Conference Report: Partnering for Success

A conference on how Monitoring and Evaluation can strengthen Partnerships for Sustainable Development 17-18 March 2016, The Netherlands

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WAGENINGEN UR
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Wageningen UR Centre for Development Innovation
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This report presents the key highlights and contributions from the conference 'Partnering for Success - How Monitoring and Evaluation can strengthen Partnerships for Sustainable Development' . This conference was held on 17-18 March 2016 in Wageningen, the Netherlands and was the ninth annual 'M&E on the Cutting Edge' conference. These events are organised by Wageningen University and Research centre, Centre for Development Innovation (CDI) in collaboration with Learning by Design and this year also PPPLab. The conference focused on understanding partnerships; what is specific of the M&E of partnerships; and on what aspects, approaches and conditions for M&E help partnerships better contribute to the SDGs.

Keywords: conference, evaluation, monitoring, partnerships, SDGs

Report CDI-16-024

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Preface

This report summarises the outline and outputs of the conference 'Partnering for Success - How M&E can Strengthen Partnerships for Sustainable Development', which took place on March 17-18, 2016, the Netherlands.

This conference is part of the annual CDI series 'M&E on the Cutting Edge'. These annual events are organised by the Centre for Development Innovation and Learning by Design, in collaboration with partners, this year PPPLab. So far, the following events have been organised:

- **2016 'Partnerning for Success: How M&E can Strengthen Partnerships for Sustainable Development',** with Bruce Byiers and Ros Tennyson; Wageningen, 17-18 March 2016 http://tinyurl.com/pr88j6c
- **2015 'M&E *for* Responsible Innovation'** with Prof. Dr. Phil Macnaghten and Dr. Irene Guijt; Wageningen, 19-20 March 2015 http://tinyurl.com/o3oucnz
- **2014 'Improving the use of monitoring and evaluation processes and findings'** with Marlène Läubli Loud; Ismael Akhalwaya & Carlo Bakker; Wageningen, 20-21 March 2014 http://tinyurl.com/pxhvwfs
- **2013 'Impact evaluation: taking stock and moving ahead'** with Dr. Elliot Stern and Dr. Irene Guijt; Wageningen, 25-26 March 2013; http://tinyurl.com/pkpgfb6
- **2012 'Expert seminar on Developmental Evaluation'** and **'Global hot issues on the M&E agenda'** with Dr Michael Quinn Patton; Wageningen, 22-23 March 2012; http://tinyurl.com/nbw29ub
- **2011 'Realist Evaluation'** with Dr. Gill Westhorp: Wageningen, 22-23 March 2011; http://tinyurl.com/mhw89ka
- **2010 'Evaluation Revisited. Improving the Quality of Evaluative Practice by Embracing Complexity'** Utrecht, 20-21 May 2010; http://evaluationrevisited.wordpress.com/
- **2009 'Social Return On Investment'** Wageningen, March 2009; www.Sroiseminar2009.org
- **2009 'Innovation dialogue - Being strategic in the face of complexity'** Wageningen, 31 November and December 2009; http://tinyurl.com/nfxzdpg
- **Other innovation dialogues on complexity:** http://portals.wi.wur.nl/navigatingcomplexity/

The funding support provided by CDI, PPPLab and Oxfam Novib made this conference possible. We are deeply grateful for their support.

We are grateful to the keynote speakers Bruce Byiers and Ros Tennyson, whose inputs helped us shape the conference. Their stimulating ideas, experiences and concepts helped frame the conference thought-provoking discussions.

We are grateful to all the contributors for their willingness and courage to openly share their experiences and concepts. Our thanks go to:

- **Keynote speeches**: Bruce Byiers (ECDPM) and Ros Tennyson (Partnership Brokers Association);
- **Conference contributions** (parallel sessions, in order of appeance in the program): Giel Ton (Wageningen UR, LEI; the Netherlands); Minu Hemmati (CatalySD; Germany) and Herman Brouwer (Wageningen UR, CDI; the Netherlands); Ciska Kuijper & Marie Christine Siemerink (Oxfam Novib; the Netherlands); Atif Zeeshan Rauf (Sarhad Rural Support Programme - SRSP; Pakistan); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB): Geert Geut (roundtable facilitator), Floris Blankenberg and Julia McCall; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands (DSO/MO): Joris van Bommel, Jannie de Graaf; Strategic Partnerships: IRC – Anita van der Laan (AKVO); IUCN/WWF alliance - Gunilla Kuperus (WWF); NIMD/AWEPA: Nic van der Jagt (NIMD); Health Systems Advocacy for Africa (HSA4A) Strategic Partnership: Maarten Kuijpers (AMREF); SRGR alliance and the ASK/UFBR programme: Marijke Priester (Rutgers); Ludger Niemann (VNG International; the Netherlands); Elsa de Morais Sarmento (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States; St Lucia); Nomsa Makhubele (Gauteng Department of Health, South Africa); Nosipho

Mbanjwa (John Snow Inc., South Africa); Irene R. Tanzo (Philippine Rice Research Institute, Philippines); Sue Sadler (University of Strathclyde; Scotland); Tsholofelo Adelekan (Gauteng Department of Health; South Africa); Nosipho Mbanjwa (John Snow Inc., South Africa; Simon Bailey (Aflatoun; the Netherlands); Jouwert van Geene & Megan Colnar (The Hunger Project Nederland; the Netherlands); Niek van Duivenbooden (Trimpact BV; the Netherlands); Carlo Bakker (IMPEC; the Netherlands; Rob van Tulder and Stella Pfisterer (Partnerships Resource Centre, Erasmus University, the Netherlands); Rita Dieleman (RiDi Consultancy; the Netherlands); Helga van Kampen (NewHow; the Netherlands); Joost Guijt (Wageningen UR, CDI; the Netherlands); Linda Gamova (Catholic Relief Services; USA); Daniel Oloo (CRS Kenya); Everline Achieng Dede (Homa Hills Community Development Organization, Kenya); Tom van den Steen (Vredeseilanden/VECO; Belgium); René Vermeulen (MDF, the Netherlands);
- **Conference facilitators:** Joost Guijt, Jan Brouwers, Herman Brouwer, Anja Wolsky, Caroline Desalos (all WUR/CDI);
- **Conference reporters:** Bram Peters (WUR/CDI), Marijke Spanjer (WUR/CDI), Matteo Metta (WUR), Sophie Wins (Partos);
- **Conference organisers:** Cecile Kusters (WUR/CDI; conference coordinator) in collaboration with Irene Guijt (Learning by Design), Joost Guijt (PPPLab), Herman Brouwer (WUR/CDI).

Furthermore, we would like to thank Tessa Steenbergen for the video production that brought the energy of the conference to those who could not attend; Cicilia Percy Jr. for the photographs; and CDI staff for essential logistic support.

The conference participants were inspired by the conference topic, and contributed to lively presentations and discussions.

We hope that this conference report and related conference products[1] will further stimulate our thinking around M&E for partnerships for sustainable development.

Wageningen, the Netherlands

June 2016

The conference organisers

Cecile Kusters, Wageningen University and Research centre, Centre for Development Innovation (CDI) – conference coordinator

In collaboration with:

Irene Guijt (Learning by Design)

Joost Guijt (PPPLab)

Herman Brouwer (WUR/CDI)

Bram Peters (WUR/CDI)

List of abbreviations and acronyms

CDI	Wageningen UR Centre for Development Innovation
COR	Collaborative Outcome Reporting
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
GSFP	Ghana School Feeding Programme
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSP	Multi-Stakeholder Partnership
OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
PBA	Partnership Brokers Association
PEP	Promoting Effective Partnering initiative
PHC	Primary Health Care
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PrC	Partnerships Resource Centre
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SRSP	Sarhad Rural Support Programme
THP	The Hunger Project
ToC	Theory of Change
UAFC	Universal Access to Female Condoms joint programme
Wageningen UR/WUR	Wageningen University & Research

Summary

This report presents the key discussions and highlights from sessions held during the conference '*Partnering for Success - How M&E can strengthen partnerships for sustainable development*'. This conference took place on 17 and 18 March, 2016 in the Netherlands and was organised by Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University and Research centre, in collaboration with PPP Lab and Learning by Design.

This conference sought to explore the rising trend of partnerships for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and implications for monitoring and evaluation. The 17^{th} SDG incorporates the need to partner in order to achieve the other SDGs. In order to track, maintain and strengthen partnerships toward these goals, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) can play a key role. There are still many questions about how (and whether) multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP) realise impact, and how the respective roles of partners contribute to the way results are achieved.

Throughout the conference three key questions were leading, and participants sought to find answers and directions to these questions:

1. What do we mean by partnerships?
2. What is specific about the M&E of partnerships?
3. What aspects, approaches and conditions for M&E help partnerships better contribute to the SDGs?

Conference presenters and participants indicated and realised that a wide range of different types of partnerships exist. Currently, the premise is often that it is *always* better to work in partnership – even though that can be questioned (or should be questioned) in some cases. There is a great need to explore the principles and factors that allow partnerships to work. Some participants experienced that forced, predictable and planned partnerships seem to generate less surprising outcomes and less systemic transformation.

Participants found that in each MSP it is essential to explore the added value of each partner contributing to the overall goal. Collectively defining value is vital, and not only in financial, efficiency or effectiveness terms. Since many partnerships deal with complex issues, each partnership depends on complementarity to bring solutions and impact closer. The role of key individuals within partnerships was explored: partnership brokers, but also M&E specialists, have the potential to steer, monitor and inform partnership practices in a fluid and constructive way.

In the conference sessions, much of the debate focused on the distinction between working to implement activities together in partnerships (and demonstrating results and contribution), and on facilitating the process of the partnership itself. In both these aspects, M&E can play a significant role. Participants found that there needs to be a balance in both these aspects: to not only focus on achieving results, but also pay attention to how the partnership can be strengthened so as to ensure maximum impact.

There is still much to explore and work on when it comes to the M&E of partnerships. This conference offered experiences, stories, international network connections, practices and tools as a stepping stone towards this, but in no way aimed to be conclusive . Each session contributed to further understanding and motivation of listeners and contributors. As such, it is hoped that the reader of this conference report will find inspiration to deepening the understanding of and contributing to partnering for success.

1 About the conference and the report

1.1 Why the conference

Partnerships for development are crucial. Global efforts have focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as the issues being tackled are increasingly recognised as complex. SDG 17 is about 'Partnerships for the Goals': "the Sustainable Development Goals can only be realized with a strong commitment to global partnership and cooperation".

SDG 17 emphasises (UNDP, 2016):

- Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development;
- Global partnership, cooperation, global solidarity and integrated approach are essential for SDGs;
- Using and strengthening interconnectedness (access to technology and knowledge for innovation), and coordinating policies;
- Enhancing North-South and South-South cooperation by supporting national plans to achieve all the targets;
- Orientation towards a universal rules-based and equitable trading system that is fair and open, and benefits all.

Collective action is unavoidable, as the post-2015 United Nations development agenda stresses. "Today's complex and interconnected world clearly needs collaboration and partnerships between interest groups spanning the boundaries of business, government, civil society and science" (Brouwer, Woodhill, Hemmati, Verhoosel, & Vugt, 2015). There is a growing role for partnerships. Investments in diverse partnerships and partnership platforms are growing apace. Donors have committed over $5.9bn in multi-annual aid to further the aims of the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, and $1.5bn in grants and loans to support African growth corridor programmes.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) are "a form of governance […], a way in which groups of people can make decisions and take action for the collective good, be it at local, national or collective scale. MSPs range from short consultation processes to multi-year evolving engagements, with more or less structure or formal organisational arrangements" (Brouwer et al., 2015, p. 16).

However, on what basis is investment in MSPs founded? An Oxfam briefing paper cautions: "Mega agricultural PPPs are by and large unproven and risky, and appear likely to skew the benefits of investments towards the privileged and the more powerful, while the risks fall to the poorest and most vulnerable" (Oxfam International, 2014, p. 2). The enthusiasm for partnerships is not yet matched with solid understanding of when partnerships are needed and what their specific role is in sustainable development efforts. Nor is it clear how to monitor the functioning of partnerships, or evaluate their promised impact in creating value at multiple levels. Partnerships are not always effective, since conflicts arise, powers are abused, downward accountability hardly takes place, and learning and communication are often inadequate.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can help strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs). M&E can support learning and decision making processes, hold partners accountable, or assess the functioning of partnerships and how they can reach more sustainable results. But what makes for effective M&E in these partnerships? How can evaluation professionals measure partnership processes and results in order to improve them? This conference report seeks to synthesise insights generated at the conference, from both practice and theory, as a contribution to the partnerships critical for sustainable development.

1.2 About the programme and the report

The conference was created through rich and diverse sessions offered by the 129 participants from Africa, Asia, and Europe. A list of the participants can be found in Appendix 1. Cecile Kusters, the conference coordinator from CDI, opened the conference (http://tinyurl.com/gs4l6zw). The first keynote speech by Bruce Byiers (ECDPM) opened with the question 'how to assess CSO-business partnerships for development', based on a recent publication. The second keynote by Ros Tennyson (Partnership Brokers Association) helped to get a deeper understanding of partnership and partnership brokering. Both keynotes attempted to address the core conference questions:

1. What do we mean by partnerships?
   - What kinds of partnerships exist? What distinguishes a partnership?

2. What is specific about the M&E of partnerships?
   - How do you assess the effectiveness of partnerships (e.g. comprehensive, flexible M&E, across scales) as well as partnership characteristics (e.g. case studies)?

3. What aspects, approaches and conditions for M&E help partnerships better contribute to the SDGs?

Subsequent (parallel) sessions provided space for presenters and participants to learn from and discuss various cases from around the world. These contributions included (paper) presentations, workshops and one round table discussion. All these contributions were asked to also address the conference questions in their presentations and discussions. The conference concluded with a plenary session to generate key insights.

The structure of this report follows the conference programme. Brief introductions are provided for each of the contributions. At the end of every contribution, a link to the presentation is given. More detailed information on each topic, including background papers, presentations, videos and photos, can be found at http://tinyurl.com/pr88j6c.

2 Keynote speeches

2.1 Introduction to the conference

Cecile Kusters

Senior advisor (participatory) planning, monitoring and evaluation – Managing for impact at Wageningen University and Research centre, Centre for Development Innovation

Cecile Kusters

Cecile Kusters, lead conference organiser, set the scene for the conference by highlighting the importance of partnering in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and current trends. She indicated that we need to be cautious since there is limited understanding when partnerships are needed and about their specific role in sustainable development efforts. Partnerships are not always effective and there is a need to better understand partnerships and how M&E can monitor and strengthen partnerships for sustainable development.

"We need to better understand partnerships and how M&E can support partnerships for sustainable development."

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2.2 How to assess CSO-business partnerships for development

Bruce Byiers

Senior Policy Officer Economic Transformation and Trade Programme at ECDPM (the Netherlands)

Bruce Byiers gave the first keynote session at the conference. He presented key findings from partnership research initiated by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM). This study sought to look at the main drivers and trends around business-civil society organisation (CSO) partnerships and the different roles that partners take; the main partnership characteristics that emerge as important in the process of establishing and maintaining effective partnerships; and the potential roles for donors aiming to support such partnerships (Byiers, Guadagno, & Karaki, 2016).

Bruce opened by saying that partnerships are on the rise in one form or another, with the SDGs just the latest global manifestation of this. There are many reasons for this rise (particularly of CSO-business partnerships) related to the decline in importance of aid for many countries, a desire to engage the private sector in development, while CSOs themselves seek to diversify funding. Partnerships offer a way to adapt business to a more sustainable form and helping to meet their social responsibility, while developing country governments also promote economic transformation.

Bruce underlined the need to really focus on the process of partnership creation and development. There are more than 50 different shades of partnerships. 'Partnerships' vary widely according to: objectives, from leveraging partner finance to minimising reputational risk; partner roles, ranging from mutual support, advocacy, partnering, and service provision; firm motivations; and CSO motivations. Bruce briefly introduced a study showing that, in a partnership, businesses often look for reputation and credibility, while CSOs often engage to access funding. A range of underlying business models are present within different partnerships, from Fair Trade, to 'shared value', and Bottom of the Pyramid approaches. In many of these cases, local institutional and governance structures are considered 'crucial' (referring to Pattberg & Widerberg, 2014).

Bruce and his fellow researchers sought to combine a range of taxonomies to arrive at four key characteristics for examining CSO-business partnerships:

- Relation to core business, a key aspect of the partnership's purpose;
- Degree of partner engagement in CSO-business partnerships;
- Partnership activities actually undertaken;
- Governance structures – formal and informal.

"New partnerships mean a lot more partners and complexity, with no linear path to development. This makes it necessary to build in flexibility: M&E systems need to help with that."

Bruce highlighted details from four case studies in two sectors (dairy in East Africa and mining in Madagaskar and Ghana) to better understand how different actors and interests influenced the partnership process. This variety and diversity of cases means that carrying out monitoring and evaluation of partnerships is particularly challenging, but also shows the need for looking at partnerships through a lens that takes account of the four dimensions as well as external factors, key actors and interests involved.

In line with the broader discussion of development processes, partnerships are gaining prominence but nonetheless remain complex undertakings. In terms of M&E, it might be really important to look at important factors like politics, coalitions, interests, incentives, and looking beyond the initial design of the partnership. When doing M&E, it needs to be clear what is being measured, to whose benefit this is; and whether it is an external evaluation, or an internal exercise to improve the functioning of the partnership. Bruce saw one key opportunity for M&E: to make it part of the internal governance and learning of partnerships. There is more recognition that there needs to be adaptive learning, and defining the value addition for co-creation. The private sector can offer ideas for this, since this sector has generally been better in adapting. Partnerships can build on private sector mechanisms, while seeking to achieve development objectives. Bruce concluded by saying that partnerships require adaptability, flexibility: there is "a need to 'plan for sailboats, not trains' (based on Kleinfeld, 2015).

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2.3 Partnership Brokers – Helping us to partner better

Ros Tennyson

Specialist in Multi-Stakeholder Partnering at Partnership Brokers Association

Ros Tennyson, of the Partnership Brokers Association, was the second keynote speaker at the conference. She opened by stating that she had started working with partnerships coming from a creative drama background. She found that in her experience "unexpected imaginations are essential in partnership success".

"I am completely passionate but also sceptical about partnerships! Partnerships can also ***not*** *be an appropriate approach."*

Ros indicated a number of aspects that really matter for partnerships to work: attention to process; context; principles; donors; and imagination. Ros said that regarding principles often power imbalances, hidden agendas and competition affect partnerships. This means that notions of control, trust and interdependence require much attention. Donors matter since they often have significant power to make and break partnerships. 85% of partnerships in the world are donor-driven and essentially compliant in nature. This can lead to collusion (not really doing your thing) and disruption of partnerships. Since many partnerships are driven by funding, this means that commitment to risk aversion and technical procedures could potentially stifle the imagination that could create more transformative rather than reactive partnerships. There is a need for more transformative partnerships that challenge and change mainstream systems and mind-sets.

Ros found that in many cases an essential role is being played by a key person forming the glue/boundary spanner (meant in an American way) working hard to make a partnership work. A process manager helping partnerships to navigate complex spaces. These partnership brokers need a few key qualities, whether they come from within a partnership or are hired as an external expert. These qualities are dependent on phases in a partnership: initially scoping and building; consequently managing and maintaining; then reviewing and revising; and eventually and continuously sustaining outcomes. In the process, brokers need to juggle contradictions. For instance, they need to serve partnerships but also challenge outdated thinking; provide fresh but disrupting ideas while also consolidating; be neutral but also passionate; and build a level playing field but also letting others take opportunities to lead.

When it comes to the monitoring and evaluation of partnerships, Ros stressed that it is necessary to really reflect on the value of partnerships. This means placing value on non-cash contributions beyond knowledge and ownership, and investing and reinforcing the partnership process. Four aspects can be looked at when evaluating partnerships. The first is the project focus of the partnership, tracking and estimating the contributions and impacts of activities. The second aspect is the partnership focus: assessing partnership effectiveness and efficiency and reviewing the value of the partnership to the partners. A third component is the broker focus. This entails assessing the broker's effectiveness and added value, and comparing brokered and non-brokered partnerships. The fourth focus is the paradigm focus. This means zooming out and looking at the whole partnership in relation to society and comparing this with other options for change, and looking at the impact of partnerships on policy and systems. In these four aspects the partnership broker can play an instrumental role: as advisor, facilitator, subject and advocate.

"Brokers have a duty to facilitate [partnership] reviews. Some might say they are not neutral... but if they have a good working relationship they can help partners to be more honest."

Ros stated that when trying to assess the value of partnerships, attention can be given to qualitative approaches such as story telling, participatory observation, using brokers as key informants and subjects in order to get an idea of the practice of partnerships. Though Ros approached partnerships as an art most of the time, strong analytical skills are needed as well to combine intuitive partnership insights with robust deductive capacities.

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3 Contributions

3.1 Day 1, Session 2: Understanding different partnerships

3.1.1 Presentation: Impact evaluation in value chain partnerships

Giel Ton

Senior researcher impact evaluations, Wageningen University and Research centre, LEI (the Netherlands)

Giel presented some of the key issues at play when it comes to impact evaluation of partnerships, and presented two cases of evaluation to illustrate approaches and methods. Giel noted the existence of two major paradigms in impact evaluation: the 'Randomistas' (answering the question: did it work and how much?), and the 'Realists' (who answer the question: under what conditions and for whom?). These two approaches different in their preference for quantitative versus qualitative data collection methods. Though these often were seen as opposed to each other, the strengths of both approaches has to be recognised.

Giel stated that 'theory-based evaluation' is the holy grail of impact evaluation. This entails three major aspects: defining the intervention logic or theory of change; focusing on key indicators that are informative for benchmarking performance, and learn and adjust the intervention theory; and use credible methods beyond before-after measurements, such as 'net-effect' research designs with comparison groups, or the counterfactual reasoning inherent to process tracing.

"Impact research can critically assess if each of the partners is indeed – as is assumed – a necessary contributory actor in a wider constellation of actors [the partnership] that caused the development impact."

In partnerships, many stakeholders work together. Giel noted that demonstrating attribution of effects to each of these stakeholders is impossible. Especially in complex situations and when partnerships seek to have effects on outcomes that are 'outside the span of direct influence', net-effect research is not possible. The counterfactual thinking requires answering questions like: "Do other actors/factors explain the observed changes in outcomes?". This requires methods that take the perspective of the critical/sceptical insider, someone who needs to be convinced with the evidence that indeed the effects are a result of the partnership activities. Process tracing is a useful methodology to do so. It concentrates on the historic sequence of real events and critically assesses if the activities undertaken can be considered as a necessary contributory cause, or that they were 'just there' but without really making a difference. Giel concluded by saying that impact evaluation is necessary, especially if public funds are invested in private business venture in order to realise public goals. These public funds need to have legitimacy and show impact or support for their claim of contributing to public goals.

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3.1.2 Workshop: Understanding and Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships - key highlights from the MSP Guide

Herman Brouwer

Senior Advisor Multi-stakeholder engagement, Wageningen University and Research centre - Centre for Development Innovation (the Netherlands)

Dr. Minu Hemmati

Associate, CatalySD (Germany)

This workshop was about the principles of successful multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs); what is needed to effectively engage with partnerships and with stakeholders; and sought to address the conference learning questions. Herman introduced the workshop by building on what was said during the first keynote by Bruce Byiers: in MSPs, there are more than 50 shades. In fact, there isn't a single platform that doesn't advocate for more partnerships, yet we need to be more precise than just calling for 'partnerships'. The reality is that partnerships often do not deliver what they promise: "they can die prematurely like snapped flowers". The core message of the workshop was that effectiveness of MSPs can be improved by putting seven principles into practice, and by investing in competencies of partners to lead, communicate, collaborate, manage and facilitate.

7 principles can make MSPs more successful:

1. *Embracing system thinking*
2. *Transforming institutions*
3. *Work with power*
4. *Deal with conflict*
5. *Communicate effectively*
6. *Promote collaborative leadership*
7. *Foster participatory learning*

Herman said that many stakeholders need to find a way to collaborate. MSPs are spaces where all actors negotiate, interact, and engage in a partnership. Working at the core of the process is about connecting multiple partners and helping to create a common understanding of issues and possible solutions. MSP are being organised in wicked and complex contexts, because it is here where stakeholders' collaboration can have higher leverage and effect.

In MSPs, it is important to decide what do you want to change, with whom you intend to do this, and how you will go about it. There are more failures than successes. Most of the success stories are written by the funders or those leading an MSP in order to legitimise what they are doing. Experience says that there are seven principles to create a good framework for having a successful MSP (Brouwer et al., 2015). MSPs can have different purposes:

1. Conflict focused: MSP to find a way to solve a conflict together;
2. Problem focused: MSP oriented to find a way to solve a problem together (e.g. land grabbing);
3. Opportunity focused: MSP oriented to innovate and take opportunities.

For more information see http://www.mspguide.org/

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3.1.3 Presentation: Comprehensive results-based monitoring in the Universal Access to Female Condoms (UAFC) Joint Programme

Ciska Kuijper

Project Monitoring Evaluation and Learning officer, Oxfam (the Netherlands)

Ciska Kuijper brought forward the case of the Universal Access to Female Condoms (UAFC) joint programme. The presentation focused on the results-based M&E system of this programme. This programme was organised in a consortium of four Dutch partners: Oxfam, Rutgers, i+ solutions, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the Ministry was not only the main donor but also part of the consortium). The joint mission of the programme is to make female condoms available, accessible and affordable in Cameroon, Nigeria and Mozambique. At the end of the first phase in 2012 it was seen that the strategic framework was not very strong and reporting was mostly about activities rather than results. In setting up the programme the development of the theory of change was a huge challenge. A new comprehensive approach to M&E needed to be set up in order to enhance results reporting and to stimulate more reflection.

"Encouraging partners to reflect was challenging, but it brings you back to the Theory of Change: you are forced to think about the ToC and the linked assumptions."

Three issues were focused on: teaming up by making a clear role division between partners; aligning efforts through revision of the ToC and strategic framework; and tracking joint progress by focusing on a limited number of indicators (18), building a results matrix, and a common planning and reporting format. This enabled better monitoring of progress, facilitated reflection, encouraged partners to develop outcome narratives, and helped with results-based reporting to donors.

Throughout the process of developing the M&E framework a few lessons became clear. The first is that different interpretations of the joint indicators at country level still complicated consolidation and comparison. Secondly, intermediate outcome indicators were needed to fill gaps between output and target outcome indicators. Thirdly, it is quite important to have ownership and to take a participatory approach in developing this M&E. Capacity support needs to be flexible to balance the demand for quality monitoring.

For more information about lessons learned on the UAFC programme please click here

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3.1.4 Paper presentation: Strengthening partnerships for development through M&E in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan

Atif Zeeshan Rauf

Programme Manager, Sarhad Rural Support Programme (Pakistan)

Atif travelled a long distance from Pakistan to present his paper at the conference. In his presentation he emphasised some of his organisation's experiences in developing M&E systems and competencies. As of March 2016, The Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) is operational in all 25 districts, implementing interventions in community development, renewable energy, infrastructure, but also policy influencing and humanitarian interventions. The context in which the programme has had to operate was tough: harsh contexts, lack of resources and lack of M&E capacity. The programme started in 1989, and by the end of the 90s the development context in Pakistan had changed considerably. Atif said that adequate M&E could have captured the changing contexts and change the organisation. Instead, SRSP threatened to lose relevance and was struggling to survive.

"We were too much focused on outputs and therefore revisited ourselves. The top management changed, and therefore we changed as well. We transformed our thinking and changed our Theory of Change and said "let's give more resources to M&E."

After 2000, SRSP, with a change in top management (with an M&E background), changed itself by revisiting its policies, systems, processes and procedures. There was a much greater focus on impacts, outcomes, baselines and to demonstrating results and achievements through the latest, effective communication channels. The principle of transparency was leading, both towards donors and beneficiaries. This proved valuable during various crises: the earthquake in 2005, the Internally Displaced Peoples crises, developments in the turbulent Federally Administered Tribal Areas. A quick learning approach to monitoring and information gathering turned out to be essential here. Key lessons from these experiences were that in these contexts you need: fast on-the-ground information gathering and sharing with all partners at national and international levels to get them involved and optimize development effectiveness. This eventually brings the benefit to communities in Pakistan.

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3.2 Day 1, Session 3: Optimising M&E for the SDG's

3.2.1 Roundtable: Experiences with M&E of strategic partnerships in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Geert Geut

Deputy Director, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) (the Netherlands)

This roundtable discussion was initiated by members of IOB in collaboration with their colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Chairs were brought round in a big circle since an open discussion among all participants was stimulated. The audience included a number of representatives of strategic partners invited for this session. Geert Geut presented the initial background and objectives of the discussion: firstly, to give an overview of the Strategic Partnerships that have now started and secondly to explore what M&E means to these partnerships. A wide diversity of 'so-called Strategic' Partnerships was seen: within the context of Lobby and Advocacy; Partnerships for Chronic Crises; Partners for Dialogue and Conflict Sensitivity; and PPPs.

Geert Geut posed a number of questions to the audience related to M&E of these partnerships: how to approach effectiveness of the activities themselves? And: how to assess the mechanism that merits the need for partnering on these topics? Is it possible to search for something deeper? Geert noted that especially the role of the Ministry is changing: not just financier, but also an actor in the partnership as a facilitator or broker potentially giving access to different networks for instance.

"The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs also wants to play its role in the achievement of our partnerships. We cannot avoid the role of financier – but the Ministries and Embassies can also play a productive role. As brokers but also an actor."

A strategic partnership in Ethiopia had their first reflection meeting a year after starting. One of the first lessons was that this needed to happen more often. A second issue that came up: not much had changed in the partnership relations. This made it necessary to go over the role division and expectations extensively. In hindsight it turned out that having good track records did not mean that there was trust among partners. Marijke Priester, from the SRHR Alliance, said that their experience was that a common ambition helped to frame the interest of partners. Furthermore, the manner of governance and exchange between partners are important aspects to pay attention to. Maarten Kuijper, from AMREF Flying Doctors, stated that in his opinion the ToC is central to whether the partnership works or not. "You can develop a ToC per country and this will change over time. Over time you can wonder whether a certain partner is needed and whether a new actor needs to be brought in. The ToC is leading and guiding, making the review of your Toc an essential part of the M&E as well". Ros Tennyson observed that you need to ask two 'killer' questions: what did you expect to happen that didn't? And, what did you not expect to happen that did?

Though the round table discussion did not provide all the answers, Geert noted that many useful ideas were harvested. Key points were that trust needs to be built in order to make expectations and interests of Strategic Partners clear; taking care to make indicators context-specific and not too abstract; and the need to regularly monitor and reflect on the relations within the partnerships.

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3.2.2 Paper presentation: Sustainability reporting by local governments: A magical tool? Lessons from pioneering cities in Europe and beyond

Ludger Niemann

Associate Researcher, VNG International (the Netherlands)

Ludger Niemann presented his paper on sustainability reporting by local governments. He noted that the main good news is that sustainable development is firmly on the local government agenda in many countries. However, the challenge is now to move from policy goals to implementation. Local governments now ask: how do we know we're moving into the right direction? How to incorporate sustainability (frameworks including the SDGs) into management cycles? How to reach citizens and businesses? In some cases local governments are taking the lead, and many are very ambitious in terms of climate goals.

"If you have the ambition of achieving an integrated approach, you'll quickly face unmanageable amounts of data and thick reports nobody reads. The crux is solving this tension between comprehensive and focussed".

Ludger explained that 'sustainable cities' is a tricky study object. Cities have data on a couple of indicators at output level. There is an overall ambition to also monitor outcomes and impacts. However, disaggregating data at municipality level is often not possible. Ludger asked: what about all these processes? Should that also be part of M&E? Other challenges relate to choices: standardization or local relevance, comprehensiveness versus manageability; managing trade-offs in the face of conflicting goals. Regarding reporting: do you want to use benchmarks? What kind of indicators? Another big issue is whether a municipality should mainly monitor its own activities or the territory at large with the influence of numerous other actors.

Ludger explored six cities in Europe that voluntarily initiated sustainability reporting. Some municipal sustainability reports were quite short and largely descriptive, others very extensive. The best reports had a clear executive summary, plain language, details on their websites, honest analysis, coherence with other instruments (e.g. Annual Report), and included stocktaking as well as an agenda for future actions. Interviews produced evidence that such reports had positive effects on local learning and agenda-setting processes. However, reporting must not be exaggerated in terms of length and frequency. Working on sustainability requires shared agendas and visions, and broad participation. Here, local governments are key facilitators and implementers/decision-makers, and need to make choices whether to focus on standardized comparative indicators or local tailor-made indicators. It is good practice to make sustainability indicators publicly available. However, reporting needs not be participatory – accountability is more straightforward when local governments produce reports to make their own analysis explicit. This can provide a good basis for other stakeholders to act and engage.

A study with case descriptions is available at www.vng-international.nl/blog/policy-paper-sustainability-reporting

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3.2.3 Presentation: The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) M&E system for governance - the case of a regional economic union

Elsa de Morais Sarmento

Head, Functional Cooperation and Programme Management Unit (St. Lucia)

Elsa presented a paper written together with her colleague Beverly Best. The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is a regional economic union of 9 countries in the Caribbean. The main characteristics these island states have in common: small islands, very small in terms of population, with many challenges related to poverty and climate change. “They wanted to become stronger by having one voice”. Three features were most important: governance; regional ownership; and movement of people and organisations. The idea for a regional partnership started in 2013 with a pilot, and eventually a whole M&E framework was built to help manage it.

The M&E system was conceived through a series of consultation meetings. The idea behind the M&E system was that it creates a platform to provide evidence-based education on national and subnational level, and provides a tool for evaluations. Governance was essential in combination with M&E of the regional economic union. Over 100 institutions were consulted during the process of formulation. It was important to take into account cooperative relations (deliberation, bargaining and compromise-seeking) between institutions, and how the relationship between vertical government levels and between public and non-public actors took shape. This is how governance relates to M&E capacity: the monitoring of the capacity of regional institutions and the Member States to carry out their declared missions, retain strategic priorities and implement reforms effectively. The intermediate outcome leading up to this is the degree of democratic accountability, and the lower-level ‘immediate outcome’ related to the extent to which public service delivery is perceived as efficient and citizen-oriented.

“Setting up a supra-national M&E system is hard work and very much requires a kind of mind-set to show up with responsibilities. It is currently being scaled up, but the states have to like the system in order to accept the system.”

It was especially difficult to define and collect information about intermediate level outcomes relating to democratic accountability. It was important to turn principles into a limited number of measurable evaluation questions and indicators. Two government units were assigned to monitor these indicators. In this process it was essential to develop creative ways of collecting data, from qualitative perception-based methods to quantitative administrative data.

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3.2.4 Presentation: Partnering for Success: Implementation of District Health Management Information System (DHMIS) Policy in Gauteng Province South Africa

Nomsa Makhubele

Acting Director, Information Management of Gauteng Department of Health (South Africa)

Nomsa presented a case from Gauteng, South Africa, which is often called the place of gold. The topic related to the way in which a District Health Management Information System (DHMIS) has been implemented there. In 2003, the National Department of Health (NDOH) of South Africa set out to coordinate, establish and implement comprehensive health information systems across all levels of the Health Care System in South Africa. Strategic objectives of the DHMIS policy are: to strengthen M&E through the harmonisation of information across the country; and clarify the main roles and responsibilities at each level for each category of staff. USAID and MEASURE Evaluation (ME-val) Strategic Information for South Africa (SIFSA) successfully managed the information system. NGOs usually come and propose what they want to do, for instance distributing condoms. SISFA, contrarily, came to the Department of Health by asking: what is necessary for improving the health system? Partnerships means working together. In partnership with USAID and SIFSA, roles and actors have to be defined. With the National Health Act (2003), an information system was developed to know who should do what, how, and why.

"A good practice is: instead of saying that this is what I can propose to you, the partnership should be based on what do you need from me and how can we help each other."

Nomsa explained that the focus was on a common understanding about the policy and the actors that should be involved. DHMIS standard operating procedures were presented on posters used to provide information and evaluation findings. Strong efforts were made to make sure that actors were aware of the evaluation process. Trainings were organised on DHMIS policy, and an online monitoring mechanism was introduced. These combined efforts led to more access and visibility of the Health policy, improved data collection and improved validation of data on different levels. It was also seen that most healthcare facilities were now conducting weekly assessments and monthly meetings to discuss data issues. Good practices were especially related to the collaboration with development partners. Partnership is about openness, transparency, and filling the gaps on what it is missing. Leadership and ownership are important factors. The success of this initiative was anchored in dual ownership, openness and trust. This project showed that even a seemingly simple project such as sharing posters in hospital is not as easy as you can imagine.

Get in touch: *http://www.health.gpg.gov.za/* **|** *http://tinyurl.com/zzvobuv*

3.2.5 Presentation: Stories on the Ground: Identifying New Sustainable Extension Partners through M&E

Irene R. Tanzo

Science research specialist, Philippine Rice Research Institute (the Philippines)

"In rural areas in the Philippines, we eat rice five times a day. For us 'rice is life'", Irene Tanzo explained at the beginning of her presentation. She also said that on the other hand, in the Philippines there is only one extension officer per 1000 farmers. Following this low ratio, three agencies partnered together to strengthen the extension services for rice. Rice Extension Intermediaries (REI) were sought for improving extension services. These REIs were individuals or groups with a presence in the communities with a relation to academia, media, the private sector, or communities. Irene stated: "we need to show to young people that agriculture is cool, sexy; we need to change the mind-set of young people and let them start dreaming about agriculture!". She said that knowledge, sharing, and learning are the main activities of the partnership. The partnership uses different tools to achieve goals. These can be: videos showing the state of Philippine agriculture; lectures on and hands-on agricultural apps; live testimonies of successful people in agriculture.

"Partnership means helping local partners understand the situation and the big role they can play."

The question is how to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness/ productivity of rice extension services. The M&E was carried alongside the services, not just at the end. The partners developed a baseline survey and after every extension services feedback and reports were collected. Another interview was done after 6 months to capture the impact of the project. It turned out that, among our activities, Pinoy (i.e. Philippines) Text Center was often used to reach farmers with Knowledge, Sharing and Learning material. This is a call centre set up to answer any questions raised by Philippine farmers. Different evaluation questions were asked to evaluate the impact of this project: "we asked who was targeted from the projects. The results showed that the farmers were the first target but surprisingly, we realised that these farmers spilt over this information to their friends, parents, children, etc." Extension-providers were asked the reason why they were contributing to extension services. Some of the REIs even managed to influence key policies related to agriculture. The policy system changed as well in order to adapt itself towards the impact of the REI project. Loans for fertilizers, services, machinery increased to satisfy the growing demand of the farmers.

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3.3 Day 2, Reflections on day 1

Minu Hemmati

Associate, CatalySD Sustainability (Germany)

At the beginning of the second day of the conference, after an energetic start, Minu Hemmati gave her initial reflection points and the questions she still had for the rest of the conference.

Minu noted two main impressions from the day before: a full and enjoyable day, and a great exchange of values, sincerity and strength. Value clarification came up as an important point: of yourself and of the others within partnerships. Much is about strength and the interior condition within partnerships as well. In our work it is a lot about relationships and making space for the other. This is also quite demanding work, and recognition helps to support each other to explore the latest findings and results, but also for peer coaching. The theme of this conference, 'M&E of partnerships' really helps to understand and acknowledge the kind of work being done.

Rob van Tulder

Academic director and founder of the Partnerships Resource Centre (the Netherlands)

Rob van Tulder offered the second reflection of the morning. He spoke about tension in relation to the topic of M&E for partnerships. "The tension I feel is tension between academia and practice". When talking about partnership there seems to be a build-up: first talking about measuring and control, and now more about learning and exploring value. These are serious questions.

Rob visualised some of the key messages from the day before. He pictured the sailboat and train metaphor mentioned by Bruce Byiers. The train is about accountability and control, whilst the sailboat is about process, learning and cooperation. There is this tension again: practioners need to show progress, while academics want to know what you can prove. However, in the past we were more frantic about this tension. Rob hoped that it is possible to combine academia and practice, "so we can save the partnership fashion from it's supporters. We don't know how it works, so we can't prove that it works." It is not about proving, it is about making how partnerships work, more understandable. Rob finalised by saying that he had high hopes for the second day to provide deeper understanding by talking more practically about M&E approaches and especially how community involvement can help with achieving the SDGs.

3.4 Day 2, Session 4: Deepening our learning

3.4.1 Paper presentation: Co-constructing an accountability community for the Home Grown School Feeding Programme in Ghana

Sue Sadler

Research Associate, University of Strathclyde (Scotland)

Over a period of three years (2013-2015) a programme of social audit in Ghana has engaged over 2,800 participants in social accountability processes relating to school feeding. Sue Sadler, from the University of Strathclyde in Scotland, researched this social audit process. The Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) has ambitious goals to reduce hunger and malnutrition; increase school enrolment, attendance, and retention; and to boost domestic food production. The programme has grown substantially from the initial ten schools in 2005, to some 5,000 public primary schools in 2015, with further expansion planned for the coming years.

Sue described how the GSFP tries to foster input and cooperation between SMEs; school committees; parents and communities; and smallholder farmers. This essentially fuzzy partnership, comprising both formal and informal elements, requires good information and communication to work effectively. Throughout the programme many complications occurred and a lot of information was missing. Examples of this were: delayed payments leading to decreased spending by caterers; caterers being paid on the basis of how many children were in school, leading to more young children showing up for lunch; and misunderstandings about the role and contribution of parents and school committees.

"Co-constructing accountability has great potential for both proving, and improving, what we do in partnership.[...] Co-producing accountability made everybody feel more responsible, and placed emphasis on social learning and awareness."

The social audit model was adopted to help with building capacity, exchanging information and managing expectations. In Ghana, this meant asking parents to come to school and help with setting indicators and facilitating exchange of views with district officials. The process (funded and supported by SNV) used local organisations to facilitate a process of sensitisation, mobilisation, use of input tracking and community score cards, followed by a district interface meeting. The model adopted demonstrates that social audit need not be confrontational, nor limited to a 'proving' agenda. It can stimulate social learning and be co-productive: a dynamic, iterative process with an *improving* agenda to which all partners can 'buy in'. Social audit can promote an improvement agenda by bringing in elements of social accountability such as meaningful measurement, engagement, capacity building for all parties, transparency, rights and responsibilities and dialogue. This goes hand in hand with a co-production orientation that respects autonomy and emphasises agency, inter-dependency and joint action.

Sue concluded that the approach delivers an agenda for change and improvement rather than a static report format that simply justifies and evidences the rationale for what has been achieved. However, it can be difficult to link this iterative and dynamic framework to more formal governance systems at regional and national levels. While power imbalances don't just go away, the co-productive improvement agenda directs additional attention to organisational cultures, relationship building and flexible approaches to communication (Miller, 2014) that support and enhance social accountability partnerships.

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3.4.2 Presentation: Do Primary Health Care Facilities Supported by Development Partners do any better in M&E?

Tsholofelo Adelekan

Monitoring and Evaluation Director, Gauteng Department of Health (South Africa)

Tsholofelo Adelekan presented baseline findings from research currently being conducted on the Gauteng Primary Healthcare (PHC) facilities in South Africa. The overall research objective is to explore to what extent quality of data generated at PHC sites can be improved by direct support or technical assistance. The presentation touched on the way in which collaboration between the Gauteng Health department and the Strategic Information Capacity for South Africa (SIFSA) programme. This initiative is part of the South African government and USAID's 'President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)'. The research focused on Johannesburg and on HIV prevention, treatment and care. A key role played by partners in the PEPFAR is on strengthening M&E and data management capacity of health care departments.

The main motivation for the research was to see how better quality health care information could be generated; increased need to demonstrate results and maximise use of resources; qualify audit outcomes based on non-financial data; and to improve public confidence. The baseline explored the data management systems of Gauteng PHCs, the level of staff capacity relating to data management, and follow-up implementation of Department of Health Management Information System policy. 166 PHC facilities took part in the baseline. Two tools were developed: a preliminary visit with a Recount and Systems & Staffing Tool, and a statistical data management system recount.

"Opportunities that we see is that M&E could be used to drive the change that we want to see in terms of partnership data management."

Tsholofelo showed that the data was gathered about the educational and employment distributions within Gauteng PHCs; districts with the most data discrepancies in relation to patient headcounts; and cases of under- and over-reporting of HIV testing. The main conclusion is that there are many inconsistencies of facility reports in relation to source documents at many levels. This could be related to gaps in compliance to current policies and weak supervision by the different partners and the Health Department. Tsholofelo stated that the main opportunities to further strengthen mutual accountability models are by making use of explicit theories of change, harmonised reporting processes, and access or sharing of performance information resources.

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3.4.3 Workshop: Aligning Partners through Assessment and Learning: Evaluating Network Effectiveness in a Social Franchise

Simon Bailey

Head of Programmes and Research, Aflatoun International (the Netherlands)

In this session Simon Bailey shared Aflatoun's approach to partnership evaluation through Qualitative Comparative Analysis and annual network assessments. Aflatoun is a network of organisations and programmes that seeks to provide social and financial education to children all over the world. Simon explained that a social franchise implies that Aflatoun provides the content for education but doesn't give the resources to its partners. The presentation explored how Aflatoun uses different evaluation tools to improve the way in which partnership works. Accountability can be used in different ways to improve your organisation.

There are three levels of evaluation:

1. Creating strategic directions in multi-level governance;
2. Improving the effectiveness of the partnership;
3. Assessing program implementation.

"Evaluations with learning, and not assessment, as the aim is good for partnerships."

The main trade-off in evaluation is related to accountability and consistency of voice. How can you engage the people that are you working with and have an accountable evaluation? This question is not merely answered with some scale or rates, but the results are compared and elaborated to understand the performance in depth. Most of the Aflatoun partnership works in a decentralized way and the main challenge is to hear all the voices. Generally, partners know the social franchise but they don't know each other. The international secretariat plays a key role in linking and supporting local partners. Some of the ways to do that is by sending out surveys to hear from as many people as possible about the information we as International Secretariat want. These data are aggregated at different levels, and the results are shared before the beginning of the new strategic programme. Also, mid-term evaluations are often done in a more comfortable phase of the program: usually when results start to make sense.

Qualitative Comparative Analysis is one methodology that was implemented to understand "why" programmes work differently. Simon showed that it is a realistic and theory-driven method, based on case-studies. He said: "we don't provide funds to our partners but we try to evaluate why our partners continue to work, or they disappear, or they scale-up. We look at the conditions behind programme implementation by mapping the pathways to categorise the kind of partners and to provide different kinds of services according to their conditions. We try to pinpoint the partners that deviate from the average performance and we try to focus on them". As such, cross-comparing case studies makes it possible to show the quality of each condition for success. Also, organisations themselves co-author their own conclusions. Simon concluded by stating that the main strengths of this evaluation approach are that it can improve organisational performance, help with alignment of key stakeholders and create positive feedback and learning loops. However, challenges for evaluation are that they are time-consuming and demanding on partners, the distinction between assessment and learning is subtle, and that it is often not exactly clear how the organisation can use evaluation findings.

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3.4.4 Workshop: Data by the people, for the people – How participatory monitoring & evaluation tools, practices and experiences can strengthen partnerships for community-led development

Megan Colnar

Director of M&E, The Hunger Project Global (United State)

Jouwert van Geene

Programme Director, The Hunger Project (the Netherlands)

Megan and Jouwert presented the case of the Hunger Project and its approach to participatory M&E tools. The Hunger Project (THP) is active in 12 countries and has over 40,000 village-level volunteers and leaders for community development. THPs approach is to work holistically with local communities and address their needs. Starting from women and communities, THP helps to develop their leadership, education, skills, and advocacy. However, the challenge is how to monitor and evaluate the impact of partnership made with local people. More specifically, these challenges are:

1. Use of information for SDGs;
2. Use of evaluation to understand the community perspective.

The partnerships described mainly concerned active collaboration between communities, community based organisations, THP (as a national NGO) and local and national governments. THP feels that the involvement of local communities in data collection and interpretation is crucial: both for their own empowerment and role in development, and for the partnerships with social service providers or other stakeholders. THP actively uses community leaders and community volunteers in data collection and analysis. Apart from many programme-related outputs and outcomes, THP also tracks outputs about the M&E system itself related to the partnership with the communities.

Megan and Jouwert gave some examples of different techniques to visualise results and make sense of findings:

- Community Data Boards;
- M&E animators: building the capacity of people to track their activities;
- Community-led evaluations;
- Women Leader's outcome reporting. This is an important method to deal with sensitive issues. Local women leaders are usually more embedded in the system and they are closer to the women.

"Organisational commitment, investors, awareness, willingness to listen are critical inputs. These elements are not easy to build and funders should be flexible for this."

Together with Simon Bailey, Megan and Jouwert led an interaction exercise that asked workshop participants to explore their projects' key challenges and opportunities for M&E at different levels. The participants were divided into different sub-groups per level: national level, organisational partnership level, network level and community level. Each group was asked to explore what tools and methods seem effective for M&E at that specific level, and how to relate to other levels and principles. It was seen that each level requires diverse principles and methods to make M&E more effective. For instance, at peer organisation partnership level, flexibility, aligning interests and goals and building relationships were found to be essential. At community level principles of ownership, trust and building awareness was important.

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3.4.5 Presentation: Intelligent Mapping to increase collaboration and impact towards SDGs

Niek van Duivenbooden

Senior Project Innovator, Trimpact BV (the Netherlands)

Niek van Duivenbooden, representing Trimpact BV (a social enterprise), gave a presentation on his perspective on M&E of partnerships and introduced the Development Synergy and Alignment Tool (DevSAT). Niek explained that key elements of working on M&E of partnerships is that you: get out of your comfort zone; map activities at the start of a partnership; increase impact by smart linking of activities; and emphasize the strong combination of M&E and partnerships.

Niek started with an anecdote of his work in Burundi with an Alterra Wageningen University project. While there, he met someone who was working in one of the same villages Niek's project was also active in. The other project was also from Wageningen University! They didn't know this about each other and this was a wake-up call: "we can see that impact is limited somehow, but we are not able to act or play around a bit to work on this". Niek challenged listeners to think about what goals we are trying to achieve: the donor's or the SDGs? A common vision is important when building partnerships - a shared vision, building on the strengths and competencies of stakeholders and being transparent about what you can offer and dare to ask what you need. This requires courage, to make yourself vulnerable.

"Connecting an M&E-tool to DevSAT gives insight in monitoring the functioning of partnerships or evaluate their promised impact in creating value at multiple levels."

Niek introduced the Development Synergy and Alignment Tool (DevSAT), which is focused on the SDGs and makes use of the IATI registration form. DevSAT is a spatial, layered mapping tool that shows the SDGs until the level of collines (Burundian communal districts). For the Fertile Grounds Initiative in Burundi, Niek was involved in the development of a Theory of Change. The first step of this was to take stock: what is the actual situation and who is involved, and what is the preferred situation. DevSAT shows the different kinds of projects in a country and the organizations involved. It also shows the level of integrated approaches taken. This can then form the basis of identifying areas where projects can work together or new joint projects can be created. However, this requires making data and agendas more open.

Especially when it comes to the SDGs, impact is limited if these goals are worked on separately. Some projects serve multiple SDGs and others do not. It is therefore important to create a similar type of language when talking about SDGs and to have an overview at country and lower level to see who is working on what and what SDG indicators are addressed there. Niek concluded that when mapping and linking of activities is required for improved partnerships, three things are essential: a common vision, a clear overview of activities going on, and building trust.

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3.4.6 Presentation: The added value of ICT in partnerships

Carlo Bakker

Director, IMPEC (the Netherlands)

Carlo Bakker, focused his presentation on his work in South Africa with the government Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), positioned under the office of the presidency. This cooperation is about adding public value through data technology, and facilitating and supporting Planning Monitoring and Evaluation of government programmes. Carlo spoke about the work IMPEC is doing in assisting the DPME with capacity, methods and ICT. Some of the work that was done related to an international study on how to add public value through information and data technology, developing an online platform for civil servants to share good examples of government performance, and an innovative online tool that informs government officials with relevant information to improve public value.

"Regardless the subject or policy area the MKIT links learning routes and learning content to M&E results, resulting in a platform where all partners can find and share information."

A four-step framework was developed to make progress on achieving public value: from the first step of non-compliance with legal requirements, to step four of full compliance and doing things smartly. In the process civil servants are provided with advice and capacity to make progress along this framework. Carlo presented the Management Knowledge Improvement Tool (MKIT): an online tool that provides operational management with relevant content that impacts public value. As such this tool can help with defining evaluation indicators, but also with monitoring progress and showing results. The important thing Carlo added was that it is a flexible tool, that can work with any topic participating parties want to focus on.

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3.5 Day 2, Session 5: Understanding partnerships more deeply – Workshops

3.5.1 Workshop: Navigating Partnership Impact

Rob van Tulder

Academic Director, Partnerships Resource Centre (the Netherlands)

Stella Pfisterer

Research Associate, Partnerships Resource Centre (PrC; the Netherlands)

Rob van Tulder and Stella Pfisterer, observed that when navigating, or 'sailing with a partnership' there is a need to be flexible, have a learning attitude and deal with a common Theory of Change. Rob and Stella explained that this workshop was about developing 'guiding questions' for partnership impact, asking: 'Where I am now? How to define performance?' The key issue is to develop a tool to stimulate a competent M&E system for a high performing and high-impact partnership.

Partnerships involve highly dynamic processes and require flexible M&E approaches. Developing comprehensive M&E systems for cross-sector partnerships is a complex task. Three building blocks are distinguished: 1) the M&E lenses about performance, impact and the linking pin 'additionality'; 2) The phases of partnership; 3) the four levels of analysis. Partnerships consist of multiple levels of analysis: the individuals in organizations, partner organizations, the 'partnership' and the system where they operate. Therefore it is required that comprehensive partnership M&E systems balance their focus and measures on the partnering process, relationships, outcomes of the activities and impact.

"The PrC created a tool that contains a set of guiding questions on performance and impact for partnership practitioners to use together when designing and using their M&E systems. The PrC will create a community of practice in the coming months to refine this tool".

Standardized M&E systems restrict partnerships and do not do justice to their complexity, therefore, guiding questions are a promising approach for supporting decision-making on how to design comprehensive M&E systems. Such guiding questions can be based on key challenges/tensions which are usually experienced in partnership M&E in different partnering phases and at different levels of analysis. Rob and Stella reflected on such possible guiding questions related to four key M&E challenges: coming towards an aligned impact definition and ToC; the tension between accountability and learning; openness for change and flexibility to adapt; and whether and how to make use of M&E insights for scaling. Examples of guiding questions that were highlighted by participants included: Are we all involved in the development of the ToC? Do we have the same goal/objective? What is your added value to the partnerships? What do you expect to benefit from the other partners? How does the partnership affect other partnerships? Should the donor define part of the M&E set-up?

In light of the SDGs it is particular important to jointly reflect on and develop M&E as a community. The participants were invited to further develop and build an M&E tool together with the PrC that provides guiding questions and tools which support the development of partnership specific comprehensive M&E systems. This invitation is placed in the context of the project *Promoting Effective Partnering (PEP)* on: http://www.rsm.nl/prc/our-research/projects/promoting-effective-partnering-pep/

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3.5.2 Workshop: Steering the Partnership Process - the Partnership Learning Loop

Rita Dieleman

Independent evaluator and accredited Partnership Broker, RiDi Consultancy (the Netherlands)

Helga van Kampen

Lead trainer and accredited Partnership Broker, New How (the Netherlands)

Rita Dieleman and Helga van Kampen gave an interactive presentation about 'the Partnership Learning Loop'. They said that there are many assumptions about partnering being the key to success as opposed to working alone. However, the question is when partnering brings added value and on what level: for society, for beneficiaries, for the partnership as a whole, for organisations, for individual employees?

Partnerships don't mean equal relationships. A relationship might well be transactional, a service delivery agreement. Partnering means an ongoing relationship in which the partnership's activities are co-created, where each partner brings in contributions (be it financial, in kind or other), are where each partner commits to mutual accountability. If it doesn't suit the situation, a partnership becomes a (administrative) burden for everyone involved. Current Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) usually focuses on projects and programmes, with less attention being paid to the collaboration itself and the added value of the partnership. What would be helpful in the PME of partnerships is more insight into the partnership process. Monitoring and steering the partnership process instead of the programme alone requires a different approach than PME at programme level.

"The problem with many partnerships is high ambitions but generally business as usual. We see that current PME is still focused on the projects and less attention to the process and the collaboration. […] The Partnership Learning Loop visualises the partnership process and the perceived added value throughout the partnership."

A partnership evolves over time. Sometimes there is a clear joint vision and strategy, with clear expectations on each side, sometimes not. Each partnership is unique and changes depending on the context, the phase it's in and the people involved. Expectations are usually not that explicit on the table, especially in a phase and position where trust has to be built. There is a growing need to get more insight in the partnership process and its added value on different levels. Rita and Helga gave an introduction to the Partnership Learning Loop. This tool is designed to create an understanding of the unique fingerprint of the partnership and to include the partnership process in steering mechanisms to enforce well informed decision making. Based on standards as well as partnership-specific indicators, the Partnership Learning Loop seeks to assess the perceptions of all partners involved in the different layers of a partnership. It shows the nuances and differences between those perceptions. It helps to stimulate dialogue in an open atmosphere about these differences.

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3.5.3 Workshop: How to track how a partnership is doing as a partnership and the potential link with impact on the ground

Joost Guijt

Management team member, PPPLab (the Netherlands)

Anja Wolsky

Advisor Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation, Wageningen University and Research centre - Centre for Development Innovation (the Netherlands)

Joost and Anja presented an emerging e-tool for partnership tracking: the Partnering Process Tool. The workshop tapped into the experiences of their audience to improve it further. This tool comes out of the work of the PPPLab studying Public Private Partnerships. As they said "In the PPPs we look at, 2% of the budget is the minimum amount dedicated for M&E. We started studying how the partnerships carry out their monitoring and evaluating but we soon realised they were often struggling with internal partnering issues. Consequently, we decided to look at the partnership processes instead." Anja and Joost stated that a structured assessment of how partners work together is the main focus of this M&E of partnerships.

The Partnering Process tool aims to track and manage the health of partnerships. The ambition is to then correlate the impact of partnership process as a whole with the partnering process. It can be used for three aspects: tracking trends within the partnership and partnership building; diagnosis (what causes problems within the partnership); and design (how to better design PPPs). Seven principles with key questions are used to assess the partnership process. Each partner individually reflects on the principles and gives them scores. The results are visualised in a radar chart of that partner, and every partner can see the answers of the other partners. The PPTool can be used as self-assessment tool, where partnership members can discuss differences in answers, consensus, reasons, possible implications, and multiple perspectives. The tool lends itself for regular updates to check trends.

Workshop participants worked in two groups to improve the tool. One group focused on possible improvements to the principles built into the tool, the other on how the tool can be used to stimulate and structure discussions within partnerships. Generally it was found to be a useful tool to help with the partnership process.

Some of the recommendations were to:

- Think about tailoring certain questions to force people to think about surprising topics: such as adding an 8th principle each partnership can fill in themselves;
- Include aspects of communication in principles 1-4;
- Create comment boxes to add open answers;
- Create multiple levels in the tool to collect internal responses from organisation members;
- Think about creating an off-line as well as an online version.

7 principles of the Partnership Process Tool:

1. *Recognizing and accepting the needs for partnership*
2. *Developing clarity and realism of people*
3. *Ensure commitment and ownership*
4. *Develop and maintain trust*
5. *Create clear and robust partnership arrangements*
6. *Monitor, measure and learn*
7. *Programme evaluation*

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3.6 Day 2, Session 6: Practical Options - Methodological Workshops

3.6.1 Workshop: Catholic Relief Services Partnership Scorecard

Linda Gamova

Technical Adviser for Partnership and Capacity Strengthening, Catholic Relief Services (United States)

Daniel Oloo

Programme Manager, Catholic Relief Services (Kenya)

Evelyn Achieng Dede

Programme Officer, Homa Hills Community Development Organization (Kenya)

This session was introduced by three brief presentations about the application of the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Partnership Scorecard. This tool was used throughout 2 years of the nine-years old partnership between CRS and Homa Hills Community Development Organization (HHCDO) in Kenya. An important aspect noted was that the partnership is guided by mutually shared purpose and values, and entering into partnership is based on agreed-upon shared principles for win/win propositions: purpose, benefits, costs and resources. In the eyes of the presenters, the Partnership Scorecard was a breakthrough helping to strengthen the partnership and monitoring and evaluation of the same. This web-based tool is used to assess and rate the performance on key partnership criteria. This allows reflecting on four major outcomes important to CRS and its partners: partnership; transparency and accountability; capacity strengthening; and civil society development. The Partnership Scorecard is filled in by CRS and partner staffs and, importantly, is followed up by a meeting to review the scorecard survey results and developing an Improvement Plan. CRS and its partners also monitor and evaluate the partnership via partnership reflection workshops and external partner feedback surveys.

"Partnerships are dynamic. It involves personal perceptions, so it has to represent the view of many and should be participatory. Leadership is crucial, so opinions of leaders are important. Regularity, consistency, trust and openness are key."

During the workshop a number of key points came up:

- Partnership is a long-term process and should be based on shared purpose as well as focus on risks and resources;
- M&E of partnership is not easy as mostly it is about individual/team perspectives and dynamic relations usually affected by the context (both internal and external). However, it should be done as it helps to celebrate the successes and improve the weaknesses. Partners should be given a regular opportunity to reflect on the relations and how those affect the work they do together;
- M&E of partnership should consider different aspects to measure as well as methods (e.g. both quantitative and qualitative). Triangulation of data is key here;
- CRS and partners are discussing how their partnership support or hinder their ability to serve the communities to support them to address the needs. However, neither the Partnership Scorecard nor other partnership measuring complementing tools directly measure the effect of the strong partnership on the successful project results in the communities. Currently, CRS together with universities and partners, engage in case studies development and researches as well as piloting tools to try to create evidence of partnership and capacity strengthening contribution to better project results;
- To contribute to the SDGs, partners should contribute to the relations and the M&E of those relations. The follow up and measurable improvements, the evidence-based decisions and communication, can demonstrate the desirable change both in the relations and performance and boost more energy and faith to move forward in achieving the SDGs;
- Subsidiarity should guide all processes and decisions in partnerships and M&E of partnership.

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3.6.2 Workshop: The power of large-scale micro-narratives for driving participatory and multi-stakeholder PM&E

Tom Van den Steen

Programme Advisor Planning, Learning and Accountability, Vredeseilanden/VECO (Belgium)

Tom Van den Steen, spoke about his organisation's approach to participatory and multi-stakeholder PM&E. He introduced VECO, an international NGO that operates worldwide through its 8 regional offices, enabling and supporting smallholder farmers to take up their role in transforming the food system and to contribute to feeding a growing world population in a sustainable way.

Tom opened his workshop with an exercise. Each participant was asked to think about a specific experience they had lived through related to agriculture. The objective was to 'make sense' of this experience by placing points on various answering fields (such as triangles, sliders and a square) representing different options, perspectives and time allocations. VECO uses the SenseMaker approach to valorise the gamut of perspectives beneficiaries have of partnerships that affect their lives and to introduce their appreciation into the monitoring of the work of these partnerships. SenseMaker is based on the collection and indexing of fragmented material including personal experiences, pictures, reports, blogs and other forms of data. VECO has focused on collecting large amounts of micro-narratives. These anecdotes, experiences or stories are self-signified by the storytellers at the point of origin. This means that respondents assign meaning to their own stories through a set of "signifiers" (indexes) rather than an external intermediary interpreting the narratives (common in qualitative approaches).

"There are no shortcuts. You have to learn by doing, by making your hands dirty. Just make sure that whatever you do contributes to filling the black holes of understanding your work and its context."

Tom explained that VECO has developed two Signification Frameworks to inform programmatic approaches: the Inclusive Business Scan and the Youth in Agriculture Scan (which is still to be fine-tuned). The Inclusive Business Scan looks at the commercial relations between stakeholders in a given value chain, i.e. the partnerships between farmers, the farmer organisation they are associated with and the buyer of their produce. The participatory analysis and feedback sessions led to strengthening the partnerships between both the farmers and their farmer organisation as between the farmer organisation and the buyer. Stakeholders have put forward pro-active and realistic propositions engaging all parties so as to overcome hurdles in these partnerships. The Youth in Agriculture Scan has been implemented in Central America and the Andes region with the purpose of deepening the understanding of the agri-business context in which the regional offices operate and in which they seek to promote youth involvement. Through the large-scale collection of self-interpreted anecdotes and a multi-stakeholder participatory analysis workshop, representatives of farmers, government, private sector, service providers, and NGOs learned from the data, the stories and each other's perspectives. Participants also came up with a dozen of "safe-to-fail" action proposals that were coherent with the complex nature of the intervention areas.

Both experiences showed that SenseMaker has been valuable as a complementary tool for VECO to capture the voices of different stakeholders and use these to nurture the debate between partners, to monitor on-going and guide future actions, and evaluate the effectiveness of partnerships in the realm of its programmatic interventions.

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3.6.3 Workshop: Collaborative Outcome Reporting for Strengthening of a programme-implementing Alliance or Coalition

René Vermeulen

Trainer/Consultant, MDF Training & Consultancy (the Netherlands)

René Vermeulen, from MDF Training and Consultancy, presented two different techniques in this workshop: Collaborative Outcome Reporting (COR), and the Alliance Thermometer. René explained that COR is a methodology for evaluations to strengthen involvement of stakeholders and verify results. The COR method focuses around one or more workshops (with internal stakeholders and external topic experts) to formulate the *performance story* of the project or programme. During the workshop existing data and additional data are combined and the *findings* are presented by the evaluators, thereafter the outcomes are jointly formulated.

The Alliance Thermometer is a tool to *take the temperature* of the cooperation in a partnership, or alliance, or coalition. This management tool gives insights into the *systems* and *dynamics* of the cooperation, inspired by GiZ's Capacity WORKS and the FAN (Free Actors in Network) approach. The building blocks that are included are: Strategy, Connection & Cooperation, Steering structure, Processes and Learning & Innovation. Of this building blocks, the *what* (systems) and the *how* (dynamics) are analysed through various questions in a questionnaire that is sent to internal stakeholders. This tool can be used at different moments of the project life cycle and is not only useful for evaluations. In their approach to evaluations it has been used to collect additional data on the cooperation. This data then fed the COR workshop. The application of the Alliance Thermometer in combination with the COR technique was observed and experienced by the participants in the workshop. Small groups were formed to discuss a case owned by one of the participants. The Alliance thermometer was filled in by the groups.

"Collaborative Outcome Reporting strengthens the learning aspect of evaluations and improves the involvement of all parties involved."

By including the reflective point of view on the cooperation within the programme's alliance, the learning aspect of the evaluation is strengthened. By doing so in combination with a focus on learning lessons at a higher level than output level, the results of the programme become a joint story that can be used for communication and learning lessons within the organisations, within the alliance and to the outside world (strengthening support for the programmes). Collaborative Outcome Reporting is an interesting methodology for evaluation of partnerships where various parties at different levels are involved. This strengthens the learning agenda of mid-term or final evaluations. Alliance Thermometer is a practical tool to reflect on the (internal) cooperation between different organisations different levels and helps to identify issues for strengthening and improvement of the cooperation.

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4 Key insights on the core conference questions

Throughout the conference, the main theme was: “Partnering for Success: how M&E can strengthen partnerships for sustainable development”. Conference participants were encouraged to explore three questions that were guiding the conference. Some of the main insights and lessons learned during the conference have been captured below. This report is not trying to be conclusive but rather intends to provide insights and stimulate learning around the topic of partnerships and related monitoring and evaluation. The range of presentations and discussions during the workshop as well as the list with recommended reading and references provides ideas for further exploring the topic.

4.1 What do we mean by partnerships?

Already during the first two keynotes by Bruce Byiers and Ros Tennyson it became clear that a wide range of perspectives on partnerships exist. Many different distinctions are made in how partnerships can be understood. Bruce Byiers succinctly captured this notion when speaking about “50 shades of partnerships” with combinations from a wide range of sectors. Partnerships are on the rise, with the inclusion of partnerships as the 17^{th} Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) as a very recent example. Ros Tennyson added to this by saying that currently the premise is that it is always better to work together in partnerships. Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) have yet to fully prove the potential attributed to them: in some cases collaboration in partnerships can also not be the right approach. There is a much greater need to explore what really allows partnerships to work.

Throughout the conference, participants had the chance to define for themselves what partnership can mean. Should we talk about partnerships, networks, collaboration or alliances? Interpretations differ per case and per organisation participating in them. Some are driven by financing relations; others seek systemic transformation and co-creation. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can depart from a problem-solving, conflict-focused to opportunity-seeking question.

Some definitions of partnerships provided by participants:

- “Partnership is an arrangement between individuals, organizations or groups to cooperate for mutual benefits”;
- “Like-minded people working together in a platform towards common interests and objectives”;
- “When organizations/individuals put together a pool of competency, capacity, resources, interest, expertise to achieve a specific goal, but also hope to achieve impact and innovation”;
- “Networking for mutual benefit”;
- “A coherent effort from multiple organisations and entities on multiple levels”.

Setting goals and reaching results in partnerships relies heavily on the principle that you reach more in collaboration than alone. An element of sustainability is present as well: the idea that goals might be reached more sustainable in and with better conditions. Ideally, in each MSP each individual partner contributes and adds value to an initiative for more significant impact. This is often difficult however. Both keynote speakers hinted at the fact that collectively defining value is vital, not only in financial, efficiency or effectiveness terms. Bruce said that the definition of value is very different between sectors, while Ros highlighted the risks of compliance and disruption of partnerships due to interdependence and limited space for imagination.

As can be read from the diverse interpretations of partnership, much revolves around achieving common goals and working together. Partnerships work on the premise that partners can be complementary and that addressing complex problems together can bring a solution closer. Important aspects recognised were that the context and the principles under which partnerships are designed and work are essential and should be explored actively. This means exploring and defining a shared vision, and creating an environment of openness, trust and commitment. Ros felt that imagination for creativity and flexibility to achieve unexpected results could open up the path to more transformative partnerships that can broadly affect society rather than the intervention area.

In the conference sessions, much of the debate focused on the distinction between working to implement activities together in partnerships (and demonstrating results and contribution), and on facilitating the process of the partnership itself. In both these aspects, M&E can play a significant role.

Various presenters such as Giel Ton (WUR-LEI), Ciska Kuijper (Oxfam), Ludger Niemann (VNG International) and Rob Tulder and Stella Pfisterer (PrC) spoke about researching, evaluating and reporting the impacts of partnerships. Other speakers, such as Herman Brouwer (WUR CDI) and Minu Hemmati (CatalySD), and Atif Zeeshan (Sarhad Rural Support Programme) spoke about partnership and common principles needed to build effective collaboration with and within partnerships.

Other presenters went into the process of how partnerships work together – some called it the 'mechanism' of partnerships, others spoke about M&E of partnerships. Examples of this were sessions by Geert Geut (IOB) on possibilities to assess *how* partnerships work together can be linked with impacts on the ground, and sessions by Joost Guijt and Anja Wolsky (WUR CDI) and Rita Dieleman (RiDi Consultancy) and Helga van Kampen (New How) about tracking and steering the partnership process. Many of these sessions brought forward that the aspect of process is something any partnership should not think about lightly. Each partner within a partnership should ask themselves: what makes this a partnership and are we all living up to our own and each other's expectations? In this process the role of key individuals such as 'partnership brokers' was emphasised. These partnership brokers can figure as convenors, catalysts, evaluators and advocates in different phases of MSPs.

4.2 What is specific about the M&E of partnerships?

Understanding the role of monitoring and evaluation within partnerships was a key focus of the conference. In anticipation of the event, it was said that M&E can support learning and decision-making processes, hold partners accountable, or assess the functioning of partnerships and how they can reach more sustainable results. Throughout the conference participants found that M&E of partnerships requires something extra. Within an already complex world, it opens up the challenge of capturing the additionality of partnerships. Bruce Byiers coined a main metaphor that visualised the conference theme for many people: "the need to plan for sailboats, and not trains". Additional complex factors brought together by collaboration across sectors and geographies underline the difficulty of linear planning and control. The sailboat, or a fleet of sailboats for that matter, represents partnerships which, due to their complexity, need flexibility and adaptability, and make use of opportunities of diverging paths and reach goals by unexpected means. Partnership is not a straightforward process, so its M&E should take into consideration the changing environment as well as changing actors involved.

Major challenges still exist when exploring the M&E of partnerships. In many of the sessions in which presenters showed their cases, it was seen that many still depart from programmatic/project M&E systems, which seem to be much more experienced or developed. There is less of a focus on the partnership processes and characteristics. Some participants noted that many tools still focus too much on individual organisations and projects without taking into account partnership members and boundary stakeholders. When it comes to measuring the effect of partnerships and the respective contributions of partners, much still needs to be done. This requires investing in the M&E systems of MSPs:

- M&E of partnerships should be flexible enough to accommodate the needs of each partner;
- It must be very flexible and focused on the long term;
- Be clearly set within the context;
- Include exploration of relationships, agendas and power;
- It can include the role of brokers to open up mind-sets, improve communication, and allow for dissent and diversity;
- Partnership brokers and facilitators can help to monitor how well the partnerships are operating.

A wide variety of tools and approaches were shared at the conference, including M&E systems adapted to include MSPs at multiple scales, participatory and results-based monitoring, and mapping of potential SDG partners to harvesting micro-narratives.

Much of the partnership M&E elements highlighted the attention to process. M&E *of* partnerships can be a very important tool for partners to assess and evaluate what they have done, what still needs to be done, and how to do it better. M&E of partnerships can help to redefine the partnership and promote learning and a system for improvement. It can help to value the contributions and commitment that each party brings to the partnership as well as align interests. A number of interesting approaches to explore partnership and its processes more deeply, included: the Partnership Learning Loop (Rita Dieleman and Helga van Kampen); the Partnership Tracking Tool (Joost Guijt and Anja Wolsky - PPPLab); the Partnership Scorecard (Linda Gamova and colleagues – Catholic Relief Services); and the Alliance Thermometer (René Vermeulen - MDF). Many of these approaches revolved around qualitative perception-based tools, which form the basis for dialogue and action.

In terms of reaching results and impact, M&E can enhance partnerships in terms of improving performance. This can be by identifying weak as well as strong areas, but also complementary approaches built on partner's expertise and experience. Alignment and joint learning is valuable to further discover how to value the expected as well as unexpected outcomes. If partnerships are able to learn from this continuously, this can lead to improved contributions by partners and enhanced service delivery and impact. Approaches such as social auditing presented by (Sue Sadler - University of Strathclyde), impact evaluation through contribution analysis (Giel Ton - WUR LEI), network assessment and learning (Simon Bailey - Aflatoun) and community-led M&E (Megan Colnar and Jouwert van Geene – the Hunger Project) could also provide valuable entry points for effective M&E of partnerships.

4.3 What aspects, approaches and conditions for M&E help partnerships better contribute to the SDGs?

Sustainable Development Goal (and SDG) 17 reads "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development". This encompasses themes such as finance, technology, capacity building, trade, and systemic issues. Systemic issues contain topics such as policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and data, monitoring and accountability. The SDG on partnerships is strongly seen as a goal that reinforces and helps to achieve impact on the other SDGs. In order for partnerships to truly address systemic change, they need to be understood more deeply and the M&E of and for partnerships can contribute to that.

Many participants found this question the hardest to address. Many presentations touched on the issue of SDGs, or at least linked to it in a broad sense. Some of the main interpretations on this issue related to how partnerships relate to general achievement and the underlying principles of the SDGs:

- Planning for sail boats as opposed to linear trains - that is what it means for partners to operate in an environment that is complex and flexible: the SDGs require building on opportunities and imagination;
- M&E of partnerships can contribute to ensuring that partnerships are fruitful and do not just exist on paper;
- There is a need for two kinds of M&E: the need M&E of results (including inclusiveness, reaching the poorest, leaving no one behind) and M&E of partnerships (such as the functioning of the partnership; transparency; what needs to change to improve how partners work together);
- Partnership M&E should closely engage with local communities through multiple connections in order to verify the M&E results;
- Involvement of governments and donors is important to increase their awareness about how partnerships work and how they influence MSPs both as financiers and implementers. Based on M&E of partnerships, Theories of Change can be constantly adjusted based on current conditions.

It was seen as important that a space for exchange and better evaluation is created, in turn leading to better programme design. Also, creating a relationship based on learning, building capacity and open communication will lead to expertise building and innovation. The principle of inclusivity was mentioned often: in relation to equal partnerships and in relation to including vulnerable groups all over the world. M&E has the potential to help partners to see how they contribute to a joint goal and how they reinforce each other – in order to achieve the SDGs. Good leadership is essential in this.

Participants noted that the ultimate goal should always be one or multiple SDGs – these are joint goals and visions which should align and be worked on together. However, much more work needs to be done, and more knowledge needs to be generated to explore how partnerships can work effectively and valuably to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

5 Recommended reading

Reading related to understanding partnerships

Binder, A., M. Palenberg & J.M. Witte (2007) 'Engaging Business in Development. Results of an International Benchmarking Study'. http://tinyurl.com/z8sf7z5. Comprehensive research on enhanced donor dialogue and coordination in the area of collaboration with the private sector in development.

Brouwer, H., Woodhill, J., Hemmati, M. with Verhoosel, K., & van Vugt, S. (2015). *The MSP guide : how to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships*. Wageningen: Centre for Development Innovation Wageningen UR, http://edepot.wur.nl/358948.

Brouwer, H., Woodhill, J., Hemmati, M. (2015). Seven principles for effective and healthy multi-stakeholder partnerships. http://tinyurl.com/z4g7pwn. Good and effective MSP processes don't just happen – they need to be designed and facilitated. Applying these seven principles can help prevent MSPs from becoming endless talk shops, toothless animals, ruthless battle zones, or exercises in reinventing the wheel.

Bruce Byiers, Francesca Guadagno, Karim Karaki (2015). From looking good to doing good: Mapping CSO-business partnerships. http://tinyurl.com/gqos8ym. Mapping of some of the key characteristics of CSO-business partnerships: (i) the main drivers and trends around business-CSO partnerships and the different roles that partners take; (ii) the main partnership characteristics that emerge as important in the process of establishing and maintaining effective partnerships and; (iii) the potential role for donors aiming to support such partnerships.

ECDPM (2016). Partnerships with Business for Development. GREAT Insights Magazine - Volume 5, Issue 2. March/April 2016. http://tinyurl.com/h29uhcm. With articles on facilitating partnerships, partnerships for impact, and partnerships in extractives. For a short summary of each article see http://tinyurl.com/jcjde3d.

FSG (2014). The Promise of Partnerships: A dialogue between International NGOs and donors. http://www.fsg.org/publications/promise-partnerships. Partnership Models and Impact Gaps and the implications for international NGOs.

Helsloot, Lucia (2015): Partnerships for sustainable change with transformative impact http://tinyurl.com/zezc9nv. In the context of decreasing government funding many NGOs increased their collaboration with businesses, but mainly driven by the need to increase their financial resources. However, the collaboration with businesses is also an opportunity to increase impact. How can partnerships achieve impact towards sustainable change, or, how can partnerships have transformative impact?

Hemmati, M. & Rogers, F. 2015. Multi-stakeholder Engagement and Communication for Sustainability. Beyond Sweet-talk and Blanket Criticism - Towards Successful Implementation. London / Berlin: CatalySD http://tinyurl.com/hfn84xa. About investing in high-quality multi-stakeholder engagement and communication, necessary at the programming level when governments convene for the purposes of initiating transformation towards the SDGs, as well as when brokering, creating, and facilitating collaborative initiatives.

Horton, D., Prain, G. & Thiele, G. 2009. Perspectives on partnership: A literature review. Lima, Peru. International Potato Center (CIP). Working Paper 2009-3. 111 p.

PPPLab Food & Water. (2015). Insight Series 2: Building Partnerships (pp. 32), http://www.ppplab.org/insight-series-02-building-partnerships/. The different phases of the partnering lifecycle; critical success factors; mutuality in the partnering process and the underlying mechanisms; trade-off between quickly moving ahead with a partnership in order to start implementing activities as soon as possible, versus accepting a slower pace and ensuring that there is adequate organization, governance set-up, and planning in place, as well as the time needed to develop mutuality.

Quak, E.J., & Metz, N. (2015). Building partnerships with whom? Quick scan of the key actors in food security Public-Private Partnerships (pp. 18). The Hague, the Netherlands: Food and Business Knowledge Platform. http://tinyurl.com/hz4tuk7. Brief and non-exhaustive overview (a 'quick scan') of the players who are involved in the PPPs, from companies, civil society, inter-governmental organizations, farmer organizations, to knowledge institutes. The focus is on multi-stakeholder initiatives, in particular those that are established on an international level to improve food and nutrition security as well as catalyse and facilitate investments in the agricultural sector in Africa.

Sustainable Development Solutions Network, a Global Initiative for the United Nations (Dec. 2015). Getting started with the Sustainable Development Goals. A Guide for Stakeholders. http://tinyurl.com/zygntrr. New York. Aims to help stakeholders, including governments at all levels (national, regional, and local), to understand the SDG Agenda, to start an inclusive dialogue on SDG implementation, and to prepare SDG-based national development strategies (or align existing plans and strategies with the goals). It draws upon lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and proposes guiding principles to help countries navigate the SDG Agenda. Including toolkit of data instruments for monitoring the SDGS.

Tennyson, Ros (2003): The Partnering Tool Book (4th edition 2011) - http://tinyurl.com/hc4hzur. Concise overview of the essential elements that make for effective partnering.

Tennyson, Ros (2005): The Brokering Guidebook - http://tinyurl.com/gujw2yp. Illuminates the critical part played by brokers in multi-sector partnerships as both process managers and behind the scenes leaders. Outlines and supports in practical ways the many tasks that a broker may undertake on behalf of partners during the life-cycle of a partnership.

Reading related to the M&E of partnerships and the Sustainable Development Goals

Abdulsamad, A., Stokes, S., & Gereffi, G. (2015). PPPs in Global Value Chains: Can They Actually Benefit the Poor? United States Agency for International Development: Leveraging Economic Opportunities Report no. 8. http://acdivoca.org/sites/default/files/attach/2015/02/LEO-Public-Private-Partnerships-in-Global-Value-Chains_0.pdf

Byiers B., Guadagno F., Karaki K. (2016): How to assess CSO-business partnerships for development. http://tinyurl.com/zj34tmm. Case study approach to assess these aspects based on four dimensions: relation to core business; degree of partner engagement; partnership activities; and governance structure.

Halliday, J., Asthana, S. N. M., & Richardson, S. (2004). Evaluating Partnership: The Role of Formal Assessment Tools. *Evaluation, 10*(3), 285-303. doi: 10.1177/1356389004048279, http://evi.sagepub.com/content/10/3/285.abstract. It outlines some key methodological limitations and stresses the continued importance of an understanding of context alongside any measurement of partnership effectiveness.

Hardy, B., Hudson, B., & Waddington, E. (2003). Assessing strategic partnership. The partnership assessment tool (L. Strategic Partnering Taskforce. Office of Deputy Prime Minister, Trans.) (pp. 1-49), http://www.iape.org.il/upload/AssessingStrategicPartnership.pdf. Tool that local authorities can use to assess partnership relationships and aid the achievement of successful partnership working. The Tool has been adapted for the wider local government service areas with a particular focus on strategic partnerships.

Independent Evaluation Group (2015). Evaluation Beyond 2015 Implications of the SDGs for Evaluation. http://tinyurl.com/jmwsg35. The SDGs set the agenda for a better world by 2030 and put forward challenges to development practitioners and evaluators. By taking them on, evaluation can make significant contributions to changing the understanding of development processes and their outcomes.

Lundy, M., Amrein, A., Hurtado, J. J., Becx, G., Zamierowski, N., Rodríguez, F., & Mosquera, E. E. (2014). LINK methodology: A participatory guide to business models that link smallholders to markets. International Center for Tropical Agriculture, CIAT, https://ciat.cgiar.org/dapa/tools/market-tools. TOOLKIT to build inclusive and sustainable trading relationships linking small-scale producers to modern markets, including "Monitoring through rapid feedback loops".

PARTNER (2007). http://partnertool.net/tools-and-training/partner-tool/: PARTNER is a social network analysis tool designed to measure and monitor collaboration among people/organizations. By using the tool, you will be able to demonstrate to stakeholders, partners, evaluators, and funders how collaborative activity has changed over time and progress made in regard to how community members and organizations participate.

Patscheke, S., Barmettler, A., Herman, L., Overdyke, S., & Pfitzer, M. (2014). Shaping global partnerships for a post-2015 world. Stanford Social Innovation Review 1-8.

http://tinyurl.com/z2rqf9s. Article explores lessons and best practices on how to develop a common agenda, operate effective shared measurement systems, support and coordinate activities, facilitate communication and provide strong governance for global collaborative efforts. It offers important new insights on how to build successful cross-sector partnerships from the global to the local level.

Romero, M.J. (2015). What lies beneath? A critical assessment of PPPs and their impact on sustainable development. European Network on Debt and Development. http://www.eurodad.org/whatliesbeneath

South Australian Community Health Research Unit (2007): Collaborative partnerships evaluation tool. http://som.flinders.edu.au/FUSA/SACHRU/Toolkit/PDF/3.pdf. Tool to evaluate the processes and outcomes of working in partnership. The tool has questions to pose in three sections: preparation for partnership, partnership processes and partnership impacts and outcomes.

Tewes-Gradl, C., de Ruyter de Wildt, M., Knobloch, C., & Huppert, J. (2014). Proving and improving the impact of development partnerships. 12 good practices for results measurement: endeva | BMZ. http://tinyurl.com/zra8aag. Focus on how actors in existing partnerships have met specific challenges. Good practice examples show that there are pragmatic solutions for overcoming the most common problems in results measurement. How to prove and improve partnerships for inclusive and sustainable growth and thereby contribute to more effective public-private collaboration

United Nations (2015). Transforming our world - 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. http://tinyurl.com/z4o6pk4. Plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets.

Useful websites & initiatives

http://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/blog/using-evaluation-enhance-performance-development-partnerships: Using Evaluation to Enhance the Performance of Development Partnerships. Independent Evaluation Group Conference March 16-17 2016.

http://partnershipbrokers.org/w/learning/: Resources of The Partnership Brokers Association

http://thepartneringinitiative.org/ : The Partnering Initiative is an independent non-profit dedicated to unleashing the power of partnership for a prosperous and sustainable future. TPI was founded with a passionate belief that only through collaboration across business, government, NGOs and the UN can we tackle the greatest development and business sustainability challenges.

http://www.inclusivebusinesshub.org/page/know-how-partnerships-for-inclusive-business: The Practitioner Hub and The Partnering Initiative focuses on Partnerships for Inclusive Business in May 2016.

http://www.partnershipbrokers.org/w/journal/: Betwixt & Between: The Journal of Partnering Brokering

http://www.ppplab.org/: The PPPLab is a four-year action research and joint learning & support initiative (2014-2018) to learn about the relevance, effectiveness and quality of Dutch supported public-private partnerships (PPPs). Its mission is to extract and co-create knowledge and methodological lessons from and on PPPs that can be used to improve both implementation and policy.

http://www.theoryofchange.nl/: This portal presents current thinking and work on the use of Theory of Change (ToC) thinking in complex change processes.

http://www.mspguide.org: This portal brings together resources on how to design and facilitate effective multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs). Besides the full MSP Guide, it features 60 additional tool descriptions that you can apply in different stages of an MSP.

https://www.rsm.nl/prc/our-research/projects/promoting-effective-partnering-pep/: the PEP Initiative's main aim is to create an openly accessible facility to drive and strengthen partnering competence of public, private and civil society actors in support of achieving the SDGs. The partners in the PEP Initiative will gather (gaps in) knowledge and existing support structures and guidelines on partnering and will pilot the PEP Facility. The PEP Facility will offer support services to those involved in partnering endeavours for the SDGs.

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Miller, E. (2014). Considering two outcomes paradigms: the improving (person-centred) and the proving (managerialist) agendas. In S. Hessle (Ed.), *Human Rights and Social Equality: Challenges for Social Work* (pp. 34–39).

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Appendix 1 Conference participants

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To explore
the potential
of nature to
improve the
quality of life

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The Centre for Development Innovation works on processes of innovation and change in the areas of food and nutrition security, adaptive agriculture, sustainable markets, ecosystem governance, and conflict, disaster and reconstruction. It is an interdisciplinary and internationally focused unit of Wageningen UR within the Social Sciences Group. Our work fosters collaboration between citizens, governments, businesses, NGOs, and the scientific community. Our worldwide network of partners and clients links with us to help facilitate innovation, create capacities for change and broker knowledge.

The mission of Wageningen UR (University & Research) is 'To explore the potential of nature to improve the quality of life'. Within Wageningen UR, nine specialised research institutes of the DLO Foundation have joined forces with Wageningen University to help answer the most important questions in the domain of healthy food and living environment. With approximately 30 locations, 6,000 members of staff and 9,000 students, Wageningen UR is one of the leading organisations in its domain worldwide. The integral approach to problems and the cooperation between the various disciplines are at the heart of the unique Wageningen Approach.