

Working Together: Critical Perspectives on Six Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines six cross-sector partnerships in South Africa and Zambia. These partnerships were part of a research study undertaken between 2003 and 2005 and were selected because of their potential to contribute to poverty reduction in their respective countries. This paper examines the context in which the partnerships were established, their governance and accountability mechanisms and the engagement and participation of the partners and the intended beneficiaries in the partnerships. We argue that a partnership approach which has proven successful in one context can be used as a valuable learning resource. However, a partnership's work, which includes all aspects of the partnership and its activities, cannot necessarily be transferred directly to another partnership without a thorough and locally informed analysis of the context in which it is implemented. In addition, we suggest that it is difficult to assess whether the good intentions behind partnerships were translated into real benefits for target groups as effective monitoring and evaluation procedures were not in place in the partnerships studied. Similarly, the absence of regularised governance and accountability systems in partnerships made it difficult to support partner and beneficiary participation and engagement. We conclude that there is a need to move beyond a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to partnerships and that partnership replication should focus more strongly on the transfer of learning about partnership processes instead of simply copying partnership activities. Moreover, the development of stronger mechanisms for assessing and ensuring accountability towards both partners and intended beneficiaries is required if partnerships are to meet their intended objectives.

KEY WORDS: cross-sector partnerships, critical perspectives, South Africa, Zambia

Introduction and background

During the last decade, a "partnership boom" has occurred (Zadek et al., 2001, p. 23) Partnership has

been described as: 'the development approach of our time' (Kjaer, 2003, p. 13), 'the mantra for the new millennium' (Tennyson, 1998, p. 3), and 'a new and innovative type of environmental governance' (Witte et al., 2003, p. 2). From its endorsement as an approach towards achieving environmental and developmental change at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (Tennyson, 1998, p. 4, 2004, p. 3), partnership has been promoted by large numbers of corporations, governments, international agencies and non-governmental organisations as the most effective way of working towards the achievement of sustainable development.¹ According to Zadek (2003, p. 9), it is a movement which came of age 10 years after Rio, at the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, where Kofi Annan declared that:

The Summit represents a major leap forward in the development of partnerships with the UN, Governments, business and civil society coming together to increase the pool of resources to tackle global problems on a global scale.²

Although some work has been undertaken in the study of partnerships, there is not yet a significant body of critical analysis on their impact. However, at the most fundamental level, the effect these partnerships have on those who are most directly and immediately involved in them is of paramount importance since they provide the partnerships with their very *raison d'être*.

We shall attempt to make a contribution towards filling this gap in the literature by discussing insights from six partnerships in Zambia and South Africa, examining the context in which the partnerships were established; their governance and accountability mechanisms; and the engagement and participation

of the partners and the intended beneficiaries in the partnerships. It is important to emphasise that our fieldwork was conducted between 2003 and 2005, that our findings relate to that specific period in time and that none of the partnerships had completed their work during the time our study was undertaken. Partnerships are not static entities, they move through different phases³ and internal and external changes will inevitably have had an impact on their development since the time of the study.

Another issue that merits highlighting relates to the co-operation of those involved in the partnerships studied. As Stott (2007, p. 4) has observed, the “raw material” for critical partnership research is not always easy to obtain as “...the emphasis of much information on cross-sector partnerships has been on positive stories and there are enormous sensitivities about going public and airing differences that may disrupt on-going work or suggest that such connections have ‘failed’”. The willingness of partners and stakeholders to share information openly, accept critical questions, and learn from the research findings was fundamental to our work and testament to a genuine commitment to develop and improve their partnering activities. In this respect, our approach was to explore promising practice in dialogue with partnership participants rather than prove impact.

Two major components of the research were: firstly, to identify and examine the complexities of the interrelationship between the different partners involved in the cross-sector partnerships studied; and secondly, to understand whether the cross-sector partnerships were meeting their own objectives and targets in relation to poverty reduction. These partnerships addressed development issues in the areas of agriculture, health and education.

Of these six partnerships, two can be considered major case studies. The first of these was the *Chamba Valley Partnership Project* in Zambia, which aimed to increase small-scale farming income through a partnership in which a farming co-operative was developed with some government support, to grow fruit and vegetables in order to supply the private supermarket chain, Shoprite. The second was *Amangwe Village*, a holistic health care centre set up through a partnership mechanism by the Zululand Chamber of Business Foundation in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, which worked with and for people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

The other four case studies were small in nature. The first of these, the *Small-scale Sugarcane Farming Communities’ Partnership* focused on the development of livelihoods among the small-scale sugarcane growers in South Africa through engagement with government agencies and the Sugar Industry. The *Mthashana Further Education and Training College Partnership Programme* in South Africa, under government direction, worked to develop partnerships for learning and skills development in KwaZulu Natal. The *Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership* was promoted by the Partnership Forum⁴ in Zambia to engage businesses in improving educational infrastructure and teaching conditions. The *Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS* linked businesses together with NGOs and government agencies to tackle the HIV/AIDS pandemic.⁵

Each of the case studies addressed partnering in different ways. What worked well and what did not; the manner in which each partnership dealt with challenges during particular phases and how they moved between one phase and another were seen as important in determining the effects for partners, beneficiaries and the wider society.⁶

While the partnerships developed and moved through different phases and processes, they also intersected with a wide variety of crosscutting factors that were important in determining their wider effects. We identified these as: (1) the *context* in which a partnership is operating; (2) partnership *governance, accountability and organisation* and (3) partnership *monitoring and evaluation* processes. We shall consider each of these factors in turn using insights from the six partnerships studied.

Context

There has been a tendency within the literature on partnerships to portray these forms of collaboration as a kind of magic bullet capable of providing solutions to diverse development problems across a variety of settings through win-win situations where all stakeholders benefit. Our starting point for this analysis is that partnerships may work for some stakeholders, in some places, in some situations, some of the time. In fact, the manner in which a partnership unfolds is directly related both to the context in which it is situated and the ability of

partnership participants to find appropriate responses to the challenges that arise in this given context. Contextual factors include a wide range of variables, such as: regional, national and local environments; economic, political, cultural and social conditions; linkage with international bodies and with networks promoting partnerships; the presence or absence of intermediary organisations and/or key individuals capable of bringing different institutions together; and specific 'drivers' (i.e. factors arising out of wider contexts) that exert directionality and impetus towards partnership solutions. All these factors interlink and overlap in complex and dynamic ways; and they inevitably have effects on the emergence and development of partnerships. As a result, during the course of our study, we found that what worked well in a partnership approach in South Africa might not work in Zambia and vice-versa.

In South Africa, an 'enabling environment' for cross-sector collaboration was clearly favoured by government policies.⁷ For this reason, partnerships had been promoted widely in a number of sectors, including the three 'thematic areas' of health, agriculture and education that provided subjects for our case study research. However, this favourable attitude to partnerships has to be understood in the light of the broader socio-economic inequalities inherited from the apartheid period which created a 'push' for the private sector to assume its part of the responsibility for the reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa.⁸ Combined with the international trend towards corporate social responsibility this is an important factor in explaining why the member companies of the Zululand Chamber of Business Foundation were involved in addressing social issues such as the Amangwe Village project. The involvement of the South African Sugar Association in the Small-scale Farming Communities' Partnership offered a similar case of a private sector actor responding to calls for it to adopt a role in addressing inequalities inherited from the apartheid era.⁹

The apartheid era in South Africa witnessed the emergence of a strong and highly articulate civil society. Since the end of apartheid, however, numerous NGOs and community organisations had seen their roles taken over by government and funding re-directed to the public sector. This led many of them to take an interest in partnership approaches to development where they could make

use of their skills and knowledge when co-operating with private or public sector actors.

In Zambia, a very different context was apparent. Here, the prevalence of extreme poverty and the change from heavy state involvement to the privatisation reforms of the 1990s were the most significant contextual issues. The steep decline in the wealth of the country plunged thousands of Zambians into poverty and became the main driver for the Zambian partnerships we studied. However, regulatory pressure on business also appeared to provide incentives for the private sector to make a contribution to development projects. For example in the Chamba Valley case study, the private sector partner, Shoprite, indicated that their assistance to local farmers in Zambia had occurred in response to government demands that the company should invest more substantially in the country. Contrary to South Africa, NGOs had a lower profile and were less well organised in Zambia; yet there was a growing realisation in the Zambian NGO sector that NGOs needed to build capacity and make their voices heard through links with other sectors of society. This was particularly the case for NGOs working in the area of HIV/AIDS.

Recognising these contextual differences provides an important check against imparting partnership models from one context to another without considering the key differences that play a role in determining their outcomes.¹⁰ For example, the Chamba Valley Partnership Project in Lusaka was based upon the Luangeni Partnership in Eastern Zambia in which a large number of farmers provided produce to Shoprite with spin-offs for the community at large.¹¹ However, the transfer of this model to the Chamba Valley was hampered by difficulties in shifting a partnership model from a rural environment to a peri-urban setting and the challenges of involving different partners with differential access to resources. Replication or, rather, adaptation, while not the primary force behind the development of Amangwe Village in South Africa, played a role in the development of this partnership project since it was at least partially based on the Zululand Chamber of Business Foundation's previous experience with developing a contractors' village. While the development of Amangwe Village provided a base for the partnership's activities, the wider intention of creating a holistic community health care centre for

HIV patients had, at the time of the study, not necessarily been achieved. There is evidence to suggest that the Chamba Valley and Amangwe partnerships did not fully take into account the multiplicity of contextual factors that influenced their development.¹² Indeed, the assumption that previously 'successful' models could be replicated or adapted to other contexts might be the very reason that early contextual scoping was quite limited.

Governance and accountability

The governance and accountability mechanisms of a partnership and its projects have a strong influence on its ability to reach its intended objectives. In our study we set out to explore (1) the degree to which partnership systems and structures were transparent; (2) whether decision-making processes were based on consensus-building; (3) how far the partnership was accountable to both the partners and the beneficiaries and (4) how successfully the partnership worked within the wider policy and regulatory systems.

Partnerships with a large number of private sector partners such as the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership, the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS and Amangwe Village undoubtedly benefited from increased resources. Nevertheless, the presence of many private sector partners tended to create a more 'hands-off' approach towards the partnership, and structures that could encourage deeper relationship-building were not developed. The Mthashana College Further Education and Training Partnership Programme in South Africa also showed that involving a large number of partners from varying sectors may create problems in the initiation of a partnership. Here, it was difficult to attract and maintain the participation of appropriate partners because of the large number of stakeholders identified by government.

None of the partnerships, apart from the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, had defined core principles for working together. The lack of such principles had to do with the way in which the partnerships were established: a sense of urgency combined with the need and injunction to 'get on with the job' appeared to be so prevalent during the set-up and start-up phases that, little time, if any, was

spent on clarifying mutual aims and objectives, getting to know one another more deeply, or negotiating guidelines on how partners would work together. The absence of partnership goals and mission statements manifested itself later in the varying interpretations by each partner of what the partnerships actually intended to achieve.

Formalised partnering agreements are frequently advocated as being necessary to ensure accountability in partnerships, firstly, of partners to each other and, secondly, of partners in relation to meeting their obligations regarding the implementation of project activities (Evans et al., 2004). Such an agreement may take the form of a legal contract, a less formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or an informal agreement to co-operate. Irrespective of the level of formality, developing such an agreement is often perceived as the starting point for working together as the process binds partners to specific aims and objectives and also helps to define the roles and responsibilities of each partnership participant. In the case of the Amangwe Village, organisations initially received verbal invitations to join the partnership, whereas written agreements existed only in the form of proposals for the funding of specific projects. The Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership had no collective MoU to guide its operations and only one written agreement with a private sector partner. The Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, acting as the umbrella body for its members, did formalise its relationship with the implementing partners through a MoU. The Chamba Valley Partnership Project was the only partnership with an agreement that was signed by *all* partners, even though, interestingly, the signings did not take place at a joint meeting, and some partners were unaware who else had signed it. All the Chamba Valley Partnership Project partners considered that the agreement lacked detail, and that a revised version including additional information on the roles and responsibilities of participants as well as communication and evaluation processes should be produced. Indeed, some of the Chamba Valley Partnership Project partners believed that existing working relationships could only evolve into a properly constituted partnership on the basis of a revised agreement. This last point also raises questions about how effective a written document really is in regulating relationships, and which other

measures might be needed to make a partnership more effective, particularly in relation to improving communication and transparency. As Evans et al. (2004) emphasise, 'paperwork' is only one aspect of a healthy collaborative relationship: it cannot be a substitute for other aspects such as good communication, aligned goals, transparency and parallel commitments.

Where there were clear divisions between the partnerships and the partnership projects, there were also two differing types of management structures, one of which covered the partnership and the other which managed its projects. In the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership, the management of the Partnership and the financial management of its projects were both undertaken by a broker,¹³ the Partnership Forum, while project management for particular building works was devolved to the relevant departments within the universities. However, where partnership and project converged, as with the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, the distinction between the management structures relevant to each of these components inevitably became blurred and overlapped.

At the same time, none of the partnerships with established organisational structures had provisions for collective decision-making processes. Thus, a sense of team-working and consensus-building was largely absent. Relationships tended to be managed bilaterally or through a broker and, as a result, participation of partnership members was limited.¹⁴

The absence of widespread stakeholder involvement in partnership structures was also apparent. In the case of Amangwe Village, this derived from both the extent and the type of community involvement when clarifying and defining the original parameters of the project work, whereas, in the case of the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, respondents' statements indicated that some community partners considered themselves to be marginalised from the workings of the partnership.

In both the Chamba Valley Partnership Project and the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership, the lack of structured planning frameworks and targets for the project work of the partnerships contributed to difficulties as the partnerships developed. In this connection, it is interesting to note that none of the partnerships studied here possessed a well-defined conflict resolution mechanism.

The growing sense of frustration shown by the Chamba Valley Co-operative members *vis-à-vis* the perceived shortcomings of the partnership, for example, provided a clear indication of where such systems may be of considerable value during partnership implementation.

Strong and transparent internal communication strategies had not been institutionalised in most of the partnerships studied. This had clear implications for their work. In the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, for example, the absence of an effective communication system meant that its partners did not meet regularly to review progress. Among respondents at Amangwe Village, there was a realisation that better communication channels within the Partnership were required; and, indeed, a number of initiatives were started in order to foster a more participatory approach for all partners. Even at the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, where regular meetings were held to manage different aspects of the implementing partners' work, the partners still felt a need to meet with greater frequency.

By means of reports, media coverage and links with international agencies and bodies, external communication with both stakeholders and the general public was generally better than internal communication. This wider dissemination of information about the partnerships and their work had been instrumental in raising awareness, obtaining resources and developing stronger policy linkages. Nonetheless, the view was consistently expressed by respondents that communication with government needed to be more strategic and that this involved identifying and working with the 'right' people, with whose help or intervention issues could be resolved more effectively and swiftly.

Engagement and participation

Our analysis suggests that stakeholder participation took place in a variety of ways within the partnerships studied. As the ultimate aim of most of the partnerships, whether stated or implicit, was to 'serve the community', it follows logically that the community should itself have had a role to play both in ensuring the effective targeting of the partnerships' projects and in the advocacy and promotion of wider sustainable change.

In this connection, a central concern is whose interests participatory processes really serve? Do they serve the interests of project partners to implement their own development priorities using the jargon of ‘participation’ as a means of rubber-stamping a process whose outcome they have already pre-determined? Or do they serve the interests of communities by empowering them, facilitating collective community action and negotiating access to resources that would otherwise not be available? The range of possibilities for community involvement in partnerships is varied. It can be broken down along a rough scale in which, at one end, its members play a passive role and have little opportunity for involvement or voice, to, at the other end, a situation in which their active engagement is fundamental to partnering and where there are opportunities for them to initiate a particular course of action or take a lead in it.¹⁵ It is also important to note that ‘the community’ rarely speaks with a unified voice. Hence, developing and maintaining community engagement is not an easy task. Local power brokers may manipulate participatory processes to exclude marginalised groups and present their own views as those of the whole community’s. For these reasons, both the criteria and modes of selection of representatives from the community to work with a partnership are matters that require careful attention.

In the partnerships studied, it was often necessary to build capacity for community participation with considerable care. The South African Sugar Association spent over a year working through a lengthy scoping exercise with small-scale sugarcane farming communities, by means of community dialogue and workshops, in order to build social and political capital and gain support for its partnering initiatives. In the case of the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, dialogue of a similar kind emerged, at a later stage, through the Partnership Forum. However, scoping exercises for partnerships have potential drawbacks. They may, if not skilfully managed, lead community representatives to understand partnerships as ‘accessing’ rather than ‘sharing’ resources. In our study, there were indications that some community representatives were eager to assert that the community as a whole supported the idea of working in partnership in order to obtain such resources. As previously argued, even when a development approach is deemed ‘participatory’, “local

power brokers are often able to silence and sideline marginalised groups, especially women” (Parpart, 2001, p. 5). An indication of this may be that women interviewed in the Chamba Valley community felt less well informed than their male counterparts about the aims and objectives of the partnership.¹⁶

A more exhaustive needs analysis, on the other hand, may lead to the build-up of such high expectations that a partnership may in practice turn out to be a disappointment for the local community, especially in its earliest stages, arousing criticism and resistance from the community rather than positive engagement. The expectation raised by the Chamba Valley Partnership Project in a neighbouring community was an example of this. Similarly, in the Amangwe Village Partnership project, there was ongoing concern about whether the community was being ‘heard’.¹⁷ It is a moot point whether the Partnership fully recognised the potential constraints that its practices had on the ability and, indeed, the willingness of the community to participate.

We also examined gender aspects of the partnerships as it is widely recognised that sustainable development relies on the empowerment and engagement of women.¹⁸ By researching who is involved in partnerships, particularly at community level, and where, how and to what extent women contribute or do not contribute, more concentrated and proactive efforts may be set in motion to engage women in partnership activities (Grieco and Araba Apt, 1998; Vargas, 2002, p. 1555).¹⁹

The thematic issues covered by our six case studies demonstrate the potential for addressing women’s participation in partnerships. Women farmers, for instance, have been marginalised by agricultural development policies, despite the fact that they are an integral part of the African farming structure and combine domestic work with subsistence agriculture, especially food crop production (Grieco and Araba Apt, 1998). Almost 57% of those infected by HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa are women; and three out of four young people, between the ages of 15 and 24, who are likely to be infected with HIV, are female.²⁰ Meanwhile, girls are more likely to drop out of school and to receive less education than boys because of discrimination, education expenses and household duties.²¹

On a positive note the six partnerships studied had either directly or indirectly addressed the issue of

gender at both partnership and project level. For example, in the Amangwe Village and Mthashana College partnerships, women played key managerial roles, while both the Chamba Valley Partnership Project and the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS stressed that, not only was gender a key issue for them, but they recognised that greater efforts were needed to encourage women to participate more fully in their work. In the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership, the University of Zambia acknowledged that, in view of national policy directives aimed at increasing women's enrolment at the University, gender would play an increasingly important role in their partnership.

Monitoring and evaluation

Few, if any, of the partnerships had regularised evaluation procedures built into their management systems and projects. This made it difficult for the partnerships to obtain a sufficiently balanced and integrated set of perspectives on the effectiveness of the partnerships and their projects. In fact, neither the strengths nor the weaknesses of the partnerships appeared to have been fully appreciated by partners or intended beneficiaries.

The Partnership Forum carried out *ad hoc* monitoring of the Chamba Valley Partnership Project, suggesting that its impact was quite limited, with only 10 farmers out of a possible 98 actually selling to Shoprite. This limited data cannot be used to suggest that the partnership itself was not 'successful': while there were serious problems in relation to this partnership meeting its stated objectives, there was scope for individual farmers to grow their business in a sustainable way due to their membership of the co-operative. However, without regular evaluation and reviewing processes, it was not possible for the management and directorate of the Partnership to obtain a better understanding of how the partnership affected the farmers and how it could be improved over time.

The Zambian Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, which linked businesses and NGOs in order to combat the HIV-AIDS pandemic, was the only partnership to have a self-monitoring and evaluation process incorporated into its projects. However, as

Coalition staff acknowledged, this process was not widely undertaken and did not involve all members. Although defining an evaluation strategy was part of the Coalition's plans for the future, the evaluation parameters had not yet been devised in-depth at the time we conducted our study. Some individual company members had devised cost-benefit analyses that allowed them to assess the financial savings generated from their involvement in the Partnership but these models had not yet been applied to all member organisations. We were also not able to establish how many patients had been treated or supported as part of the Coalition's projects and it was not clear whether these figures were known to the Coalition members.

The Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership was able to provide tentative statistical evidence of those students who had been directly affected by the Partnership (e.g. through the provision of scholarships and environmental improvements). However, longer-term evaluation would need to be undertaken to achieve a fuller understanding of the wider potential of the types of partnerships set up under this scheme.

In terms of partnership trajectories, very little attention had been paid to planning for what might happen after a partnership had completed its project work. The issue of whether a partnership might disband, evolve into a different structure or move on into a different area, will ultimately depend upon how effective its work is felt to be by partners and stakeholders. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems could make a contribution to policy-making by helping to shape the best alternatives for such long-term outcomes and eventualities.

While there now seems to be widespread agreement in the partnership literature on the need for evaluation and impact assessment of partnerships, our research shows that these review mechanisms were either absent or limited in the partnerships studied. Although the reasons for these limited evaluation processes were manifold, the research identified a need to move beyond the rhetorical support for impact assessment to a more sympathetic approach including regular reviews together with evaluation plans built into both partnership processes and their projects. The complex dynamic between a partnership and its projects needs to be taken into account along with the option that each component

should have its own separate review and evaluation process, in addition to combined procedures. In this context, it is necessary to assess what the outputs and outcomes of a partnership's work have been at a number of different levels. Finally, evaluation processes need to be sensitively designed in order to be attuned to the context of the specific partnership and its projects. In these ways, evaluation can be seen by all concerned to be a helpful learning and developmental activity rather than as a tool for mere measurement and judgement, a view which is likely to add to increased burdens, tensions and pressures that may arise in situations where the partnership is facing a crisis.

Conclusion and recommendations

We have argued in this article that attention should be paid to the context in which partnerships take place. One of the undoubted dangers of the fashionable status that partnership currently enjoys is the assumption that there is a model of partnership which can be applied to each and every situation. Our research suggests that partnerships need to be built very carefully both on established good practice and on the constraints of local conditions. With regard to the former, there is considerable material in the existing literature which catalogues good partnership practice. With regard to the latter, however, our research suggests an additional generalisation: that a detailed and attentive consideration of context is likely to have constructive and beneficial effects both on partnership practice and on policy-making.

There is a real danger when replicating partnership models and projects that certain factors may not be taken into account. What has proven successful in one context can be valuable both as a learning resource and as an inspiration, but cannot necessarily be transferred directly, in the same form, to a new context, without a thorough and locally informed analysis of the new environment. It needs to be borne in mind that replication need not necessarily imply the 'copying' of *activities*, but rather the copying of successful process and understanding; in other words, it is the *learning* that is transferred.

Our research showed that the collaboration of institutions from different sectors enabled resources to be directed to key development concerns, such as

the provision of education, health care and economic development. In some instances, such provision could be seen to be filling a gap created by government inaction or resource shortage, whereas, in others, it served to establish innovative ways of meeting the needs of developing commercial markets.

Monitoring and evaluation processes were mostly absent in the partnerships we investigated, making it difficult to assess whether the good intentions behind the partnerships were translated into real benefits for both partners and intended beneficiaries. At the same time, exit strategies had not been agreed upon in any of the partnerships. Further work needs to be done to support and improve the capacity of cross-sector partnerships to identify, monitor and evaluate their own objectives and impacts even if this is not a problem-free exercise in itself (see Utting and Zammit and Lund-Thomsen in this special issue).

The potential value of partnerships lies in their ability to deliver tangible improvements in social services or economic goods and the opportunities they can give to relatively weak or disadvantaged sections of the community. At the same time partnerships can draw attention to a community's concerns and problems and build dialogue with other groups and institutions which may offer complementary objectives and resources. Partnerships may also offer models of collaboration which can inspire other groups to 'find a voice' and to seek innovative ways of working together to support their own (and mutual) development. However, there is still a need to address the question of who actually represents a given community in participatory partnership processes and whose voices/concerns are promoted/marginalised in the name of participation. Local power brokers are often able to manipulate participatory processes in ways that favour their particular interests while partnership participation may lead to unrealistic expectations on the part of a community in terms of the benefits the partnership will bring with it. Particular attention has to be paid to where, how and to what extent different categories of women, participate in partnership decision-making processes. Nevertheless, with regard to the partnerships we studied, we were encouraged by the attention given to addressing gender concerns in the partnerships.

Finally in terms of governance and accountability processes, the partnership literature recommends clear boundaries, together with robust and transparent structures and sound systems of communication, to not only support the functioning of a partnership and maintain partner engagement but also to potentially facilitate conflict resolution and avoid the marginalisation of partnership participants. Members of the partnerships we studied struggled to define core principles for working together, establish collective decision-making processes and devise transparent internal communication strategies. While the development of stronger mechanisms for assessing and ensuring accountability towards both partners and intended beneficiaries is clearly important if partnerships are to meet their intended objectives, the gap between the literature and the actual experience of ground-level implementation also points to the need for more rigorous investigation into the barriers that thwart such a process and how they might be overcome. We believe that a more informed understanding of the contextual reality in which partnerships operate is crucial to this.

Notes

¹ For example: the Department for International Development's White Paper (November 1997); the UN's Global Compact; the World Bank's Business Partners for Development (BPD) initiative (see Business Partners for Development 1998–2001 (2002); the International Business Leaders Forum as well as the global partnership promoted to achieve the Millennium Development Goals [*the World Bank Group, the Millennium Development Goals* (2004) <http://www.developmentgoals.org/>, accessed 20 June 2005].

² See United Nations Development Programme, 2002, Johannesburg Summit Promotes Partnerships for Development. (<http://www.undp.org/dpa/frontpage/archive/2002/september/5sept02/>, accessed 23 November 2004).

³ These phases have been broadly defined as *scoping; initiating; implementing; consolidating* and *sustaining/terminating*. When examining the partnerships it was considered appropriate and relevant to 'situate' them in relation to the phase and process that they were going through at the time. It was not our expectation that the partnerships would follow any particular 'progression model'. See Rein et al. (2005, p. 8) and Stott and Keatman (2005, p. 2).

⁴ The Partnership Forum, or Forum for Business Leaders and their Social Partners, is a cross-sector grouping that seeks to bring different sector organisations together in Zambia to address development challenges.

⁵ See Rein et al. (2005) for a more in-depth description of these partnerships.

⁶ The time-consuming nature of the work involved within each of these phases is often underestimated, particularly when it comes to consolidating relationships, structures and systems, and engaging partners and stakeholders. In many cases, the lack of adequate time to dedicate to particular phases combines with a lack of awareness both of the time-frames needed by different partners and of the factors creating pressures on them. Not surprisingly, this combination tends to have a detrimental effect on the ongoing effectiveness of the partnership.

⁷ See Rein et al. (2005, p. 52).

⁸ Drivers for this 'push' have been attributed to a necessary 'payback' by business for its role in supporting apartheid and to business conforming to growing national and international trends that push for such an approach. A more cynical argument is that such an interest is simply 'greenwashing' which distracts "the gullible into believing that business has a serious sustainability agenda" (Fig, (2005, p. 617). See also Discussion in Rein et al. (2005, p. 27).

⁹ Governmental pressure and policy might also be considered as important drivers for supporting the partnership with small-scale cane growers.

¹⁰ Nevertheless, we should also recognise that there were some similarities in South Africa and Zambia with regard to the key drivers behind the initiation of the partnerships studied. The role of government, both national and local, was crucial in a number of ways, especially in relation to explaining how difficulties can occur in the implementation of projects when partnerships are initiated from the top-down and undertaken on a large scale (The Mthashana FET College Partnership and Small-scale Farming Communities' Partnership). A related issue is that a number of organisations had been motivated (from within) or prompted (from without) to set up and engage in partnerships either in order to fill a 'gap' left open by government or to provide services and support in crisis situations – or both (Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnership in Zambia and Amangwe Village in South Africa). In South Africa and Zambia private sector involvement was augmented by the increasing presence of large multinational and trans-national companies (in the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS and the Sharing Responsibility for Higher Education Partnerships).

An international crisis was also a strong catalyst for collaboration and this was evidenced by the HIV/AIDS pandemic (in the Zambia Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS and Amangwe Village partnerships).

¹¹ See Rein et al. (2005, pp. 37–38).

¹² We have to acknowledge that it is far easier to make analytical and judgemental observations from the safe and comfortable seat of an outsider's perspective. The decision-maker working in the thick of events has no such luxury. Thinking fast, and on one's feet, is often the prime requirement, especially when measures need to be taken during a crisis.

¹³ "A partnership broker operates as an active go-between or intermediary between different organisations and sectors (public, private and civil society) that aim to collaborate as partners in a sustainable development initiative" (Tennyson 2005, p. 8).

¹⁴ See Rein et al. (2005, p. 3).

¹⁵ See Stott and Keatman (2005, p. 7, 2006, p. 21).

¹⁶ See Rein et al. (2005, p. 10). Kapoor (2004, p. 63) asserts that "Rhetorical devices – sensationalist arguments, technical or esoteric language, misrepresentation of evidence, loud or aggressive speech – can all unduly sway opinion or silence and intimidate participants..." Parpart indicates that women's schedules and agendas can also militate against their engagement (Parpart, 2001, p. 5).

¹⁷ See Rein et al. (2005, p. 43).

¹⁸ See for example Boserup (1970); Elson (1991); World Bank Group: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/MDG/gdmis.do> (accessed 4 May 2005); and United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE): WomenWatch (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>, accessed 4 May 2005).

¹⁹ It is also important to reinforce here that this requires considerable skill and the need for what, Parpart describes as, "techniques for analyzing the way global and national political and economic structures and practices intersect with and affect local power structures, particularly gender inequality" (Parpart, 2001, p. 6).

²⁰ United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)/World Health Organization (WHO), 2004, Women and Aids: An Extract from the AIDS Epidemic up date December 2004, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva, p. 1. (http://www.unaids.org/NetTools/Misc/DocInfo.aspx?href=http://gva-doc-owl/WEBcontent/Documents/pub/GCWA/JC986-EpiExtract_en.pdf, accessed 4 June 2005).

²¹ See World Bank Group: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger (<http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/MDG/gdmis.do>, accessed 4 May 2005).

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