

**WALTZ, JAZZ, OR SAMBA?
THE CONTRIBUTION OF LOCALLY DRIVEN PARTNERSHIPS
TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

A DISCUSSION PAPER

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*Seed Initiative Research
and Learning Channel
coordinated by:*



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A Discussion Paper

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Disclaimer: This document is a discussion paper and reflects the views of the author. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the Seed Initiative, the Seed Initiative partners or its supporters.

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SUMMARY

This Seed Research & Learning discussion paper is based on data collected and experience gained from the first round of submissions to the Seed Awards. It presents data, observations and examples, thereby pointing to a range of important issues that require further investigation and research. The goal of this discussion paper thus is not to jump to (most likely premature) conclusions.

This preliminary analysis has generated some interesting results. Most importantly, the analysis shows that while most scholarly and political attention focuses on large-scale international partnerships, a much wider range of partnerships exists than those registered with the CSD Secretariat. The composition of the Seed partnerships shows clear leadership of civil society organisations and of developing countries and emerging economies; they overwhelmingly focus directly on implementing sustainable development, defined as the WEHAB issues or the Millennium Development Goals; they are predominantly new ventures developing innovative solutions; and they derive many of their financial resources from partner organisations. Since the Seed Initiative focuses on locally driven partnerships, whereas the “type II partnerships” registered with CSD need to have an international component, these differences might not be surprising. Nevertheless, assessments of partnerships for sustainable development should not neglect the existence of locally driven partnerships.

This paper also addresses one key question: How and where can partnerships have a positive impact? How can they contribute to sustainable development goals? Here, the examples of selected Seed partnerships suggest that future research could focus on their role in conflict resolution and prevention, in furthering compliance and implementation, in facilitating market access for local producers and in disseminating knowledge and technology.

The experiences of the Seed partnerships also point to a number of issues relevant for the successful set-up and operation of partnerships. With regard to enabling conditions for partnerships, the Seed partnerships suggest that small to medium-sized loans or grants are more relevant to partnerships than large financial contributions; that existing markets can trigger partnership formation; and that conferences, workshops or other programmes facilitating contacts can be catalysts for partnership development. Concerning the management of partnerships, experiences point to the crucial, but also problematic, role of entrepreneurial individuals; the dilemmas involved in defining partnership processes and internal governance structures that are flexible, yet create transparency and accountability; and the need to further define what kinds of external supports can be beneficial to partnership development.

PARTICIPATING IN SEED RESEARCH & LEARNING

The Seed Initiative supports innovative, entrepreneurial and locally driven partnerships in the early phases of their development. The Seed Research & Learning Channel uses the data and experiences gained from the Seed Awards to inform political debate and to disseminate information and good practice to partnership practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

This discussion paper is the first in a planned series of Seed Research & Learning publications. It relies on quantitative data generated by the first round of the Awards process as well as qualitative data collected during interview with 12 partnerships that were chosen as finalists. This paper pursues a dual purpose: to understand the nature of the Seed partnerships and to explore when and how partnerships can be made to work. Rather than drawing any conclusions, it points to emerging issues and builds a provisional agenda for future research.

To guarantee that the Seed Initiative's Research & Learning activities meet your information needs as closely as possible, we would like to get **your input**.

Please email us as research@seedinit.org or use the feedback form provided at <http://seedinit.org/research>.

UNDERSTANDING THE SEED PARTNERSHIPS

The Seed Awards: focusing on nascent, locally driven partnerships

The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in 2002 in Johannesburg, put the international spotlight on partnerships among local and international businesses, NGOs, civil society groups and public authorities.¹ Advocates argue that partnerships have the potential to make an important contribution to the effective implementation of sustainable development policies.² Critics counter that partnerships have yet to prove their effectiveness; that they are dubious in terms of their legitimacy and accountability; and that they can be counterproductive by taking political pressure off from governments, international organisations and business to make greater investments in sustainable development.³

To date, large-scale, international partnerships have captured most of the public's attention. Reflecting the official definition of the original "type II partnerships" as international initiatives, partnerships spanning many countries and involving key international organisations have been given most exposure in international fora. These partnerships have also been prominent in the academic debate, supplying much of the empirical evidence underlying the - often critical - studies on partnerships. Many observers claim that these new

¹ Despite its practical relevance and a growing body of literature on the subject, no common definition of 'partnerships' has been arrived at to date. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development designated partnerships as "type II" outcomes of the summit, i.e. recognised them as official outcomes alongside the political decision and plan for implementation. Partnerships were defined as "voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives contributing to the implementation of Agenda 21, Rio+5 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI)." (<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships.htm>).

² For a collection of both supportive and critical assessments, see (Witte, Streck et al. 2003).

³ See for example (Ottaway 2001), (Richter 2001), (Corporate Europe Observatory 2002), (Mallaby 2004).

partnership initiatives are simply old programmes in new guises and that they are mainly driven by the supply-side of development policies. In other words, critics allege that most partnerships are donor-driven.⁴

The growing Seed database

Against this background, it was a deliberate choice and strategy of the Seed Initiative to focus on nascent partnerships that have a local drive and focus. In early 2004, Seed put out a call for applications and, through a complex selection process, 5 partnerships were chosen as winners of the awards. The applications submitted by partnerships to participate in the competition are the basis for a database that contains coded data on the composition, purpose, main challenges and experience of the applicants.

Obviously, data collected through an application are very likely to be biased in two respects. First, we can expect that the partnerships tailor their information to fit the criteria defined by the Seed Awards. Second, partnership officials are most likely tempted to portray their initiatives in an overly positive way, stressing their actual or potential achievements, while downplaying their problems and downsides. Since this was the first time that the Seed Initiative called for applications, moreover, the sample size is limited: 263 applications were received, of which 206 were eligible (for eligibility criteria see below).

Nevertheless, the data are highly valuable, for various reasons: First, more systematic empirical data on partnerships are generally very scarce, particularly beyond individual case studies; any addition to the pool is important. Second, existing data collections tend to concentrate on more established and high-profile partnerships that have emerged in the context of the Johannesburg follow-up process. The sample generated here is unique since it focuses on nascent partnerships that are locally grounded.

Since both the award criteria and the application process influence the sample, both warrant more detailed explanation. The Seed Initiative was hoping for applications from partnerships that incorporate the following criteria:⁵

- the partnership is innovative and entrepreneurial
- the partnership contributes to the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development
- the partnership itself is sustainable
- the partnership has a local drive and focus

⁴ According to the CSD 11 Decision on Partnerships and the Bali Guiding Principles for Partnerships, partnerships could register with the Commission on Sustainable Development if they were new, voluntary, multi-stakeholder arrangements of governments with local involvement and an international component, pursuing integrated approaches to the implementation of sustainable development goals that achieve tangible results. Their records are some of the few that are accessible in a database (accessible at <http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/browse.do>). These data have been analysed e.g. by (ECOSOC 2004), (Andonova and Levy 2003), (Hale and Mauzerall 2004) or (Ivanova 2003).

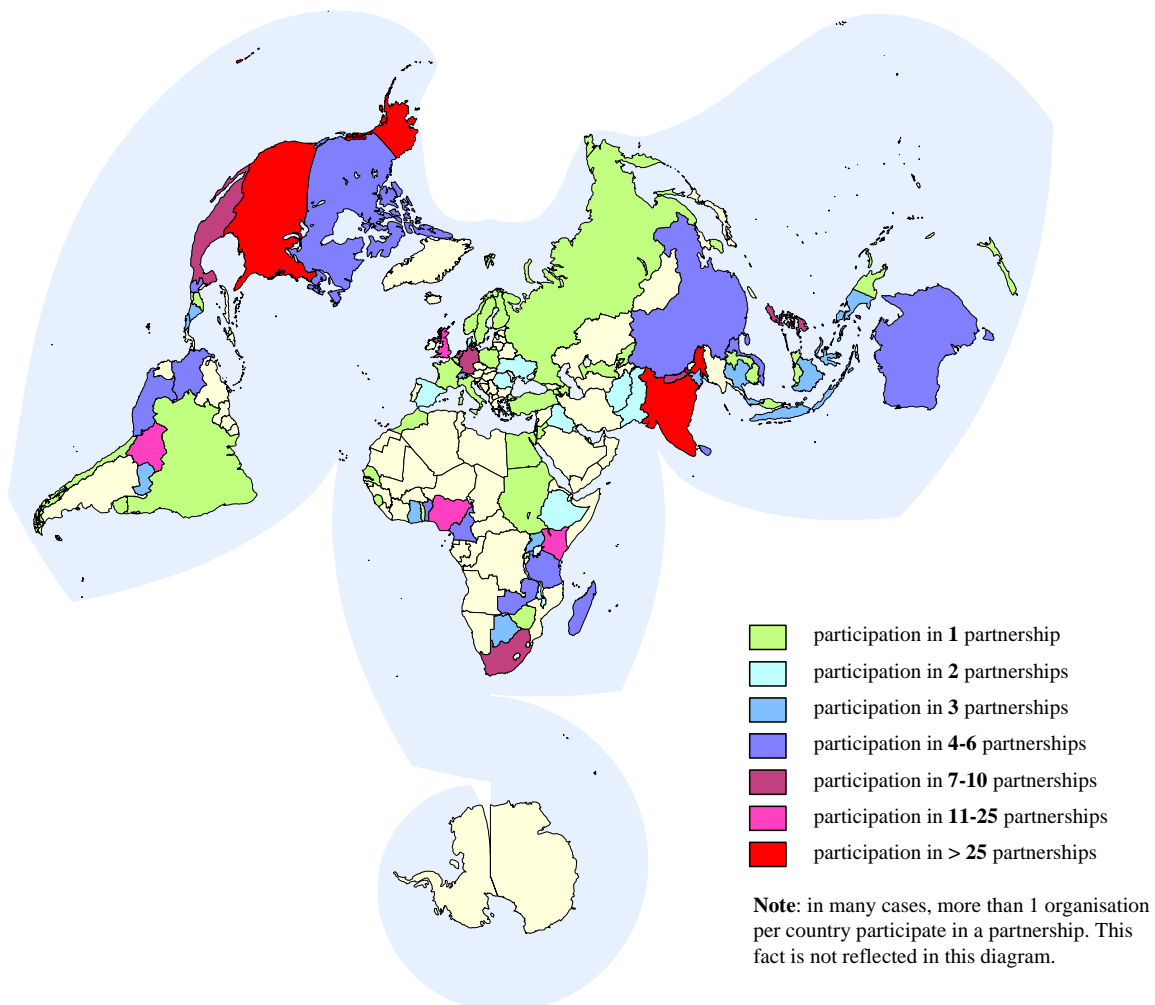
⁵ These criteria are largely in accordance with the criteria developed in the WSSD process, known as the “Bali Principles”, as described above. The Bali Principles’ criteria have been widened since, but the majority of the CSD registered partnerships database is still based on them. Seed partnerships are different in that they do not require the participation of governments or intergovernmental organisations, nor do they require an international component.

- the partnership includes relevant stakeholders
- the partnership could benefit from support through the Seed Initiative.

On the basis of these criteria, application forms in English, Spanish and French were developed. These were actively disseminated through the local offices of the Seed Initiative core partners (UNDP, UNEP and IUCN-The World Conservation Union), the Seed Associate Partners Network, internet lists and individual mailing lists. Language and technological barriers as well as differing levels of intensity of dissemination between various agencies and offices partly account for why some countries are so much stronger represented than others. Thus, for example, over 86% of the applications were submitted in English.

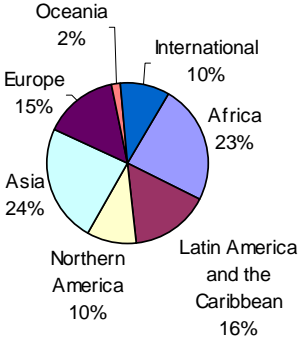
The deadline for submission of applications was August 15th, 2004. By that time, 263 applications were received, almost all of them in electronic format, with only a few as faxes or letters. All submissions with at least 3 partner organisations and including at least 3 different stakeholder groups were qualified as eligible. Those that did not qualify as partnerships or that had not yet identified specific partners were disqualified. The 206 eligible submissions are included in this analysis.

Geographical spread

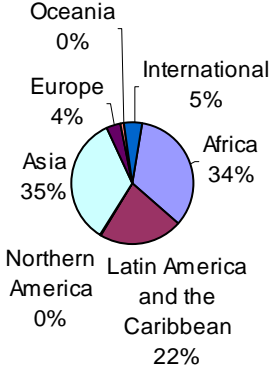


The 206 eligible partnerships that submitted an application to the first round of the Seed Awards feature partner organisations from 83 different countries, plus 34 international entities. They focus on projects implemented in 71 countries, and 12 partnerships focus on an international issue that cannot be linked to any specific country.

regional distribution of partners



regional focus of implementation

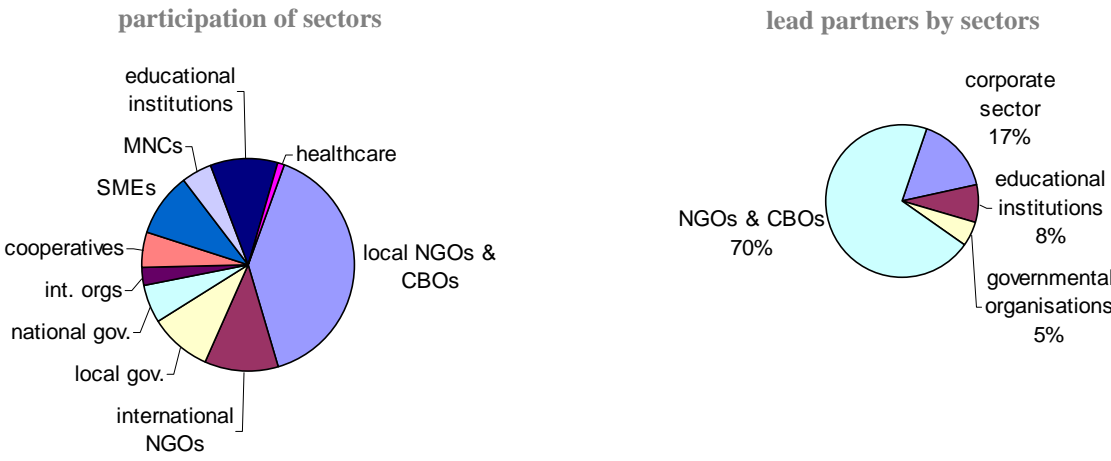


Partnership composition

Research to date has mainly focused on the partnerships that have registered with the CSD Secretariat. Based on this information, analysts have concluded that, “the Johannesburg program remains mired in many of the problems its supporters hoped to avoid, such as North-driven processes and a lack of private sector and grassroots involvement” (Hale and Mauzerall 2004, p. 224). Further they have stated that, “partnerships are more likely to be led and dominated by traditionally powerful actors such as intergovernmental agencies, donor governments, and transnational NGOs, rather than Southern governments, NGOs, and local communities” (Andonova and Levy 2003, p. 21).

To draw general conclusions about partnerships however, a broader spectrum of initiatives must be assessed. Reflecting the Seed selection criteria, the partnerships analysed for this paper by and large appear to display very strong local drive. They show leadership from both NGOs and local communities, combined with international cooperation. The 206 eligible partnerships that submitted an application to the first round of the Seed Awards feature partner organisations from 83 different countries, plus 34 international entities. They focus on projects implemented in 71 countries, and 12 partnerships focus on an international issue that cannot be linked to any specific country. At the time of submission, a total of 1032 organisations were engaged in the partnerships, i.e. an average of about 5 organisations per partnership.

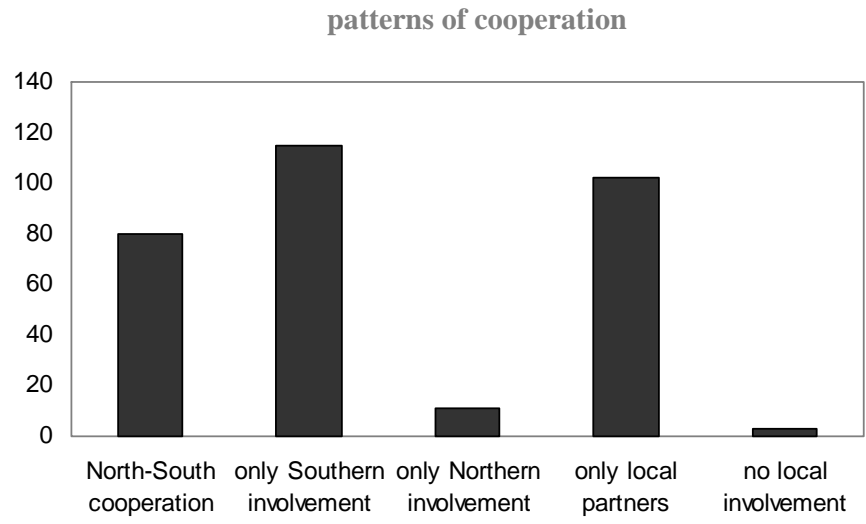
When the involvement of different sectors in these partnerships is considered, the dominance of civil society organisations – and in particular local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) – is evident. Over 50% of all partner organisations are NGOs or CBOs; local cooperatives (5.6%) and educational institutions (10%) should be added to this score. Civil society plays a leading role for sustainable



development even beyond its impressive involvement in partnerships. An even larger proportion of partnerships are led by NGOs or community based organisations (70%) – more than three quarters of which are local.⁶

Local and national governments together with international organisations are comparatively less involved. They make up less than 18% of the partner organisations and lead only 5% of the partnerships – and this despite the fact that the Seed Awards were strongly advertised through international organisations such as UNDP and UNEP. Companies account for roughly 15% of all partner organisations, and stand at the helm of 17% of the partnerships.

The patterns of international cooperation displayed by the Seed partnerships provide an additional indicator for the strength of local drive and the quality of relations between organisations based in the ‘North’ and in the ‘South’. They also point to the fact that in the



Note: these categories are not mutually exclusive and sum up to more than the total number of partnerships

⁶ For the partnerships contained in the Seed database, the organisation providing the main point of contact for the application procedure was coded as the ‘lead partner’. In some cases, this organisation is also the initiator or main driver of the project. In others, no clear lead organisation exists or access to communication technology and linguistic skills account for why one partner rather than another submitted the application. The number of partnerships ‘led’ by large or Northern-based organisations is thus likely to be overstated.

submissions, cooperation between organisations based in different developing and emerging countries remains rare and that many applying partnerships are concentrated at the local or national level.

Around 39% of all eligible submissions have partner organisations from developing (or emerging) as well as industrialised countries. While critical observers might expect these partnerships to be dominated by the Northern partners, the Seed partnerships are not. A majority of 56% are led by the developing (35%) or emerging (21%) country partner, as compared to 44% that are led by the Northern partner.

The majority of the partnerships in the Seed database do not involve cooperation between rich and poor or middle income countries: 56% involve only partners from developing and emerging countries, while 5% involve only organisations from industrialised economies. One cannot, however, interpret this as a sign of strong international cooperation between developing or emerging countries: of the 115 partnerships that exclusively have partners from developing or emerging countries, 98 do not include any international partners at all.

Finally, the strong local involvement is also borne out by the fact that only 3 partnerships, or less than 1.5%, do not actively involve organisations from the country of implementation.

Partnership focus

Partnerships are usually seen as innovative mechanisms for implementing multilaterally agreed goals of sustainable development. But what is their actual record? The Seed partnerships are analysed here with respect to their focus on the “WEHAB” issues (water, energy, health, agriculture, biodiversity) defined as priorities by the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, referred to as ‘Millennium Development Targets’ in their operationalised form).

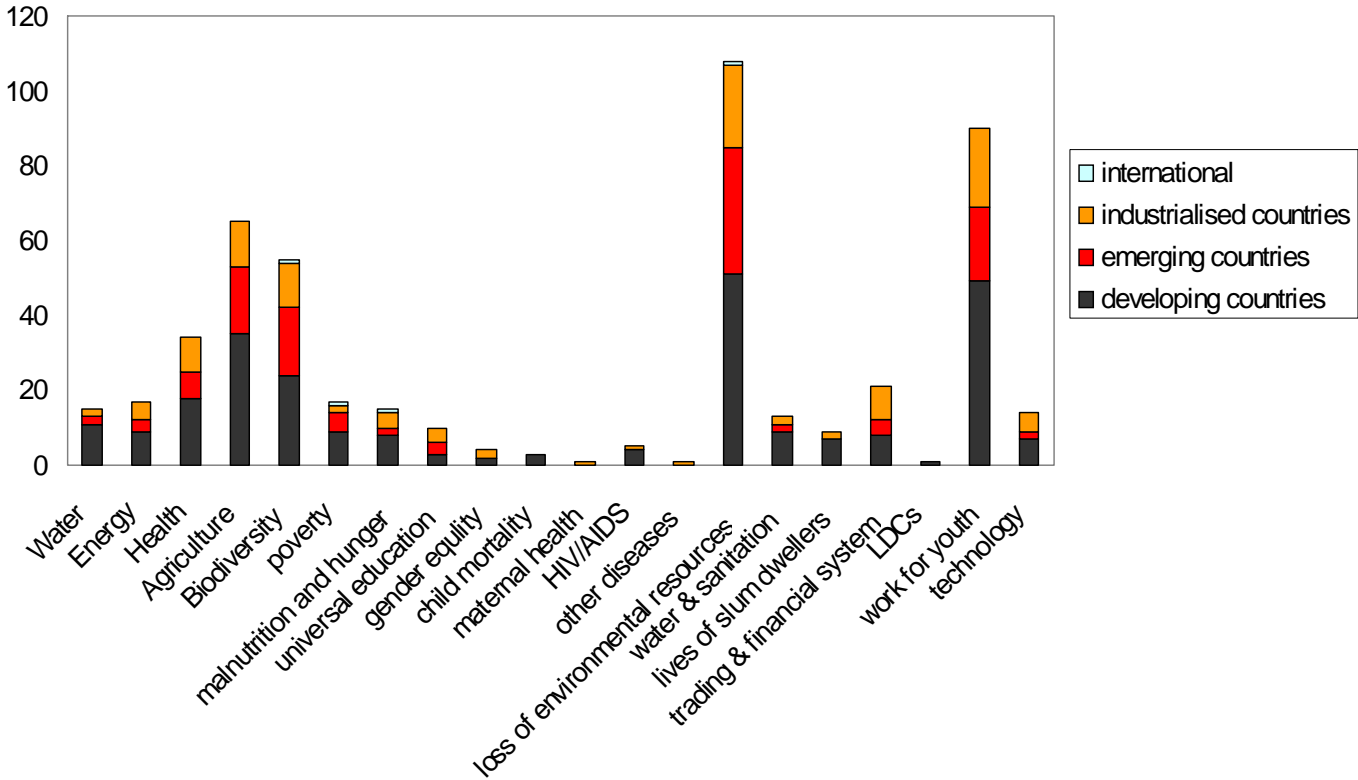
Almost all Seed partnerships focus on one or more of these priorities, with only 2% not addressing either a WEHAB issue or a Millennium Development Goal. Since the application forms explicitly asked partnerships to specify their contribution to sustainable development, this finding is, however, not that surprising. Implementing sustainable development means finding solutions that take into account the social, economic and environmental aspects of a problem. Partnerships reflect this need for integrated approaches since they frequently focus on more than one issue: 72% of the partnerships concentrate simultaneously on a WEHAB issue and a Millennium Development Target. Moreover, 14% address two or more WEHAB issues and 43% include two or more Millennium Development Targets.

Partnerships addressing multiple issues: The Maya Nut Program

In the Maya Nut Program, various international and local NGOs, local governments and international businesses cooperate to revive and encourage the production and marketing of maya nut in Central America. The maya nut is a highly nutritious non-timber forest product indigenous in Central America. The partnership trains women of marginalised indigenous communities in harvesting and processing the nuts and supports local and international marketing. Through this combination, the partnership helps preserve forests and biodiversity at the same time as it empowers women in Nicaragua, improves food security and nutrition in poor communities, increases family incomes and facilitates access to international markets.

The Seed partnerships thus have a clear focus on the multilaterally defined goals of sustainable development. At the same time, they show a set of priorities which may not be entirely congruent with the priorities defined at the international political level. Thus, for example, very few partnerships (less than 5%) focus on health issues. Rather, these locally driven initiatives overwhelmingly combine an interest in agriculture (32%) and reversing the loss of environmental resources (52%) with the creation of employment opportunities (43%). This focus raises an important question for future research: do some issue areas lend themselves more readily to a partnership approach than others?

focus on sustainable development issues



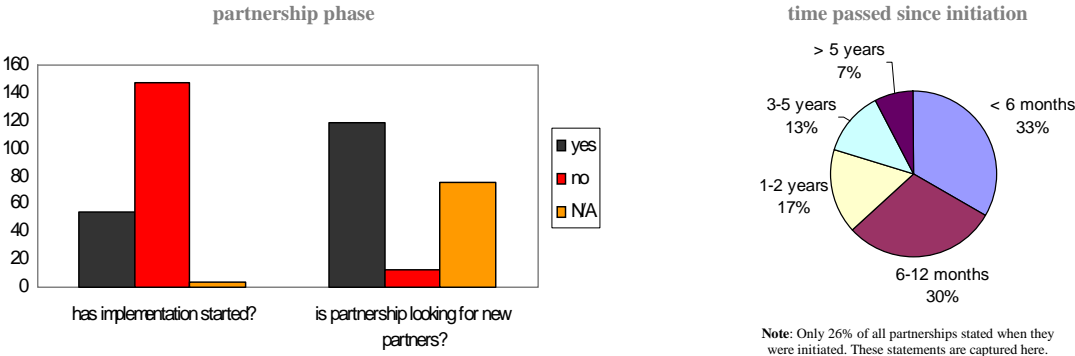
It is interesting to note that the partnership focus is roughly similar, no matter whether the lead partner comes from a developing, an emerging or an industrialised economy. The only exceptions are the issues of water and poverty eradication, where industrialised-country led partnerships are relatively less involved. By contrast, partnerships led by a partner from an industrialised nation have a relatively stronger focus on initiatives addressing the international trading and financial systems.

Partnership history & innovation

Are partnerships just old wine in new bottles, or do they create new projects with innovative characteristics? Two features of the Seed partnerships shed light on this question: the phase of their development⁷ and the kinds of innovation their projects include.

⁷ A model of different phases of partnership development can be found in (Tennyson 2003, p. 4).

Before we proceed, a few notes of caution are in order: First, many submissions (74%) did not indicate when the partnership was initiated. The sample size for how much time has passed between initiation and the time of submission is therefore very limited, though we do have data from most partnerships on whether they had started implementation and whether they were still looking for new partners. Second, the Seed Awards explicitly focus on ‘nascent’ partnerships and it should therefore not come as a surprise that many submissions came from initiatives that were in the launching phase. Third, the problem concerning the reliability of the data described above is especially pertinent for the question of innovation. Since innovation is one of the key selection criteria for the Seed Awards, partnerships had a strong incentive to present their projects in positive ways in this respect. Determining whether or not an initiative is ‘innovative’, moreover, contains a certain degree of subjective judgment. To

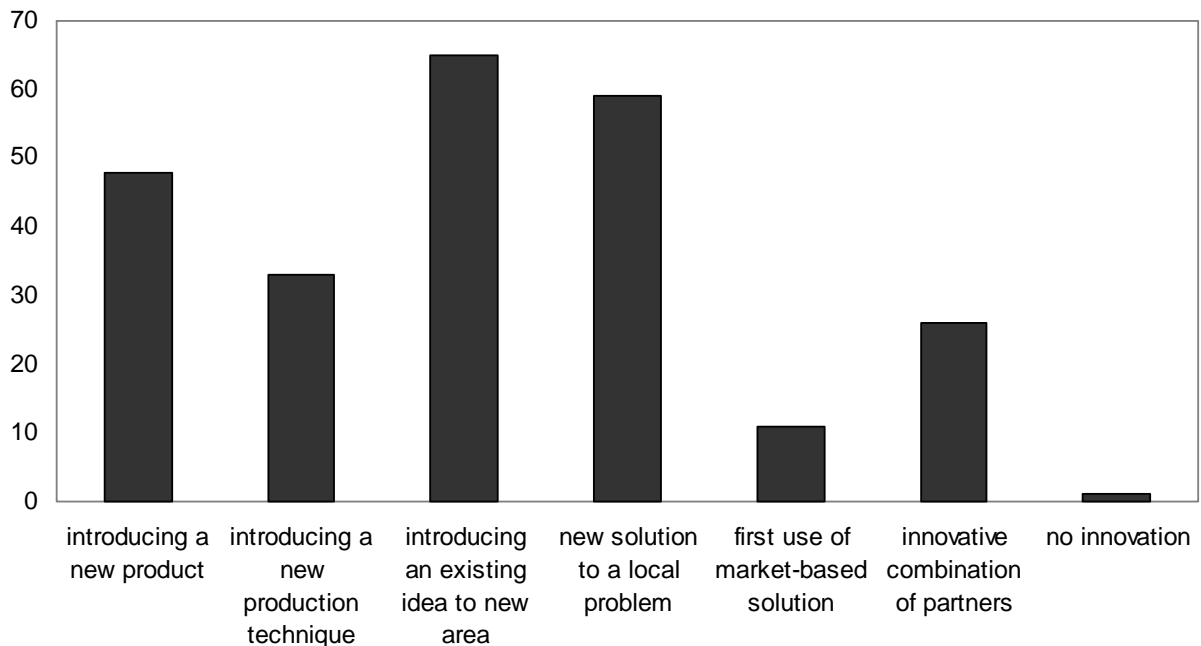


limit this, different categories of innovation were defined basic plausibility checks were carried out when the data was coded. Nevertheless, a bias is likely to persist. In addition, through the categorisation, the complexity of most responses is not reflected.

With these caveats in mind, the evidence does suggest that the partnerships contained in our database are predominantly very young ventures. Among the few partnerships that stated their age, a clear trend is discernible: Almost two thirds (63%) were less than a year into their existence at the time of submission. Only 7% were older than 5 years. There are additional factors that indicate that the Seed partnerships are mostly in the early development stages: only 26% of all partnerships had begun implementing their ideas by the time of submission. Less than 6% indicated that they did not need any additional partners, while almost 58% were still explicitly looking for new partners.

The chart below lists the broad types of innovation featured by the Seed partnerships. In only one case, the application form did not state any innovative aspect. All other partnerships displayed one (81.5%) or more innovative aspects (18%). The most frequent types of innovation were introducing an existing idea to new area (31%), developing new solutions to a local problem (28%) and introducing a new product to the market (23%). 13% of the submissions were innovative in combining an unusual set of partners, and of those around two fifth featured no other type of innovation, while three fifth did.

types of innovation



Note: these categories are not mutually exclusive and sum up to more than the total number of partnerships

WHEN AND HOW TO MAKE PARTNERSHIPS WORK

Partnering with other social groups and potentially across international borders has its costs. Thus, over 26% of all partnerships applying to the Seed Awards stated in response to open ended questions that working in partnership risks slowing down project implementation. 19% reported difficulties in coordinating the partners' activities, 16% emphasised linguistic, cultural or geographical barriers to cooperation and as many worried about potential conflicts of interest among partners. Despite the tendency of applicants to a partnership award to focus on the bright sides of partnering, only 30% did not indicate any downsides to working in partnership.

In addition, as mentioned briefly above, partnerships are subject to important principled objections. These concern for example the legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness of partnership arrangements and highlight the potential for other organisations to abuse partnerships to escape their responsibilities. Therefore, it is essential to build an understanding of when and where partnerships can have a positive impact (which makes it necessary to develop a model for measuring and tracking that impact), what framework conditions further or obstruct this contribution and how partnerships can be managed to ensure their efficiency, effectiveness and accountability.

Functions of partnerships

Partnerships are certainly not a magic potion. But, based on the Seed partnership database and earlier research, it seems reasonable to assume that they do have the potential to make

important and lasting contributions in specific areas. This includes preventing and resolving conflicts, generating access to markets and disseminating knowledge and transferring technology.

Much work remains to be done to specify when and where partnerships have a comparative advantage over other mechanisms for achieving sustainable development. For the time being, the Seed partnerships can only point to some areas in which partnerships can make a contribution.

The following includes some of the partnership functions that have emerged from work with the Seed partnerships, and especially from the experiences reported by the 12 Seed finalists. This list is by no means supposed to be comprehensive. To the contrary, it is expected that it will change and expand as we learn more about partnerships.⁸

- Conflict resolution and prevention

Partnerships for Conflict Prevention: Agua Para Todos in Cochabamba

Twice in the last decade, a ‘war over water’ was waged in Bolivia. In 1999/2000 in Cochabamba and in 2004/2005 in El Alto and La Paz, massive street protests erupted against rising prices and insufficient coverage of water services. Ultimately, they led to the cancellation of service contracts with international water firms.

The conflict arose out of a dilemma: Water and sanitation systems require large-scale investments. These were reflected in rising prices, but the companies could not keep pace with rapidly expanding urban areas. Higher prices combined with lack of coverage fuelled the anger of local communities, thus threatening the stability required for long-term investments.

Agua Para Todos has emerged as an alternative approach to organising water services. It includes local water committees that had started developing their own distribution networks. The Agua Tuya programme links them with a company providing pipes, network design and maintenance training to create networks of better quality. A microfinance institution contributes with loans for the water committees to finance the investment. Crucially, with the integration of the municipal water company, the process can be planned and local networks are linked to the central distribution system.

As a result, distribution systems emerge in response to local needs; local ownership guarantees better maintenance; the water company serves entire communities instead of individual households; administrative costs fall, as well as water prices; investments are carried out in a decentralised fashion and are incremental, allowing them to react to unforeseen developments. With the public sector working hand in hand with the private sector and civil society, future conflict over water has become much less likely in Cochabamba.

Partnerships bring together different social actors for addressing specific problems. The benefits of including those concerned in the process of designing solutions are well known:

⁸ One strand of literature that analyses partnership functions is that focusing on public-private partnerships and public policy networks. It usually distinguishes the different policy functions of a partnership, e.g. agenda-setting, negotiation, implementation and policy reformulation and institutional learning (Reinicke and Deng 2000). In a different formulation, researchers distinguish between policy design and planning, policy coordination, monitoring, evaluation and review, implementation and service provision, resource mobilisation and resource management (Bovaird 2004). Another relevant body of literature is that on multi-stakeholder processes. Here, the functions tend to be described in terms of their impact on the resulting policy, e.g. in terms of enhancing the quality and credibility of programmes, enhancing their likelihood of implementation and leading to capacity development among the parties involved (Hemmati 2002).

policies or programmes can respond better to the needs of affected groups, compliance is likely to increase, and social conflicts can be addressed in a more effective way.⁹ Partnerships go beyond most other forms of participation. Rather than only providing input sporadically, the partners take decisions, design and implement their projects jointly. Partners also contribute tangibly to project implementation – be it through investments, time or sharing their decision making authority.

This makes partnerships particularly suited to addressing situations of entrenched social conflict over public policy issues. When mistrust has developed between the parties involved, attempts by any single actor to put forward a solution are usually doomed to failure. By allowing all partners to influence decision making processes directly, partnerships can help rebuild trust and transform conflict into a constructive process of joint policy making.¹⁰ By the same token, when partnership solutions are chosen early on in an area ripe with conflicting interests, they can help prevent conflicts from breaking out.

Partnerships can also make a valuable contribution in situations where social conflicts are not acute, but where compliance and policy enforcement are an issue. This is often the case in projects aiming at the protection of biospheres. While all would benefit from a successful implementation of protection policies, there are strong incentives for individuals or groups to free-ride and thus undermine the initiative's success. Partnerships can help overcome collective action problems like this by building trust and enhancing voluntary compliance. As a partnership developing a marine protected area in Madagascar reports, their collective development of a surveillance and enforcement system has led to “full compliance with the project so far, with no fishing reported in the no-take zone to date”.

- Access to markets

Almost a third of the Seed partnerships focus on agriculture. They typically encourage farmers to use organic production methods and use traditional crop varieties to safeguard biological diversity. Almost inevitably, this leads to a common dilemma: to have an incentive to apply environmentally friendly production techniques and promote local crops, farmers need to be able to sell their produce at profitable rates.

The farmers tend to operate on a small scale, serving local markets. Local elite markets for eco-friendly and exotic foods at premium prices often remain underdeveloped so that demand centres mainly on Europe and the United States. Serving these markets with their very high quality and certification requirements is usually beyond the capacity of small agricultural producers. The Seed partnerships reflect this dilemma: of the partnerships that responded to the question of what they perceived as their dominant obstacles, 13% percent named lack of access to markets.

⁹ The literature on participation is vast and encompasses a range of different disciplines. For good examples, see e.g. (Renn, Webler et al. 1995), (Enayati 2002), (Fisher 1997).

¹⁰ Cf. Kishan Khoday, who describes partnerships as processes for negotiated rule making, regulating conflicts between different social groups in the global economy (Khoday 2003).

Partnerships Connecting Local Producers to Markets: The SRI Global Marketing Partnership

The SRI Global Marketing Partnership was formed in response to the problem of market access for smallholder rice farmers in Africa and Asia. The Cornell International Institute for Food, Agriculture and Development (CIIFAD) originally set out to promote the application of SRI: The ‘System of Rice Intensification’ is a method for growing indigenous varieties of rice that increases yields significantly with less water, chemical inputs and costs.

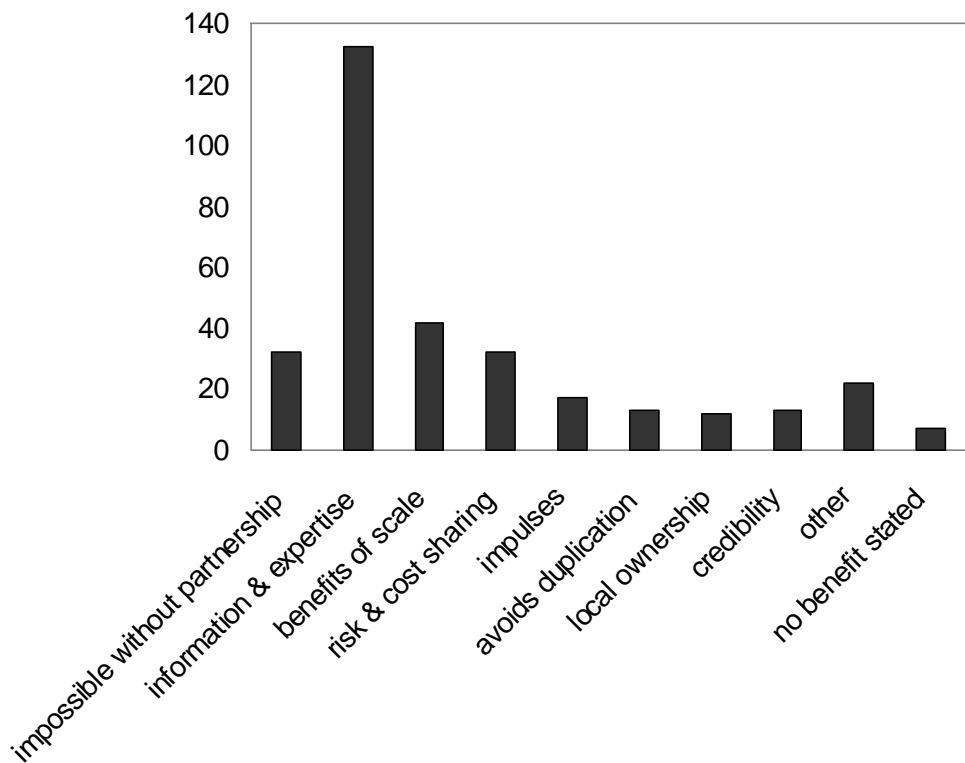
Application of the SRI production method is gaining rapid acceptance and is increasingly adopted by small-scale farmers around the world. To promote SRI and its benefits for biodiversity and human and environmental health, knowledge exchange among farmers and collective marketing efforts are needed. CIIFAD has therefore initiated a partnership with local NGOs and farmers cooperatives from Cambodia, Madagascar and Sri Lanka to help them gain access to domestic and international markets.

In situations like this, partnerships can have a crucial impact. Firstly, they can play a coordinating role among local producers. This can raise production to a scale at which it becomes marketable, while also increasing the farmers’ collective bargaining power. Secondly, partnerships can link these local producers to partners in their local and international target markets. These partners can contribute a much more detailed understanding of the rules and regulations, improve quality control and packaging and have better capabilities for marketing new products. That international partners can play an important role here appears to be supported by some evidence that suggests that partnerships led by partners from industrialised countries have a stronger tendency than others to focus on problems relating to international trading arrangements and finances.

- Knowledge dissemination and technology transfer

One of the great advantages of cooperation is that it gives the partners access to each other’s knowledge, experience and expertise. The Seed partnerships show that benefits from complementary skills and information are not merely a theoretical construct: when replying to the open-ended question of what they perceived as the greatest benefits of partnering, over 64% of all respondents referred to access to other partners’ knowledge and expertise. That the partnerships appreciate this aspect so

benefits of partnering



much is closely connected to their composition. 90% of the Seed partnerships include partners whose knowledge and know-how are at least in part complementary (bearing in mind that some duplication of expertise is very likely in partnerships including a large number of parties).

Partnerships for South-South Technology Transfer: Cows to Kilowatts

In the ‘Cows to Kilowatts’ partnership, various Nigerian organisations cooperate with a Thai technology research centre. Prime objective of the Nigerian partner organisations is to address the problems caused by unregulated pollution from abattoirs. The Thai organisation had developed and applied a technology for generating biogas from rice, vegetable and fruit waste. Their cooperation now aims at adapting the technology to address the specific situation in Nigeria. As a result of gaining a new partner from another developing country, the partnership now not only treats abattoir waste, but also generates clean and affordable energy resources for household use.

While most partnerships benefit from knowledge dissemination among partners, some are more specifically designed to achieve technology transfer. A partnership can offer advantages by ensuring a very close cooperation between technology users and technology developers. Cooperation helps the technology producers to develop technologies that are suited to the specific needs and circumstances of the users. Working together to develop and apply the technology, moreover, can have a capacity development effect. This makes it more likely that technology will be put to good use and applied in a sustainable fashion.

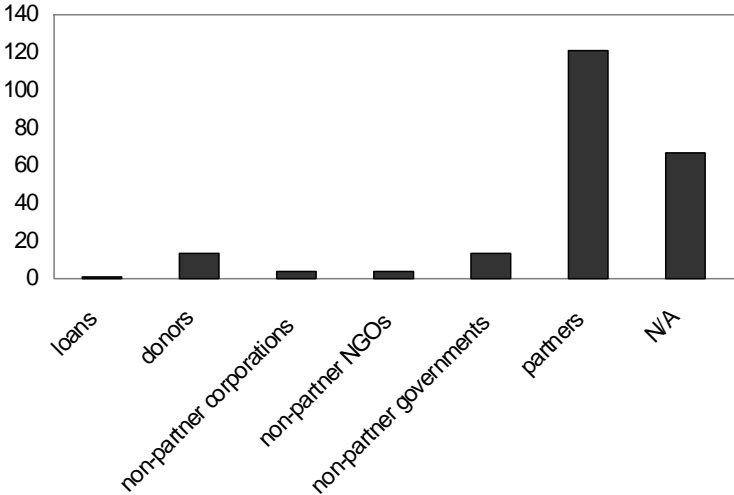
Factors for partnership success

- Finance

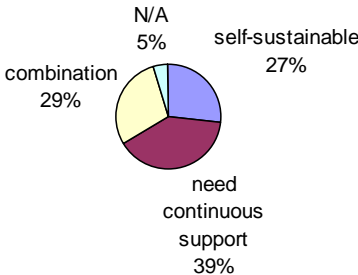
The availability of adequate financial resources is critical to partnership success. An important point in the debate concerns the question of whether partnerships open new avenues of funding or simply channel existing resources in new directions. While the evidence gathered to date from the Seed partnerships is far from sufficient to answer this question, it contains some interesting indicators.

First, the sources of initial funding are noteworthy. Overwhelmingly (87% of those that have indicated any source of initial funding), Seed partnerships are initially supported through

provision of initial funding



long-term financial sustainability



financial or in-kind contributions by their partners. As we have seen above, traditional donor organisations are little represented as partners: national governments and international organisations together account for only 8% of the partner organisations. This means that only few Seed partnership can be accused of simply creating new channels for using existing resources.

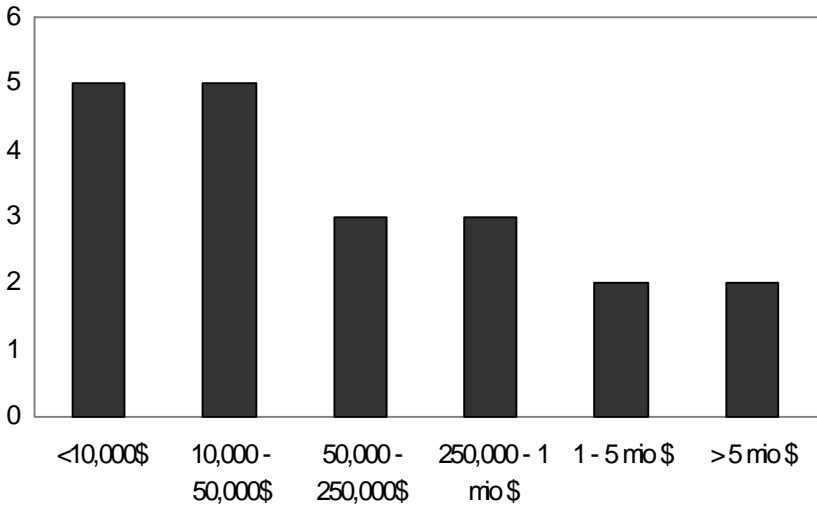
Second, the medium to long term financial goals of the Seed partnerships vary. It is impossible to assess how realistic the partnerships’ projections are. It is nevertheless telling that 39% do not aim at generating at least part of their income through the partnership’s activities. However, 27% plan to become entirely self-financing, so that an important number of partnerships could be described as commercial endeavours for sustainable development.

This last category of partnership raises the question of access to funds. 45% of the partnerships explicitly declared their need for financial support, but only very few (10%) have indicated the exact extent of their financial requirements. Among those who did, however, there are clear signs that there is a need for small to medium size grants or commercial credits rather than larger investments or grants. In many developing countries, commercial investments or loans are not available.

One of the finalist partnerships, the “Cows to Kilowatts” initiative described above, is trying to effectively address this problem by relying on local investors, receiving guarantees from donor institutions to attract international investors and applying for international award schemes.

The financial situation is different for partnerships that are triggered by an existing commercial demand for their products or services.

financial requirements



Partnerships Encouraged by Existing Demand: Allanblackia Seed

The Allanblackia tree is indigenous in the tropical forests of Africa. Its fruits contain seeds rich in oil that can be used for the production of soap and foodstuff. To date, Allanblackia seeds are not produced commercially in West Africa. The Dutch multinational Unilever has developed applications for the oil and guarantees demand for Allanblackia oil to produce consumer products. This has provided incentives to local farmers, NGOs and governmental bodies to join the partnership, begin harvesting the seeds and plant new trees. The initiative thus contributes to the conservation of African tropical forests. For Unilever, the partnership with local communities provides reliable high-quality supply of Allanblackia oil.

- Contact facilitation

For local organisations in developing countries, identifying and establishing contacts to

potential partner organisations or donors can present a formidable challenge. Not only is it difficult for poor communities to cover travel expenses. In addition, access to communication technologies is frequently restricted as well. The low rate of international South-South cooperation found among the Seed partnerships (only 8% of the partnerships have South-South cross-border cooperation without the involvement of any Northern partner) is a symptom of that problem. Contacts are especially difficult to establish when all potential partners have minimal resources for travel and communication.

Under these conditions, organisations or programmes designed to facilitate contacts can be effective triggers for partnership development. Examples of such programmes drawn from the Seed partnerships include international fairs, especially those focusing on organic agriculture and exotic foods, expert conferences, the World Bank development marketplace, internet platforms and organisations actively involved in networks building.

Partnerships Triggered by Contact Facilitation: Rising in the East Partnership (REAP)

The Jamaica Organic Agriculture Movement (JOAM) is a non-profit organisation focusing on the promotion of organic agriculture in Jamaica. As part of its work, it convenes meetings and facilitates encounters and training among organic farmers and other interested groups.

During a workshop to strengthen the capacity of women organic producers, participants identified the lack of skilled labour as one of the major challenges confronting their enterprises. To address this problem, participants initiated the Rising in the East Partnership (REAP). REAP brings together a diversity of organisations including private companies, small farmers, development agencies and educational institutions to develop a training programme for unemployed rural youth. The training programme is integrated into a larger project promoting eco-agriculture, community tourism and small enterprise development to enable the participants not only to find jobs, but to create opportunities for self-employment after completing the training.

Given the multi-dimensional nature of the REAP project, contact facilitation plays a critical role in attracting partners and in sustaining the momentum of the project. While developing integrated solutions for complex issues, REAP partners are strengthening their on-going programmes, and are better able to make a sustainable impact at the community level.

Just how important the facilitation of contacts can be is also borne out by the needs expressed by the respondents. 46% of all partnerships stated that they would like to receive support in establishing connections to potential new partners, donors or investors and commercial agents that could be interested in their products. The 12 finalist partnerships reinforced this by showing very strong interest in possibilities for exchanging experiences among themselves.

- The role of entrepreneurial individuals

There are no 'hard data' available from our sample on the role and significance of individual leadership in setting up partnerships. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is hardly a partnership that has not a story of a strong individual at its core.

Partnerships can be the consequence of policy decisions in large organisations. But typical Seed partnerships are much more likely to arise out of individuals identifying concrete problems and recognising that these can best be addressed through cooperation. People provide the creativity for arriving at innovative solutions, use their personal networks for finding partners, commit their energy and resources for initiating partnerships and invest their

personal commitment to create the trust that allows partnerships to function.

The Role of Entrepreneurial Individuals in Partnerships: Harvesting Seabuckthorn at the Top of the World

It is over 20 years ago that Susanne von der Heide first met the local communities in the remote Nepalese region of Mustang. Ever since that, she has returned countless times to do research or implement development projects. This relationship forms the backbone of the Harvesting Seabuckthorn at the Top of the World partnership that promotes sustainable harvesting and cultivation of seabuckthorn in Nepal. “They simply know me up there” is one of the first reasons she gives when explaining why her project seems to succeed where many others failed.

Among others an ethno-botanist by training, she quickly recognised the potential of the high quality seabuckthorn that is indigenous to the region. She began promoting the plantation of seabuckthorn to counter forest degradation in Mustang. But the project only took shape in its current form when she learned on a conference that international medical companies are looking for seabuckthorn products.

With the help of funds from the NGO she co-directs, local farmer groups established nurseries for seabuckthorn and received training on how to harvest and process fruits from the wild forests. For overcoming the serious transport problem in this inaccessible region, she gets support from local helicopter and plane services.

Currently, she is mobilising her international contacts to find the best technology for producing oil from seabuckthorn seeds and to buy a first mobile oil-press. She is also exploring contracts with international cosmetic firms, inviting them to visit the project on-site. In the meantime, a local doctor she knows is using the first outputs of the seabuckthorn partnership in his clinic and a tea based on seabuckthorn pulp and peel is now available on the market. The revenues generated help maintain the support of the local farmers.

The role of individuals should thus not be underestimated. But as in so many other situations, a partnership can also become overly dependent on a leadership figure. This can restrict the inputs and commitments of other partners and limit the effectiveness of a partnership. It can also endanger the sustainability of an initiative when that person begins to focus on new projects. The challenge is therefore to design processes and structures that allow a partnership to grow into a team of partnership leaders.

- Partnership processes and structures

It is in the early stages of their development that partnerships define – whether consciously or not – the essential processes and structures through which they work. These are important in two respects: they shape interactions among partners and thus influence whether a partnership can operate smoothly and effectively. They also mould the relationship between the partnership and the outside world as they determine transparency, accountability and possibilities for inputs and consultations.

Designing adequate processes and structures is a challenging task for all types of organisations or initiatives. For partnerships, it can turn into a genuine dilemma. On the one hand, some of the most serious criticisms concerning partnerships relate to their lack of accountability and demands have been voiced to increase for example the transparency, reporting and monitoring requirements for partnerships (Ottaway 2001).

On the other hand, partnerships are seen by many as attractive mechanisms for implementing sustainable development because they take them to be an antidote to bureaucracy. Where traditional institutions lack flexibility and are inefficient, partnerships seem to offer a more

spontaneous alternative. As one Seed finalist put it “*partnerships thrive on the enthusiasm of individuals and their ability to grasp opportunities spontaneously*”. Inflexible processes and overly strict structures can therefore be counterproductive and harm the very raison d’être of partnerships.¹¹

Communication for Partnering: Madagascar’s Marine Protected Area

The village of Andavadoaka is located in a remote part of Southern Madagascar, virtually cut off from the rest of the world. Its coastal reef system is one of the most biodiverse in the Indian Ocean and is acutely threatened by the effects of climate change and unsustainable fishing. An international conservation NGO has therefore entered into a partnership with the local fishing communities, a national research centre and a fisheries business to implement an experimental community-run marine protected area.

Working in an environment with no roads, no telephone system, no electricity grid and no postal address system, the NGO relies on expensive satellite based technology as well as volunteer researchers remaining in situ for many months at a time for communication with its partners. Two recent cyclones cut off connections to the main local and national partners for over two months and made a planned major meeting among partners impossible. To create the basic preconditions for working together, the partnership has had to learn to work continuously to develop innovative solutions to overcome these complex logistical barriers. Consequently, the partnership is now actively seeking to involve a telecommunications company that could provide mobile phone access to the region.

For the internal coordination of activities, partnership practitioners therefore tend to stress the importance of good communication and trust rather than formal agreements. Often, this is more easily said than done, though: even with a small number of partners all having access to advanced telecommunication technology, many partnerships report difficulties in communicating sufficiently and taking decisions quickly. Geographical distance and poor infrastructure obviously exacerbate these problems. Reflecting this, 19% of all Seed partnerships reported difficulties in coordinating the partners’ activities and 27% the slowing down of processes as the main downsides of partnering - and the real number is likely to be higher since the application process probably generated a bias for stressing the positive aspects of partnerships.

- External support

Setting up and running partnerships involves numerous challenges. To facilitate partnership processes, various organisations have developed programmes designed to provide external support to partnerships. Among those are various UN-led partnership fora, an accreditation scheme for partnership brokers, a postgraduate course in cross-sector partnership, courses in facilitating multi-stakeholder processes and the Seed Awards.¹²

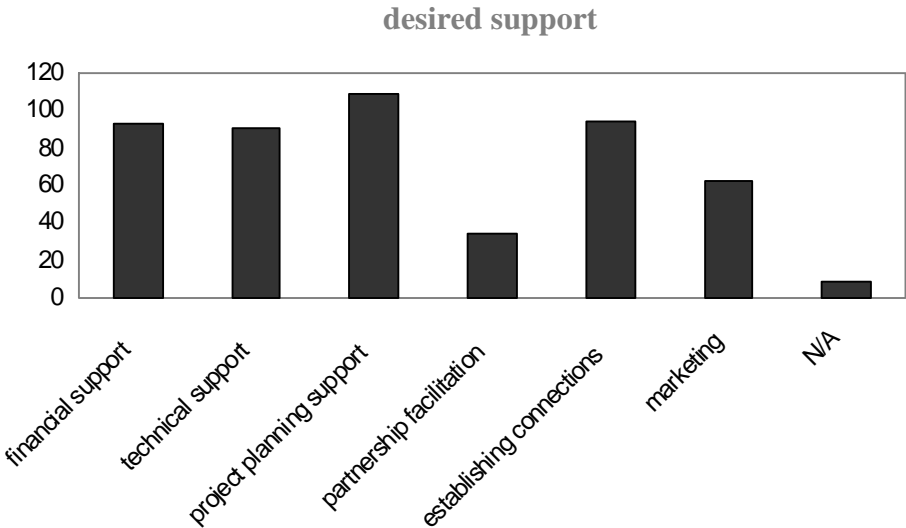
While these programmes are becoming operational, very little research has been undertaken as to what type of support partnerships need and how this support could best be provided.

¹¹ I have described the downsides and trade-offs of strict accountability mechanisms for partnerships elsewhere in greater details (Steets 2005).

¹² More information on these programmes is available on the internet at: <http://www.odi.org.uk/pppg/PBAS/index.html>; <http://www3.cpi.cam.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/56/110/>; <http://www.iac.wur.nl/iac/index2htm?courses/module.cfm?code=61/50/2005>; <http://seedinit.org>.

Future experiences of the Seed Initiative with providing support services to the award winners and evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions will contribute to closing this knowledge gap.

During the application process, the Seed partnerships were asked to specify their projected support needs in an open-ended question. In this process, a clear need for financial and technical aid as well as support in marketing, “business-planning” and establishing connections to partners and financiers was expressed. By contrast, only 17% indicated a demand for support in partnership facilitation or brokering. In interviews, however, partnerships that were nominated as finalists for the Seed Awards described positive effects of the selection process. According to these statements, initial interactions with members of the Seed support services team encouraged partnerships to become more self-reflective, helping them to design partnership processes more consciously.



NEXT STEPS

The submissions for the first round of the Seed Awards show trends that differ markedly from the characteristics of the CSD-registered partnerships. The qualitative experiences of the 12 finalists complement this picture and point to a number of important issues. It is, however, too early to draw conclusions from this analysis. The most important questions have not yet been addressed in a systematic manner and the remaining knowledge gaps are daunting.

The Seed Initiative Research & Learning Channel will contribute its modest share to filling these gaps over the next years. The broad goals as well as the more short term priorities of this research agenda are outlined below. *Please email us at research@seedinit.org or use the form available at <http://seedinit.org/research> to provide your feedback and input to this agenda.*

Seed R&L can collect information on partnerships through

- improving application forms for next round of Seed Awards
- asking previous applicants for updates
- providing & evaluating support to winners
- tracking progress of winners
- conducting interviews & writing case studies on winners

In the long-term, the Seed Initiative Research & Learning Channel seeks to address three broad questions:

- What contribution can partnerships make to sustainable development? In what areas and under what circumstances are partnership activities most effective and legitimate?
- Which factors make partnerships effective? What are the external conditions and the internal structures and processes that enable partnership success?
- How can partnerships best be promoted? In those areas where partnerships are effective and legitimate tools for the implementation of sustainable development, how can we facilitate learning between them? Which external support services address partnerships' need effectively?

In the short-term, only a limited subset of these questions can be addressed. With multiple organisations engaging in partnership research, the Seed Initiative Research & Learning Channel will concentrate on areas where it can make a special contribution:

- Focusing on the set-up phase of partnerships. We know that partnerships face a myriad of challenges particularly in the early stages of their development and that many fail during the set-up phase. While most research programmes focus on established partnerships, the Seed Initiative is designed to support young initiatives. By accompanying its winners from this early stage over a period of time, it is uniquely positioned to analyse what challenges emerge and how they can be addressed. Case studies covering the process of getting a partnership off the ground can be used to define good practices, produce learning materials or simply provide inspiration to partnership practitioners.
- Action learning with support services. The Seed Initiative provides the winners of its awards programme with services addressing needs articulated by the partnerships. This can include process facilitation, technical advice on project planning and the

design of internal governance structures or the establishment of connections to new partners, funding organisations or market agents. For its own learning, the Seed Initiative will evaluate its experiences with different approaches to providing these services. The lessons learned on what works and what doesn't can be valuable for training institutions as well as the growing ranks of partnership brokers and facilitators.

- Collecting data for evaluating partnership success. The application process for the Seed Awards generates a wealth of data on young, entrepreneurial partnerships with local drive and focus. A data base containing the submissions has the advantage of capturing data on partnerships beginning with their early development. With later updates, this has the potential of generating a unique collection of materials for evaluating partnership success. First, it enables researcher to trace how many partnerships fail in their early phases and maybe even why they fail. Second, it allows identifying whether and how the focus and structure of partnerships change over time. Third, it will indicate in what issue areas and under what circumstances partnerships are successful and prepare a basis for measuring their impact. We hope that the results will be valuable for decision-makers in foundations, national agencies, and international organizations as they embark on deciding if and where to include partnerships in future program priorities on sustainable development.

Partnerships are not a panacea that will solve all problems of sustainable development. But they hold certain promises and the Seed partnerships demonstrate that they can bring local drive, innovation and new resources to bear on pressing issues. To determine when, where and how partnerships can contribute most effectively to sustainable development, the Seed Initiative Research & Learning Channel as well as many other research programmes will collect more experience and conduct further research.

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