Unity in Diversity

**Mechanisms and Practices of
Cross-Sector Development Partnerships
to Create Mutuality**

THE **PARTNERSHIPS**
RESOURCE CENTRE

ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
ERASMUS UNIVERSITY

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ACHIEVING UNITY IN DIVERSITY

A practical look into mutuality
and its role in creating synergies
while preserving
organisational diversity

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The Partnerships Resource Centre is supported by Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, and brings business knowledge to partnerships for sustainable development.

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The Diversity Challenge

Cross-sector partnerships between public authorities, business and civil society organisations are increasingly becoming the preferred approach in stimulating sustainable development. Partnership value lies at the very heart of the collaboration between organisations, with diverse contributions to development. While an increasing level of diversity translates into wider range of available resources and capabilities, it also implies contrasting logics and interests, conflicting value structures, and diverging expectations and approaches to value creation[1]. Partner organisations' inherent diversity may become a hindrance if it stands in the way of creating synergies across partners. However, the added value of partnerships remains as long as the organisational partners can also retain commitment to their own missions, organisational characteristics and comparative advantages.

Research by the Partnerships Resource Centre (PrC) discovered that achieving a degree of mutuality provides partnerships with the potential for creating collective and individual value[2]. Its research highlights a number of key mechanisms and practices to develop mutuality[3] in a specific type of partnership: cross-sector development partnerships. This booklet introduces a model that depicts key mechanisms to facilitate mutuality, as well as practices that partners can develop to put such mechanisms into action. Later in the booklet, we go into more detail for four of these mechanisms to show practitioners how to create unity in diversity.

Mutuality in Partnerships
## CREATING SYNERGIES WHILE PRESERVING DIVERSITY

Partnerships are based on the idea of working together effectively to create synergy. Mutuality refers to a reciprocal relationship between two or more organisations. Partners work towards reaching a joint objective but it must still be acknowledged that each partner has potentially differing interests. Mutuality encompasses principles such as[4]:
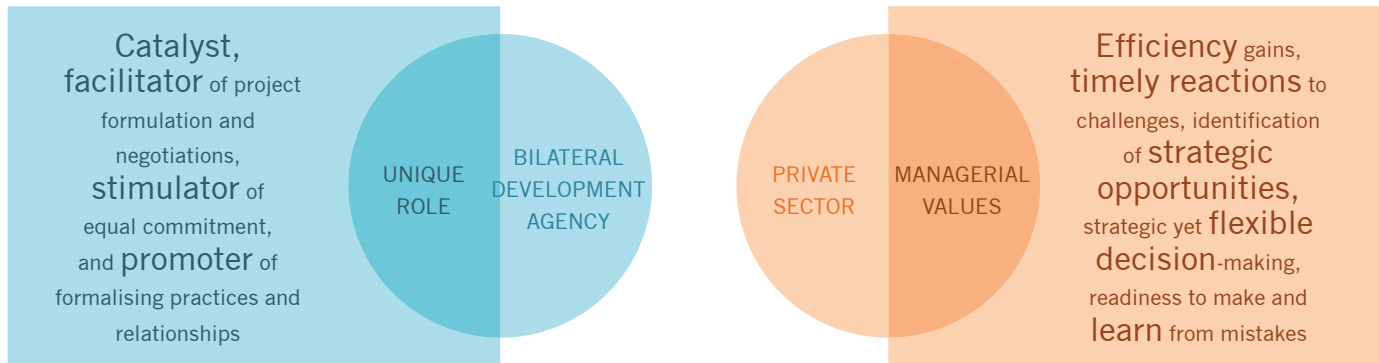
Why?

When partners develop a strong commitment to common goals and attributes, and identify their equal benefit from the relationship, they realise that joint objectives are consistent with their individual missions. This supports the partnership, making it more enduring and high performing[5].

Jointly agreed purpose and values, MUTUAL TRUST-BUILDING BASED ON RESPECT, EQUAL BENEFIT FROM THE RELATIONSHIP, Partner Interdependence, SHARED RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES, MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF PROBLEMS AND CONSEQUENCES

Cross-Sector
Development Partnerships

'Engaging business in development' has become a trend in development co-operation since the early 2000s. Bilateral and multilateral development agencies are increasingly working with businesses to accelerate sustainable development in Cross-Sector Development Partnerships (CSDPs). They have two distinct characteristics: (1) bilateral development agencies have a specific, influential role to play and (2) the partnering approach is imbued with a number of managerial values as a result of the private sector's active participation in the collaboration.

BILATERAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

PRIVATE SECTOR

PUBLIC SECTOR

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
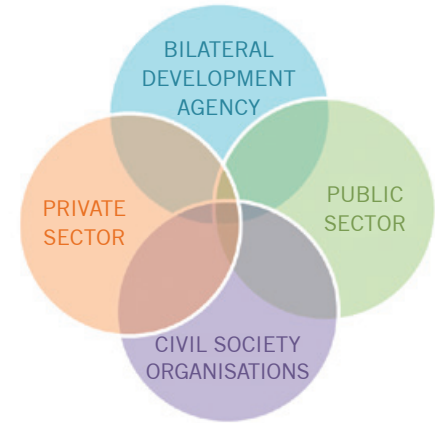
The challenge of CSDPs to achieve MUTUALITY is based on balancing the POLICY OBJECTIVES of development co-operation and BUSINESSES INTERESTS

Catalyst, facilitator of project formulation and negotiations, stimulator of equal commitment, and promoter of formalising practices and relationships

UNIQUE ROLE

BILATERAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

PRIVATE SECTOR

MANAGERIAL VALUES

Efficiency gains, timely reactions to challenges, identification of strategic opportunities, strategic yet flexible decision-making, readiness to make and learn from mistakes
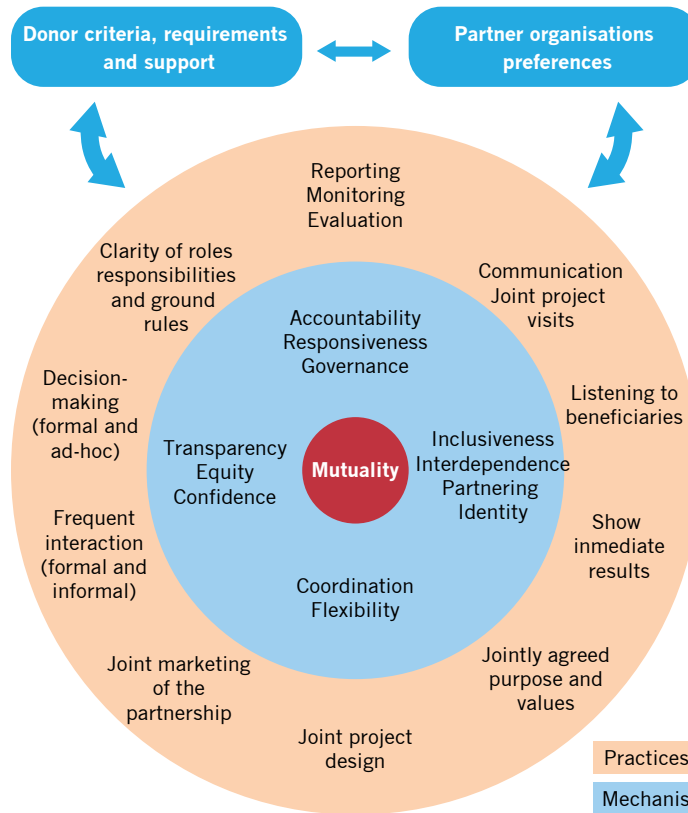
The Research Project

The Partnerships Resource Centre and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Colombia carried out a review of various partnerships with the private sector facilitated by the Embassy (summarized in the PrC publication: *Development Partnerships with the Private Sector at Work*). The analysis of seven partnership cases with the private sector uncovered lessons learned on the dynamics and factors leading to partnership success.

The cases studied were all implemented in Colombia and focused on a specific type of partnership – CSDPs – but it is suggested that several principles apply to a broader range of cross-sector partnerships. This can be shown through research which identified many of the mechanisms presented in this publication in other geographical, cultural and institutional contexts, and in different partnership configurations.

"Embajada de Holanda Evalua Alianzas en el Departamento de Magdalena"

22.Mar.2011 - "Researchers from the Erasmus University evaluated several partnership projects. The results of their research support the idea that Public-Private Partnerships may be effective mechanisms for addressing social problems"

Diario El Informador

Key Mechanisms and Practices in the Partnership Approach

Case studies highlight the importance of individuals acting as 'PARTNERSHIP CHAMPIONS'[6] who support the development of these practices and mechanisms

Donor criteria, requirements and support ↔ Partner organisations preferences

Reporting
Monitoring
Evaluation

Clarity of roles responsibilities and ground rules

Communication Joint project visits

Accountability
Responsiveness
Governance

Decision-making (formal and ad-hoc)

Listening to beneficiaries

Transparency
Equity
Confidence

Mutuality

Inclusiveness
Interdependence
Partnering
Identity

Frequent interaction (formal and informal)

Show inmediate results

Coordination
Flexibility

Joint marketing of the partnership

Jointly agreed purpose and values

Joint project design

Practices
Mechanisms

Organisational Influence

Organisations involved in partnerships have their own preferences for project design, decision-making, measuring and evaluation. On one hand, development agencies have specific criteria and requirements tied to their provision of funds and participation. On the other hand, partners also have their own preferences in the way activities are carried out or resources are deployed. As organisations interact in the negotiation phase of the partnership, they engage in a process of mutual adjustments to each other's requirements in order to create common ground. In doing so, they also build the framework within which they can develop practices and mechanisms.

Mechanisms

Partner organisations need to develop, formalize and jointly commit to a number of interdependent mechanisms to create mutuality within a partnership. These are the instruments and procedures that, when properly functional and institutionalized within the partnership, will give way to increased levels of mutual trust, understanding, shared ownership of values, processes and outcomes, and ultimately learning.

Practices

The development of these mechanisms requires partners to engage in a series of practices, or habitual activities, such as the design of monitoring and evaluation processes, marketing of the project and joint project visits entailing formal and informal interactions. Through such interactions, conversations and co-ordinated action, partners become acquainted, learn from each other and build relationships[7]. The outcome is a set of effective mechanisms, which in turn create a stronger sense of interdependence.

1. Co-ordination

What?
Co-ordination constitutes the organisation of tasks trusted to different partners in such a way that it enables them to co-operate effectively. Inter-organisational co-ordination is achieved through informal channels, behavioural norms and agreements of task distribution.

Why?
Co-ordination mechanisms build stronger relationships because they allow for consensus on how to best manage resources and meet common objectives. The process of building consensus, mutual understanding and trust is often a journey of trial and error [8].

How?
- Engage all partners in collaborative decision-making[9]
- Distribute tasks according to the unique expertise and capabilities of each partner[10]
- Facilitate spaces for informal interaction and feedback on implementation
- Foster a culture of mutual adjustment of individual activities, whereby one partner can complement the activity of the other, and learning is exchanged[11]

Some PARTNERSHIP CHAMPION'S qualities for coordination:
- Opportunity seeker
- Engaging
- Long-term oriented

At Work

The *Sustainable Development Programme for Coffee Growing Families in Nariño* (Colombia) reached a level of co-ordination in its partnership activities that satisfied all parties.

For instance, decisions were made collectively at different levels, taking into account partners that had the most direct contribution to the decision-making process in terms of knowledge or experience. This consideration for specialised capabilities was also incorporated in the distribution of tasks when one partner took charge of the on-the-ground technical training while another contributed social components of the programme.

2. Accountability

What?

Partnerships often require structures for multiple accountability between partners, towards beneficiaries and towards stakeholders[12]. Internal accountability refers to inter-partner (horizontal) systems for taking responsibility of the partnership and direct response to resource-providing partners. The development of accountability mitigates power imbalance between partners and can relate to accountability in inputs, processes or results[13].

Why?

Accountability requires information-sharing among partners in jointly defined and formalized formats. In turn, information sharing is the foundation for building confidence and mutual understanding. Thus accountability fosters confidence from individual organisations – in each other and in the partnering approach[14].

How?

Balance formal structures and informal processes by:
- Engage in joint reporting, monitoring and evaluation
- Design a structure of committees for participative decision-making at various levels
- Hold formal meetings throughout the project
- Organise joint field visits
- Create agreements which build the framework of the project and the relationship
- Incorporate flexibility in the governance structure to account for changing circumstances within organisations, among partners and in the context.

Some
PARTNERSHIP
CHAMPION'S
qualities for
accountability:
- Collective thinking
- Confidence in the approach

3. Partnership Collective Identity

What?
Partnership identity is the 'glue' that binds partners together and provides them with a shared feeling of togetherness[15], and it's the result of communicative processes between partners. It constitutes the partnership's sense of itself and entails the recognition of the partners and stakeholders of the collective.

How?
- Design logos, banners and slogans
- Develop information sharing platforms such as websites.
- Stimulate a change in discourse through the use of expressions and names that give the partnership a sense of collective, for example: 'we' or 'the partnership' (instead of using the name of one organisation).

Why?
A partnership identity allows partners to not only market their project towards external stakeholders but also supports the sustainability of the collaboration. Partnership collective identity helps attract support, legitimacy and resources.

Some PARTNERSHIP CHAMPION'S qualities for identity:
- Networker
- Enthusiastic
- Acute communicator

At Work

The *Alliance Programme for Socio-Economic Development of Banana Community* in Magdalena and Urabá developed a strong partnership collective identity through the design of a partnership logo (see above), which was incorporated in all internal documentation, external communication tools and official stationery.

This allowed partner organisations to visualize the partnership as an entity in itself and themselves as part of it. As a result, partners developed a sense of ownership and belonging, external stakeholders identified the partnership as a collective and beneficiaries were aware of the value provided by the partnership itself.

4. Confidence through Transparency

What?
Partnerships in Colombia demonstrated the importance of developing confidence, built through – for example – transparency. These practices have encouraged recognition of shared objectives and the collaborative implementation of the project has stimulated confidence in each other and in the joint project.

Why?
Confidence can supplement, substitute or lay the foundation for trust. Increased transparency often results in enhanced mutual understanding of each partner's comparative advantages and constraints [16].

How?
- Regular project visits
- Listen and integrate beneficiaries' needs into project design
- Support information flow between partners
- Ensure clarity in partner expectations with regard to the relationship and how they benefit from it through, for example, internal newsletters, or storing documents in shared locations such as clouds

Some PARTNERSHIP CHAMPION'S qualities for transparency:
- Collective thinker
- Initiator
- Acute communicator

The Road to
Unity in Diversity

Partnership success is bound by specific cultural contexts, industries, or regions where partnerships are implemented, and also by the organisational background which influences the formation of the partnership. Comparably, the degree of mutuality in a partnership is influenced by the context in which partners interact and the specific partner configurations. Yet partnerships in the Colombian cases have not only reflected similarities in mechanisms and practices that are conducive towards mutuality, but there are also similarities reported from other forms of cross-sector partnerships. Developing coordination, accountability, transparency and a partnership identity can help partners achieve higher levels of trust and equality, two principles of mutuality. Thus, mutuality is believed to develop when partners have jointly agreed on how such mechanisms are defined and what practices they will develop to make the mechanisms happen.

- Co-ordination
- Accountability
- Partnership Identity
- Transparency

Key mechanisms and practices for mutuality

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