Literature review on partnership arrangements for development organizations in Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical synthesis of literature concerning partnership arrangements for development organizations in Papua New Guinea. Partnership arrangements play an important role in development organizations and therefore it is beneficial to do a review of literature on the factors that influence them. A distinction was found between Northern NGOs which have their roots in the industrialized countries and undertake development or emergency relief work in aid-recipient countries, and Southern NGOs which are those NGOs that emerged locally in the countries where Northern NGOs are active. Differences in motivation and power are highlighted along with the need for trust based authentic partnerships. The paper is an attempt to accumulate knowledge about strengths and pitfalls of partnerships in order to have an informed basis for research into partnership arrangements that work in the best interests of Papua New Guinea.

Key words: developing countries partnership, development organizations, development indicators, trust based authentic partnerships, hierarchical donor-recipient relationships

Introduction

Partnership arrangements are not new in PNG. The Government, along with the Non Government Organizations (NGOs), the private sector (for profit), Community Based Organizations, Faith Based Organizations, and the Civil Society Organizations have all been working together towards providing avenues for people to improve the country's human development indices.. Partnership arrangements play an important role in development organizations and therefore it is beneficial to do a review of literature on the factors that influence them

The literature on partnerships mostly argues for arrangements to bring about improved services or improving certain products. Most of the literature comes from developed countries and focuses on developing infrastructure to achieve efficiency, and also about partnership between the public and private sectors. Some have been highly successful, while others have failed to make an appreciable impact, often at significant financial and opportunity costs.

Thus this paper aims to explore the literature to identify dimensions of partnership arrangements for development organizations in PNG.

Partnerships in development organizations

In the 1990s a new trend emerged in the field of international development regarding interest in development organizations. Robinson (1993) argued that this was due to the view that 'government-led development approaches had failed and thus development organizations were the alternative'. The new recognition and the increased roles in longer-term development work have made development organizations very visible when it comes to crises in developing countries.

Fowler (1995) carried out a study to find out why equitable relations or true partnerships among Non Government Development Organizations (NGDOs) are difficult to achieve. The study found that it was the new policy agenda for international aid that gave emphasis on contract-based relationships that was making it difficult for real partnerships to occur. In addition, the study also found that trust based authentic partnerships are vital for development. The study recommended NGDOs to seriously think of their role, and those that played an intermediary role in the process of funding should let their role be played by facilitators of international co-operation for the many groups in the civil society. Figure 1 shows development organizations playing intermediary or facilitating roles for developed countries in developing countries.

Figure 1: Roles of development organizations towards developing countries
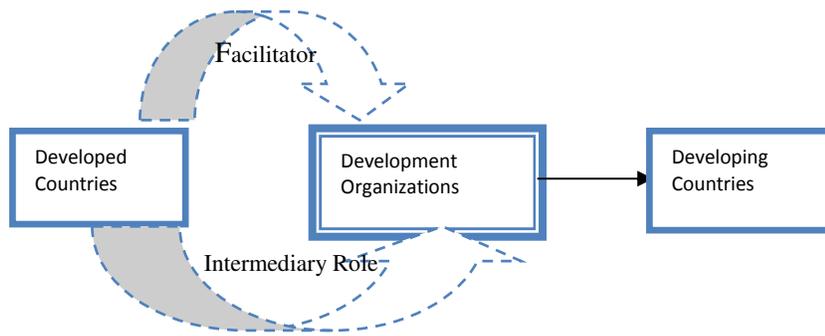
Maxwell and Riddell (1998) in their study mentioned that the United Kingdom White Paper made a commitment to the idea of 'partnership' as the cornerstone of a new aid relationship with countries committed to poverty reduction and good governance.

Lewis (1998) found that Northern NGOs have their roots in the industrialized countries and undertake development or emergency relief work in aid-recipient countries, and Southern NGOs are those NGOs that emerged locally in the countries where Northern NGOs are active.

Furthermore, other studies (Drabek, 1987; Elliot, 1987; Kajese, 1987; Nyoni, 1987) found that leaders in Southern NGOs argued with their Northern counterparts about the terms of cooperation; arguing that they must change from hierarchical donor-recipient or patron-client relationships to those of partnership. The studies also found that Southern NGOs rejected the legitimacy of Northern design and control of development programs because they perceived that the North was allocating only implementation roles to the South. Kajese (1987) in particular found that the Southern NGOs demanded to be seen as leaders in the development processes of their own countries, bringing their own development agendas and resources to joint activities. Other studies done by the International Council of Volunteer Agency (1987) showed that a new consensus emerged in the North to adopt partnership as the paradigm for international development cooperation.

In the literature of developing countries, a similar paradigm shift to partnership is found in a study of NGOs in Bangladesh by Lewis (1998). The study found that three sets of changes had taken place regarding Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs:

1) Northern NGOs had moved from an implementer of development projects towards a partnership approach in which they fund and attempt to work with Southern NGOs;

2) Official bilateral or multilateral development donors were increasingly moving towards the direct funding of Southern NGOs rather than the previous model of funding through Northern NGOs in a partnership approach; and

3) The need to respond to international emergencies had led governments increasingly to fund Northern NGOs to undertake relief and emergency work on a contractual basis.

In particular, Lewis noted that NGOs in developing countries still continue to implement development projects, but the implementation approach has shifted to one in which local partner organizations are identified and do most of the work, while the Northern NGO provides funding and plays an organizational support role. In this way, many Northern NGOs have become donors and have begun to define their relationships with organizations in the South in new ways. Figure 2 shows in a diagram the traditional terms of cooperation between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs.

Figure 2: Traditional Terms of Cooperation between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs
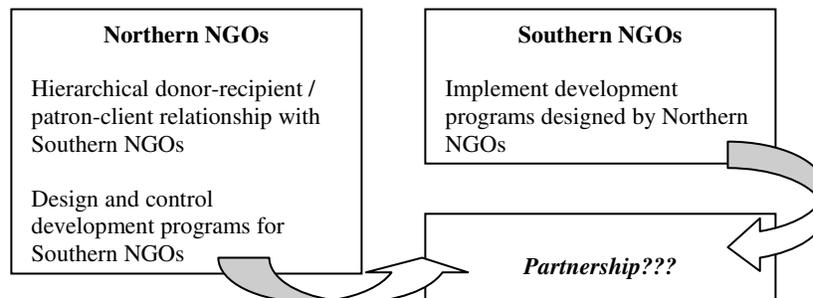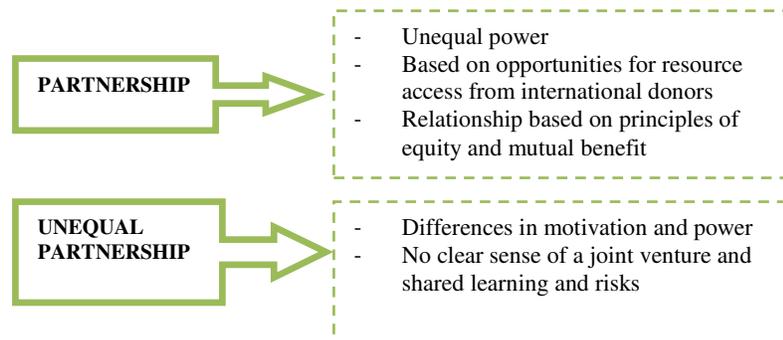
Other studies have found that partnership is a complex concept understood differently by organizations which have unequal power. Lewis (1998b) argued that the rhetoric of equal partnership between agencies was found to hide differences in motivation and power which led in some cases to partnerships being based on opportunities for resource access from international donors rather than on a clear sense of a joint venture and shared learning and risks. In the same way, the relationship between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs tends to be viewed differently by the Northern 'donor' NGO and the Southern partner 'recipient'. For example, when a Northern NGO talks about partnership, the Southern NGO 'partner' may view the relationship purely in terms of transfer of resources.

In addition, Astley and Van de Ven (1983) argue that the partnership literature has not explored the contrasting set of factors relatively predetermined by resources and social structures in partnership environments, and that structural explanation of partnerships would suggest that their behaviour is not fully emergent or freely negotiated. Instead, pre-existing, relatively fixed elements of partnership environments tend to shape inter-organizational choices, behaviour, and outcomes. Some examples of structural influences on partnerships include the internal organizational systems of partners and important external stakeholders such as donors, governments, and communities.

Further, the 1980 studies by Drabek (1987), Dichter and Fisher (1988), International Council of Volunteer Agencies (1987), and Interaction (1989), have been mostly about organizational self-studies, research projects, and workshops to guide partnership change efforts. The 1990s studies by Abugre (1999), International Forum on Capacity Building (1998), International NGO Training and Research Center (1998), and Leach et al. (1998), show that more attention to the partnership issue is still needed.

Some scholars see the concept of partnership as a paradigm for development cooperation, which means that a relationship is based on the principles of equity and mutual benefit (Kajese, 1987). Figure 3 shows a simple diagram of the perceptions of partnerships according to literature.

Figure 3: Perceptions of partnership

- PARTNERSHIP →
  - Unequal power
  - Based on opportunities for resource access from international donors
  - Relationship based on principles of equity and mutual benefit

- UNEQUAL PARTNERSHIP →
  - Differences in motivation and power
  - No clear sense of a joint venture and shared learning and risks

Historically, the balance of power in most relationships between United States (US) Private Voluntary Organizations and Southern NGOs has been tilted in favour of the Private Voluntary Organizations, due to their positions as Northern agencies and their roles in transferring financial and other resources to the South. Leach et al. (1998) found that US Private Voluntary Organizations perceive the balance to be changing toward the South. Most of the US Private Voluntary Organizations reported that they have shifted a significant degree of influence to their Southern partners. Their Southern counterparts, however, appear to disagree. The International Forum on Capacity Building in 1998 found in their survey of NGOs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that most Southern NGO leaders say that they have little influence in their relations with Northern agencies. In Africa, NGOs even reported that cooperating with Northern NGOs threatens their missions and managerial autonomy. Ledford et al. (1989) found in the case of the US Private Voluntary Organizations that for Northern NGOs to change it would be quite a challenge because they are large, well-established, and globally diversified organizations in which change processes are by nature complex and challenging.

In another study, Lewis (1998a) found that there is a tendency for a partnership or partnerships to be seen as dependant rather than active. Lewis argued that active partnerships are those built through ongoing processes of negotiation, debate, occasional conflict, and learning through trial and error. In an active partnership, risks are taken, and although roles and purposes are clear they may change according to need and circumstance. Lewis further argued that dependent partnerships have a blueprint character, with relatively rigid assumptions about comparative advantage, and are often linked to the availability of funding. Farrington and Bebbington (1993) argued that NGOs in particular are vulnerable to be viewed instrumentally as agents enlisted to work to the agendas of others as 'reluctant partners'.

Kazibwe (2000) found that the comparative advantages are related to the proximity to respective constituencies. Kazibwe argued that Northern NGOs are well placed to engage with the donor public and to undertake policy influencing and advocacy, whilst Southern NGOs have the benefit of local knowledge and presence. In working together, Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs combine their strengths and act as a link between their respective constituencies, strengthening their legitimacy. Thus, the total Northern NGO and Southern NGO partnership has the potential to be greater than all the parts put together.

Edwards (1999) and Offenheiser et al. (1999) argued that 'as the globalization of civil society expands, it will become even more critical to improve international relations between Civil Society Organizations and reduce perceptions of Northern dominance'. An example is given by the World Bank (1999) that in sub-Saharan Africa, poverty is expected to increase and demands for equitable and effective development cooperation will intensify. Leach et al. (1998) also argued that 'of course many Northern NGOs say they anticipate increasing the extent to which they work and share control with Southern
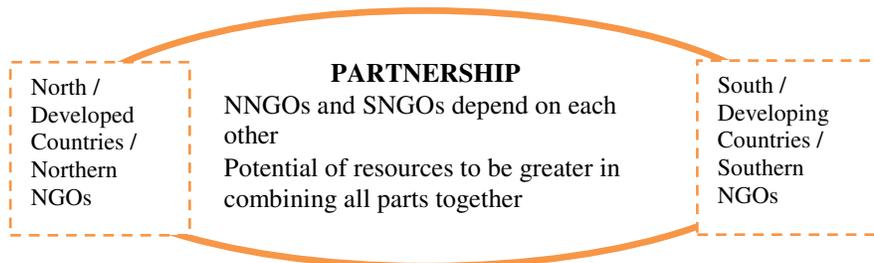
partners, while some argue that Northern agencies are using partnership rhetoric to mask their on-going control of international aid relationships'.

In the developed countries, improving North-South partnerships to be more equitable and effective is a priority, and both sides have been working on that for more than a decade, but findings from studies (Dichter and Fisher, 1988); Drabek, 1987; ICVA, 1987; Interaction, 1989; International Forum on Capacity Building, 1998; International NGO Training and Research Center, 1998; and Abugre, 1999) show that current attitudes still suggest that much work remains to be done.

Brehm (2001) carried out an empirical research study to find out what NGOs actually mean by partnership and how they implement it in practice and the challenges they face in developing and managing effective partnerships. Brehm found that the nature of partnerships between NGOs is complex and varied and therefore it is important for both (or all parties) to be clear about the purpose of the partnership, and the mutual expectations and responsibilities.

Nevertheless, Hewitt (1999) found that partnership studies have also identified challenges such as: maintaining channels of communication; continuing political support (including resources) over time; avoiding the temptation to simply 'deliver' outputs and outcomes; managing expectations; the impact of political systemic change; the sustaining of change over time, especially vis-à-vis expectations; and difficulties in monitoring and evaluation, which may also threaten programs in budgetary priorities. Furthermore, the study found that many inter-institutional partnerships also depend upon the energy and commitment of individuals, and can fade as personnel change over time if relationships are not effectively institutionalized. Figure 4 shows the diagram of the emerging paradigm in partnerships.

Figure 4 An emerging paradigm in partnerships

| North / Developed Countries / Northern NGOs | **PARTNERSHIP**
 NNGOs and SNGOs depend on each other
 Potential of resources to be greater in combining all parts together | South / Developing Countries / Southern NGOs |

Definition of development organization and partnership

According to the literature, the term *development organization* is mostly used to refer to NGOs, and that development organizations are the facilitator for developed countries to carry out development work in developing countries. This research broadens the definition and includes the government also as a development organization, from the point of view of developing countries.

Therefore the definition of development organizations in this study is 'all organizations in PNG that work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals'. Furthermore, partnership has been defined as 'the working together or cooperation of organizations'. This working together comes about because of the need for resources from the developing countries and the need for developed countries to assist the developing countries. Thus, this study uses partnership to refer to 'working together for a shared goal'.

Some factors of partnership in development organizations

Factors of partnerships in development organizations were identified from the literature. Research studies (Dichter & Fisher 1988; Alter & Hage 1993; Brown & Ashman 1996; Lewis 1998) have identified a difference in the issue of mutual influence, which is a critical factor when it comes to effective partnerships. While Northern NGOs report that some influence has shifted to their Southern partners, many Southern NGOs say that they have little influence in their relations with Northern agencies. The International Forum on Capacity Building (1998) found that NGOs in Africa reported that cooperating with Northern NGOs threatens their missions and autonomy.

Ring and Van de Ven (1994), collaboration theorists, argue that critical factors associated with effective partnerships are the development of trust between the parties; and others like Brown and Ashman (1996) and Lewis (1998) argue that cooperative interpersonal relationships and behaviours such as active communication, mutual influence and joint learning are also critical factors.

Astley and Van de Ven (1983) found that most of the partnership change efforts were influenced by research that talked more about factors that were related to the agency of the organizational actors. Gray (1989), Ring and Van de Ven (1994) and Brown and Ashman (1996) in their studies found that where partnerships were seen as expressions of voluntary agency, it was understood that there was 'a series of negotiated phases'. Brown and Ashman (1996) and Lewis (1998) found the critical factors to be: ***the development of trust, the development of cooperative interpersonal relationships, and the development of the processes that lead to communication, mutual influence and joint learning.*** In accordance with the mentioned critical factors, efforts have been focused on policy statements and workshops to try and change ideas, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals for them to interact with partners.

Alter and Hage (1993) and Leach (1995) found structural factors in inter-organizational relations to be focused primarily on governance structures, and that effective structures would promote shared control. For example, structural factors are a horizontal representative of partners rather than vertical representative of partners, and are relatively not controlled by outside forces like funders or organizational parents.

Other studies in Offenheiser et al. (1999) found that international development partnerships tend to use formal agreements like contracts or letters of agreement to govern the relationships. Structural factors in international

development partnerships are those factors that would influence the negotiation, implementation and evaluation of agreements and joint activities. They may include organizational strategies, internal procedures for accountability, organizational systems and culture, and policies of key external stakeholders like donors and governments.

Moreover, Fowler (1997), Gray (1989), Lewis (1998) and Ring and Van de Ven (1994) have found that partnerships can be forms of collaboration that involve external relations among organizations. Astley and Van de Ven in their 1983 study explained partnerships primarily by factors associated with the voluntary agency of organizational actors, and Brown and Ashman (1996) and Gray (1989) found that they are emergent forms of collective action that evolve through a series of negotiated phases.

A recent study carried out by Devas (2001) found that community engagement in the planning and design of projects is a challenge faced by all partnerships, and is critical to success. Klitgaard (1997) found that even if the supply side were trained, the improvement would not last long and would be weakly linked to better development outcomes. The argument is that even though developing the capacity of local institutions to manage themselves and their financial and other systems is important, it is not the only solution. But it can still be argued that capacity and legitimacy can come about from doing development through collaboration, as well as from improvements in design and planning.

Other studies in Alter & Hage (1993), Geringer & Hebert (1989) and Yan and Gray (1995) view partnerships to be effective when both parties agree that their goals have been achieved and express their satisfaction with the partnership. Satisfaction is used as the indicator to measure the extent to which partners perceive benefits from the partnership beyond its explicit goals. The indicator was used because it was found that satisfied partners tend to continue to invest their resources in partnerships, whereas dissatisfied partners either exit relationships or become passive participants.

To end, partnership is a common term used in different contexts by different disciplines to reach desired goals and outcomes. Used in a good manner, partnership can lead to all parties involved benefitting. Therefore it is an equally important development issue in PNG.

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