caplan et al (2001) have advocated the importance of viewing partnerships within their social, economic and political context; and the data from this study strongly underline that stricture. The partnerships observed in South Africa and Zambia owed their existence to a complex and highly heterogeneous range of drivers. These included: delivery of government policy; response to social crisis; initiative by private enterprise; and community attempts to fill a gap in public provision. The precise manner in which the partnerships subsequently developed, the relationships between the participating institutions, and the capacity of each partnership to achieve its goals cannot be understood without analysing the contextual drivers which shaped the individual projects. Similarly, the difficulties encountered in projects aiming to replicate earlier successes cannot be explained without reference to the influence of even modest variation in local context.

The example of the Chamba Valley agricultural partnership in Zambia illustrates these points well. Set up as a replication of a successful rural development partnership elsewhere in Zambia (the Luangeni Partnership), the Chamba Valley Partnership has struggled to reproduce the achievements of its model. Its difficulties can be

attributed, to some extent, to the distinct contextual differences between the two projects, the former in a rural setting, the latter in a peri-urban environment. Furthermore, a different combination of private enterprise and community groups was involved in the Chamba Valley. Such variations alter the partners' perceptions of one another, their expectations of success and their level of commitment to the project. Planning for replication requires an in-depth recognition and understanding of environment-specific factors.

ii) Governance and accountability

Much of the literature which the researchers drew on for *Working Together* stresses the centrality of well-planned, robust and transparent governance structures if successful cross-sector partnerships are to be developed and sustained.[5] Although paperwork, of itself, is not a panacea, its absence tends to endanger a partnership's internal communication and long-term sustainability. However, because of the sense of urgency and need to get on with the work, virtually all of the partnerships reviewed had not clarified the formal structuring of the roles, responsibilities and relationships of the collaboration. The impact of this was evident, first, in the frequent perception from partners that more meetings and communication were needed in order to clarify roles; and, second, in the dependence which some of the partnerships had on intermediary or 'broker' organisations. In the absence of adequate structures for direct interaction, such 'brokers' took responsibility for managing communication between partners.

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[5] For example Evans et al (2004)

Only one of the six partnerships (Chamba Valley) had a written partnership agreement signed by all of its partners, although the Zambian Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS had drawn up a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the intermediary body and the active partners. This MoU was the only example of a partnership agreement which defined the core principles governing the participants in the project. Elsewhere, partnerships such as Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education had no collective MoU and one written agreement with the private sector partner which provided much of the project's resources.

The lack of formal partnering structures was apparent in the consequent organisational arrangements and lines of communication for running the projects. Partnerships primarily driven by private sector institutions tended to have an umbrella body established, or adapted, to manage the partnership as a whole: in this way private funding could be channelled through a single recipient body accountable for both the partners and the project. Other partnerships, driven by public or community initiative, were heavily dependent on the role of the broker who managed interactions between the partners and acted as a common contact point for partners who sometimes had little or no direct contact with each other.

Such formal constraints in these specific partnerships limited their effectiveness, although much good work was still being achieved through the bringing together of diverse resources and commitment. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of the partnerships could be regarded as being hampered by the absence of direct communication, shared agreements and clear common purpose. Similarly, over-dependence on a single

organisation or individual makes the long-term survival of a partnership and its project more vulnerable to contextual or organisational changes.

iii) Roles and skills

If the performance and sustainability of a partnership is significantly influenced by its formal organisational arrangements, then this puts increased emphasis on the roles that individuals within the partnership take on and the skills which they bring to the accomplishment of those roles. The dependence of many of the projects on an institution or individual fulfilling the role of broker or intermediary was exacerbated in some instances by the extent to which the broker became the sole conduit through which resources or communication flowed. The decision, for instance, of the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education partnership to channel all their contributions of resources through the brokering institution (in this case the Zambian Forum for Business Leaders and Social Partners) limited the ability of the partnership to develop more influential roles in the project and placed a substantial burden of work and expectation on the brokering organisation.

Similarly, all of the partnerships had, at the outset, relied to some degree on the energy and advocacy of an individual or institutional 'champion'. Other studies of partnership have acknowledged the importance of both the 'champion' and the 'broker' roles (Tennyson R. and Wilde L., 2000), but the effect of prolonged or excessive dependence is an issue which merits further examination. Of the six projects studied here, three experienced this kind of over-dependence, limiting a direct and equal relationship between partners. These potential problems of brokering and leadership imply that those who establish a partnership need to consider in

advance how to build the skills and capacity of all partners and also how to determine at which stage the champion and/or broker withdraws from active involvement.

The role of capacity building in creating stable, effective partnerships is also demonstrated by difficulties encountered by partnerships when key individuals leave participating institutions. In the Amangwe Village project, for example, staff departures resulted in serious short-term skill shortages which endangered the viability of the project. Although it is impossible to avoid such staff changes, there are practical steps which may be taken to preclude, or at least mitigate potentially negative outcomes. One such step is to conduct a skills 'audit' at the outset of a partnership, reviewing what skills and resources a partnership needs and which individuals can offer them. The second involves the issues covered in section ii) above, i.e. the establishment of robust and transparent procedures. The third is the provision of skills training for participants in the partnerships and their projects, in order to ensure that key skills do not become the exclusive province of a limited number of individuals. Thus, perception and provision of such skills are not restricted to the performance of project tasks, but include planning for those skills needed in the management of the partnership itself. In this way, all partners acquire a better chance of engaging fully in the partnership activities: they become less dependent on 'expert' brokers or champions and are more likely to sustain the partnership even if key staff move on.

iv) Engagement and participation

On the basis of *Working Together* and previous research studies, it can be argued that the effectiveness of partnership projects rely to a significant degree on the extent and

nature of the partners', stakeholders' and communities' engagement. Across the six partnerships considered in *Working Together*, at least five distinct kinds of engagement can be identified (see Rein et al, 2005 pp 116-117), with some of the partnerships having examples of more than one form. For example, the Amangwe Village partnership included two government partners, the Department of Welfare and the Department of Health: the relation with the former was primarily contractual with the Department of Welfare controlling some aspects of the project through contractual arrangements; the relation with the latter was 'notional'; with the Department of Health acting as a partner in name only and, at the time of the research, taking no active role in the running of the partnership. Such varying relationships necessarily affect the operation of partnerships and the manner in which partners interact and negotiate with each other.

Few of the projects studied in *Working Together* explicitly stated the incentives for each partner's participation in the project, even though there may have been strong 'implicit' understandings. The research revealed that relying on 'implicit' understandings can lead to problems as a partnership matures and the level of commitment or participation of partners fluctuates in relation to their incentive to engage. The risk of institutional withdrawal, or a change in the nature of engagement, can endanger the resourcing and stability of the partnership and its project/s.

A further notable factor to be considered is the relation between a partnership and the community in which it is operating, whose ultimate benefit will often be the rationale for the partnership's existence. The community, however it is defined, even though definition is intrinsically problematic, needs to be considered and consulted as a key

stakeholder; and it may also be formally represented within the partnership. In *Working Together* approaches to community engagement within the selected partnerships varied: communication was often hampered by the fact that the prime driver for the partnership may have been a government or corporate 'top-down' initiative. At the outset of the Small Sugarcane Growers Partnership in South Africa, the trade body driving the partnership (the South African Sugar Association) undertook a lengthy consultation exercise with the farming communities by way of community workshops and dialogue. Such a process is admirable in its intent but can raise unexpected challenges. In particular, expectations of benefit may be raised very high in the communities, putting unreasonable pressures on the partnership in its early stages and leading to a possible reaction against the partnership when results fail to match expectations

Parpart (2000) points to the problems of achieving consultation with more marginalised groups in local communities who may be excluded from what appears to be participatory consultation whether for reasons of culture and/or established power distribution. All six partnerships researched in *Working Together* addressed this issue to some degree.

v) Resources

Just as partnerships need to review the skills which partners bring to collaboration, so the range of available resources also needs to be carefully assessed at the outset. This has been recognised as a valuable way in which partners can respect the diversity of resources on offer, and so avoid undervaluing the contribution of partners who do not bring with them substantial financial resource (Tennyson, 2004, p. 11). Careful

analysis of this issue at an early stage may help a partnership to make the most of the resources at its disposal and to avoid spending too much time in subsequent search for external resources.

Nevertheless, the need for external resource, over and above what the constituent partners can bring, was an important constraint for a number of the partnerships studied in *Working Together*. In certain cases, long-term survival was seen as dependent on accessing additional funds from international donor bodies or similar agencies. In such instances, the crucial requirement for a partnership is to establish a mechanism, as early as possible, for assessing the need for funds and to dedicate appropriate resources to accessing such funds with a long-term view to building independence from such support.

One factor helping to foster long-term independence was the influence of private sector partners in encouraging the use of financial and business planning models. Such planning is inescapable in the contemporary development environment and many non-profit and community organisations are required to achieve familiarity, and indeed expertise, in its use. In this respect, skills in the management of resources become another issue that partnerships need to learn and integrate.

vi) Adaptation to change

All of the factors set out in the sections above highlight the need for partnerships to be capable of responding to change and adapting to a changing environment. Caplan et al. (2001) write of 'flexibility by design'; and this phrase aptly indicates the necessity for partnerships to create systems of operating and decision-making which permit

adaptation. However, as we have seen, several of the partnerships studied in *Working Together* reflected the nature and difficulties of the environments in which they worked vis-à-vis systems of governance, poor internal communication and over-dependence on intermediary institutions. In any organisation, and especially in such circumstances, radical innovation may be needed in order to survive, as the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS demonstrated when it responded to the loss of its Director and Education Officer by not just recruiting replacements but re-writing the partnership's objectives to reflect the changes in its circumstances since its foundation.

vii) Monitoring and evaluation

It is difficult to state with any certainty the nature and extent of the effect of any of the *Working Together* partnerships on its chosen area of social development or on poverty eradication. The lack of formal or consistent processes for monitoring and evaluating partnership activities presented an obstacle, in most cases, to quantifying the impact of a partnership in terms of improvement in the target community. However, in the Zambian health partnership (ZBCA), there was a self-monitoring process in place. This procedure has enabled the partnership to track the numbers of employees being treated through the project's activities and has also helped some of the partner companies to carry out cost-benefit analyses of their engagement.

The Chamba Valley agricultural partnership has also introduced some tracking of its impact, showing that 10 of the possible 98 farmers in its catchment region are selling produce through the partnership. The partnership guarantees sales and prices in return for a commitment to improved quality and targeted production. Although the

numbers appear small, there are indications of wider improvement to the wealth and welfare of a larger proportion of farmers than just those 10 selling directly through the partnership. A further relevant issue in this respect, is not so much whether these partnerships have had an impact on poverty eradication since they all, to some degree, deliver benefit, but whether it is possible to define the criteria for success clearly and then measure activities accurately against those criteria, in order to establish sound principles for further good practice.

We would, therefore, argue for the need for effective monitoring and evaluation processes to be embedded in partnerships from the earliest stage of planning and development.

Conclusions

Much of the literature surveyed for *Working Together* emphasises the complex nature of cross-sector partnerships and the need to view them as processes, taking place in very specific – and influential – local contexts. The results of the *Working Together* research confirms this observation and also point to the need to understand the concept of cross-sector partnership not as a fixed model but as a pattern established via negotiations made in specific circumstances and based on the perceptions of the local participants. The centrality of context and definition has important implications for the use of existing models of best practice.

 Previous research and practitioner accounts have led to the production of fairly detailed models for implementing and managing cross-sector partnerships (see Tennyson 1998). The results of *Working Together* support the correctness of those

models in terms of their analysis of procedural factors, such as the need for written agreements and proper governance structures. However, what this research does highlight is the need to apply such models cautiously and with a thorough knowledge of the local context: while there is undoubtedly established good practice to be followed, this needs to be considered within the specific constraints of local conditions.

Indeed, *Working Together* demonstrates that the attempt to replicate successful practice in dissimilar conditions can lead to unanticipated challenges to effectiveness. Not only are cultural, social and economic conditions likely to be different but the incentives and drivers for partners to participate may also vary from a preceding project. Understanding why each partner is participating – and what they hope to gain – becomes a crucial element in analysing the partnership's likely success in achieving its explicit goals.

Another area in which the *Working Together* may be seen to have both confirmed and refined the work of earlier studies is in the analysis of roles within a partnership. Certainly, this research confirms the necessity for roles to be transparent, well-defined and mutually agreed between the stakeholders. The value of a specialist partnership broker in facilitating this process, as well as others, is also validated. However, *Working Together* clearly indicates that over reliance on pivotal partners, whether in the broker role or in the role of sponsor or 'champion' for the project, risks creating dependencies within a collaboration and effectively disenfranchising other partners. Here again, it is vital to stress the evolutionary nature of the partnership relationship

and the need for a high degree of self-awareness and self-monitoring among the partners.

As a result of the conclusions above, there is a strong argument for the use of ongoing evaluation within the partnership process, so that the effectiveness of a partnership is capable not just of being 'judged' but of being defined, monitored and focused, as the process of collaboration evolves. Successful partnerships are likely to be those that have a commitment to collective learning at their core.

The initial impetus for *Working Together* was one of policy enhancement. Here, some key implications are summarised for international policy-making, with regard to the promotion and resourcing of cross-sector partnerships as mechanisms for achieving social development and poverty reduction.

First, the selection of partnership as a way forward needs to be the result of a carefully considered decision rather than a response to a particular policy trend or trends. Partnership, in itself, is not a panacea; and there are plenty of instances where development objectives might be better delivered through conventional arrangements. This argument is reinforced by the observation that partnerships that have been created 'top-down' by national governments or international agencies can generate problems for local implementation, especially when it turns out that general policy directives conflict with the constraints of local conditions.

Second, the commitment to a partnership needs to be consistent and explicit from the outset. Partnerships established in response to specific crises may enjoy short-term

success, but they may also generate long-term problems, either by masking the underlying causes of the crisis or by raising new expectations which the partnership is not resourced to meet. Those funding, championing or managing partnership projects need to consider realistic objectives at the beginning of the collaboration, which take into consideration the resources and skills that each partner brings, their incentives for participating and, thus, the likelihood of the partnership being successfully sustained beyond the immediate stimulus for its creation.

Third, the governance and communication structures of partnerships need to be set up in such a way that they allow for the evolution of the partnership through a number of possible future phases. This, as has been emphasised above, should include provision for evaluation of the relationships and outputs of the partnership in a way that is supportive and iterative: thus evaluation becomes an activity that is embedded into the partnership, which in turn helps partners to improve their working relationships as well as to achieve their explicit goals.

This conclusion is not an argument for policy-makers to become more wary of promoting or funding partnership mechanisms, for *Working Together* confirms the very real value that effective partnerships are capable of delivering. The *Working Together* research indicates that if partnership is to be embraced by policy-makers, it should be as a long-term process with its own requirements. These include: investment in contextual knowledge and understanding and analysis of incentives, as well as practical skills building and ongoing evaluation.

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