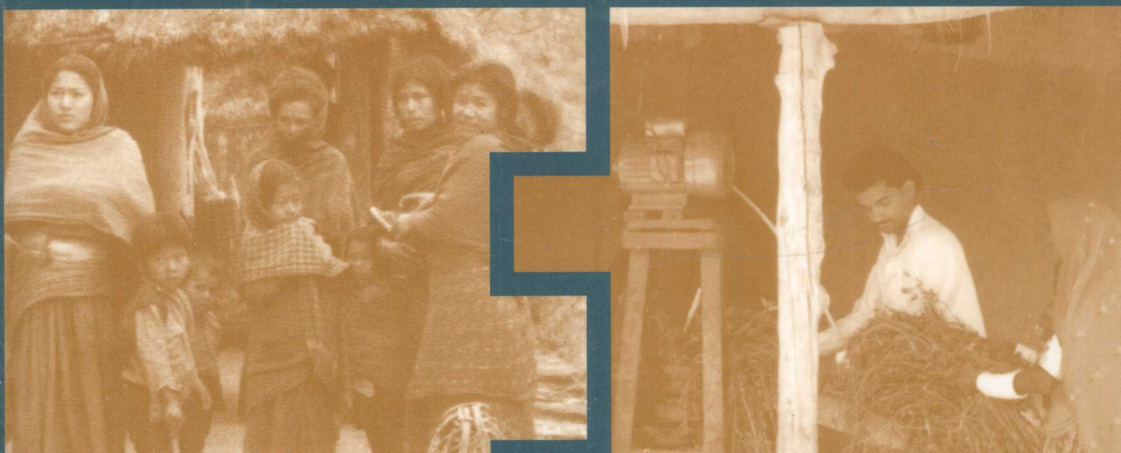
PARTNERSHIP FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Rhetoric or Results?



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PREFACE

We have entered a time when international development figures prominently among policymakers, in the media, and among the general public. The complexity posed by globalization, coupled with the continuing challenges of poverty, security, and political and economic instability, necessitates creative approaches and new institutional structures to address the simultaneous needs for technical expertise and participatory, democratic practices. These challenges are intensified by the need to embrace cultural identities in the process and outcomes of international problem solving. But resources remain scarce, and policymakers and the general public continue to seek to minimize the direct involvement and funding of government bodies. In every sector and service sphere, actors are looking for the most effective and efficient means to deliver services in an increasingly interdependent world. *Partnership* has become the buzzword used to describe many of these endeavors. However, rhetoric alone will not lead to solutions, but may only make things worse as it leads to cynicism and lack of trust, discouraging actors from pursuing partnership approaches.

In this book, I seek to clarify the concept of partnership, as well as its practice, to critique our understanding and practice of partnership in international development to date, and to specify partnership's defining dimensions. Implementation guidelines outline contextual factors, which inform the decision to partner and suggest strategies for maximizing and maintaining partnership effectiveness. A more nuanced understanding of potential actors and corresponding selection criteria can assist cooperating actors to be more strategic in who they partner with, as well as how they design and implement partnerships.

One of the greatest challenges of partnership work is maintaining the balance between a focus on desired programmatic results and the necessary emphasis on process. Organizations' existing structures, systems, and rules are rarely conducive to partnership work and often present substantial obstacles to productive relationships. While agreement on the concept of partnership may be readily forthcoming, the process often breaks down during initiation and implementation. Thus, in the pages that follow, I suggest incentives and governance mechanisms to support effective partnership work. Three cases illustrate differing approaches.

Scholars and practitioners from all sectors are exploring partnership. My hope is that the policy implications, as well as the pragmatic emphasis on operationalizing partnerships, discussed in these pages will be useful to them. The term *partnership* connotes positive feelings and values. My aim in this book is to build on this potential goodwill, recognize the pragmatic contributions of its underlying values, and encourage actors to move beyond the rhetoric of partnership to actually address development challenges effectively and efficiently.

* * *

This book is the culmination of several years of applied and investigative work, including numerous conversations with partnership practitioners, proponents, and skeptics. It is impossible to trace the influence of so many people who stimulated my thoughts, provided examples, and sometimes pointed me in new directions. My thanks to you all.

There are several people I would like to highlight. Najma Siddiqi gave me a tremendous opportunity to explore these issues with practitioners from the World Bank and beyond. Qaim Shah was generous in providing information and answering my many questions whether from Washington, Pakistan, or Myanmar. Afzal Latif followed his lead and provided me with invaluable project documents and e-mail support. The team from International Medical Services for Health (INMED), including Linda Pfeiffer and Thad Jackson, gave generously of their time. I particularly want to thank Joyce Capelli, not only for the many hours of inquisition, despite jet lag, but also for her very heartfelt responses and the way her example and compassion continue to inspire me. Thanks to Conrad Person and Michael Bzdack from Johnson & Johnson and Bill Collins from El Paso Energy International for their thoughtful responses to my many questions. In addition to our interview, Andreas Liebenthal provided helpful feedback on Chapter 7.

Others who provided support (interviews, correspondence, materials, and/or feedback on chapters in progress) include Derick Brinkerhoff, Martin Hewitt, Nigel Twose, Jaime Kuklinski, Anthony Judge, Norman Nicholson, Aaron Williams, Art Goldsmith, and Michael Brown. I also want to thank the many practitioners who listened and gave feedback on my partnership frameworks and ideas. I would particularly like to thank

those I interviewed as part of the World Bank's Learning Series on Partnerships (1998–1999). Sara Evans, my graduate assistant at George Washington University, helped with the bibliography. Very special thanks to Joshua Forrest, a superb colleague and friend, who invested a substantial amount of time and energy to provide feedback on early chapters and who encouraged me throughout.

Last on this list but first in my heart, thanks to my husband, Derick, for the depth and range of partnership we share.

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Partnership: Promise and Practice

The mixed results of development since the 1970s, coupled with a simultaneous recognition of interdependence and resource scarcity in our globalized world, has led some scholars and practitioners to argue that development is not possible without partnership approaches and that "business as usual" cannot continue. Not only have previous approaches proved ineffective, some argue they have been detrimental.[1] The nature and scale of socioeconomic development problems are impossible to address in isolation. To solve their complexity and intransigence requires multiple actors and resources. The structure of development assistance must change to prevent a worsening of conditions and to initiate a movement toward more effective approaches. This book addresses partnership between nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), governments, donors, and the private sector for the purpose of enhancing development outcomes.

Organizations form partnerships not only to enhance outcomes, whether qualitatively or quantitatively, but also to produce synergistic rewards, where the outcomes of the partnership as a whole are greater than the sum of what individual partners contribute. Most evidence of partnership's contributions to performance is anecdotal.[2] Synergistic results are often sought and referenced, but they are rarely fully articulated and measured. Furthermore, the process of creating such synergistic rewards is more hopeful than methodical or well understood.

While partnership is being promoted in every service sphere, nowhere is the increasing need for and experimentation with partnership more in evidence than in international development.[3] And nowhere is the context for partnership more complex, with myriad potential partners who have multiple and often divergent motivations, facing the most challenging development circumstances—dire poverty, entrenched social stratification, and conflicts of many sorts. These problems are so daunting that it is obvious no actor can face them alone. Partnership is the topic of numerous reports, conferences, and anecdotes.[4] As with many terms in good currency, while many embrace the notion of partnership and stake a claim in its promotion, there is little agreement on what partnership means.[5] The design and management of partnerships has been little informed by theory or conceptual frameworks (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998; Lister 2000). Partnership is in danger of remaining a "feel good" panacea for governance without obtaining a pragmatic grasp of the "why" and a clearer understanding of the "how" of partnerships.

Partnership rhetoric is not serving the objectives partnership work seeks. A conceptual and practical understanding of what partnership is and how to design and implement partnerships effectively will accomplish two important objectives. First, it will establish a common language for what partnership is and how to maximize its rewards, enabling partnership actors to lobby for improved partnership practice on both practical and normative grounds. Second, it will contribute to improved partnership performance, adding substance to rhetoric, based on a clear articulation of partnership's value-added, encouraging greater commitment to and experimentation with partnership approaches, and ultimately contributing to important development outcomes.

This chapter addresses four key questions: Why is partnership so popular? How are practitioners doing in their partnership practice? What is partnership? How can partnerships be more effectively managed? The first question examines the rationale for partnership, identifying four primary reasons actors choose to partner with others. The next section provides a selected overview of the use of partnership rhetoric and results as promoted by some donor agencies (the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID], the World Bank, and the United Nations [UN]). The review demonstrates the gap between rhetoric and actual commitment and practice, and it identifies some common administrative and political challenges to partnership work within donor agencies. Partnership is defined both in an ideal sense and as a relative practice, distinguished by two defining features: organization identity and mutuality. I argue that partnership in the ideal sense is not possible, as partnership actors may have differing conceptions of those ideals or the ideals may be unrealizable given actors' organizational constraints. The emphasis throughout the book is on partnership as a relative practice.

The last section of the chapter outlines initial lessons for effectively managing partnerships, emphasizing the softer side of partnership design and implementation. This approach encourages actors to be more proactive about establishing and reinforcing a values basis for partnership work and a corresponding partnership identity. The question of effectiveness is the primary subject of the book; therefore, the response is more fully developed in the chapters that follow.

The Why of Partnership

The most obvious motivation for establishing a partnership is the desire to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of development efforts. Partnership can provide a means of developing strategic direction and coordination. It affords a scale and integration of interests and services that are impossible for any actor operating alone. The Barani Area Development Project (BADP), for example, integrated and coordinated the efforts of eight government departments, an NGO, and numerous village organizations in order to improve public service delivery, development outcomes, and sustainability of project efforts and institutions (see Chapter 5).

The need for partnership is most obvious in the daunting challenge of achieving sustainable development, which is predicated on the equally daunting challenge of maintaining good governance. Sustainability is increasingly viewed in a more holistic sense, which encompasses social, political, and ethical issues, all requiring strategic and operational responses. Despite differences in opinion or strategy, cooperation between NGOs and donors is recognized as "an essential prerequisite" for reaching the ultimate goal of a sustainable environment (Peterson 1997: 16). Without the cooperation of multiple and diverse actors, each with its own perspective and comparative advantages, we risk treating symptoms rather than causes of underdevelopment and becoming frustrated by systemic forces that preserve the status quo (Brown and Ashman 1996).

Partnership contributes to effectiveness by affording actors access to crucial resources—including expertise and relationships—that would otherwise be inaccessible. Those actors closest to the issue to be addressed have better information, strong incentives for assuring good performance, and lower transaction costs in bringing resources to bear. Governments and donors can access these resources via NGOs, local governments, and the private commercial sector. For example, in Brazil, multinational corporations and government agencies access the expertise and local knowledge of International Medical Services for Health (INMED) in implementing health education and improvement programs, while INMED creates new resources by harnessing opportunities for corporate philanthropy (see Chapter 6).

Similar lessons have long been acknowledged in private-sector networks where member organizations use their networks to access key technologies or other resources (Madhavan, Koka, and Prescott 1998). In this context, an organization's power is determined not by its internal resources but by the set of resources it can mobilize through its contacts. Effectiveness is also enhanced through the innovation partnership can foster. This innovation might emerge solely from the combination of different perspectives and skills or, less directly, through trust building, which allows for more effective problem solving and positive sum solutions (Peters 1998); both of these factors were instrumental in the successful process of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) (see Chapter 7).

Partnership can also enhance the efficiency of development efforts through identification and exploitation of the comparative advantages of the actors involved. Partnership rationalizes the use of resources and skills. Creativity may emerge from the assembling of diverse actors with different perspectives and expertise, resulting in efficiency improvements. For example, businesses that access the environmental expertise of NGOs and local communities are able to produce "eco-efficiencies," or savings on energy and waste (DeSimone and Popoff 2000). Similarly, partnership can reduce information and transaction costs through coordination and trust building (Börzel 1998).

Conflict, too, can form the basis for partnership. The costs of conflict in time and resources can be much greater than the costs associated with cooperation. The most obvious example is in the environmental sector, where competition over scarce resources and their protection is an ongoing moral and practical dilemma. Similar controversies surround resettlement projects. In such instances, major differences in interests and conflicting objectives can bring diverse actors together. This may be because the opposition has thwarted the parties from any action, forcing them all to the negotiating table. Or the costs of pursuing a particular agenda amid such opposition may be too great. Public relations concerns are increasingly driving the latter, especially for donors and the private sector, and they were a major force in driving both the World Bank and the large dam industry to participate in and support the WCD (Chapter 7).

The combination of these perspectives and resources can spawn creativity, yielding win-win solutions heretofore unimaginable. The conflict basis for partnership is also inherent to any good governance effort, regardless of the target organization. The potential for conflicting motivations and objectives forms the basis for accountability in upholding the pursuit of common goals, or at least agreements on goals, when diverse actors are sufficiently engaged.

Partnership can also be used strategically to open decisionmaking processes (Stoker 1997). This strategy can represent a moral dimension, where the intent is to further public interests rather than private ones, or it can be viewed pragmatically as the only means to ensure sustainability. Input from all concerned parties is essential to creating sustainable benefits.

This is particularly true in the case of the WCD, where the legitimacy of its final report is commensurate with perceptions of transparency and inclusiveness, and compliance with the WCD's recommendations remains voluntary (see Chapter 7). The benefits of increased openness and participation can contribute significantly to all of the other partnership incentives.

Regardless of the initial incentive for partnership, multiplier effects can ensue once a partnership becomes operational, further supporting the continuation, growth, and replication of partnerships. The most immediate of these effects concerns capacity. The capacity of any one actor is expanded when the resources of other actors can be leveraged for wider impact. One partner's capacity can be enhanced through the experience of working with the other partners and through training and staff exchanges. Individual partners may also benefit from access to new domains, creation of new opportunities, protection from potential threats, and improved effectiveness in achieving their own objectives, or through positive public relations and new ways to market themselves. For example, INMED Brazil was initially formalized to support INMED's partnership with Interfarma (an association of pharmaceutical manufacturers); through that initial experience, INMED developed a program design and implementation model and learned how to work effectively with multinational corporations, understanding their priorities and operating style (Chapter 6).

Another significant multiplier effect concerns the influence that each actor has upon the others. Studies show that the climate is most favorable to poverty reduction where there is a high level of interaction among the sectors, particularly between government and civil society actors (Tandon 1991; USAID 1995a). Actors can influence both the agenda of the partnership as a whole and the individual agendas of the partners. Such influence can range from NGOs promoting government responsiveness to the needs of particular constituencies, to government steering NGOs away from what it perceives as subversive activities, to the private sector influencing regulation policies. This influence is not necessarily in the interests of only one partner; allowing actors the opportunity to voice their concerns can reduce implementation problems, which benefits the partnership as a whole (see Clark 1997). For example, BADP's development of standard operating procedures and a Social Organization Unit created the space and opportunity for each partner to introduce its concerns, priorities, and technical expertise and to ensure that these would be appropriately integrated into project implementation (see Chapter 5).

The relationships cultivated in partnerships represent social capital that can be applied to other development issues, involving the same or other partners into the future. USAID found that the greater the capacity of partnerships and of individual partners themselves, the better the public dialogue with USAID and other donors will be (USAID 1997). More important for donors' objectives, this social capital is the foundation for any exit strategy. When a project is completed, the institutional capacity to sustain programs and benefits is left behind, and the society-to-society linkages the partnerships cultivated can facilitate continuing access to donor-country expertise and technology and support long-term cooperation on issues of common concern. A subtle but fundamental aspect of this social capital, extending far beyond donor interests per se, is that the greater understanding of each actor's perspective, operations, and contributions can be brought to bear on subsequent efforts, as occurred in INMED's partnerships (see Chapter 6).

From a pragmatic perspective, partnerships emerging at multiple levels entail an increasing development and specification of actors' comparative advantages and a refinement of respective roles, in order to maximize all available resources. The many benefits to partnership work outlined above can be seen as "collaborative advantages" (Huxham 1996; Kanter 1994; Doz and Hamel 1998). In general, individual actors choose to partner for one or more of the following four reasons:

1. To enhance efficiency and effectiveness through a reliance on comparative advantages and a rational division of labor. This entails incremental (though possibly dramatic) improvements in the delivery of development initiatives.
2. To provide the multiactor, integrated solutions required by the scope and nature of the problems being addressed. Without this approach, the effort would be impossible.
3. To move from a no-win situation among multiple actors to a compromise and potential win-win situation (i.e., in response to collective action problems or the need for conflict resolution). It may be possible to continue without partnership, but stakeholders would remain dissatisfied and continue to incur losses.
4. To open decisionmaking processes to promote a broader operationalization of the public good. The normative dimension of this motivator seeks to maximize representation and democratic processes; the pragmatic perspective views this as a means to ensure sustainability.

How Far Have We Come? Donor Agencies and Partnership

So-called partnerships between resource agencies and developing country institutions have been scrutinized for some time (see, for example, Garilao 1987). Clearly the rationale and rhetoric of partnership approaches to international development have been well established. A brief overview of development activities in the 1990s indicates an increasing focus on partnership as demonstrated by conferences and workshops (e.g., the World Bank's Partnership Learning Initiative), donor policies (e.g., the requirement of local partnership for funding by the British government, European Union, and USAID's Private Voluntary Organization Matching Grant Program), and new programs and activities. Both the UN and the World Bank have established NGO liaison officers or civil society specialists in many of their departments and resident missions. Much donor partnership work is pursued on a project-by-project basis. A sampling of donor agency partnership work reveals that partnerships are also pursued as a reorientation to general operations and policymaking, and through special programmatic offices and initiatives.

Reorientation of General Operations and Policymaking

The Development Assistance Committee 21st Strategy, the UN Common Country Framework, and the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers offer new models for thinking about and formulating development strategy. These incorporate explicit consultation with and frequently more intense participation of the private sector and civil society, in addition to governments and donors. The frameworks seek a holistic approach to development, intended to be driven by the country in need, though who represents the country (whether government, civil society, or both) is not often clearly outlined. Each of these similar frameworks expresses the donor's perspective and desired role in the process. This puts governments in the position of having to choose among frameworks, in effect prioritizing the importance of various donors and their preferences.

Despite their rhetoric, none of the frameworks inherently guarantees a partnership between a government and the local private sector and civil society or between the donor and the host country government. The extent to which partnerships are operationalized depends on the dominant actor in each of these relationships: the government in terms of receptivity to private-sector and civil society participation and the donor in terms of allowing the government to drive the partnership process. The incentive structures to support partnership work, for both governments and donor staff, are vague at best.

Aside from these multilateral efforts, some bilaterals have promoted new partnership approaches for development strategy and implementation, including USAID's New Partnership Initiative (NPI) and, more recently, its Global Development Alliance (GDA). NPI began with a learning phase that produced a core report (USAID 1995a); related reports on democratic local governance, NGO empowerment, and small-business partnership (USAID 1995b, 1995c, 1995d); and a resource guide, which assembles the results of its learning phase and includes field-based reports on NPI pilot missions (USAID 1997). This work culminated in an intersectoral partnerships handbook (Charles, McNulty, and Pennell 1998) to support and encourage intersectoral partnership within USAID.

NPI focused on supporting and facilitating partnership work; it did not represent actual partnership engagement. No funds were designated to support partnership work at the country level. Missions had the option of pursuing an NPI approach in the selection of strategic objectives and corresponding strategies, but this was not required and no additional funds were made available to support these more ambitious, time-consuming, and costly approaches. NPI competed with other approaches and strategic objectives, and it did not often fit well with earmarked funds and programming. In addition, procurement requirements were not adjusted to accommodate partnership approaches; no special arrangements were made to facilitate partnership relations and the necessary administrative adaptations. At most, NPI recommended the creative use of existing mechanisms, such as umbrella grants. As a centralized initiative, NPI was endorsed by the USAID administrator and promoted in vague policy guidelines, but it was not necessarily supported administratively or financially.

USAID's GDA seeks to redefine how USAID implements its foreign assistance mandate and is touted as USAID's "business model for the 21st century." The alliance acknowledges the role of NGOs, foundations, corporations, and institutions of higher education in development assistance, and it seeks to marshal the resources of these diverse actors through brokering and participating in strategic partnerships. Among GDA's objectives are better coordination, leveraging private financing, and enhancing policy reform through advocacy (USAID 2001).

The GDA and its programs are still at the earliest stages of implementation. However, strategic questions are already emerging. For example, partners will want to ensure that their participation is valued beyond the material resources they provide. This requirement highlights the issue of strategy development and program design and the potential constraints that congressional oversight may pose to partnership approaches in these areas. Congress and the U.S. public demand more than haphazard development programs, negotiated on a case-by-case basis with available partners and their particular comparative advantages and interests. The GDA guidelines repeatedly call for flexibility in considering alliances that may not fit neatly into agency strategic objectives. How such flexibility will be maintained, particularly in a results-driven environment, remains to be seen. The GDA received a $20 million budget allocation for its incentive fund for fiscal year 2002. Its first year's performance will prove critical to its ability to attract future funding.

Specialized Offices and Initiatives

Donors' partnership work is also demonstrated in specialized offices and initiatives, including those that encompass learning, and partnering with the private sector and NGOs. The World Bank has engaged in several learning initiatives related to partnership work, among them the Learning Series on Building Effective Partnerships to Meet the Challenge of Equitable and Sustainable Development, which consisted of two workshops (in 1998). The first focused on collecting the lessons learned from officials within the Bank who had engaged in partnership work; the second, drawing upon this information, sought to provide training to those interested in pursuing partnership work. Publications included proceedings of the two events and a collection of case examples (Coston 1999). More recently, the World Bank sponsored the Internet-based Forum on Partnering with Civil Society, which had global participation from practitioners and scholars. These dialogues are useful opportunities to exchange ideas; however, they tend to preach to the converted without having concrete impact on World Bank procedures and modes of operation.

Another learning initiative, Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (1996–1998), sought to promote a partnership approach to poverty reduction efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean. The program itself was a partnership between the World Bank, the Inter-American Foundation, the UN Development Programme, and national committees of six participating countries. Participants developed and disseminated hundreds of best-practice case studies. The analysis of the program and the lessons learned there identifies the outcomes of and enabling environment characteristics for partnerships for poverty reduction (Fiszbein and Lowden 1998). It is a useful beginning for selling the partnership approach, though it does not include analyses that would inform partnership practice.

Donors' cooperation with the private sector is not new; however, it is increasingly couched in partnership rhetoric, and specific partnership initiatives are emerging. For example, the International Finance Corporation–facilitated program Business Partners for Development (BPD) aims to study and promote good examples of trisector partnerships (business, government, and civil society) around the world. BPD organizes partnerships into four clusters: youth development, water and sanitation, natural resources, and road traffic safety. Its activities in each of these include direct input to focus projects, national roundtables and workshops, expert study visits, training, research, and communications. BPD's Knowledge