



## **Partnership Marker**

A partnership is an agreement to work collectively for an all-encompassing goal that will benefit the target recipients, bringing results that could not have been achieved by a single partner operating alone, while reducing duplication of efforts as well. And if successful, it enhances the impact and efficacy of action through combined efforts and more efficient use of resources. Effective partnerships promote innovation and are distinguished by a strong level of commitment from each partner. At the same time, it is essential that basic working parameters of the partners are developed and agreed upon before entering into the partnership; including resourcing, defining responsibilities, delegation of authority and the appropriation of funds.

National Humanitarian Network (NHN) as well as the International Humanitarian Organizations (IHOs) that are part of this partnership i.e. ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Concern, Oxfam and Tearfund, have been around long enough to know the basic rules of partnership. Building relationships based on trust and honesty is the foundation of any coalition. Partnerships are only successful if they are managed by people who recognize the significance of cultivating healthy working relationships with complete sincerity and commitment. In a large partnership such as the NHN and IHOs partnership, comprised of many relationships/organizations, it becomes essential to establish parameters and guidelines on how the partnership members will work together. Below are the basic characteristics that must be adopted for a valuable and lasting partnership to exist between NHN and IHOs:

### **1. Shared future vision**

Co-operation in a partnership is able to bring together different actors for collaborative action to achieve a certain set of agreed objectives. For this action to have a long lasting sustainable impact, it is essential that partners share a strategic vision, pursue compatible targets, and are equal members in the predetermined partnership structure. The notion of ownership is often used in this context as well, to describe the level of commitment within the partnership. Unless all partners believe in the same envisaged achievements and outcomes they will not have the same motivation and will not be able to overcome complications on the way to progress. Therefore, having the same purpose will help them face collective successes and failures as a group and develop a strong sense of ownership.

### **2. On-going commitment and clear expectations**

Whether it's strategic partnership between humanitarian organizations, or individual business partnership amongst businessmen, or partnerships between employers and employees, all alliances require careful design and ongoing commitment from all partners to be successful. Partnerships

that are committed to continuous improvement and exceptional performance have the ability to grow and deliver increasing value. The risks of increased conflicts or project deviations are higher when the level of commitment doesn't remain the same as at the start of the partnership. Past experiences show that often partnerships come to a sudden or early end, due to conflicts that arise from unclear expectations of each party's role and contribution over the life of the relationship, or any changes taking place over time without clear mutual agreement. It's essential for partners to take the time to explore their expectations and what the commitment level of each partner will be during the entire course of the partnership. Once this has been identified, document them for a clear course of action. Responsibilities and the nature of co-operation of each partner must also be clarified for a smooth relationship to exist.

### **3. Structured decision making processes**

At some point or the other, all partnerships are faced with decisions that might be taken collectively or individually depending on the process adopted. Therefore, separating basic administrative decisions from the management decisions right at the outset of the partnership, can help keep the decision making process effective and timely. For a structured collaboration, create a few categories of 'types of decisions', define who will be responsible and which decision making process will be used. All decisions aren't unanimous; therefore it is vital to document with clarity as to who has the authority to make decisions, approve decisions and notifications for a controlled decision making procedure to exist. Bringing in third parties to approve decisions is also one option that some partners use for the purpose of developing formal, but at the same time smooth procedures. Assigning these roles and responsibilities up front can help smooth the operating processes and avoid anomalies and costly delays.

### **4. Open and informed communication**

Defining the lines of communication amongst partners ensures that all partners are well-informed and involved at all times. It allows the partnership to take an inclusive approach and involves relevant actors in planning and implementation related matters. A good communication strategy is especially important when there is personnel turnover. But, this is not a single person job. So whenever there is a change of leadership or even change at mid-level, the entire communication should not stop. It should continue as if there has been no change. In fact multiple high-level interconnections among all the key players should exist for a good communication flow. There have to be enough people involved in the process for a continuous flow of information. This does not just allow smooth sharing of information but in fact builds trust upon each other and leaves little room for confusions and ambiguities. Once the communication links are in place, interactions can increase through monthly or weekly meetings for sharing purposes and for better informed strategy and decision making.

### **5. Defined process for conflict resolution and mediation**

A defined process for conflict resolution provides a guideline for handling situations that may invoke a clash of opinions. In a scenario where partners are not able to collaboratively reach a resolution, having a clear process for mediation can help diffuse an escalating conflict situation. A process that allows two or more levels of escalation provides opportunities to take time/space to

re-engage in a collaborative process before moving to irreparable stages such as litigation. Mediation, arbitration and collaborative processes are much more effective and practical, with significantly less expenses involved. Therefore, the use of these methods can help avoid unnecessary deviations and disputes and protect the partnership.

## **6. Regular review process**

With the constant changing socio-economic and political dynamics of the crisis inflicted communities, partnerships such as the NHN and IHOs must be committed to continuous review of process and strategies to be able to effectively navigate envisaged change. Regardless of well-laid plans and sincere intentions, unpredictable situations still transpire. A regular scheduled review process with a defined agenda must be planned, in order to catch issues early on and make necessary adjustments. Most organizations agree on a monthly or quarterly timeframe for conducting partnership reviews. NHN and IHOs may also decide a similar timeframe. The agenda could include a review of the previous quarter and the coming quarter action plan. External factors i.e. things happening outside the partnership that might affect the partnership either directly or through either party, must also be a point in discussion. Great partnerships can deliver amazing results that would be impossible otherwise, but they require careful management. These reviews are one way of doing so. Review meetings not only help develop better understanding of each other's on going work but also contribute in maintaining cordial relations between partners.

## **7. Dissolution plan**

Ending a partnership is very natural. It could happen due to various reasons, such as achievement of mutual objectives or it just didn't work out. It's always better to walk away from a partnership if it's no longer viable and regroup with new partners instead of forcing a relationship that's not working. Partnership is often based on a formal commitment that was agreed upon by two or more partners by signing a contract. Similarly, ending the partnership must also be done through a formal dissolution plan, in order to amicably bring the relationship to a closure. The dissolution plan will provide guidelines for formal processes including handing over of things, completion of tasks and all other formalities such as financial procedures, employee contracts, etc.

Partnerships having similar core values and ethics always last longer, with more chances of long term success and are able to avoid unnecessary conflicts with ease. But at the same time there needs to exist a certain degree of autonomy, flexibility and freedom within the partnership structure for the partners to operate devoid of any political influence and achievements of objectives more efficiently.