



The roles and strengths of different partners

This Insight sets out some basic information on the different roles and strengths that partners from different sectors can bring to a partnership. It was prepared by Michael Massey, Associate Fellow, Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA) for the SEED Initiative, and includes input from participants at the SEED 2007 Annual Partnership Forum and Practitioners' Workshop in South Africa.

*The **SEED Initiative** identifies, profiles and researches promising entrepreneurial approaches to locally-led sustainable development in developing countries, and provides partnership building and capacity development through a tailored support programme for start-up sustainable development enterprises.*

Briefing notes on other topics in SEED's Insight series are available online from the SEED website: www.seedinit.org

Summary

Partnerships provide a basis for bringing a range of perspectives and experience to a problem, thereby generating innovative approaches to sustainable development. Partnership working can exploit and pool the resources and competencies of different organisations and interests. By working together the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts.

A variety of stakeholders have important roles to play not just as direct participants in partnerships but also in providing support and creating an enabling environment which encourages the development and success of partnerships.

Close involvement of local communities helps ensure that development approaches are tailored to their needs. Involving the private sector can bring in skills in business planning and cost-effectiveness and help the partnership develop new markets and products. Donors can help not just in funding but also in linking these ventures to wider networks of experience and expertise. National governments can help ensure access to advice about compliance with local regulation and use their convening powers to bring potential partners to the table.

Theme 1: Starting and growing a venture

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Business as a partner

Corporations large and small have a pivotal role to play: business as a partner can bring the market and financial acumen to turn a partnership project into a viable enterprise. Business can also play an enabling role in the local environment. For example, corporations investing in developing countries often build manufacturing sites and infrastructure. This capacity and know-how can be leveraged locally to help and support other initiatives that would use the same infrastructure.

In addition, corporations differ from governmental organisations or NGOs due to their entrepreneurial mindset and result-oriented approach. Throughout the development of a partnership, companies can provide valuable contributions by evaluating markets, developing business plans and marketing strategies for partnerships, providing services from their human resources and legal departments, and ensuring that the partnership keeps focusing on its goals.

Benefits for businesses

It is important that business moves beyond seeing partnership with civil society as solely philanthropic or part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda. Approaching partnerships in a spirit of mutual self-interest means integrating sustainable development principles into their core business practices.

While business can bring to a partnership its skills in planning and cost-effective implementation it can also gain in terms of the development and commitment of its own staff. There is therefore potential for multiple dividends for businesses in participating in and supporting partnerships for sustainability: making a practical contribution to social and environmental objectives; fostering productive relationships with local communities; and developing and motivating their own staff.

Governments as partners

Governments have multiple roles in fostering partnerships:

- Convening relevant stakeholders and facilitating a favourable policy and regulatory environment
- Endorsing good practice
- Diplomacy with other governments
- Promoting and helping to mainstream the learning from multi-stakeholder partnerships across industry sectors

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Governments can use their convening power to create platforms which facilitate contacts between the private sector and other stakeholders, enabling all actors to find appropriate partners with whom they wish to collaborate; to identify common issues; and to create innovative solutions.

In addition Governments are in a position to remove unnecessary barriers and to create a supportive environment for action. They are neutral brokers, in most cases have a democratic mandate to act, and are accountable to the electorate for their actions. Government has, or should have, the structures in place to make scale-up easier, changing the level of action from local to regional or national.

Governments and institutions also provide much of the policy framework within which all partnerships operate. A positive enabling environment can drive innovation and scale-up while a negative one can create unnecessary barriers.

NGOs and community groups

NGOs and community groups are important in representing local communities' interests. They can provide contacts for community leaders, and facilitate engagement of communities. Both business and NGOs have a role in influencing government policy. If people on the ground are encountering big hurdles, it can often be that these can be dealt with only by local or national governments. Feedback and providing evidence to them will help to persuade them of the need for change, and so help to create a more supportive policy framework for action.

Seeking matchmakers.

It is invaluable to make contact with national and international support networks, such as SEED, and to draw on their knowledge and services. Relevant resources for start-up partnerships are available at www.seedinit.org

SEED Partners

SEED is a global network founded in 2002 by **IUCN** (the International Union for Conservation of Nature), the United Nations Development Programme (**UNDP**) and the United Nations Environment Programme (**UNEP**). Major Supporting Partners are the governments of **Germany**, the **Netherlands**, **South Africa**, **Spain**, the **United Kingdom** and the **United States of America**.

