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PROMOTING EFFECTIVE NORTH – SOUTH NGO PARTNERSHIPS

A Comparative Study of 10 European NGOs

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACT	Action of Churches Together
APSO	Agency for Personnel Service Overseas (Ireland)
DCA	DanChurchAid
INTRAC	International NGO Training and Research Centre
MS	Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke (Danish Association for International Co-operation)
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGDO	Non-Governmental Development Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNGO	Northern Non-Governmental Organisation
SCF	Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom)
SNGO	Southern Non-Governmental Organisation
UK	United Kingdom

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

1. Introducing the NGO Partnership Debate

Partnerships between Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) based in the 'North' and the 'South' have become a key part of international development processes.¹ Whilst NGOs are drawn to the concept of partnership as an expression of solidarity that goes beyond financial aid, few development concepts have been the subject of such rigorous debate by outside commentators and also internally within NGOs themselves. In fact, much of what has been written on partnership has been a critique of the concept, comparing idealised notions of partnership with general statements about the failures of Northern NGOs to live up to those ideals. This has been fuelled by the fact that 'partnership' has become a **fashionable** term, adopted by all manner of government, civil society and even private sector organisations, to describe all manner of organisational relationships. Thus the debate has tended to become polarised between expressions of aspiration to partnership and its critique.

The critique of NGO partnerships has largely been based on **anecdotal** evidence, rather than an assessment of the potential benefits of partnership in relation to actual practice. Although there is now an extensive literature on the concept of partnership, much of this has focused on definitions, ideal types and suggestions on what Northern NGOs should be doing in order to promote effective relationships with their Southern partners. There has been little empirical research on what Northern NGOs actually mean by 'partnership', how they have tried to implement it in practice and the lessons that they have learnt from their many and varied relationships with Southern organisations. This research takes a very practical look at how Northern NGOs have put into practice the notion of partnership, particularly in their relationships with Southern NGOs.

The Potential Benefits of Partnerships

The starting point for this research has been to explore the purpose of partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs: **why is partnership seen to be necessary** and what **benefits** can it bring? Individual NGOs have access to distinct resources and may have very different organisational strengths and weaknesses. They must therefore interact with other NGOs whose particular organisational characteristics complement their own. Where a partnership leads to an optimum division of roles and responsibilities between different types of organisation, it can be said to increase the cost-effectiveness of NGO interventions (Fowler 2000). Such partnerships can potentially enhance the **legitimacy** and **transparency** of NGOs, helping to sustain complex programmes by encouraging a sense of shared ownership.

¹ The 'North' is broadly used to define countries that are net donors of development aid; the 'South' is broadly used to define those countries that are net recipients of development aid. The terms are used as shorthand, recognising the actual complexity of patterns of resource distribution between and within countries.

In the specific context of interactions between NGOs in the North and the South, partnerships supposedly bring benefits related to the **comparative advantages** of the two sets of organisations (Kazibwe 2000). These advantages relate to the proximity of NGOs to their respective constituencies. Thus, Northern NGOs are well placed to engage with the Northern donor public and to undertake policy influencing and advocacy. They are in a good position to interact with the official donor agencies due to their geographical proximity, shared cultural background, technical and financial resources. Northern NGOs also have the scope to be flexible and rapid in their funding, to be bold in risk-taking and to provide international experience and contacts (Moseley-Williams 1997).

On the other hand, it can be argued that Southern NGOs have the benefit of local knowledge and presence. Kazibwe (2000), for example, strikes a very positive note in terms of Southern NGOs and local contexts:

‘They understand the culture and norms of the people they are working with and also the socio-political context. A further advantage is that in times of emergencies, unlike expatriate staff who are evacuated, local NGO staff remain within the communities, sharing and suffering together.’ (Kazibwe 2000, p.7.)

In working together, Southern and Northern NGOs combine their strengths and act as a link between their respective constituencies, strengthening their legitimacy:

‘NGOs have the ability to make disparate constituencies accessible; they speak the language at both ends, and can represent one in terms of the other.’ (Craig and Porter, 1997.)

A further benefit of partnerships is their potential to go beyond time-bound and discrete interventions such as the classic development ‘project’. A partnership involves the co-operation between organisations; the **organisational dimension of the relationship** presents important opportunities for mutual organisational strengthening and capacity building (Fowler 2000). Given the inter-organisational nature of NGO partnerships, in principle a partnership is greater than the individual relationships between NGO staff. At the same time, strong partnerships are built on good relations between staff, with open dialogue and effective communication. It is this complex combination of the **organisational nature** of partnership with its intrinsically **relational dimension** that lies at the heart of the advantages of partnership. At its best, partnerships between NGOs in the North and South have the potential to be the practical expression of **solidarity** and **mutuality** between both organisations and individuals. At its worst, the term partnership is an over-used buzzword, devoid of meaning (Mohiddin 1999).

Why is the Concept of Partnership so Contested?

The debate on partnership has been dominated by criticism of NGOs and their failure to live up to the aspirations for ideal partnership based on solidarity and mutuality (see for example Nwamuo 2000, Muchunguzi and Milne 1997). There have been two sets of factors that have influenced this perspective. Firstly, there is the wider context of exploring the role of **civil society** actors within the development process. Since the

late 1980s, the move away from state-led paradigms of development has meant that development actors are no longer considered in isolation. As state actors have increasingly looked to working with other actors of civil society and the private sector, the notion of 'partnership' has become popular in the discourse of official agencies and government, particularly with the growing recognition of the need for institutional strengthening. The concept of partnership has been downgraded as a result of being too fashionable and overused.

It is therefore important to recognise that in fact **not all relationships are partnerships** (Fowler 1997). For example, contracting and networking are alternative forms of relationship between NGOs in the North and the South. Whilst this research does not specifically compare partnerships with relationships based on contracts or networking, it is worth mentioning these alternative models in order to underline the broad spectrum of NGO relationships.

Secondly, the relationship between Northern and Southern NGOs is often distorted by the funding process into a relationship of **donor-recipient**. Whilst many NGOs are drawn to the concept of partnership as an expression of solidarity that goes beyond financial aid flows, there is a contradiction between the implied mutuality and equality of the term 'partnership' and the fact that in reality partnerships are generally weighted in favour of the North, given its control over financial resources. The imbalance in resources often results in imbalances in partnerships:

'Experience shows that donors... have exhibited attitudes that projected them as 'senior partner'. As such, they determine priorities, budgets and activities and generally interfere with the autonomy of local institutions'. (Nwamuo 2000.)

In this study, a distinction is made between the term **partnership** as an often idealised concept, and the term **partnerships** to refer to NGO relationships in practice. Whereas partnership is used to denote an idealised relationship based on abstract qualities of equality and mutuality between NGOs, the term partnerships is used more broadly to cover a wider range of relationships.

2. The Aim of the Research

This research explores the way in which Northern NGOs approach partnership and how they internalise the concept in terms of policy, practice and organisational culture. However, the research has not attempted to assess NGOs' own notions of partnership against an idealised notion. Rather, the starting point has been to seek to understand and analyse the views and practices of Northern NGOs. **The aim of the study has been to look at how the NGOs define and manage partnership processes internally within their organisations.** Drawing on the literature on NGO partnerships, the study compares the management of partnership processes within 10 European NGOs. As such, the study compares organisational approaches to partnership; it does not, however, seek to assess the effectiveness of individual partnership relations *per se*.

The research addresses the following specific themes:

- **Contrasting Approaches to Partnership:** comparing the organisations' understanding of and approach to partnership, both in terms of current policy and future developments.
- **Contrasting Practice of Partnerships:** comparing organisational structures, processes and management of partnerships.
- **Accountability and Shared Governance:** comparing approaches to accountability, policy dialogue and shared decision-making.

The research concludes by looking at the main outcomes of establishing partnerships in practice and the lessons that emerge.

The Scope of the Study

It is important to acknowledge that the scope of this research has been to look at partnership from a Northern NGO perspective. It is anticipated that a Southern NGO perspective on partnership will be developed in a subsequent phase of the research. The survey of the literature has, nevertheless, incorporated a Southern perspective by assessing published Southern literature on NGO partnerships.

3. Methodology

The Origins of this Study

This study has been undertaken as part of the NGO Sector Analysis Research Programme. This Programme, which is implemented by the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC), explores the changing environment in which NGOs operate and the organisational implications thereof. The Programme is run with the active participation of ten European NGOs, who meet together twice a year to agree a common research agenda. The idea of exploring the nature of NGO partnerships emerged at the group meeting in September 1999. It was later agreed that the group itself would form the basis of a study into the nature of Northern NGO partnerships. The ten NGOs that participated in the study come from six countries:

APSO, Ireland
Concern Worldwide, Ireland
Cordaid, Netherlands
DanChurchAid, Denmark
MS Danish Volunteers, Denmark
Norwegian Church Aid, Norway
Novib, Netherlands
Rädda Barnen (Save the Children), Sweden
Redd Barna (Save the Children), Norway
Save the Children Fund, United Kingdom

It is recognised that this group of NGOs is not necessarily representative of European NGOs in any statistically significant way and, furthermore, there is considerable variety and heterogeneity even amongst European NGOs. However, the selection does represent a marked variety of different types of organisations across a wide spectrum of national contexts. The research has sought to document and compare how Northern NGOs have put into practice the concept of partnership. The study has therefore been undertaken as a contribution to the debate about effective and balanced NGO partnerships.

The Structure of the Study

The study began with an extensive literature review including published and unpublished bibliographical sources and material from the internet. This formed the basis for analysing the background context of NGO partnerships. The study of the ten European NGOs included the collection of primary written data, such as policy statements, guidelines and reports. This was complemented with a series of visits to the organisations between August and October 2000 to conduct interviews with staff. In each organisation, an attempt was made to interview members of staff with an in-depth knowledge of the organisation's policy as well as staff with direct experience of relating to Southern Partner NGOs. The interviews were supplemented by material from a questionnaire sent to staff who have direct contact with partners, for example programme officers. The data was compiled into a standardised organisational profile, enabling comparisons to be made between the ten NGOs. The comparisons were then analysed and the results are presented in this text.

'Partnerships' between NGOs are complex in that they have both an organisational and a relational dimension. There are inherent methodological problems in trying to isolate **individual** perceptions and behaviour from **organisational** perceptions and behaviour (Management Perspectives International, 1998). Whilst every effort has been made to document the organisation's practice of partnerships, it is recognised that much of the interview data draws heavily on individual staff perceptions of the partner relations. It is also important to recognise that the study was undertaken within a short time-scale of four months, which inevitably limited the depth of analysis of the individual organisations.

In total, interviews were conducted with some 40 staff members of the European NGOs involved in the study. In addition, INTRAC staff, associates and independent consultants contributed their perspectives. Since the study drew on the experience of practitioners, the material gathered gives a realistic perspective on both the potential and the difficulties of managing NGO partnerships in practice. A strength of the study was the engagement of the ten NGOs in the research process. The fact that the organisations themselves commissioned the study would suggest that there was a commitment to investing time and resources into researching this critical issue.

Chapter 2

REVIEWING THE CONCEPT OF PARTNERSHIP

1. Introduction

In spite of the widespread use of the term partnership in development circles, defining the concept has proven to be elusive. There is an inherent contradiction between the implied mutuality and equality of the term and the fact that in reality partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs are generally imbalanced in favour of the North, given its control over resources. In spite of generally good intentions, Northern NGOs have been reluctant to discuss openly the imbalance of power in their relations with Southern partners (James 2000).

As a starting point for the research, an extensive literature review was undertaken in order to synthesise key themes and principles for 'effective' partnership. The overview of the current literature is presented in this chapter, and includes both published and unpublished documents from both academic sources and practitioners. Most of the literature is based on **anecdotal evidence**, with some case studies of individual organisations' experiences. The literature is characterised by **idealised** notions and definitions of partnership, contrasted with the real difficulties of practising partnership in reality. The theme of contrasting ideal notions with reality provides a backdrop to the study of the ten European NGOs; there are strong echoes between the themes emerging in the literature review and those of the research findings. Co-operation between organisations is complex and diverse, and does not fit neatly into idealised notions of partnership.

2. Definitions of Partnership

At its most basic level, a partnership between organisations involves co-operation for a specific purpose in order to achieve common objectives (Mohiddin 1999). The idea of partnership draws heavily on the concept of a business partnership, which is a formal relationship between two or more parties based on shared goals, obligations and risks. In the context of international development, definitions of partnership draw on two main themes. The first theme focuses on the **exchange of resources** between organisations (Hudock 1999). This concept of partnership is related to how organisations acquire and use resources within a broader **organisational environment**:

Partnerships are strategic alliances that involve a sharing of resources and responsibility to achieve a common objective. (Caledon Institute of Social Policy 1998.)

The second theme relates to **trust-based definitions of NGO partnership**. These definitions relate to a more idealistic concept of 'authentic' partnership:

Authentic partnership implies... a joint commitment to long-term interaction, shared responsibility for achievement, reciprocal obligation, equality, mutuality and balance of power. (Fowler 2000c.)

In the specific context of development interventions, the trust-based notion of partnership between NGOs is seen as an integral part of participatory development processes. For example, Trocaire (1995) defines partnership in the context of **accompaniment** and enabling local communities to take control of their own development. Hoyer (1994) takes the notion of partnership as accompaniment further, and defines partnership as a means of enhancing the potential of each partner to meet the needs of the poor in a more efficient way. Partnership is related to the philosophy of accompaniment and the idea of being *with* the partner, based on the experience of the grassroots movements in Latin America, Asia and Africa. In comparison to the short-term nature of official development policies and funding towards Southern NGOs, Northern NGOs can establish longer-term relations: 'their value lies in long-term accompaniment rather than short-term funding of Southern NGOs' (INTRAC 1998).

Hoyer also makes the important point, often lost in the partnership debate, that in the context of social development the 'partnership model' is a **three-way relationship**. The first of the three partners is the grassroots organisation and the members of the community. The second is the local NGO and the third is the international institution for development co-operation, such as the Northern NGO or official donor. The grassroots organisation and community should not be the junior partner, but should hold the others to account. Partnerships between NGOs are seen as a means to achieving social development for marginalised groups of people. In fact, the extent to which partnership is a means to **good development practice** or an important process in and of itself is a constant tension that is expressed in both the literature and in the documented experience of NGOs (Muchunguzi and Milne, 1997).

In fact, Hoyer's argument can be extended further by looking at partnership as a **four-way relationship**. The first side of the equation, concentrating on the links between the (local) Southern NGO and its grassroots constituency, is evidently important. Equally important is the relationship between the Northern NGO partners and its own home constituency. The relationship between the Northern and Southern NGOs therefore acts as a channel between two distinct constituencies. If it were possible, Northern constituents may often prefer to dispense with an intermediary and have a direct link to the constituency in the South.

Typologies of Relationships

It must be recognised that any definition can only draw out general characteristics on the nature, purpose and aspiration of the concept of partnership. Partnerships, like relationships, are **unique** and develop in a range of different contexts. There can be no universal blueprint for NGO partnerships, and defining what does and does not constitute a partnership is highly subjective.

In addition to the many different definitions of partnership, some writers have attempted to explore the variety of NGO partner relationships by developing

typologies. A common theme is the contrast between **equal and imbalanced relationships**. For example, Mohiddin (1999) expresses this as a continuum of relationships, contrasting 'free' with 'imposed' partnership. Free partnership is created deliberately and is based on shared objectives and ownership. Imposed or engineered partnership, on the other hand, is imposed by one party where the objective is presented as beneficial to the other party.

Similarly, Hoyer (1994) draws the contrast between the ideal of mutual trust-based partnership and the reality of donor-recipient relationships, which result in paternalism. The imbalanced relationship of the Southern NGO depending financially on the Northern partner is likened to the interaction between child and parent (Fowler 1998). The theme of inequality that emerges from these typologies is related to the way in which **funding processes create power imbalances in the relationship**. The prevailing funding, evaluation, accountability and management systems result in Northern control over Southern NGOs (INTRAC 1998).

Fowler (2000b) has developed a typology that recognises the wide spectrum of NGO relationships. He distinguishes between authentic partnership and other types of NGO relationships based on the **quality** and **organisational breadth** of the relationship. Fowler suggests five categories of relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs:

- **partner**
- **institutional supporter**
- **programme supporter**
- **project funder**
- **development ally.**

The term 'partner' here implies the greatest breadth of organisational interaction, where there is mutual support for the identity and all aspects of each organisation. 'Development ally', at the other end of the spectrum, implies the lowest level of collaboration and is typically found in networks, coalitions, alliances and so forth. Unlike the other four categories, it does not imply financial transactions.

Leach (1995) takes this organisational perspective further in his typology. He identifies six models of collaboration between organisations based on **the degree of shared governance**:

- **Contracting:** the local NGO provides a well-defined package, determined by the Northern NGO, for payment.
- **Dependent franchising:** the local NGO acts as a field office, operationally independent but dependent on the Northern NGO for direction and funding.
- **Spin-off NGOs:** the dependent franchise or field office is expected to become independent over time.
- **Visionary patronage:** there is a shared vision and joint goals. The Southern NGO implements and the Northern NGO provides funding and other resources.
- **Collaborative operations:** there is shared decision-making. Joint programmes are implemented by the Southern NGO with support and funding from the Northern NGO.

- **Mutual governance:** each organisation has substantial decision-making power over policy and practice at both organisational and programme levels.

These typologies of partnership highlight the diversity in NGO relationships, and indeed the diversity of relationships that NGOs broadly refer to as ‘partnerships’. Co-operation between NGOs covers a wide spectrum of relationships from ‘authentic’ partnership based on solidarity, mutuality and a broad organisational relationship to narrower, funding-based relationships such as those of donor – recipient. The main criteria on which the typologies are based are the extent of **equality, mutuality and shared governance** in the relationship. What the typologies fail to include is the notion that an organisation may have a number of **different ‘types’** of relationship with various NGOs at the same time. Furthermore, inter-organisational relationships are not static but may **change over time**. At best, the typologies provide a basic tool for identifying broad types of NGO relationships.

3. The Dimensions of Partnership

The concept of partnership is complex and has many dimensions. It is the combination of the **organisational** nature of partnership with its intrinsically **relational** – almost personal – dimension that gives partnership its distinctive characteristics. Much of what has been written about partnership concentrates on the relational dimension, setting out **principles** for developing effective partnerships. Perhaps it is because partnership promises so much in relational terms that there has been such criticism of relationships that fall below the ideal of ‘authentic’ partnership. There is, nevertheless, a second group of partnership principles emerging within the literature, related to its organisational dimension; inevitably this looks more practically at the dynamics of interactions between organisations.

The Relational Dimension: Principles of Effective Partnership

There is a remarkable consensus amongst writers on the key ingredients for effective partner relationships: **mutuality; clearly defined expectations, rights and responsibilities; accountability and transparency**. Binding these together are the elusive principles of trust, respect, integrity, credibility and ownership (for example Fowler 1998; Mohiddin 1999). The principles are based on a concern for the relational and institutional sustainability of the relationship. In order to achieve and maintain effective partnership, deliberate and planned resources dedicated to promoting the relationship are needed. This is often in contradiction to the project- and funding- oriented systems of many NGO interactions (Yonekura 2000). As in any relationship, trust cannot be created; it is a product of living and working together, sharing expectations, values and commitment over a long period of time (Mohiddin 1999). Effective partnership is therefore **time-intensive**.

The concept of **mutuality** implies that in a partnership, both (or all) parties have a valuable contribution to make as equal, autonomous organisations. The principle of **interdependence** is important to the partnership, since its absence leads to dependency and patronage (Fowler 2000c). The power distortions in NGO partnerships that arise from the transfer of resources can undermine mutuality; this

means that partnerships need to compensate by respecting non-monetary contributions, especially the knowledge and expertise of the Southern partner (Muchunguzi and Milne 1997). Similarly, Lewis (1999) has argued that partnership is often viewed **passively** as a means of gaining access to resources; in fact for partnership to be effective it needs to be viewed as an **active, dynamic process**. In summary, for a partnership to be effective it is essential that both parties need the relationship: 'As long as one party is not fully convinced that the partnership is necessary... the effectiveness of the partnership will be compromised,' (Campbell 1998).

The importance of clearly defined **expectations, rights and responsibilities** is also seen as essential to effective partnership. Again, there is considerable consensus on this principle amongst writers (Kerr and Lohin 1998; Kikers 1999; Nwamuo 2000). Here, the process of negotiation between the parties is crucial as is the flexibility to adapt to different contexts. Where the Northern NGO comes with a pre-set or standard agreement to which the Southern NGO must sign up, this can undermine the partnership as the negotiation process is not open between equals.

Similarly, **accountability and transparency** are important for effective partnership. In practice, accountability is often one way from the Southern NGO to the Northern NGO. Where this is the case, the Northern NGO will tend to have a greater institutional knowledge of its Southern partner, leading to a lack of transparency (Fowler 1998). As mentioned above, development partnerships should ultimately be accountable to the grassroots organisations and members of the community (Hoyer 1994). In reality, the funding systems often skew accountability northwards; there is a need for deliberate mechanisms and processes to be developed to compensate for this tendency, enabling **mutual accountability** to take place.

Practical Tools of Partnerships

In addition to these relational principles, much has been written in terms of practical suggestions and **tools** for promoting effective partnership. The suggestions concerning good practice are built around the need for clarity: defining what kind of partnership, for what purpose and how it will operate in practice (Mohiddin 1999). A number of writers have referred to a **partnership agreement** or a **joint memorandum of understanding** (Bergdall 1997; Mintz, Hudson and Lebrun 1998). A written partnership agreement could cover the following areas:

- The **purpose** and **scope** of the partnership, setting measurable objectives.
- The **roles** and responsibilities; the benefits to each partner.
- Details of **implementation** and milestones.
- The **duration** of the partnership; the evaluation process.

The importance of negotiating a framework for **evaluation** right from the start of the relationship is recognised by many writers. Often, evaluation systems are developed around projects and do not expressly evaluate the partnership.

A final area of discussion concerns the **selection** of partners. Given that effective partnership relies so heavily on abstract, relational qualities such as trust and

credibility, identifying 'suitable' partners is a complex and risky process for both Northern and Southern NGOs. The proliferation of NGOs in recent years due to increased funding has, in some contexts, made the process of selection difficult as 'bogus' NGOs have appeared with the sole purpose of accessing funding. NGO **networks** and **associations** are becoming increasingly important ways of ascertaining the track record of local NGOs. Likewise, the need for **greater regulation** of Northern NGOs is also gaining momentum with discussion of NGO ombudsmen and codes of conduct (ONTRAC 2001). The South African National NGO Coalition, for example, has produced 'Guidelines for Good Practice for Northern NGOs Working in South Africa' (Development Update 2000).

The Organisational Dimension: Managing Effective Partnerships

Partnership involves a form of close co-operation between organisations. Beyond the relational nature of partnerships, therefore, lies the important question of how partnerships are **managed** internally by the parties concerned. As partnership is about sharing and increasing the value of resources, it is important that the partnership 'philosophy' is ingrained in **organisational culture** (Mintz, Hudson and Lebrun 1998). Partnership has the potential to go beyond resource transfers, and to be a means by which organisational strengthening and learning can take place for all parties. Furthermore, how the partnership is viewed in both partner organisations' decision-making structures will determine the nature of the partnership and the extent to which it reflects the principles of mutuality, clear definition, accountability and transparency. As described previously, Leach (1995) argues that the **degree of shared governance** between the partners determines the nature of the partnership.

In practice, the processes of partnership between Northern and Southern NGO have developed around **project funding** systems. **Organisational structures** closely reflect the needs of the funding, monitoring and evaluation systems; very rarely have they been developed around the needs of a specific partnership. A notable, documented exception from the literature is the case study of the Katalysis partnership (Brown 1990; Jones 1993). This partnership model was set up on a much closer inter-organisational co-operation to avoid the creation of dependency and in order to enhance the strength and capacity of the organisations concerned. It was originally set up as a partnership between the American NGO Katalysis, the local Honduran NGO ODEF (Organización de Desarrollo Empresarial Femenino) and the NGO BEST (Belize Enterprise for Sustained Development) who were responsible for dissemination of the learning from practice. The partnership emphasised the learning between all three organisations, and whilst respecting the autonomy of each organisation, staff and Board members participated in the decision making process concerning the partnership. The partnership was based on the following principles:

- Shared governance in relation to policy, programmes, fund-raising and field operations.
- Open communication and transparency.
- Joint decision-making, funding, programme work and planning.
- The joint selection of new partners.

Even within this framework, the partners found that there was a need to constantly monitor and transform the hierarchical patterns of North/South relations in order to achieve the commitment to equality in practice.

Other suggestions for the management of partnerships in the literature have also centred on the need for Southern NGOs' engagement in **decision-making** to be strengthened. There are a number of implications for Northern NGOs organisational practices. For example, Southern NGOs should be represented on the Boards of the Northern NGO counterparts and be involved in decisions concerning policy. Northern NGOs should consider strengthening the **financial independence** and long-term sustainability of the Southern NGO by supporting non-project costs, through core funding, institutional support and endowments. In order to build effective partnerships, it may be necessary for Northern NGOs to maintain a field presence, as suggested in the findings from the INTRAC study on 'Direct Funding from a Southern Perspective':

... the presence of a field office... was considered to be important. Southern NGOs like to know who they are dealing with and to have constant access to contact in donor organisations rather than receive occasional flying visits. (INTRAC 1998.)

Similarly, there are suggestions about the ways in which Southern NGOs can strengthen their **negotiating position** as equal partners. Fowler (1997) suggests the Southern NGOs should be more discriminating in whom they will engage in partnership, drawing up an organisational profile of the Northern NGO before entering a partnership. This would include details of the origins of the NGO, its history, constituency, details of where its funding comes from and the conditions on which it is based.

4. Southern Literature on the Concept of Partnership

There is limited published literature on the concept of partnership from a Southern perspective. The overwhelming view of the concept in the published Southern writing on the topic is one of deep **scepticism** in relation to the use of the word itself, the motives of Northern NGOs and agencies who adopt it, and of the possibilities of meaningful North – South partnership. Malhotra (1997) states that 'the term is yet another example of an import and imposition from the traditional North on the traditional South'. He sees the emergence of the term as a product of Northern NGOs' search for legitimacy and proof that they 'add value' in the face of increased direct funding of strong Southern NGOs. Some Southern NGOs reject the term as inappropriate or ambiguous (Muchunguzi and Milne 1995; Malhotra 1997) or as culturally unacceptable.

INTRAC's own research into 'Direct Funding from a Southern Perspective' came to the same conclusion:

'It became clear early in this study that there was a major difference in perception over the concept of partnership between NGOs in the South and the

North. Whilst Northerners espoused the rhetoric of partnership and claimed that strong partnerships distinguished them from official agencies, the same view was not always held by their partners in the South'. (INTRAC 1998, p.90.)

The Southern commentators point out that true partnership is a relationship of equals (Malhotra 1997), based on common objectives or shared interests (Mohiddin 1999), and raise the question of whether such a relationship can exist between donor and recipient organisations. The problematic nature of the **financial relationship** emerges as central to the issue of whether genuine partnership is possible. The financial input of the Northern 'partner' is often given a greater value than the non-monetary inputs (goods, services, and knowledge) provided by the Southern NGO (Muchunguzi and Milne 1995). It is used as a pretext for the donor agency to **impose** its own agendas on the activities of the recipient organisation, an approach which is seen as patronising and paternalistic (Centro de Investigación para la Acción Femenina in Theunis 1992).

There is a consensus that Northern NGOs attitudes, roles and capacities will need to change, but limited confidence in their ability to make the transition. Malhotra (1997:8) states, 'there does not appear to be anything in the NNGO make-up, funding structure... or reward and incentive systems that would ensure that changes enabling more genuine partnerships to emerge with SNGOs will actually occur without sustained, relentless pressure from the latter'. Reference is made to the 'charity mentality', (Eritrean Relief Organisation, in Theunis 1992) which gives rise to project rather than programme funding. The '**mentality of grant-worthiness**' (Obibi 1995) means that Southern NGOs design projects because they will attract funding and not primarily because of relevance to the community.

Despite uncertainty over the ability of Northern NGOs to change, within the literature there is a clear view of the sort of activities which would characterise authentic partnership. Malhotra (op cit.) identifies **awareness raising, constituency building** and education in the North, policy advocacy and dissemination of information as appropriate roles for Northern NGOs. The financial relationship is recognised as both essential for Southern NGO funding and a stumbling block to the creation of true partnership. Whilst questions of accountability, mutual trust, and longer-term programme funding are identified as important in managing the funding relationship, opinions are divided about the possibilities of creating equal partnerships. Mohiddin (op cit.) questions whether there can be equality and respect. On the other hand, the Latin American NGO Centro de Investigación Para la Acción Femenina (in Theunis 1992) has a straightforward view of the relationship: 'seeing donors not as philanthropists but as parties in an exchange, we regard the two sides involved as **entirely equal**: they provide the money, we provide hope, fresh outlooks and information, ethical rewards.'

5. Concluding Discussion

The literature on NGO partnerships concentrates almost exclusively on defining **types** of partnership and identifying **ideal principles** for effective partner relationships. This is true both for the Northern literature and for the limited published literature from a Southern perspective. Definitions of partnership occupy a spectrum from functional, resource-based definitions at one end, to idealistic, trust-based notions at the other end. The reality, as presented in the typologies of many writers, is a confused mixture of the two. The equality and mutuality of partnership is easily skewed by funding processes, whilst the scope for shared governance is limited by the unequal nature of North - South NGO partnerships.

The main weakness of the literature on partnership is its failure to move beyond identifying types of relationships and measuring these against ideal models. There is an almost complete absence – with a few exceptions – of real **case studies** of individual partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs and indeed of assessing different **models** of partnership in practice. In other words, the wealth of definitions of partnership contrasts with the lack of examples of **NGO experiences** of translating the concept into strategic interventions. The literature is generally strong on theory and weak on assessing the **state of current practice**. This is reflected in the tendency to categorise partnerships into broad types without taking into account the nuances of relationships between organisations. Furthermore, the **static** categorisation of partnership types fails to recognise that partnerships are built over time and go through processes of change.

An assumption that underlies the idealised concept of partnership is that only a relationship that is harmonious and balanced ‘makes the grade’ of partnership. In fact, there will always be differences and tensions in relationships between organisations and indeed within organisations. The key question for effective partnership is therefore not the extent to which differences and tensions exist, but rather the way in which they are handled.

Whilst there is a recognition of the importance of accountability in North – South NGO partnerships, the literature generally fails to relate the discussion of accountability to the question of NGOs’ **legitimacy** in their respective constituencies. This is a key question: what is the overall **purpose of partnerships** (or indeed relationships) between Northern and Southern NGOs and how have they come to be such a prevalent feature of NGO practice? In reality, NGO legitimacy must be rooted in local constituencies. Partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs are not confined to inter-organisational relations; ultimately, the NGOs act as a channel for interaction between geographically distinct constituencies. Maintaining their roots in and accountability to their **respective constituencies** is in fact the over-riding challenge that NGOs face in the practice of partnership. This theme will be explored further in the research findings.

Historically, development aid has been based on the transfer of resources between North and South, both within official and non-governmental channels. Relationships between NGOs in the North and the South are cross-cultural in nature, and partnerships in practice have become the bridge between the two. The mechanics of

these relationships between North and South are well established and form the substance of the debate on partnership. However, the broader question to consider is the future of the concept: will partnerships between NGOs in North and South continue to be a key element of development aid?

Chapter 3

RESEARCH FINDINGS

APPROACHES TO PARTNERSHIP

1. Introduction

Having considered the perspectives on NGO partnerships in the published literature, the research findings presented in this chapter assess the perspectives of Northern NGO practitioners. Perspectives on the concept of NGO partnership fall within a spectrum from **idealism**, to **realism** and finally to **pessimism**. In general terms, the literature on partnership displays idealism in relation to what partnership should be, and pessimism concerning actual partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs in practice. By contrast, the perspectives emerging from the interviews of Northern NGO staff are generally characterised by a mixture of **idealism** and **realism**. Staff spoke with idealism about the concept of partnership, however they defined it, and the importance of working with partners in the South. Nevertheless, experience from working in partnerships was talked about with a great deal of realism, openness and honesty concerning the difficulties and tensions inherent in practice. Differences in the management of partner relationships between the NGOs were also explored in depth, highlighting lessons learnt. The third set of perspectives presented in the research findings relates to how the Northern NGO staff thought that their Southern Partners viewed partnership. The views given were characterised by both **realism** and **pessimism**. Northern NGO staff recognised the difficulties of achieving equality in partner relations, and from their experience concluded that Southern Partners are generally dismissive or sceptical about the concept of partnership.

2. Contrasting Approaches to Partnership

The Concept of Partnership

Approaches to the concept of partnerships vary considerably both between NGOs and between individuals interviewed.² Almost all the staff interviewed considered working in some form of partnership with Southern development organisations as a cornerstone of development practice. They place a very high value on their working relationships with organisations in the South, and see them as integral to a **developmental approach**. Working with local organisations (not necessarily NGOs) is seen as the only way for Northern NGOs to work.

There was also considerable discussion over the use of the actual **term** ‘partnership’, and many recognise that the concept has been inflated and abused. Some individuals and indeed organisations prefer to use other terminology such as ‘**partner co-operation**’ or ‘**collaboration**’, but still value the practice of working with Southern organisations.

² In presenting the research findings, a distinction is made between NGOs’ policy statements and the perspectives of individual staff members. Inevitably, however, the distinction between organisational policy and personal opinion is not always clear-cut.

From the research interviews with NGO staff, the following recurrent themes emerged as underlying the importance of partnership as part of good development practice:

- **Local ownership:** partnership is about who owns the development process, enabling people to solve their own problems, ‘development experience by the people, for the people – not taken away by expatriates’ (interview at Redd Barna).
- **Sustainability:** sustainability is more likely to be achieved by local stakeholders.
- **Poverty reach:** local actors are better placed to reach the poorest and most marginalised groups.
- **Mutual benefits:** partnership is more than a client relationship; it is about a dialogue, cultural exchange, organisational renewal and strengthening.
- **Benefits for the North:** to learn from the South and access information for development education.
- **Benefits for the South:** capacity building and organisational strengthening. Working in partnership can strengthen civil society, particularly in contexts of change towards greater democratisation.

A further important theme that emerged was the **legitimacy** of NGOs, both in the North and South, and the need for NGOs to be rooted in and accountable to their local (or sectoral) **constituencies**. Working through or with local partners is an important aspect of legitimacy: ‘Partnership is about co-operation between legitimate organisations in North and South with a common will to change reality,’ (interview at Norwegian Church Aid). Legitimacy for both Northern and Southern NGOs is seen as being based in the strength of the organisation’s links to its constituencies.

The shift from direct implementation to working in partnerships with local organisations informed much of the discussion. About two thirds of the NGOs in the study have been operational at some point in the past (and a minority still are in some cases); only about one third of the NGOs have never been operational and have always worked with local partners. The **shift away from being operational** throughout the 1980s and 1990s was seen to have come about as a result of pressure from donors and from the South. Non-operational European NGOs therefore **need** partners in order to reach the poor and marginalised.

Policies and Definitions of Partnership

Policy definitions of partnership display a great deal of common ground. In general, the NGOs define partnership in terms of how they aspire to conduct partnership relationships:

Selected Definitions of Partnership

Concern Worldwide

'Partnership is defined as a mutually beneficial and long-term relationship between Concern and a local organisational entity which results in local communities taking more control of their own development, in improved and sustainable delivery of services to vulnerable individuals, households and groups and in increased livelihood security for the poorest.' Concern Worldwide (1999) *Concern Worldwide Draft Partnership Policy*. Draft Discussion Paper.

DanChurchAid

'A Partnership is a close two-way co-operation between DanChurchAid and an organisation. The relationship is long-term, based upon a mutual understanding of fellowship, shared values, shared responsibility, mutual respect, dialogue, trust and cultural understanding.' DanChurchAid (2000) *Turning a Rights Approach into Practice: Mode of Operation on Partnerships*. Draft.

MS

'A partnership for MS is a relationship in which two or more partners join resources to achieve a mutual goal. It is therefore essential that the partnerships are based upon common visions and on respect and knowledge of each other.' MS (1996) *MS in the South 1996 Revision*.

Norwegian Church Aid

'By partners Norwegian Church Aid means churches and church, religious and voluntary organisations with which Norwegian Church Aid has a long-term collaboration... Co-operation is characterised by mutual trust, respect, openness and responsibility.' Norwegian Church Aid (2000) *Global Strategic Plan 2000-2004*.

Novib

'Novib co-operates with local organisations working with and for the poor... The aim of this co-operation is to increase the capacity of local organisations to raise living standards sustainably and to empower them to overcome social and economic oppression'. Novib (1998) *The Functions, Values and Competencies of the Novib Project Department*.

Save the Children UK

'Partnership is founded on common values, goals and principles of working, and a willingness to work together for mutually agreed objectives. It is also dependent on an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of potential partners - both in government and among organisations in civil society.' Save the Children UK (1997) *Global Programme Strategy*. Working definition.

Redd Barna (Save the Children Norway)

‘Redd Barna shall engage in co-operation on the basis of a shared commitment to the best interest and the rights of the child. Co-operation shall be based on equity, mutual respect and understanding between the parties.’ Redd Barna (1999) *Redd Barna’s Policy on Co-operation with Partners*.

Overall, the definitions tend to lack clarity in relation to the overall purpose of engaging in partnership. Thus, the NGOs’ definitions of partnership reflect the same tendency as the published literature to focus on the nature of the partnership relationship in relation to an ideal notion of partnership. Less emphasis is placed on what partnership can **achieve** and why it is seen to be **necessary** within development practice. A noted difference between the definitions is the extent to which they emphasise a functional approach to partnership as a means of achieving development goals, and a broader view of partnership as an important process in its own right.

The most striking fact about the partnership policies and statements of the ten NGOs in the study is how **recent** they are. Most have been written in the last five years, even though many (particularly DanChurchAid, Novib and Cordaid) have been working mainly with local partners for several decades. Five NGOs have a written partnership policy containing a definition of partnership. The earliest written policy is MS’, dating to 1993; the other four are more recent, developed between 1997 and 2000. Out of the remaining five organisations, one has a working definition of partnership and three have recently written discussion papers. One organisation, Cordaid, is in the process of re-working its policies following a merger in January 2000 (Bilance, Memisa and Caritas Netherlands). This process involves reaching a joint agreement based on the understanding of the three NGOs.

When asked about the reason why partnership policies had only been developed recently, some of the NGO staff interviewed saw this as part of the general process of **developing systematic policies**. This is related to the pressure on NGOs to demonstrate their impact and become more professional. A second explanation that emerged amongst a number of NGOs is that there has been a trend to move away from a **project focus** to a **partner focus**. Even for NGOs who have always worked with local partners, the project (and funding) focus has dominated. Looking at development co-operation from a partner (organisational) focus has been more recent, with the move towards organisational strengthening. For the NGOs who have been operational, the development of written policies reflects a more dramatic shift in the way they work. It is also based on a movement away from isolated, small-scale projects to working towards an integrated strategy at country, regional and even international levels.

The Purpose of Partnership

A difference that emerged between the Northern NGOs relates to the debate over whether partnership is a **means to an end** or an **end in itself**. Some saw partnership quite strictly as a means of achieving their own organisation’s aims. Others saw partnership as important in and of itself, as part of the process of **capacity building** and strengthening civil society. For these organisations, partnership is central to their

approach. This was expressed most often in the Church-based organisations that had strong natural links to their Southern Partners, and in MS which has consciously decided to place partnership at the centre of its whole approach to working in the South. Perhaps not surprisingly, the NGOs that had more recently started working in partnerships had a more **functional** view of partnership, expressing the benefits more in terms of cost-effectiveness because they had not yet developed partnerships over a long period of time.

Discussion about the purpose of partnership was coloured by the contentious question of **agenda-setting**: while in principle partnership is based on shared aims and vision, in reality there is always compromise and often conflict when organisations work together. For organisations that have clearly defined **strategic goals**, partnership can be seen quite narrowly as a means of achieving those goals. This is particularly the case with the Save the Children organisations that have a clearly defined agenda based around child rights. Interviewees recognised the inherent risk of imposing their own agendas by pushing Partners too hard.

By contrast, the Church-related organisations have tended to be more **responsive** to their Southern Partners' agendas based on the assumption that 'the Partner knows best' (interview at DanChurchAid). The problem with this approach is that the ultimate impact can get lost and it can be unclear what the partnership is actually achieving. There is now a tendency within the Church-related organisations to move towards a more strategic – and assertive – approach.

Lastly, Novib has the most conscious response to the risk of imposing an agenda on Southern Partners. Novib sees its core function as strategic development funding to Partner organisations, but is wary of programmes becoming donor-driven. Novib therefore has a principle of not mixing dialogue with funding in order not to influence the Partner's agenda. For Novib, there is a recognition of the different roles it plays within the relationship: funder/adviser/expert. In practice, however, it has been difficult to keep the roles separate: for example, should technical advice be 'imposed' on the Partner?

NGO staff were asked to define the benefits to the Northern NGOs of working in partnership with Southern organisations. The following benefits were referred to:

- **Reciprocal, critical dialogue:** the cross-fertilisation of ideas, checks and balances in policy development; strengthened contextual analysis.
- **Development education:** working with partners provides important information for development education and solidarity work in home constituencies.
- **Achieving aims:** shared responsibilities; reaching mutually agreed goals.
- **Shared vision:** shared vision, values and trust in spite of differences
- **Sustainability:** partnership is a long-term sustainable way of improving the lives of the poor.
- **Strengthening civil society:** partnership can be a means of strengthening local organisations and capacity building.
- **Impact:** Long-term involvement is a prerequisite for long-term impact.
- **Flexibility:** partnership allows for flexible support.

- **Cost-effectiveness:** supporting local organisations is cost effective compared to running operational programmes, particularly where expatriates are involved.

3. Types of Partnerships

Almost all the NGOs in the study have a great **diversity** of practice when it comes to their relationships with different partners. Relationships are shaped by a complex mixture of factors, including the history of the organisation and its involvement in a particular country, the local context and the length of the relationship. Most staff interviewed (and indeed most of the NGOs they represent) distinguished between a **business relationship**, based solely around funding, and a **partnership** which aims to go beyond a business relationship and achieve greater quality and depth. All staff ascribed to working in partnership, at least in some of their relationships with Southern NGOs. In other words, by definition partnership involves a **quality** in the relationship. This does not necessarily imply that only 'true partnership' is of value; there was a general recognition of the inevitable diversity of relations. Furthermore, it was recognised that often a relationship would start out on a funding bases and mature into a partnership over time.

Achieving **quality** and **depth** in the relationship is intrinsically linked to the capacity of the two partners; a dependent relationship cannot therefore be termed a partnership. It is difficult – though not impossible – to achieve real partnership between organisations with very different capacities. This was reflected in people's perceptions of the extreme types of partner relationships:

- **Funding-based Differences in Relationships**

- (a) A relationship involving funding alone with no dialogue.
- (b) A partnership with no funding involved, based on a broader agenda involving dialogue, exchange visits, advocacy and lobbying. There is not always a clear distinction between this type of partnership and a network or alliance, where various organisations co-operate around a common cause.

- **Capacity-based Differences in Relationships**

- (a) A relationship with an organisation with little capacity, dependent on and requiring lots of support from the Northern partner, for example many community-based organisations.
- (b) A partnership with a strong, capable organisation which is autonomous, self-sustaining and contributes experience, for example national level organisations or provincial government.

- **Trust-based Differences in Relationships**

- (a) Control of the Southern partner by the Northern NGO.
- (b) Unconditional trust of the Southern partner by the Northern NGO.

The greatest optimism about the possibility of achieving equality and mutuality within partnership relationships was attributed to relationships based on **advocacy** and **policy dialogue**. Engagement in advocacy and policy dialogue was seen as bringing greater equity into the partnership relationship, generally because this was

based around sharing knowledge and expertise rather than funding. Nevertheless, a partnership may often start with funding and develop into policy dialogue over time.

Formal Classifications of Partnerships

Few of the NGOs have formal categories of relationships or classifications of partners, although most acknowledged that in practice there are different levels of depth in the relationships. Cordaid has drawn the clearest distinction in types of relationship with its Southern Partners:

- **Project Relation:** based on one-off funding interventions. There is no dialogue, but a straightforward project monitoring process.
- **Programme Relation:** a Project Relation may develop into a Programme Relation, based on longer-term financing. There is still little or no engagement on policy.
- **Partner Relation:** also known as ‘Key Partners’. These Partners may or may not implement programmes. However, they have an important role in discussing policy, particularly at regional and country strategy level.

MS draws a distinction between the **phases** of partnerships, recognising that relationships take time to develop. There are difference between organisations with whom MS has recently started to work, and Partners with whom MS has developed a formal partnership agreement. Some organisations such as DanChurchAid and Novib have experimented with the idea of introducing the notion of ‘main’ or ‘key’ Partners but found resistance amongst Southern Partners. In practice, there is a difference in the nature of the relationships; some are exclusively funding-based, whilst others are based on dialogue.

Types of Organisation and Organisational Capacity

The organisational capacity of the Southern partner is seen as a **prerequisite** to equitable partnership, and has a big influence on the selection of partners. Whilst the building of local organisational capacity is a key aspect of the partnership approach, the Northern NGO has to achieve a delicate **balance** between allocating resources and time to capacity building versus development activities. The approach to the selection of local partners is very organic, largely decided in response to the situation in the region concerned. The Northern NGOs are generally less concerned with what type of Southern organisation they work with than its capacity and structures.

This research set out initially to look at the relationship between Northern NGOs and their Southern **NGO** partners. However, most of the organisations in the study defined partnership to include other types of organisations as well. These are mainly civil society organisations including, for example, grassroots organisations, community-based organisations, trade unions, churches and professional organisations. A few NGOs include relationships with local and even national governments, however questioned whether these could really be considered ‘partnerships’. Some people mentioned their Northern constituencies, particularly their supporter base, as partners.

For example, as a Catholic agency Cordaid favours working with Catholic Churches and organisations. However, they will also work with non-Church Partners where these are seen to work to high standards. Similarly, Norwegian Church Aid and DanChurchAid favour working through ecumenical networks, but will also work with secular organisations such as local NGOs and human rights organisations where this is seen to be more appropriate. The three Save the Children NGOs work with the widest range of organisations; the distinction made by staff interviewed between partnership and networking relationships was sometimes blurred.

It is apparent that for Northern NGOs, there are clearly differences between working with small, local level organisations with limited capacity and larger, more experienced organisations with greater capacity. The organisational capacity of the Southern partner is perhaps the greatest single determining factor in the nature of the relationship that develops. Balanced partnership is most likely to be achieved between autonomous organisations of **similar** size and capacity, where funding does not dominate the relationship.

4. Principles of Effective Partnerships

Only a minority of the NGOs in this study have clearly defined principles for partner relationships, and many expressed difficulties in implementing these in practice. However, from the interviews with staff there was a great deal of similarity in experiences and opinions on what makes an 'effective' partnership and what are the barriers. Not surprisingly, factors that make for effective partnerships can also be barriers where the factors are absent or skewed in practice.

Organisational Principles

Few of the NGOs have formalised, clearly defined principles for partnerships at a policy or procedural level. Many of the organisations do have general statements on partnerships within policy documents such as mission or value statements. However, principles for the relationship are often seen to be part of the organisation's **culture**, with significant differences in approach between individual members of staff and between different regions or countries. This reflects, to a certain extent, the fact that **project funding** is a core activity and has traditionally been a central focus; funding systems and procedures are almost always far more systematised than partnership processes.

In DanChurchAid, for example, the principles of partnership tend to be based on organisational culture and traditions. There are some broad principles in the document 'Turning a Rights Approach into Practice: The Mode of Operation on Partnership' (2000): 'DanChurchAid has worked with partnerships for 75 years - from the beginning it has been a special concern to build relationships based upon equality, mutual respect, cultural understanding and long-term commitment.' Similarly, Save the Children Fund UK does not have particular principles for partner relationships, but has some general principles based on the organisation's values: 'Striving - within the limits set by SCF's role as a donor agency - to embody a spirit of equality,

transparency, co-operation, openness and mutual respect in all of the Fund's relations with its Partners,' ('Partnership in South Asia' 1994).

By contrast, Novib sets out principles for partnerships quite clearly in the document 'The Functions, Values and Competencies of the Novib Project Department' (1998):

- Clear **communication** of policies and expectations
- **Flexibility** in accessing funding applications, depending on the organisation
- **Dialogue** with the Partner and spending time in field visits
- Undertake to be a **good donor** by timely transfer of funds and co-ordination with other donors
- Recognition of the need for **checks** and **balances** in the donor-recipient relationship
- **Core values:** respect for diversity, learning from others
- **Autonomy:** respect for self-governance together with interdependence
- **Mutual accountability**
- **Consultative decision-making**
- **Transparency.**

Similarly, Redd Barna has specific 'Working Principles' in its policy on Partnership. These are based around:

- Shared vision and values
- Common goals
- Mutual learning and recognition
- Flexibility and local adjustment
- Long-term perspective
- Transparency and trust
- Donor co-ordination
- Party-political neutrality.

Out of all the ten organisations, MS has the most developed principles for partnership. The principles and phases of partnership development are expressed thoroughly and clearly in the 'Partnership in Development Toolkit' (1997):

'A partnership is not a donor-receiver relationship. The relationship should be as equal as possible to preserve the dignity and independence of each Partner. It is crucial, therefore, that it includes resources from and benefits for both (all Partners). It is equally crucial that either Partner respects the political and cultural values of the other – they should be open for discussion, however. Partnership is about influencing and being influenced.' (p.10)

MS recognises that the development of partnerships is resource intensive. The principles are that partnerships should be mutual, expectations of each Partner should be clearly defined, and that MS also needs to provide information to Partners. Both parties are required to be transparent and accountable.

The obligations of both in the partnership are outlined as follows:

- **Partners in the South:** will gain access to networks, training, technical and financial support. They are responsible for implementation of projects and accounting, and for contributing information and solidarity work.
- **MS** will gain inputs to its policies both in relation to the South and lobbying in Denmark, and a realistic representation of development realities. MS' responsibilities are to be trustworthy, to have professional staff with appropriate experience and preparation and provide training and other inputs to support the partnership.

On the basis of this evidence, there is a need for principles of partnerships to be developed and applied more **systematically** within all Northern NGOs. The wealth of experience gained from working with Southern partners has not been translated into organisation-wide principles of practice in the majority of cases.

Effective Partnerships

Establishing principles for partnerships is of course only half the story; making partnerships work 'effectively' is another matter. Clearly a partnership that exists solely on paper is of little value. Partnership has to be based on effective relationships between two organisations. The effectiveness of the partnership, therefore, is an important issue. In this respect, there are three key aspects of effectiveness: the effectiveness of the work carried out, the quality of the relationship and clarity about the purpose of the relationship.

- **The Effectiveness of the Work**

The effectiveness of the partnership relates to the effectiveness of work carried out, also described as **mutual delivery** by both partners. From a Northern NGO perspective, the capacity, expertise and confidence of the implementing partner is therefore crucial. An 'effective partner' achieves results and impact. The credibility of the partner is important, for example whether or not it is based in and accountable to the local constituency.

- **The Quality of the Relationship**

Mutuality, shared values and vision are important, as are a culture of working together, respect and understanding for each other's roles and joint problem solving. Both partners have to acknowledge that they need each other. Key ingredients are **transparency, trust** and **openness**. In order to achieve mutuality, good and frequent communication is necessary. Communication needs to be wider than just the funding relationship, sharing information and organisational experiences. A long-term perspective, with frequent contacts, visits and time are all-important. Personal relationships or 'professional friendships' play an important role in developing mutual trust and understanding the totality of the other's situation; there is a need for people of **integrity** on both sides. Norwegian Church Aid and DanChurchAid, for example, are reducing their number of Partners in order to have deeper partnerships, recognising that there is a limit to the number of close partnerships that staff can develop.

- **Clarity about the Purpose of the Relationship**

Mutual clarity about what both parties want to achieve is very important: 'Establish the **boundaries** of the relationship from the beginning,' (interview at Redd Barna). Clarity can be achieved through discussions with the partner, agreeing jointly on accountability systems. It is important to acknowledge the **different levels** of relationship. For example, a 'business' (funding only) relationship can also be effective if it is based on clear goals. On the other hand, policy partnerships involving no money can also be very effective.

5. The Limits to Partnerships

Inevitably, a qualitative relationship such as 'partnership' has its limitations. Partnerships are not easy, and attempts to establish effective partnership face a range of cultural, political and social **barriers**. Amongst NGO practitioners and researchers alike, there is consensus that the main barrier in North – South NGO partnerships relates to finance and the role of Northern NGOs as funders. This theme therefore forms the main substance of the discussion of the limits to partnership. Nevertheless, other more subtle factors also emerged.

Finance and the Role of the Donor

'...Although we have been using the word partnership for a long time ... project implementation has been the main thrust, and funding the main link. And with one partner giving funds and another receiving them, all the inequalities enter the relationship.' (Redd Barna-Asia 1997.)

The NGO staff interviewed recognised that NGO partnerships are seriously limited by **power** and **money**. In this regard, there is a greater degree of realism amongst NGO practitioners than is suggested by the literature. It is difficult for Northern NGOs to avoid exerting their power in order to force the partner to work to a particular agenda; priorities between the partners are not always the same. The **dependence** of Southern NGOs on outside funding is a barrier, and there is always the fear that the relationship will revert to that of client when money is involved. Partnership is a term which masks the inherent inequalities and tensions in the donor-recipient relationship:

'There is always a risk that the funding relationship will skew the partnership and turn it into a client relationship; this is a built-in danger of financial domination distorting the relations'. (Interview, Cordaid.)

'Novib is sensitive to situations in which our power as a donor skews the partner relationship'. (Novib 1998.)

There is a need, therefore, to build in checks and balances in the relationship. Local Partners have to be strong in order to have an equitable partnerships, and both Partners need to take steps to achieve that. Some organisations have recognised this within their policy statements on partnership. For example, in order to discourage dependence, Rädda Barnen only funds 49% of project costs.

Funding Processes and Distorted Accountability

Finance acts as a barrier on both sides of partnerships. For the NGOs in the study the relationships are skewed by reporting requirements to back donors. For their Southern Partners, this detracts from accountability to local constituencies. The continued dependence for finance from international organisations means that the manipulation of agendas can take place; there is a tendency to follow **fashions in funding** and a risk of **distance** from local constituencies. The funding system also consumes disproportionate amounts of energy and tends to divert energy from the other areas of co-operation.

The strict reporting requirements of government donors, in terms of disproportionately emphasising the **control function** of the Northern ‘intermediary’ NGO, were mentioned as a problem on numerous occasions. Dependence on government donors was also seen as a limit to the freedom of the NGOs to engage in partnership. The **dependency relationship of the NGOs** on government donors limits their work; for example, some organisations have ended partnerships in various regions following cuts in government funding.

Organisational Capacity Limits

The theme of Southern partner capacity has already been discussed in detail above. However, there are a number of specific points on how partner capacity can limit the development of an effective partnership. There is an inherent risk that the Northern NGO can have an ‘**extracting**’ role, placing heavy demands for information on the partner. Where the partner is not able to deliver the reports and financial accounts to meet the standards of the back donors, this limits effectiveness; technical capacity may also be limited. This does not necessarily mean the Northern NGO is not serious about the concept of partnership, but rather is a reflection of the inherent tensions between the partner relationship and the demands of funding systems. Only strong, Southern partners with a **clear identity** can withstand the risk of becoming **donor-driven**. There can be a **capacity mismatch** between small, Southern partner organisations and large Northern NGOs; partnership dialogue is much easier to achieve between organisations of similar size and capacity.

There is, of course, the other side of the coin. This refers to the **capacity limits** of Northern NGOs themselves in relation to their ability to engage in effective partnerships. In this respect, there are a number of critical issues:

- **The number and depth of partnerships**

Northern NGOs have to balance the need to spend funds with the development of close partnerships. It is not possible to develop strong partnerships with all Southern NGOs, and some are actively reducing their number of partners. There is no easy way of calculating the optimum number of partners.

- **Lack of co-ordination**

This is a particularly critical issue in emergencies, but also occurs in other contexts. One extreme was mentioned of an Ethiopian organisation that received funding from

forty different Northern organisations, each of which wanted to develop a 'partnership', and each of which had different requirements and ways of working. Greater efforts are needed to ensure that co-ordination with other agencies is established from the beginning.

- **Money as 'taboo'**

For the Church-based NGOs in particular, the principles of sharing resources and close partner relationships can make talking about funding 'taboo' and generate unrealistic expectations about access to resources. Where standards are changed, this can lead to a breakdown in relationships, particularly in situations where the Northern NGO previously offered money with few strings attached.

- **Being unable to deliver**

When the NGO is unable to keep its promises concerning funds, development workers, or other resources, this can cause problems of credibility.

- **High staff turnover in Northern NGOs**

This is often a complaint from Southern NGOs, as it involves building relationships with new members of staff all over again. Turnover can be a problem for Southern Partners too, although this was not seen as such a problem by the NGOs in the study.

- **Organisational barriers**

Within the organisation, there may be conflicts over different goals; some staff may prioritise time and energy for developing the partnership relationship, whilst others see a pressure to deliver results in terms of measurable outputs.

- **Relational barriers**

Lack of trust, suspicion and not understanding the other's context can be barriers, as can distance and not dealing with crises. Partnership takes time and the relationship needs to be established gradually; the availability of funding can put pressure on this process.

For NGOs making a **transition** from programme implementation to working with local partners, there are some specific problems that emerge. There is a critical transition process for staff from being **managers** to being **facilitators**. The desire to control programmes can still dominate; time is needed in order to build up trust and confidence, understand organisations and the nuances of how they work. It takes time to build a culture of working with partners, working out what level of detail is required in discussions.

Perceptions of Southern Partners' Attitudes to Partnership

Within the time constraints of the study, it was not possible to interview the Southern Partners directly. We were, however, able to discuss the subject with the NGO staff in terms of how they **perceive** their Southern Partner's attitudes to the notion of partnership. Inevitably, there is a great diversity of opinions and a 'mosaic of attitudes'. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, perceptions varied between realism and pessimism.

In general the NGO staff felt that expectations are changing: Southern Partners want **less domination** by Northern NGOs and for their knowledge and skills to be recognised. Even where partnership is seen as positive, Southern Partners do not want to be controlled. Examples were also given of differences between regions, with Latin American Partners generally seen to be the most vocal in expressing their views, particularly that partnership should be more equal. Some Southern Partners think that partnership is difficult, and do not believe in true partnership because of the financial relationship and the relative **powerful/weak** positions of the two Partners. There is too little attention paid to the mutual benefits and the totality of the Partners' respective contributions.

Some Southern Partners fear becoming too **dependent** on a few organisations, which would also be problematic for their local accountability. This leads to the dilemma of how far Partners are independent; do Southern Partners end up listening more to the Northern NGO than to their local constituencies? One interviewee felt that partnership can only work where the Southern Partner is in the **driving seat**, defining its own criteria for co-operation with Northern NGOs; furthermore, Southern Partners need to become more assertive.

The question of achieving **equality** in partnership has been addressed in a number of organisational reviews and assessments. These will be discussed further in Chapter 4, Section 4 'Accountability and Shared Governance'. For the time being, it is worth mentioning two examples of how the Southern Partners' perceived their relationship with their Northern Partner.

In the MS Uganda Country Programme Review, MS asked Ugandan Partners whether they thought the relationship with them was equal. It was found to be an impossible question: how can you be equal when only one partner has the resources? This is a problem both in philosophical and practical terms. MS is also seen as a donor and powerful, and therefore there is not an equal balance. The Ugandan Partners felt that in practice MS decides the financial framework, but the Partners themselves decide how to operate within that framework. **Size** and **dependence** were the greatest determinants in the level of equality within the relationship. The bigger organisations, which were less dependent on MS, felt a greater degree of equality. Sometimes Partners value MS support in crisis management, both financially and morally, particularly when they are operating in situations of instability.

Novib commissioned an independent report of Partners' attitudes as part of its Quality Review Process (BART 1997). Most Partners see Novib primarily as a donor, although they also see Novib as more than just a donor. For example, Novib supports Partners with organisational development and overcoming problems; it is a Partner in good and bad times. Equality in partnership comes out more where Novib and the Partner are involved in **advocacy**, rather than in poverty alleviation where the donor role tends to dominate through the funding process. Partners generally wanted a **closer** relationship of dialogue.

In conclusion, for some Southern NGOs, the **partnership metaphor** can be a disguise for a financial relationship. The indications of this can be when the Southern NGO appears to be chasing many donors. By contrast, some Partners are more

interested in the quality of the dialogue. The concept of partnership can be easily abused – on both sides.

6. Partnerships and the Changing Role of Northern NGOs

Funding trends have created considerable soul-searching for Northern NGOs in recent years. In many European countries, the funding base of NGOs has faced uncertainty with the increase in the **direct funding** of Southern NGOs by bilateral and multilateral agencies (INTRAC 1998). This has created particular concerns for some of the NGOs in the study who are highly dependent on funding from government sources. The continued increase in direct funding will have a considerable impact on them, as more funding is channelled directly to Southern civil society organisations. Northern NGOs are under pressure to **redefine their role** in this context, as they reassess what they can offer as professional organisations, beyond being intermediaries for government finance. They may, for example, become facilitators of direct links between donors (individuals or groups) and Southern NGOs. They will have to be flexible, and not restrict themselves to traditional types of partnerships.

In relation to their Southern Partners, a number of Northern NGOs have plans to give greater **definition** to their concept of partnership. Cordaid, for example, is working to come up with a more specific definition of partnership and clear expectations, although it does not expect its role to change. Similarly, DanChurchAid is currently refining its concept of and approach to partnership, introducing rights and responsibilities through contracts. It is taking on board Southern Partners' perspectives and wants to engage in more meaningful partnership with close involvement.

Several NGOs expressed a desire to work more on **advocacy**, as they move away from service delivery towards a rights-based approach. A spin-off of the change in emphasis could be that policy dialogue brings closer relationships. Some NGOs will deliberately look for new partners who already have expertise in advocacy and a rights approach to development.

A further influence on some of the NGOs in the study will be the effects of increasing integration into **international alliances**. For example, Novib expects the harmonisation process within Oxfam International to influence its policies on partnership. Similarly, within the Save the Children Alliance the organisations will co-operate more closely, including at country level in the South. For the Save the Children organisations, the distinction between partnerships, networks and alliances is becoming less clear-cut as they work together with a wide variety of actors in achieving common goals.

The Future of Partnership

When asked to speculate about the future of the concept of partnership, NGO staff showed a degree of realism, although most were fairly optimistic. Only a few were pessimistic about the prospects for partnership. It was generally felt that partnership is becoming more equal, within the **constraints** of the funding system. There was also optimism that partnership is moving back towards a notion of **solidarity**; partnership is about being together in times of problems and helping the partner organisation to succeed.

The move towards a **partner focus** is likely to continue and to become more important, with the continued emphasis away from piecemeal projects and the orientation towards results-oriented development. **Increased ownership** from the South will lead to increasing claims on Northern NGOs; partners will make demands for mutuality. They will also want to lobby and advocate directly in the North, rather than being 'represented' by Northern NGOs. The traditional North/South geographical divide is also breaking down and this is changing partner relationships. For example, the question of refugees and migration is a contentious topic at the moment and there is debate amongst Northern NGOs about the extent to which they should work on these issues.

Southern partners who have considerable expertise will increasingly be in a position to **choose** which Northern partners to work with and on what conditions. However, the negative side of this is that the trends towards professionalism and setting standards may lead to a risk of distance and elitism as 'strong' partners in the South becoming distanced from the grassroots.

7. Concluding Discussion

Partnership in practice is difficult because of the intrinsic problems that organisations face in working together in close collaboration. The cultural, geographical, financial and capacity differences between European NGOs and Southern partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America make partnership between NGOs from diverse geographical areas more complex. Working out complementarities is a challenge which depends on staff competence and vision, the capacity of the Southern partners, and finding out where the Northern and Southern agendas can meet. It is important to work towards creating a **culture of negotiation** which draws on the positive dynamic created by the differences between organisations and their contrasting agendas. Partnership is about organisations giving up something of their own **identity**. Sometimes Northern NGOs expect Southern partners to give up their identity but are not willing to go so far themselves. Partnership is about give and take; both partners need to be heard on both partners' issues.

The '**old model**' of partnership based on project funding has its limits, and it seems that it will only work where the Southern partner is in the **driving seat**, setting the agenda and defining the planning and reporting processes. However, it is difficult to see an immediate alternative to current models. Partnership can only work as Southern partners become stronger in articulating their needs and what they can offer.

New models of partnership are starting to emerge as a departure from the old model; here partnerships are based on **policy dialogue** between **strong, autonomous** organisations. These are often more fluid alliances around specific purposes, with smaller amounts of funding involved. These new forms of partnership look set to increase, with the trend amongst NGOs generally to move away from service delivery and towards advocacy and policy influencing.

Northern NGOs face a number of **key issues** in the development and management of their partnerships with Southern organisations:

- **Moving from a project to a partner focus:** the benefits of partnerships are much broader than the project funding system, but funding tends to dominate. Northern NGOs need to find ways of safeguarding the central purpose of their partner relationships.
- **Being realistic about partnerships:** ‘authentic’, mutual partnership depends on the partner organisations being similar in their capacity. Northern NGOs need to develop greater clarity in identifying different types and phases of relationships with Southern partners.
- **Agenda setting:** given their power as funders, Northern NGOs should guard against the tendency to impose agendas on Southern partners. This could be achieved through more equitable negotiation processes.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

THE PRACTICE OF PARTNERSHIPS

1. Introduction

It is evident that the approach to partnership amongst the ten European NGOs studied has been undergoing significant changes throughout the 1990s. Some NGOs, such as Norwegian Church Aid and Redd Barna, have changed from being largely **operational** to working through local Partners, and this shift has often been dramatic. For others such as Save the Children UK and Rädda Barnen the change away from being operational has been more gradual. Two of the NGOs, APSO and Concern Worldwide, are at the stage of debating whether they should shift their emphasis to working with local Partners. For these organisations, the debate has benefited from the experience of other NGOs and a certain degree of realism:

Concern acknowledges that relationships between organisations can operate on a number of different levels and it is up to the organisations to choose and negotiate the nature and level of their co-operation... Almost all of the literature available on partnering experiences has underlined the importance of understanding the elements which make up organisations and how they hang together. (Concern Worldwide 1999.)

For those NGOs who have had a long tradition of working in partnerships, there have nevertheless also been changes. For some, this has been related to processes of **formalising** policies and approaches. Producing guidelines and frameworks for partnerships has not been easy, and a common conclusion expressed was that it is easier to define the form of the relationship than the content. Some organisations such as DanChurchAid, Cordaid, Norwegian Church Aid and Novib have had considerable experience of **reducing their numbers** of Partners in recent years, either through a conscious decision to develop closer relationships with fewer Partners or due to externally imposed funding restrictions. These processes have also been problematic, as ending a partnership can be a painful process.

2. Organisational Structures and the Management of Partner Relationships

It was beyond the scope of the study to assess in any detail the relative effectiveness of the different organisational structures that the NGOs have set up to manage partnerships. Furthermore, it should be recognised that the study was carried out in relation to overall policies and processes, based on interviews with staff at head offices and a review of written documents. It has not been possible, therefore, to look in detail at variations in structures and ways of relating to partners in-country. Nevertheless, there are some general conclusions which can be made in relation to overall structures and the management of partnerships by the NGOs.

The Role of Field (Country Programme) Offices

There are many similarities in the staffing structures of the ten NGOs. The management of Partner relationships is generally located within a clearly defined Regional and Country Programme structure. The management processes are closely aligned to **funding processes**, underlining the fact that working with local Partners essentially revolves around funding. Generally, there are Country Programme Officers or Desk Officers who relate directly to Partners in a given country or region. These officers work within country or regional teams, and the processes for decision-making concerning both partnerships and funding generally have a clearly defined, hierarchical structure. For example, funding processes are structured in such a way that there is a degree of decision-making taking place at country/programme level; expenditures above a certain level are assessed by more senior members of staff and often by a committee.

The main difference between the NGOs relates to **where** partnerships are managed and the related question of where funding and strategic decisions are made. These differences reflect the extent to which organisations have been operational in the past. In this respect there are **two main groups**. On the one hand are the NGOs who have not been operational; for these NGOs, Partner relationships have traditionally been managed from the **Head Office**, with no Country or Regional Offices; for example, Cordaid, Novib and DanChurchAid. Interestingly, both Cordaid and DanChurchAid have recently started establishing a pilot regional presence, in order to develop closer contact with their Partners and a better understanding of the local context. Within DanChurchAid, there is now a mixture of partnerships being managed directly from Denmark and from the regional offices.

On the other hand, all of the other NGOs have **Country** and/or **Regional Offices**. For most, Country Offices have emerged from a background of being 'implementors' of development programmes. The Country Offices are generally staffed by one or two expatriates, usually at senior level, together with national staff. The Country Programme Officers are responsible for relationships with local and national Partners. The Country Offices vary in the extent to which they are **autonomous**; for many of the organisations there is a hierarchical level of decision making with certain decisions taken in the head office.

MS, for example, has Country Programme Teams responsible for developing partnerships. The Country Co-ordinator is usually Danish; the Programme Officers are nationals and have direct contact with the Partners. They select and maintain partnerships, developing a balance of different types of Partner in relation to the local context. However, certain levels of funding decisions are taken back in Copenhagen through a Committee Structure. Similarly, Save the Children UK has Country Programme Offices. These offices have the direct responsibility for working with Partners, and funding and management decisions are devolved to them. Save the Children UK has a third layer of organisational structure in the Regional Offices, which are involved in co-ordinating regional strategy and planning processes. Similarly, Norwegian Church Aid has both Country and Regional Offices.

In general, the NGOs that have recently experimented with having some form of Country (or Field) Offices in order to develop **closer contact** with Partners reported positively on the initial results. So far, there is anecdotal evidence that the establishment of the Kenya Office of DanChurchAid has strengthened relationships, and Partners are more open to expressing their real needs and problems than before. A further benefit is that DCA gets to know Partners at all levels within the organisation, not just the senior staff. In a recent review of the Regional Offices, all Partners mentioned their appreciation of having a DCA presence. However, Partners do not want to be controlled by DCA; there is a **balance** to be struck between **proximity** and **interference**.

Only one NGO (Novib) expressed opposition to the idea of Country Offices in principle, seeing that Field Offices run the risk of tipping the balance into becoming operational. The **role** of the Field Office is clearly the key factor. Organisations that were operational and have moved to working through Partners have had to undergo profound changes in the way their Country Offices work, with a huge scaling back of staff. Country Programme staff have had to change from being **managers** to **enablers**. In the interviews, a number of staff commented that the processes of their Country Offices were over-elaborate and set up for programme implementation. Changes are needed to orient the systems towards working with local Partners.

Starting and Maintaining Partnerships

Several of the NGOs have developed procedures and guidelines for staff concerning partner selection and starting partnerships. The guidelines tend to deal with the framework for the partnership and procedural issues related to funding. The processes and guidelines concerning the development of partner relationships per se are far less well developed. Furthermore, it is also evident that the process is highly context-specific and **variable**. A number of people interviewed expressed the variations between individual and teams, and in some organisations the diversity of approaches is formally encouraged.

Individual partnerships also vary over time. The various **phases** of a partnership may or may not be recognised formally, with institutionalised processes for the different phases. DanChurchAid, for example, plans to document more clearly how the change over time takes place, developing a three or four phase model. This would include criteria for when a partnership can move on to the next phase, selection and phase-out. The transition between the phases represents a natural opportunity to evaluate the partnership.

At the start of most partnerships, there is a phase of getting to know one another, both in terms of establishing contact and building up an understanding of the other organisation. For example, Rädda Barnen has 'Criteria for the Selection of Rädda Barnen Partners' which sets out clear criteria for the sorts of organisations Rädda Barnen will work with, and is a means of screening. There is considerable debate over how far to go into **organisational assessment** before the partnership has progressed. There are differences in perspective concerning how deeply to assess the Southern partner organisation at the beginning of the relationship. Cordaid, for example, uses a Partner Capacity Study document to assess potential Partners. As

this is a very detailed assessment, staff would not use it for 'Project Partners'. Rather, they would use it with organisations they have already established a relationship and with whom they are considering moving into an in-depth partnership.

Of the NGOs in the study, the approach of MS is distinct. It has the most **formalised** processes for developing partnerships through a number of clearly defined phases. MS carries out quite detailed organisational assessments with its Partners. As MS gets to know the organisation, its constituency and the extent of democracy in decision-making, Partners can feel the questions are intrusive. The process is also time-consuming, especially given that MS only provides small amounts of funding. There is therefore some initial scepticism to the approach amongst Partners. However, many Partners appreciate the process of partnership as it develops.

A final key point is that the process of 'getting to know one another' is also highly **unequal**. Again, the dominance of funding in the partner relationship tends to mean that it is the funder who asks most of the questions:

'In most cases the international NGOs ask us questions, which out of respect for their privacy and human integrity, we would never ask of them. Indeed, it is crucially important for us to identify true international friends and yet this process is more difficult for us than it is for the international NGOs.' (Redd Barna-Asia 1997.)

Ending Partnerships

The question of ending a partnership was assessed in the research interviews. There is clearly a degree of confusion between ending project funding with a Southern NGO and actually ending the partnership per se. The project funding orientation of most NGO partnerships was reflected in the fact that project exit-strategies were often interpreted to mean the same as ending a partnership. A number of the NGOs spoke openly of the difficulties of 'phasing out'. Part of the problem relates to clarity over the **objectives of the partnership**; clearly defined objectives assist in identifying when phase-out should occur. However, it is not easy to state in advance – at the beginning of a relationship – when the time for phasing out will occur. Novib, for example, does not plan the phasing out from the beginning because in theory partnership is seen as a long-term approach. This tension of long-term partnerships relates to **how flexible** the relationship should be, and to what extent processes should be formalised and stated from the beginning.

The question of ending partnerships is discussed in depth by Angela Penrose of Save the Children Fund UK (Penrose 2000). Ending a partnership is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of the whole process. There is a delicate balance to be struck between providing support for the purpose of capacity building, and being loyal to an organisation which is not seen to be effective. It is particularly in the ending of a partnership that the Northern NGO can have a **dominant** role.

Again, the approach of MS stands out for being more formalised. Phasing out can be a long and difficult process, and MS now recognises that the phasing out should be written into the partnership agreement from the beginning. This is included in the

suggested format for negotiating partnership agreements. It is easier to decide when to phase out if an objective for the partnership is agreed from the beginning, as it is then possible to identify whether or not the objective has been achieved.

Most partnerships go through various stages from **dependence** through to **interdependence**. Time is a key constraint, as it takes many years for trust to be established. 'There is a paradox that true partnership is achieved at the moment of mutual independence and equality, yet this is generally the moment the partnership ends,' (Goold 2000³). The dominance of funding in North-South NGO relationships is once again a limiting factor, as funding is most often central to the purpose of the partnership. Only a very small minority of NGO partnerships are not based around funding. However, these are the very relationships that are most likely to achieve equality and mutuality because they are based on professional dialogue and exchange of expertise. Similarly, the skewing effects of funding are also greatly reduced when the Southern NGO has established a secure and diverse portfolio of funding.

3. The Scope of Partnerships

There was generally a great deal of clarity in understanding amongst the NGOs in terms of their role in **development education** to their respective constituencies. Most of the NGOs in this study are membership organisations, with clearly defined constituencies and a representation structure at Board level; they see their **legitimacy** as being directly related to their roots in their respective national constituencies. The interactions with their constituencies are based on the concept of **solidarity**; thus, the Northern NGO acts as a facilitator of interaction between its own constituency and its Southern partners. The purpose of these partnerships is therefore broader than the transfer of resources between North and South.

Beyond the Funding Dimension

It is perhaps in the area beyond direct project or programme funding that there is the greatest degree of innovation and interesting experiences of North-South exchanges. The examples given of partnership activities outside the funding dimension came closest to a **solidarity** based notion of partnerships.

'A South partnership is much more than a project or activity. It entails a potentially wide range of development efforts and implies a broader involvement than the traditional donor-recipient relationships.' (DanChurchAid 2000.)

The types of support and exchanges mentioned fall into the following categories:

- **Capacity Building and Organisation Development:** including the support of organisational core funding and support for the development of planning and financial systems.
- **Technical Support:** for example, the provision of advice and expertise in specific programme areas.

³ Interview with Liz Goold, INTRAC Associate.

- **Linking and Networking:** promoting cross-cultural understanding and solidarity -
South-South Exchanges, for example Norwegian Church Aid's Angolan Partners have visited Brazilian Partners.
South-North Exchanges, for example some Novib Partners go to the Netherlands each year to get to know the context better.
North-South Exchanges, for example Novib organises exchange visits for supporters to visit Partners, and this is a positive experience.
- **Advocacy:** for example, MS provides a platform in Denmark for Southern voices to be heard.
- **Volunteer Programmes:** the MS Programme is based around volunteers, as is the APSO programme. Others such as DanChurchAid have a volunteer programme as one aspect of their work.

There are differences in the extent to which NGOs get involved in the provision of **capacity building** inputs. Some are involved in the direct provision of capacity building; for example the MS Training Centre for Development Co-operation in Arusha, Tanzania, emphasises organisational capacity building for MS Partners and other organisations. The other NGOs are not necessarily direct providers but will fund capacity building inputs. Some, such as Novib, have a particular policy that the Partners themselves should initiate and manage and capacity building processes. This is in recognition of the potentially conflicting role of the Northern NGO as a funder, which does not mix easily with organisational strengthening processes. Staff recognised that tensions do occur when Northern NGOs are seen to impose training and capacity building on an organisation.

Dialogue

Partnerships vary considerably in terms of **breadth** and **closeness**, and in the degree to which partners are involved in dialogue and policy discussions. Although in principle a partnership does not have to involve funding, the partnership terminology is usually associated with funding. In the interviews, a distinction was made between **formal** and **informal** dialogue. Formal dialogue in relation to consultation and representation processes is dealt with below (see Section 4).

Cordaid, which draws a distinction between Policy Partners and Project Partners, engages in dialogue with Policy Partners over Cordaid's policy, strategy and direction. Dialogue also takes place around specific themes such as gender and sustainability. Similarly, DanChurchAid and Norwegian Church Aid both have a Core Group of Partners who are involved in policy formulation. There is also informal dialogue with individual Partners, on a wide range of issues. A final theme that emerged is that policy dialogue is often stronger when the Northern NGO is engaging with Southern Partners on **advocacy** issues. For example, in Sri Lanka Redd Barna worked with a national television producer to produce programmes on children's rights. The partnership turned out to be a good match, as both parties had expertise to offer. This echoes the fact mentioned earlier that in partnerships based around advocacy and policy influencing it is often easier to achieve an equitable relationship.

Regional Variations

There is considerable **diversity** in the nature of partnerships in different regions, countries and even within countries. Whilst it was not possible to assess the complexity of factors behind this diversity, there are some very general trends which emerged from the European NGOs' experiences of working in some regions. Much of the variations in experiences of partnerships are related to the strength or weakness of the partner organisations, combined with the particular history of relationships in that context.

Broadly speaking, partnerships in **Africa** are seen to have been the most **unequal** with the greatest evidence of **paternalism**. This is particularly the case in East Africa, where there has been a high level of international funding. Interestingly, almost all of the ten NGOs have traditionally had an emphasis on East Africa. Some have a particular history of being operational in the region, and the shift towards working with local partners has taken place very recently. Generally, it was thought that African partners are less willing to express their misgivings about the concept of partnership than their Latin American counterparts. This could be partly related to a **lack of organisational confidence**; conflict and political instability were also stated as reasons why African partners did not question the concept of partnership as many are concerned with more pressing issues. However, South Africa is seen to be somewhat of an exception, with stronger and more confident Civil Society Organisations.

The **Asian** context is very different: it is important to note that some of the NGOs that have been operational elsewhere, such as Redd Barna and Save the Children UK, have been working with partnerships in Asia for a long time. There are also examples given of Asian Partners who have 'outgrown the relationship' with the NGO. For example, several of Cordaid's Partners are now receiving direct funding from government sources. Cordaid sees this as part of the partnership process and still maintains its relationships with these organisations in relation to policy dialogue; these relationships are more **reciprocal**, in that the Asian Partners also provide Cordaid with technical services and advice.

As with Asia, some NGOs such as Redd Barna and Save the Children UK have always worked with Partners in **Latin America**, even at times when they have been operational elsewhere. The Latin American Partners are seen to be the most expressive and **critical** of the partnership approach. Issues related to the imbalance of money and power in the relationship are discussed more openly.

Emergencies

The approach to working in emergencies falls into two groups. The first group of NGOs such as Novib and MS, focus on long-term development and have a very limited involvement in emergencies. The second group of NGOs have a much greater involvement in emergencies, combining a **mixture** of working with local partners and being operational. Notably, many of these NGOs also liaise within their own international networks. For example, DanChurchAid and Norwegian Church Aid co-

operate with the network Action by Churches Together (ACT). Likewise, the Save the Children organisations co-operate through their Alliance.

Given the large amounts of funding usually available and often readily accessible in emergencies, there are considerable numbers of international development agencies that are becoming operational. This is a great barrier to effectiveness, and **co-ordination** is a problem. In this context, there is justifiably a concern that local structures should be used more fully in emergencies, particularly for co-ordination purposes. Some organisations have a policy of working with local partners as their first choice as partners have the benefit of local knowledge and of being able to respond quickly.

In emergencies, it is still important to think about long-term development. The **transition phase** is also crucial in terms of mitigation; reducing vulnerability is the whole point of emergency intervention and in this case local actors are better placed to respond. To take one example, in principle Norwegian Church Aid's emergency assistance should always be co-ordinated through a local organisation. The aim is to increase the Partner's capacity, although this is very difficult to achieve in practice. For example, a local development NGO in Macedonia responded to the Kosovo refugee situation. They have gained valuable experience and are better equipped as a result, however the situation could have overwhelmed the organisation.

Nevertheless, it is an important point to recognise the **trauma** that the local partner has faced and the very strong effects on NGO personnel. This can be an obstacle to the partner's capacity to cope in an emergency situation. The physical and psychological effects of emergency can be a barrier to working through partners, especially in the early stages of an emergency. The NGO staff interviewed highlighted the importance of handing over to the partner gradually with long-term support.

The **solidarity** aspect of partnership can come to the fore in situations of extreme disaster, conflict and complex emergencies. Solidarity and trust-based relationships can become more important, particularly where there are security risks for the local partner. Reassurance is an important role for the Northern NGO, recognising the status of the local structures and providing a link to the outside world.

4. Accountability and Shared Governance

As discussed in Chapter 2, Leach (1995) identifies six models of collaboration between organisations based on **the degree of shared governance**. Co-operation between NGOs covers a wide spectrum of relationships. Given that funding dominates the nature of the relationship between NGOs in the North and South, the ideal of a close partnership based on shared governance and agreed areas of joint decision-making is very difficult to attain in practice. In order to compensate, it is necessary to **strengthen** the position of Southern NGOs in decision-making, particularly in negotiating partner agreements. This is also the case for the **question** of Southern representation in decision-making structures, such as a Northern NGO's Board. This last section assesses different approaches taken in practice.

Partnership Agreements

As with other areas of managing partnerships, the ten NGOs often have clearer guidelines and procedures in relation to funding processes than for the partnership relationship. For example, reporting requirements are usually defined within funding agreements and some of the NGOs use a standard contract. There have, nevertheless, been a variety of attempts to introduce **formal partnership agreements** covering all the dimensions of the partner relationship. Some of these attempts have been formalised within the organisation as a whole, but there have also been experiments at country programme and regional levels.

The experience of MS is that all Country Programmes must now enter formal Partnership Agreements. Agreements are usually reached with long-term Partners, based on dialogue and getting to know one another. The process of coming to an agreement varies between countries, but the emphasis is on building a relationship. In some places an outside facilitator will draw up the agreement between Partners. The tendency is to use the guidelines on agreements for all Partners, regardless of whether they are large or small. Smaller organisations may find the process time-consuming, although it can also be a learning experience in and of itself.

Norwegian Church Aid has also undertaken lots of work around developing partnership agreements. Some of the staff interviewed felt that there had been too much focus on the **legal framework**, but not enough thought to the **content** of the partnership since the guidelines for reaching an agreement are procedure-oriented. In some areas the process has not worked as well as expected. In 1999 the Partners in East Africa therefore started to work on developing their own concept of how they wanted to work with NCA. For example, where the Northern NGO is only involved in providing project support, the Southern Partner can set their own limits on how far the Northern NGO may be involved in other discussions.

Partnerships in Novib are negotiated individually, and each partnership must be covered by a **mutual agreement** setting out the responsibilities and expectations of both parties. There is considerable flexibility in the negotiation process, and a commitment to clearly defined agreements. The approach is **contractual** in nature, and again is oriented towards funding processes. The standard contract also sets out Novib's commitments, such as giving feedback on annual reports and responding to proposals within four months. The contract also sets out the reporting requirements and the financial conditions of the funding given.

Redd Barna has some general guidelines for partnership agreements as outlined above within the Programme Handbook; however, the weight is now being placed on **negotiation**, moving away from detailed instructions. There is also a set format for the co-operation agreement, but this is weak and does not cover all the areas it should; there are also big differences concerning how they are used in practice. It is felt that the guidelines are too idealistic.

Accountability Processes

Accountability processes from Southern Partners to the NGOs in the study centre around **funding**. Almost all the NGOs have clearly defined reporting and audit requirements, usually dictated by the reporting requirements of their bilateral donors. A number of staff expressed the view that their financial accounting systems were very **control-oriented**, and often excessively strict. This can be in direct contradiction to the principle that partner organisations should be rooted locally and accountable to local constituencies. Interestingly, most staff understood the term 'accountability' in terms of financial accountability alone, even though most organisations have evaluation systems in place relating to the impact of the development programme and project work itself.

On the other hand, the formal **accountability of the NGOs** to their Southern Partners is generally weak. Very few of the organisations include an assessment of the individual partnership relationship as part of evaluation processes on a routine and systematic basis. There is some progress in this direction, and a few interesting cases stand out. For example, Save the Children Fund UK is developing indicators of quality for the partnership. In relation to feedback mechanisms, Novib has a specific complaints procedure for Partners as a process that can be used to deal with unresolved issues and conflict. Cordaid is working on developing a quality assurance system using a Total Quality Management approach. This involves developing a questionnaire that gives Partners the opportunity for feedback, enabling Cordaid to monitor the quality of its performance.

Shared Governance

It is in the area of shared governance that there is the least **mutuality** within the partnership process between Northern and Southern NGOs. There are very real practical constraints to shared governance. The Katalysis approach to partnership outlined in Chapter 2 is based on clearly defined areas of shared decision-making, and the agreement was between three organisations. By contrast, the European NGOs in the study are relating to upwards of 40 partners; there are, therefore, very real **practical limits** to the potential for shared governance.

While the concept of 'shared' governance implies mutuality, in practice the degree of shared governance is highly uneven. The NGOs in the study maintain a respect for the autonomy of the Southern Partner and most would not expect to influence their decision-making processes, particularly at Board level, in a formal way. However, there is at the same time a recognition of the indirect influence the Northern NGO has as a donor setting funding priorities. The **power** of the donor is therefore **indirect, implicit** and often **disguised**.

On the other hand, attempts to compensate for the **lack of power** of Southern Partners are undertaken through **direct** mechanisms. There are examples of **Partner consultation**, particularly at regional or country level, but fewer examples of formal Partner representation in decision-making processes. There are no examples of direct representation of Partners on the Northern NGO's Board, although some such as Norwegian Church Aid have set up a structure where a small advisory group of

Partners feeds into Board level decision-making. Most of the NGOs resist the idea of having formal Partner representation on their Boards because this relates to the **identity** of the organisations. Many of the Northern NGOs have strong national roots based on membership and clearly defined constituencies. From this perspective, they do not want to turn into international (multi-national) organisations. Furthermore, staff expressed doubts as to whether Partner representation on Boards would necessarily result in more effective partnerships. This remains a speculative point, given that there are no examples emerging from the study to assess in reality.

In its review of the concept of partnership MS has moved away from the idealistic notion of **power-sharing**. Their thinking is now more in terms of **shared responsibilities**, recognising that MS is ultimately responsible for accounting to the Danish government and Danish constituency: ‘...Authority still remains with MS concerning the establishing of management procedures within the organisation,’ (MS 1996).

Attempts to introduce structured Partner **consultation**, as distinct from **shared decision-making**, have been somewhat more successful. The majority of the NGOs have some type of formal structures for Partner consultations, usually at the country or regional level. Generally, these consultations centre on discussing thematic policies and country (or regional) programme strategies. Some organisations have a form of policy advisory Board, either at a country or international level, which is made up of a selection of Partners, usually appointed by the NGO itself. For others, Partner consultation processes remain **ad hoc**, and there are not clear processes for consultation at the country level to be fed into organisational policy and strategy processes.

Lastly, a key observation is that dialogue and consultation work best where Partners are working in similar areas. Novib, for example, found that some Partner Platforms did not work well as the Partners attending were working in different fields and at different levels; thematic workshops tended to be more productive. Similarly, Redd Barna has found a degree of synergy in consultation processes due to the fact that the Partners are all child-focused and benefit from working out the implications of a child-rights approach together.

Assessments of Partnerships

A large number of the NGOs have undertaken country and programme reviews which have included detailed assessments of partnerships: *MS Country Programme Reviews for Zambia, Kenya, Nepal, Tanzania and Mozambique*; Norwegian Church Aid’s *Approach to Partnership Co-operation in East Africa*; Redd Barna’s *Partnerships for Children: A Review of Redd Barna’s Collaboration with NGOs in Thailand* and Redd Barna - *Asia Partnerships: A Development Strategy for Children: Learning from Redd Barna’s Experience in Asia*. These documents provide a wealth of information about experiences of partnerships in different contexts.

Out of the ten NGOs, only two – MS and Novib – have undertaken in-depth studies of their partnerships in the South as a whole. The Novib study was carried out by the research organisation BART, and consists of a formal consultation of Partner

organisations (BART 1997). The findings of the report can be summarised as follows:

- Partners saw **funding as a key role** for Novib, although not the only role. Partnership was broader than just funding, or even advocacy and lobbying. Partnership with Novib was based around **solidarity** and was a two-way relationship. There was generally a positive view of Novib as a professional organisation, although some found it slow and bureaucratic.
- Partners wanted more **involvement in policy**, especially at a country level, as well as more dialogue, visits and information about decision-making.
- Partners were keen for the partnership agreements to specify **mutual commitments** and **responsibilities**, and for financial reporting processes to reflect the Partner's financial needs, not just that of the funder.
- There was no consensus amongst Partners about the idea of having an ombuds person to provide advice and **feedback** to Novib; some wanted more direct feedback to Novib.

The partnership focus of MS was reviewed in 1996 and more recently in 2000. This latest 'MS in the South Review' has accepted the concept of partnership, but has found that MS needs to improve its operations by **refining the instruments** related to partnership. The particular weaknesses are in monitoring and evaluation; with the emphasis on the MS/Partner relationship, there is very little known about how the efforts are affecting the ultimate beneficiaries. Over the years to come, there will be a move to assess how partnership is affecting the beneficiaries or client groups. Also, because of the decentralised structure, there are wide variations between country programmes. There is a need to make more consistent use of the tools they have, and to standardise information and knowledge across country programmes.

One final observation about the assessments of partnerships carried out by the NGOs is that they represent a wealth of material and documented experiences. There is considerable potential for the NGOs to increase the exchange of experiences in this area, reflecting on approaches and tools they have developed. There is a need for greater **dissemination of experiences** in developing partnerships from NGOs themselves.

5. Conclusion

In practice, the processes of partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs have developed around project funding systems. Organisational structures and processes closely reflect the needs of funding systems; very rarely have they been developed around the specific needs of partnerships between organisations. A distinction can therefore be made between a **partner focus** and a **partnership focus**. Many of the NGOs in the study have moved from a **project focus** to a partner (organisational) focus; however, funding remains at the centre of their way of working, limiting the extent to which they can achieve – or indeed aim to achieve – the ideal of 'authentic' partnership in practice. The difference between a partner and a partnership focus is a subtle one, and most organisations fall along a spectrum between the two. In particular, the study suggests that there are limits to how far Northern NGOs can develop close partnerships given their sheer number of partners.

Even within this spectrum of approaches, there can be big differences in the **quality** of relationships with partners. In other words, a ‘partnership focus’ does not necessarily imply that the organisation has high quality partnerships, but rather that the aim and orientation of its approach is based on developing ‘authentic’, in-depth partnerships. Likewise, an organisation with a ‘partner focus’ based primarily around the funding relationship can achieve a high quality of relationships as long as there is **clarity** about what it is trying to achieve.

The challenge for Northern NGOs is how to be more **consistent** and **systematic** in their relationships with Southern partners, without losing the **flexibility** and potential creativity of North-South exchanges. In this respect there are a number of specific issues facing Northern NGOs:

- **The management of partnerships and the role of field offices:** clearly management structures will always vary between NGOs depending on what is appropriate to the organisation’s mandate. The research findings suggest that the **transition from being operational** to working with local partners brings specific challenges as the role of the field office is redefined and staff have to move from a management/control function to one of being facilitators. In particular, operational systems of working may be inappropriate to a partnerships approach.
- **Developing consistency in practice:** processes related to the partnership relationship are less formalised and systematic than funding processes. There is considerable scope for Northern NGOs to maximise their experience of working with Southern Partners by developing a more systematic approach to ‘good practice’ in partnerships and specifically by developing and implementing consistent principles for relating to Partners.
- **Solidarity work and constituencies:** Northern NGOs have an important role in development education and solidarity work; this role faces the risk of being neglected when NGOs become over-dependent on official funding sources and consequently donor-driven.
- **Strengthening policy dialogue:** the study suggests a reluctance on the part of Northern NGOs to consider radical measures towards formalised shared governance with Southern Partners. Nevertheless, there is scope for developing systematic, structured consultation of Southern Partners in the strategy and policy processes. Policy dialogue between Northern and Southern NGOs is a key strength of working in partnership, however the ad hoc nature of much consultation means that the full potential of policy dialogue is not being fulfilled.
- **Accountability and assessments of partnerships:** mutual assessment of the partnership relationship needs to be built into Northern NGO systems and procedures, to facilitate reflection and learning from experience. Furthermore, it is important for NGOs to remain rooted in and accountable to their respective constituencies. The dominance of funding systems can seriously undermine local accountability. Northern NGOs therefore face the challenge of developing forms of accountability that strengthen the legitimacy of Southern Partners and their accountability to local stakeholders.

Chapter 5

Summary of Research Findings and Conclusions

1. Summary of Research Findings

Approaches to Partnership

Perspectives on NGO partnerships fall within a broad spectrum from **idealism**, to **realism**, to **pessimism**. Within the literature on partnership, writers tend to view the notion of partnership with idealism and the practice of partnership with pessimism. By contrast, staff within the ten European NGOs view the concept of partnership with idealism and the practice with a great deal of realism, recognising the difficulties of achieving mutual, equal relationships with Southern Partners. Southern Partners are perceived as having a realistic or even pessimistic approach to partnership; whilst most did not see that think it was possible to achieve an **equal** relationship given the imbalance of power and control over resources, some appreciate the dialogue and solidarity offered by Northern NGOs. Northern NGOs are valued mainly as donors, but not just donors; their role is broader than providing resources.

Almost all of the ten European NGOs in the study see the practice of working with Southern Partners as a key pillar of a **developmental approach**. The benefits are seen in terms of improving local ownership, sustainability and poverty reach, as well as the mutual exchange of resources and ideas between the North and the South. This is intrinsically related to the question of **legitimacy** and the importance of being rooted in their respective **constituencies**. The role of organisations in North and South should therefore be related to their immediate (home) context; legitimacy is directly related to the strength of these links.

There is some debate over the use of the **term** partnership; some organisation see this as too idealistic, and prefer to talk of **partner co-operation**. It is evident that there has been a trend away from a piecemeal, **project focus** towards a **partner focus** based on the notion of organisational strengthening. This is closely related to the trend within NGOs away from ad hoc ways of working to a greater systematisation of approaches. Northern NGOs have been moving away from working in isolated, small scale projects and towards an integrated strategy. For many, working with Partners is seen in the wider context of **strengthening civil society organisations**. Nevertheless, it is important to note that funding processes tend to dominate the role of the NGOs in the study, and this has influenced the nature of their partnerships.

A difference between the NGOs is the extent to which they take a **functional** view of working with partners as a means to achieving their own organisational aims. Some of the NGOs see the development of long-term relationships with Southern Partners as an end in itself, based around notions of **solidarity** and the strengthening of civil society in the South. A tension that emerged from the study is the balance between being **proactive** and **responsive** in a partnership; a proactive approach, seeing partnership as a means of achieving specific aims, risks imposing an agenda on the Southern Partner. On the other hand, although a responsive approach does not carry the same risk of imposition, the Northern NGO can lack focus and direction.

The Diversity of Types of Partnerships

The European NGOs in the study all have a diverse range of relationships with their Southern Partners, and value that diversity. Furthermore, relationships are dynamic and change over time; it is not therefore possible to classify organisations according to a specific typology. Few of the organisations have formal categories of types of relationships, although there is often an implicit awareness of how those relationships differ. Differences in types of relationships broadly fall into three types:

- **Funding-based differences:** there is a difference between a **business** relationship based on funding alone, and a **partnership** based on a broader agenda and dialogue. Relationships that are based around **advocacy and policy influencing** have the potential for a greater degree of mutuality and equality than funding-based relationships. Both types of relationship are seen to be of value in different contexts, providing the nature of the relationship is clear.
- **Capacity-based differences:** close relationships develop more easily between organisations of similar capacity. The capacity of the Southern Partner is therefore the most important determinant of the nature of the relationship that develops with the Northern NGO.
- **Trust-based differences:** differences in the **quality** of the relationship centre on the level of trust; developing trust takes time.

Principles of Effective Partnership

In general, there are few formalised principles for partnerships within the NGOs studied. Principles of relating to Partners tend to be part of organisational culture and values, although a few of the organisations studied have tried to develop specific frameworks for partnerships. Some general conclusions did however emerge from the interviews with NGO staff. Effective partnership is based on:

- The **effectiveness of the work:** mutual delivery.
- The **quality** of the relationship.
- **Clarity about the purpose** of the relationship.

The Limits to Partnership

As with the principles for effective partnerships, there is a degree of consensus amongst those interviewed concerning the main limits to partnership. **The role of the Northern NGO as donor** is a major obstacle to achieving equality, since funding plays such a key part in the nature of North-South NGO relationships. The imbalance in the relationship created by the Northern NGO's control of over resources skews the power balance. The nature of funding processes also leads to **distorted accountability**. Whilst accountability to local constituencies should be important in theory, in practice the funding processes 'hi-jack' the accountability mechanisms and re-orient them towards Northern donors. Northern NGOs assume a control function, whilst Southern NGOs risk becoming donor-driven and distanced from their grassroots constituencies.

Organisational capacity is also a limiting factor, both from the perspective of Southern and Northern Partners. **Capacity mismatch** often occurs; it is very difficult for a Southern Partner, such as a small NGO, to have an equal relationship with a large European NGO. Partnership dialogue is more feasible between organisations of a similar size and capacity.

The **capacity limits of the Northern NGO** themselves also emerged as a constraining fact. Given the need to spend funds, Northern NGOs tend to develop relationships with a large number of Southern Partners. It is not possible for them to develop in-depth partnerships with so many Partners. Being unable to deliver funding or personnel can also be a constraint; often the Northern NGO is dependent to a large extent on government funding, which may be subject to cuts. In the opposite scenario, the availability of new funding may cause the Northern NGO to rush the development of the relationship with the Partner. **High staff turnover** can also be a barrier to the development of the relationship, as can a lack of mutual understanding between Partners who may be geographically and culturally distant.

Southern Partners are perceived by their Northern NGO counterparts as having a pessimistic perspective on the prospects for equal partnerships. Southern Partners want less domination and do not want to be controlled by the Northern NGO. The **dependence** on external funding is a serious constraint to the development of partnerships. As Partners in the South gain confidence, they are making increasing claims on the Northern NGOs for greater equality and a voice in policy dialogue.

Partnerships and the Changing Role of Northern NGOs

The role of Northern NGOs is changing, and there are increasing questions over the security of their funding.⁴ Northern NGOs are therefore under pressure to demonstrate their contribution beyond the channelling of funds, for example in terms of their professional expertise. Many NGO staff foresee a continued trend away from service delivery to concentrating on **advocacy** and **policy influencing**. This is seen positively in terms of the prospects for partnership, as it offers scope to move towards greater **solidarity** and **mutuality**. The old or traditional model of partnership, revolving around discrete project funding, is giving way to new types of partnerships. The distinction between **partnerships**, **networks** and **alliances** is becoming increasingly blurred, particularly for NGOs which are part of an international alliance.

Processes of Partnerships in Practice

Amongst the ten European NGOs in the study, the most significant trend over the last ten years has been the **transition** away from being **operational** and towards working with local Partners. This has had a significant impact on field (country programme) offices, as the role of field staff has changed from that of **manager** to that of

⁴ The threats to the security of funding are of particular concern to European NGOs who raise a significant percentage or the majority of their funds from government. Development ministers in the UK, Norway, Germany and the Netherlands are currently working together to strengthen the role of the UN within their respective countries' development policies and budgets. This will have implications both for bilateral aid and for the NGO sector. In Norway, for example, although the development budget has been increased in recent years, the percentage channelled through Norwegian NGOs has remained static for the last three years.

facilitator. Whilst having a field presence is perceived to be beneficial in terms of developing close contact with Partners, there is a risk that the field office can become control oriented. There is a delicate balance to be maintained between **proximity** and **interference**.

Overall, there has also been a slow but steady process of **formalising** approaches, policies, and procedures related to partnerships. Processes of relating to Southern Partners are still based around funding systems, and there is far greater clarity surrounding funding processes than the development of partnerships per se. There is also a considerable degree of variety within organisations, particularly between different countries and regions. There are different approaches to the process of Partner 'selection', and to what level of detail of information about the potential Partner should be requested in advance of starting a partnership. In general, there is **inequality in information exchange**; Southern Partners are required to be more transparent and open than the Northern NGO in the 'getting to know you' process.

A final area of difficulty in the processes of partnership surrounds the whole question of when and how to **end the relationship**. To what extent should organisational loyalty and the capacity building process be a justification for continuing a partnership, or should the partnership be ended if the Partner is seen to be ineffective? This question is another expression of the debate on whether partnership is a **means to an end** or an **end in itself**. It is important to establish **clear objectives for the partnership** from the beginning. Even if the relationship will be long-term and it is not possible to predict when it will end, clarity concerning the **purpose** of the individual partnership helps in identifying when the objectives have been achieved.

The Scope of Partnerships in Practice

The activities outside the funding relationship offer, in many ways, the greatest scope for **innovation** and **solidarity** in North-South partnerships. There are a wealth of examples of activities 'beyond' funding, such as volunteer programmes and engagement in advocacy and development education. Another area of innovation has been in the process of exchanges, both between North and South and also from South to South. The non-funding elements of partnerships have been very poorly documented in the literature on partnership, and this could be an area for further research potential.

The extent to which the NGOs engage in **capacity building** of Southern Partners varies considerably. It is not necessary for the Northern NGO itself to act as a capacity building provider, and in any case this could lead to a conflict of roles – particularly in relation to organisation development interventions – given its role as a donor. Nevertheless, many NGO staff recognised the growing importance of having an understanding of organisations and how they function in order to support capacity building interventions effectively.

In the context of **emergencies**, a surprising research finding is that in spite of the fact that many of the NGOs in the study had come from an operational background, they are reluctant to become operational in emergencies and still retain the principle of working with local Partners and structures. This was seen to be important in order to

ensure a gradual transition to long-term development. However, it is also necessary to recognise the limits of local Partners considering the physical and psychological trauma they may have faced themselves in the emergency context. **Solidarity** emerged as a crucial aspect of North – South relations in times of crisis, emergency and instability; it is in difficult times that solidarity-based partnership can come to the fore.

Accountability and the Degree of Shared Governance

The processes for negotiating partnerships vary considerably amongst the organisations, and even within organisations. A number of the NGOs in the study have attempted to introduce **formal partnership agreements** in recent years, based on a process of negotiation and covering all aspects of the partnership, not just funding. An issue that has arisen is what level of detail should be defined in terms of guidelines on agreements, and how flexible the process should be. There was a general tendency to concentrate on the framework for the agreement rather than the content itself. Furthermore, energy tended to be channelled into setting up the agreement rather than **maintaining** the relationship on an ongoing basis.

In terms of accountability processes, **South to North accountability** clearly centres on **funding**. The control-orientation of funding systems is also thought to be somewhat excessive, even amongst the staff of the European NGOs themselves. Moreover, the control orientation of the system contradicts the principle of **local accountability** to local constituencies. More work needs to be done in terms of developing systematic ways of strengthening local accountability structures. Northern NGOs need to ensure that funding processes do not undermine local accountability.

North to South accountability is **weak** overall, and Northern NGOs are not as transparent as they expect Southern Partners to be. Some organisations have introduced formal processes for Partners to give feedback on their performance. This is an important step to take, and is a critical area to be further developed over the next few years.

The degree of **shared governance** and **mutuality** in relationships between Southern Partners and Northern NGOs is perhaps the area that is most limited by funding processes. Northern NGOs exert a considerable degree of **indirect power** and **implicit influence** because of their control over funding, irrespective of whether they are committed to the principle of equal partnership. In the study, there were no real examples of mutual, shared decision-making. However, there has been a considerable level of experimentation with Southern Partner **consultation**, particularly in relation to country or regional strategies and thematic policies.

There are also various examples of **formal Partner consultation** mechanisms, particularly at Country Programme level or in an advisory role to the European NGO's Board. The formal consultation of Southern Partners raises some very practical problems, given the sheer **numbers** of Partners involved; having selected Partners involved in consultation can be divisive. A second problem which emerged concerns the **identity** of the European NGO; most see themselves as rooted in their

national context and directly accountable to their own constituencies and governments. There is a reluctance to develop into international, or more specifically multi-national organisations. In conclusion, Partner consultation and thematic policy discussions have generally been more successful than attempts to introduce formal, shared decision-making.

Assessments of Partnerships

There have been a number of in-depth studies of partnership commissioned by the ten European NGOs themselves; two have covered all partnerships, and many others have been undertaken in relation to particular countries. The findings from these assessments point to the fact that generally Southern Partners want partnership to be based on **solidarity** with greater scope for **dialogue** and involvement in **policy decisions**, particularly at country level. Southern Partners want more **information** about Northern NGO decision-making, although they do not always need to be involved in the process. Partnership agreements need to be based on **mutual commitments**, and not just on the requirements of the funder. The studies also conclude that there is a need to refine the **instruments** related to partnership, such as the processes for negotiating agreements, monitoring and evaluation the relationship itself in a systematic way and providing stronger feedback mechanisms.

2. Concluding Discussion

This study has reviewed the efforts of a group of Northern NGOs to promote effective partnerships with Southern Partner NGOs. This final section assesses the main conclusions that can be drawn from the research findings and draws out the challenges facing Northern NGOs as they develop and manage partnerships in practice. There has been a general trend amongst the European NGOs studied to move from a **project focus** to a **partner focus**, based around a broad understanding of strengthening civil society organisations. This has been part of a process of moving from discrete, piecemeal interventions towards strategic, results-oriented ways of working. Organisations have a considerable variety of types of relationship with Southern partners; whilst processes and ways of working are dominated by funding processes, there is plenty of evidence of solidarity-based relationships as well. It is not possible therefore to categorise organisations in terms of a business-only or a solidarity approach to partnership.

What is evident is that the implications of working in **close, mutual partnerships** are far-reaching. Most organisations operate along a spectrum from a partner focus (or partner co-operation) to examples of individual in-depth partnerships. **Authentic** partnership is easiest to achieve where there is least funding involved, with policy dialogue and the mutual exchange of expertise. These types of partnerships, which often form part of broader networks and alliances, are likely to increase and become a new 'model' of NGO partnerships. The implications for Northern NGOs are to develop greater **clarity** in terms of the **purpose** and **nature** of individual partnerships and of their overall approach to partnerships in practice.

There are areas within the practice of partnerships between Northern and Southern

NGOs which need to be developed further. Northern NGOs need to develop more **systematic** and **consistent** approach to **feedback** mechanisms concerning individual partner relationships, as well as greater **mutuality** in the negotiation of partnership agreements. Similarly, processes of partner consultation need to be strengthened and integrated into policy and planning processes. The critical areas that Northern NGOs need to address can be summarised as follows:

- **Being realistic about partnerships:** ‘authentic’, mutual partnership depends on the partner organisations being similar in their size and organisational capacity. Northern NGOs need to develop greater clarity in identifying different types and phases of relationships with Southern Partners.
- **Agenda setting:** given their power as funders, Northern NGOs should guard against the tendency to impose agendas on Southern Partners. This could be achieved through more equitable negotiation processes.
- **Developing consistency in practice:** processes related to the partnership relationship are less formalised and systematic than funding processes. Northern NGOs need to maximise their considerable experience of working with Southern Partners by developing a more systematic approach to ‘good practice’ in partnerships.
- **Assessments of partnerships:** there is a need for mutual assessment of the partnership relationship to be built into Northern NGO systems and procedures in order to facilitate reflection and learning from experience.
- **Strengthening policy dialogue:** systematic, structured consultation of Southern Partners in the strategy and policy processes of Northern NGOs should be strengthened and consolidated. Policy dialogue between Northern and Southern NGOs is a key strength of the partnership model.

Finally, a key finding from the research relates to the importance for NGOs to be rooted in and remain accountable to their **respective constituencies**. For Northern NGOs, legitimacy comes from strong links to a national constituency, particularly through membership structures. Northern NGOs can play a key role in development education and solidarity initiatives within their constituencies. Likewise it is important for Southern NGOs to remain accountable to their local or national constituencies. In working together, Southern and Northern NGOs combine their strengths and act as a link between their respective constituencies, strengthening their legitimacy.

However, funding systems skew the **accountability processes** for Southern organisations. The strict, control-oriented reporting requirements of Northern donors (both official agencies and NGOs) mean that accountability for funding flows from Southern organisations to the North. This can seriously undermine local accountability and the rooting of Southern NGOs in civil society and, ultimately, their legitimacy. Northern NGOs need to be aware of these risks and develop **alternative forms** of accountability. Southern NGO Partners need to be given greater flexibility in setting the format for reporting processes, depending on their own context.

Northern NGOs need to move away from a control-orientation, placing greater emphasis on ensuring that their Southern Partners have adequate processes and systems of accountability to local stakeholders as part of their organisational structures. This could be achieved by increased local peer-regulation of NGOs, for example through the promotion of codes of conduct and membership of umbrella groups. Furthermore, Northern NGOs need to strengthen and formalise their mechanisms for receiving feedback from Southern Partners.

The findings presented here represent Phase One of the research, and have concentrated on the perspectives and practices of Northern NGOs. In this regard, the study has been written within the specific focus of current NGO practice. INTRAC is currently developing Phase Two of the research, which will incorporate a broader range of perspectives from other stakeholders, including Southern NGOs. The research will continue to monitor the changing nature of North-South NGO relationships, in the context of developments in communications technology and the emergence of new forms of partnerships, networks and alliances.

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Note

In the study, a distinction is made between in the use of the word partner. The term **partner** is used as a generic term. The term **Partner**, on the other hand, is used as a proper noun and refers to the particular Southern and Northern NGO Partners included in the study.

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Appendices

The Interview Questions and Questionnaire

1. Interview Questions

Approach to Partnership

1. Definition

- Why is partnership important in the development practice of NGOs?
- How does the organisation define partnership?
- Does the organisation have a stated partnership policy?
- Has the approach to partnership changed over the years?
- Purpose: why does the organisation work in partnership with Southern NGOs? What are the benefits? (*funding dimension, organisational strengthening, mutual exchange*).
- Is there a distinction between types of partnership relationship? e.g. grant receiver/partner/ key partner.

2. Principles of Partnership

- Are there written guidelines on the partnership relationship?
- Quality: What principles guide the way the organisation relates to Southern partners? (*e.g. respect, cross-cultural sensitivity, transparency, etc.*)
- What factors make for an effective partnership?
- What are the barriers to effective partnership?
- What do you see as the extreme types of partnership along a spectrum?
- What do you think is the attitude of Southern NGOs to the notion of partnership?

3. Future

- Will the nature of partnerships change over the next five to ten years?
- Will the organisation's role in supporting Southern partners change?
- Where is the notion of partnership going?

The Practice and Management of Partnership

Organisational Structures

- How is the organisation structured?
- What are the organisational implications of having different types of organisations defined as partners?
- Who has the responsibility within the organisation for starting - maintaining - ending partnerships?
- Who makes decisions concerning funding for partners?
- Are there regional variations in the nature of the organisation's partnerships in different contexts?
- Are there differences to partnerships in emergency situations compared to long-term development contexts?

Processes of Partnership

1. Scope of Partnerships

- Are there written criteria/guidelines concerning the partnership relationship?

- Are there other (non-financial) ways of supporting partners/ of partners contributing to the organisation?
- Do the partnerships with the organisation exist beyond the parameters of the main programme or project?
- How does the nature of partnership change over time?

2. Degree of Shared Governance

- How are partnerships initiated? Are they negotiated individually, or is there a standard agreement?
- What accountability mechanisms are there?
- To what extent are the partners autonomous in terms of designing and managing programmes?
- Do partners participate in the organisation's decision-making structures (e.g. through representation on Boards) and in policy dialogue?
- Do you assess the partnership with the partner in question (upwards accountability)?

Comparing Practice with Policy Definition

- Have there been any assessments of the nature and effectiveness of the partnership relationships? If so, when and for whom?

2. Partnerships Questionnaire

1) What is your job title? (please state)

2) How long have you worked for your current employers? (please state)

3) What proportion of your working day involves working with, or on behalf of, your Southern NGO 'partners'? (please mark one box)

Less than 25% []

Between 25 and 50% []

More than 50% []

4) How many Southern NGO 'partners' do you work with regularly? (please state)

5) How frequently do you communicate with a typical Southern NGO 'partner'? (please mark one box)

Daily []

Around once each week []

Around once each two weeks []

Monthly []

6) How frequently do you meet face -to-face with a typical Southern NGO 'partner'? (please mark one box)

Monthly []

Quarterly []

Bi-annually []

Yearly []

7) Which of the following types of information does your organisation send to a Southern NGO 'partner'? (please rank in order of importance: 1 = most important, 3 = least important)

Resource materials []

Technical and policy documents []

Project related documents/ reports []

8) Which of the following types of information does the Southern NGO 'partner'? send to your organisation? (please rank in order of importance: 1 = most important, 3 = least important)

Resource materials []

Technical and policy documents []

Project related documents/ reports []

9) If formal reporting requirements exist for the Southern NGO 'partner' what is their frequency? (please mark one box)

- Monthly []
- Quarterly []
- Bi-annually []
- Yearly []

10) What types of resources does your organisation deliver to its Southern NGO partners? (please rank in order of importance: 1 = most important, = least important)

- Project costs []
- Core funding (organisational overheads) []
- Staff time []
- Staff exchanges []
- Staff training []
- Dissemination costs []
- Support to attend conferences []
- Other capacity building support []
- Other support (please state)

11) What types of resources does the Southern NGO partner contribute to your organisation? (please rank in order of importance: 1 = most important, = least important)

- Local knowledge []
- Project knowledge []
- staff time []
- staff exchanges []
- staff training []
- Other capacity building support []
- Other support (please state)

12) Does your organisation ever fund non-project costs without funding project costs? (please state)

13) Does your organisation have any partnerships that don't involve funding? (please state)

14) How many of your organisation's staff are involved in any one 'partnership' arrangement? (please state)

15) In which regions are your Southern NGO 'partners' based? (please state)

16) Does your organisation have a local office in the regions where your Southern NGO 'partners' are based? (please state)

In all cases []

In some cases []

No []

17) Which of the following types of organisation come within the scope of your definition of partnership? (please mark one or more box)

Non-governmental Development Organisations []

Non-governmental Organisation Support Organisation []

Trade Unions []

Governmental Agencies []

Multi-lateral Agencies []

Private Sector Organisations []

Church-based Organisations []

Community-based Organisations []

3. Findings from the Partnership Questionnaire

A questionnaire was sent to staff of the ten NGOs in the study in order to provide supplementary information. Questionnaires were sent mainly to staff who have direct contact with Southern Partners, such as Programme Officers and Programme Office staff.

Key Findings

The results of the survey confirmed a number of the findings from the research interviews and the review of policy statements and documentation from the ten NGOs in the study. The exchange of documents between Northern and Southern NGOs centres around project-related documents and reports, confirming that partnerships are based around **project funding**. The reporting requirements of the Northern NGOs also bear out the findings on their **control-oriented** function; for example, 41% of respondents indicated that reporting requirements are quarterly or even monthly.

Contact with Partners is relatively frequent, with 62% of respondents meeting Southern Partners on either a monthly or quarterly basis. The average respondent work with 15 Southern Partners, and in most Northern NGOs only one member of staff is involved in any partnership arrangement. A high number of NGOs have offices in the regions where their Partners are based, and a total of 78% of respondents reported that their NGOs have **in-region offices** in all or some cases.

There are interesting results on the scope and nature of partnerships. When asked to rank the contribution of the Northern NGO to the partnership, **capacity building, project and core funding** were seen as most important. Southern NGO Partners were seen to contribute **local knowledge, project knowledge** and **staff time**. A high percentage (64%) of respondents stated that their NGOs did have some partnerships that did not involve funding at all. This contrasted with the project-funding orientation of the overall communication with Partners. The results on what types of organisations Northern NGOs enter into partnerships with also confirm the research findings that partnerships are not confined to Southern NGOs. Whilst NGOs make up the biggest category of partnerships (19%), community-based organisations and NGO support organisations are also significant. A somewhat surprising result is the inclusion of government agencies and even multi-lateral agencies as Partners.

Summary of Results

1. The Profile of the Respondents

In total, 29 questionnaires were returned to INTRAC. Of the 29 responses received, 10 were from managers, 17 were from programme staff and 2 were from staff working at the field level. The average length of service of the respondents in their respective NGOs was 6 years.

2. Contact with Southern Partners

- The average respondent works with **15** Southern Partners (ranging from 1 to 30).

- The **proportion of the working day** spent working with, or on behalf of, Southern Partners is as follows:
 - 24% spend less than 25% of their working day working with Southern Partners.
 - 26% spend 25% - 50% of their working day working with Southern Partners.
 - 40% spend more than 50% of their working day working with Southern Partners.
- The **frequency of communication** with Southern Partners varies as follows:
 - 15% respondents communicate with their Southern Partners on a daily basis.
 - 28% respondents communicate with their Southern Partners once a week.
 - 12% respondents communicate with their Southern Partners once every two weeks.
 - 45% respondents communicate with their Southern Partners on a monthly basis.
- The **frequency of meeting** with Southern Partners varies as follows:
 - 31% of respondents meet their Southern Partners on a monthly basis.
 - 31% of respondents meet their Southern Partners on a quarterly basis.
 - 17% of respondents meet their Southern Partners twice a year.
 - 21% of respondents meet their Southern Partners once a year.

The Content of Communication with Southern Partners

It was agreed without question that **project related documents and reports** are the most important type of information sent to Southern Partners. The next most important types of document sent is technical and policy documents; the least important are resource materials.

The most important information sent to Northern NGOs by Southern Partners is also project related documents and reports. The next most important documents sent is technical and policy documents; the least important are resource materials.

- Northern NGO formal reporting requirements vary as follows:
 - 14% respondents have a monthly reporting requirement.
 - 27% respondents have a quarterly reporting requirement.
 - 41% respondents have a bi-annual reporting requirement.
 - 18% respondents have an annual reporting requirement.

The Scope of Partnerships

Respondents were asked to rank what they saw as the most important contribution that their NGOs make to Southern NGO Partners (where a rank of 1 is the most important). Respondents were then asked to rank the contribution of Southern NGO partners in terms of importance.

Northern NGO Contribution	Rank
(Other) Capacity building support	1
Project costs	2
Core funding	3
Staff training	4
Staff time	5
Other support	6

Dissemination costs	7
Support to attend conferences	8
Staff exchanges	9

Southern NGO Contribution	Rank
Local knowledge	1
Project knowledge	2
Staff time	3
Staff exchanges	4
Staff training	5
Other capacity building support	6
Other support	7

- The scope of funding for partners is as follows:
 74% respondents' organisations do fund non-project costs without funding project costs.
 26% respondents' organisations do not fund non-project costs without funding project costs

 64% respondents said their organisation have partnerships that do not involve funding.
 36% respondents said that their organisation do not have partnerships that do not involve funding.

The Management of Partnerships

The majority of Northern NGOs only have one staff working in any one partnership arrangement. 4 NGOs have 4 members of staff working in any one partnership arrangement, and 2 NGOs have more than 100 members working in any one partnership arrangement. *(This latter statistic is on such a different scale to the first two categories that it is possible that these respondents misunderstood the question).*

- The data on whether Northern NGOs have Programme Offices in-country or in-region are as follows:
 35% said their organisations have a local office in the regions where the SNGOs are based in all cases.
 43% said their organisations have a local office in the regions where the SNGOs are based in some cases.
 22% said their organisations do not have a local office in the regions where the SNGOs are based.

The Profile of Southern Partners

- Southern Partners are based in the following **regions**:
 38% Partners based in Africa.
 19% Partners based in Asia.
 19% Partners based in Latin America.
 19% Partners based in Eastern Europe.

5% Partners based in Middle East.

- Respondents were asked to define which types of organisation could be included within the scope of their definition of partnership. The results were as follows:

Development NGOs 19%

Community-based organisations 17%

NGO Support Organisations 15%

Government agencies 14%

Church-based organisations 11%

Multi-lateral Agencies 9%

Trade Unions 8%

Private sector organisations 7%

PROMOTING EFFECTIVE NORTH – SOUTH NGO PARTNERSHIPS

Vicky Mancuso Brehm

Partnerships between NGOs based in the 'North' and the 'South' have become a key part of international development processes. NGOs are drawn to the concept of partnership as an expression of solidarity that goes beyond financial aid, however few development concepts have been the subject of such rigorous debate. Although there is now an extensive literature on the concept, there has been little empirical research on what Northern NGOs actually mean by partnership, how they implement it in practice and the lessons that they have learnt from experience.

In order to bridge this gap, INTRAC is carrying out research into North-South NGO Partnerships. The first phase of the research assessed how Northern NGOs implement the notion of partnership in practice in their relations with Southern NGOs. The starting point was to understand and analyse the views and practices of ten European NGOs in Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK. This paper presents the research findings, illustrating the complex and varied nature of partnerships between NGOs. It suggests ways in which Northern NGOs can develop more systematic approaches to 'good practice' in partnerships.

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The INTRAC Occasional Papers Series

INTRAC's Occasional Papers are designed both to inform and stimulate debate concerning development policy and practice, with particular reference to the NGO sector. The perspectives are derived from INTRAC's own research, training and consultancy work with development agencies in the North, the South and the East.

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