South-North Partnership for Development

Another decent mode of NGO co-operation and a process orientated approach to mutual capacity building

Insight gained and challenges experienced by MS during a decade

Partnership concept

In the early fifties, the British Mandate Administration violently evicted more than 3000 WaMeru from their land in N'gare Nanyuki in Tanganyika. Their church and homes were burned down and the people dumped far away in semi-arid surrounding given to them as compensation.

 It did not help that the people had the law on their side. It did not help that they complained to the United Nations (Denmark voted against a resolution supporting their rights). An overriding principle was at stake: Development - an euphemism for European settlers taking over the land for cattle ranches that could flood the world market with canned beef.

In the justifications for the theft, the British also depicted a new development principle that they had invented, and to which the individual, African farmers should bow down. The principle was "Partnership between various peoples" for the sake of "developing the territory."

Some compared this notion of joint venture with the "partnership of a rider and his horse."

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In the beginning of the 90ties MS introduced the Partnership as a cornerstone of new strategy (MS in the South). Many of us proclaimed the idea as something very special and brand new, but we soon realised that it had been in use for some time. And we later saw the hazy term spreading and being misused in the development jargon.

However, when MS focused on Partnership it was clear to us that we wanted to stress a decent mode of inter-action with local organisations - to bring to life in reality what we felt were basic values behind our development work. We did not want to work *through* the partners, but together with them. When speaking about Partnership we are process-orientated as opposed to results-orientated, but are also convinced that we create better and sustainable results by this mode of co-operation. Our definition[1] is not only about participation; we also have shared control over decisions and resources (empowerment) in mind. We talk about a process of partnership between two or more organisations when they engage in:

A **long-term** relationship marked by **mutual trust**. The organisations **share responsibility** for **joining resources** to achieve a **common goal** for their **mutual benefit** and **empowerment.**

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[1]	Another definition: The presence of "constructive intent" among the involved parties to plan and act together in order to achieve a common goal, defined by the context of a shared agenda and a mutual commitment to empowerment.

Background for policy shift

We had many reasons for changing. Running a volunteer programme (DVS) had become problematic as the need for gap-fillers was diminishing, and the programme was increasingly dissociated from the realities - it was too little embedded in the local setting. In the late eighties is was normal that the MS Annual Meeting in Tanzania was conducted in Danish, and one could partake in interesting *all-white* volunteer discussions where programme strategies were made under the heading: <u>What does Tanzania need?</u>

Now we shifted the focus from the Danish Development worker to the Partner organisations' need. We wanted a more flexible programme where personnel assistance could be one out of many types of support.

Offices began busily looking for potential partners. They were looking for local organisations with aims and aspirations compatible to MS policies and with an interest in what MS could offer in the short run (money).

Having identified an interested organisation, we initiated a process of co-operation on small, well-defined activities. After a successful collaboration, and if both parties felt that they have common interests, then they began to explore the basis for a more lasting relationship.

This entails that a lot of energy was – and is – spent on defining common goals and visions, and finding out the modalities for the co-operation between the two organisations. Joint workshops with stakeholders are used to facilitate this process in most of the programmes.

This process, in itself, has proven to be extremely valuable as a means of organisational capacity building. Not only for the potential partner organisation, but also for MS. We negotiate with organisations where it is evident that *we* need them more than they need us. *We* are asked questions about our values, loyalties, and modes of operation. It has not been an easy task for some of our country programmes to assess their own strengths and clarify their Missions, Visions, Objectives - and all that.

The negotiations end up with a written Partnership Agreement that specifies the areas for co-operation. It is as much concerned with the process of co-operation as with the results, but agreed activities; budgets and work-plans are part of the paper. It further includes rules for conflict resolution and a timeframe for the present type of engagement (exit strategies for funding, for example).

Transforming an established development programme

To our surprise, the gradual change process is not yet finished! Many traditions, cultures of offices, programme orientations and partner attitudes needs to be changed. I am now of the opinion that the process of change will actually never finish - it is part of the dynamism in the programme.

From the beginning, we made a blunder. In the good old times, we had relations to many institutions (many government institutions) where volunteers were positioned. Out of sheer politeness, these organisations were overnight lifted to "Partner" status – but many of them were not interested. Both they – and MS – were actually quite comfortable with the present *contractor* mode of operation. One challenge has been - over the years - to say good-bye to each other in a decent way. Some are still in the system, and they contribute to a certain blurring of the picture. They water out the profile.

Selection of new partners also posed some challenges: Looking for like-minded organisations sharing values and policies of MS tended to point in the direction of the urban based, bigger, intermediary NGOs only. We soon found out that we needed a mix. The programme will loose

contact to the realities if we are not in contact with a significant proportion of grassroots orientated, directly operational partners.

Mixing the partner portfolio is actually a great opportunity for all. In Kenya, for example, we can facilitate a much-needed contact between strategic, national and urban based Human Rights organisations and rural, grassroots NGOs or CBOs.

It was also not easy to find a reformed mode of co-operation:

Full openness (transparency) is necessary.
However, it is difficult to change. Many partners - even today - feel that MS is untimely nosy when we want to know about their budgets, relations to other donors etc. They also get surprised when we openly put forward how we work, where we have problems, with whom we work and how our budget is allocated.
It must also be said that until recently we had COs that withheld vital information for partners. *No reciprocity*!

Accountability is another demand, and we all have had to de-learn a lot: Who shall be accountable to whom?
I believe that MS still is lagging behind. We have lots of guidelines and papers describing how partners should be accountable to MS (at least financially). We have little paper describing how MS should be accountable to partners.

It was difficult to adjust to new mechanisms for joint *influence on priorities and decisionmaking*. Experience has shown that it is important to create fora for such joint policy-making. We have formed the PABs - Policy Advisory Boards. The boards represent the partners and other stakeholders in the country programme, and they are there to *give advice.*

In the beginning, MS sent out manifests telling the PABs what would be the priorities in the months to come. The answer we got was "Who do you think you are?" "Who are you to tell us to do a, b, c?" Soon we introduced the Global Brainstorm to secure that PABs had a say in setting the MS agenda. Partners are today heavily involved in Policy Planning, Reporting from Country Programmes, and M&E. Some are more involved than others, but the trend is clear.

Equity versus an *equitable relationship*. It is possible to have an equitable relationship between rich and poor – provided that both parties agree about each other's differences, contribution, and respect other indicators than money. We still - in some isolated cases - tend to communicate that MS has the upper hand, and the partners give often in to this perception as well. Reciprocity is at stake here.

Examples: Kenya: "not all made it",   Zimbabwe DW: "*We* have to phase *you* out."

On the other hand, we have also experienced that it is relatively easy to promote a partnership approach just because *MS does not have considerable funds* to offer. One could say, that at least some partners fall in love with MS not because of the money, but because we are attractive in terms of other qualities.

What did we learn?

- Do not impose your perception of an NGO on others. (In Tanzania, they translated Partnership with Ubia, meaning a contractual relationship between business entities - strangely enough: this was in accordance with Tanzanian perception of NGOs).

- Do not create partners (in your own image) – e.g. Zambia
  The inevitable *differences should be spelled out*, also in the Partnership Agreements

- Call a spade a spade – do not pretend a partnership if you have a clear contractual relationship only. We have actually *all types* of relationships on board.

- Government partners – best at local levels or alliances with individuals

- If you do not have clear *strategies* for your work in country X, it will be extremely difficult to select or identify partners that then may select you.

- The co-operation is bound to fail if you only pay lip service to the partnership concept. Rhetoric is abundant in the development world. The partner reacts to what you *do*, not what you say.

- Be tough with partners – show your respects by making demands.
  Example: Adult/child relations

- Mutuality: Specify in negotiations and Partnership Agreements what the benefits to MS are

- Building partnerships adequately takes time - several years (some phase out before phasing in).
  It is worth the effort: We create something unique, and releases forces and initiatives never seen before
  Example: Yatta South Women or Uganda Debt Network.

- A presence (office) is a precondition for a good co-operation. Inter-action is crucial.
  Related to this: MS should be better to indicate how the Danish Development Worker can serve as a facilitator of the Partnership rather than being a technical development resource. During the transformation period, many DWs took their advisory role too literally.

- Exit routes and conflict resolving mechanisms should be agreed on

- Logframe terrorism and elaborate, extremely specified action plans are working against a good partnership. Be careful not to demonstrate too strong a loyalty to your donor (or the Danish taxpayer).
  On the other hand: Realistic and objective orientated planning is necessary.

- Partnership invites to focus on organisational capacity building activities. Be careful about NOT to detach these activities from the partner's tasks.
  Example: Partner getting so busy with developing itself that it forgets its beneficiaries.

- Partnership should not be seen solely as a means to get work done efficiently. It has a strong value in itself; it is an independent objective, and the relationship contributes to organisational capacity building; e.g. through networking S-S within the "family".

- All in all: We have learnt that South partners can, when given the chance, contribute efficiently to:

  - Making development education in the North and the South more relevant

  - Advise us on how to achieve a much better operational development assistance; we are forcing each other to politicise programmes

  - Stimulate and participate actively in lobbying of Northern and Southern government institutions (they do it now)

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