

Chapter 10

Key Factors for the Successful Implementation of Stakeholder Partnerships: The Case of the African Cashew initiative

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Abstract The implementation of sustainable development efforts often requires finding joint solutions to complex challenges and cooperation between different societal actors in order to pool expertise and resources. Such cross-sector stakeholder partnerships require patience and persistence, but, when managed well, they can build the cross-sector stability we need to address global challenges and find innovative solutions. Any attempt to initiate, implement or facilitate such cooperation processes is an intervention into a fragile and often controversial system of actors, requiring careful attention to the quality of relationships and interaction among stakeholders. This chapter discusses the main concepts related to multi-stakeholder partnerships and the key factors for their successful implementation. Laying out a methodological background developed by the Collective Leadership Institute (CLI) and drawing on its 2 years of extensive experience with the African Cashew initiative (ACi), the chapter elaborates on eight key factors for the success of complex stakeholder partnerships and illustrates their relevance with a series of examples from the initiative.

Introduction

The implementation of sustainable development efforts often requires finding joint solutions to complex challenges and cooperation between different societal actors in order to pool expertise, experiences and resources (Kuenkel et al. 2011). Such cross-sector stakeholder partnerships require patience and persistence, but, when managed well, they can build the cross-sector stability we need to address global challenges and find innovative solutions. Any attempt to initiate, implement or facilitate such cooperation processes is an intervention into a fragile and often controversial system of actors. So, it requires careful attention to the *quality of the process*, the quality of relationships and interaction among stakeholders (Armistead et al.

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2007), as well as to the quality of the formal and informal structures that are created to make the cooperation work (Bryson et al. 2006).

Complex cooperation processes in sustainable development may be influenced by external factors that the initiators have little power over, such as political instability or economic crises. But most factors crucial for the success of such initiatives actually can be influenced to a certain degree. These factors – in combination – can determine the quality of a cooperation process and, eventually, contribute to its success. Paying attention to them helps to maintain the dynamic, to keep stakeholders sufficiently involved and finally to achieve tangible outcomes or successful implementation.

In the field of international cooperation, value chain promotion has become increasingly interesting for testing innovative models for alleviating poverty, not only for development agencies, but also for governments and for advocates of sustainable economic and environmental development in the private sector.

This chapter will briefly outline the context in which the following examples are set, that of the African Cashew initiative (ACi). The subsequent section will briefly lay out the methodological background developed by the Collective Leadership Institute on which the key factors are based (*The Dialogic Change Model*). Drawing on the Collective Leadership Institute's two years of extensive experience with the ACi, this chapter will discuss eight key factors for the success of complex stakeholder partnerships and illustrate their relevance with examples from the initiative. Finally, the lessons learned will be summed up in the conclusion.

Context and Background of the African Cashew initiative

Before discussing the key factors with the help of examples from the African Cashew initiative, a brief overview of the ACi and its objectives will help put the overall project into context.

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and Private Sector partners, ACi aims at increasing the competitiveness of African producers in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Mozambique and thus contribute to sustainably reduce poverty in these regions. Currently (2010), approximately 40 % of all cashews produced globally come from small scale African farmers most of whom live in rural areas and struggle to earn US\$100 per year from cashew production. ACi targets the entire cashew value chain. For example, it is teaching farmers better entrepreneurial practices and farming techniques; advising African cashew processing companies on business and technology issues as well as attempting to increase their access to credit; and promoting African cashew brands on the world market. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH plays a lead role in this project, which it is implementing with three other international implementing partners: the African Cashew Alliance (ACA), FairMatch Support (FMS), and Technoserve (TNS). Further stakeholders are farmer cooperatives,

traders, local processors, and a number of large global private sector companies (OLAM, Kraft Foods, Intersnack and SAP) who all contribute to the project and allocate resources.

The initiative's overall objective is the sustainable success of the African cashew industry. This success is driven by three main forces:

- I. Sustainable growth in production and farming income
- II. Sustainable success in local processing
- III. Sustainable supply chains

Higher cashew production income and volume per farmer are seen as the major drivers for force I, as well as additional income through small-scale processing. Force II aims at increasing processing volumes and productivity, improving quality standards (e.g., that meet international demands), increasing the marketability of by-products, and improving financing and trade conditions. Force III largely concentrates on building loyal relationships between farmer business organizations and processors, and improving transparency on potential factors contributing to increased quality and to an enabling investment environment.

The initiative focuses on the creation of additional income for small scale farmers, the creation of new jobs in the processing industry, improvements in cashew nut quality and increased yields at the level of production, and the expansion of improved cashew processing on medium and large scales. In addition, ACi aims at improving market linkages along the value chain, promoting African cashew on the world market and improving the framework conditions for investments and business activities in the selected cashew value chains. It is currently implemented in five countries: Ghana, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Mozambique.

Not only the roles of national governments and civil society, but also the role of the initiative's private sector partners is gaining in importance. It is becoming increasingly clear that not only harnessing the financial resources of the private sector, but rather tapping in on the entrepreneurial, innovative, and managerial capacities of businesses at all scales will help contribute to improving the social and economic objectives of the ACi.

There is the challenge of constantly ensuring sufficient coordination and integration of the partners' activities and different stakeholder expectations, but also the need to navigate between very different organizational cultures and subsequent perspectives. One of the key challenges lies in creating alignment in implementation and a collective commitment to fast mutual learning (see also Hamann et al. 2015). Ultimately, ACi can only be successful if it succeeds in inspiring and capacitating all stakeholders targeted by the initiative to take up the support being offered and develop it further into a long-lasting economic development of the sector. This requires strong management with a coherent implementation strategy, which all implementing and funding actors can identify with. However, it also requires tailor-made strategies for each individual country in order to adequately cultivate a sense of ownership for the initiative's goals on the ground.

Key Concepts

The key factors have been elaborated with reference to the different phases of a stakeholder partnership as defined in the Collective Leadership Institute's *Dialogic Change Model* (Kuenkel et al. 2011), a tool which assists the result-oriented, structured planning and implementation of a stakeholder dialogue/partnership in four phases. The following eight key factors are based on the experience of practitioners and illustrated here (Kuenkel et al. 2008). In the following section of this chapter more detail is given for each of the key factors and reference is made to the African Cashew initiative with a supporting example (Fig. 10.1).

The Dialogic Change Model

The differentiation of four phases in a stakeholder partnership has proven helpful in taking all demands and requirements of the different phases of a partnership process into account and preparing them adequately.

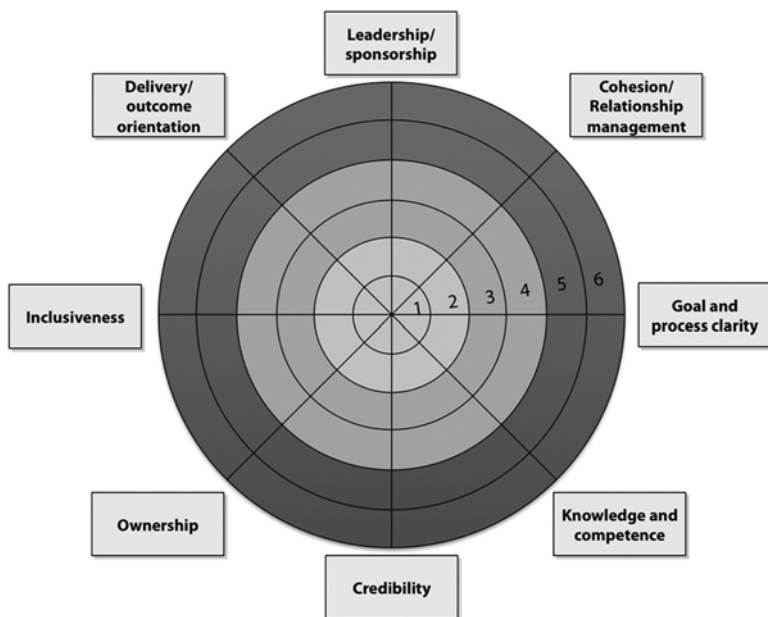


Fig. 10.1 Eight key factors for the successful implementation of stakeholder partnerships (Taken from Kuenkel et al. 2011)

Phase 1: Exploring and Engaging

In Phase 1 stakeholders explore the stakeholder partnership's context, taking other existing initiatives and the people involved into account. This requires understanding the external context, the factors that will influence the dialogue, and the dynamics of the complex system in which the stakeholder partnership will take place. Here, personal engagement through informal conversations, stakeholder mapping and a thorough context analysis can play an important role.

Phase 2: Building and Formalizing

Phase 2 is geared toward consolidating the system of stakeholder collaboration and formalizing stakeholders' commitment to change. The objective of this phase is to find an appropriate formal structure for moving an initiative forward and to build a stable collaborative system for implementation for which goals are agreed upon jointly, and roles and resources are formally defined. Phase 2 could be defined by a formal stakeholder meeting and the signing of an initial Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Phase 3: Implementing and Evaluating

This phase can be seen as the actual implementation of planned activities and includes the establishment of an internal stakeholder partnership monitoring system to ensure results and learning. Its focus is on creating visible results in a reasonable timeframe so that all actors involved can see the success of the stakeholder partnership. Phase 3 may be characterized by the establishment of formal steering, reporting, communications, and learning structures.

Phase 4: Developing Further, Replicating or Institutionalizing

Once a stakeholder partnership has reached the agreed-upon results, the question remains whether an initiative should stop there, or if it should be further developed. If the desired goal has been achieved, success should be adequately celebrated: participation and contributions of individual stakeholder groups should be acknowledged and appreciated. At this stage, it may be deemed necessary to institutionalize a partnership in order to create more sustainable results.

If conducted correctly, a stakeholder partnership can ultimately ease the implementation processes and help attain sustainable results because actors will have begun to perceive reality and other's points of view from a new perspective.

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The next section elaborates on the eight key factors for the successful implementation of stakeholder partnerships and attempts to demonstrate their relevance based on examples from the ACi.

Key Factor 1: Leadership and High Level Sponsorship

The initial collaboration in a complex stakeholder cooperation such as the ACi can be brokered/initiated by a credible (see factor 5) high-level individual or organization. Most stakeholder cooperation projects build on past, often fragmented project experience and attempt to strengthen impact by aligning the efforts of different stakeholders. Hence, it is often practitioners in the field who draw attention to an issue and bring in a powerful sponsor or organization. Legitimacy within a group of stakeholders (Crosby and Bryson 2005) is key at the onset, as initiators need a mandate to start the collaboration process. More generally, initiating individuals can be e.g., high-level leaders, recognized for their cross-sector experience, CEOs, or politicians. They can also be large NGOs, private enterprises or foundations. High level sponsorship is vital for the successful launch of a collaboration process.

In Phase 1 (exploring and engaging), the ACi was initially spear-headed by practitioners with extensive experience in supporting agricultural value chains and public private partnerships. They were committed to changing the face of the African cashew industry. Drawing on the limitations but also successes of past projects by GIZ, it became clear that any support for African cashew farmers and processors would require an integrated and market driven approach. Designing a project of such scale required an intense engagement process not only within GIZ itself, but also among key actors along the entire value chain, as well as large private sector companies and potential funders. Such an engagement process requires networking leadership skills and the capacity to inspire and convince a diverse set of stakeholders with a new approach to project implementation.

Leadership in complex stakeholder partnerships requires more than just traditional leadership skills:

“...leaders frequently have a narrow range of expertise, speak a language that can be understood only by their peers, are used to being in control, and relate to the people with whom they work as followers or subordinates rather than partners. Partnerships, by contrast, need boundary-spanning leaders who understand and appreciate partners’ different perspectives, can bridge their diverse cultures, and are comfortable sharing ideas, resources and power” (Lasker et al. 2001).

Although hierarchical differences and differences in influence and power play an important role in a partnership situation, there is no disciplinary hierarchy between

stakeholders, no leader who has the final say in what needs to happen. Leadership is therefore the capacity to engage (Armistead et al. 2007), which stakeholders need to develop jointly. Stakeholder partnerships thrive on a combination of passionate drivers and a spirit of collective responsibility for change. But they also need to take influential actors into account: obtaining their support can be a crucial success factor (Kuenkel et al. 2011).

In the context of the ACi, it took great coordination to not only manage the project, but also to create synergy between organizations that approach implementation with differing philosophies. Indeed, no formal disciplinary hierarchy exists between the partners at country level, but nonetheless the initiative's overall success depends on their effective collaboration. As noted above, collaboration under these circumstances rests greatly on the ability of leaders on every level to engage partners and create synergies within the partnership structure. This can be done by drawing on a variety of strategies based on the different 'theories of change' of each partner (see also McLachlan et al. 2015). This said, private sector partners tended to assess the project's progress in a framework typical for internal performance appraisal in large enterprises, while expectations on how to lead such a complex system were very different for partners experienced in development cooperation. Balancing the different elements of 'management' and 'leadership' was not uniquely an ACi challenge, but rather a constant in any stakeholder partnership which should not be underestimated (see also Moore 2015).

Key Factor 2: Cohesion and Relationship Management

Under the assumption that successful partnerships are key to achieving sustainable results, stakeholders need to move from an individual project management style into collaborative action (Glasbergen 2011). Therefore, creating an atmosphere of mutual trust is essential. This requires putting a particular emphasis on building and maintaining relationships with and between the different stakeholders involved in a cooperation process (Kuenkel et al. 2011) and an appropriate platform for doing this (see also McLachlan et al. 2015).

During the first 2 years of implementation, considerable effort went into building alignment between the different partners. Although objectives, roles and responsibilities (see Phase 2: building and formalizing) had been clarified with all involved partners and a management structure (see above) had been set up, much work had to be invested in creating the level of alignment required for a successful implementation phase. In the beginning there was a strong tendency toward 'insular' implementation by the different partners with limited learning mechanisms or opportunities to exchange on progress. However, the higher the demands on the individual country teams grew, the clearer it became that only a fine-tuned 'joint' effort could ensure delivery. Hence, management needed to set up a structured dialogue of strategic learning and innovation meetings, implementing partners meetings, and management retreats. They all served to enhance identification of all partners with their

common goals, align implementation activities, optimize the coordination of efforts, and jointly monitor success. This structure provided a platform for “leaders from different parts of the food to communicate with each other and to build trusting relationships across disciplinary, sectoral and organizational boundaries [...] and a ‘safe space’ for in-depth reflection and authentic communication” (McLachlan et al. 2015).

However, cross-sector stakeholder partnerships such as the ACi can be intrinsically more problematic than, for example, intra-sector partnerships such as business-to-business relationships. Based on the pure nature of such partnerships, stakeholders are often forced to assume roles and responsibilities which may be partly incompatible with their core competencies or the way they are used to operate (Waddell 2005). Specifically, diverging world views, languages, and different approaches to problem-solving, to project management and to monitoring progress can cause slowdowns which can hamper the project’s progress (compare also the experiences of the partnership case study provided by Moore 2015).

A prime example of the different ‘languages’ spoken by the private sector, the donors, and the German development agency GIZ arose just before the second ACi steering committee meeting in September 2010. In addition to the existing project proposal with agreed upon objectives and milestones, the lead agency was asked by the principal donor BMGF to produce a ‘road map’ as an additional planning tool for the project’s further implementation and to highlight its “critical path” as well as key performance indicators. As much as this helped to re-align private sector companies and enhance their confidence in the project’s delivery, the other agencies, particularly those more familiar with project and monitoring tools used within development cooperation, initially regarded the new tool more as a burden complicating the implementation and reporting than as a helpful management instrument. The process of creating the roadmap did, however, help create a stronger sense of focus and in the long run led to a stronger management capacity to adjust the initiative’s strategy based on the areas of focus. This strategy could also be more easily adapted for the specificities of each of the ACi countries.

Before any of the partners can reap the mutual benefits of such a stakeholder partnership, there first must be an inner shift in attitude and a genuine willingness to collaborate. If actors only move to assert their respective missions and the priority of their value propositions, building and maintaining trust based relationships can be difficult (see Moore 2015). The core group of stakeholders, in this case the GIZ management of the ACi, needed to constantly manage relationships with the individual partners, and maintain a certain level of trust within the ACi partnership. This is achieved through the principles of transparency and participation (Kuenkel et al. 2011) and the recognition that equity and accountability in interpersonal interaction/communication are relevant.

One example of how ACi encouraged cross-border relationship building was the establishment of the country coordinators’ meeting. Early in the project, the five country coordinators were hired and had contact only with the project’s top-management, but had no chance to directly interact and exchange during the formal meetings. However, it became quickly apparent that in order to carry out their

duties, they needed the input of their colleagues, who were faced with similar situations and difficulties in their own countries.

Key Factor 3: Goal and Process Clarity

People engage when they see the bigger picture and understand how they can contribute to positive change. Clarity about goals and about process go hand in hand in stakeholder partnerships. Although the purpose of bringing stakeholders together is often clear to the core group, this does not necessarily mean that the goal is understood or even agreed upon between all invited stakeholders.

Often – particularly in stakeholder consultation, for example – the goal remains vague, and participating stakeholders feel more like observers than engaged participants. But even when the goal seems to be clear, it needs to be developed further, adjusted, or reshaped by all main stakeholders involved. Developing an agreed-upon goal and pushing the stakeholder partnership towards outcomes requires solid process architecture. The road ahead may look unpredictable despite written up project plans, so stakeholders want to know what to expect, and when. Keeping the goal high helps stakeholders to connect emotionally, and clarity on process planning provides the minimum level of certainty that people require to stay engaged. Goal and process clarity support each other: the less developed, more changeable and more distant the goal, the more reliability the process needs to offer (Kuenkel et al. 2011).

One ACi process involved adapting some of the initiative's goals to better reflect the realities on the ground based on the experience to date. Redrawing the project roadmap, although initially difficult, turned out to become a process which helped all actors see the 'big picture'. They were thus able to see the challenges and the complementary of their contributions (see also Moore 2015). A more comprehensive document emerged outlining the rationale behind each of the initiative's objectives and their interconnectivity using a logic tree. Additionally the current status of major progress indicators were displayed in a dashboard containing selected graphs. Eventually, the new road map helped create a greater sense of ownership for the initiative's objectives on the whole.

Key Factor 4: Knowledge and Competence

Trust can be based on both the competence and on the perceived intentions of either individuals or organizations (Nooteboom 2006). As stakeholder partnerships take place around content issues and delivery, expertise and information need to be provided in a way that helps stakeholders to see the issue's full picture. If one partner's shortcomings are due to a lack of competence, then capacity-building (particularly for weaker stakeholder groups) may be an option to help strengthen their voices and

improve the quality of their contributions, e.g., educating stakeholders about the concepts, information, and tools that are key to its work (Keast et al. 2004). Stakeholders should be confident that the right competencies are present within the wider group, but not necessarily in each individual (Nooteboom 1999).

Stakeholder partnerships build on the emergence of collective intelligence and the assumption that integrating different interests and competence leads to joint progress. Both aspects require expertise, experience and knowledge in the understanding of content, as well as the capability to collaborate constructively (cf. also Hamann et al. 2015 and McLachlan et al. 2015). Nonetheless, the experience that stakeholders bring into a partnership need to be aligned (Madden 2010).

The value of mutual learning in stakeholder partnerships has already been highlighted by Hamann, Methner and Nilsson in Chap. 5 of this volume and the topics of learning and innovation also played a central role in the ACi's steering structure. Over the course 2010–2011, alongside the usual steering committee and implementing partner meetings, an extra 1–2 days were set aside for the sharing of experience and lessons learned all along the value chain. Additionally, elements of capacity building such as new tools and methods were introduced at the meetings to help strengthen all stakeholders' comprehension of the cashew sector as a whole and specificities of each of the countries where the project was active. This turned out to be an important element as new industry developments and research results could be quickly assessed and integrated into the initiatives strategy.

If partnerships lack knowledge and competence, the consultation, decision-making or implementation process they intend to deliver will be inadequate for the achievement of the goal.

Key Factor 5: Credibility

Partnerships need credibility to be effective. Credibility involves a number of factors, which are discussed briefly here.

Firstly, the reputation, neutrality and credibility of the initiator, convener or facilitator are especially important to lend credibility and legitimacy to the initiative and facilitate collaboration (Gray 1989). Secondly, it is important that all stakeholder groups be equally represented in the dialogue process in order to remain credible not only to stakeholders within the process, but also to those observing it. ACi worked hard to assure that the initiative's steering committee be composed of members from the entire value chain. This in turn improved the transparency of decision-making, as all stakeholder groups were involved in the process.

Thirdly, the reliability with which recommendations or inputs from different stakeholders are taken into account can affect the overall credibility of the decision-making process.

Finally, how embedded the Stakeholder partnership is in relevant societal processes also contributes to its credibility. Scholars call this the degree of *structural embeddedness* (Bryson et al. 2006; see also Bland and Hamann 2015). The more partners have interacted in positive ways in the past, the more social mechanisms will enable coordination and safeguard exchange (Jones et al. 1997).

The ACi planned to develop national stakeholder platforms in two of the countries (Ghana and Benin) in which it is active. An effort was being made to integrate this effort into previously existing national structures to avoid doublings but more importantly to empower local structures to take on the initiative's objectives (see Phase 3: implementing and evaluating). The objective of forming the national platforms was to capacitate the industry to grow to a stage where they can advocate for an enabling environment for the cashew industry and negotiate better conditions for improved business in their various countries.

The more credible a stakeholder partnership is the more likely participants will identify with the goal and the process and will justify their participation in the stakeholder partnership to their constituencies.

Key Factor 6: Inclusivity

Stakeholder partnerships that exclude important stakeholders will lose credibility and will cause mistrust among non-participating stakeholders. They will also be less effective, because stakeholders who are important for implementing or supporting results are absent from the dialogue process. In a study in the health sector in the US, Weiss et al. (2002) identify one of the main indicators for the effectiveness of leadership in stakeholder partnerships as being the degree of inclusiveness and openness exhibited in the collaboration process.

Integrating stakeholder groups with weaker voices, such as the poor, small or informal businesses, communities, women's groups, small NGOs, and so on, is important to ensure that participants can base their decisions on a broader picture (see also Moore 2015). Inclusivity, however, does not mean including everybody: the art herein is to find out, which stakeholders can help to create the change in thinking and acting that the stakeholder partnership requires.

With the help of African Cashew Alliance (ACA) as one implementing partner, steering committee structures were created on the national level, which included representatives from the local governments, local business and farmer associations, and were involved in the initial milestone revision and planning which took place in each country. These structures were then also represented in the initiative's own steering committee which meets twice annually to review progress and revise the initiative's overall strategy.

However, the exact composition of the steering structures at the project level was a constant subject of debate. The private sector partners tended to prefer an

‘exclusive’ steering body, reducing the number of individuals to a selected few, whereas the public partner and lead implementing body GIZ tended to be overly inclusive, preferring to leave the composition of the steering committee open.

Who should be a member and under what conditions stakeholders should be allowed to have a say in strategic decision-making processes plays an important role in how less powerful stakeholders perceive the legitimacy of the initiative and therefore to what degree they take ownership of the decisions made and their implementation.

Key Factor 7: Ownership

People implement what they have helped to create. Ownership develops when the goal of the stakeholder partnership is relevant to all stakeholders and when they perceive that their contribution counts. Keeping people engaged is an important road to success. If participants in a dialogue process have the impression that their recommendations are not being implemented and feel that their concerns and perspectives are not being taken into account, there is a high probability that they will reduce their engagement and fail to implement decisions, become passive observers, or completely withdraw from the process altogether. Authentic participation in the way contributions are handled, workshops are run and communication takes place, ensures ownership (Kuenkel et al. 2011).

It has become clear that the value of the private sector’s contribution stakeholder partnerships goes well beyond their financial resources. Tapping into their entrepreneurial, innovative, and managerial capacities is an invaluable contribution to improving the initiative’s social and economic objectives.

By revisiting the private sector’s role, the private sector partners’ ownership for concrete processes in ACi took a leap forward. They took the initiative in identifying processes within the initiative’s current configuration where they could get involved or test innovative ideas. One example of this is the SAP-ACi partnership “Virtual Cooperatives”, which aimed to provide solutions related to market linkages and overall transparency within the Cashew production and processing value chain. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) provide the means to enhance the productivity of Cashew farmers, to strengthen farmer cooperatives, and to enable them to do collaborative business with the established economy in a transparent and sustainable way (ACA newsletter, August, 2011).

If a group of stakeholders is going to invest resources in implementation, it is critical that the actors involved in a stakeholder partnership have a joint ownership of the strategies being developed. Not all stakeholders can contribute equally to the solution, as each partner comes with different types and scale of resources. However, it is important not to focus simply upon the outcome, but to also maintain the acute awareness that the process itself and building of relationships is part of the outcome (Waddell and Brown 1997).

Key Factor 8: Delivery and Outcome-Oriented

Bryson et al. (2006) argues that the main objective of cross-sector partnerships should be the creation of sustainable 'public value' that would not otherwise be created by a single sector alone. This is most likely to occur by making use of each sector's characteristic strengths while also finding ways to minimize, overcome, or compensate for each sector's characteristic weaknesses. Focus on outcomes is a prerequisite for commitment, particularly in Phase 3 (implementing and evaluating).

As a time-bound implementation initiative, the ACi focus was on delivery. And although implementation may have been slow and complex in the five pilot countries, there was a need to regularly report results in an aggregated way to keep the funders engaged.

Proprietary reporting formats which the different sectors often take for granted, obviously play a major role in keeping players engaged. Private sector expectations such as quarterly reports, key performance and cost indicators (KPIs & KCIs), and project dashboards are in most cases not the norm for development projects. On the other hand, descriptive reports and activity-reporting typical for development cooperation appear to the private sector as being vague, unsubstantiated and lacking in concrete results. Hence, despite the fact that all expected results have been laid down in writing in an initial project proposal, the way to get there, the speed with which to get there and above all, the evidence of achievements in a complex development and market environment remained a continuous point of discussion among the collaborating stakeholder within ACi.

As discussed in the introduction to this volume, collaboration processes themselves are often the source of social and environmental innovation. However, concrete outcomes are still essential to maintaining ownership and momentum in any stakeholder partnership. Decisions and programmes that produce concrete results on the issues that originally motivated the partnership are critical to keeping the partners' interest high, and their evaluation positive. Stakeholder partnerships are more effective when their members pay attention to both process and product (Waddell and Brown 1997).

Conclusions and Implications for Practice

Project set-ups such as that of the ACi are becoming more and more common due to larger scale interventions and change initiatives which are gradually choosing cross-sector approaches and becoming increasingly international, both in their organization and their implementation. This means that improving collaboration between NGOs, the public sector, the private sector and development agencies will remain a major topic on the agenda for sustainable change for the foreseeable future.

This gradual shift in paradigms requires an exchange of best practices and an evaluation of approaches which have succeeded or failed in the type of complex

context described in this chapter. This also means that there can be no premature answer as to how best to design a cross-sector initiative which aims to have an impact in individual countries, across borders languages and cultures. This is especially true for those value chain actors who have tended to be at the receiving end of global market changes. However, the valuable learning from the experiences with the ACi can be summarized as follows:

The complexities of setting up a multi-country and multi-stakeholder project of this scale were underestimated at the outset. Equally underestimated/undervalued was the necessary time and effort required to carry out a sufficient engagement process both at the regional level and at the country level.

The capacity to design this engagement process is not fully synonymous with traditional project management skills. In practice, this implicates the possibility of bringing in professional external support or an expert stakeholder broker to assist in designing, implementing and monitoring the stakeholder partnership process.

Further, the implementation styles of the public and private partners were, in the case of the ACi, difficult to reconcile. Private sector driven implementation may not always take into account the complexity 'on the ground' in the individual countries. The considerable distance in understanding world views between funders and beneficiaries was equally difficult to overcome. This implies that future initiatives should pay more attention to such possible dissonances during the planning phase. This should take into account the mutual learning opportunities which can arise from cross-sector collaboration: both the NGO style and the private sector style have their advantages and disadvantages. Stakeholder partnerships such as ACi should integrate cross-sector learning opportunities into their project design. However all actors involved must be open to a different approach, e.g., key performance indicators that truly reflect the nature of development work.

As much as a matching fund¹ approach can help get private sector companies on board by offering them the possibility to make in-kind contributions, a stronger direct involvement of the private sector in actual implementation work streams (e.g., SAP) is the true key for success. This example shows a partner which moved from a simple supervisory function to being an active collaborator in the implementation process.

Stakeholder partnerships and stakeholder dialogue initiatives require more than just patience and long-term commitment. This chapter has outlined the key factors which have and will continue to impact the outcomes of stakeholder partnerships such as the African Cashew initiative, demonstrating how, when well-managed, they can build the cross-sector stability needed to address global challenges. Stakeholder partnerships are not a recipe for every problem and do not work according to an exact blue print. Beyond their complexity and complication they have qualities that are of high value for strategically oriented projects, because they provide in-depth experience of all stakeholders' perspectives.

¹Matching funds matches donations made by organizations contributing cash or in-kind dollar-for-dollar.

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