



CONCEPT NOTE

Building Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Background

Strategic alliances in the form of cross - sectoral partnerships between private companies, public sector and civil society organisations are becoming a backbone for initiatives aiming at sustainable development. The process of working in partnerships is a structured and guided 'cross model conversation' – an exchange of views between people who hold very different viewpoints and often have diverse, if not contradicting interests. Partnerships are successful when the different and sometimes contrary positions and interests are brought to join behind a common goal. The best solutions emerge dialogically. In high quality partnerships differences, even conflicts, hold the potential for innovative solutions and the achievement of goals that ultimately benefit all. The dialogic methodology is an innovative, effective and future-oriented way of facilitating and building partnerships.

Partnerships often chart unknown territory. Different forms of organisations with subsequently different internal structures, mandates, purposes, values and decision-making procedures meet in a common space, often for the first time. Different, sometimes contradicting worldviews need to be mutually understood and mediated. Different forms of planning need to be negotiated. Different dialogue expectations need to be managed. When people of different backgrounds decide to move into such output-oriented constructive cooperation they need to develop their communicative competency. This is greatly supported by dialogue facilitators, dialogue coordinators or multi-stakeholder brokers: people who understand the different worlds earn the trust of the different stakeholders and are able to move between the worlds. A key success issue for dialogue coordinators is their ability to design and facilitate effective communication processes.

Cross sectoral partnerships bring together different civil, private and/or political representatives in a structured dialogue in order to:

- Get the full picture – by listening to and integrating the different perspectives.
- Ensure the representation of different interests, making them transparent.
- Bind together different competencies and resources
- Increase the quality of opinion building
- Build trust and transparency
- Increase the credibility of decision-making processes
- Define a common goal.
- Increase the commitment to the goal
- Plan joint activities.
- Increase the learning ability of the partners
- Increase the likelihood of implementation
- Achieve durable results

Process

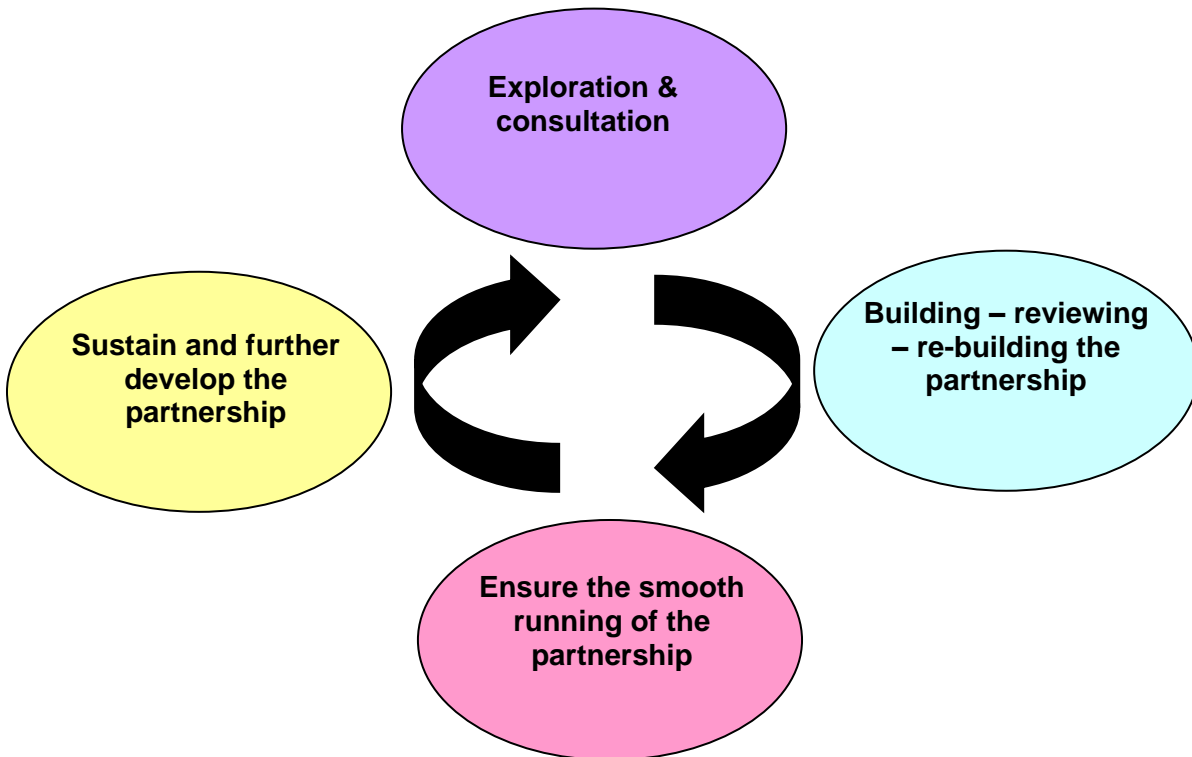
Step 1: Learn about and take into account stakeholder interests

Every stakeholder has different motivations for entering into a multi-stakeholder partnership. The table below shows an overview of motivations for building cross-sector partnerships.

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|-----------------------|--|--|
| Public Sector | <p><i>Motivation: Rule of Law</i> <i>Interest in building partnerships:</i> <i>Opportunity to establish a broader platform to promote and implement issues for the common good – e. g. standards, codes of conduct.</i> <i>Greater efficiency in the implementation of governmental (legal) and development services.</i></p> | <p><i>Rights-oriented</i> <i>Access, Information, Stability, Legitimacy</i></p> |
| Private Sector | <p><i>Motivation: Growth</i> <i>Interest in building partnerships:</i> <i>Gain of reputation</i> <i>Implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives</i> <i>Ensure long-term market share</i> <i>Risk mitigation</i></p> | <p><i>Profit-oriented</i> <i>Creative, productive, targeted, fast</i></p> |
| Civil Society | <p><i>Motivation: Ensure social development</i> <i>Interest in building partnerships:</i> <i>Influence the private sector and government – beyond campaigning and charity.</i> <i>Efficient implementation of social and development goals</i></p> | <p><i>Value-oriented</i> <i>Reacts to injustice and concerns of overall society, provokes attention</i></p> |

Step 2: Work along the generic multi-stakeholder cycle

Phases in multi-stakeholder partnerships



Phase 1: Exploration & consultation

- Clarify the idea dialogically
- Sell the idea – test the common ground
 - Create first resonance, identify common goals, build a group of promoters
- Understand the context
 - Exploration and exchange with potential partners, identify competencies and potential of possible partners and clarify different interests and motivation, be aware of potential areas of conflict.
- Initiate the partnership
 - Generate first structured dialogue, get commitment, build container for issues to tackle

Phase 2: Building and reviewing and re-building the partnership

- Clarify goals and resources
- Clarify roles, structures and procedures
 - Make common and individual goals transparent
 - State agreements
 - Develop a steering / governance structure, assign tasks, apply timing
- Establish an effective but simple governance systems
 - In a structured dialogue, confirm the goals, resources, roles and tasks
 - Implement a simple participatory monitoring system
 - Design a simple governance structure that defines the decision-making process
- Review the partnership and draw conclusions on necessary improvements
 - Critical review and statement on progress
 - Be aware of transparent and just distribution of the cooperation rent
 - Agree on further monitoring and review

Phase 3: Ensure the smooth running of the partnership

- Ensure transparency and communication
 - Implement, monitor and evaluate
- Celebrate success!
 - Make positive experience visible
 - Make good practices transparent and produce knowledge products
- Establish feedback mechanisms
 - Allow for feedback/evaluation on a regular basis
 - Adjust the implementation strategy if necessary
 - Potentially allow for external feedback / evaluation

Phase 4: Sustain and further develop the partnership

- Build a new container
 - Possibly involve new stakeholders
 - Take it to the next level
- Institutionalize the partnership (if desired and necessary), e.g., legal form, processes and standards in accordance with quality management and state regulations
 - Define results and processes that should sustain over time
 - Design measures to strengthen the sustainability of results over time
- Promote learning opportunities
 - Promote topic focused encounter and facilitate knowledge sharing
 - Apply the concept of Communities of Practice

General Aspects for the Successful Design and Implementation of Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues and Partnerships:

- Create a context of trust and continuity in order to enable the partners and stakeholders to engage in open, free and honest communication. Promote and facilitate face-to-face and virtual interaction.
- Be aware about the important role that dialogue coordinators or multi-stakeholder brokers – internal and external - play. Make sure that moderators / facilitators are explicitly accepted by the stakeholders.
- Integrate the tangible goals of the Multi-Stakeholder-Partnership into an overarching thematic frame that reflects the joint vision – e.g., roadmap to sustainable development.
- Make sure that objectives and goals of the Multi-Stakeholder-Partnership are matching the existing interests of the participating stakeholders and their respective organizations.
- Be prepared and open to understand the different value systems of the various stakeholders involved. Promote the setup of a joint code of conduct that makes the joint vision more explicit and provides orientation for communication and interaction, participation and governance.
- Establish feedback mechanisms and a simple monitoring system to review periodically the progress and the results.

Source: SEED International Practitioner Workshop and Conference: Building Partnerships for Sustainable Development. October 2007

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