



AUSTRALIAN  
COUNCIL  
FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

# Partnerships for Effective Development

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with support from Fiona Donohue



## About ACFID

### Vision

A world where gross inequality within societies and between nations is reversed and extreme poverty is eradicated. A world where human development is ecologically and socially sustainable for the benefit of current and future generations. A world where governments lead their societies in striving to protect and realise all peoples' human rights. This vision will be achieved through the collective efforts of civil society, governments, business and all peoples who are concerned for the future of our collective humanity.

### Roles and purpose

We advocate with our members for Australia to be a leading force in international human development and human rights. We are the primary vehicle for collaboration and collective action by NGOs in Australia. We foster good practice and capture this in sector standards and self-regulation. We foster peer support, learning and networking amongst NGOs, and all interested in human development and human rights.

## ACFID response

From the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, to the Australian-NGO Cooperation Program, and partnerships between Australian NGOs (ANGOs) and the private sector, there is a growing importance placed on partnerships for effective development outcomes and increasing diversity as to the nature of partnerships and the actors involved.

This report provides Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) members, and the wider international development sector, with a deeper understanding of the changing landscape of partnerships, and a useful typology for understanding the emerging partnership models being used by ANGOs.<sup>1</sup> It builds on previous ACFID research on NGO effectiveness and accountability, most notably the *Promoting Voice and Choice* report.<sup>2</sup>

The report contains important findings and recommendations for individual ANGOs and the sector alike, both in terms of supporting a larger strategic conversation on the added value of working in partnership to achieve development outcomes, and the need for revised resources and approaches for managing, implementing and evaluating partnerships within the changing landscape.

In sum, ACFID supports the recommendations targeted at individual ANGOs (pages 38 – 39). In particular, ACFID would be keen to play a support and coordination role with regards to the recommendation that ANGOs undertake long-term research and assessment about the added value of working in partnership.

ACFID also supports the recommendations targeted at the ANGO sector (pages 39 – 41), and proposes to take forward the recommendations as summarised in the table below.

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<sup>1</sup> ACFID extends thanks to the Development Practice Committee (DPC) for leading this work; consultants Chris Roche, Linda Kelly, and Fiona Donohue for undertaking the work; and ACFID members agencies for their contributions via consultations and case studies.

<sup>2</sup> Roche, C, 2009, *Promoting Voice and Choice*, ACFID, Available: <http://www.acfid.asn.au/resources-publications/publications/acfid-research-in-development-series/promoting-voice-and-choice/view>

Recommendation	ACFID response	Comments
Collecting (and analysing) more partnership resources	Supported	For action in 2014 by the ACFID Secretariat, with the support of the Development Practice Committee. ACFID will call for examples of partnership resources used by members and further afield. Such resources will form part of ACFID's web-based Good Practice Toolkit, which is currently under development for finalisation by late 2014. Part of this process will involve identifying gaps and suggestions for additional tools and resources.
Exploring some action-research collaborations	Supported in principle	ACFID Secretariat to explore in 2014, with the support of the Development Practice Committee, University Network, Humanitarian Reference Group and ACFID working groups as relevant. Initial steps will include identifying one or more proposals for action-research collaboration.
Experimenting on behalf of the sector	Supported in principle	As above, although focused on identifying proposals for experimenting on behalf of the sector.
Creating a 'safe space' for debate	Supported	For action in 2014 by the ACFID Secretariat, as part of a proposed series of discussions leading up to ACFID Council on the role of ANGOs in the changing context of aid and development, and adapting practice in light of disruptive change.
Developing a 'core curriculum' in this field	Supported	For action in 2014 by the ACFID Secretariat as part of an existing initiative to re-develop the ACFID learning and development program around a core curriculum, including leadership and management components.

ACFID looks forward to taking forward this report to continue to support ANGOs' approaches to working in partnership, and the development outcomes that result.

## Executive summary

The rapidly changing context within which Australian aid and development non government organisations (ANGOs) are working has a number of implications for how they approach partnership. These include taking into account shifts in the geography and nature of poverty and a growing focus on inequality, the increasing number of players on the development scene, and the challenge of navigating the political realities of calls for greater accountability.

Over the last 10 years of ANGO work, a far greater range of partnerships has begun to emerge. This report suggests a number of typologies to describe these responses. These indicate both an appreciation of the complexity of development, as well as the need for development solutions to be created and owned in the local context. In addition, the work being undertaken to develop international alliances and coalitions aligns with a growing understanding of the common drivers of poverty and inequality experienced by people around the world.

The research identified that many NGOs are finding the tools they currently have for managing and implementing partnerships – often based on bilateral relationships and funding – are no longer ‘fit for purpose’. Respondents to the research identified a number of challenges and gaps. These included the need to pay greater attention to understanding the purpose as well as values within different sorts of partnerships. However, they also identify the importance of organisations being able to accommodate various partnership types, including having the capacity for flexible and responsive business processes. There appears to be a particular challenge around the development of individual and organisational skills to support managing effective partnerships and address asymmetries of power.

ANGOs identified the challenge of demonstrating the added value of acting in partnership in achieving development outcomes as being particularly important. Currently, the available research about this connection is limited. It is strongly recommended that the next step from this current research is for ANGOs, under the leadership of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), to collaborate in a longitudinal research study focused on this area. Clarity around the assumptions and hypothesis about why and how working in partnership is adding value will be necessary. This study will also need an ability to assess the changing nature of partnerships and relationships over time. There are a number of innovations in monitoring and evaluation and tried and trusted processes of action research which might be particularly useful for ANGOs to explore.

ANGOs are not standing still. They are evolving towards an uncertain future in a variety of ways based on their own circumstances, the changing context and institutional pressures and demands. There are a number of possible avenues for ACFID and its membership to explore in order for the sector to collectively be better able to adapt its partnership approaches to respond to a rapidly changing world. At the individual agency level, this might include more engagement of senior managers and boards to:

- review current partnership portfolios;
- explore different means of addressing power and inequality in partnerships;
- better manage multiple accountabilities; and
- invest in making the quality of partnerships and relationships more central to monitoring and evaluation.

Across the sector, there could be action to:

- collect and analyse partnership resources;
- develop a core curriculum for program managers working in this field;
- collaborate around action research which might include agencies experimenting on behalf of the sector; and finally,
- the creation of a 'safe space' for debate.

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## 1. Introduction

Given the importance placed on partnerships by ANGOs, the ACFID Executive Committee approved the ACFID Development Practice Committee's (DPC) proposal to undertake research to contribute to better understanding of emerging challenges and opportunities. The research was to build on earlier ACFID and DPC work on NGO effectiveness and accountability, most notably the *Promoting Voice and Choice* report, in recognition that partnerships are often a primary mechanism through which ANGOs connect with participant communities and other stakeholders, and put accountability into action. In April 2013, the DPC established terms of reference for a piece of research that will form the basis of a deeper understanding across the ANGO sector about current and emerging partnership models. The overarching question that DPC wished to see addressed was:

*“What constitutes effective partnership models for ANGOs working with beneficiary/partner organisations and stakeholders? Based on what evidence?”*

The intended research outcomes included:

*“From the findings of the above question, and context provided, what resources do practitioners use (or need) for developing and sustaining effective partnerships?”*

### Research process

In line with the terms of reference, research was undertaken with ANGOs about the current and emerging practices through the following activities:

- Telephone interviews with nine ANGOs and a number of their overseas partners, representing a mix of small and large agencies;
- Analysis of material submitted by ANGOs related to partnership management; and
- Two workshops with 22 ANGOs in Melbourne (30 July) and Sydney (1 August).

In addition, a literature review of INGO and academic material on partnership and associated areas was undertaken and utilised as a basis for analysis and testing of the practice based research findings.

### Draft report

The first draft report was presented at an ACFID Council session in November 2013, with approximately 75 participants from a wide range of Australian organisations.



The feedback from this session, together with the feedback received on the first draft report and additional case study material, was incorporated within this draft.

This draft report attempts to respond to the original terms of reference while also responding to issues and questions developed throughout the consultation process. The report is therefore structured in the following manner.

The first section of the report explores the changing landscape of partnership and suggests some key dimensions of change which have important implications for ANGOs.

The second section explores how one might consider different typologies of partnership, given the wide range of partnerships which ANGOs describe.

The third and fourth sections cover the management, implementation and M&E of partnerships – areas where ANGOs felt the need for particular attention and learning to be focused.

The final section focuses on the future and some of the avenues ANGOs need to explore if they are to remain effective partners over the next 10-15 years. The results of the literature review are found in Appendices 1 and 2.

## 2. The changing landscape for partnerships<sup>3</sup>

This section sets out key changes in the global context over recent years, as well as the implications of these changes for partnerships<sup>4</sup>. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather an attempt to draw out some issues of relevance to the issues of partnership for ANGOs<sup>5</sup>.

### Shifts in the global distribution of poverty

In 1990, almost 95 per cent of the world's poor people lived in countries classified as low-income countries by the World Bank. Today, almost three-quarters of the world's poorest people - up to a billion people, or a 'new bottom billion' - live in largely stable, non-fragile middle-income countries. Half of the world's poor currently live in India and

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<sup>3</sup> Rather than attempt to give a definitive definition of the term 'partnerships', we look at different typologies of relationships under the term in the next section of the report.

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller analysis of these issues and full referencing see Appendix 1.

<sup>5</sup> We use ANGO when we refer to issues specifically related to Australian NGOs and INGOs when we refer more broadly to issues facing international NGOs.

China, while a quarter of the world's poor live in other middle-income countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia. The remainder of the world's poor (about 23 per cent) generally live in fragile low-income and fragile middle-income countries.

However, some authors suggest that this shift in the distribution of global poverty to middle-income countries will be short-lived. Strong economic growth in large middle-income countries with substantial pockets of poverty (for example, India, Indonesia and Vietnam), coupled with limited population growth, should continue to reduce poverty. If this occurs then in the medium term poverty will be increasingly concentrated in fragile and conflict-affected states. Some estimate that by 2025, the number of income poor in stable, middle-income countries could be as low as 18 per cent of the world's poor. Conversely, the concentration of poor people in fragile or conflict-affected states could increase, particularly as energy, water and food become increasingly scarce due to the impacts of climate change.

### **Rising levels – and recognition – of inequality**

While there is a wide variation in levels of inequality in middle-income countries, countries such as South Africa and Brazil retain high levels of inequality in income, educational attainment and health, despite their economic success. This suggests that the root cause of poverty in middle-income countries is not a lack of economic development in a country as a whole, but rather the political, economic and social marginalisation of some groups in countries that are otherwise doing quite well.

It is increasingly recognised that high levels of inequality can inhibit growth, discourage institutional development towards accountable governments and undermine civic and social life.<sup>6</sup> A number of authors also see the failure in many countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a function of inequality. Owen Barder, in his analysis of the 2010 UN Summit on the MDGs, argues that one of the main narratives emerging in development is the idea that “the challenge is increasingly inequality, not absolute poverty”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Birdsall, N 2006 *Income Distribution: effects on growth and development*, Working Paper 118, Centre for Global Development, Washington D.C.

<sup>7</sup> Barder, O 2010 ‘UN Summit round up: three development narratives’ Owen Barder’s blog, 28 September 2010, [www.owen.org/blog/3815](http://www.owen.org/blog/3815)

## **A changing aid and investment backdrop – new donors, new funding**

New donors and sources of development funding are challenging long established aid industry actors, such as the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors, and arguably INGOs. These new donors include south-south development cooperation and blended public-private funding in general, high-impact philanthropy and non-government giving channels, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and remittances, as well as climate change finance.

Over the past ten years, aid provided by the developing BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) is estimated to have grown ten times faster than that of the G7 (USA, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, UK, Canada). At the same time, many ‘traditional’ donors (i.e. OECD DAC donors) are facing funding squeezes, and may not be as willing, or as able, to fund development programs. It is predicted that emerging economies currently provide about \$15 billion per year in aid (or aid-like flows), and this could increase to \$50 billion per year by 2025 (i.e. up from about 12% to nearly 40% of what may be a relatively stagnant total).

Other new actors to emerge include private foundations, ‘social impact investors’ and individual donors. There has been an explosion in the scale of resources available for ‘bottom-of-the-pyramid’ ventures that target the poor. Private donations towards development are estimated to be between \$57-75 billion a year. Annual FDI and remittances flows are now estimated to total over a trillion dollars i.e. about nine times annual aid flows.

## **Greater understanding of complexity and uncertainty**

Within this changing development landscape, there is an emerging understanding of the uncertainty and complexity surrounding the development process. The development process is highly localised, particular, context-bound and time-specific, and relies on a complex web of inter-relationships. These inter-relationships are sensitive to context, and may react to development interventions in unpredictable ways.

Many of the problems that development is normally concerned with, such as poverty and inequality, international immigration, HIV/AIDS, human and food security and climate change, are now understood as ‘wicked’ problems. That is, they are complex, politicised, unpredictable and global. The complexity of linkages between development actors means that no one perspective, or agency, can hope to capture

the complex reality. Multiple perspectives and collective action are thus required to address such issues.

Global public goods (such as protecting environmental commons, human security or international trade) are likely to be increasingly important in a world of global collective action problems such as climate change. Global public goods cannot by definition be supplied by governments, corporations or civil society actors acting in isolation.

## **Rising hostility to NGOs and civil society**

Lastly, INGOs and civil society are operating in an increasingly hostile environment in some countries, led by rising nationalism and a reluctance to accept NGOs and civil society as legitimate voices in political discourse. CIVICUS, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, documented 413 threats to civil society in 87 countries between the period of January 2012 and October 2013, despite the explicit and positive commitments made towards the role of civil society in the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.<sup>8</sup> In a number of countries, civil society groups have been forced to contend with legislative restrictions including laws restricting access to foreign funding and limiting criticism of government policy. Many governments around the world are also trying to clamp down on the ability of citizens and civil society organisations to organise and mobilise including restricting online freedoms, harassment and disappearances. This includes targeting activists who cooperate with United Nations' bodies to highlight human rights concerns.<sup>9</sup> Such shifts can significantly restrict the work of ANGOs and their local civil society partners in some developing countries. It also raises important questions about how best the international community can respond in ways that don't exacerbate the situation.<sup>10</sup>

## **Implications for ANGOs and partnership**

### **i. Addressing poverty and inequality**

The shift in the distribution of global poverty, and rising inequality, should affect who ANGOs are partnering with, where they are partnering and how they are partnering.

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<sup>8</sup> CIVICUS, October 2013, *Global Trends in Civil Society Restrictions*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Carothers, T and Brechenmacher, S 2014, *Closing Space: Democracy and Human Rights Support Under Fire*.

While poverty and conflict will remain and humanitarian emergencies will continue, for the next decade at least most poor people - the traditional target group of INGOs - will be living in places that have enough domestic resources to address their problems over time. In these cases, ANGOs will need to move beyond 'traditional' aid relationships and projects and instead focus on finding alternative means of supporting poverty reduction and associated inequality. This might include:

- Increasingly engaging with local NGOs and civil society organisations (such as women's organisations, social movements and rights-based organisations) with social change agendas which address exclusion and inequality more squarely;
- A shift to policy agendas that promote empowerment and political voice as well as the transfer of resources and investment in public services;
- Supporting domestic policy processes that favour the redistribution of economic, social and political power, such as changes to public expenditure and taxation, labour and land ownership policies; and
- Building middle-class political support for more inclusive policy interventions.

Looking further ahead, development in fragile contexts may require longer time-frames than ANGOs currently employ, and may need to change focus to areas such as security, demobilisation and social justice and reconciliation. These are areas in which only a few ANGOs have a comparative advantage, and may well require alliances with different players.

## ii. Changing power relations

The emergence of new types of donors and alternate funding sources may alter the power dynamic that underlies many partnerships. Unequal power relations are frequently considered a barrier to effective partnerships, particularly donor-recipient and north-south partnerships. The exercise of the power associated with funding is often seen as the primary barrier to 'authentic' partnerships. This situation can be compounded by the notion of donor conditionality. Partners able to raise funding from multiple sources are in a stronger position to negotiate with donors and ANGOs.

The processes of 'disintermediation' whereby individual donors are able to directly support local projects and organisations, via web-based organisations like Kiva, also put greater pressure on more traditional INGOs to demonstrate their added value.

These factors may reduce the traditional influence and leverage of ANGOs in partnerships, and require them to rethink their roles within partnerships, and how they best add value to them. Arguably, this provides ANGOs with an opportunity to remodel

partnership arrangements, to overcome the persistent problems of paternalism and INGO legitimacy, and to engage in more equal partnerships.

### **iii. Becoming brokers and convenors**

ANGOs, with their intermediary status, are ideally placed to provide resources such as specialist support and advice to partners, connections within their partnership networks, and to mediate between different approaches to social change. There is already some experience of ANGOs working successfully as brokers of collective action or facilitators of change on either or both sides of a service relationship. ANGOs may need to develop a range of new skills and competencies in learning, bridging, mediation, dialogue and influencing to support these roles and relationships. This will require thinking about partnerships as more than bi-lateral relationships with a single 'partner' or counterpart, but rather being about engaging with multiple actors at the same time through networks, coalitions and alliances.

### **iv. Developing (or reviving) new concepts of solidarity**

The future role of INGOs in this new landscape is part of a broader debate around the role of aid, encouraged in part by the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation's call to move from effective aid, to cooperation for effective development. This indicates complementing the focus on poverty in some countries or specific locations, with debates and action on the provision of 'global public goods' from which everyone benefits and to which everyone should contribute, under a framework of sustainable development.

Issues like tax justice, climate change mitigation, labour migration and stricter controls on arms sales are likely to become increasingly important, with as much focus on rich-country responsibilities as on poorer countries themselves. In these areas, INGOs will need to consider their role as partners in emerging international coalitions for financial regulation, social protection, fair trade, climate change management and the like, and may need to draw on a renewed sense of global solidarity to address these challenges. Consequently, this has implications for the ways by which ANGOs communicate with their supporters about their roles and what they are asking their supporters to do.

### **v. Navigating political realities**

The pressure on INGOs from their donors, and increasingly their own boards and management, to demonstrate results and value for money is not going to go away. At the same time, the complexity of the development process makes simple definitive

statements about ‘what works’ highly problematic. This situation is often compounded by the desire of INGOs to keep their messages to the public accessible and straightforward, and usually located within a narrative which suggests that resource transfer can ‘Make Poverty History.’

Clearly, in order to keep the confidence of the public and of donors, ANGOs need to be able to communicate what they have achieved, and at what cost. Furthermore, they need to keep their communications clear and straightforward.

However, there is also evidence to suggest that a) the way in which program and partnership management, monitoring and evaluation is done can undermine transformational development processes, and b) that a public narrative of resource transfer and ‘transactional’ development can create support that is a ‘mile wide and an inch deep.’

Knowing how and when to push back on unreasonable demands, developing innovative alternatives to orthodox approaches, and testing different ways of building different forms of partnership and solidarity are all capacities that are likely to be necessary for a sensible navigation through the political climate which does not diminish ANGOs purpose.

## Summary

Much of the way that INGOs seem to think about and manage their partnerships is largely based on experience and literature that dates from the 1990s and early 2000s. Much of this was concerned with bilateral relationships usually based on funding, together with some elements of transfer of capacity (what is referred to in the literature as ‘transactional relationships’). With the new challenges in the development sector, those relationships are changing and new forms are emerging (what we suggest could be called ‘transformational relationships’). The next section of this paper examines how ANGOs are shaping their partnerships in this changing context.

## 3. Partnership typologies

This section considers the changes in partnerships which have emerged in the work of ANGOs, drawing from current examples of Australian agencies and their international partners, and identifying how these are developing in response to some of the challenges identified in the previous chapter.

Discussion with ANGOs suggests that up until recently, development partnerships have had a strong focus on financial transaction for the purpose of achieving specific project outcomes. Most often such partnerships were between Australian organisations, or other INGOs, and local institutions, including local government. In these situations, there was a strong focus on effective transfer of financial resources, sometimes with additional transfers related to skills and knowledge to support the work of the local institution. Many of these partnerships had strong elements of solidarity and shared values between the two organisations.

Other partnerships, such as those with private companies, were likewise largely developed for the purpose of financial transfers (in that case obtaining funds and financial support from those commercial companies for the work of the INGO). While there were some variations, especially for those NGOs working through advocacy, this notion of partnership dominated much of the literature and research around partnership up until the early 2000s.

Over the last 10 years of ANGO work, a far greater range of relationships has begun to emerge. This is in line with the trends identified in recent international literature (see Appendices 1 and 2). This highlights the complexity of the partnership arena and the difficulties agencies have in trying to develop systems that support what are quite different sets of relationships, with different aims and different ways of relating.

## Emerging typologies

Partnership has become a word that covers a great range of different sorts of relationships. It was obvious from early in the research that rather than trying to formulate an inclusive definition of partnership, it was more important to look at the range of working relationships ANGOs are utilising to support and extend their development work.

One way to make sense of this range of relationships is to look at the different typologies or groupings of such relationships. While there has been some classification around new forms relationships related to who is involved (private-public partnerships for example), a more useful typology is to consider the varying *purpose* of these relationships. A suggested range of typologies based on different purposes is outlined below. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list but illustrates the wide variety of reasons why ANGOs might be working with others.



i. **Partnerships for more effective development at the local level**

Several of the ANGOs who responded to this research identified that they continued to work with local NGO and community-based organisation (CBO) partners and continued to support the work of those partners through the transfer of resources. However, the purpose of these relationships was not primarily about achieving project outcomes but rather was related to *building the capacity and independent ability of the local organisation to function as an effective development agency*.

The underlying assumptions for these partnerships related to an understanding that development responses need to be locally derived and created, and able to be further developed and addressed in that local context. ANGOs were concerned with supporting the development of local actors who, in turn, would be able to identify development issues and work over the long term to provide adaptive and appropriate local responses.

Significantly, this approach was different to the somewhat vague notions of capacity development that have been attached to previous INGO-local NGO partnerships. The purpose of the capacity support appears to be evolving towards being less about developing an organisation that will respond to the needs of the INGO, and more about what a local agency requires to be effective in their context.

### **Box 1. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA): Australia and Nepal**

The relationship between ADRA Nepal and ADRA Australia is an example of the new direction in partnership for ADRA Australia. ADRA Australia has been quite purposeful about the development of new partnership directions, recognising both changes in international aid flows as well as the need for INGOs to move towards new roles in facilitating and supporting local action for change. It is moving to establish organisational partnerships where it no longer drives the shape of programs based on funding, but instead seeks to support and find funding for the programs that are designed and defined by the local entity.

There is considerable existing development capacity in Nepal, particularly in the approximately 29,000 local NGOs operating across the country. International partners have to understand what they can add into this situation and how they can support change over time; that will see them withdrawing as direct actors within the country.

This is in line with the philosophy that has been adopted by ADRA Nepal for some time. They have identified that their role is about understanding and knowing the strengths and values of local partners and supporting them to exercise those strengths. For example, they invite applications for funding from local NGOs. That funding includes resources for areas such as technical support, monitoring and evaluation, audit and risk assessment and so on. The local NGOs use those funds to employ ADRA Nepal to support them in these areas. ADRA Nepal therefore becomes directly accountable to local NGOs for the quality of services and the value that they add to the implementation work with those organisations. They also support the same organisations to develop proposals for funding from other donors and funding institutions as part of the support for the overall capacity development and independence of those local NGOs.

ADRA Australia understands the philosophy behind this approach and is willing to support it. ADRA Australia makes funds available for capacity development and supports access to technical expertise. It has shaped its partnership support to respond to the opportunity and approach in Nepal.

## **ii. Partnerships to support civil society development**

A second variation in partnership purpose reported by ANGOs was relationships with local organisations for *the purpose of civil society development*. In these relationships, the ANGO is making a contribution to the development of a broad set of actors within another country assuming that they, in turn, will promote development and change in that context. Rather than being solely concerned with the development of a specific organisation at local level and what it could then achieve (and therefore indirectly what the ANGO support had achieved), the focus is now more on how local organisations could be fostered to grow and develop in order to work together with others as required in that context. There is a strong underlying assumption in this approach to partnership that with a strong civil society will come the capacity and capability to contribute to positive development within a country context.

Importantly, in this typology, people were less concerned with program or project outcomes and even with specific measures of organisational effectiveness in the short term. There was a much broader view that development of strong actors who could operate independently was in itself an effective and important contribution to country development.

**Box 2. Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS) partnership with Life with Dignity – Cambodia**

ALWS partnered with the Lutheran World Service in Cambodia for more than 15 years. Work started with an assumption by the Australian counterparts that they were supporting the Cambodian entity as a local actor, not just as a body to implement the projects funded by Australia. The relationship was nurtured through strong relationships between ALWS staff and the Cambodian counterparts. Everyone, including the CEO, understood that this was about building and supporting something that went well beyond short-term project implementation.

The relationship was characterised over the 15 years by a focus on sharing information and building specific ‘in country’ competencies. ALWS understood it was trying to build the capacity of its partners to act with government and others, independent of donors. It encouraged the Cambodian partner to seek a wide range of donors to minimise its dependency upon ALWS. The relationship was described as an ongoing dialogue between the two organisations characterised by humility, especially on the part of Australia, and mutual respect.

Significantly, there was a clear focus on assessing the progress of transformation from an externally managed organisation to one that would be locally controlled. The assessment included tracking the increasing competency and independent decision making of the villages being served in Cambodia, which acted as a proxy to assess the growing capacity of the Cambodian team. In addition, the local director, who was appointed three years prior to the agency being fully independent, was assessed over time in terms of his capacity to lead and manage the organisation. While the process was long term and involved multiple work areas and processes, it was managed towards and carefully assessed against an overall objective throughout the partnership.

Life With Dignity -Cambodia (the name chosen by the Cambodian staff) now has a national Cambodian board and has graduated to an independent organisation managing its own development work in country. Significantly, it invited ALWS to sit on that board, the only non-Cambodian member.

This approach takes a very long term view. It is looking to create legitimate and sustainable local institutions able to provide relevant engagement in their local and national context for many years into the future beyond the ANGO engagement. At the same time, this approach can be difficult to explain to donors who operate in very short timeframes.

### iii. Partnerships which leverage a more effective response to complex change situations

A further type of partnership emerging in ANGO work is relationships with various actors, in order to access *a range of capacities to address complex development situations*. In these partnerships, ANGOs are working together with private companies, research institutions, United Nations (UN) agencies and other NGOs, both international and local, to draw together the respective strength and values of these different organisations. This is related to the positioning available through those organisations, as well as the skills and capacities each brings to a particular context. It draws from an understanding of change as multi-layered and complex, requiring direct interventions alongside advocacy and leverage which is exercised in different ways, from national through local and sometimes across regions and internationally.

There are considerable challenges attached to such partnerships, recognising that they often involve agreements to work together, rather than formal contracts focused on financial transfers and pre-determined outcomes. Arrangements such as these may be made between INGOs and other organisations with different values. While there may be shared objectives which serve as the basis for the relationship, organisations will also bring their own organisational intentions and objectives.

People identified that in many of these relationships, there was less control for the ANGO and greater risks. At the same time, these multi layered and multi-partner relationships provided some of the most dynamic responses to complex problems and situations.

#### **Box 3. CARE Australia: Mekong Region**

CARE has worked with marginalised people from ethnic minority groups in Cambodia for more than 11 years. The work started with a focus on increasing children's access to education through utilisation of a bilingual approach, and has developed over time to a much wider focus on inclusion. Supported through the CARE program approach, which encourages analysis of all elements in a change situation, CARE has looked to develop partnerships which would support a more effective and sustained approach to change.

Working originally in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MEYS), CARE expanded their approach to include partnerships with local groups and local NGOs. CARE recognised the complexity of assessing performance in a broad multisectoral program approach and sought to utilise a range of expertise to contribute to both performance assessment and ongoing program learning and development. Independent research was provided by the University of Minnesota, in collaboration with the Australian Catholic University and the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

After five years, the program had developed considerable evidence about its success. Collaboration with UNICEF identified that the UN organisation could contribute to further program impact by raising and sharing the evidence and research about the work in the high level education technical working groups between development partners and the Government of Cambodia. Joint advocacy with UNICEF and lobbying at this high level, together with the four years of research, has been successful in getting the Government of Cambodia's interest, with the model now being taken to scale in other locations. The combined partnership with local civil society groups, such as indigenous school boards, government and UNICEF is providing the platform for wider impact and sustained change for ethnic minorities across the country.

Partnerships such as this operate both in poor countries as well as in Australia and other rich countries. The focus is often on bringing together multiple players to work at different levels which include influencing policy in national and regional settings, and identifying multiple targets for change.

A significant challenge for ANGOs is that they may be a contributor in these partnerships but are unable to attribute outcomes directly or solely to their intervention alone.

#### **Box 4. Close the Gap Campaign – Oxfam Australia**

The Close the Gap campaign is a multi-stakeholder coalition whose members include Indigenous, non-Indigenous health and human rights organisations. The purpose of the campaign is to ‘close the gap’ in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality within a generation.

The establishment of the Close the Gap coalition, under Indigenous leadership, was a unique and critical feature of the campaign. The creation of the Indigenous Leadership Group meant that coalition members supported the promotion and recognition of Indigenous organisations as playing a leadership role in the campaign, supporting the ‘voice’ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Non-Indigenous organisations, such as Oxfam, played a key role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership - sharing its resources and campaign approaches with partners to increase access for Aboriginal representatives to decision-makers. It also provided advocacy and policy expertise to the campaign and engaged in a range of public awareness activities around Indigenous health.

Oxfam felt it important that their brand/ logo was not emphasised to the detriment of the campaign brand. This approach was consistent with the principles of a rights-based approach, and also recognised the long-term and ongoing efforts of many Indigenous organisations in the health sphere. Understandably, this decision led to some debate within an organisation that relied on the promotion of its brand to encourage public financial support. However, Oxfam’s accountability to the principles of a rights-based approach, and the need to build trust among a range of partners, were considered more important.

#### **iv. Partnerships which add quality to the work of all partners**

Another variation in partnerships are those formed by ANGOs with others to *improve the quality and effectiveness of development outcomes*. In these types of partnerships, there may be an exchange of funds or skills but increasingly the focus seems to be on learning and interaction for the purpose of better quality development work.

In these forms of partnerships, ANGOs recognise both the limitations of what they can achieve on their own and the value of the expertise held by others. The focus is certainly on improved development outcomes but in the more immediate term there also seems to be an emphasis upon improving the standards and quality of the work

supported by the organisation and giving attention to the skills for development capacity of staff and programs.

**Box 5. CBM Australia and Water Aid Australia**

The partnership between CBM and Water Aid in Australia has its origins in a 2008 workshop around disability inclusion. Some joint work led to Water Aid recognising the value of increased focus on inclusion. Further capacity development and interaction between the two organisations was the basis for CBM becoming a strategic partner with Water Aid in the Civil Society WASH Fund (a program funded by Australian Aid). This has been the basis for a more formal partnership, which includes two focus countries (PNG and Timor Leste) alongside broader work between the two agencies.

Water Aid describes the process as broadening and deepening the understanding of WASH within the disability sector. CBM consider that they have supported the capacity of Water Aid to develop more inclusive WASH programming and have also learned from the broader equity and inclusion approach that Water Aid takes.

The outcomes for both agencies have been tangible. Water Aid can identify that more people are being reached by their programs and that there is greater inclusion of people with a disability. The Water Aid country staff identified what they have learnt and how it has changed their action. CBM describe the outcome as improved and deeper quality of inclusion, which sees the focus on expanding from disability inclusive infrastructure to how people with a disability can be included in design, implementation and assessment of WASH programs. They identify that they have developed and strengthened their work around disability inclusion within a broader inclusive development approach. This is a consequence of working with other strategic partners in a holistic inclusive approach that considers gender, children, people living with HIV, and other groups that have often experienced limited access to WASH, and other development programs.

**v. Partnerships and alliances for social change**

Finally, ANGOs are increasingly working as members of broader alliances for social change. Recognising *the value of such alliances and networks to create new paradigms of development*, ANGOs work within what can be very diverse sets of relationships.

In some cases, such membership is about solidarity with broader movements for change, such as support for the women's movement in various countries and regions around the world. In other situations, the ANGO might identify a role for themselves around support for specific operations within an alliance, or support for specific organisational members within an alliance.

The long-term purpose in these relationships is to contribute to more substantive social change. This understandably raises considerable challenges in terms of short to intermediate outcomes. Performance assessment is often limited to the ANGO being

able to identify its value add and quality of contribution, rather than point to shorter term outcomes.

#### **Box 6. Vanuatu Climate Change Adaptation Network - Oxfam**

The Vanuatu Climate Adaptation Network (VCAN) is a network of national and international organisations that focus on climate change. VCAN arose in 2012 out of the need for a consistent coordinating mechanism for climate change adaptation programming in Vanuatu. Prior to its establishment, organisations in the climate change sector were largely working in isolation. This meant that information and learning were not being shared efficiently between organisations, and that communities often received inconsistent information about climate change.

Oxfam played a key role in convening and establishing VCAN. Oxfam initially brought together a group of organisations working on, or interested in working on, climate change adaptation. This group recognised that a national network of civil society organisations would have a greater impact than a single organisation, and that such a network could have a substantial influence on climate change policy and practice. VCAN developed out of this initial loose network of organisations, as a direct outcome of Oxfam's broker/convenor approach.

VCAN is a good example of the advantages of collective action. The network can draw on the collective experience and specialist skills of members (and others) in addressing climate change issues. VCAN is seen as a key consultative body and stakeholder in climate debate and policy development in Vanuatu. VCAN members meet regularly to discuss climate related issues, and VCAN representatives attend all government and non-government climate related activities.

Oxfam's broker/convenor role provides opportunities to learn and promote best practice across the development sector, and directly input into government processes and key development issues. Oxfam has played a key role in the network in facilitating engagement and collaboration between the Vanuatu government and local civil society organisations, with a focus on increasing the participation and representation of civil society. For example, VCAN is currently gathering community views on climate change issues. This input was provided to government to help determine Vanuatu's position on climate change in the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP19) in November 2013. VCAN also negotiated significant civil society representation on Vanuatu's National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, a recently established government body which oversees climate change and disaster risk reduction policy and action.

## **Conclusion**

The typologies emerging in ANGO partnerships suggest that agencies are in various ways responding to some of the key changes in international development. These include both appreciation of the complexity of development alongside the need for development solutions to be created and owned in the local context. Likewise, the work being undertaken through alliances and coalitions aligns with an understanding of poverty as inequality experienced by people in both poor and middle income countries.

It is important to note that typologies will change and develop over time. ANGOs will use combinations of those described above, as well as continuing to work in partnerships which focus around financial transactions and those which emphasise solidarity with others.

The point of the discussion is not to try to fit organisations into particular partnership typologies. Rather, exploring these many different types of partnership or relationships illustrates that defining and identifying the purpose of the relationship is important. And that not all development partnerships operate for the same purpose.

This is central to the next part of this report which looks at partnership management and implementation. Clarity about purpose is critical to identification of the underlying values and assumptions associated with the partnership. As discussed in the next section, values and assumptions about partnerships, and clarity about purpose and objectives, are key to providing a more effective way to manage and implement partnerships. Knowing what you're intending to achieve, even if how to get there is unclear, is also critical to monitoring and evaluation.

## 4. Partnership management and implementation

Throughout the research, there were two areas of interest and concern identified by participating ANGOs. These included tools and approaches for more effective management of the emerging typologies of partnership, and how to better assess and identify the value of these various relationships. This section identifies how ANGOs are currently addressing partnership management, drawing lessons from current practice and identifying some remaining gaps and challenges. Monitoring and evaluation of partnership is covered in section 5.

### Previous practice

It is important to identify that many of the existing tools for partnership management were largely developed in the late 1990s and early 2000. Most of these tools were based upon a transactional approach to partnerships. They include partnership agreements and partnership appraisal checklists, which place considerable emphasis upon assessing if partners are 'fit for purpose'; usually with that purpose being what is sought by the ANGO.

The research identified that many ANGOs are finding these tools to be inadequate and that they fail to support the new types of partnerships they are developing. In



particular, where ANGOs are entering into relationships with organisations where there is limited financial exchange, partnership agreements and MoUs based largely on the management of resources and linear accountability are not suitable. Overall, it appears that the associated management and business practices to support new types of partnership are still under-developed.

**Box 7. World Vision Australia: Combating Child Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism (CSETT)**

This program funded by the Australian Government, works with key government ministries in each partner country to seek to address and prevent sexual exploitation of children in the tourism industry. As well as the partnerships with government it also draws upon collaborations with other external public, private and NGO entities at local and regional level.

World Vision reports that this requires significant investment of time, dedication and effort in the short to medium term. However, the benefits of sustainability, formal buy in and establishing of CSETT within national mechanisms and agendas far exceeds the cost of this initial work.

This partnership approach drawing together multiple actors is now being utilised in wider original work focused on preventing people trafficking.

A common feature throughout many of the discussions was that effective partnerships take considerable time and require upfront investment in building the processes and systems to effectively implement that partnership.

Some of the features which require consideration in that apparent development phase of partnerships are discussed below.

## Organisation orientation

Starting with the whole of organisation, it is clear that rethinking typologies of partnership is associated with a more substantial development of INGO approaches to change. If, as proposed, problems are now understood as complex, requiring multiple actors and/or locally developed and facilitated solutions, the role of INGOs may well be required to change; from that of simply raising and transferring funds to a role of facilitating, brokering, networking and acting with others for change.

Rather than applying technical expertise to solve particular problems, INGOs may therefore be required to be far more nimble in their responses, and better able to bring a range of skills, alliances and relationships to support the development of solutions.

ANGOs responding to this research demonstrated that understanding of change is shifting some organisations approach to development practice. For example, the CARE programme approach<sup>11</sup> provided an important basis for understanding change within a complex system. In turn, it provided the basis for the agency work in the Mekong region, supporting collaboration with various partners and actors working together to achieve change.

**Box 8. Anglican Board of Mission (ABM) working with the Episcopal Church in the Philippines**

Anglican Board of Mission (ABM) describes its project work with different church partners as a means to a longer term end of supporting the church to become an actor for development in the local context. From this perspective, the ABM relationship with the Episcopal Church in the Philippines (ECP) has been a long-term partnership, supporting the Episcopal Church's Community Based Development Program to grow and move towards being an independent development actor.

The relationship provides the opportunity to facilitate a wider network of learning and development, with ECP sharing its experience in community development with other partners of ABM. For example, ABM recently organised for Bishops from the Anglican Church in Myanmar to visit the Philippines, where they undertook a strategic planning process supported by the experienced community development team of the ECP. This significantly built understanding of effective community development practices in the Church of Myanmar, which has only recently begun to engage in this area. Supporting networking and exchange between its partners is one way that ABM sees itself adding value, by linking skilled organisations with others that can benefit from their experience.

ABM identified that they have to be able to respond and work differently in different locations. For example, ABM's partners in places like China and Kenya already have considerable strengths and capacity and are mentoring other development organisations in the country. The relationship with them has to be sensitive and based on respect for mutual strengths. ABM needs to have a good understanding of what it can offer to those partners. ABM also recognises the benefit it gains through learning from the experience of such partners.

ABM has worked to develop systems to support this long-term and varied approach to partnership. For example, it has developed different types of MoUs, and is currently developing a new partnerships framework for the different types of partnership. Significantly, it is fostering an approach within the organisation that identifies its need to change and grow internally, in the same way that it expects to see change in its partners.

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<sup>11</sup> The CARE program approach represents a transition in agency work from a focus on discrete time bound projects to working through more complex and multisectoral programmes. It represents an understanding by the agency that development problems and challenges are complex, requiring multiple interventions and actors to achieve effective and sustained change.

## Partnership objectives and values

There was considerable discussion throughout the research about how to manage both partnership objectives and values. Some respondents suggested that identifying the shared objectives of the partnership was the most important element in negotiating effective action together. However, others suggested that it was also important to identify individual organisation objectives for entering into the partnership. That is, to identify the differences between what could be achieved by working together from what each organisation or group sought to achieve by entering into working with others. There was a view that honesty around the different objectives organisations might have for entering into partnership was important to ensuring that all partners would be satisfied with the outcomes of the arrangement.

This extended to discussion around values. It is clear that in the past, shared values were often the 'glue' that held together many partnerships. People describe that when there were differences and difficulties within partnerships, the sense of solidarity brought about by shared values was important to provide the rationale and a basis for on-going relationships, and to deal with conflict and disagreement when it arose.

In current situations however, organisations are moving into partnership with other agencies where values are not necessarily the same. While there may be some overlap and a degree of respect for each other's values, it is clear that for ANGOs entering into relationships for example with private business and governments, there can be considerable difference in significant organisational values<sup>12</sup>. Negotiation in these situations requires honest and realistic identification of difference and in many cases the creation of a working arrangement that respects differences but creates a shared way of working that both, or all, partners can negotiate.

For example, the Australian Aid-funded NGO program in Africa (the Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme) is a partnership of 10 ANGOs together with their various local African partners and the Australian Government. Under the partnership agreement, the objectives for the program have been clearly identified and a set of values and principles, together with anticipated behaviours, have been negotiated with all parties. Those behaviours and principles will not necessarily apply to other aspects of interaction between the Australian Government and INGOs. They also do not necessarily represent all of the values and principles of any one of those partners.

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<sup>12</sup> Clearly one could argue that such relationships are not partnerships at all. However, for the purposes of this exercise we have taken a broad definition of partnership which includes cooperation between agencies and looser alliances for change.

### Box 9. Oxfam and PHP Billiton – a changing relationship

The relationship between Oxfam and BHP Billiton (BHPB) is an interesting example of a relationship that has evolved over time. Oxfam's initial relationship with BHPB was largely centred on activist-led campaigns against the mining company's social and environmental activities in developing countries. Perhaps the most well-known of these is the Ok Tedi campaign in 1995. The Ok Tedi gold and copper mine was developed by a consortium of partners led by BHP. The mine operations led to major environmental damage. As a result of this damage, local landowners took legal action against BHPB for compensation and a commitment to limit further environmental damage.

Oxfam supported landowners in their efforts through a well-publicised advocacy campaign in Australia. The campaign focused on the environmental damage caused by the mine, with Oxfam openly critical of the environmental and social impacts of the mine in the media and on its website. The campaign also included several highly confrontational and well-publicised actions in an attempt to shame the company.

In response to the negative publicity and criticism surrounding the mine, BHPB approached Oxfam and other Australian-based NGOs in the late 1990s to examine the social, economic and environmental dilemmas facing Ok Tedi. This approach coincided with recognition from Oxfam that engagement with multi-national corporations such as BHPB was becoming an important policy consideration for INGOs. This engagement led to the establishment of the Forum on Corporate Responsibility, which now has a permanent place within BHPB's broader stakeholder engagement program. The Forum provides a means by which invited civil society leaders and BHPB senior staff can engage on social and environmental issues relating to BHP's mine operations. For example, Oxfam contributed to BHPB's policy change and commitment to Free, Prior and Informed Consent as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Oxfam's approach to engagement with BHP continued to evolve following the establishment of the Forum in 1999. In 2002, BHP and Oxfam collaborated to develop a Corporate Community Leadership Program in Orissa, India. This learning program was designed to expose and sensitise BHPB managers to a participatory and human rights-based approach to development. Given that Oxfam had campaigned against BHPB in the past, collaboration was not necessarily a 'natural' fit for either organisation. Collaboration between the two groups required trust, mutuality and accountability from both parties. The program was viewed as a positive initiative in terms of relationship-building between the two organisations. It represented a major evolution in the relationship, from one of adversary to critical collaboration.

These efforts towards collaboration were accompanied by increased 'constructive engagement' and 'dialogue' between the two organisations. Although challenging, such engagement did result in opportunities for mutual learning and positive outcomes. For example, Oxfam, BHPB staff, community members and local government officials participated in a formal Dialogue Table meeting in 2002 to resolve a range of social and economic problems associated with Peru's Tintanya copper mine. The Dialogue Table negotiations succeeded in partially resolving long-standing conflicts between BHPB and local communities, and helped improve the relationship between the two groups.

While generally positive, the increased engagement between Oxfam and BHPB left Oxfam feeling that in some cases, there was a "risk of opening the engagement door too far" (Phillips 2003, p. 19). For example, Oxfam Australia staff were regularly contacted by mining companies to be 'sounded out' for their views on issues, technically amounting to free expert consultation. As a result, Oxfam has more recently pursued a policy of strategic engagement and 'critical collaboration' with BHPB and other mining industry players. Oxfam is now more selective in how it formally engages with mining companies, restricting their corporate engagement to both strategic meetings and, in some instances, use of the media, to highlight adverse impacts.

The partnership agreement acknowledges there are several differences in objectives and values but seeks to create an effective working space for all parties for the purposes of that program.

Identifying differences in values and objectives may not be possible at the start of all relationships, and objectives are likely to change over time as partners develop a sense of trust, as well as a common understanding of problems and solutions. It is important that agreements between organisations are able to accommodate this flexibility and learning. It is also important that the ANGO as an organisation is able to identify both risks and opportunities within partnerships and be able to manage for these as they emerge.

## Partnership agreements

Building on identification of values and objectives, organisations often establish partnership agreements to guide the work they do with others. In the past, these agreements were usually developed as contracts or MoUs, with specified inputs, responsibilities and agreed outcomes.

International research around development partnerships suggests that these agreements have often been problematic, in particular because they fail to address power differences, or indeed exacerbate them. The research points to issues with hidden power relationships in typical partnership arrangements between international and local organisations which limit the opportunity of local partners to influence the fundamental approach and purpose of the relationship.<sup>13</sup>

Broader research suggests that what is required are approaches to agreements and working arrangements that enable the emergence of local solutions which are politically acceptable and technically feasible in a given context. The implication is that INGOs need to “*take partners as they find them*”, and try to work with them, rather than trying to make them work in fundamentally different ways. It is a world where finding a ‘good fit’ with locally driven change becomes more important than the inappropriate introduction of alien ‘best practice’ (Booth, 2013).

Recognising this, various agencies are experimenting with new approaches to guide their partnership interaction. For example, Caritas Australia has a set of principles from which it manages its various partnerships. Likewise, ACFID has proposed a

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<sup>13</sup> See additional detail in Appendix 1.

principled based approach for ANGOs wanting to work with Australian indigenous organisations, building on the principles of the ACFID Code of Conduct<sup>14</sup>.

These approaches represent important shifts from a transactional or contractual approach to managing partnerships and can provide for some more respectful and diverse engagements. Although some risk remains that without careful examination of the underlying power differences between organisations, the needs and focus of the more powerful partner can still dominate.

Some agencies are therefore examining their use of finances and are trying to separate financial agreements and accountabilities from the partnership process in order to delink financial power from the relationship negotiations. In other partnerships, there is an increased emphasis on providing core funding to organisations to enable the local organisation to determine its direction and development interventions.

**Box 10. Australian Government partnership with BRAC**

The Australian Government together with UK Department for International Development (DfiD) has a large scale partnership with BRAC, a major Bangladeshi INGO operating in 11 countries, focused around enabling and supporting BRAC to grow as an organisation and continue to make an effective development contribution in Bangladesh.

The partnership is based upon identification of shared objectives and principles as well as identification of each organisation's individual objectives and intentions for entering into the partnership.

It was identified through the partnership negotiations that even for a large NGO such as BRAC, there can be problems in negotiating ongoing working arrangements with international donors. To this end, an additional paper was developed to guide the partnership that outlines the terms of engagement for donors. This holds the two current, and any future, donors to account for their behaviour and provide some empowerment for BRAC in ongoing partnership management.

The partnership is reviewed annually with attention given to the quality of relationship as well as the outcomes of working together.

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<sup>14</sup> ACFID, 2012, *Practice Note on Effective Development Practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities* (currently under review), Available: [www.acfid.asn.au/resources-publications/publications/practice-notes/effective-development-practice-i-n-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-communities](http://www.acfid.asn.au/resources-publications/publications/practice-notes/effective-development-practice-i-n-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-communities)

## Partnership implementation

Probably the most significant challenge identified in partnership management was the process of implementing the partnership. Throughout the research, it was clear that organisations are looking for new tools and examples to help them work more effectively in new and emerging partnerships. The research suggests however that implementation challenges will not be met simply by new tools and checklists.

Some of the elements that clearly need development for effective partnership implementation include the following:

### i. Skills and capacities

Effective partnerships take considerable effort and work, particularly in the early months of initial partnership negotiation. During this time, it is critical to identify the purpose of the partnership, to understand the various objectives and values of organisations, to identify power and other differences and divisions, and to develop the skills of all partners in brokering and negotiating relationships with each other.

Managing this process requires skill and a wide range of tools and resources to facilitate the communication between individuals and organisations required for an honest engagement. Some organisations have existing long-term relationships and/or international structures which provide some framework for these negotiations but in other cases, particularly for non-traditional partners, this process can take time. For example, Australian Aid has estimated that a recent partnership negotiation in South Asia bringing together local NGOs, as well as donors and regional organisations, required a seven month establishment process. This included time for developing the skills of each organisation to be able to effectively negotiate for their needs and interests and establishing the core objectives and principles that would guide the partnership.

The skills required to facilitate these processes are considerable, and potentially change the role of the typical Australian-based NGO program manager. Currently, many of the people working in these situations spend much time managing agreements and accountabilities, sometimes alongside provision of specific technical expertise. Being an effective partnership manager would also require them to be highly skilled in multi-stakeholder facilitation, cross cultural mediation and negotiation, as well as being able to mediate across differences in power, gender and other divides. Program managers ideally would also be highly skilled in adaptive management skills.

Some agencies are working to identify and develop the skills within their organisations. For example, Caritas Australia has identified a series of core competencies for their program managers that include a focus on competency in relationship building and management. Plan International Australia is currently researching the types of skills program managers require for effective partnership implementation.

There is an emerging focus on training in ‘partnership brokering’ across the international development sector but this will likely only provide part of the answer. The complexity of negotiating partnerships in international development means that no one manual or training will be sufficient to cover all the skills and capacities that are required. This is an important area which is revisited in the recommendation section of this report.

## **ii. Internal management**

Implementing effective partnerships appears to have implications for organisational expectations and systems. People responding to the research reported that they often had to work in ways that created new space in their organisations to accommodate new types of relationships. Some people suggested that partnerships which facilitated others and/or relied on multiple actors to achieve change, was contrary to public identity and messaging of their organisation. That is, for some agencies it was difficult to explain to some board members, as well as the public, that they were working to facilitate others to achieve change, rather than directly achieving the change themselves.

Reflecting upon its different ways of working for example, CBM identified that one of the key factors in the enabling their partnership approach was to facilitate understanding across the whole organisation about this approach and the value of this alongside direct program work.

## **iii. Business processes**

The research suggests that ultimately, the business processes, including agreements and financing arrangements as well as agreements around communication and reporting, needs to be developed to suit the partnership. Partnerships, particularly those emerging between non-traditional partners and those designed to facilitate partners’ creative responses to complex problems, should not be driven by organisational systems.



#### **Box 11. PNG Churches Partnership Program**

The Churches Partnership Program (CPP) in Papua New Guinea is a long-term, multi-stakeholder partnership between seven denominational ANGOs, the churches in PNG that they represent, and the governments of PNG and Australia. The CPP was established in 2004, in collaboration with the Australian Government which agreed to provide funding, and the PNG Department of Community Development and Religion and the Department of National Planning and Monitoring.

The various partners are committed to work together in close collaboration which is unusual in PNG where there is limited work across denominational church lines. Outside of CPP, there are a few, if any, formal structural links between seven churches.

The approach of the program has been around consensual decision-making and a collegial approach to structure and systems. The CPP is governed and managed through a range of specific committees. The roles and responsibilities of these committees, together with the values and principles that underpin and guide the approach of this partnership, are clearly articulated in a number of core documents including the Partnership Charter and the Council Members Handbook. These documents capture the long-term process of innovation and experimentation among the partners to identify new and more effective ways of working together to achieve the program outcomes.

This is clearly very challenging for many ANGOs and there were few examples of organisations able to freely recreate their own business systems in response to each new and emerging partnership. But some are emerging. For example, CBM in its work to support the capacity of other Australian and International NGOs to work with people with disability has instigated a system whereby management of grants and financial arrangements are separated from the partnership management. This provides more flexibility and freedom for program and technical staff to focus on developing the most effective working systems with their NGO partners.

#### **Box 12. World Vision Australia farmer managed natural regeneration**

Farmer-managed natural regeneration (FMNR) is a low-cost, sustainable land-restoration technique used to combat poverty and hunger amongst poor subsistence farmers in developing countries by increasing food and timber production, and resilience to climate extremes. It involves the systematic regeneration and management, by farmers and communities, of trees and shrubs from tree stumps and root systems. As well as returning degraded croplands and grazing lands to productivity, it can be used to restore degraded forests, thereby reversing biodiversity loss and reducing vulnerability to climate change.

World Vision Australia is fostering partnerships to spread FMNR through a secretariat, the FMNR Hub that scopes, advocates, initiates and supports the spread of FMNR globally.

For example, in 2012 the Hub partnered with the World Agroforestry Center to hold an FMNR/Evergreen Agriculture conference in Nairobi. It brought together nations' ambassadors, aid agencies, agriculture and environment ministers, experts from international organisations, research organisations, and leading practitioners from communities and NGOs.

Another example is Australian Government funding to Pacific regional organisations such as the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC). In seeking to develop an effective partnership relationship with SPC, the Australian Government has provided core funding for that organisation that is, funding to support the overall work of the organisation rather than focus on specific project outcomes. This provides a basis for more effective policy and program dialogue between the two organisations freed from a focus on short-term, narrow results.

#### **iv. External management**

Several respondents discussed how difficult it is to explain effective partnership implementation to official donors. People particularly identified the time it takes to negotiate and manage good quality partnerships alongside the need for partnerships to be mutually accountable. People identified that donor systems, including the current Australian Government process of NGO accreditation, largely fail to appreciate these elements of effective partnership. Further, donor funding systems and requirements generally failed to give the space or the time required for good partnership implementation.

#### **v. Accountabilities**

Finally, it is clear that most people working in NGO partnerships understand the importance of mutual accountability as an aspect of the partnership. There remains some tension in some organisations about accountability for partnership outcomes versus attention to accountabilities between partners and accountability for the quality of partnership implementation.

Some organisations are starting to develop systems to support mutual accountability. For example, ALWS has an accountability framework for engagement with all of their partners which is reviewed on an annual basis by those partners. They also invite partners to contribute to staff assessments on an annual basis, drawing a direct connection between the quality of partnerships and the work of the program staff.

### **Box 13. Australian Red Cross – measuring and evaluating partnerships**

Australian Red Cross has adopted and adapted a partnership assessment tool developed by a consortium of Red Cross national societies in Africa (led by the Netherlands Red Cross in 2008). This tool builds upon and takes into account the International Federation of Red Cross' Code of Good Partnership, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movements' Fundamental Principles and its statutes, and the specific mandates of all parts of the Movement.

The tool is structured around a number of core values: equality and respect, relevance, integrity, transparency, mutual responsibility, achieving expectations, harmonisation, flexibility and communication, and has been adapted for use in different contexts. Criterion and indicators are attributed to each of these values, and a numeric rating is also possible.

In the Pacific, the tool was used to establish a partnership benchmark when a new region wide program was established, and new partnerships formed. Subsequently this information has been drawn upon to inform program reviews/evaluations.

In Asia, the tool has been used to construct a multi-layered mutual assessment of a number of partnerships, and as well as assessing the partnership itself, it has been used to influence the direction of partnerships going forward.

Risks and tensions remain however. In the past, organisations appear to have relied on the quality of relationship between individuals and organisations to provide accountability for partnership outcomes. While international research suggests that this focus on relationships often masked considerable inequality in power and control between partners, it did provide some form of oversight for development outcomes. In more complex partnerships, where individual relationships are not necessarily a feature of the partnership and where the ANGO is not in control, accountabilities need to be negotiated and problems and differences need to be identified and solved. This requires good quality conflict resolution and mediation skills. Ideally, there should be regular, independent assessments to ensure that accountability of all partners is addressed and understood, both mutual accountability and accountability for the outcomes of the work. It also requires organisations to assess their risk appetite and the degree to which they are willing to enter into partnerships where they are unable to be fully in control of the progress and outcomes of those relationships.

## **Summary**

Partnership management and implementation remains a considerable challenge for ANGOs. Respondents to the research were able to identify the challenges in areas where they required further assistance. However, the responses and new approaches are still emerging and remain a partial solution to those challenges.

The gaps include some greater attention to understanding purpose as well as values within different sorts of partnerships. However, they also include the way organisations are able to accommodate various partnership types, including their capacity for flexible and responsive business processes. There appears to be a particular challenge around the development of individual and organisational skills to support partnership implementation.

## 5. Monitoring and evaluation of partnerships

Respondents to this review, and participants at the two workshops conducted, indicated that the challenge of how best to monitor and evaluate partnerships was a central concern. This is illustrative of a much wider concern about how ANGOs can effectively demonstrate the value and contribution they make more generally. This challenge is likely to become harder and more important in the new conservative climate of Australian aid.

It is clear that in the more simple transactional partnerships, it was easier to identify the value each partner brought to the project situation. However, once we turn attention to some of the new typologies of partnerships and the purposes that they seek to achieve, the complex nature of these partnerships alongside other relationships such as coalitions and networks makes them much more challenging to evaluate. Perhaps for this reason there are few evidence-based evaluations of partnerships available in the literature, other than a few empirical studies. Clearly there is evidence that individual projects - which involve relationships between INGOs and local organisations - have made a difference. However, there is less understanding about how the element of *partnership* that they exhibit may, or may not, have contributed to those changes. Arguably, there is greater evidence of how coalitions have brought together different actors to make change happen (see for example 'Close the Gap', Make Poverty History or the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and the research of the Developmental Leadership Program).

Some authors argue that current accountability requirements within partnerships often fail to allow for the complex and political nature of partnerships, and therefore may not be sufficient to capture value and impact. INGOs can often rely on linear, cause-effect and results-based monitoring and evaluation tools and frameworks to measure the success of relationships. Many of these tools and frameworks are designed for simpler, grass-roots-based direct-action or service delivery organisations, rather than processes or practices intended to change power relations – including those that may exist between partners. The focus on risk and financial accountability within partnerships can crowd out other less quantifiable aspects of partnership, and

underestimate the importance of interpersonal relationships. Indeed some go further and suggest that these demands can change the very nature of the organisations that INGOs support as they start to recruit people who are able to meet their demands, but who may not share the organisations' values.

It is increasingly recognised that in complex non-linear systems, adaptive learning mechanisms and feedback loops are critical in helping partnerships evolve in a positive manner. The new 'transparency movement' that has emerged in the development sector and initiatives such as the Keystone Development Partnership Survey, which allows independent feedback to be collected from the partners of INGOs and then be compared, are attempts to build stronger independent and collective feedback. This complements moves by individual agencies to build more accountability to the people and partners they support (see the ACFID 'Voice and Choice' report), as well as conducting research into their approaches to partnership (see for example BOND's work in this area<sup>15</sup> and this study for ACFID).

As suggested in the previous section, many agencies monitor and evaluate their partnerships based on mutual responsibilities and accountabilities which are defined in formal *partnership or program agreements*. These agreements can include:

- Partnership principles;
- Defined program and partnership objectives and outcomes;
- How feedback from communities or others will be gathered;
- How the partnership will be assessed, including through 'learning events' and meetings;
- What reporting, monitoring, reviews or evaluations will be undertaken; and
- How complaints and redress from partners can be addressed.

The BOND study, cited above, concluded that: "every agency has a clear rationale for working in partnership but they seem less able to quantify the added value. They monitor whether the partner has achieved their strategy and planned objectives, but are not so clear as to the quality of the partner relationship." It would seem that this is similar to the situation here in Australia. In fact, agencies see the challenge of demonstrating the value of partnerships in achieving development outcomes as particularly important.

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<sup>15</sup> BOND, 2010, *Approaches to Partnership*, Available: [http://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/Effectiveness\\_Programme/comparative\\_study\\_of\\_partnerships\\_final.pdf](http://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/Effectiveness_Programme/comparative_study_of_partnerships_final.pdf)

This will require firstly being much clearer about the assumptions and hypothesis about why and how working in partnership should be adding value. Secondly, it will need a better ability to assess the changing nature of partnerships and relationships over time. Thirdly, it will mean enhancing agencies' ability to assess development outcomes – an ongoing challenge. And finally, it requires the relationship between how partnerships have contributed to those outcomes to be more clearly delineated. However, we are witnessing a number of innovations in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) which are proving to be promising<sup>16</sup> in engaging stakeholders more effectively and providing more real time feedback. Experience from INGOs and government agencies working on complex leadership programs also provides some useful pointers for how this might be done.<sup>17</sup> Some of the lessons from these agencies are provided below.

**i. Having a 'theory of change' that provides an explanation for the program**

While there is currently a lot of discussion about theories of change in international development, much of this assumes a 'simple' or at best 'complicated', operating environment. 'Complex' program environments require an analysis of political and social relations and processes as well as careful analysis of influential stakeholders and the relationships between them.

This kind of analysis can provide an informed starting point for program strategy (or what some call a theory of action) and effective partnerships. By providing a rationale and justification for change theories and associated 'action', programs are in a better position to build and maintain stakeholder engagement and support. This also provides a useful basis for partners to *collectively* decide what should be measured and assessed over time.

**ii. Capturing short-term process and results in a long-term program**

In many programs, the reality of engaging with partners and other agencies as activities commence starts to provide essential learning about the degree to which the words on paper and in a 'theory of change' make much sense. For many programs – particularly in their early days - short term 'results', focused upon changes in individual and organisational relationships, can provide critical and early learning about whether the foundations of an effective partnership are being built. Tools and methods such as

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<sup>16</sup> See UNDP, 2013. *Discussion Paper - Innovations in Monitoring and Evaluating Results*.

<sup>17</sup> Roche, C and Kelly, L, 2013, *Monitoring and Evaluation When Politics Matter*, DLP, Canberra.

Outcome Mapping<sup>18</sup> are particularly helpful in focusing attention on changes in the behaviour of what have been called ‘boundary partners’ i.e. those stakeholders in a direct relationship with a given program.

These changes clearly do not tell the whole story, but systematic collection of data about these issues can provide: a) important early feedback allowing adjustments to be made; b) a useful base for understanding the causes and processes of longer-term change and c) the data necessary for accountability to other stakeholders such as donors.

### iii. Understanding contributions to longer-term change

When trying to assess significant, and usually long-term, social change it is typically more realistic to use M&E systems to identify a program’s or partnership’s *contribution* to change rather than trying to directly attribute changes to their inputs. Rather than asking “did it work?” it is often more helpful to ask “did it make a difference?” It is important for agencies working in partnership to be able to acknowledge that their collective action should be the focus of their M&E efforts, as well as assessing individual contributions. There are a number of tried and tested methods that can be used for this including:

- direct observation;
- asking participants and observers for feedback;
- undertaking organisational or partnership assessments;
- assessing the evolution of coalition or alliances;
- exploring simple value for money assessments;
- trialling social network analysis;
- developing case study narratives;
- developing and testing theories of change; and
- cross-checking findings through independent reviews and evaluations.

Doing these things well can often require putting some effort into ‘getting the basics right’, that is, capturing basic data that can be overlooked, about how trust and ways of working between partners is changing over time, as well as reserving the time to undertake these exercises. Eliciting feedback from allies and partners, using formal and informal methods as well as independent third party assessors, can be an important part of these ‘basic’ processes.

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<sup>18</sup> See Outcome Mapping Learning Community: [www.outcomemapping.ca/](http://www.outcomemapping.ca/)

A common challenge for all programs is to assess the counterfactual, i.e. what would have happened without the program or partnership in question? A number of agencies are attempting to use theory-based M&E approaches, case studies, direct observation and participatory methods to address this issue. As recent reviews suggest,<sup>19</sup> these can be credible alternatives to experimental approaches, which use ‘control’ or ‘comparison’ groups, particularly for small-scale programs where the sample size would not be large enough for experimentation, or for complex multi-stakeholder programs. This usually involves verifying their theory or hypothesis about how change happens, which includes an analysis of other influencing factors, and thus seeks to reduce uncertainty about the contribution being made as much as it seeks to ‘prove’ impact.

**iv. Monitoring and analysis that is timely and responsive**

Development programs and partnerships need to be flexible, adaptive, and able to readily test their continuing relevance. Monitoring in a context like this needs to be nimble and focused upon the actions at hand. At the same time, it is important that M&E continues in a systematic way, enabling programs to collect the regular data they need for reporting and communicating with stakeholders.

Reserving the time and the space for regular analysis and reflection can be a critical component of this process. It can enable partnerships to flexibly manage, systematically document, and maintain a common understanding about changes to program rationale and direction.

**v. Resourcing effective communication and feedback**

Complex, ‘messy’ program and partnerships are difficult to communicate. However, the communication of achievements can often be important and help to mobilise further action. If M&E is going to meet the demands of multiple stakeholders, and lead to program and policy adaptation, then the effective communication of what are often complex processes needs to be a central consideration. Supporting partners and coalitions to ‘tell their own story’ can not only provide some concrete and verifiable examples of achievements, but can also allow the primary actors to determine which of these they chose to make public. In this sense, the process can simultaneously strengthen partners in their ability to promote change and provide donors with some of the evidence of change that they need to satisfy their constituents.

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<sup>19</sup> See Stern *et al.* 2012, *Broadening the Range of Designs and Methods for Impact Evaluations*, UK Department for International Development.



These processes also have to allow for complaints and ‘harm’ to be identified, and redress undertaken. ANGOs clearly look at the risks of partnership with others, including risks around financial accountability and security. This needs to be expanded to include risks to partners, for example, around the creation of dependency, or the risks associated with passing on donor demands to the point that this changes the nature and shape of the organisations being supported.

#### **vi. Integrating and resourcing M&E (and related research)**

For M&E to be done well, it requires an adequate investment of resources and embedding into all stages of program and partnership planning and development. Furthermore, it can also be important to separate out some longer term research or evaluation work from the more immediate monitoring. Some of the questions and testing of assumptions about partnerships will not be answered through ongoing monitoring. The complex, non-linear nature of the change processes involved may require more of a research oriented approach to tracking and explaining change over time. Recognising this can help ensure that hard-pressed program staff or systems are not overwhelmed by expectations. This may require partnerships with research institutes or universities, and/or hiring research staff to broker these relationships.

## **Conclusion**

Different agencies will need to tailor their M&E processes to suit their operations, scale and range of stakeholders. What is possible for larger ANGOs would not be feasible or realistic for smaller organisations or informal networks. However, if ANGOs are going to be able to be clearer about the value they add to partnerships they are engaged in, then although some of the budgets and methods that are deployed may differ, the questions they need to address are potentially very similar. This suggests that greater collaboration across the sector in this area may have a lot of benefits.

## **6. The future**

ANGOs are not standing still. They are evolving towards an uncertain future in a variety of ways based on their own circumstances, the changing context and institutional pressures and demands. In this section we outline a number of possible avenues for ACFID and its membership to explore in order for the sector to be best placed to respond to a rapidly changing world. The section is divided into two parts first around ideas for individual agencies and then broader ideas that may require collective action across the sector.

## Ideas for individual ANGOs - in priority order

### i. Monitoring and evaluation

As noted, it is clear there is often insufficient investment in good quality monitoring, evaluation and learning about the added value of partnerships for effective development, and that such assessments can be difficult, requiring a long-term approach. This is an area of considerable concern and one where ANGOs should focus future research resources. Also, some, but not all, agencies have invested in assessing the quality of their partnerships. It is therefore recommended that:

- ANGOs invest resources in long-term research and assessment on the added value offered through partnership approaches.
- ANGOs that have undertaken work in this area be encouraged to share their findings.

### ii. Engaging the leadership of organisations

Given the importance of organisational context for how partnerships are framed and what they are able to achieve, it may be appropriate to engage more senior managers and boards in reviewing their 'rules' for partnership. Towards this end it is recommended that:

- Boards and senior managers review the current partnership portfolio of an ANGO, considering how this aligns with the changing context and with their organisational norms and values.
- Senior leadership provide the context and space for program managers to more effectively identify the purpose of different partnerships and develop the business processes to implement those partnerships.

### iii. Managing accountabilities

Partnerships, particularly multi-stakeholder ones, illustrate the challenges for ANGOs in trying to manage multiple accountabilities. Rather than assume that program managers and program teams are able to balance multiple and often competing accountabilities, it is recommended that:

- Senior leadership and boards within organisations identify the various accountabilities and develop organisational responses to management of these.

- ANGOs prioritise accountabilities and identify organisational positions around competing accountabilities in order to clarify the basis for different partnerships and direct attention to which accountabilities should be given priority in organisational systems.

#### **iv. Attention to the quality of agency partnerships**

An unexplored area in the quality of various ANGO partnerships is the different forms of power and inequality underlying some of those partnerships. This includes inequality both within partnerships and that created through partnerships. It is therefore recommended that:

- ANGOs develop a more systematic analysis of power and how it operates in traditional and emerging forms of partnership and how it affects development outcomes (this would be an important contribution to more effective partnership as well as a basis for more effective accountability within partnerships).

### **Ideas for action by the ANGO sector - facilitated by ACFID**

#### **i. Collecting (and analysing) more partnership resources**

A range of useful resources were identified throughout this research. There was insufficient time to collect and collate these resources. Therefore, a very practical and immediate recommendation from the research is that:

- ACFID call for examples of resources used by members in the management, implementation and M&E of partnerships based on the typologies identified.
- These additional resources could be assessed – in terms of the degree to which they might help the sector evolve - and incorporated in revised Code of Conduct implementation guidelines as appropriate.

Certain agencies – inside and outside Australia<sup>20</sup> - could be targeted to ensure a good coverage of the typologies. We suspect that in some cases – particularly for more complex partnerships and coalitions - this might require eliciting the tacit knowledge that agencies have, as much as the formal tools and methods they use.

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<sup>20</sup> Collaboration with the Partnership Resource Centre, for example, might be beneficial.  
[www.partnershipsresourcecentre.org/about/partners](http://www.partnershipsresourcecentre.org/about/partners)

## ii. Exploring action-research collaborations

There are a number of issues raised in this review that would lend themselves to joint action-research and learning in a number of areas. It is therefore recommended that:

- ACFID invite agencies in different ‘clusters’ to participate in joint research maybe supported by links to researchers from the ACFID University Network. Research questions might include:
  - What is the value added of *partnership* across different typologies?
  - What is the value of collective action by partners and how is this best supported by ANGOs?
  - What are the resources, skills and capacities required for effective brokering and convening of partnerships?
  - How are power and gender relations expressed by and within different partnership typologies?

## iii. Experimenting on behalf of the sector

As the case studies included above suggest, different agencies have particular skills, networks, niches and risk appetites that they bring to the sector. This makes them well placed to undertake experiments which may be of broader benefit. Often, agencies are ‘hiding their light under a bushel’ which means that they generally retain any benefit and the sector as a whole loses out. Therefore, in order to complement the recommendation about collaborative research as above, it is also recommended that:

- ACFID invite individual agencies to identify the areas of innovation and experimentation in relation to partnership and agree to share the findings both positive and negative from this experimentation over time. Examples for such individual agency experimentation include:
  - The benefits of engaging with ‘keystone reporting’; and
  - The use of mobile phones and social media to gather partner feedback.

The advantage of collaborating in this way and having a more deliberative strategy means that the sector can effectively undertake more experiments without some of the costs of jointly designed processes.

#### **iv. Creating a 'safe space' for debate**

It seems that amongst agency staff there is a hunger to debate issues of partnership and more broadly the role of INGOs in a changing world. There is also a view expressed that it is sometimes difficult to openly discuss these issues in agencies, particularly when there is a view that organisational systems, culture or priorities are part of the problem. Thus the popularity and interest in initiatives such as the 'Big Push Forward' – the two events in Melbourne attracted over 80 people each and a large number who were unable to attend. It is therefore recommended that:

- ACFID utilise its resources for learning and development to try and organise some more face to face or on-line 'safe spaces' for cross-organisational debate on these matters.

#### **v. Developing a 'core curriculum' in this field**

This review notes the importance of developing the skills, capacities and organisational pre-requisites for effective partnerships. It is therefore recommended that:

- The ACFID University Network considers how to develop a core curriculum for program and partnership development for ACFID agencies. This could be based on what a number of agencies are already doing, along with a number of subjects currently being run by universities through appropriate Masters' subjects. This would combine theory, practice and skills development based on existing challenges facing agencies. On-line modules could be developed as well as face to face processes. The elements of this might include:
  - Building partnerships, coalitions and alliances for collective action;
  - Addressing power, inequality and collective action in program design;
  - Managing and implementing partnership and collective action processes;
  - M&E of partnership and collective action; and
  - Organisational development and partnership.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

# Literature review – development partnerships into the future

## 1. Introduction: Partnerships – now and into the future

Over the past twenty years, development non-government organisations (NGOs) have increasingly shifted from direct operations to the partnership approach we are familiar with today. A more detailed understanding of the complexity of the change process during this period has required NGOs to engage in more multi-actor collaborations. NGOs currently partner with a wide range of development actors, including international and local NGOs, governments, civil society organisations, research institutes and private enterprise to achieve social change. The failure of state and market to deliver on social and economic development has meant an increased emphasis on civil society participation in both domestic public policy and international development (Bokil, Kearton & Roche 2012). NGOs today regularly engage in partnerships that support the development of civil society in order to achieve development goals.

This contemporary understanding of partnerships leads us to the obvious question of ‘what next’? This review attempts to determine what will be required by development NGOs in the future for effective partnership practice. The review consists of three parts. The first part examines the changing development landscape, brought about by a shift in the distribution of global poverty and inequality and the rise of new development actors, and discusses the implications for development NGO partnership practice. The next section provides an overview of the complex and uncertain nature of development, and the complexity faced by many NGOs in their partnership practice. It examines the changing roles that NGOs may need to play to deal with complexity in partnerships. The review concludes that there are a range of new partnership opportunities available for NGOs. However, NGOs will need to encourage and support new ways of thinking and operating to make the most of these opportunities, and to remain relevant both at home and abroad.

## 2. The changing landscape for partnerships

### A shift in the global distribution of poverty

There has been a shift in the distribution of the world’s income poor from low-income countries to middle-income countries over the past 20 years. In 1990, almost 95 per cent of the world’s poor people lived in countries classified as low-income countries by the World Bank (Sumner & Mallet 2012). Today, almost three-quarters of the world’s poorest people - up to a billion people, or a ‘new bottom billion’ - live in largely stable, non-fragile

middle-income countries (Sumner 2011). Half of the world's poor currently live in India and China, while a quarter of the world's poor live in other middle-income countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia (Sumner 2012). A similar pattern is evident in other aspects of human development, such as the global distribution of malnutrition towards middle-income countries (Sumner 2010). The remainder of the world's poor (about 23 per cent) generally live in fragile low-income and fragile middle-income countries.

This shift in the global distribution of poverty is due to several factors. Many of the world's poor live in countries that have become richer in average per capita terms, and have subsequently been reclassified from low-income to middle-income countries (Sumner 2012). There is some suggestion that this trend will continue, and that the number of countries classified as low-income countries will fall by 2025 (Moss & Leo 2011). The world's poor have also become more concentrated in a small number of countries, half of which are middle-income countries.

It is unclear whether the high concentration of global poor in middle-income countries will continue into the future. Kharas and Rogerson (2012) suggest that the shift in the distribution of global poverty to middle-income countries will be short-lived. Strong economic growth in large middle-income countries with substantial pockets of poverty (for example, India, Indonesia and Vietnam), coupled with limited population growth, should continue to reduce poverty. If this occurs then poverty will be increasingly concentrated in fragile and conflict-affected states in the long-term. Kharas and Rogerson (2012) estimate that by 2025, the number of income poor in stable, middle-income countries could be as low as 18 per cent of the world's poor. Conversely, the concentration of poor in fragile or conflict-affected states could increase, particularly as energy, water and food become increasingly scarce due to the impacts of climate change.

### **Rising levels - and recognition - of inequality**

Most of the world's poor now live in middle-income countries with increasing wealth in average per capita terms, yet inequality remains an issue. While there is a wide variation in levels of inequality in middle-income countries, countries such as South Africa and Brazil retain high levels of inequality in income, educational attainment and health, despite their economic success. This suggests that the root cause of poverty in middle-income countries is not a lack of economic development in a country as a whole, but rather the political, economic and social marginalisation of some groups in countries that are otherwise doing quite well.

It is increasingly recognised that high levels of inequality can inhibit growth, discourage institutional development towards accountable governments and undermine civic and social life (Birdsall 2006). A number of authors also see the failure in many countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals as a function of inequality (Vandermoortele 2008). Owen Barder, in his analysis of the 2010 UN Summit on the Millennium



Development Goals (MDGs), argues that one of the main narratives emerging in development is the idea that “The challenge is increasingly inequality, not absolute poverty” (Barder 2010).

### **New roles for NGOs**

The shift in the distribution of global poverty, and rising inequality, will affect who NGOs are partnering with, where they are partnering and how they are partnering. While poverty and conflict will remain and humanitarian emergencies will continue, for the next decade at least most poor people - the traditional target group of NGOs - will be living in places that have enough domestic resources to address their problems over time (Edwards 2013).

NGO partnerships in middle-income countries generally involve a donor-recipient relationship, with a focus on aid as a resource transfer of grants or concessional lending. Aid in the form of resource transfers will remain important for low-income countries. However, NGOs may find that, like Governments, they increasingly lack financial leverage in middle-income countries. Indeed, many middle-income countries may be foreign aid donors themselves. Further, it is unlikely that taxpayers in donor countries will be comfortable with resource transfers to countries that have substantial domestic resources. NGOs will thus need to move beyond ‘traditional’ aid relationships and projects to find alternative means of supporting poverty reduction (Sumner 2011) and reducing inequality. NGOs can seek to enhance their influence through increasingly engaging with local NGOs and civil society organisations (such as women’s organisations, social movements and rights-based organisations) with social change agendas which address exclusion and inequality more squarely. NGOs will need to continue to build long-term and consistent partnerships with local organisations with social change agendas, and gain an in-depth understanding of local context. Such partnerships can yield positive results. For example, Eyben et al. (2004, p. 14) describe how a very small financial investment in strengthening the relationships between Brazil’s state government and its civil society brought about significant shifts in social policy.

This approach will require a shift in policy agenda for many NGOs, to one that promotes empowerment and political voice as well as the transfer of resources and investment in public services (Barder 2010). These partnerships are likely to be politically sensitive, as supporting organisations with progressive agendas constitutes an explicitly political approach. Eyben et al. (2004, p. 24-25) note that “many of the larger [middle-income countries] have more complex and diverse institutions both within and outside government and donors can find themselves involved in internal political conflicts through the choice of whom they decide to associate with”. This means that NGOs will be required to involve themselves more intimately with domestic political processes, something they have tended to be unsure about doing in the past (Eyben et al. 2004, p. 15).

Inequality remains an important issue in middle-income countries. Poor people often lack a voice in governance structures, and their governments may lack political will, even when domestic resources are on the rise. Sumner (2012) suggests that global poverty is becoming a matter of national inequality, and therefore a domestic issue (national distribution and domestic political economy) rather than a traditional aid issue. NGOs may thus need to look towards supporting domestic policy processes that favour the redistribution of economic, social and political power, such as changes to public expenditure and taxation, labour and land ownership policies. Given the expanding middle-class in many middle-income countries, NGOs and their partners will need to build and understand middle-class political support for such inclusive policy interventions.

Looking further ahead, the predicted increase in the concentration of the poor in fragile and conflict affected states may require that NGOs alter – or complement - their basic aid delivery model. Development in fragile contexts also may require longer time-frames than NGOs currently employ, and may require focus on areas such as security, demobilisation and social justice and reconciliation, areas in which only a few NGOs have a comparative advantage (Kharas & Rogerson 2012). This means that NGOs will need to establish long-term partnerships, and potentially work with local partners in new areas of development, and may well require allying with different players.

### **A changing aid landscape - new donors, new funding**

Against this backdrop, new donors and sources of development funding are challenging long established aid industry actors such as OECD-DAC donors, as well as International NGOs. These include south-south development cooperation and blended public-private funding in general, high-impact philanthropy and non-government giving channels and innovative and climate change finance (Kharas & Rogerson 2012).

Over the past ten years, aid provided by the developing BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) is estimated to have grown ten times faster than that of the G7 (Brant & Romanes 2013). China has provided large non-concessional loans for infrastructure, natural resource development and industrial parks in many poor countries (Kharas & Rogerson 2012). Gulf states are playing an increasingly important role in the financing of humanitarian action, as reflected in Saudi Arabia's contribution of \$500 million to the World Food Programme food crisis appeal in 2009 (Harmer & Martin 2010). At the same time, many 'traditional' donors (i.e. OECD DAC donors) are facing funding squeezes, and may not be as willing or as able to fund development programmes. With relatively strong economic growth still forecast for the BRICS countries, emerging economy donors will likely continue to play an important role in international development assistance and financing. Kharas and Rogerson (2012) predict that emerging economies currently provide about \$15 billion per year in aid (or aid-like flows), and this could increase to \$50 billion per year by 2025.

South-south development cooperation differs from traditional aid in several ways. New donors have resisted a push by traditional donors to assimilate them into the existing aid architecture, with its attendant norms of transparency, good governance, untied aid and debt sustainability (Brant & Romanes 2013). Emerging economy donors are also more willing to blend aid with commercial support than traditional donors, and demand less aid conditionality (few or none in broad macro-economic and governance terms), or fewer strings attached than traditional development assistance (Kharas & Rogerson 2012). Whether this is a positive development remains to be seen, although Fowler (1998, p. 145) notes that partnerships based on “contract-based aid” are never likely to produce the levels of inter-personal and organisational trust and social capital necessary for real change.

South-south development cooperation is strongly premised on mutual benefit in growth and trade, and is explicitly designed to stimulate overseas demand for national industries and facilitate market entry for national companies. In essence, the mechanisms and practices of emerging economy donors are designed to promote economic growth and development in both their own and other countries (Brant & Romanes 2013). This development model has been variously described as ‘horizontal cooperation’ or ‘development cooperation’ (Mawdsley 2010, cited in Darnton & Kirk 2011). China is the biggest force in this emerging model of development, pursuing its agenda not through donations but through partnerships. The Chinese government recently announced its intention to build a \$1 billion hydro-electric dam in Guinea by declaring “The dam is not a gift; it is an investment” (Mawdsley 2010, p. 18, cited in Darnton & Kirk 2011).

This method of development has been received by some traditional donors with suspicion and skepticism (Woods 2008). Darnton & Kirk (2011, p. 60) remark on the need for ‘northern’ NGOs “to try and manage the potential negative impacts of [south-south] partnership arrangements, grounded in self-interest, on the world’s poorest people”. Such observations stem from the perception that south-south development cooperation is incongruent with the notions of ‘charity’ and ‘altruism’ that underlie much traditional development practice.

Other new actors to emerge include private foundations, ‘social impact investors’ and individual donors. There has been an explosion in the scale of resources available for ‘bottom-of-the-pyramid’ venture that target the poor. Private philanthropy has been growing at a rapid pace, from larger gifts such as the well-publicised Warren Buffet donation to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to smaller contributions from individuals through internet sites such as [www.kiva.org](http://www.kiva.org) and [www.globalgiving.org](http://www.globalgiving.org). Global initiatives such as the GAVI Alliance, which increase access to immunisation in poor countries, rely heavily on donor pledges. ‘Social impact investors’ such as the Shell Foundation and Acumen Fund offer financial returns with social or environmental benefits. Private donations towards development are estimated to be between \$57-75 billion a year (Kharas & Rogerson 2012).

An array of new sources of development financing has also emerged in recent years, including innovative financing mechanisms and climate financing. For example, the Leading Group on Innovative Financing for Development proposed a 'Global Solidarity Levy' to be used to finance global public goods during the 2010 Millennium Development Goals Summit (Giovannetti 2010, p. 50). Other examples include UNITAID, a global health initiative financed almost solely through airline ticket solidarity contributions, the Millennium Vaccine Initiative, which has channelled \$1 billion in tax credits to corporations in order to promote delivery of existing vaccines and accelerate development of new vaccines for developing countries (Stansfield et al. 2002, in Sumner 2011), and the auction of greenhouse gas emissions permits (IFM Working Group 2, 2009, in Sumner 2011). These new sources of funding represent a shift away from the traditional donor-recipient arrangements, and, in many cases, are successful at engaging new stakeholders and different kinds of donor networks (Sumner 2011).

### **A bridge between players**

NGOs will continue to play an important role in the aid landscape. As Edwards (2013, p. 15) observes, "There's no vaccine against inequality or violence". However, growth in the variety of providers of development assistance may reduce the influence and leverage of NGOs in partnerships, and require that NGOs diversify their roles within partnerships.

New opportunities for donors and recipients to easily establish direct links may reduce the need for intermediaries to channel resources from one place to another, and manage the process involved. Donors may also seek to save significant costs by directly funding recipients. If development programmes can be financed and delivered using a national government's own resources, supplemented by those of private philanthropists and 'social impact investors', NGOs face a high risk of disintermediation (Kharas & Rogerson 2012). Costa et al. (2012) suggest that disintermediation will provide NGOs with an opportunity to remodel partnership arrangements, to overcome the persistent problems of paternalism and NGO legitimacy and engage in more equal partnerships. NGOs may have the opportunity to form new types of partnerships, to move from "control to facilitation and from being donors and decision-makers to co-creators and translators" (Edwards 2013, p. 8). NGOs, with their intermediary status, are ideally placed to provide resources such as specialist support and advice to partners, connections within their partnership networks, and to mediate between different approaches to social change. There is already some experience of NGOs working successfully as brokers of collective action or facilitators of change on either or both sides of a service relationship. NGOs may need to develop a range of new skills and competencies in learning, bridging, mediation, dialogue and influencing to support these roles and relationships.

This will require thinking about partnerships as more than bi-lateral relationships with a single 'partner' or counterpart, but rather being about engaging with multiple actors at the same time through networks, coalitions and alliances. *Ahmad (2006) suggests* NGOs are

well placed to act as relational brokers and linkage makers, operating as an information source and facilitator to help local actors to engage with one other. Green (2013) provides an example of the role that NGOs can play in bridging and mediation, through the activities of Oxfam in Tajikistan. Water management in Tajikistan was characterised by multiple institutions with overlapping mandates and the breakdown of much of the supply network. Oxfam brought together ‘key actors’ from different sectors (government ministries, international NGOs, academia, the media; Tajiki civil society organisations and the private sector). Oxfam’s role as ‘convener and broker’ improved communications between government actors and other stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector, and led to an emerging set of initiatives, both in public policy and partnerships.

### **Developing (or reviving) concepts of solidarity**

South-south development cooperation generally has a business foundation, with a clear expectation of mutual give and take between the different parties. Such partnerships may provide a more realistic assessment of the self-interest of the different participants, and thus have a better chance of achieving sustainability (Costa et al. 2012). Costa et al. (2012) suggest that NGOs should take a more open approach towards their self-interest, as this would support more honest and transparent partnerships.

The future role of NGOs in this new aid landscape is part of a broader debate around the role of aid, encouraged in part by the Busan Declaration’s call to move from effective aid, to cooperation for effective development. This indicates a need to complement the focus on poverty in some countries or specific locations, with debates and action on the need for the provision of ‘global public goods’ from which everyone benefits and to which everyone should contribute, under a framework of sustainable development (Edwards 2013). Issues like tax justice, climate change mitigation, labour migration and stricter controls on arms sales are likely to become increasingly important, with as much focus on rich-country responsibilities as on poorer countries themselves. In these areas NGOs will need to consider their role as partners in emerging international coalitions for financial regulation, social protection, fair trade, climate change management and the like (Edwards 2013), and may need to draw on a renewed sense of global solidarity to address these challenges. Arguably this will mean communicating somewhat differently with their supporters about their role and what they are asking their supporters to do.

### **Changing power relations**

The emergence of new types of donors and alternate funding sources may alter the power dynamic that underlies many partnerships. Unequal power relations are frequently considered a barrier to effective partnerships, particularly donor-recipient and north-south partnerships. For example, Malavisi (2010, p. 55) examines the relationship between

southern and northern NGOs in Bolivia and concludes that “unequal power relations hinder effective partnerships between southern and northern NGOs”.

Discussions around power relations in partnerships frequently refer to the issue of funding. Fowler (1998) identifies the exercise of the power associated with funding by NGOs as the primary barrier to ‘authentic’ partnerships. Others consider that the exercise of power associated with funding can diminish relationships by undermining mutuality, affecting the funded partner’s organisational identity (*Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff 2004*), and reducing trust within partnerships (Harris 2008). In practice, Yonekura (2000) found that while Oxfam Great Britain chose potential partners based on the presence of shared values and appropriate accountability practices, local Cambodian NGOs did not apply the same rigour in choosing Oxfam Great Britain as a partner, largely due to intense competition for donor funds. This situation can be compounded by the notion of donor conditionality. In the case of donor-NGO partnerships, Reith (2010, p. 450) suggests that unequal power relations can be reinforced where NGOs fail to question donor conditionality “for fear of losing support”.

Partners able to raise funding from multiple sources are in a stronger position to negotiate with donors. This was evident in a recent study in Cambodia, which showed that the government was using ‘non-traditional’ donors (in particular China) to bolster negotiating power in relation to its more challenging relationship with traditional donors. In a study on emerging donors from a recipient perspective in Cambodia, Sato et al. (2011) noted that the Cambodian government accepts aid from emerging donors despite associated transaction costs, not as a passive willingness to ‘accept whatever aid is offered’, but rather as part of a carefully considered strategy that views the new donors as providing alternatives important to the country’s balanced development. The growth in the variety of providers of development assistance, particularly the non-traditional, is also helping strengthen the negotiating power of governments, and may make it more difficult for traditional donors to influence policy (Greenhill, Prizzon & Rogerson 2013).

### **3. Partnerships in a complex landscape**

Within this changing development landscape, there is an emerging understanding of the uncertainty and complexity surrounding the development process. Eyben et al. (2008, p. 203-204) and Ramalingham (2013) have examined this issue in depth. Their argument can be summarised as follows: complexity theory posits that it is not possible to predict with any confidence the relation between cause and effect. Change is emergent. New inter-relational processes are constantly being generated, which in turn may affect and change those already existing. Small ‘butterfly’ actions may have a major impact, and big ones may have very little impact.

The development process is highly localised, particular, context-bound and time-specific (Ramalingan & Jones 2008), and relies on a complex web of inter-relationships that make

up this process. These inter-relationships are sensitive to context, and may react to development interventions in unpredictable ways (Hewett & Roche 2013). However, many NGOs continue to operate using a simple cause-effect approach to promoting change, based on certainty, rationality and predictability, and the assumption that the development process and inter-relationship can be 'managed' (Hewett & Roche 2013).

Current attempts to address complex development challenges largely occur through 'isolated impact'. That is, NGOs rely on an approach that involves finding and funding solutions embodied within a single organisation, along with the hope that the most effective organisations will grow or replicate to broaden their impact (Leftwich & Wheeler 2011). This means that NGOs, and their partner organisations, often try to invent independent solutions to complex development problems, sometimes working at odds with each other. Unequal power relations between different partners may mean that it is difficult for those having one world-view, or set of interests, to hear or accept the views of others (Hewett & Roche 2013). The isolated impact of individual organisations is further compounded by the isolation of the not-for-profit sector. Social problems arise from the interplay of government and commercial activities. As a result, complex problems can only be solved by cross-sector coalitions that engage those outside the non-profit sector (Kania & Kramer 2011).

### **No single agency has all the answers - the need for collective action**

Many of the problems that development is normally concerned with, such as poverty and inequality, international immigration, HIV/AIDS, human and food security and climate change, are 'wicked' problems. That is, they are complex, politicised, unpredictable and global. The complexity of linkages between development actors means that no one perspective, or agency, can hope to capture the complex reality; that is, a single NGO or their partners will not have all the answers. Multiple perspectives are thus required for 'wicked' problems, along with enhanced participation and partnership between development actors and better management of power relations between actors (Hewett & Roche 2013).

There is evidence to suggest that large scale social change arises from improved cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organisations (Kania & Kramer 2011). In other words, those NGOs, governments, businesses and civil society organisations that work together around a common agenda to create collective action are better placed to solve particular complex development problems. Peiffer (2012) notes that several donor agencies have rhetorically acknowledged the importance of encouraging public-private partnerships and, to varying extents, have designed and supported programs that appear to aim at enabling the rise of state-business coalitions. For instance, DFID and the World Bank fund several private-public dialogue programs that are designed to bring together business and

governments to work cooperatively at identifying and resolving constraints for private sector development.

Global public goods (such as the environmental commons or international trade) are likely to be increasingly important in a world of global collective problems such as climate change (Sumner 2011). Middle-income countries are key players in the supply of global public goods, and developing partnerships with middle-income countries is seen as increasingly important for global collective action. Global public goods cannot usually be supplied by governments acting in isolation; cooperation is typically needed between countries (Barrett 2002, in Sumner 2011). NGOs can thus play a key role in helping to build these relationships through their ability to convene, to generate and transfer knowledge, and to assist global and regional negotiations (Ferroni 2001, p. 13, in Sumner 2011).

NGOs looking to participate in collective action may need to seek new ways to engage and reconnect with their supporters and own civil societies (i.e. their 'partners'). Collective action requires a move away from the 'transactional framework' (in which support for tackling poverty is understood simply as making donations to charities) that currently defines the public's engagement with development issues (Darnton & Kirk 2011). As Hewett and Roche (2013, p.27) note, "NGOs arguably continue to focus much of their public messaging on aid with an implicit proposition that raising money here to send over there, to make 'them' more like 'us', is sufficient to overcome poverty and achieve development". The recent 'Make Poverty History' campaign, a UK-focused coalition campaign, relied on this type of transactional relationship, and arguably failed to change the UK public's perception or understanding of poverty (Cox 2011; Darnton & Kirk 2011).

The nature of NGO partnerships with their supporters and own civil societies is critical. NGOs may need to shift the balance of their public engagement activities from 'transactions' to 'transformations', through providing their supporters with opportunities to engage more deeply in development issues (Darnton & Kirk 2011). This may require a greater focus on co-investment in processes of sharing and mutual learning to collectively address common problems, and a greater emphasis on idealism and social justice, or the politics of the common good. Ed Milliband, in a talk at the London School of Economics in the lead up to the Copenhagen Summit of 2009 argues this point with regards to the global challenge of climate change. He indicates that "We need a politics of climate change that speaks to people's idealism...one that demonstrates that addressing climate change can also reduce inequality and help build stronger inclusive societies" (Hewett & Roche 2013, p. 21).

### **The importance of coalitions and networks**

The need to address collective action problems has resulted in a broader call for better multi-stakeholder partnership models, and the creation of more effective networks of actors, agencies and organisation, particularly within the context of institutional change



and innovation (Hewett & Roche 2013). This is partly a recognition of the lack of global governance institutions and appropriate architecture that can address key transnational problems. It also partly stems from an acknowledgement that NGOs need to engage in new and potentially unusual forms of partnership, with the associated phenomenon of organisational boundaries becoming more porous (Hewett & Roche 2013).

Coalitions represent one of the key political mechanisms for overcoming pervasive collective action problems. Coalitions are well-placed to undertake collective action, as they allow individuals and organisations to come together to achieve goals that they could not achieve on their own, and to restrain in some degree their immediate and short-term pursuit of self-interest (DLP 2012). The constituent parts of a coalition retain their identity, but are in essence, a group of actors with a shared purpose or similar interests and ideas. Coalitions of a variety of kinds play a particularly important and often under-recognised role in policy reform and the development process in general (Leftwich 2011). For example, in South Africa women's coalitions have made significant progress in women's rights and access to improved services, including reproductive healthcare, increased protection of women in the workplace and better education for women and girls. These coalitions have drawn on and expanded their networks, and then exploited political and institutional arrangements to build development partnerships that cross both civil society and government, thereby creating the space and capacity required to achieve tangible outcomes in the long term (Hodes et al. 2011, in Roche & Kelly 2012b).

Many coalitions cannot be created from the outside, but instead are the result of endogenous political and policy processes (Peiffer 2012). NGOs may thus need to draw on their intermediary status to support local actors working for social change, and be 'brokers rather than doers' (DLP 2012). 'Reform' coalitions for example - coalitions that include both state and business actors working for policy and institutional reforms - are often cited as being central to the development paths of many countries (Peiffer 2012). NGOs can assist with bringing local stakeholders together, and providing financial and logistical support for meetings between stakeholders. For instance, the Australian Government's Pacific Leadership Program supports the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO), which among other things aims to assist in building the capacity of private sector organisations to engage in dialogue with the state and to contribute to national policies related to private sector investment (Peiffer 2012).

Multi-stakeholder networks are also key to addressing collective action problems. Networks are generally looser forms of entity than coalitions. As with coalitions, they have the potential to pull diverse groups and resources together, including government and public sector, NGOs, multi-lateral actors, affected communities, the private sector, and other actors that may not traditionally be part of the aid sector (Collinson 2011). Knowledge networks such as the Global Development Network and Development Gateway provide a structure for collective action in social and economic development. In practice, the success of South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign rested on its ability to leverage 'transnational

networks of influence' to contribute to the formation of a moral consensus on treatment access, and build international pressure which drug companies were particularly sensitive to (Cox 2011).

Other new forms of partnership may also be required. For example, the Solomon Islands NGO Partnership Agreement (SINPA), supported by Australian Aid, is an example of a bi-lateral aid agency attempting to build new forms of partnership. The partnership is implemented by six ANGOs and their Solomon Island partners. The program represents an innovative approach to partnership with civil society, incorporating higher than usual degrees of flexibility in the program design process, an emphasis on ongoing and inclusive reflection and learning, and a recognition of the unequal power relations that exist between partners in the program (Roche 2009).

Development is a political process which requires an understanding of 'the inner politics of change': that is, how individuals and groups work politically in different institutional contexts (DLP 2012). NGO efforts to assist or participate in coalitions and networks should be informed by both in-depth analysis of the political, business and sectorial climate within which they operate, and a detailed understanding of the players and their relationships. Efforts to do so can enhance political effectiveness and local acceptance, and limit backlash and 'guilt by association'. For example, Tadros (2011), in her study of coalitions in Jordan and Egypt, found that a coalition on protection of the family against violence in Jordan that framed the issue in terms of protecting the family, its welfare and interests was strategically very successful in minimising the possible backlash against it. Had the issue been framed in terms of protecting or defending women's rights the scope and level of opposition would have been considerably greater.

### **The value of 'local'**

The complexity of the development landscape means that externally driven or 'one-size-fit-all' responses may not be appropriate for particular country contexts, or sensitive to local politics. Development projects, policies and programmes often create incentives for development country organisations to adopt laws, policies and organisational practices which appear to be 'best practice', but which rarely fit within specific country contexts (Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock 2012). These development interventions aim to reproduce particular external solutions considered 'best practice' through a pre-determined linear process, often coupled with rigorous monitoring and evaluation requirements. This has led to what Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2012, p. 2) describe as 'capability traps', where governments and organisations adopt 'reforms' to ensure the ongoing flow of development resources and their own political legitimacy, yet fail to achieve sustained improvements in performance. NGOs can help overcome capability traps through allowing change to be driven locally and supporting local 'hybrid' solutions in their partnership practice.

The prevalence of external, ‘best practice’ solutions in development work has the potential to crowd out alternative ideas and initiatives that may emerge from local partners. For example, studies have shown how local NGOs in developing countries were forced to realign their orientation to match changing partner priorities, shifting their focus away from areas that were crucial to local communities and their original mission (Markowitz & Tice 2002; Wallace et al. 2006, cited in Elbers & Shulpen 2011). Change primarily takes root when it involves a range of actors engaged together in designing and implementing locally relevant solutions to locally perceived collective action problems (Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock 2012). Such an approach requires that NGOs ensure that problems are locally defined rather than externally determined, and encourage, or even facilitate, local partners to find and adopt solutions to emerging problems.

Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2012, p. 13) advise against “closing the space for novelty” by providing or imposing easy answers, which may in reality fail to address context specific issues. Rather, the process of problem-solving should empower local partners, and allow them to provide solutions that are politically acceptable and that respond to local capacities. This requires that NGOs ‘take partners as they find them’, and try to work with them, rather than trying to make them work in fundamentally different ways (Booth 2013). This may require a change in organisational culture for some NGOs. Booth (2013) notes that in the UK context, there are incentives within country offices to disburse funds quickly, to emphasise tangible results delivered according to a pre-established timetable, and to be adverse to risks, especially reputational risks. This approach is ill-disposed towards work that may require little or no transfer of funds, have unpredictable outcomes, and that may involve some level of risk.

Support of locally driven solutions requires that NGOs provide an “authorising environment for decision-making” that encourages experimentation (Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock 2012, p. 13). The ability to make decisions within a partnership is closely linked to the power relations between partners. This includes the ‘hidden’ power relations that occur within a partnership, or what Elbers & Shulpen (2011, p. 50) refer to as the “rules of the game”. These institutional rules determine a partner’s participation in decision-making, and can enable or constrain a partner’s ability to act within a partnership.

Any attempts to allow local actors to ‘steer the ship’ requires that NGOs first recognise the hidden power relations that exist within partnerships. This is something that NGOs have struggled with in the past. For example, Elbers and Schulpen (2011) examined decision-making in partnerships between three private aid agencies and their local partners in Ghana, India and Nicaragua. They found that the rules that governed the partnerships were unilaterally set by the three aid agencies, and remained beyond the influence of their southern partner organisations. As a result, decision-making between partners was regulated topic-by-topic, ranging from exclusion from some topics to full decision-making authority for others.

The complex nature of development problems means that they are unlikely to be addressed through ‘one-best-way’ solutions. If completely new to a context, pre-determined or ‘best-practice’ solutions may lack the political acceptance to be effective. This applies particularly to institutional change and innovation to promote sustainable growth, political stability and social inclusion, a key political process for change. Local solutions to problems may require institutions that are ‘good enough’ in terms of current global standards of governance quality, or orientated to a ‘good-fit’ with local circumstances, rather than to the notation of ‘best-practice’ (Booth 2013).

A focus on ‘best-fit’ rather than ‘best-practice’ may mean that NGOs may need to concentrate on playing a facilitating or ‘bridging’ role, one that supports local processes that show promise (Booth & Therkildsen 2012). This does not mean that NGOs do not have their own strategic objectives, or that they are not fully committed to achieving development results (Booth 2013). Rather, this approach is based on the idea that the process through which change occurs is not pre-programmed. That is, while there is a broad ‘theory of change’ underpinning development activities, the “story does not have to be told in advance” (Booth 2013, p. 7).

NGOs can gain greater certainty about how change happens in specific contexts through enhancing their understanding and recognition of endogenous and local politics and institutions (Hewett & Roche 2013). For example, Boege et al. (2008) discuss the importance of local customary institutions in the process of state formation in the Pacific. Customary social and political institutions such as kinship-based networks play an important role in providing security and other public goods such as social support networks. Strengthening of ‘hybrid’ models of governance such as customary and introduced institutions can thus help strengthen central state functions.

### **Accountability and learning within partnerships**

The complex and nature of multi-agency partnerships, coalitions and networks can make them challenging to evaluate (Tennyson 2011). Horton, Prain and Thiele (2009, p. 93) refer to the methodological challenge of assessing the “diverse, complex, dynamic and little-understood institutional forms that are commonly labelled ‘partnerships’”. Partners may also have conflicting or evolving goals and objectives, which can make it challenging to assess partnerships using traditional models for goal achievement. Perhaps for this reason there are very few evidence-based evaluations of partnerships available in the literature. The empirical studies of Brehm (2001; 2004), Kilby (2006) and Vargas (2002) are the most frequently cited exceptions.

Current accountability requirements within partnerships generally fail to allow for the complex and political nature of partnerships, and may not be sufficient to capture value and impact in the context of this type of complexity. NGOs often rely on linear, cause-effect and results-based monitoring and evaluation tools and frameworks to measure the success of

relationships. Many of these tools and frameworks are designed for simpler, grass-roots-based direct-action or service delivery organisations, rather than processes or a practice that is intended to change power relations (Batiwala 2011).

Accountability mechanisms often do not allow for the time and resources required to build partnerships. For example, the current focus on the measurement of financial accountability within partnerships (such as the use of resources by partners) does not allow for the measurement of less quantifiable and non-financial aspects of partnership. Bokil, Kearton and Roche (2012) observe that building genuine partnerships and strong interpersonal relationships is a time-, resource- and energy-intensive process without immediate measurable impact. Fowler (1998) suggests that the benefits of partnership can be difficult to quantify, particularly when partnership is considered as an ongoing process of building social capital.

Rigid accountability requirements in partnerships generally do not allow for diverse understandings or perceptions of accountability within or between organisations. For example, Davis, Macdonald and Brenton (2012) examined ideas, perceptions and evaluations of accountability practices in Oxfam Australia home country and field staff, predominantly in the Asia-Pacific region. They found that field and home staff expressed very different beliefs about accountability and views on current accountability practices. These differing views led to tensions within the organisation, and made it difficult to improve accountability practices. There may also be different understandings of accountability between organisations. For example, World Vision recently reviewed their assessment of National Office capability and performance with local organisations. They found that there were a number of measures of effective relationships which were seen by communities to be important, but were not in World Vision's original assessment template. It is unrealistic to expect NGOs to reduce their accountability requirements to the extent that funds spent by partners are not accounted for. Similarly, NGOs that do not apply some form of accountability within their partnerships may disadvantage some organisations in their future partnerships where such measures are required. However, how accountability is measured is important. The complexity of partnerships requires a flexible rather than a rigid, bureaucratic approach to accountability, one which recognises the political nature of the development process and its inter-relationships, and one that rewards learning and adjustment.

Accountability tools and frameworks need to allow NGOs to assess both the technical and political aspects of development work. This includes less tangible parts of the change process such as formal and informal relationships (Roche & Kelly 2012a). Evaluation mechanisms such as social network analysis allow for the complex and political nature of partnerships through their focus on the relationships and the flow of information within networks. This tool is used to identify key players (e.g. those who may not be particularly high in a hierarchy but who have numerous links to others), to identify bottlenecks in the flow of information or those who are isolated from knowledge flows, to spot opportunities

for better flow of information or influence and so on. It can also identify key points of influence to be targeted for change (Roche & Kelly 2012b). A recent multi-country study of service delivery, collective action and social accountability in Brazil, India, and Mexico used network analysis to "...explore changing patterns of relations among collective actors who represent the poor and in their relations to policy makers. When combined with detailed qualitative and contextual data, it allows one to identify changes in the structural capacity for action of different collective actors and of their network as a whole" (Houtzager and Acharya, 2008, p. 35, cited in Roche & Kelly 2012b, p. 12).

Accountability mechanisms that allow NGOs to track and document negative changes in partnerships, or resistance by partners, are essential for 'honest' partnerships. However, there may be little political will within organisations to openly and honestly examine partnership practice. Competition for limited amounts of funding can mean that some NGOs become secretive about failures in partnership practice. Roche, Kasynathan and Gowthaman (2005) note that most of our development organisations have effective means of ignoring findings that challenge us. This suggests that the challenge is as much to look at how open we are to dealing with difficult information about our performance, as it is to develop sophisticated methods, which produce results that we might subsequently ignore. The new transparency movement that has emerged in the development sector (McGee 2013) may indicate an increased willingness towards being open about 'difficult findings'. Transparency initiatives such as the Keystone Development Partnership Survey, which allows independent feedback from partners, are becoming increasingly popular, with some NGOs even placing their survey results on their organisational websites.

Accountability mechanisms such as monitoring and evaluation are most useful and relevant when they are approached as a learning process, rather than a fundraising or reporting requirement (Batiwala 2011). Yet the current reliance on linear and simplistic accountability tools and techniques means that adaptive learning within partnerships can be short-circuited or at worst, suppressed (Ramalingam et al. 2009). Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2012, p. 5) stress the importance of active learning mechanisms and feedback loops in partnerships, with the immediate feedback of lessons about what works and why.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

NGOs are operating in a changing, complex development landscape, one which offers possibilities for new partners and new ways of partnering. NGOs will need to adapt to this landscape in terms of their partnership practice, or face the risk of being left behind. As Kharas and Rogerson (2012, p. 6) succinctly note, "Those agencies that are nimble and responsive can be expected to survive and thrive. Those that are caught unaware of the changing aid landscape, or that are too rigid to adapt, will face problems".

NGOs have a range of new opportunities available to them in terms of who they partner with, where and how they partner, and the types of partnerships that they engage in. The scale of the challenges of international health, security, poverty and environmental degradation are such that making a difference in any of these fields requires NGOs to work with a whole range of public, private and hybrid actors who each deliver a growing variety of public goods (Severino & Ray 2010). Partnerships, coalitions and networks will thus form an essential component of the effective collective action required to address these global challenges. Understanding how this can best be achieved will require on-going experimentation, learning and review, and a commitment to appropriate processes of generating feedback and effective evaluation.

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## Appendix 2

### Literature review – purpose of partnerships

This appendix provides a brief review of the academic and practitioner-orientated literature concerned with the purpose of development partnerships. The first section contains a general discussion around the purpose of partnerships. The next section focuses on typologies available in the literature that are based on partnership purpose.

#### 1. The importance of ‘purpose’ in partnerships

NGOs generally engage in partnerships with institutions, organisations, civil society and businesses to enhance their development effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (Bokil, Kearton & Roche 2012). Partnerships allow individual actors to pool resources and ideas. Partnerships may also allow multiple actors with differing agendas to move from a no-win situation to some form of agreement (for example, in response to collective action problems or the need for conflict resolution) (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff 2011). There is some debate as to whether partnerships are a means to an end or an end in themselves. Some NGOs view the purpose of partnership strictly as a means of achieving their own organisation’s aims, while others view partnerships as important in and of themselves, as part of the process of capacity building and strengthening civil society (Brehm 2001).

Much of the normative literature around partnerships considers a strong and shared sense of purpose as a key element of ‘effective’ and ‘successful’ partnerships, although this may be dynamic or need to develop over the life of the partnership (Horton, Prain & Thiele 2009; see Tennyson with Harrison (2008) for an alternative viewpoint). This sense of purpose may relate to shared/mutually agreed vision, aims and objectives within a partnership, but also a shared set of values and ideals of development.

Brehm (2001) indicates that clarity about the purpose of a partnership is also key to an ‘effective’ partnership. This is clearly demonstrated in a study by McDonald and Chrisp (2005), who explored a public-private partnership between a large pharmaceutical company and a national charity in the United Kingdom. The stated purpose of the partnership was to improve the lifestyle of teenagers in the UK. However, as the partnership progressed, it became clear that the drug company sought improved public relations, and the charity money. This reality was not acknowledged by either partner, leading to a partnership that was less successful than it may have been.

Discussions about the purpose of partnership often include the issue of agenda-setting: while ideally partnerships are based on shared aims and vision, in reality there is always compromise, and often conflict when organisations work together. NGOs that have clearly defined strategic goals may view partnerships solely as a means of achieving those goals, and may be unresponsive to local partner agendas (Brehm 2001).

## 2. Typologies based on ‘purpose’

The main criteria on which typologies of development partnerships are based are the extent of equality, mutuality and shared governance in the relationship (Brehm 2001). There are few clearly defined typologies based on purpose available in the development literature.

Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2011, p. 6) have developed a purpose-based framework for public-private partnerships in development, although this could equally be applied to partnerships in areas such as local development, humanitarian response, advocacy, research and training and education. They identify various purposes of partnership, including:

- Policy: partnerships seek to design, advocate for, coordinate or monitor sectoral, national and/or global public policies. They may be required to work quite politically. Partnership structures may range from informal networks (such as transnational policy networks for engaging government on global policy issues) to more formal partnerships.
- Service delivery: partnerships that engage non-state actors in delivering public services (for example, government-NGO service delivery partnerships).
- Capacity building: partnership that explicitly focus on helping groups or organisations targeted for assistance to help themselves through helping to develop their skills, systems and capabilities. They may include loose knowledge networks that combine governments, universities and local communities, or more formal knowledge and research partnerships. There is a strong focus on the autonomy and agency of assisted groups through enhanced ownership and empowerment.
- Economic development: cross-sectorial partnerships that promote economic development and poverty reduction. Governments and international donors frequently play a brokering role, both in terms of finance and matching up private firms with NGOs and/or local communities (for example, USAID’s Global Development Alliance). Driving norms include empowerment, equitable distribution of benefits and inclusion of marginalised groups such as women and indigenous peoples.

Horton, Prain and Thiele (2009), in their extensive review of partnership literature, identify a similar range of purposes, namely knowledge creation and transfer, service delivery, capacity development, policy influence and improved accountability/governance, but do not elaborate further on the nature of these partnership purposes.

### 3. References

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