

INTRAC Talk on Equitable Partnership

The key issues I have been asked to address:

1. Downward accountability: from NNGOs to their partners in the South.
2. How can NNGOs achieve equitable partnership as a donor?
3. How to develop an exit strategy towards sustainable partnership?

Approach to INTRAC Input

- This session will mostly be presentation (20 slides).
- Will stop at a couple of points for some discussion.
- More scope for questions in the next session.
- Will try and keep it practical, giving some examples along the way.
- I should emphasise that these are my personal views, and on this topic, it is hard to say that there are 'correct' answers.

Background

- INTRAC – International NGO Training and Research Centre – started in 1991 to work on civil society strengthening.
- Issues around partnership have been a preoccupation since 1990s.
- After the initial flurry of activity, debates grew a bit quieter, but now it seems to be back on the agenda.
- It increasingly features in INTRAC's work, as a topic in itself, or as part of other work.

What is Meant by ‘Partnership’?

- Partnership is a widely used, but often debated term.
- It covers a range of relationships. These all involve elements of two or more organisation coming together to achieve shared objectives.
- However, beyond this, there are a range of examples from sub contracting to fully equal relationships.
- Alan Fowler breaks such relationships down into: Partner; Institutional Supporter; Programme Supporter; Project Funder; Development Ally.

Changing Context for Partnerships (1)

- Changing nature of aid programmes – reducing number of countries supported, lower budgets.
- Paris Agenda emphasises harmonisation of aid and local ownership.
- Greater focus on ‘results based management’.
- More international families of agencies (Oxfam, Save the Children, ActionAid – forming and moving closer together).

Changing Context for Partnerships (2)

- Greater emphasis on strategies, policies, professional standards.
- Increasingly complex multi stakeholder arrangements.
- More delivery of funding through in-country basket funds.
- INGOs worrying – what value do they add? Will they be by-passed in the future?

Equal/Equitable Relationships

Taking the second question first...

- Equal: the same as, evenly balanced.

- Equitable: reasonable, fair, just.

- There is a lot of rhetoric about equality (especially in the North), but is true equality possible, where there is a transfer of resources in one direction?
Only in rare circumstances.

- Equitable is more realistic. Why is it important?
a) In terms of our values; b) Better chance of achieving our ultimate aims.

What are we trying to achieve through partnership?

- Instrumental: to achieve certain social development outcomes at community level or at the policy advocacy level. This might be starving people fed, credit provided, new legislation passed.
- Intrinsic (normative): a strong civil society is an important outcome in itself.

Where is the balance between these two in practice?

Key Aspects of Equitability

Ask: what is inequitable? – do the opposite.

- Lack of respect.
- Lack of transparency.
- Have unreasonable expectations of/make unreasonable demands on partners.
- Do not provide for core organisational development and costs.
- Do not allow for changes in circumstances.
- Leave organisation in weakened and vulnerable state at the end of a partnership.
- Not listening and responding to partners' issues. 9

Keystone Survey

INTR▲C

http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/sites/default/files/Keystone%20partner%20survey%20Jan2011_0.pdf

NNGOs are generally **good** at:

- Respectful, helpful, capable staff.
- Comfortable to discuss problems.
- Understanding the sector we work in.

NNGOs are generally **not good** at:

- Allowing flexibility to make changes.
- Rarely allow southern partners to be involved in shaping their (NNGOs') strategies.
- Plan for exit strategies

Priority Areas for Support - 1 (from Southern partner perspective)

- Southern partners generally want NNGOs to help them become strong, independent, better funded and influential organisations. They do **not** so much like being contracted to implement Northern NGOs' projects and programmes.
- The key features of support wanted are:
 - a) funding; b) promoting partners's work;
 - c) capacity building (organisational rather than project focussed).

Priority Areas for Support - 2 **(from Southern partner perspective)**

- Accessing other sources of support
- Raising profile of local partners.
- Sharing lessons learned

Not so important:

- Strengthen technical capacity.
- Management capacity.

Downward Accountability - 1

- What is accountability? It is not just about being open and sharing information (transparency).
- Accountability is the acknowledgment of responsibility for decisions, and being answerable to others for the resulting consequences.
- Accountability features a lot in organisational rhetoric, but is hard to put into practice.
- Factors which inhibit: time pressure, needs for upward accountability, donor requirements, financial years, procedures etc..

Downward Accountability - 2

How to put it into practice:

- Promote the right environment – encourage partners to express their concerns; be ready to accept criticism;
- Regular structured interactions – ‘partners forum’.
- Complaints procedure.
- Include feedback in monitoring and evaluation.
- Don’t ‘punish’ those who complain.
- Challenge: are partners accountable to those downwards of themselves?

Downward Accountability - 3

Questions about downwards accountability:

- How do deal with partner complaints or concerns?
- Are partners always 'right'? What to do when NNGOs think they are 'wrong'?
- How to include non-partners (potential partners)?
- Should an external facilitator be involved?

Developing an Exit Strategy - 1

Clarification: we are talking about sustaining the partner and its work, rather than the partnership per se.

- In general, NNGOs are really bad at this – it frequently features in partnership reviews and evaluations.
- Why? Is it impossible.
- Well it is difficult: not a priority, does not easily fit within ‘results based’ and short terms planning frameworks, it is somewhat negative (we prefer not to think about it – a bit like a ‘pre-nup’).

Developing an Exit Strategy - 2

- Be open about it (when the partnership is likely to end, what will happen afterwards).
- Plan for it from the start.
- Address organisational issues (management, internal, funding) as part of overall partnership approach.

Developing an Exit Strategy - 3

Practical steps:

- Define what a post-aided partner will look like and what it needs to achieve it.
- In doing this, consider the nature of the partner.
- Fundraising support.
- Raising profile – recommendations.
- Strengthen accountability systems.

Developing an Exit Strategy - 4

Afterwards:

- Keep in touch.
- Invite to meetings.
- Visit – stay friends.
- Provide non-financial support if possible.

Need for more research on how to do this – what works and what doesn't.

Conclusions

- Partnership is not easy.
- There are no conclusive answers to many of these questions.
- The context is constantly evolving.
- Keep asking and discussing these questions.
- Raise them with donors too.