

## Reading materials

### A. THE CHALLENGES OF PARTNERING

Paper compiled by the Facilitation Team as preparatory reading for the **Making Partnerships Effective** event

Based on a dictionary definition, the term ‘partnership’<sup>1</sup> can be understood as: *an ongoing working relationship where risks and benefits are shared*. But how often do the arrangements we call ‘partnerships’ actually adhere to this description? In reality, do those operating as ‘partners’ explore what the term partnership means or arrive at a shared definition of the term as a basis for their work together? Where the answer to these questions is ‘no’ or ‘not really’, the partnership may be setting itself up to fail since there is a serious risk that each person involved will be working single-mindedly to their own definition of what a partnership should be, based on their individual assumptions, preconceptions and expectations.

This is not a good starting point.

#### Does your TWG currently have an agreed definition of your partnership?

A partnership is not simply another word for ‘business as usual’ it is a fundamentally different way of operating. The term partnership implies that each partner is involved in:

- **Co-creating** the partnership’s activities
- **Contributing** resources to the partnership (albeit of different kinds)
- **Committing** to shared decision-making and mutual accountability

#### How fully does your TWG partnership conform to these practices?

Of course partnerships can be very different. They are highly adaptive to the cultural, economic, social and environmental context – as, of course, they should be. Partnerships can also operate at different levels, international, national as well as local, and their focus can range from policy-making to grass-roots implementation. So it is perfectly correct to say that every partnership is unique to its culture, context and membership – as, indeed, every TWG is unique.

For this reason, there is little merit in measuring or comparing one partnership with another and there is even less merit in trying to push partnerships into a formula. Every partnership needs to be created and to evolve as appropriate to the specific tasks, circumstances and challenges they were set up to address.

---

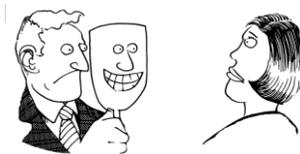
<sup>1</sup> The term ‘partnership’ is used here to suggest a multi-stakeholder partnership for sustainable development

Having said that, there is a real and helpful distinction between a **partnership** (which is unique) and the **process of partnering** (which is generic). Observations of and work with multi-stakeholder partnerships over a period of 20 years and in many different contexts make it clear that there are some common process elements in all those partnerships that work well – by ‘working well’ we mean they are efficient, effective and bring multiple and often unexpected benefits.

It is clear that effective partnerships are those that are also values-driven. In a partnership-building workshop in India in 1992, one of the participants created the following ironic cartoons<sup>2</sup> – as a way of challenging behaviours and encouraging a values-based approach.



Is this equity?



Is this transparency?



Is this mutual benefit?

The core values of equity, transparency and mutual benefit have been found time and again to be fundamental to partnerships working to their maximum capacity because, over time, they become respectful, trust-worthy / trusting and sustainable.

It is interesting that in our preliminary meetings with TWG members, comments like those cited below were made quite frequently:

*“There is the lack of agreement on partnership values, or where these exist, there is often a lack of consistent implementation of the values we have agreed”*

*“We have to learn to put our own agency hats on the back seat... the partnership has to work together for the greater good of all”*

*“We operate too often from a point of denial with important issues needing discussion getting deflected”*

But we also heard from many partners a strong wish to move into applying these kinds of values more strongly in their day-to-day TWG partnering work.

But agreeing and adhering to values are not enough! Partnerships can be made or destroyed by the way partners behave and communicate with each other. There are a number of key partnering skills that, when applied, can make all the difference to the functioning of a partnership. These include:

- **Interest-based negotiation** where agreement is reached based on an understanding and consideration of each partner’s underlying priorities (the ‘drivers’)

<sup>2</sup> Cartoons by Guy Venables, copyright: The Partnering Initiative

- **Facilitation and brokering** where partners are assisted in working collaboratively and in managing the decision-making process effectively
- **Active listening and plain speaking** giving time to hearing each other's views and being clear in communicating your own

**What skills do your current TWG partners currently have and what further skills are needed for your partnership to be more effective and productive?**

Preliminary meetings with TWG representatives reveal that there is: a growing desire to understand each other's drivers and constraints; growing confidence in the secretariats and appreciation of those that act as TWG 'champions' and, above all, an increasing desire to move beyond 'rhetoric' into practical / implementation mode.

*"We need a fresh way to look at old issues and build on what we have done so far in new ways"*

A change process always needs leadership and since partnerships change over time, they require particular attention to leadership roles. In other partnerships it has been helpful to identify different types of role as part of the change management process. These are:

Change **leaders** – those who exhibit leadership behaviours that clearly signal the need and vision for change, integrates change with strategy and provides resources

Change **advocates** – those who actively promote and support the partnership through actions and words

Change **agents** – those who make the change happen, champion the change, build the case and measure the results)

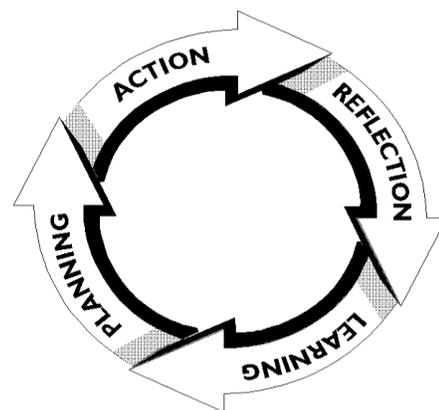
**Have you adequately defined the changes your TWG wants to achieve?**

**Do you have a clear mandate for the change?**

**Do you demonstrate your commitment to change through your words and actions?**

Leadership and change management are both best supported by adopting a 'learning' culture within the partnership. In fact some key writers about partnership argue that it is only those partnerships that develop a capacity to learn and change that are able to be flexible and responsive in the light of changing needs and conditions.

But leadership and learning are not the only challenges a partnership faces. There are others – both internal and external to the partnership. Common partnering challenges within a partnership include: partners not giving the partnership or its projects priority; unresolved disagreements; approaches that are too divergent; differences in organisational culture; different delivery timescales; and too many changes of key personnel.



In our meetings with TWG representatives, it is clear that these challenges also apply. These have been captured in the SWOT analysis that accompanies this paper.

Other common challenges are those that impact the partnership but are outside its immediate sphere of influence. These types of challenge include: scepticism about the partnership from key stakeholders; unwillingness or inability to engage with the partnership by others and / or an inadequate or even hostile enabling environment.

### **What key internal and external challenges does your TWG partnership currently face?**

It can be hard for partners to retain a focus on the ambitious goal of the TWGs – the implementation of effective aid – when the day-to-day challenges are numerous, time consuming and seemingly insurmountable. But experience suggests that careful attention to the partnering process can make a huge difference. This is the premise under-pinning the September meeting.

And, of course, there have been many achievements of the TWGs and these should be recognised and celebrated. (These are also captured in the SWOT analysis.)

### **What are the achievements of your TWG partnership so far and what will ‘success’ look like in 5 years time?**

Partnerships need to be both realistic and ambitious. Above all, they need to be outcome, outputs and sustainability focused. Achievements cited by partnerships elsewhere include changes in capacity and impacting policy alongside more practical deliverables, for example:

- Meeting development / reform targets
- Building sustainable approaches to development (beyond the life of the partnership)
- Changing mainstream systems and structures to be more efficient
- Influencing policy and strategy to be more effective
- Building confidence, competencies, skills in all the agencies involved as partners
- Better cross-cultural communication
- Unexpected levels of innovation in tackling difficult challenges

As we said earlier, whilst there may be many common features in the partnering process, no single partnership is like any other. All partnerships are highly context-specific and will invariably be a reflection of the surrounding circumstances. Sometimes it is necessary to settle for a ‘good enough’ partnership until the surrounding conditions change. But this should not be used as an excuse for making no effort since the partnership itself can help to influence and bring about change in the surrounding conditions.

Based on observation of many different partnerships, it is becoming clear that partnering works best when those involved...

- Take time to build strong working relationships
- Develop genuine concern for each other's underlying interests
- Do more listening than talking
- Develop good communication skills at all levels
- Deal with difficulties rather than ignoring them
- Balance a flexible with a rigorous approach
- Focus on practical and sustainable results

We have compiled this paper in order to provide some initial insights into partnering drawn from international partnering experience as well as to provide you with an opportunity for objective reflection about the nature of your partnerships – what challenges they may pose and what benefits they can bring. We hope that you will see this as a starting point for your own assessment about how well your TWG partnership is functioning and what things may need to change in order to be more effective and productive.

We also want to give you an indication of the kinds of issues we will explore during the September meeting – to which we want you all to feel free to contribute fully and frankly.

## **B. WORKING TOGETHER**

### **Summary SWOT<sup>3</sup> analysis of the current status of the various TWG partnerships**

Views of RGC and Development Partners drawn from 1-2-1 and small group discussions during the preliminary phase of the project

---

<sup>3</sup> Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

## WORKING TOGETHER: Perceived Strengths

<p><b>Points of Agreement:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. TWG structure provides a regular and official channel for exchange of information between the 2 groups</li> <li>2. The Secretariats are playing an effective role in networking and providing support to TWGs</li> <li>3. Overtime we have seen more effective working relationships and increased goodwill:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Greater focus on SWAP and alignment with government programme strategies</li> <li>b. Examples of donor harmonisation</li> <li>c. Increased national ownership</li> <li>d. Increase in outputs</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Contributions made to strengthening capacity</li> <li>5. MIS now in place (= foundation for managing for results)</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Government Partners also said:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Greater mainstreaming of some key issues</li> <li>▪ Improved mutual accountability</li> <li>▪ Moving towards management by results</li> <li>▪ Commitment to trying to improve the various mechanisms</li> <li>▪ Experienced staff: have been involved since the beginning</li> </ul>	<p><b>Development Partners also said:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Working to an agreed set of principles</li> <li>▪ Better understanding of people's constraints</li> <li>▪ Pooling of funds – a much better approach</li> <li>▪ Better aid flow information</li> <li>▪ Leadership and facilitation provided by CDC is good</li> <li>▪ There is more transparency</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observations from the project team</b></p> <p>Where the TWG's are experienced as working well, there are enthusiastic reports of real progress and change. Government Partners feel more 'equal' in the relationship and value the increasing sense of mutual accountability as well as stronger relationships and increased commitment to making the TWG's work. Similarly, Development Partners appreciate greater openness and willingness to improve mechanisms as well as to adhere to shared principles and goals.</p> <p>However, these perceived strengths only apply to some of the TWGs, not all. There was a marked discrepancy between those that were seen as productive and 'on course' and those that were not.</p> <p>It was also interesting that there seemed to be a general lack of enthusiasm for sharing good practice and what was working well between TWGs.</p> <p>It was also clear that, on the whole, the cross-cutting TWGs felt far less satisfied with their achievements.</p>	

## WORKING TOGETHER: Perceived Weaknesses

<b>Points of Agreement:</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of appreciation of the investment required for TWGs to work effectively and low prioritisation of TWG activities</li> <li>2. While there has been more alignment with SWAPs and greater donor coordination:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Overall approach is still fragmented</li> <li>b. Lack of national ownership</li> <li>c. TWGs lack authority and/or skills to influence others</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Over-emphasis on process versus implementation and achieving results; multiple monitoring processes waste time and resources</li> <li>4. Incomplete and inaccurate reporting leads to lack of programmatic information</li> <li>5. Have not worked out how to manage competing priorities</li> </ol>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Government Partners also said:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Failing to use MIS effectively and consistently</li> <li>▪ DPs still not making decisions based on national priorities</li> <li>▪ Failing to get the cross-cutting issues properly addressed</li> <li>▪ Poor representation (in cross-cutting TWGs) from line ministries</li> <li>▪ Lack of mutual accountability</li> <li>▪ Coordinating with other ministries causes delays</li> <li>▪ Challenges in monitoring results</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Development Partners also said:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Little or no implementation of principles</li> <li>▪ Same (few) people do everything</li> <li>▪ Lack of champions in the ministries</li> <li>▪ This way of working is not comfortable or understood</li> <li>▪ Players can't see the potential gains</li> <li>▪ TWGs often only seen by ministries as a mechanism to leverage funding</li> <li>▪ We do not acknowledge our successes</li> <li>▪ Lack of willingness of some partners on both sides to give up their control, power and agendas</li> <li>▪ Little or no debating of issues / meeting agendas tend to be formulaic</li> <li>▪ Disconnect between those donors involved in TWG and those not</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observations from the project team</b></p> <p>The perceived weaknesses as described here are very clear – though there may be a bias to the views of those in the weaker TWGs (i.e. those from TWGs that are perceived as working well did not identify many of these weaknesses). At some level these comments seem to reflect the experience (and for some surprise) that working collaboratively in this way takes more investment of time and energy, commitment and willingness to share ownership and decision-making than had been anticipated. The issues raised here will inform the event in September, since failure to address them risks repetitive behaviour patterns and stagnation in terms of achievements and productivity.</p>	

## WORKING TOGETHER: Perceived Opportunities

<p><b>Points of Agreement:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Potential for CDC to focus on more cross-cutting issues</li> <li>2. To strengthen learning and linkages between TWGs</li> <li>3. To enhance capacity to make these partnerships more effective and build leadership strength</li> <li>4. To mobilise support from and engage different civil society actors, the private sector and 'new' donors</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Government Partners also said:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving the collection and analysis of data to help measure and monitor achievements</li> <li>▪ Systematic approaches to reviewing TWGs and improving where necessary</li> <li>▪ As public administration and D&amp;D reform happens the TWG work will become easier</li> <li>▪ Building on the growing political stability and development of human resources</li> <li>▪ Involving academia in these processes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Development partners also said:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Further develop basket funding</li> <li>▪ Develop sub-groups to: air issues before meetings; make decisions</li> <li>▪ Develop a 'whole system' approach to partnership capacity building</li> <li>▪ Build further political will to support a holistic approach</li> <li>▪ Get all those involved in TWG to better agree division of labour</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observations from the project team</b></p> <p>There was a notable focus on capacity-building so as to be able to partner more productively and efficiently and on being more systematic in approach (reviews, division of labour, monitoring etc). Leadership and 'political will' are both potentially key issues for the September event.</p> <p>These responses also raise interesting suggestions about CDC's role and its potential to act as 'broker' or intermediary, for example, to help the cross-cutting TWGs to work better or to increase its role in linking the TWGs in order to share learning and experience in practical ways.</p>	

## WORKING TOGETHER: Perceived Threats

<b>Points of Agreement</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Over-reliance on short-term external advisors and experts can undermine the TWGs</li> <li>2. New DPs are driven by a different set of drivers and are not aligning with the process</li> <li>3. Unless we can develop a mechanism to move away from ‘blame’ and talk about contentious issues, the TWGs will continue to stall</li> </ol>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Government partners also said:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ DPs and ministries continuing to pursue individual policy objectives without assessing their impacts on other programmes</li> <li>▪ Civil service and other central reforms take too much time or don’t work as hoped</li> <li>▪ Lack of trust in government systems leads to DPs developing own systems: thus perpetuating the weaknesses</li> <li>▪ Hard to convince donors that capacity development is a process that needs long-term and systematic commitment and investment</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Development partners also said:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of financial and fiscal controls in place</li> <li>▪ Salary supplements issue not resolved</li> <li>▪ Limited or reducing authority of CDC</li> <li>▪ DP differences of approach jeopardising partnership arrangements (e.g. Global Fund)</li> <li>▪ Lack of capacity to commit to predictable multi-year funding</li> <li>▪ Too many parallel monitoring and other processes – wastes time and resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observations from the project team</b></p> <p>Two significant issues that impact negatively and threaten the TWGs are to do with actual or perceived weaknesses in fiscal controls and administrative reforms taking too long.</p> <p>There is confusion and concern about the interface between the TWGs / secretariats and external advisors. There is concern that some advisors/experts are not directly relevant or responsible to the partnership. There is disappointment and frustration that some of the newer donors and development agencies do not want to work within the TWG structure. In other words, activities outside the TWG structure were seen as a serious risk to the development and impact of the TWGs.</p> <p>Other more ‘internal’ risks are to do with wastage (e.g. too many parallel systems operating) and with frustration at a tendency to avoid addressing internal challenges head on.</p>	