

ADB

A NOTE ON PARTNERSHIPS

A. Enhancing Strategic Alliances

1. A partnership is a formal or informal agreement between two or more partners to work together to achieve common aims. Partnerships with multilateral and bilateral agencies and—possibly—private foundations can compensate for resources that fall far short of requirements. Partnerships with NGOs can improve the effectiveness, quality, and sustainability of ADB's operations.¹ However, ADB has not yet given the fullest consideration to the opportunities and constraints that are associated with the creation and running of partnerships. A frequent cliché relates to the need to avoid duplication and overlap. And, typically, extant memoranda of agreement are loosely worded.

1. Factors of Success

2. Creating and running partnerships is a long-term endeavor that demands vision, organization, and steadfastness. It is not a bolt-on or cosmetic activity. The factors of success include:

- (i) Agreement that a partnership is necessary.
- (ii) Esteem and trust between different interests.
- (iii) The leadership of a respected individual (or individuals).
- (iv) The commitment of key interests developed through a clear and open process.
- (v) The development of a shared vision of what might be achieved.
- (vi) Shared mandates or agendas.
- (vii) The development of compatible ways of working, which presupposes organizational flexibility.
- (viii) Good communication, perhaps with the help of facilitators.
- (ix) Collaborative decision-making, with a commitment to achieving consensus.
- (x) Effective organizational management.
- (xi) Time to build the partnership.

2. Factors of Failure

3. In opposition, the characteristics of failed attempts at running partnerships include:

- (i) A history of conflict among key interests.
- (ii) One partner manipulates or dominates.
- (iii) Unrealistic goals and objectives.
- (iv) Differences of philosophy and ways of working.
- (v) Poor communication.
- (vi) An unequal and unacceptable balance of power and control.
- (vii) An absence of common interests.
- (viii) Hidden or incompatible agendas.
- (ix) Financial and time commitments that outweigh potential benefits.

¹ NGOs can (i) lend skills and experience to plan, implement, and evaluate projects and programs, (ii) offer models for similar projects and programs that will have a wider scope, (iii) represent marginalized groups and communities, and (iv) provide alternative perspectives on development issues.

3. Guidelines for Managers

4. Partnerships can be very tightly bound or broadly defined. Notwithstanding, it is essential that they should deliver tangible benefits to the parties and that they be cost-effective. In general:

- (i) Informal partnerships work best when a project is specific and achievable.
- (ii) Where the project is complex and long term it may be necessary to create formal partnership structures for decision-making.
- (iii) It is not easy to tackle a wide range of issues through an informal partnership. It is better to address such matters through consultations.
- (iv) Simply setting up a partnership structure does not solve all problems. Partners still need to clarify the joint goal and objective, values, and interests, among others.
- (v) Partnerships do not have to be equal but the partners do need to feel that they are involved to an appropriate degree.

4. Guidelines for Project Officers

5. The following suggests how project officers can make a start:

- (i) Clarify the goal and objective behind forming a partnership.
- (ii) Identify the stakeholders and the key interests that can help or hinder the development of a project.
- (iii) Consider who one really needs as partner and who would really want to be a partner: some stakeholders may only want to be consulted.
- (iv) Before approaching potential partners, make sure that you have support and agreement within ADB about working with others.
- (v) Make informal contact with partners to understand their values and interests before formulating formal proposals.
- (vi) Communicate with your partners in a language that they will understand, focusing on what they may want to achieve.
- (vii) Plan the partnership process over time.
- (viii) Use a range of methods to involve people in workshop sessions as well as in formal meetings.
- (ix) Encourage ideas from partners because ownership leads to commitment.
- (x) Be trustworthy. One of the main barriers to creating and running successful partnerships lies in the attitudes that people bring to the process. To develop trust, it is necessary to draw out and deal with suspicions from past contacts; be open about what one is trying to achieve and about problems; be prepared to make mistakes and to admit to them; and deliver what one promises.

B. Creating and Running Partnerships

6. Since partnerships are formal or informal agreements to work together to achieve common aims, there can be no recipe for success. Creating and running partnerships takes time and is fraught with difficulties. Whatever the working arrangements, and whatever phase of the partnership one is in, there will be problems: people will not read documents or come to meetings; colleagues will fail to deliver on promises; different interest groups will have conflicting aims; deadlines will be missed; and the champions behind the partnership may become scapegoats. Notwithstanding, the need to enhance strategic alliances calls on project divisions and project officers to:

- (i) Advertise country strategies, programs, and details of lending and technical assistance projects through media such as the Internet, newsletters, and public meetings, and take care to give evidence of strategic integration.
- (ii) Map potential partners for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- (iii) Understand the priorities and skills of potential partners.
- (iv) Seek assistance from ADB's NGO Center and the Office of Cofinancing Operations.
- (v) Develop a partnership structure based on a clear purpose, trust, and agreement on responsibilities.
- (vi) Identify champions and communicate with them frequently.
- (vii) Build partner confidence through early involvement in project work.
- (viii) Accept that partnerships need long-term support and make resources available.
- (ix) Develop a "forward strategy" for partnerships.
- (x) Ensure appropriate monitoring of progress by the partnership.

7. From the foregoing, it should be realized that the existence of commonalities of interest and memoranda of understanding offers only the promise of partnership. The onus of enhancing strategic alliances is on project divisions and project officers to integrate partnerships in the Tonle Sap Initiative's operating outputs in the myriad ways that the multifarious nature of such associations dictates.