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Uneasy Alliances: Lessons Learned from Partnerships Between Businesses and NGOs in the context of CSR

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ABSTRACT. Interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has proliferated in academic and business circles alike. In the context of CSR, the spotlight has traditionally focused on the role of the private sector particularly in view of its wealth and global reach. Other actors have recently begun to assume more visible roles in the context of CSR, including Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which have acquired increasing prominence on the socio-economic landscape. This article examines five partnerships between businesses and NGOs in a developing country context that fall in the realm of CSR. The article starts with a literature review, delineating foundational underpinnings that have to be carefully designed and crafted to promote the success of collaborative ventures. An empirical study of five selected partnerships between businesses and NGOs in Lebanon is then presented, allowing to derive interesting insights into types of existing alliances, their relational characteristics as well as salient factors considered most determinant of success or failure in this regard.

KEY WORDS: Corporate social responsibility (CSR), collaborative ventures, business nonprofit alliances, partnerships, developing countries, Lebanon

Introduction

In a dynamic and complex milieu, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has attracted increasing attention in academic and business circles. Corporations have become powerful because of the increase in their size, the large number of people they employ, the buying and selling power they have in relation to suppliers and distributors, respectively, and the impact they have on customers through pricing strategies/practices and quality of their products. The outcomes and processes of the operations of these corporations, such as environmental impact, various depictions of employee maltreatment/injustice (as in the case of Wal-Mart), and the bearing they have on the societies where they operate have come under scrutiny, particularly in the wake of large scale scandals in Europe and the USA – e.g., the scandals of Parmalat, Enron, WorldCom, Adelphia, and Tyco (Greenfield, 2004).

At the same time that corporations have gained power, their stakeholders have also become influential. Efficient financial markets allow investors to buy and sell their stocks freely, customers have become informed and demanding, and free trade and anti-trust regulations have intensified competition. Stakeholder advocacy groups have also gained visibility in different contexts. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have in specific been active in recent years, more attuned to CSR, and more willing to collaborate with businesses in pursuit of common goals. They have attenuated their confrontational adversarial style, exhibiting a more favorable collaborative inclination in the context of CSR (Conley and Williams, 2005). Their role has specifically been accentuated/brought to the fore at a time when governments have failed to solve social problems and have diminished in scope (Smith, 2003).

Globalization on the other hand has given rise to multinationals that have revenues larger than the GDPs of the developing countries where they operate and that are more powerful than the governments of those countries. Hence, the impact these companies can have, constructive or destructive, on the communities where they operate. In most developing countries, governments are either absent, corrupt, or lack the resources necessary to act in favor of the ‘‘greater good’’. With dwindling purchasing parity and appalling conditions relative to their developed counterparts, societies in developing countries are at the mercy of multinational and domestic corporations to act legally, ethically, and responsibly. Societies in developing countries are in dire conditions and in need of proactive, genuine and substantial efforts to alleviate social, economic, and environmental calamities.

Herein lies the emergent interest in partnerships in the realm of CSR which can be attributed to the realization that strategic partnering can promote effective results for all concerned, businesses, NGOs, and especially the society/community, and lead to scaling the impact of CSR interventions particularly in developing countries with scant resources (UNDP National Research Report, 2003). Although the process of forming partnerships is not easy especially when the parties involved have different strategic orientations, the synergies they create can be powerful (Makower, 1994). After presenting a brief overview of the CSR construct and relevant literature on business–NGO partnerships, this article examines the collaborative alliance literature to identify the core determinants or ingredients of successful partnerships. An empirical study of selected partnerships between businesses and NGOs in the Lebanese context is then presented, leading to an assessment of their overall viability and success in relation to the core dimensions or success factors delineated. Conclusions are then outlined in relation to patterns and added value of business–NGO collaboration in the context of CSR.

An overview of corporate social responsibility

According to Frederick (1994) the essence of CSR is the obligation of corporations to contribute to social betterment through their mainstream and peripheral operations, whether that obligation is recognized and fulfilled voluntarily or coercively. As for Davis (1973, p. 312), CSR is ''the firm's consideration of, and response to issues beyond the narrow economic, technical, and legal requirements of the firm … [that leads to the accomplishment of] social benefits along with the traditional economic gains which the firm seeks.'' Carroll defines CSR as ''the social responsibility of business [which] encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time'' (Carroll, 1979, p. 500). These components are not mutually exclusive but in continuous and dynamic tension, especially the tension between economic and all the remaining components (Carroll, 1991). Lantos (2001), on the other hand, differentiates among three types of mutually exclusive CSR, based on the nature (obligatory versus voluntary), and purpose (whether to benefit shareholders, other stakeholders, or all) of CSR activities that corporations practice: ethical, altruistic, and strategic. Lantos' ethical CSR is similar to Carroll's (1991) ethical responsibility, the altruistic CSR to Carroll's philanthropic responsibilities, whereas strategic CSR is CSR that leads to the accomplishment of strategic business goals while promoting at the same time the wellbeing of society (Lantos, 2001). This article considers CSR to comprise the principles, processes, practices, and activities adopted by a corporation beyond its pursuit of economic responsibility for its shareholders and beyond compliance with regulations, which contribute to the improvement of the welfare of its stakeholders or specific constituency groups and societal segments.

NGO–business partnerships in the context of CSR

Joint efforts between businesses and not-for-profits in the context of CSR are on the rise (Arya and Salk, 2006; Overdevest, 2004). The interactions of these two actors are no longer restricted to philanthropy and charity but have exhibited increased diversity in recent years, with a range of alliances addressing environmental issues and codes of conduct (Arya and Salk, 2006). In the context of rising social consciousness and activism and the emergence of new expectations, business executives are more inclined today to broaden the basis of their performance evaluation from a short-term financial focus to include long-term socio-environmental impacts and value added (Hardjono and van Marrewijk, 2001). According to Guay et al. (2004) more corporate executives are willing today to consider an alternative view to strategic management integrating social responsibility considerations. This has been paralleled in turn by the proliferation of NGOs seeking to promote more ethical and social responsible business practices (Guay et al., 2004). Some observers consider NGOs as counterweights to business and global capitalism (Scholte, 2000), and as increasingly powerful agents of change in the context of CSR (Guay et al., 2004), with the potential to cause in turn substantial changes in corporate management, strategy and governance (Doh and Teegen, 2003).

While the boundaries between these actors have become increasingly permeable in recent years, with positive propensities for collaboration on both sides, the motivations for considering cross sector alliances are still divergent. On the business side, the motivations traditionally revolve around increased legitimacy (Inkpen, 2002), positive reputation effects (Oliver, 1990), increased social status, and recognition (Stuart, 2000) as well opportunities for learning in the novice field of CSR (Arya and Salk, 2006). The NGO partner is motivated on the other hand by increased competition for limited funding, escalating societal needs, hostile environmental forces, and serious sustainability concerns (Melaville and Blank, 1993). It is also generally accepted that those actors wield different sets of competencies and strengths. Businesses have enormous resources at their disposal and are differentiated by their managerial efficiency, technical expertise, creativity, dynamism, and access to finance (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). On the other hand, NGOs have expertise and knowledge in what is needed to be done in the field, are mission driven, and better able to reach the impoverished (Jamali, 2003). These differences imply that partnerships can, under the right conditions, provide an effective mechanism for capitalizing on the peculiarities and strengths of each sector in the pursuit of common objectives. Through successful collaboration, these two actors can complement each other and better allocate resources for the common good. The question then arises as to under what conditions do partnerships create win-win situations, and promote a synergistic combination of the strengths, resources and expertise of the different sectors. We address this question in the next section.

Partnerships: success factors and evaluation criteria

When a business and a nonprofit organization recognizes that their needs can be met by the other, they engage in what Sagawa and Segal (2000) call partnerships. A partnership is a sort of collaboration to pursue common goals, while leveraging joint resources and capitalizing on the respective competences and strengths of both partners (Jamali, 2004; Nijkamp et al., 2002; Pongsiri, 2002; Widdus, 2001). In this article, the terms partnerships and cross sector alliances will be used interchangeably to refer to forms of collaboration between for profit organizations and nonprofit organizations such as local and international NGOs.

As any other collaborative relationship, business-nonprofit partnerships do not succeed by chance. Several issues are salient and deserve careful consideration when contemplating a partnering arrangement. Some of these issues are nicely fleshed out by Sagawa and Segal (2000), Austin (2000), and The Drucker Foundation (2002), involving, for example, a self assessment in the initiation stage, a careful consideration of partner choice, mission connect, alignment of values, a clear assignment of management responsibility as well as respective areas of competence, commitment of resources, open frank and constructive communication, inter-personal relationships between the CEOs of partner firms, appreciation and positive inclination to learning, and the regular tracking of progress and performance along previously agreed upon dimensions or criteria.

Samii et al. (2002) similarly highlight the key formation requirements of effective partnerships, including resource dependency, commitment symmetry, common goal symmetry, intensive communication, alignment of cooperation learning capability, and converging working cultures while Kanter (1994) emphasizes individual excellence, importance, interdependence, investment, information, integration, institutionalization, and integrity as the key ingredients of effective collaboration (Table I). Both the appeal and the challenge inherent in partnership arrangements arise from the notion of building new relationships between actors that have drastically different constituencies/interests, along with divergent strategic and operational realities.

Alliance research also suggests that the failure of many alliances can be traced to the partner selection and planning stages and identifies the four Cs of compatibility, capability, commitment, and control as critical for successful pre-selection of alliance partners (Hagen, 2002). Particularly important are the notions of compatibility, which entails identi-

TABLE I

Main ingredients for successful partnerships

Based on	Requirement	Description
Samii et al. (2002)	Resource dependency	Recognition by the partners that what can be achieved together can not be achieved alone.
	Commitment symmetry	Equal commitment from partners confirmed through the allocation of time and resources.
	Common goal symmetry	Individual goals as output or subset of the overall program objectives.
	Intensive communication	Regular communication through different channels/means.
	Alignment of cooperation working capability	The sharing of knowledge across organizational boundaries to alleviate problems of information asymmetry and ensure convergence in learning skills and speed.
	Converging working cultures	The joint development of a set of working practices and procedures to level out differences in working style/culture.
Kanter (1994)	Individual excellence	Both partners are strong and have something of value to contribute to the relationship. Their motives for entering into the relationship are positive (to pursue future opportunities), not negative (to mask weaknesses or escape a difficult situation).
	Importance	The relationship fits major strategic objectives of partners so they want to make it work. Partners have long-term goals in which the relationship plays a key role.
	Interdependence	The partners need each other. They have complementary assets and skills. Neither can accomplish alone what they both can together.
	Investment	The partners invest in each other (e.g., equity swaps or mutual board service) to demonstrate their respective stakes in the relationship and each other.
	Information	Communication is reasonably open. Partners share information required to make the relationship work, including their objectives/goals, technical data/knowledge of conflicts, trouble spots or changing situations.
	Integration	The partners develop linkages and shared ways of operation so they can work together smoothly.
	Institutionalization	The relationship is given a formal status, with clear responsibilities and decision-making processes.
	Integrity	Partners behave toward each other in honorable ways that enhance mutual trust without abusing the information they gain, nor undermining each other.

fying complementary strengths and weaknesses and commitment as reflected in the formalized commitment of necessary time, energy and resources. This stream of literature generally points out that partnerships are high-risk strategies, particularly at the level of implementation, but that the advantages/mutual benefits in case of success far outweigh the risks involved (Hagen, 2002; Horton, 1998).

Ring and Van De Ven (1994) highlight the importance of efficiency and equity in evaluation of cooperative inter-organizational relationships (IOR), and the importance of interpersonal based trust and role relationships. They view the development and evolution of a cooperative IOR as consisting of a repetitive sequence of negotiation, commitment and execution stages, each of which is assessed in terms of efficiency and equity. Efficiency is described as the most expeditious and least costly governance structure for undertaking a transaction, while equity is defined as fair dealing. Arino and de la Torre (1998) and Arino et al. (2005) reiterate the importance of efficiency and equity in the context of collaborative ventures, emphasizing in turn the salience of relational quality as an alternative construct to the notion of trust, with relational quality defined 'as the extent to which the principals and agents of alliance partners feel confident in dealing with their counterparts' organizations.'

Husted (2003) identifies in turn two salient drivers of collaborative CSR projects, revolving around centrality (the closeness of fit between the firm's CSR activity and its mission and objectives) and specificity (the extent to which the firm is able to capture a share of the profit stream generated by its investments in CSR). This research suggests that collaborative CSR ventures with nonprofits are more likely when the firms agree on projects characterized by at least intermediate levels of centrality and specificity. Arya and Salk (2006) stress on the importance of setting formal goals, and learning in the context of NGO–private sector alliances. Particularly important is the shared partner commitment to formal goals and social value generation which they suggest can increase significantly both alliance viability and assimilation of socially responsible behavior (Arya and Salk, 2006).

One useful model that integrates/consolidates a number of the success factors or ingredients described above in way of gauging the depth of partnerships and their successful evolution is the Collaboration Continuum proposed by Austin (2000). This is a framework that tries to assess the stages of the partnerships and their evolution along seven dimensions, encompassing level of engagement, importance to mission, investment of resources, scope of activities, interaction levels, managerial complexity, and strategic value. As illustrated in Table II, three distinct stages are identified in the evolutionary path of cross-sector alliances, namely the philanthropic, transactional, and integrative (Austin, 2000). As a relationship moves from the first, to the second and third stages it strengthens and becomes a genuine full fledged partnership, and has better chances of long-term viability and endurance.

In the philanthropic stage, the donor–recipient relationship between the two parties is of modest strategic value, characterized by low engagement, peripheral importance to the firm's mission, small amount of resource investment, narrow scope of activities performed together, infrequent interaction, and simplicity. In the transactional stage, the relationship moves beyond pure corporate philanthropy and takes a transactional form (e.g., cause related marketing, sponsorships, etc.) with moderate levels of engagement, investment of resources, interaction, scope and strategic value. An alliance reaches the integrative stage when it becomes of clear strategic value to the partners, with clear mission connect, and higher levels of engagement, increased investment of resources and broadened scope of activities, as well as increased complexity with regard to processes and procedures in place (Austin, 2000).

Obviously, developing and sustaining partnerships is a complex and dynamic process, especially when the parties involved come from different sectors and have different cultures and philosophies. It is clear from the cooperative alliance literature generally and

TABLE II

Collaboration Continuum (*Source*: Austin, 2000)

Relationship Stage	Philanthropic	Transactional	Integrative
Level of engagement	Low	→→→→→→→→→→→	High
Importance to mission	Peripheral	→→→→→→→→→→→	Strategic
Magnitude of resources	Small	→→→→→→→→→→→	Big
Scope of activities	Narrow	→→→→→→→→→→→	Broad
Interaction level	Infrequent	→→→→→→→→→→→	Intensive
Managerial complexity	Simple	→→→→→→→→→→→	Complex
Strategic value	Modest	→→→→→→→→→→→	Major

the business–NGO alliance literature specifically that partnerships are not inherently successful arrangements and that a number of foundational underpinnings have to be carefully designed and crafted to promote the success of collaborative ventures. It is also clear that partnering arrangements have become increasingly salient and important in view of the escalation and complexity of needs requiring cooperation among diverse actors, each with their own perspectives, resources and comparative advantages (Brown and Ashman, 1996). This makes this research all the more interesting and timely.

Background information about Lebanon

Lebanon is a small country located along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean sea bounded on the north and east by Syria and on the south by Israel, with a total area of 10,452 square kilometers and a population of around 4 million inhabitants. Lebanon qualifies as a parliamentary republic with a centralized, multi-religious, and multiparty government. Its quasi-democratic political system is based on power-sharing among the country's confessional groups. The grouping of people by religion plays a critical role in Lebanon's political and social life and has given rise to Lebanon's most persistent and bitter conflicts.

Since its independence from French rule in 1943, Lebanon has been characterized by large public freedoms, which have given it a distinctive position that made it a haven in the region, a place where different ideas, currents and trends can thrive and interact. Peaceful multicultural coexistence, however, collapsed into violent warfare in the years 1975–1989. The conclusion of the Taef Accord of 1989 led to the reinstatement of security. However, the war, which Lebanon endured, interrupted the normal course of development, leading to an overall deterioration in political, economic, and social conditions.

Lebanon is now in the phase of reconstitution of its political, economic, and social structures and institutions. The first phase of reconstruction and development, namely the rehabilitation of the physical infrastructure has been completed and has re-established normal operations of public services. Daunting challenges however lie ahead particularly in terms of economic recovery. Post-war governments have pursued monetary stabilization policies aiming at curbing inflation rates and restoring confidence in the national currency. Recent governments have had to go further in their stabilization policy to finance the growing budget deficit.

The main economic challenge confronted by successive governments in recent years has indeed been large recurring budget deficits, averaging more than 18% of estimated GDP over 1997–2006. Efforts to restore fiscal balance have generally been undermined by the high costs and expenditures allocated for sustaining the post-war reconstruction program. Fiscal issues have therefore tended to dominate policy-making in the post-war years, limiting the government's scope to adopt more growth-orientated measures, and accentuating the need for greater reliance on the private sector to promote growth, generate employment and improve standards of living.

The Lebanese private sector has traditionally been the dominant engine of growth in a relatively open and liberal economic environment and its resilience has been invoked in the post-war context to lead the reemergence of Lebanon as a preeminent regional hub for trade and services. Capitalizing on its traditional strength in the banking and services segments, the private sector is rising to the challenge, but the constraints imposed by fiscal macro-economic realities are real and the scope for private sector maneuver seems limited at best. Recent studies of CSR in Lebanon suggest growing appreciation on the part of the private sector of the importance of the concept, and modest CSR initiatives, rooted in a philanthropic conception, but still mostly lacking institutionalization and strategic alignment (Jamali, 2007; Jamali and Mirshak, 2007).

Lebanon enjoys on the other hand one of the largest, most active and least restrained civil societies in the Middle East (Elbayar, 2005). Although exact information about the size and scope of Lebanon's NGO sector is lacking, recent research suggests that more than 1,000 NGOs are registered in the Capital Beirut alone, and the Ministry of Health estimates that 60 percent of all Lebanese health centers are run by nonprofit groups. The strength of Lebanon's NGO sector stems from the major role NGOs played during the 1975–1990 war, as organizations fulfilled typical state responsibilities, such as education, healthcare, and emergency relief. While a large number of NGOs are still operational in focus and organized along religious lines, they have often proved capable to reach beyond sectarian boundaries to provide services to many outside their confessional communities (Elbayar, 2005).

The collaborative relationships between businesses and NGOs in Lebanon – which will be explored in the following sections – therefore, need to be viewed within this contextual framework of economic stagnation, escalating social needs and expectations, growing pressures on the private sector to engage in CSR, stemming in part from an NGO sector that is agile and sophisticated. While collaborative ventures are on the rise providing potential opportunities for leveraging resources, competencies and networks, and the scaling-up of CSR activities, the efficiency and viability of these collaborative alliances has not received systematic attention and thus deserves closer scrutiny and assessment.

Research methodology

The empirical component of this article entailed a primary exploratory research culminating in five case studies of selected business-NGO partnerships in the context of CSR in Lebanon (Table III). Interviews were conducted in November/December 2006 with the person or persons responsible for CSR and partnerships, from both the business and NGO side. First, through existing publications, a number of companies from various sectors that have some CSR activity and evidence of collaboration with NGOs were identified. Second, these companies and their NGO partners were interviewed separately but consecutively to obtain a thorough understanding of their respective conception of various aspects of these partnering alliances. The companies and their NGO partners were initially contacted by phone and/or e-mail and later each partner was interviewed for approximately an hour and a half. For the in-depth interviews, a semi-structured questionnaire was developed consisting of two parts. The first part addressed general questions such as line of business and the nature and scope of CSR activities. The second part comprised partnership specific questions synthesized from the collaborative alliance literature generally, and the business-NGO alliance literature specifically, with particular reference to Samii et al. (2002), Kanter (1994), Ring and Van De Ven (1994), Husted (2003) and the Collaboration Continuum proposed by Austin (2000).

The interview notes were reviewed thoroughly and main issues understood and fleshed out. Five partnership case studies were subsequently compiled and were sent to both partners for comment and approval. Consistent with much writing in alliance research – e.g., Arino and de la Torre, 1998 and Ring and Van De Ven, 1994 – the information gathered will be presented next in aggregate form in relation to three core phases – the partnership initiation, execution, and re-evaluation stages – and 21 dimensions (Table IV), which synthesize the most salient success factors encountered in the literature.

Research findings

The findings are presented here in the aggregate with respect to the three phases and 21 dimensions outlined in Table IV. Points of convergence and divergence are highlighted, although overall, we detected a level of convergence in our findings, despite the diversity of partnerships examined. From the first part of the questionnaire, we determined that all private sector firms had developed a specific CSR theme or orientation, but that their CSR approach mostly qualifies as altruistic, and lacking strategic alignment. In way of example, Byblos and Fattal are interested in giving back to society in the field of education; Sanita believes in helping the community through environmental stewardship, while Mariott and Deloitte have a broader CSR orientation rooted in principles of community service and engagement.

The partnership initiation phase

In the majority of cases, the nonprofit partner initiated the partnership, which was the case with UNICEF–Byblos Bank (Case 1), Marriott–Association for Volunteer Services (Case 2), and Sanita–Cedars for Care (Case 5). The two exceptions are the Our Lady of Hope Foundation set up by Khalil Fattal & Fils to externalize its CSR initiatives (Case 3) and the Deloitte–Injaz collaboration (Case 4), which was

TABLE III
Sample/partnership profile

Company/NGO	Reach	Industry/activities	Partnership
Case 1			
Byblos Bank	Regional	Retail and commercial banking, and financial markets.	"Adopt-a-School": a tri-part alliance b/n UNICEF, Byblos Bank, and NGOs. It incorporates rehabilitation of Lebanese public schools; capacity building by enhancing teacher and administrator skills; community mobilization; and empowering the youth. Initiated in 2004.
UNICEF	International	Advocacy for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and expand their present and future opportunities.	
Case 2			
Beirut Marriott Hotel	International	Hospitality.	The Corporate Volunteer Council of Lebanon (CVCL): established in 2004, consists of AVS, Marriott, and 4 other companies, encompasses training in developing and managing corporate volunteer programs for a fee, support to corporate volunteers, and a forum for exchanging information/working together.
Association for Volunteer Services (AVS)	Local	Promotion, facilitation, and improvement of volunteering and community service.	
Case 3			
Khalil Fattal & Fils	Regional	Agents of multinational companies and distributors of premium brands – beauty & accessories, food & beverages, household and personal care, health, electronics, and telecom.	The Our Lady of Hope Foundation for Education was founded in 1987 by the chairman of Khalil Fattal & Fils. It provides financial support to 800–1,000 students in the intermediate and secondary school levels.
Our lady of hope foundation for education and learning	Local	Provides financial assistance to underprivileged Lebanese students at the intermediate and secondary level.	
Case 4			
Deloitte	International	Audit, tax, and financial advising.	Deloitte is a member of the advisory board of Injaz, hosts students on Job Shadow Day, and provides corporate volunteers to deliver Injaz courses. Initiated in 2004.
Injaz Lebanon	Member of Junior Achievement worldwide network	Delivers programs to educate the Lebanese youth about entrepreneurial and leadership skills, helping them enhance their economic opportunities.	
Case 5			
Sanita	Local	Manufacturer of disposable hygienic products for retail/industrial markets.	"Operation Big Blue": Sanita donates money and products, and provides corporate volunteers for cleaning the sea and shores of Lebanon. Regular environmental awareness campaigns are also integrated in the operation.
Cedars for Care (CFC)	Local	Environmental awareness, cleaning up projects, community service, and community development projects.	

TABLE IV

Dimensions of partnerships studied

Partnership initiation	Preparation, Negotiation, Criteria for partner choice, Motives, Goals of partnership, Centrality alignment with mission, importance, Specificity
Partnership execution	Scope of Activities, Magnitude of resources, Trends of investment, Level of engagement, Leadership involvement, Communication, complexity of processes, Efficiency, Equity
Partnership evaluation	Evaluation, Future expectations, Learning

initiated by Deloitte as a venue to enact its corporate volunteering CSR theme. While corporate foundations are one type of partnerships according to Wymer and Samu (2003), this partnership is not a collaborative alliance in the traditional sense as the business partner retains the upper hand in the relationship. Hence, Deloitte stands as the only exception, in way of having identified a clear CSR orientation (corporate volunteerism) and proactively sought a nonprofit partner to pursue common goals.

All five cases reveal evidence of little systematic involvement and preparation in the initiation phase. There was no mention, for example, in all five cases of any processes of bargaining, negotiation, persuasion, or probing motivations and expectations in the initial phases. A passive assessment approach was noted on the part of private sector partners, who, with the exception of Cases 3 and 4, await proposals from nonprofit partners for collaboration projects and evaluate them according to traditional criteria revolving around scope, fit and budgetary requirements. The preparation phase was accorded more systematic attention by the nonprofit partner as reflected in Cases 1, 2, 4, and 5, where the private sector partner was selected based on strategic planning goals and needs assessment. The preparation phase was thus transactional, revolving around codifying initial understanding into formal relational contracts, rather than probing and clarifying informal psychological motives/expectations.

The motives for partnership initiation were also explored in this research and stemmed in most of the cases from instrumental orientations. On the business side, the most commonly cited motives included enhanced reputation and increased legitimacy in the community. The motives on the nonprofit side stemmed invariably from the need for funding, with the exception of one NGO who claimed that the motive for the partnership was to promote its core mission (AVS). Criteria for partner choice were also examined and some NGOs (e.g., UNICEF) had strict and predetermined guidelines for partner selection (e.g., non-political and non-religious). The majority of nonprofit partners had more lenient criteria, but mentioned the need for the business partner to have a social mission and a positive CSR inclination. The criteria mostly emphasized on the part of private businesses revolved around the NGO's reputation, professionalism, and its ability to deliver on concrete outcomes.

While the goals of the partnership were explicitly stated and agreed upon in all cases, there was no attempt to operationalize these goals in terms of specific strategies, milestones or time frames. In all five cases, we were able to get a general sense of the goals embarked upon through the collaborative venture as in capacity building and rehabilitation of public schools (Case 1), the promotion of volunteering (Case 2), providing financial educational support (Case 3), education and capacity building (Case 4) and environmental type projects (Case 5) but there was no evidence in any of the cases of a long-term and phased approach regarding goal achievement with concrete action items and delineation of respective commitments, and areas of intervention on the part of the two partners. In way of illustration, though the main objective of the partnership in Case 2 was to promote volunteering, only one short-term activity was fleshed out revolving around the collection of books for public libraries.

In all cases, the partnerships' missions were more aligned with the missions and values of the nonprofit partner. For the nonprofits, the objectives of the partnerships were very much aligned with their institutional objectives and the CSR partnerships were established to support the nonprofits' operations or causes, which according to Husted (2003) reveals high centrality or closeness of fit between the firm's CSR activity and its mission/objectives in the NGO cases. With the businesses, the objective of the collaboration fell under the overall theme of CSR that each business performed, but these CSR initiatives were themselves not linked to the firm's strategic goals/objectives, revealing according to Husted (2003) low centrality on the business side.

All parties have expressed that the partnerships they have formed are important to them, but the fact remains that a relationship qualifies as important if it fits the major strategic objectives of partners, so they want to make it work. On the business partner side, it is clear that none had evolved long-term goals in which collaborative CSR relationships can play a key role, given that their approach to CSR is still mostly altruistic. Partnership success and project completion are obviously more critical and thus important to the mission of the nonprofit partner, with greater strategic value accorded to the partnership accordingly. It follows also that the specificity dimension delineated by Husted (2003) – or the extent to which the firm is able to capture a share of the profit stream generated by its investments in CSR – is low for the private sector partner and intermediate at best for the nonprofit partner.

The partnership execution phase

In the majority of cases the partnerships examined had rather modest scopes of activities. This is certainly true of the AVS and Marriott partnership (Case 2) which entailed one activity relating to collecting books for public libraries, the Sanita and Cedars for Care partnership (Case 5), where the scope of work entailed occasional cleaning of shores and environmental awareness, as well as the Deloitte–Injaz partnership (Case 4) which entailed the delivery of specific training courses geared towards the youth (Case 4). The possible exceptions are the Byblos and UNICEF partnership (Case 1) in the sense that the 'Adopt-a-School' project initiated had both hard and soft components, involving physical rehabilitation of Lebanese public schools, enhancing teacher and administrator skills, and community mobilization. The same could be said of the Fattal–Lady of Hope Foundation partnership (Case 3), where the scope of work, while narrow seemed significant entailing the provision of financial support to 800–1,000 intermediary and secondary school students every year.

Specific and measurable information could not be obtained regarding the magnitude of resources invested in the partnerships although the businesses were highly favorable and proud of their contributions. Even when monetary information was obtained, specific information about the amount of time and effort invested on the part of personnel was not available. Byblos has invested \$200,000 over 3 years; Marriott has invested ~\$650; Fattal has not provided specific figures but provides financial aid funding to 800–1,000 students; Deloitte has donated \$2,000 in 2005–2006 and provides 20 volunteers and hosts students; and in the case of Sanita, no specific figures were made available regarding amount of in-kind or monetary donations or number of volunteers. As for the NGOs, they are the ones responsible for running the partnerships which in most cases, except for AVS, constitute part of their own operations. Hence, NGOs have invested the time and effort of their personnel and their office space in the partnerships. It is clear that the private and nonprofit partners have deployed different resources (money versus time and staff) in the context of these partnerships, with salient potential implications for perceptions of efficiency and equity on both parts.

Significant variations were also noted in terms of trends of investments across cases and how these trends varied over time. With Sanita–Cedars for Care (Case 5) the investment of Sanita in the relationship has been fluctuating depending on the needs of its partner. With Deloitte–Injaz (Case 4), Deloitte's investment has been increasing and the relationship has developed and deepened over time, with Deloitte occupying a seat in the advisory board of Injaz. With Fattal–Lady of Hope (Case 3), the amount of money donated by Fattal to the Foundation has increased over time to accommodate the increased requests for financial assistance. With Marriott–AVS (Case 2), the investment has decreased in the sense that the partnership has become dormant. With Byblos–UNICEF (Case 1) the investment has been stable, with an equivalent amount of \$200,000 to be disbursed over a 3-year period. This kind of variation was more difficult to track in the case of the nonprofit partner, given the intangible nature of resources invested (e.g., time and personnel). It is clear that the private sector partner has in all cases been involved in the capacity of donor of funds or in kind resources (Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) as well as provider of volunteers (Cases 2, 4, 5) while the NGO partner has been involved in the capacity of project execution/implementation.

The level of engagement of partners in the partnership also varied from case to case, with overall higher levels of engagement on the part of the nonprofit partner. In Case 1, the involvement of the private partner has been at the strategic level in terms of deciding on which schools to adopt (as donor of funds), but Byblos is not involved in the operational details of running the project. The nonprofit partner (UNICEF) bears the whole responsibility of managing the project and reporting to Byblos on progress. With Marriott and AVS (Case 2), both parties were involved in the formation of the Corporate Volunteer Council of Lebanon with other businesses as members, but the nonprofit partner actually represents the soul of the project and the common link or denominator with various private partners. With respect to Case 3, Fattal top managers are on the board of the Lady of Hope Foundation and participate in the planning of its activities, but other than that the foundation has acquired its own status and dynamics over time. With Sanita and Cedars for Care (Case 5), the level of engagement of the private sector partner is relatively low based on occasional donation of goods and money, and volunteering, while the nonprofit partner is continuously engaged in environmental type projects. The partnership between Deloitte and Injaz (Case 4) is the only one that presents high levels of engagement on both sides, depicted in Deloitte's involvement in the board of Injaz and the delivery of its various training programs, and Injaz taking an active role in overseeing the preparation and implementation of these capacity building programs in terms of scope, needs, and logistics.

We also noted a certain level of consistency in terms of patterns of leadership involvement across cases and between partners. In all cases, top leaders were involved in approving and initiating the partnership. With the nonprofits, the leaders or top managers have continued to be involved beyond the initiation stage, which is the case with AVS, Injaz, Cedars for Care and UNICEF. With businesses, patterns of leadership involvement were more symbolic, intermittent, and less concerned with the operational aspects of the partnership. For example, Fattal's chairman is on the board of the Foundation and intervenes in relation to major decisions. A similar pattern of symbolic and intermittent involvement was noted on the part of other responsible leaders and top managers including the director of sales and marketing at Marriott, the head of marketing at Sanita, the head of communications at Byblos, and the HR manager and one of the partners at Deloitte.

In the majority of cases the interaction level is generally infrequent but relatively intensive at the initiation of the partnerships and before specific projects or activities. With AVS and Marriott (Case 2) there were planned monthly meetings but these have been interrupted because the partnership has evolved into a dormant phase. The Byblos–UNICEF partnership (Case 1) is in a transition state with Byblos asking to be more involved; therefore communication has intensified, beyond the twice-yearly progress meetings, with attempts to find a new communication mode that is suitable for both partners. With Deloitte and Injaz (Case 4) there is more frequent interaction than in other cases, which takes the form of monthly board meetings, and contacts to prepare for the Job Shadow Day or for other program deliveries. In all cases, both informal and formal modes of communication were used ranging from meetings, to emails, and phone calls depending on the stage of evolution of the partnership (e.g., more intense communication towards the beginning or in the initiation phase). However, patterns of communication in all five cases can best be described as sporadic and ad hoc rather than regular and institutionalized.

Generally all the partnerships studied were relatively simple and there were no specific or complex processes put in place to manage them. There was no evidence of significant changes in routines, processes or actions, or partners embracing completely new procedures or a new set of values to give the partnership a higher chance of beating the odds. Both partners seemed rather laid back, with the private sector partner treating the partnership as important yet peripheral to its core business/operations and the NGO partner treating the partnership as part of 'business as usual'. It is worth noting in this context that both the business and nonprofit partners are involved with a number of other cross-sector alliances of various sizes. Except for the Lady of Hope Foundation (Case 3), all nonprofits in this study have multiple partners involved in the partnership, while businesses are also involved in other CSR initiatives with other nonprofits.

In terms of efficiency and equity, it seems that efficiency conditions were generally met in most cases, in the sense that the expected value from the alliance to each company is greater than zero and greater than the expected value from alternative organizational arrangements. This can be said of Cases 1, 3, 4, and 5. Based on the interviews conducted, the partnership embarked upon represented an expeditious, non-costly governance structure for pursuing joint CSR initiatives. Equity, on the other hand, encompasses fair dealing or ensuring that standards of reciprocity are met and that parties receive benefits proportional to their investments. While the nature of investment was clearly different on both sides, the two partners confirmed the salience of norms of reciprocity or sense of fair dealing as reflected in the donation of funds by the private sector partner and responsibility for project execution on the part of the nonprofit partner. Benefits accruing to both partners entailed continuation of projects in the nonprofit case and various reputation/legitimacy gains for businesses. These two factors combined in turn help account for the continuation/endurance of most of these partnerships in their present form.

The partnership re-evaluation phase

In most cases, there were no formal evaluations of the partnership and its evolution. There was little evidence in all cases of an effort at pausing and stepping back to rethink the terms of the relationship in light of changing expectations, or evolving understandings/conflicts. This was not even evident in Case 2, where the partnership has gone soar and evolved into a dormant phase (the problem started with different Marriott managers attending the meetings, creating a lack of continuity and Marriott managers subsequently delivering the wrong books in the context of the ''Lebanon reads'' campaign). One possible exception is Case 1 where there was some evidence of renegotiation on the part of the private sector partner, in way of increased involvement and more frequent communication. Although we would have expected some evidence of re-evaluation and renegotiation in all five cases over time, to revisit core assumptions and resolve any contested issues through supplemental agreements, this was clearly not evident. It is worth noting in this context that the projects undertaken by the partners were themselves subject to evaluation in some cases. For example, UNICEF submits project progress reports to Byblos, Fattal receives reports of disbursements of funds from the Foundation, and Injaz shares with Deloitte the evaluations of its programs.

When asked about future expectations, the nonprofits' expectations of their business partners entailed mostly continued support, which is the case for Cedars for Care, Lady of Hope Foundation, Injaz, and UNICEF. It is interesting to note that none of the NGO partners expressed expectations of closer involvement in the implementation/delivery of projects or in critical operational decisions. The private sector partner expressed different forms of expectations, mostly taking the form of new creative proposals in the context of CSR, and the identification of projects with clear timeframes and localized impact. Most private sector partners thus expect the NGO counterpart to continue to take the lead in way of identification of new added value projects as well as the completion of existing projects. Deloitte expressed in this regard that it expects its nonprofit partner to sustain its delivery of high quality training programs in the areas of leadership and entrepreneurship targeting the youth, while also identifying new programs. Partners on both sides expressed increased appreciation of the importance of alliances as vehicles for proactive change and as mechanisms to address escalating needs and challenges that are difficult to address in isolation.

When inquiring about learning in the context of the partnership experience, we received positive but different feedback from both partners. The nonprofit partner has benefited from learning how to be better prepared logistically at the onset of a partnership. Cedars for Care has learned, for example, how to prepare better proposals and Injaz has learned how to better manage the logistics of its programs. AVS, on the other hand, has learned how to better structure and communicate project expectations so as not to face some of the problems that it faced with Marriott, resulting in the termination of the partnership or rather its passive discontinuation. As for the businesses, almost all have expressed that their learning has been mostly CSR related, with many admitting that they have learned that there is a need for further involvement in CSR because of the range of needs identified at the community level. Although businesses have paid lip service to CSR type learning, it is worth mentioning that there was no evidence of changed practice, or better integration of social issues into a newly invigorated vision of responsible practice or into overall corporate strategy/decision-making.

Discussion of findings

This research has tracked and examined five partnerships in the context of CSR, shedding light on their various relational aspects from the perspective of both the private and nonprofit partner. Our research supports the traditional economic view of alliances as ventures rooted in the need to acquire necessary complementary resources in the pursuit of joint objectives. In all five cases, partners embraced the partnering arrangement with a view to capitalize on a set of complementary resources offered through the partnership, namely private sector funding for NGOs and NGOs' drive/operational focus from the perspective of the private partner. Through collaborative arrangements, both partners hoped to tackle CSR challenges that they could not have addressed in isolation.

Having said this, an evaluation of the partnerships that had materialized in the Lebanese context along the core dimensions identified in the literature suggests that the partnerships crafted were mostly symbolic and instrumental rather than substantive and integrative. We can support this observation by looking at the respective evaluations obtained in relation to the three phases and core evaluation factors identified in Table IV. For example, we noted evidence of little systematic involvement and preparation in the initiation phase, with no mention of processes of negotiation, persuasion or probing mutual motivations/expectations. We also noted the salience of instrumental motives on both sides, vaguely formalized goals, and high centrality/moderate specificity on the NGO side, but low centrality and low specificity on the business side. We also found evidence that the majority of partnerships examined had a modest scope of activities, fluctuating investments of resources, simple processes, sporadic modes of communication, while also noting low levels of engagement on the business side coupled with symbolic/intermittent patterns of leadership involvement. Interestingly, we also noted that while some sense of efficiency and equity prevailed, these revolved around a distorted symmetry in terms of allocation of funds versus time and personnel. In the evaluation phase, we noted no formal evaluation of the partnerships and no evidence of renegotiation of expectations or contested assumptions, we also noted the salience of modest instrumental type future expectations on both sides and limited evidence of partnership learning or CSR related learning, particularly on the business side.

While these observations are applicable in the context of the five partnerships examined generally, some exceptions were noted with respect to specific dimensions and these have been captured and illustrated to the extent possible in Table V.

We take this analysis a step further by evaluating the partnerships studied in relation to the specific set of success factors or dimensions that were presented earlier in Table III. In terms of aggregative summative assessment, the analysis presented in Table VI suggests that the five partnerships examined have fallen short with respect to some of the key success factors identified in the collaborative alliance literature.

We also attempt to place the partnerships studied on the Collaboration Continuum proposed by Austin (2000) as illustrated in Figure 1. The majority of the partnerships studied seem to be characterized by low engagement, narrow scope of activities performed together, infrequent interaction, simplicity, and modest strategic value, particularly from the business partner perspective, and thus have not evolved beyond the philanthropic stage. The Marriott–AVS partnership (Case 2) is dormant, and cannot be placed accurately on the Continuum. Byblos–UNICEF (Case 1) and Fattal–Lady of Hope (Case 3) partnerships are purely philanthropic. Sanita–Cedars for Care (Case 5) relationship is also philanthropic but it is more developed than the other two since there is a continuous pattern of involvement on the part of Sanita employees in the annual cleaning projects of Cedars. As for Deloitte–Injaz (Case 4) relationship, it seems to be the most developed of all, and certainly has the potential to grow over time to become integrative.

Generally, while we find the continuum to be useful, we also find that it fails to capture the complexity of partnerships, or the fact that while a partnership may overall fit in a specific stage (e.g., philanthropic), it may embody some features that are characteristic of other stages. Two notable

TABLE V

Detailed evaluation of partnerships studied

	High	Moderate	Low	Other	Applies to Cases	Not applicable to Case(s)
Preparation		NGOs	Businesses		1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Negotiation			NGOs Businesses		1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Formalized goals		NGOs Businesses			1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Specific, Phased and measurable goals			NGOs Businesses		1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Criteria for partner choice				Instrumental	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Motives				Instrumental	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	2, normative motives seemed also salient
Centrality	NGOs		Businesses		1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Specificity		NGOs	Businesses		1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Scope of activities				Narrow	2, 3, 4, 5	1, which entailed a broader scope of activities
Nature and magnitude of resources		NGOs (time and personnel) Businesses (funds/in kind)			2, 4, 5	1, 3 where the magnitude of resources invested on the business side seemed higher
Trends of investments				Fluctuating	2, 3, 5	1, 4 where more stability in trends of investment was noted over time
Level of engagement	NGOs		Businesses		2, 3, 5	1, 4 where a higher level of engagement was noted on the business side
Leadership involvement	NGOs		Businesses		1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Communication				Sporadic	2, 3, 5	1, 4 where more regular patterns of communication were noted but still do not qualify as regular/intensive
Complexity of processes			NGOs Businesses		1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Efficiency		NGOs Businesses			1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Equity		NGOs Businesses			1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Partnership evaluation			NGOs Businesses		2, 3, 4, 5	1, where some attempt at evaluation/renegotiation noted on the business side
Future expectations			NGOs Businesses		1, 2, 3, 5	4, where some higher future expectations were noted on the business side
Learning		NGOs	Businesses		1, 2, 3, 4, 5	

1 = Byblos–UNICEF; 2 = Marriott–AVS; 3 = Fattal–Lady of Hope; 4 = Deloitte–Injaz; 5 = Sanita–Cedars for Care.

TABLE VI

Summative evaluation of partnerships studied

Resource dependency	Resource dependency of NGOs on funds provided by businesses Resource dependency of businesses on NGO time and personnel
Commitment symmetry	Unequal commitment of time and personnel resources Unequal commitment of funds Unequal affective commitment or engagement
Common goal symmetry	Agreement on a common set of vaguely formalized goals No agreement on specific, measurable and phased sub-goals Coveted instrumental motives on both sides
Intensive communication	Irregular modes of communication on both sides
Alignment of cooperation working capability	Limited evidence of sharing of knowledge across firm boundaries Limited evidence of information symmetry Limited evidence of convergence in learning skills and speed
Converging working cultures	Limited exposure to partner cultures, structures, processes Limited development of common working practices and procedures Limited development of common sets of values
Individual excellence	Both partners have weaknesses that they are seeking to compensate for through embracing a collaborative CSR relationship
Importance	Relationship fits major strategic objectives of only non profit partner Relationship is more important to non profit partner
Interdependence	Evidence of interdependence and complementary assets and skills (funds and in kind resources versus time/personnel)
Investment	Both partners invested in the relationship but the nature of investment was significantly different on both sides
Information	Communication is opaque and infrequent Partners do not share substantive information relating to objectives/goals, technical data/knowledge, trouble spots or changing situations
Integration	No evidence of development of shared ways of operation
Institutionalization	The relationship is given a formal status, but there is no clear assignment of responsibilities and decision-making processes
Integrity	Evidence of integrity although more limited evidence of relational quality

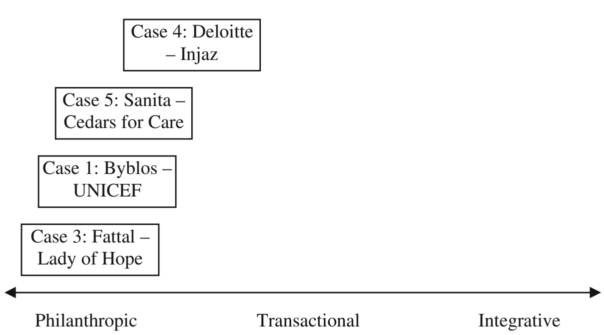

Figure 1. Stage on Collaboration Continuum.

examples are the Byblos–UNICEF (Case 1) and the Deloitte–Injaz (Case 4) partnerships, which embody characteristics of a transactional stage as illustrated with respect to some of the dimensions in Table V (e.g., level of engagement and trends of investment). It is the opinion of the authors that partnerships are too complex and dynamic to be placed precisely on such continuum. This kind of complexity and variation is better captured in the kind of finer grained analysis presented throughout this article and illustrated in Table V.

Aside from the evaluation of the Collaboration Continuum (Austin, 2000) through an empirically grounded investigation, this research makes several interesting contributions. First, it suggests that partnerships are increasingly initiated and sustained in the context of CSR, even when serving minimalist objectives. In view of a variety of constraints in developing countries coupled with escalating needs, it seems that partnerships are geared more towards 'satisficing' than 'maximizing' and a philanthropic approach is considered satisfactory on both sides. We also note the salience of resource dependency theory, with partnerships in developing countries evolving in the context of resource dependence, and firms (particularly NGOs) looking for other institutions with complementary resources to achieve specific goals. Resource dependence was identified as a salient factor in previous collaborative alliance research (e.g., Arya and Salk, 2006; Ring and Van De Ven, 1994).

The research makes a second contribution in that it suggests that a few determinant factors are considered crucial for partnership initiation and sustenance. These revolve in the first place around the efficiency and equity dimensions identified in earlier research (e.g., Arino and de la Torre, 1998; Ring and Van De Ven, 1994). In other words, even when other factors (e.g., commitment symmetry, intensive communication, converging working cultures) are not successfully crafted and nurtured, the partnership can endure and continue to exist for an extended period and under conditions of high uncertainty. While the partnership may not qualify as successful in a real sense and while its quality may be significantly affected, its basic viability is not threatened/undermined as long as it continues to meet basic efficiency and equity norms of exchange and outcomes.

Finally, our research lends support to earlier research by Husted (2003), which highlights the salience of centrality and specificity in the context of CSR collaborative ventures. The main reason why the five partnerships examined did not evolve beyond the philanthropic stage to more substantive and integrative forms relates to the low centrality and low specificity of CSR activities for the private sector partner. In other words, the attributes of CSR activity for the private partner (strategic versus altruistic) inevitably affect its overall orientation in the context of collaborative CSR ventures. In none of the five cases examined had CSR evolved to a strategic level supporting the competitive advantage of the firm, translating in turn into low centrality and low specificity of CSR activities for the business partner and a subsequent minimal engagement in the partnership given its modest strategic value to the firm.

Concluding remarks

Collaborative relationships in the pursuit of CSR have proliferated in recent years. This is partly based on an increasing appreciation of the potential benefits and added value that can accrue from collaboration and the powerful synergies that can ensue. Partnerships between businesses and NGOs in specific have received systematic attention in recent years. This article has reviewed the literature pertaining to the topic, with particular focus on the ingredients or preconditions for successful partnerships as well as the possible evolutionary path of cross sector alliances. In the context of this framework, the findings of an exploratory study of business-NGO partnerships in the Lebanese context were presented. Our study reveals that partnerships between businesses and NGOs are frequently formed in the pursuit of CSR, and that these partnerships have taken different forms, ranging from corporate foundations to corporate volunteering to joint ventures. In other words, there is evidence of some appreciation in developing countries of the potential role and benefits of partnering in the pursuit of CSR particularly in light of rising needs and expectations.

Tracking the evolution of these alliances in the Lebanese context, we noticed that most of the alliances crafted lacked depth and breadth and qualified more as symbolic and instrumental rather than integrative collaborative ventures. This was gauged by examining the five partnerships with respect to 21 dimensions derived from the collaborative alliance literature, which suggested in turn minimal preparation and negotiation and instrumental motives on both sides, vaguely formalized goals, low centrality and specificity in the business case, a modest scope of activities, fluctuating investments of resources, simple processes, sporadic modes of communication, while also noting low levels of engagement on the business side coupled with symbolic/intermittent patterns of leadership involvement. We also found limited evidence of reevaluation, renegotiation or learning in the context of the various partnerships initiated or any significant change in the orientation or improved practice on the private sector side in areas of social responsibility and social value generation.

Probing further into these findings through discussions with the business and NGO partners, we noticed that one way to account for the continuation of such symbolic and minimalist partnerships rests with the fact that these relationships have continued in the majority of cases to meet basic efficiency and equity norms of exchange and outcomes. While the partnerships do not qualify as successful or substantive in any real sense, they endure under conditions of adversity and uncertainty as long as basic efficiency and equity criteria are met, in the sense that the expected value from the alliance to each partner is greater than zero and that some standards of reciprocity continue to be met. We also noted the salience of resource dependency in the context of developing countries, and pointed to the need to account for this factor in explanations of both the types of partnerships that were crafted as well as their endurance in their current minimalist forms. Hence, equity, efficiency, and resource dependency emerge from our study as the most salient factors to consider in future alliance research in developing countries.

Finally, our research suggests higher levels of commitment and engagement on the part of the NGO partner, who seemed based on this research consistently ready and willing to exert even more effort towards a successful partnership. The crux of the limited evolutionary pattern on the Collaboration Continuum detected in the Lebanese context lies with the private sector partner who is often seeking minimal engagement in partnerships, preferring to outsource responsibility for CSR initiatives to the nonprofit partner through a philanthropic approach. We linked this finding in turn to the centrality and specificity considerations suggested by Husted (2003), suggesting that the mostly altruistic (i.e., non strategic) attributes of CSR activity for the private partner in our cases have certainly molded its overall distant and philanthropic orientation in the context of the collaborative CSR ventures examined. Evidence of centrality and specificity of CSR activities for both partners thus emerges as an essential pre-condition for CSR partnerships to evolve towards more integrative forms.

In essence, we believe that there is much to learn from this research into NGO–business collaborative alliances in the context of CSR and room for further research on the topic. For partnering to reap its anticipated benefits in the context of CSR generally and in the Lebanese context specifically, more serious modes of approach and engagement are required on both sides. Partnering should be mutually viewed as representing an opportunity, with a focus on identifying common goals, delineating relationships, negotiating expectations, and building bridges including mutual learning and engagement. It is only under these conditions that partnerships will mobilize the resources and consolidated efforts to deliver innovative projects and solutions that will spread the benefits of CSR more widely. Minimalist partnerships will in turn deliver minimalist outcomes and solutions.

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