

# Partnerships



The Primary Sources of lessons in this document are projects within DFID's Rural Livelihoods Programme (RLP). The evidences for these lessons mainly come from evaluations of the projects carried out by the Rural Livelihoods Evaluation Partnership (RLEP). The evidences in this document are included as key findings. The Thematic Lessons Paper (TLP) series documents are available in many formats based on stakeholder demand for product style identified through a communications needs assessment survey. This document is the 'Master' or full version of TLP, which includes more detailed lessons clustered under key issues and their evidences recorded as key findings. The TLP series also has available a two page policy brief or 'Summary Sheet' both in English and Bengali. All the documents produced under TLP series are accessible at [www.lcgbangladesh.org/rlep](http://www.lcgbangladesh.org/rlep).

Thematic Lessons Papers (TLP) are intended for stakeholders who are involved in policy/programme design and influencing, in order to assist them in making informed decisions in the future.

The TLPs draw together experiences of livelihoods programme in a particular thematic context. This paper focuses on the Partnerships theme. The lessons in this document are grouped under the following key issues:

- Government-Donor Organisations
- Government / Institutions-NGO
- Private Sector
- Networks and Forums
- Beneficiary/GO/NGO/Institution/Private Sector

**8 PROJECTS  
WITHIN  
DFID'S  
RURAL  
LIVELIHOODS  
PROGRAMME  
(RLP)**

1. Fisheries Training and Extension Project- II (FTEP II)
2. Agricultural Services Innovation Reform Project (ASIRP)
3. Research and Extension in Farm Power Issues (REFPI)
4. Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA)
5. Support For University Fisheries Education and Research (SUFER)
6. Fourth Fisheries Project (FFP)
7. CARE Rural Livelihoods Programme (CARE RLP)
8. Community Based Fisheries Management (CBFM2)

## KEY LESSONS SUMMARY

1. Partnerships are often a means to an end, and not an end in themselves. The nature of the RLP partnerships has therefore tended to reflect the intended project outcomes, and the arrangements may intentionally last only until these have been achieved.
2. The most important kind of development partnerships are probably those between Government and civil society. Short-term partnerships created purposively under the umbrella of an RLP project may not be sustained, but have often contributed to, or encouraged, the wider goal of improved governance.
3. The word 'partnership' is used too liberally within the RLP and includes 'partners' under contractual conditions. Shared visions, common goals and mutual trust are essential for successful long-term working partnerships, particularly when 'partnering' involves equality in decision-making from the planning stages. Under performance-based contractual regimes the mutuality of vision and goals is less critical.
4. Donor changes in policy and approach during project implementation can place strains on Government partners and project staff. This hinders performance of projects and can cause confusion, misunderstanding and resentment that mar institutional partnerships. This is particularly acute in multi-donor funded projects where the donor partnerships may themselves be fragile and accommodating differing priorities.
5. The capacity of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) to provide technical and logistic support has often been overestimated. This is particularly true with smaller NGOs who struggle to recruit and retain quality staff, particularly when they are rurally based. Efforts by projects to upgrade NGO staff skills are frequently frustrated by their subsequent movement to higher paid and/or urban-based posts.
6. In the developed world NGOs often regard themselves as the independent conscience of Government, able to raise their own funds, and adhere to their fundamental principles and priorities. In Bangladesh, local NGOs are, of necessity, primarily focused on micro-credit and are more comfortable with contractual relationships than with developmentally strategic partnerships.
7. It must also be recognized that whilst NGOs are generally considered as being there to "help the poor", in reality, local organisations often lack the skills and training required for social development and livelihoods analysis. As partners for poverty reduction and sustainable development such NGOs are an evolving resource that must be trained and encouraged to adopt a more strategic view of their role in national development. It cannot be assumed that they will naturally fall into this role.
8. Partnership between civil society organisations and Government agencies is often constrained by mutual suspicion and hostility. Such attitudes can, to an extent, be broken down through project-brokered workshops, forums and conditionalities attached to funding. However, senior Government staff will always be wary of losing influence and authority, and the best options for improvement in the short term probably lie at junior levels where newly formed personal friendships appear to have led to good working relationships in some projects.
9. It is difficult to target the extreme poor. NGOs are good at providing linkages to poor and vulnerable groups but believe that such people are incapable of repaying credit, while the private sector and Government agencies rarely see them as "customers". When the poor are engaged, it is essential that socially and technically aware partners ensure that any support given is appropriate to their needs, desires and capabilities.
10. Carefully conceived networks and forums can provide valuable tools for discovering common interests both within and between organizations, but maintenance of such arrangements is difficult outside of a project funding umbrella.
11. For obvious reasons, private sector partnerships are largely driven by financial incentives. Whilst poverty focused projects can, and often do, provide money to kick-start such linkages, sustainable long term success must involve a fiscal commitment on the part of the private sector partner(s). Such commitment will be dependent on transparent mutual financial benefit.
12. All research orientated projects have engendered productive, poverty focused, research partnerships between Government Organisations (GO), institutions, NGOs and the private sector through variously using Competitive Grant Schemes (CGS), networks and forums. Dissemination of research products has been achieved by intensive use of NGOs, the media and workshops involving GOs and private sector bodies.



Photo Credit: Rachel Waterhouse

## INTRODUCTION

Partnership is a term employed in different ways by different development actors. It is often used to describe the relationship between customer and client, but is more correctly applied to the joining of individuals or institutions in the pursuit of a common objective. In project terms, partnership may simply be a time-bound vehicle to achieve a specific purpose, or it may in itself, be an output. Both may be valid in development terms.

Watkins and Csaky (2003) identified two common elements for partnerships. The first involves a sense of mutual trust and equality between partners working together and the second is mutual commitment to agreed objectives, reciprocal obligations and accountability. They stated that *“These two themes can be thought of in terms of unity between individuals and organisations, and the direction (or overarching goals) of the partnership shared among its members.”*

The RLP project supports partnerships and encourages networks to strengthen programme delivery. The experiences and lessons from the RLP projects may contribute to future partnering arrangements that are more closely associated with the conceptual objectives of long-term commitment, shared responsibility, reciprocal obligation, equality, mutuality and balance of power.

## THEMATIC LESSONS

### Key Issue 1 Government-Donor Organisations

All externally donor funded programmes/projects require Government involvement to some degree. This can be on a purely superficial level with the formal approval for project funding and implementation or as a direct active partner. The former is outside the remit of this document because of the different partnership emphasis involved and the resulting stresses peculiar to it. Many projects though, directly function as a partnership with a duality of Government employees working alongside expatriate and locally recruited staff. The quality of such an alliance can be directly linked to the outcomes of any such project. Such a partnership however is only destined to continue at inter Governmental level whilst terminating at project level with the latter's completion.

### Key lesson for 'better practice'

Government and donor partnerships tend to be driven by the latter and rapidly changing donor development perspectives can seriously delay project and programme implementation if the Government side is not fully engaged at all times in the process of change.

### Lessons Learnt

- **Shared vision.** Such partnerships are often based on differing perceptions of the “common” goal. At a macro level this can be seen in the process whereby Government follows the Technical Assistance Project-Proforma (TAPP) but the donor focuses on a Project Memorandum. This can lead to considerable divergence of opinion amongst project managers, although this is less evident at the junior levels tasked with direct implementation. The latter are generally responsible for success where it occurs. A shared vision is also vital where there is multidonor funding of a particular programme/project. An extreme case is the difference in partnership perspective between a development bank offering loans and a bilateral agency providing grants.
- **Participation.** There is often a two-tier approach in project staffing that can cause resentment on both sides. Remuneration of local project staff is usually significantly higher than Government employees at comparable grades (although long-term job security is a significant bonus for the latter). This dichotomy of terms and conditions between partners frequently translates to different working patterns that can frustrate project implementation. It is an inescapable fact that projects create “artificial” working structures and processes that can rarely be sustained post-project thus affecting potential longevity of the partnership.
- **Changing emphasis over project life span.** Over the last eight years there has been significant evolution of the aims and approach to development by donor agencies, and the agencies themselves are changing. One consequence of this has been that projects conceived and agreed in earlier policy environments find themselves at odds with current donor thinking. This can cause considerable confusion to partners, particularly when the changes of attitude may themselves become obsolete or marginalised within a short period.
- **Government dependency.** Long term projects and extensions, whilst often permitting enhanced achievement of goals and the chance to respond to changed development objectives, can lead to dependency and a lack of incentive for sustained “home grown” development.

### Key Findings

- The Fourth Fisheries Project (FFP) design ignored fundamental incompatibility between the goals of the Department of Fisheries (DoF) and those of the donors. The donor mandate was to reduce poverty through enhanced knowledge and participation, whereas the sole aim of DoF was to increase production. This conflict was, to a lesser extent experienced in other fisheries projects.
- The Fisheries Training and Extension Project Phase 2 (FTEP II) identified a lack of linkage between donor thinking and the perception of DoF of its needs for sector development. This was in part attributed to continuous project funding from donors with minor parallel pressure for strategic thinking.

- The changing donor emphasis over project life span caused initial delays in implementation to the Research and Extension in Farm Power Issues (REFPI), Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project (ASIRP) and Support for University Fisheries Education and Research (SUFER). This was particularly true of the introduction of the “Livelihoods” concept into projects designed under a different regime. Some Project Directors complained of rapidly changing donor directives, which frustrated long term strategies for project implementation and thus opportunities to strengthen government-donor alliances.
- Reduced engagement by the Department For International Development Bangladesh (DFIDB) at project level was felt to be a retrograde step by many local staff at all levels and induced a feeling of lack of commitment by the donor. The ASIRP EOP review specifically noted that “DFID-B staff need to do more to re-engage with project TA teams and their executing agencies, partly in terms of explaining to the national partners any changes that have taken place in management style and partly in terms of providing feedback to TA teams regarding issues that substantively affect project outcomes”.
- Where there is multi-donor funding every care should be taken that goals and management objectives dovetail. For example, it was noted with ASIRP, which was funded by DFID and the World Bank, that there were areas where lack of co-ordination was detrimental to the project.
- ASIRP and FTEPII noted entrenched attitudes or a resistance to change in some Government departments. This questions whether donor support was valid without firm commitment.

#### Key Issue 2 Government / Institutions-NGO

Where Government agencies have a designated responsibility for social and technical assistance there is a strong tradition of autonomy with little perceived need to involve other organizations. NGOs however vary in function according to size and national or international status. Most large NGOs perform much as Government departments or institutions although they usually maintain a sound basis at village level. Despite being founded as organizations dedicated to poverty alleviation, NGOs inevitably focus much of their time on credit management and seeking support from external agencies. Conversely, Government departments see themselves as implementers of legislation and are either internally or externally funded to achieve, from their perspective, production targets and centrally set initiatives. Partnerships between NGOs and Government or institutions such as universities and research institutions are frequently hindered by this difference in emphasis, which can be further obstructed by mutual distrust.

#### Key lesson for 'better practice'

With ever changing development needs and implementation it is essential that time and money is set aside to provide training to all partners on major issues such as livelihoods concepts and social development. Joint participation will hopefully also turn mutual suspicion to mutual respect and engender sound working relationships.

#### Lessons Learnt

- **Capacity.** The effectiveness of both Government and NGOs to provide positive inter-agency cooperation and social change for beneficiaries is a major constraint. Likewise technical transfer is limited by lack of training skills. Many recent donor programmes have attempted to address this with particular success amongst some Government departments. Long-term effective use of trained personnel is usually hampered by lack of funding and arbitrary posting of staff without regard for their specific skills. For financial reasons NGO employees tend to be poorly qualified when recruited, and once trained will frequently leave for higher paid work in the Government or private sector.
- **Ownership.** With inter-institutional competition for funding and kudos (e.g. universities and the Fisheries Research Institute), partnerships can be severely hampered to the point of total dysfunction.
- **Sustainability.** There have to be perceived areas of common interest and mutual benefit for any partnership to survive. Most frequently, partnerships are driven by a common funding source with conditionalities of cooperation. Such relationships will usually cease upon project/programme cessation. However, at a personal level, individuals have often been observed to continue



cooperation based on friendship and mutual trust established during the process of project implementation. Institutionalised partnerships rarely exist.

- **Poverty targeting.** NGOs tend to exclude hardcore poor from their programmes, focusing on individuals and groups that can service credit arrangements. Despite this, they provide Government agents with access to the poor and medium poor that usually fall below their “poverty focused” extension programmes.
- **Complementation and building bridges.** For many smaller NGOs there is often a cultural and intellectual divide between themselves and Government departments and institutions. Neither believes that they need each other or that the other has anything to offer. Despite this attitude, developing such partnerships can be mutually beneficial providing that poverty alleviation is the common goal. NGOs have access to the poor whilst Government and institutions can provide financial and technical support plus access to elites within communities. Introductory forums centred on a common theme with the offer of shared resources, particularly funding, can successfully establish long-term relationships.
- **Reluctance to engage.** GO and development agencies frequently contract NGOs to manage projects or provide assistance in aspects of a larger programme. Many NGOs accustomed to such arrangements prefer this approach and are reluctant to engage in the less formal atmosphere of partnerships.

### Key Findings

- All projects working with NGOs identified the limited effectiveness of NGO capacity to organize and achieve cooperation among all stakeholders and limited coordination between implementing parties as an important constraint (e.g. DoF, DAE, CARE).
- The ASIRP End of Project Report (EOP) stated that “*Local NGO efforts have not built significant social capital; even when the hardcore poor are targeted, they tend later to be replaced by small and medium farmers*” and that “*With the exception of some large national NGOs, NGO capacity for providing extension services is generally weak and all NGOs tend sooner or later to exclude the hardcore poor from agricultural initiatives*”.
- NGOs are generally unable to single-handedly deal with local disruptive forces e.g. local elites. This is hardly surprising when most NGOs are not used to being involved in brokering power struggles over common property resources. If the NGOs receive strong backing from GoB agencies there is more chance of success. FFP illustrated this; “*In the 20 per cent of sites which the project considers to be successful such success has largely been achieved because local stakeholders have been able to counteract the elite and develop strong partnerships with DoF and NGOs that have enabled them to do this*”
- The Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA) project was particularly successful in establishing a working relationship with the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) because the project and funding were embedded with the national partner. SUFER was similarly successful in breaking down isolationist attitudes amongst various departments of five national universities by the simple expedient of organizing joint training sessions and workshops thereby engendering friendships and working relationships.
- Partnerships can enable different stakeholder agendas (GO, Institutions, NGOs, private industry, farmers and other end users) to be shared, understood and addressed. This was particularly effective with the research projects of REFPI, SUFER and PETRRA.
- Detailed livelihoods analysis revealed to Northwest Fisheries Extension Project phase 2 (NFEP2), SUFER and ASIRP that NGOs tend to exclude hardcore poor from their programmes. Only those that can service credit and have some form of collateral are included.
- REFPI demonstrated that shared incentives and complementary strengths are necessary for partnerships to thrive with added potential scale-up (win-win situation).
- Experiences from the research projects (PETRRA, SUFER and REFPI) suggest that if attention is given to complementary strengths of partners (NGO, researchers, private sector) then the end-result is very good but without shared incentives the relationship will not sustain beyond project funding.
- ASIRP found that there was no sustainability in partnerships that were based solely on access to funding. Genuine partnerships are based on perceived mutual objectives.

- Poor people can successfully act as partners with scientists, researchers and extension agents of GO and NGO if they are provided with necessary support. PETRRA, Community Based Fisheries Management Phase II (CBFM2) and SUFER all demonstrated the success of such initiatives but with serious reservations about long term sustainability when funding ceased. SUFER attempted to address this problem by encouraging NGOs to commit a proportion of their funds to the market development of products resulting from university and farmer research initiatives.
- Negative attitudes between GO and NGO preclude strategic partnerships for service delivery; this is a constraint to maximizing client benefits (FTEPII).
- ASIRP, FTEP II and CBFM2 all demonstrated the difficulties in equal partnership management if GO are represented in committees/forums comprising a broad range of stakeholders.
- Government and institutions have a poor record in targeting women. This was addressed to some extent by PETRRA and SUFER, which selected NGOs with female targeted programmes.
- SUFER, PETRRA and REFPI funded research clearly demonstrated that extension conducted jointly by a variety of GO, NGO and donor funded local staff had long term benefits in terms of knowledge transfer and farmer practice.
- University-NGO collaboration has been successfully demonstrated by SUFER because the parties had a clear understanding of each other's shared interest and complementary strengths in the collaboration.
- CARE-RLP made efforts to improve the partnering arrangements through joint training and planning exercises so those partner NGOs were more involved with decision-making. However, in common with SUFER, they noted, that some NGOs appear to prefer previous contractual arrangements.

### Key Issue 3 Private Sector

Partnerships with the private sector almost exclusively entail financial involvement in terms of investment by at least one partner for the promotion or development of a commodity. Within that caveat the private sector does participate in larger forums and in partnerships with institutions and NGOs (themselves sometimes considered to be part of this sector). From a project perspective such partnerships can be a very successful means of developing and promoting “cottage industries” from the poor in rural communities with potentially long term benefits for all. Care should be taken though that the poor are not disadvantaged through sharp practice by a generally more astute and financially powerful partner. Clear and transparent mutual financial benefits are the key to successful private sector partnership.

### Key lesson for 'better practice'

The private sector is not a philanthropic organization and as such should not be expected to operate in any association that will not produce a profit in the long term. At project level this **might** mean subsidizing private partners in the short term to establish long-term partnerships with the poor.

### Lessons Learnt

- **Marketing.** Poverty focused research and development can be successfully addressed through universities and the National Agriculture Research Centres. However, research scientists generally have a poor grasp of marketing and promoting their developed products. Partnerships with the private sector have proven vital for such ventures.
- **Protecting the poor.** However good the relationship between researcher and beneficiary in product development that is appropriate to their needs and circumstance, it is a sad fact that when the private sector and NGOs become involved the poor are frequently sidelined to the role of exploited employee with their ownership lost. This is usually due to the business interests and profit motives of the socially and financially more secure private sector entrepreneur. Selection of partners is critical to preventing this scenario. Fortunately researchers need funding for continued work and have a clear incentive to manage such linkages to demonstrate their development capability to external funding agencies.

- **As research partners.** There is a danger with many private sector partnerships that the private sector only becomes involved when paid to do so. Commitment to long-term development and marketing should be demonstrated by financial investment by the private sector. Adverse linkages can be avoided where all parties have a common interest in the product.

### Key Findings

- The REFPI EOP review stated that *“participation of manufacturers and researchers for the equipment and technology development helped to bring the groups closer to each other and focused on the need of the farmers”*. Furthermore, partnerships could be developed in the private sectors if the partners work for the common interest and complement each other.
- SUFER found that key research initiatives with the very poor could be successfully completed but very careful management of NGO selection and monitoring was necessary to prevent exploitation of the poor. Exploitation usually occurred at local level and senior NGO managers were generally unaware.
- Both FTEPII and NFEP2 attempted to engage private sector banking and NGOs in formal agreements to disburse money earmarked for the aquaculture sector to poor pond owners. Despite training for bank staff in the basics of aquaculture and its economics plus numerous promotional meetings between enthusiastic senior bank officials, local branch managers and NGOs the whole initiative failed. The principle reason was that with a few exceptions local bank staff considered the loans too small to warrant their attention.
- Experience by PETRRA showed that emerging issues like marketing could easily be addressed if regional forums are developed involving the private corporate sector. For instance PETRRA found *“The involvement of the private companies in some agriculture research was successful in linking the poor with this sector. Marketing can be a weak link affecting the potential of certain technologies to impact on livelihoods and it appeared that private sector links should be further enhanced to make sure that innovative marketing and processing activities are introduced and accessible to the poor”*.
- FTEPII suggested that a clear mandate based on a coherent sector strategy could encourage the private sector to play a major role in partnership.
- FFP identified potential willingness of the private sector to invest in providing support to small- scale shrimp producers in the interests of improved product quality both during on-growing and in distribution.

### Key Issue 4 Networks and Forums

By definition these are, to varying degrees, a loose association of partnerships that are principally formed to provide dissemination of information and shared experiences. Properly formed, and with a dedicated membership, they have the potential to provide powerful lobbying groups for issues ranging from legal reform to funding. Their form can cover constituted committee led organizations, informal yet regular gatherings, fairs, workshops to electronic newsletters and websites.

### Key lesson for 'better practice'

Sustainable networks or forums involving a wide range of participant experience can be achieved if there is a demonstrable need with common aims and objectives. A key factor is usually the possibility of accessing funding but also to share work experiences and achievements. An indicator of success is attendance without financial assistance.

### Lessons Learnt

- **Common goals.** A network of professional stakeholders can be a platform to raise common issues with a longer-term aim to pursue development of wider strategies based on lessons from the project. However networks and forums were generally dominated by professional bodies and elites and it was rare for the poor to be included.



- **Coercion through funding.** With the exception of a few locally formed networks and forums set up by NGOs, most are formed by projects. These usually have some financial incentives whether direct or through providing access to external funding. Such partnerships never survive the project.
- **Pragmatism.** It is unrealistic to expect potential network/forum partners to finance such activities if the perceived benefits are minimal or even negative. Acquired or self-generated knowledge provides a competitive advantage and will not be shared between rivals such as NGOs and private sector organisations. From a project perspective, networks and forums are seen as a conduit for disseminating and promoting project activities and for this purpose funding will be made available.
- **Impact.** Lessons on the impact of these networks are unavailable because the RLP projects have not measured impact (perhaps a lesson in itself). Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that linkages have been valuable to the projects and forum members in knowledge transfer and sharing information (the extent of 'gain' and cost is unknown)

### Key Findings

- FTEPII was instrumental in assisting the formation of District fisheries forums with the aim of providing a semi-formal linkage between the DoF and NGOs at local level. The purpose was to engage these groups in dialogue to address mutual concerns and a shared goal of enhancing aquaculture management with particular emphasis on the poorer sector. Results and sustainability were mixed with much dependent upon the enthusiasm of the local District Fisheries Officer.
- The CARE-RLP was probably the only project that successfully integrated the poor as active participants in a forum, on a regular basis, through their farmer field schools. Initially designed for training they were evolving into community-based organisations that were addressing such issues as sanitation, vaccinations and access to water bodies.
- The common experience of NFEP2 and FTEPII was that NGOs attended principally for the prospect of accessing finance through donor-funded projects.
- SUFER had good success with the formation of the Bangladesh Fisheries Research Forum, which at the end of project was seeking formal Government registration. No expenses were paid to attending members and the three meetings held each attracted over 80 representatives from GO, NGO, private sector, institutions and donor agencies. Its continuation appeared assured, in the short term at least, as a conduit for donor research funding.
- ASIRP found that facilitating partnership formation cemented by money created “marriages of convenience”; which their EOP review believed actually countered sustainability, as it could get in the way of genuine partnerships based on perceived mutual complementarities.
- FFP and PETRRA both used networks as a platform for professional stakeholders to take up common issues with a longer-term aim to pursue development of wider strategies based on lessons from the projects.

### Key Issue 5 Beneficiary/GO/NGO/Institution/Private Sector

Critical to all development focused partnerships are the end users (beneficiaries in this context), typically poor people whose livelihoods are dependent upon a rural based activity. Without their presence in any such partnership the *raison d'être* for such is meaningless. Frequently though, cognizance of the need for their active involvement is lost in the emphasis placed upon more vocal and socially advantaged agencies within the partnership(s). Failure of complete participation places any such coalition at risk.

### Key lesson for 'better practice'

Time, training and resources of pro poor partners must be built into development programmes if a genuine and sustained engagement of the poor is to be manifested during project implementation.

## Lessons Learnt

- **Engaging the poor.** Usually the poor and hardcore poor lack a voice as a result of their perceived status in society and inherent want of confidence through limited education. Conscious effort is essential by all other partners to listen and recruit their active participation. Failure to do so will result in misconceptions of development purpose within the circumstances of the partnership.
- **Participation.** Poverty focused project design and research initiatives fail if target groups are not intimately involved from the outset. Successful outcomes are further enhanced if the beneficiaries are also the participants and their opinions sought and listened too throughout the project cycle.
- **Research.** All research-based projects successfully engaged all but the Government sector through well-advertised calls for proposals to access CGS funding. Most included socio economic and gender issues as subjects for research as well as technological development. Many NGOs however mistook this access to money as an opportunity for extension activities rather than address issues raised by their farmer groups.
- **Conciliation within the partnership.** It is not enough though to assimilate the opinions of the poor. An initial training and sensitisation of GO, institution and in some cases NGO staff to working with and understanding of the needs of the poor within the livelihoods framework is an essential prerequisite to a successful partnership with the rural poor. However there has been no compensatory addition of time within project lifecycles to build partner capacity in order to understand these complex development issues.
- **Partner selection.** Selection of partners is often governed by location and interest, which can in some instances override capacity to deliver. Partner integrity (particularly in the case of NGOs and the private sector) can also cause problems that are not often discovered until well into project implementation. Such obstacles can however be minimized if donors, Government, institutions and major NGOs are well coordinated at senior management level.
- **Sustainability.** During the course of formal partnerships, it is often the case that personal friendships and business linkages are formed that extend the partnership scenario beyond the lifetime of a project. However, these are often missed by project reviews since their effectiveness begins as projects end. Most evidence of this is therefore anecdotal.

## Key Findings

- CARE-RLP farmer field schools (FFS) found that even when the poor are targeted the “wealthier” members still displayed advantages in marketing and advocacy. In CARE's 1st Output to Purpose Review it was cautioned that “*If the FFS ends up as a new elite group that does not have a socially responsible philosophy, it may even be perpetuating disparities rather than improving them*”.
- As documented by NFEP2, aquaculture projects can adversely affect the extreme poor. This may, for example, result from promoting sound pond aquaculture management, in previously uncultured ponds used by the poor for subsistence fishing. A FFP review team also reported that “there have been adverse impacts on the livelihood of households that previously engaged in the jatka fishery” and recommended “*an assessment be carried out ... of the potential social impacts on fishing communities, with particular emphasis on poorer groups, to inform the management plan currently being developed and ensure that mitigation strategies are realistic.*”
- REFPI and PETRRA were particularly successful in securing research partnerships between institutions, beneficiaries, NGOs and the private sector by advertising access to research funds through CGSs. They took the opportunity to broaden research from a technology base to include gender and social issues.
- The SUFER experience was that most NGOs applied for money to continue extension work or support credit programmes. However, it had a very good experience in funding MSc projects that enabled students, universities and NGOs to engage in much smaller farmer led research proposals. The process resulted in a much better understanding of the differing logistics, attitudes and conditions under which all partners worked.
- Partnerships with NGOs, private sector and local Government can help in delivering extension services at the field level which was clearly demonstrated by FTEPII and NFEP2.

- PETRRA and SUFER demonstrated that close contact by the research community with the farming community at project site remarkably enhanced the process of information exchange. This engagement built up functional linkages with stakeholders at different levels.
- PETRRA, REFPI and SUFER used training in livelihoods and participatory research techniques to greatly enhance and in some cases completely change, the perspective of researchers towards their understanding of the needs of the poor and how to make experimental design relevant. This was further broadened by the involvement of the target groups at implementation level.
- Where a livelihoods approach was taken in project assessment as with GOLDA, FTEPII and NFEP2, there was a knock-on effect of enhanced poverty awareness by GO officers, NGOs and local staff involved in the reviews.
- There is evidence from FTEPII and NFEP2 that some Government Officers involved in the schools programmes were frequently accessed by parents of participating pupils to provide informal advice on pond aquaculture practices.
- Management of the ASIRP Partnership Initiative Fund commented that *“community / beneficiaries should be considered as partners if continuity and sustainability of the post project activities is desired”*

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## WAY FORWARD?

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- The term partnership covers many types of association and its use requires considerable care. During the project/programme planning process it is necessary to clearly define the benefits anticipated for, and from, each partner, and to decide whether partnerships must continue beyond the project term for these benefits to be sustained. A marriage of convenience may be an acceptable project delivery vehicle in some cases, but in a policy environment focusing on budgetary support, more genuine strategic partnerships may be essential.
- Once the required nature of partnerships has been determined the project/programme can be tailored to ensure an appropriate supporting environment. Where long-term associations and networking are deemed vital, it is necessary to build into the design sufficient time and resources for capacity building, and possibly a mechanism to support critical elements in the post-project period.
- Where more than one donor partner is supporting a project/programme it is important that their (possibly differing) policies and approaches are understood by all stakeholders at the outset, and that a transparent and user friendly process is in place for explaining any policy change process during implementation. The establishment of initial mutuality of purpose between all stakeholders is vital, as is mutual understanding of evolving Government, donor and NGO thinking.
- The ultimate goal of most aid projects is sustainable and equitable economic development that ultimately leads to poverty elimination. It is well recognised that improved governance at all levels is essential to achieving this ultimate target. The formation and nurturing of project partnerships should be seen as an opportunity to encourage good governance by bringing together key stakeholders that might not otherwise meet in a suitable forum. When thinking partnerships think strategic.
- In Bangladesh it has frequently proven true that whilst the upper echelons of institutional management are inflexible and reluctant to cooperate freely and openly with partner organizations, field level junior staff have a more pragmatic approach. Where Government dictat and policy fail, friendship and respect amongst junior staff can deliver successful partnerships. In designing interventions this reality should be reflected in opportunities to bring together junior staff of partner organisations on a regular and carefully structured basis.
- Reference to private sector involvement has become fashionable in development thinking, but in reality limited effort has been invested in what this could actually mean in the context of rural livelihoods improvement at a field level. Partnerships between private sector organisations and communities, NGOs or even Government departments are all possible, but would require a very focused approach that accommodates the commercial ambitions of the companies and the vulnerability of the poor. Development of such partnerships deserves major attention as a route to sustainability and graduation from project dependence.

- A directory of strong and corruption free potential NGO and private sector partners would greatly enhance delivery of development to the poor and limit wastage of time and money. Donor agencies and/or international NGOs could manage such a directory. However, the likelihood of political pressure against such a scheme is likely to be vigorous. One existing option to address this is to use more explicitly the DFID draft Voluntary Code of Conduct for Corporate Governance. The Code sets out the best practice NGOs should aspire to follow.
- Websites could be a cheap alternative to maintaining networks, but this approach lacks the spontaneity of a debating forum, relies on access, and would thus exclude participation of the poor, and of field based institutional staff.

## FURTHER READING

**ASIRP (March 2003):** Partnership Initiative Funds, A Synthesis of Findings

**ASSP & ASIRP (2003):** Working with NGOs in Bangladesh. A Ten Year Review.

**Brooks, A.C. & Brown, D.W. [Eds. (2003)]:** Training and Extension in the Department of Fisheries, The FTEP-II Experience.

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More information on these themes and issues can be found in Project Output to Purpose and End of Project Review documents accessible at [www.lcgbangladesh.org/rlep](http://www.lcgbangladesh.org/rlep).