

## Learning Points: WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

### Evaluating our ability *to influence* to achieve better policy outcomes

In October 2005 PARC held its annual seminar which looked at partnerships that aim to reduce inequity and poverty. Speakers and participants discussed a number of aspects of working in and evaluating partnerships. Some of these have been highlighted below including:

- Conceptually *defining* a partnership
- *Principles* of sound partnership working
- *Monitoring and evaluating* a partnership
- Tools and approaches for *monitoring and evaluating* partnerships; and

Participants and speakers drew on their experience as practitioners in monitoring and evaluation, academics, members of donor and international aid agencies, members of NGOs and public servants working in social inclusion and community regeneration in the UK.

This learning note captures some of the recurrent themes from the presentations and discussion. We hope that these lessons might be useful for those evaluating and working in partnerships. The full presentations can be found on our website at [www.parcinfo.org](http://www.parcinfo.org)

### The term “Partnership” – is this important?

Speakers and participants raised the following points:

- Labelling a relationship a “partnership” without being clear about the nature of the relationship can be misleading and not particularly useful for monitoring and evaluation purposes.
- The term Partnership implies equality. Not all relationships formed to achieve pro-poor policy outcomes are equal and indeed they may not necessarily need to be equal.
- “Influence” is generally achieved through building strong relationships. Measuring influence can be achieved through measuring the strength of a relationship.

### What makes a good partnership?

- **Knowing when partnership is the best mode of operating.** We now often work in partnerships because it is either required by legislation, considered “good/best practice”, or because single actors alone can’t achieve the outcomes we desire. There is often an assumption that a partnership is always the most effective, inclusive and efficient means of achieving policy outcomes. This is true in many cases, but the pros and cons of working in partnerships as the best means of achieving a policy outcome should be considered at the outset. Experience tells us that partnership working takes considerable investment, and there may be other options. Building relationships and working in partnerships are, for most organisations, a means to an ends. That is, they are formed to bring about change.

- **Knowing your own organisational culture.** To work effectively in partnerships, organisations need to understand how their own culture and practices impact on and influence the relationship. Working effectively in a partnership may require a change in organisational culture.
- **Building an identity for the partnership** A partnership needs an identity. This can be achieved through “branding” such as being members of the “Make Poverty History Campaign”, or through giving the partnership or process a label distinct from its organisational home such as “European Partnership for Social Inclusion”. This can help create loyalty, create a sense of mutual interests, loyalty and alignment to the partnerships principles.
- **Clear governance structures** Having transparent, clear governance and accountability structures can help facilitate faster decision making.
- **Resourcing the Partnership appropriately.** As mentioned above partnership working can be resource intensive. To make the partnership work all parties have to invest. Having more resources (and sometimes partners within) a partnership can increase the impact it has. This is particularly the case for partnerships formed for advocacy purposes. However, the obvious downside is the more partners, the more complex the governance and accountability structures.
- **Being aware of barriers to inclusion in partnerships** Not having enough resources can exclude potential members into the partnership. Partners need to have the time (or the money to pay for the time) to enter into the partnership on a level playing field. Often when government wants to partner with Voluntary Organisations and NGOs, they often don't have the funds to access the partnership. Similarly, partnerships are commonly set up to have policy impact on a particular target group. This may be achieved by working with intermediaries such as service delivery agents, who can be difficult to get representation from, due to time constraints as they are delivering services. This presents issues both for the government in terms of partnership accountability and for the target group whose interests may not be best represented. The bottom line is that not all stakeholders have equal status in a partnership. It very much depends on their relationship to the partnership goals and their ability to participate in the partnerships.
- **Keeping the partnership alive through learning and analysis.** Partnerships transform over time. It is important for the partners to reflect on how effectively the partnership is working, what is making it work well, what doesn't work so well and the ways in which the partnership has been successful. Partners need to adopt a culture of learning from their mistakes and successes and taking this on-board in future partnership working.

### So what about monitoring and evaluating partnerships?

- **Focus on both process and outcomes.** Partnerships are formed for a purpose. Therefore when monitoring or evaluating a partnership we need to assess whether the partnership has achieved, or is achieving, what it set out to. This is in terms of the desired policy or programme changes the partnership set out to achieve and ultimately impact these have on the target population. To be able to understand whether the partnership is working efficiently we need to look at the different aspects of the relationship itself. Is there a shared agenda? Is the

partnership purpose and lifespan clear? Are the roles and responsibilities of each partner clear? Do clear management and accountability structures for the partnership exist? What human and financial resources are the partners committing to the partnership? What do the partners do to share learning and knowledge? Do these extend into the partner's broader organisation or operations?

- **Need to measure over time.** Partnerships evolve over time. Any evaluation of a partnership should be mindful of considering the evolution of the partnership and strength of partnership over a longer period of time, rather than simply a snapshot.
- **When evaluating partnership as a “means” to an end** (black box evaluation) identify indicators, collect data, assess contribution, assess value for money (consider alternative to partnership, compare total costs of partnership with other benefits).
- **When evaluating partnership as an ends in itself** look at values, capacity, process, and impact
- **Consider that partnerships often don't have measures of performance,** learning, and innovation (although the participating organisations may have)
- **You should consider the assumption** that partnership working is always the most effective mode.
- **Consider that trying to control** through monitoring can undermine effective relationships

### **Tools for evaluating partnerships**

Some of the tools for evaluating partnerships discussed by presenters include:

- VSO tool that can analyse the evolution of partnerships over time.
- USAID model for evaluating partnerships as an end in itself
- DFID Brazil Partnership evaluation tool
- Peer reviews, Tensiometer tool
- Link to AccountAbility models

If you would like further information on evaluating partnerships please visit our website at [www.parcinfo.org](http://www.parcinfo.org)