

Best Practices on Partnership
By
Dr. John O. Kakonge
UN Resident Coordinator

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As we have heard from the keynote speaker and the discussant, the concept of “partnership” in development assistance has been constantly debated for years. Many partnerships have been forged between various actors, including government, civil society, NGOs, UN and the private sector, with varying results. Some have been extremely successful, others have been fraught with difficulties.

The dictionary defines the term “partner” as a “sharer or partaker, an associate or an equal”. Thus, a successful, effective partnership is one where each partner exhibits commitment, trust, honesty, respect and ownership.

Examples can be drawn from some of the South East Asia countries whose governments have established effective partnerships in the area of development cooperation. These partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect. Regular honest and frank discussions are held during which the governments listen to and respect the opinions of their partners. Take for example, Malaysia and Singapore, two countries that have both accepted ownership for their development process and demonstrated their serious commitment to moving this process forward. Proposals for development cooperation are prepared by the governments and widely discussed before prioritizing the activities to be implemented. Most of these proposals are co-financed by the governments and their respective partners, such as commercial banks or bilateral donors, with each party contributing equally. The responsibilities and modalities for implementation are clearly defined and shared amongst the partners. The commitment of each partner, through his or her contribution, promotes full ownership. As a result of such successful partnerships over the last ten years, these two countries have significantly progressed in terms of development.

Another example is the Onchocerciasis Control Programme (River Blindness), which started in 1974 in West Africa. This programme has developed into one of the largest and most successful examples of regional partnership and cooperation for disease control. This success is due mainly to the commitment of the respective governments, with each contributing both financially and in-kind to the project; the equal involvement of all parties in the decision-making process; and the secondment of professional staff from the member countries affected.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I agree with the keynote speaker that some partnerships work whilst others are very difficult. But does this mean that we should forget about partnership all together? If not, then how can we improve partnership to meet the challenges of this new millennium?

I would like to highlight some of the elements of best practices for effective, sustainable partnerships:

1. Commitment. The most important element of a successful partnership is one of commitment. Each partner must be totally committed to the project.
2. Willingness. In addition to being committed, partners must be willing to contribute equally to the partnership. Lop-sided partnerships, such as projects all resources are provided externally, are not true partnerships. Rather, a true partnership is one where there is equal contribution to the project, equal acceptance of the responsibilities, equal ownership of the project and equal share of the benefits.
3. Implementation. Partners can be committed and willing but they must also be prepared to implement the project within a common set of rules, regulations and agreements.
4. Trust. A partnership involves more than simply working together. People in partnership must trust one another.
5. Ownership. One of the most powerful motives for a partnership is self-interest. Each partner should have an equal stake in and accept joint ownership of the project.
6. Transparency. In any partnership there must be a level of honesty and transparency. Partners should be accountable to each other and to the target beneficiaries they are ultimately serving.
7. Business Culture. A partnership needs to be based on a business-like culture in terms of commitment and time. Too often, a partnership fails because the partners do not take the time to make it work. If you had your own business, you would treat it very seriously, devoting time and energy to making it work, ensuring that scheduled activities are responded to in a timely manner. This same business culture needs to be applied to partnership in Government and other projects, rather than adopting a business as usual attitude.

So, in conclusion, I want to say that partnership is the one of the most realistic and effective ways of getting things done. However, the success of a such partnership depends on you and me. As partners there are responsibilities and commitments that must be assumed, both in terms of what the Government and the development partners should be doing, and also regarding the inputs that are required to make the partnership work. We all need to be committed to make our partnerships succeed, and that means taking our responsibilities seriously. Let us, therefore, re-examine our commitment to partnership and see how we can improve it to meet the challenges of this new millennium.

Thank you.