

Global Connections 24 May 2011

TEN KEY FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

1. EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS HAVE A FACILITATOR OR A FACILITATION TEAM

Have you been in a situation where a group of people or organisations agreed to work together but no-one was willing or able to convene/administer the group? What happened and why?

Partnership takes a person or a team of people committed to partnership and acceptable to all the partners. They serve the whole partnership, enabling it to function, providing leadership for now and developing leadership for the future.

2. EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS KEEP THEIR EYES ON THE ULTIMATE GOAL

What happens when a partnership does not have an agreed, clearly stated shared vision?

Only a partnership that is formed to fulfil a vision is likely to be effective. It is the strength of the stakeholders' commitment to the vision and the knowledge that they can't see the vision fulfilled alone that motivates them to overcome the difficulties of working together. Partnership for partnership's sake will be a failure because the desire to work with others is not motivation enough to pay the price of partnership.

3. EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS START BY IDENTIFYING NEEDS BEFORE SHAPING STRUCTURE

Case study

A group of brilliant individuals developed a strong vision for change that was really needed in their community. However, the stakeholders then spent a year discussing structure and registration instead of what they should do together. At the end of the process the stakeholders had lost interest and the network never achieved its vision.

Why did the group feel the need to discuss structure and registration for so long? How could they have built the trust required for them to work effectively together another way?

An effective partnership starts by identifying barriers to meeting the needs of children and from these agree on priorities for action. **Function** (what the partnership can do) should always come before **Form** (how the partnership is structured). Consensus is usually better than Constitution.

4. EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS HAVE WELL-DEFINED OBJECTIVES WHICH RELATE TO THEIR WIDER SHARED VISION.

What effect do clear objectives have on the work of a group?

In the early days, objectives will be limited and achievable. However they must be significant enough to provide motivation for the partnership. As the partnership experiences progress, the objectives that are set become more challenging.

It is easy to focus on the “means” rather than the “end”. An effective partnership keeps focused on the long-term goal and does not get distracted by day-to-day operational demands. It recognises that effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented, with tangible measurable results achieved for beneficiaries.

5. EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS ARE BUILT ON RELATIONSHIPS OF EQUITY, TRUST, TRANSPARENCY

*What happens in a partnership when there is no.....**Equity or Transparency?***

Show member statements below and ask which principle is likely to be missing:

Mutual respect between partners is built by recognising the value and contribution that each party brings: especially when the contributions are very different in nature. This respect needs to be demonstrated as well as spoken about, and takes intentional effort. Effective partners are especially sensitive towards those from cultures and backgrounds other than their own. Such relationships between partners increase the partnership’s ability to achieve measurable, accountable results; and potentially lead to further opportunities for collaboration.

6. EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS RECOGNISE THE DIVERSITY OF MEMBERS AND AIMS TO MAKE BEST USE OF THEIR COMPLEMENTARY STRENGTHS TO REACH THE COMMON GOAL

How might an understanding of the core identity of each organisation in a partnership by the other members, increase the partnerships effectiveness?

Unity is encouraged by sharing things of the heart like vision, values and common concerns that show how they can complement each other’s work. While it is important to acknowledge differences in approach, history and work experience, focusing on these alone this has the potential to divide. Developing a united approach enhances the diversity of the partnership by building upon each other’s strengths and complementary capabilities.

7. EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS MAINTAIN A HIGH LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION AND OWNERSHIP BY THE PARTNERS

*What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of a plan made in advance by others which is sold to stakeholders and a plan which is developed collaboratively?
How do these principles relate to partnering?*

Ownership and commitment to the process is encouraged by wide participation of all the partners in decision-making. This ensures that partner organisations, who have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way, only commit to activities when they have the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments.

8. EFFECTIVE PARTNERS RECOGNISE THAT PARTNERSHIP IS AN ON-GOING PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT

What is the difference between the kind of relationship that is possible between groups and organisations that already know each other well and groups that are only recently introduced?

The development of trust is essential before the potential partners come together, and this takes time. Later, time spent nurturing trust and processing issues is equally important. It can be even more challenging to grow a partnership than to launch one! While working in partnership is a primary consideration, a facilitator will need to recognise when it is not the most effective, efficient or appropriate approach

9. EFFECTIVE PARTNERS RECOGNISE THAT THEY HAVE VARIOUS CONSTITUENCIES WHOSE NEEDS MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED, WHOSE CONTRIBUTIONS MUST BE VALUED, AND SHOW HOW THEY MUTUALLY BENEFIT

What happens when groups and organisations do not feel the partnership they are involved in contributes to their own organisational agenda and that of their constituency?

There are more people and interests involved in a partnership than those that sit around the table. The constituencies involved include the leaders and staff of the partner organisations, donors, the people we are seeking to reach and the partnership itself. Effective partners understand the needs of each of these groups and seek to meet them. They also acknowledge and value the contributions each make, which leads to sustainability as partners and other community stakeholders recognise the value added from the outputs and outcomes of the partnership and then maintain and build on these results.

10. EFFECTIVE PARTNERS HAVE CLEAR IDENTITIES AND VISIONS

Why is it difficult to build a relationship with a group or organisation which does not have a clear statement/idea of its identity?

Partners who have a strong sense of their own identity and calling are most likely to be effective. If the individual partners do not have a clear vision for their own ministry, they will have difficulty seeing where they can contribute to the overall picture or benefit from the joint effort.

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