

Rethinking the Relationship of International NGOs and Local Partners

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Abstract:

“One hand cannot clap”

Humanitarian coordination seeks to improve the effectiveness of response in conflict and natural disaster by ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership. However, as crises become more complex - bringing more people together - coordination becomes more chaotic, communication among all actors is challenging and resources are limited. One key method to address this challenge is to focus on partnerships, not just among international actors, but, more importantly, between international and local partners. Emphasis on such partnerships can create opportunities to combine skills, expertise, and resources that more effectively deliver aid and strengthen local organizations' leadership capacity.

“One hand cannot clap” is an old Sudanese proverb that expresses the notion that collective efforts are the best means to achieve results. Throughout history, collective and accumulative efforts by communities and individuals have been instrumental in developing and sustaining livelihoods. Academics and development practitioners suggest the process of community participation is necessary to achieve the goal of social change. Hence, development and social activities should not be undertaken by a single individual but rather should involve a range of individuals, positively or negatively affected by the proposed change.

Partnership - a relationship of collaboration and coordination between different identities geared toward achieving specific moral or material goals - can assume various forms, including commercial, non-commercial, or personal. This paper focuses on partnerships between International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and Local Non-Governmental Organizations (LNGOs) also referred to as Implementing Partners (IPs). In recent years, “partnership” has become a common term in the literature of INGOs as well as in publications of the United Nations. Moreover, INGOs have been working on involving LNGOs in every step of project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. In short, local partners have become an important part of the management cycle of development projects.

List of Acronyms

INGOs	International Non-governmental Organizations
LNGOs	Local Non-governmental Organizations
IPs	Implementing Partners
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
VDCs	Village Development Committees
IDP	Internally Displaced People
CIS	CARE International Switzerland
PA	Practical Action
HAC	Humanitarian Aid Commission
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoH	Ministry of Health
TAs	Technical Agreements
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
LoA	Letter of Agreement
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
TJTC	Tripartite Joint Technical Committee
NRM	Natural Resources Management
CHWs	Community Health Workers
ERDN	El-Fashir Rural Development Network
WDAN	Women Development Associations Network

Rationale of Partnership

Defining Partnership:

The HAP Standard defines humanitarian partnership as “a relationship of mutual respect between autonomous organizations that is founded upon a common purpose with defined expectations and responsibilities.”¹ Partners can be small, community-based organizations or large, national institutions. A humanitarian partnership is one in which two or more bodies agree to combine their resources to provide essential goods or services for disaster survivors.²

The various types of assistance rendered, as well as the providers, change over time and depend upon capacity, priorities, and funding. The receptiveness of beneficiaries to these changes and organizations also evolves over time. In this scenario, the relationship between INGOs and local organizations plays a critical role in providing aid for beneficiaries. Given the severity and complexity of a disaster, INGOs, as well as UN agencies, need to react quickly and efficiently, which often leaves little time to understand the complexity and general composition of the affected population. This dynamic creates challenges in establishing relationships with the population. Developing and strengthening relationships with local partners thus leads to opportunities to understand the needs of the affected population as well as provide quality assistance.

From a normative perspective, the right of local people to participate in the development process of their communities should be an essential right of these communities and groups. The international community has long recognized the right to development as mentioned in several international instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and protected by provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.³ Formal steps to enshrine the right to development were adopted in 1986 in United Nations General Assembly resolution 41/128 and states, "development is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom."⁴ It is the right of local people to guide and be the engine of change in their communities. Development agencies must give villages, suburbs, and communities a full opportunity to be a part of the process of developing and managing their communities and livelihoods.

At a strategic level, partnership helps to achieve a common mission, such as reduction of poverty rates or improved quality of life. However, at a practical level, partnerships can be a useful tool to expand the coverage of development interventions, increase the impact of projects, and foster the sustainability of INGOs' services. Partnership often ensures higher levels of endurance through a sense of ownership on the

¹ Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, *Frequently Asked Questions about HAP*, <http://www.hapinternational.org/other/faq.aspx>

² Ibid.

³ United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/41/128, 4 December 1986, 97th Plenary Meeting.
<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/41/a41r128.htm>

⁴ Ibid

part of the projects' beneficiaries. Partnership can also be considered, by INGOs, as a normal and gradual step towards handing over the management and oversight of development programs to Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

Because positive change is a complex and multilayered process, international development organizations require institutional, long-term, local support as well as short-term contributions to meet requirements. Partnerships must maximize the sustainable inputs of local institutions, which will expand the impact of development projects and help avoid future duplication. One practical instance where partnership is of great benefit is contexts where insecurity limits the mobility of international organisations' staff, - particularly foreigners. For their part, local partners — who are more familiar with the local settings, culture, and environment — are not subject to the same movement restrictions.

Why Rethinking?

The Principles of Partnership as established by the Global Humanitarian Platform, aim to facilitate positive results for INGOs partnering with LNGOs - ultimately benefiting the target beneficiary population. Participating organizations agree to base their partnership on principles of:

- Equality - requiring mutual respect between members of the partnership in regards to their mandates, obligations and independence and recognizing each other's constraints and commitments;
- Transparency - which is achieved through dialogue with an emphasis on early consultations and information sharing;
- Result-oriented approach - which must be reality-based and action-oriented requiring result-oriented coordination based on effect capabilities and concrete operational capacities;
- Responsibility - humanitarian organizations have an ethical obligation to work responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way;
- Complementarity - valuing the diversity of the humanitarian community and striving to work with local capacity to enhance and complement contributions from partnering organizations.⁵

Given these Principles, why should we rethink the relationship between INGOs and LNGOs? What developments bring this issue to the forefront? The following points attempt, in summary form, to explain some of the main issues underlying why now is an important time to rethink this relationship:

Sustainability: Rethinking the relationship between INGOs and local partners vis-à-vis the Principles allows us to assess the results and impacts of existing types of partnerships, and what can be done to improve them. In many cases, INGOs work with local partners as contractors requested to accomplish specific tasks and activities, regardless of these partners' contributions to the sustainability of these activities. Yet this kind of INGO-LNGO relationship does not help build the capacity of local partners or establish strategic partnerships between these different identities. While it may not be realistic to expect all INGO projects to build capacity, failing to do so may affect the achievement of the desired long-term impact. A study for the DRR NGO Inter-Agency Group (comprising ActionAid, Christian Aid, Plan, Practical Action and Tearfund), based on DRR work funded by DFID documented the lessons learned around the importance of partnership in DRR programming.⁶

⁵ Global Humanitarian Platform, Principles of Partnership, <http://www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/pop.html#pop>

⁶ Twigg, John and Bottomley, Helen Bottomley, Making Local Partnerships Work For Disaster Risk Reduction. *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, Issue 50, April 2011. <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-50/making-local-partnerships-work-for-disaster-risk-reduction>

While the study focused specifically on DRR, the authors found that such mechanisms were significantly strengthened when local organizations and communities were brought on as partners with INGOs. As the study states, “Essentially, this involves a shift in the location of capacities and influence, in which vulnerable communities assess and understand their circumstances more completely, engage in project design and implementation with other local stakeholders on a more equal footing, and gain a much stronger voice in dialogues with higher levels of authority and power.” Improvement in programming was attributed to the resultant insights into the specific needs of the target beneficiary population, which resulted in increased sustainability.

Empowerment: LNGOs, CBOs, and Village Development Committees (VDCs) have made considerable efforts and work under very difficult circumstances to achieve results, whether these results are food distribution, creation of wells, or the construction of schools. Such committees and organizations are often born out of the same marginalized areas as the beneficiaries and share the suffering of the affected groups. The achievements of such LNGOs may be limited without the technical, institutional, financial, and logistic support of INGOs. However, with the goal of long-term sustainability, INGOs should capitalize on indigenous knowledge and skills to encourage empowerment and participation. In doing so, LNGOs are able to continue to provide services and support to beneficiary populations long after INGOs transition out and the crisis turns towards reconstruction and a return to normalcy. Empowering LNGOs and building capacity thus establishes a stronger system that will enable services to continue in the event of further complications associated with development activities.

Climate Change: Global changes are also affecting the relationship between INGOs and LNGOs. Climate change is multifaceted and multidimensional and has short, medium, and long-term consequences. Climate change will continue to impact disaster response, putting a strain on already limited funding. This reality may increase the need for local and comparatively less expensive partners to be responsible for the development process at the community level. The focus of planning for disasters caused or precipitated by climate change is emphasis on risk assessment and reduction. These two actions can be greatly enhanced if conducted in partnership between INGOs and LNGOs. Working together to identify potential hazards and establishing alert systems can ultimately lead to more lives saved and efficiency in returning to normalcy. A long-standing issue in Ethiopia is drought and its effect on the population. With advances in technology that enable forecasting weather conditions to predict changes, aid organizations have devised coordination mechanisms that encourage partnerships between INGOs and LNGOs that enable better preparation to address the consequences of drought and changes in climate.⁷ As a result, agencies are in a better position to act according to the needs of the beneficiary population from information received and consolidated through LNGO networks. Such partnerships and coordination ensures sustainability and empowers LNGOs and local communities to drive change and implement activities that have direct impact on livelihoods.

INGO/LNGO Partnerships and Impact on Capacity Building and Funding

The most common forms of partnerships used to systematize the relationship between INGOs and LNGOs are: (1) short-term, or subcontracting, and (2) long-term. It is important to distinguish circumstances, however, when each form of partnership is appropriate. Although donors and the humanitarian community often seek to achieve high-impact, quick results to alleviate suffering, donors are also interested in longer-term improvement and sustainability of development and assistance. Most government donor agencies have two

⁷ Mowjee, Tasneem, NGOs and Humanitarian Reform: Mapping Study Ethiopia Report, Development Initiatives, UK.
<http://www.devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/resource-docs/Ethiopia-Mapping-Study-full-report.pdf>

funding mechanisms, one that addresses humanitarian crises and the other that focuses on long-term development aid. For example, agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which focuses on long-term development aid, also has a unit that primarily focuses and funds disaster and emergency response, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

For INGOs, a short-term partnership (subcontracting) is useful for delivering quick results for one-off projects, such as building/rehabilitating schools or food distribution. In addition, short-term partnership might be more useful during the onset of an acute emergency when the nature of the situation requires quick impact solutions. Subcontracting may also be less costly as it does not require capacity-building programs led by INGOs for the local partners. Yet precisely for these reasons, short-term partnerships does not contribute to strengthening local institutions as local partners are dealt with largely as implementers.

Conversely, long-term partnerships between local partners and INGOs attempt to build strong local development agents with higher capacities to lead and take over their communities' development processes after INGOs phase out. The relationship between local partners and INGOs should be established based on the strategic vision, mission, and interests of both sides, with sufficient and detailed capacity-building programs to bridge the gaps between the two partners' views, plans, and strategies. Field experience shows that this type of partnership creates and fosters local partners' and communities' feelings of ownership of development projects, which in turn helps to facilitate sustainability of projects and development interventions. While it is important to establish a long-term partnership it is of equal importance to remember that the goal of such an endeavor is a sustainable outcome, not dependency upon the international community.

Capacity building prepares local partners to develop their communities and societies, to ensure the sustainability of development projects, and may involve building material capacity such as construction of offices; technical education in areas such as strategic planning, organization management, and book-keeping; building the lobbying and advocacy skills of CBO leaders; facilitating necessary links with other NGOs, UN, the private sector, and government institutions; and providing trainings on participatory monitoring. Too often when members of a community are asked in field evaluations why projects are no longer operating, their answer indicates a belief that INGOs will come back one day to rehabilitate and repair these initiatives. In short, these communities do not have an adequate sense of ownership of these projects and services; ultimately, these interventions have little chance for sustainability. Capacity-building projects prepare both local communities and INGOs for the phasing-out process, which is the usual end of each INGO-implemented development project. Such programs vary significantly based on the degree of communities' mobilization and the extent to which they are ready to accept new ideas introduced through development projects.

Partnership Framework

The partnership framework is the roadmap that shows and guides the relationship. This guideline can take different forms, such as a Technical Agreement, a Memorandum of Understanding, or a Letter of Agreement. However, irrespective of the form, the partnership framework describes in detail the roles and responsibility of each party and establishes the time frame of the formal cooperation. The framework also highlights the appropriate mechanisms to monitor activities and measure results.

Such a framework can be prepared at the sub-office or headquarters' level of INGOs. However, in both cases, the framework should reflect the agreed-upon vision and mission shared by both partners. The document must comport with the local and federal laws and for this particular reason, a government official, or an officer

of related line ministry, should witness the signing of the agreement. In some cases the government official should also provide a signature.

Long-term partnership frameworks usually include sections about capacity development of LNGOs and articulate both the INGOs' and LNGOs' roles, including in the projects' sustainability, as well as in its relation to issues such as the environment, gender, and good governance. Short-term frameworks, since they discuss precise tasks and duties to be implemented by LNGOs, are more specific. Normally, short-term partnerships do not consider the development of local partners. However, INGOs, through short-term partnership agreements, require local partners to be very specific about monitoring and reporting, as well as financial systems to be used for results assessment; in this context, INGOs do not guarantee they will make efforts to improve these systems if they are weak.

Case Study: NGO Partnership Forum: Sudan (2009 - 2010)

In an attempt to build durable relationships between LNGOs, INGOs, and the government of Sudan, the Tripartite Joint Technical Committee (TJTC) of LNGOs in Sudan organized a workshop in October 2009 under the theme "Towards a More Effective Partnership." The main objectives of the workshop were to open a continuous discussion, share information, and exchange knowledge about improving and strengthening partnerships between national and international NGOs in Sudan.

The workshop was so successful that one year later, all participants of the first event gathered again to organize a second workshop with the same purpose: to discuss the topic of "quality of relationship between LNGOs and the government of Sudan." This topic discussed in the gathering has been used as a cornerstone of future humanitarian and longer-term development work in Sudan.

All participants of the first workshop agreed that the outcome of the October 2009 workshop was positive since it raises the awareness of LNGOs and INGOs' members of the necessity of building long-term and strategic partnerships; however, follow-up on some of its recommendations has not been done properly by both local and international NGOs. Therefore, LNGO and INGO representatives have suggested organizing a NGO Partnership Forum for the purpose of maintaining and building off of the high spirit of the workshop in order to fulfill supporting the fulfillment of its recommendations and commitments.

There are many definitions of the term "partnership." For the purpose of this case study – which focuses on the experience of the author working with CARE International – we consider CARE's definition, which focuses on trust, mutual accountability, shared concerns, and joint contributions:

Partnership is a relationship that results from putting in practice a set of principles that create trust and mutual accountability. Partnerships are based on shared vision, values, objectives, risk, benefit control, and learning as well as joint contribution of resources. The degree of interdependence is unique to each relationship, depends on context, and evolves over time.

The purpose of discussing the below case of partnership is to show that there are some efforts have been made by INGOs and LNGOs to reshape, improve and strategies the relationship between both sides. These attempts of rebuilding long-term partnerships between INGOs and LNGOs have not yet taken its final and positive form; however, it represents an example of potential success since it reflects the growing awareness of the importance of long-term partnership by INGOs, LNGOs and the Government of Sudan. The case study of the NGO Partnership Forum will provide an interesting context in which to examine the benefits and challenges of partnership.

Rationale and Objectives of the Forum

The rationale of the Forum was to “To strengthen further the partnership between national and international NGOs in Sudan, using the platform provided by the recommendations of the October 2009 partnership workshop. In addition, the forum will aim to clarify the role of the government as facilitator of the partnership process, while engaging the support of other stakeholders (including international donors and the UN)”.

The NGO Partnership Forum will had three concrete objectives:

1. To review the recommendations and actions that came out of the October 2009 workshop, and to formulate plans of action that would allow concrete steps to be taken towards furthering their implementation.
2. To share experience from within Sudan of successful partnerships, and to highlight their key characteristics.
3. Based on these national-level successes, but also drawing on Experience elsewhere in the world, develop guidelines that would serve as a partnership framework for national and international NGOs working in Sudan.

With Whom Can We Make A Good Partnership?

One can look to the practices of Practical Action (PA)-Sudan and CARE International Switzerland (CIS)-Sudan as an illustration of what potential partnership might look like. PA is a British NGO that has been working in Sudan since 1993, and one of its goals is to build local partners’ capacities and skills. PA works in Sudan as well as other African, Asian, and Latin American countries. According to PA criteria of selection, partners should exhibit a variety of criteria. It is important to an INGO that the collaborating LNGO has a formal or informal village level-setting that would more difficult for an international actor to establish. While the LNGO should have the necessary ties to the community, it is also important that it measures up to certain standards as an organization. It should have a written constitution, an executive committee that is democratically elected and has considerable female representation, and recognize equal rights of all people regardless of gender, race, religion, etc. An ideal local partner organization would perform its role democratically, have methods already established for educating through action, and actively participate in community activities.

CIS is the successor of CARE International in Sudan, taking over from CARE International after the latter was dismissed from the country, along with 12 other NGOs, by the government of Sudan in March 2009 after alleged violation of their mandate. In June of the same year, the government allowed CIS to work in Sudan, and CIS took over from CARE International. Now CIS works in South Darfur with the country office in Khartoum. CIS in Sudan partners with LNGOs, CBOs, VDCs, and other civil society organizations. On the government side, CIS works with the Commission of Humanitarian Affairs (HAC) and other line ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the Ministry of Health (MoH), through technical agreements (TAs)

and memorandums of understanding (MoUs). Mentioning portions one aspect of the TAs and MoUs pertain to entails building capacities of and providing support for local partners and line ministries so that they will be better able to engage in and effectively participate in development. For their part, local partners can sometimes play a vital role in providing INGOs with knowledge and information about cultures, livelihood methods as well as methods of access to local communities and beneficiaries. As Robert Chambers notes, “everyone is ignorant, only on different subjects” (p. 168).

Figure 1: Money raised by three CBOs networks of PA: ERDN, VN RAD, and WDAN: this table shows the impact of capacity-building programs on improving CBOs’ fundraising skills

Donors	Amounts of money SDG				Total
	2007	2008	2009	2010	
UNICEF	328.496	580.000	871.798	366.600	2.146.894
FAO	65.000	135.000	60.000	50.000	310.000
UNAMID	43.000	197.000	958.000	200.000	1.398.000
HABITAT	Nil	Nil	147.000	Nil	147.000
WFP	Nil	18.000	579.000	2027.000	2.624.000
World Bank	Nil	40.000	Nil	Nil	40.000
Oxfam America	Nil	202.000	258.000	311.000	771.000
Kids for Kids	169.000	153.000	25.000	45.000	392.000
Practical Action	30.000	75.000	405.000	450.000	960.000
Total	578496	1429000	3443398	3548650	8.999.544

M Majzoub Fidiel (2010)

Selection of Partners

Crucial to the success of the INGO and LNGO partnership is selection criteria used to achieve efficient and effective humanitarian interventions. The following is a summary of criteria utilized by both CIS-Sudan and PA-Sudan. The INGO starts by inviting interested organizations to a meeting to discuss details, including the process and the objective of the partnership. This ensures that both organizations looking to form a partnership will do so on common visions, missions and goals. LNGOs are invited to submit profiles with details on the organization’s activities, current staff and skills, financial systems and mechanisms and

potential areas for collaboration in humanitarian assistance delivery. The INGO then scores potential partners based on the analysis and prepares findings and recommendations on the path forward.

By formulating the process, transparency and accountability are ensured along with clear partnership frameworks and delineation of roles and responsibilities.

Examples of projects implemented through partners' networks and supported by PA:

1. Digging 51 hand dug wells,
2. Renovating 35 hand pumps + 10 new,
3. Renovating 14 *hafirs* and 19 new,
4. Building 129 class in 46 schools,
5. Feeding 27 schools,
6. Providing materials for 174 schools,
7. Constructing 5 kindergartens and furnishing of 22,
8. Providing seating for 14 schools,
9. Constructing 2 health and 1 vet centers,
10. Training 68 midwives,
11. Training 76 para-vets,
12. Training 72 health workers,
13. Establishing 11 community forests (total of 85 *feddans*),
14. Raising seedlings and grew over 2,070,000 trees,
15. Promoting the use of gas as alternative clean energy for 3,643 families (targeting 10,000).

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