

**Knowledge Network
Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation
Research Brief #3**

Opportunities and Challenges in Civil Society Partnering Processes in Uganda

**Research by Lennart Funck
July-October 2012**

This brief is part of a series of research briefs of the DCR consortium. The purpose is to communicate lessons and corresponding recommendations for programme quality improvement. For information on the research methodology please refer to the full report, available upon request.

The research focussed on the partnerships of ZOA and Save the Children (“INGOs”) with five civil society partner organisations (“SNGOs”) and explored *the challenges and opportunities related to DCR’s hybrid partnering approach*, meaning shared implementation whereby the share of the SNGOs gradually increases. The field research was conducted from July until October 2012 in Northern and Eastern Uganda.

The partnerships were examined in closer detail by using Fowler’s (1998) set of preconditions¹ for ‘authentic’ partnerships, which he defines as ‘mutually enabling and based on inter-dependent interaction with shared intentions’. Even though the partnership policies of the INGOs are similar to Fowler’s framework, the modes of rolling out are not. The findings show that power structures based on financial resources preclude genuine and authentic partnerships, and influence the general perception of the NNGOs as “donors” and the SNGOs as “recipients”. Furthermore, the partnership seemed to be based highly on behavioural patterns of individual actors who are not institutionalised.

Lesson 1:
Multiple challenges complicate the work of Southern partner organisations

To varying degrees the SNGOs faced challenges regarding their financial and human resources as well as their organisational capacity. Insufficient office space, technical infrastructure, and means of transportation are complicating programme implementation, as well as gaps in human resources caused by high staff turnover (as a result of low salaries due to limited financial resources) or deficiencies in knowledge and experience. The partners are financially dependent on the NNGOs, which endangers not just their work but also the survival of the organisation itself.

The research also included an analysis of challenges in relation to the overall political, cultural, economic, social and legal environment of the SNGOs. Although the environment was generally perceived as secure, in some cases the influence of local politicians was criticised

Decorative sidebar with horizontal blue lines and a recommendation box.

Recommendation:

- Work toward sustainability and self-reliance of the SNGO by diversified resources, income generating activities, different donors, and knowledge related to proposal writing.

¹Fowler (1998) defines a checklist of 13 organizational preconditions for negotiating authentic partnerships and civic solidarity– see **Table 1** at the end of this research brief.

when several interviewees expressed that local politicians tried to gain influence over projects in order to gain popularity in the region.

Lesson 2:
ZOAs partnership approach perceived as authentic

The analysis of the ZOA partnership showed that ZOA and its partners perceive the relationship as equal and based on mutual responsibility. The long-term partner especially is involved in joint planning. Furthermore the partnership approach of ZOA is characterised by a long-term vision and a strong focus on development of the organisational capacity of the SNGO. In addition ZOA supported its partners in developing income-generating activities and acquiring other donors. It could be argued that the ZOAs partnership approach contains strong elements which embrace working *with* a partner or what Fowler categorises as an authentic partnership approach.

Lesson 3:
Save the Children’s partnership approach perceived as more instrumental

The partners of Save the Children regard the relationship in terms of a more instrumental approach in which the SNGOs define themselves as contractors. This is illustrated by the fact that the partners of Save the Children felt that the organisation imposed its organisational structures on them (“mini Save the Children”) and also that the local partners needed to adopt their organisational character (mission, vision, activities etc.) in order to “please” and receive (additional) support. Furthermore, an overly complex bureaucracy of Save the Children stretches the capacity of the local partners, slows down and delays activities and creates a lack of trust. Partners felt that there are too many steps to follow and that information is passed on too slowly or not at all due to the hidden interests of individuals or the organisation.

Lesson 4:
Time plays a crucial role in the progress of the partnership relations.

While the long-term partner seemed to be much more independent and involved in the process of implementation and planning, ZOA’s “younger” partner was much more dependent and passive. Furthermore it became evident that ZOA aims to empower its partners with a focus on developing organisational capacity, financial independence and a long-term vision for its partners. Most of the Save the Children partners have just started working in this partnership and therefore face a lot of challenges in terms of adapting to the way Save the Children works. Time also needs to be factored in with regards to the development of an environment of trust within the organisations and among its members.

Recommendations:

- Pay attention to the attitude of NNGO staff to work towards equal partnerships, based on mutual respect for each other’s knowledge and reciprocal exchange of knowledge (= create trust and work *with* the partner)
- Build partnership principles like accountability and transparency through mentoring and coaching (sharing budgets, explanations, flexibility).
- Increase complementarity through a shared vision, long term plan and by formulating clear responsibilities in a formal Memorandum of Understanding, with growing responsibilities for the local partners depending on performance).
- Create trust and confidence through a regular review of the partnership programme (once or twice a year).

Lesson 5:

The need to pay more attention to tailor-made capacity building

The research showed that all SNGOs are highly dependent on the capacity support of the NNGO. The capacity needs on the SNGO side were mainly related to organizational gaps such as financial management, organisational management and reporting as well as monitoring and evaluation. Both ZOA and Save the Children have included capacity development as a core element of their partnership policy. However, the main focus of the NNGOs is on the process of implementing projects rather than on empowering local civil society organisations. Nevertheless, unintentional capacity building is taking place. All partnering SNGOs reported an increase in their capacity and felt that they are now able to perform better with regards to project implementation and reporting, just by working together with the NNGO. However, capacity-building measures by NNGOs are not tailor-made to address the needs of SNGOs and instead impose structures and processes on them.

Lesson 6:

Individual actors are a significant factor in how relationships evolve

Often an individual relationship epitomises the partnership and the organisations behind it. For example, in one case the NNGO expressed the following challenge related to the leadership of an SNGO: *“...the first one was a problem. I think his interest was mainly personal, not for the benefit of the CBO.”* In another case, the SNGO felt that *“(...)sometimes the personalities, they are maybe – [unpleasant] but when you try to voice something, someone looks at you with attitude, or feels negative before you say what you want to say.”*

Recommendations:

- Build partner capacity through tailor-made capacity building plans (focus on the partner not just on the project) with support from an expert in organisational development, focusing on the needs of the local partner.
- Pay attention to the (negative) influence of individual actors, e.g. by defining clear protocols for behavior and installing feedback/complaints systems.

Table 1: Organizational Features influencing NGDO² Partnerships (Fowler 1998)

Rank	Organizational Feature	Explanation
1	Constituency	Owners and supporters are more likely to understand and endorse relationships formed with others having similar socioeconomic characteristics (Fowler, 1991). For example, workers, professionals, schoolchildren can more readily identify with their counterparts in other parts of the world than an affluent middle-class does with the poor, where compassion counts.
2	Beliefs, values and culture	Beliefs, values and culture determine the fundamentals of organizational behaviour; the more these are shared the better the grounds for mutual respect and confidence, giving less likelihood of major incompatibilities in other areas and processes.
3	Theory	Shared understandings of the cause of problems and of the way societies can be changed gives agreed interpretations of events leading to consistent, mutually supported choice of action and stance on issues of public policy.
4	Strategic choices and time scales	Shared strategies imply compatible views of the operating environment, with common goals and understandings about how long intentional change will take to occur.
5	Complementary strengths	Shared appreciation of what each has to bring to the relationship, in terms of competencies and comparative advantages, should work against disagreements on roles and divisions of labour; in addition to creating consistency between the rights and expectations of both parties which reduces competition or duplication.
6	Development policies	Significant differences in understandings of best practice, usually translated as development or technical policies, can be the source of significant friction, especially amongst specialists, which leads to time consuming arguments and mistrust.
7	Approach to gender	Compatibility in the way in which gender is approached internally and in external activities reduces likelihood of feelings of insensitivity or imposition which permeate through other aspects of collaboration.
8	Distribution of authority	Negotiation proceeds most speedily if those involved carry similar authority; referrals and consultations lead to delays and added costs.
9	Human resource policies	Disparity between staff motivation, incentives and treatment can give rise to frustration, jealousy or envy, leading to negative attitudes which interfere with communication and sound understanding.
10	Adaptability	The ability to adjust to changing circumstances is important because mismatches in this area cause organizations to be out of step when introducing changes. This disparity can lead to a sense of agreements being taken for granted or ignored, feelings which have to be made good, at extra effort and cost.
11	Fund-raising	Commonality in the way funds are viewed and mobilized leads to shared perspectives on demands for accountability and how they should be satisfied which reduces friction and misunderstanding in a sensitive area.
12	Capacities	A serious imbalance in organizational capabilities can easily lead to one partner gaining an upper hand, even if they do not want to. It is obviously undesirable to reduce capacity in order to work together, so conscious strategies and compensatory actions are needed to bring abilities on a par.
13	Standards for legitimacy and accountability	A shared concern for and combined ability to demonstrate legitimacy should lead to higher donor confidence, giving improved continuity in funding, contributing significantly to joint effectiveness.

² NGDO = non-governmental organizations involved in international development