

How to Partner for Development Research

**Effective approaches to collaboration
and partnerships in international
development research and evaluation**



Institute for
Sustainable
Futures



RESEARCH FOR
DEVELOPMENT
IMPACT NETWORK

A collaboration between
the Australian Council for
International Development
and Australian universities

About the Research for Development Impact Network

The Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network, (formerly) the ACFID University Network, is a collaboration between the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and Australian universities. It is a network of practitioners, researchers and evaluators working in international development with the objective of linking quality research, policy and practice for impact in international development.

The Network began in 2009 as a partnership between ACFID member NGOs and Australian universities, when it was co-hosted by ACFID and the Institute of Human Security at La Trobe University. The partnership grew out of a collective desire to widen debate on international development and to strengthen collaboration between academics and members of ACFID. Since this time, the Network has continued to grow and promote positive relationships and connections between ACFID members and universities, with the overall goal of supporting collaboration and understanding across actors within the Australian development sector.

The Network is supported by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

About the Institute for Sustainable Futures

The Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) is an interdisciplinary research and consulting organisation within the University of Technology Sydney. ISF has been conducting project-based research across Australia and internationally since 1997. ISF program areas spans: cities and buildings; climate change and adaptation; energy and climate change; food futures; international development, learning and change, natural resources and ecosystems, resource futures, transport and urban water futures. ISF's strategy is to deliver innovative solutions across the diverse domains on sustainability and to contribute towards reaching the UN's SDGs by aligning each program with at least 5 of the UN's SDGs.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Guide

This Guide '*How to Partner for Development Research*' is a practical resource to guide Australian-based researchers and international development organisations, particularly Australian-based NGOs (ANGOs). The Guide seeks to support good practice for research partnerships in order to generate evidence to influence policy and practice in the international development sector.

Who is the Guide for?

The primary audience for the Guide are development practitioners, including those working in NGOs; and researchers, including those working within academic institutions – with a particular focus on the Australian development sector.

The Guide will also be valuable for others engaged in international development, such as NGOs and researchers based in other countries; donors; individual consultants and the private sector, who are interested in setting up or participating in research activities.

Where did the Guide come from?

The Guide was commissioned by the Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network, a network of practitioners, researchers and evaluators working in international development. The RDI Network is a partner of and hosted by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), and funded by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). <https://rdinetwork.org.au>

The guide is a continuation of partnership work being done by the Network, including a workshop in 2014 and the collating of earlier case studies (which can be found on the website under the Learning Hub), and a series of events held over the years, and continuing to be held, focusing on partnerships.

The Institute for Sustainable Futures of the University Technology Sydney prepared the Guide drawing on experiences and lessons learned by those who have already engaged in research partnerships, and a range of existing materials and resources on cross sector collaboration particularly within the development sector.

<https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/institute-sustainable-futures>

Why are we interested in research partnerships?

There is a growing practice and appreciation of development research, which often involves both ANGOs and university-based researchers, but not everyone starts with all the necessary skills and experience to develop effective partnerships across different types of organisations.

This Guide distills key learning from across the sector and identifies features of good partnership that will maximise potential for quality research and contribute to development outcomes.

Why are we interested in ‘partnership’?

We need to be careful about the word ‘partnership’. In this Guide, we intentionally describe the different ways in which NGOs and researchers can work together to conduct research (see terminology section). We emphasise the need to create shared meaning of key terms used to describe how NGOs and researchers work together.

In this Guide we intentionally value the practice of collaboration to carry out research. As described within this Guide, this way of working provides the greatest potential to create real changes in the contexts where NGOs work, generate evidence which is usable and contributes to development effectiveness, and to inform future development of policy and practice.

Collaborative practice resonates with the way that NGO and ANGOs work with in-country partners and communities. As described through this Guide, research partnerships can strengthen and contribute to this work.

Using the guide

Following this introduction, the Guide is divided into six sections:

- Part 1 provides distinctions between different types of partnership relevant to research focused on international development
- Part 2 offers some reasons why partnership is of value, especially for the agenda of sustainable development
- Part 3 sets out practical advice to set up, maintain and improve the process and outcomes of a research partnership
- Part 4 summarises key guidance in the form of a checklist for partnership
- Part 5 contains links to additional resources and references
- Part 6 shows a range of different partnerships through a series of case studies

We suggest you take a look at the terminology section as well! (see next page)

It's important to get an understanding of the language of 'research' and 'partnerships' so that you can make informed decisions about how to set up and maintain a partnership in order to achieve the best development outcomes.

Within this document you will see a few icons to help you navigate different content areas:



recognise the 'gems' and value-add which result through research partnerships



look out for and pay attention to these topics to get the best out of your partnership



beware there could be danger ahead – take precautions to avoid challenges



take practical actions / steps to get the best out of your research partnership



ask questions to help you navigate choices and decisions within a research partnership



establish a milestone in setting up and maintaining a research partnership

Terminology

Within the development sector, the use of a range of terminology and lack of definition to describe research practice can result in mixed understandings about what we are all saying and meaning.

It's important to note that since we are building on a range of different resources and experiences, terminology on this topic cannot be definitive. However, hopefully this terminology list provides some clarity and a basis for shared understanding about research partnerships and helps you navigate the content of this Guide.

Collaboration / Partnership	<p>Often these terms are used interchangeably. They should be understood in relation to a continuum of engagement between parties.</p> <p>Both can be understood in relation to the practice of working together to achieve shared or overlapping objectives.</p> <p>Collaboration can be understood as a process to engage multiple parties to come together to address a defined purpose which could not be achieved by working alone.</p> <p>Partnership may be a more formal arrangement and often resources from each party are shared (co-mingling) to achieve shared objectives. Within a partnership, shared benefits can be realised but also risks are shared across all the parties.</p>
Evaluation	A systematic, objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program or policy. ¹
Research	An original investigation undertaken to gain knowledge, understanding and insight. ² For the purpose of this Guide, evaluation is considered as a type of applied research, and therefore the Guide covers partnerships and collaborations for both research and for evaluations.
ANGO	<p>Australian Non-government Organisations are non-profit organisations, registered in Australia, which operate independently of any government, typically whose purpose is to address a social, environmental or political issue.</p> <p>Within this Guide, the term development practitioners is used to refer to staff working within an NGO.</p>
Partnership Broker	Partnership brokers can be 'internal' (operating from within one of the partner organisations) or 'external' (called in to provide specialist support when needed). Partnership brokers serve the partners by helping them to shape their partnership. ³
Researcher	<p>A professional carrying out research.</p> <p>Could be a researcher working within an established institution or a person carrying out research activities.</p> <p>Within this Guide, a researcher is most often referred to as an academic working at a university, since the organisational dimensions of universities are especially relevant to international research partnerships.</p>

Part 1: What is partnership?

Be clear about what 'partnership' means

It's important to be clear about what we mean by the word 'partnership', especially in the context of research in the international development sector.

Within existing writing on research partnership there is often a lack of definition of this term 'partnership'. This is indicative that there is not one way, but instead a whole range of practices (see Part 6 for case studies of practice).

Often the terms 'collaboration' and 'partnership' are used interchangeably – but there is a difference.

This section doesn't aim to provide a single definition of partnership – but instead describes partnership which can be considered within a continuum of practice.

Types of partnership

Knowing the type of partnership you want to set up will help you establish the most appropriate way of working (which is explored in more detail in Part 3 of this Guide).

Knowing the type of partnership you are practicing will also help you communicate your research, internally and also externally to a range of stakeholders.

Below a few ways to consider types of partnership are offered along the continuum of practice.

Transactional or transformational?

We are interested in partnership and the contribution it offers in multiple ways. We are interested in the outputs or products which present research findings, and also in the practice of partnership and transformational change that may or may not result for individuals and organisations involved. Figure 1 sets out a continuum of practice which differentiates ways practitioners and researchers could work together. Of course, no one research partnership is the same, though there are typical features at each end of the continuum as noted below.

It may be helpful to use this idea of a continuum of practice to capture the different ways that research can be carried out, how development practitioners and researchers work together, and how the work they do together impacts each partner.

Figure 1: Continuum of practice



Source: Adapted from Partnership Brokers Association

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One party decides the research focus and design • Usually funded by one source • Expectations and deliverables set at the start with no flexibility to change • Short-term commitment to carry out the research • Risk and reward individually mitigated • Relationship must fulfil the contractual obligations • Power to make decisions about the process is vested in one party 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-development of research and design by partners • Complementary skills and resources are brought together • Evolving set of expectations and deliverables decided based on changing context and unexpected events • Longer-term commitment to shared goal • Risk and reward shared • Equity core to relationships • Parties share power to make key decisions about the research
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Questions to consider — ‘is your research transactional or transformational?’

Consider the list of characteristics above – where does your research lie on the continuum of practice in relation to each feature?

There are pros and cons for different ways of working along the continuum. A collaborative practice might not be appropriate in all circumstances. We note below, and also detailed in Part 2, a partnership approach aligns with and supports priority outcomes within the international development sector.

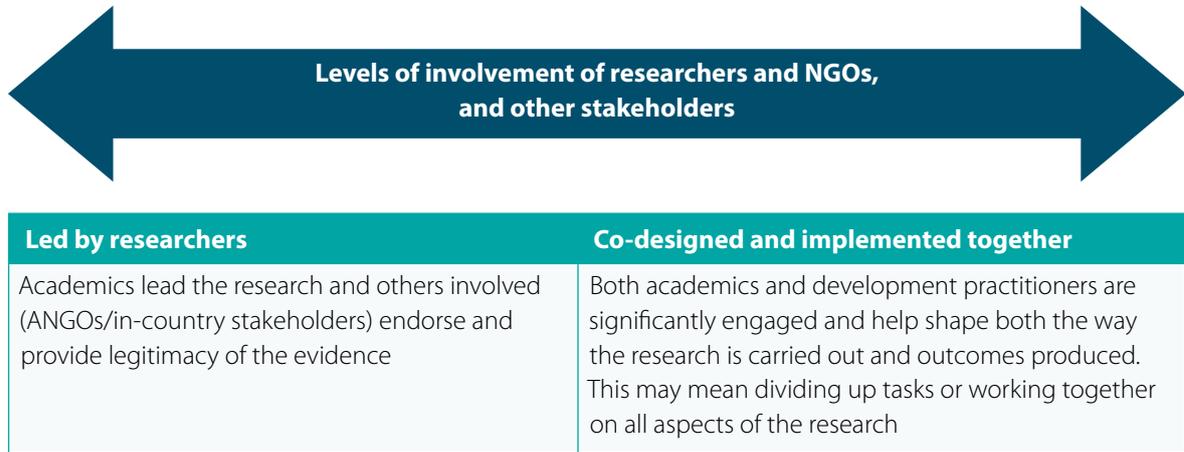
Table 1: Pros and cons of transactional / transformational partnerships

Transactional relationships	Transformational collaborations
<p>Pro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves discrete defined task • Simple, which suits short time frame • Does not require resources to develop relationships • Deliverables known 	<p>Pro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meets multiple and shared objectives and goals • Draws together skills, expertise and knowledge from a variety of contexts to address big questions • Research outputs and products can emerge based on changing context and needs of all parties and broader sector
<p>Con</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not offer opportunity to utilise all skills, knowledge and resources of each party • Research outcomes may not be responsive to changing context • Objectives for each party not known and may not be met 	<p>Con</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires reflexivity and empathy • Requires investment to build shared understanding of research objectives and goal • Requires time and resources to maintain relationships • Requires detailed mutual understanding of the political environments of all parties, and the possibility of compromise and negotiation on research products

Levels of involvement in the research

Development research can also be distinguished by the different roles and responsibilities of researchers, ANGOs and other stakeholders throughout the process.

Figure 2: Levels of involvement



How are roles and responsibilities shared?

Another way to think about different levels of involvement is to distinguish different tasks within the research and extent to which responsibility is defined separately for each of the partners or collectively shared.

In the past, roles within research may have been more clearly defined and responsibility separated between different parties to the research.

For example, in the past, NGO–researcher partnerships were frequently characterised by the following division of labour: access to funding and expertise in design and analysis were provided by academic institutions and researchers; while local representatives and NGO workers conducted data collection and other forms of research fieldwork. NGO–researcher partnerships were often unbalanced, with researchers perceived to hold ownership of ideas and results or findings of the research.

Whilst this still might be the case in some instances, more recent experience of research partnerships highlights that roles and responsibilities can be more shared and jointly owned through a process of co-creation at all stages of research (see Part 3 — Prepare for more details and example tools on establishing responsibilities).

A partnership broker or intermediary can be used to facilitate discussions between parties about deciding responsibilities and roles within the partnership process.



Letting go of tight control

A research partnership which is informed by transformative relationships requires unique ways of working for all parties, particularly for researchers who may be used to leading and controlling the research agenda.

Key practices for both researchers and development practitioners include:

- ▶ Give space for perspectives from across disciplines, sectors and cultures
- ▶ Ensure an appropriate balance between research rigour and merit, and relevance and appropriateness in the research context
- ▶ Recognise that in a partnership no partner can retain full control over the research process; power is shared
- ▶ Leadership is necessary within research partnerships, but leadership should facilitate active involvement, voice and contribution of all partners
- ▶ Be flexible and responsive to input from other partners
- ▶ Take risks together
- ▶ Let go of approaches or certain actions that you would normally insist on if they are not appropriate for other partner
- ▶ Be aware of power imbalances (including developed / developing country perspective) and use careful strategies to address any imbalances

Cooperative, coordinated or collaborative practice

Another way to think about your development research is to consider the different ways that the parties work together. A common framework is cooperation-coordination-collaboration. Using these terms, you can also consider a continuum of practice as noted in Figure 3 below.

Let's remember that the terms 'partnership' and 'collaboration' are often used interchangeably in development research. Collaborative practice is a key ingredient to partnership.

Figure 3: Cooperative, coordinated or collaborative practice

Not integrated	Transformational collaborations		
Autonomous	Cooperative	Coordinated	Collaborative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations operate independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain independent but network and share information • Low commitment • Informal arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some joint planning • Often project-based coordination • Semi-formal partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared culture, visions, values and resources • Joint planning and delivery of some services • High commitment • Formalised partnerships

Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). An integrated approach to early childhood development: background paper. Paddington, NSW: Benevolent Society.

Principles of partnership

A partnership is far more than a relationship between organisations or the mere co-ordination of their activities. A partnership is underpinned by a set of values such as trust; transparency; accountability; reciprocity; and respect. The enactment of these principles evolves over time through mutual learning, voluntary participation and commitment.

A partnership also involves joint and shared benefit and shared risks. Resources from each party are shared together (co-mingling) to achieve the shared objectives and mutually agreed goals.

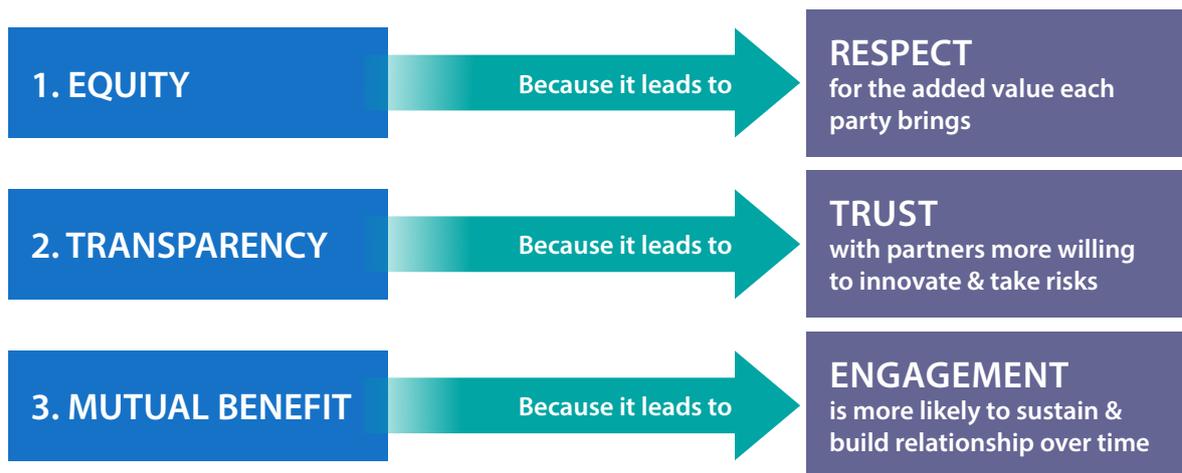
Genuine partnership needs genuine effort to put the principles into practice. The principles have to be embodied in new business processes, and codified through clear expectations of how each partner will behave in the partnership. Expressing principles alone will not ensure you have the foundation for a strong partnership.

The enactment or practice of partnership principles needs to be ongoing as the research partnership continues. Even if you have established principles at the start, you need to continually assess and refresh the principles (see Part 3 for more details on managing your partnership).

Figure 4 below shows how principles for partnership support effective outcomes.

Figure 4: Partnering principles

Core partnering principles and why they enable better partnerships:



Source: The Partnership Brokers Association

The principles used in this Guide are drawn from the Partnership Brokers Association and used with permission.

www.partnershipbrokers.org



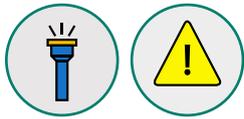
Could you work with partnering principles?

It may be valuable to consider – even within a transactional arrangement – what might be ways to engineer the practice of partnership principles and transformational outcomes normally associated with the partnering end of the spectrum?

Could you define principles of practice and measure these through your working arrangements?

Transformational outcomes through partnership

A research partnership which is formed on the basis of collaboration not only contributes to research findings, but may also influence the practice of each organisation. Each party should be prepared to be influenced by the partnership and be prepared to respond by carrying out structural or systemic change. Organisational practice or individual ways of working may need to be adjusted in order for the partnership to work.



Consider power in your partnership

Research partnerships can potentially mirror unequal donor-recipient relations evident in international development cooperation. Appreciation of these imbalances and preparation of careful strategies can address these.

Power imbalance can be present in:

- Funding: who has access to and responsibility for funding / uneven resource constraints of partners
- Knowledge: whose knowledge is privileged and who has access to knowledge
- Decision making: who has control and authority within the partnership

Often power relations can be influenced by differing priorities. For example: interest in practical findings to improve programming improvements in comparison to findings that generate new theoretical understandings; or the drive for academic excellence and methodological rigour versus capacity building aspirations. Different priorities can be accommodated when there is sufficient resources and time. However, perceived hierarchies of importance are reinforced and consequences compounded when resources are scarce and time is limited.

Attention to cross-cultural sensitivity is also important in a conversation about power. Your own organisational culture sets attitudes, behaviours and practices that may be different to others. Because of differences in culture you may be perceived by in-country partners differently from what you expect. Differences in culture may set up unequal power relations. In order to enable contribution from all parties to your research partnership you need to be aware of cultural similarities and differences and act in a way that enables everyone to engage.

Collaborative practice in partnerships is focused on recognising and valuing different types of knowledge brought by research partners in Australia and overseas, and ensuring that this can contribute to effective research.

Considerations about power in terms of gender, local and Australian-based individuals need to be factored into partnership practice.

A research partnership should value the varied contribution and 'powers' of each party.

"The question is about how equal are partners - what is the experience of each, appreciating each other's mutual expertise and finding a way to work together. All are different - all have different powers" (Australian researcher).

Where power is not shared between research partners, you may need to reconsider how you define your partnership. Perhaps you need to orientate the working relationships towards transactional practice, instead of striving for partnership ideals which are not practical or possible. Whatever type of working relationship you establish it's important that it is clear and communicated to all parties.



Determining the type of research partnership you want

What are the values of each organisation and how could they underpin different types of development research?

How much time do you have, and is there any money available to negotiate and set up a research partnership (establish shared objectives and decide on ways of working)?

What are the organisational and individuals' motivations for the research – and is there shared purpose?

How flexible is each organisation and can they share responsibility for and control of the research process?

How experienced is your organisation in setting up and managing partnerships – is there a need to strengthen skills?

Part 2: Why partner?

Transformational change for sustainable development

Partnership has always been part of the agenda for international development and its importance has been elevated by the scope of the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 17 sets out an agenda to 'Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development'.

Research through partnership, which draws on the collective resources, skills and expertise of multiple parties including researchers and development practitioners, offers an effective means through which to influence change for the sustainable development goals.

Table 2: Research partnerships make sense at a range of levels as an effective way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

Combining resources for greater impact	Research partnership provides an opportunity for best use of scarce resources and means that access to funding can be achieved through multiple and varied avenues
Multi-sector approach in order to address complex problems	Research partnership brings together complementary skills and knowledge of development practitioners and researchers, offering a way of working beyond single sector approaches
Combine multiple sets of knowledge in order to create new knowledge	Research partnership is part of the agenda for transdisciplinary response to the complex issues the world is facing (see next page for more discussion on transdisciplinary research)
Creates multiple pathways to use evidence and influence policy and practice	Research partnership offers the opportunity to create multiple pathways to use evidence with a range of different actors in development and ensure evidence is translated to influence both policy and practice

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

Albert Einstein

What is transdisciplinary research and why does it matter to international research partnerships?

Through research partnerships multiple sets of disciplines or knowledge can be valued and brought together to maximise contribution to development. By definition, development requires addressing multifaceted, interconnected and multilayered issues.

In research for international development, 'discipline' can refer to a wide range of knowledge systems such as practitioner knowledge, contextual knowledge, traditional knowledge, policy knowledge and academic knowledge.

Space must be given so that complementary knowledge can intersect within all stages of research.

This can enable 'experts' from various disciplines to learn from each other, and to develop new forms of knowledge important to addressing the big issues the world is facing.

Research partnership aligns with ways of working in international development

The values of partnership align with the practice of the ANGO sector. The ACFID Code of Conduct sets out values and Quality Principles which echo elements of research partnership already described in this Guide. Core to the practice of ACFID members is collaborative working relationships, which is described as one of the nine Quality Principles.

Partnership is defined as a core principle by ACFID. Working towards a shared goal, combining complementary skills and resources and working through established working relationships means that resources are effectively targeted to support effective outcomes.

The ACFID Code is underpinned by a set of values which inform the behaviours of ACFID's members. These values are:

Integrity – We act with honesty and are guided by ethical and moral principles in all that we do.

Accountability – We take responsibility for our actions and are accountable to all our stakeholders, and in particular primary stakeholders, for our performance and integrity.

Transparency – We openly share information about our organisations and our work to all our stakeholders and to the public.

Respect – We recognise the value and diversity of every person and are committed to treating others with due regard for their rights, dignity and integrity.

Effectiveness – We strive to deliver outcomes that bring about positive change in the lives of people living in poverty.

Equity – We are committed to overcoming prejudices and disadvantage and promoting fair and just access to resources and opportunities.

Cooperation – We work with and alongside others in a spirit of mutuality, respecting diversity and difference in the pursuit of common goals.

<https://acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct>

Benefit for development practitioners and researchers

'What's in it for me?'

'What's in it for us?'

Research partnership provides potential benefits for the organisations and individuals involved.

Benefits can be both shared and unique to development practitioners and researchers. As noted throughout this Guide, mutual and shared benefit is achieved through processes of research co-creation, collaborative practice and partnership.

Table 3: Benefit of partnership for development practitioners and researchers

Benefit for development practitioners	Benefit for researchers
<p>Impact: Influence practice and policy, create structural and systematic change and support innovation, through trusted research</p> <p>Knowledge transfer: Access to expert advice on research methodologies and approaches Increase skills and capacity to generate and analyse data Access a wider range of connected research to strengthen evidence base</p> <p>Legitimacy: Generate new evidence and reach new audiences to share your organisations work Demonstrate results and value for money to management, public and donors</p>	<p>Impact: Demonstrate real world impact of research as universities strive for social contribution and to support innovation and change</p> <p>Knowledge transfer: Access experiential knowledge and other forms of knowledge in support of new knowledge creation Access to networks of organisations and communities working in the research area</p> <p>Legitimacy: Engagement and contribution to the research agenda provides opportunities to submit further funding applications Increased credibility for students and among practice and policy professionals</p>



Identify the value of research partnerships

Demonstrating the benefit of partnership is important to ensure ongoing organisational support.

Measuring the value of partnership and reporting on this during the life of the partnership could be a valuable way to sustain organisational support and individual interest.

As suggested in Part 3, identifying a few measures and tracking these over time might help to show the value of partnership beyond the research outputs, to the individuals involved and also organisations more broadly.

Complementary contribution of researchers and development practitioners

Development practitioners and researchers bring complementary sets of resources to a partnership which supports effective research processes and outcomes.

Contribution of development practitioners	Contribution of researchers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enable community engagement and can navigate local contexts for the research based on existing knowledge of context and relationships in community• Have the experiential knowledge to ensure relevance of research to inform policy and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can connect the research findings to wider sets of knowledge to inform policy and practice at sector level• Can assist NGOs to promote the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of their projects

Whilst this simple description of complementary skills is helpful, in reality the contribution of practitioners and researchers is more varied depending on the unique qualities of each.

The distinction between practitioner and researcher does not take into account that research increasingly involves a greater diversity of actors – from within Australia and overseas; and through a range of modalities: development organisations may have research departments in-house, or researchers have extensive local country knowledge and expertise at both programming and policy levels.

Importantly, through research partnership there is mutual learning, exchange and flow of knowledge and through the partnership, generation of new learning to inform policy and practice. Complementary skills can be brought together through partnership.

Organisational interest and mandates for partnership

It's important to recognise that motivations for research partnerships are often informed by different organisational mandates (NGOs /universities) which inform individuals' interest and motivation in the research. As noted throughout this Guide, different motivations and interests need to be recognised and managed to ensure the research achieves the best outcomes possible.



Know organisational interest for research partnerships

Being transparent and describing clearly the mix of motivations, especially from different institutional perspectives, is vital to achieving a successful partnership.

Knowing the interest in partnership, and what organisational mandates and constraints exist will help to decide what type of partnership is most applicable in your context.

See Part 3 for more detail on ways to develop organisational understanding and support for a research partnership.



Why partner?

What do you hope to gain from the partnership?

What do you contribute to the partnership? (e.g. knowledge, skills, resources, networks)?

Do you have senior leadership and organisational support to partner?

Will the research be more effective as a collaborative practice compared to other working relationships such as a contracting arrangement?

If you are interested in collaboration, do you have flexibility and can you be responsive to input from your partners? Are you prepared to be transformed through the research partnership?

Part 3: How to partner?

This section provides guidance on how to set up and manage your partnership, to get the best results from your research to influence policy and practice.

There is a need to go into any partnership with your eyes wide open – and to have the necessary information to make informed decisions about establishing and then maintaining good working relationships between all parties.

Partnership cycle

Research partnerships can be understood in relation to a partnership cycle. The guidance below is offered for three key stages. Whilst the range of existing resources and materials (see Part 6) spell out different stages/steps, we've kept it simple and concise and hopefully easy to manage within any organisational setting.

Within each stage there are a number of steps and considerations, which are detailed below.

As described in the earlier parts of this Guide, we are most interested in collaborative research partnerships – the transformational end of the spectrum - and guidance is orientated towards this practice in line with alignment and contribution to international development.



Prepare	Manage	Review
Find a partner that's going to work best for you	Measure and reflect on your milestones	Measure the value and impact of the partnership
Establish the foundation of partnership	Manage any emerging challenges to your partnership	Build ongoing partnerships
Establish working arrangements to carry out the research	Conduct partnership health checks	
Define research outputs and communication for impact		

Read on for more guidance on these steps and considerations within a research partnership!

PREPARE



Much of the work within the research partnership cycle happens before you even start the research. It is especially important to set up a solid foundation for partnership practice.

Find a partner

It's often hard to find a partner – let alone find a perfect match!!

There are things that both development practitioners and also researchers can do to be better connected and increase opportunities to develop research partnerships. These include:

- Use networking opportunities to connect with others
- Be knowledgeable about your area of interest/project to connect with others
- Publicise your research interests to build partnerships

Importantly skills for partnership, and working across organisations, need to be developed on both sides and resources, provided to support effective research partnerships

Table 4: Ways to find a research partner

For development practitioners	For researchers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish and maintain a network to know and access researchers and the resources they offer• Outline the scope of work that you are interested in researching – be proactive in sharing your interest with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create gateways for NGOs to make contact with relevant researchers• Strengthen appreciation of work and contexts and priorities of NGOs• Invest in facilitators of interactions across organisations



Who do you want to partner with?

Your initial ideas on the scope of the research will help you consider what type of research partnership is right for you, and who is the right partner. Consider:

What are the research questions?

How do you want to influence policy and practice?

Who do you want to influence?

Do you want to directly contribute to local communities where the research was carried out?

Do you have your research design in place or are you interested in co-developing with other parties?



Know your values and match with your partners

It's important that as individuals and as organisations your values and interests align to support effective partnership practice. As described by a development practitioner:

"Trust your instincts – you want to feel that you are on the same page with people – get a feel of that."

If individual and/or organisational values don't align, at least you will know, and can manage these within your research practice!

Knowing organisational values and ensuring there is a match is especially important for collaborative practice, where joint practice and shared commitment to common objectives guides the research.



Find an Expert

The RDI Network connects academics and development practitioners with the purpose of advancing quality and ethical research and knowledge translation for impact in international development.

The Find an Expert portal aims to connect expertise and foster opportunities for collaboration and co-creation. Go online today to see who you can find! If you have expertise to share, add yourself, so others can find you.

Find out more at <https://rdinetwork.org.au/find-an-expert/>

Establish the foundation of partnership

Open, honest and clear communications are necessary and conversations need to happen to explore the possibilities of what can be done together within the research.

Knowing the type of partnership (See Part 1 for more information) will help you consider the range of topics you can consider and what aspects of the partnership foundation you want to negotiate together and define within a research partnership.

Inputs you will need to set the partnership foundation:

- Time
- Early and ongoing conversations
- Rapport established between multiple personalities
- Established trust
- Engagement and mandate from organisational leadership

Results you can expect from setting the partnership foundation – each partner to share and know from others:

- Expectations
- Priorities
- Research objectives
- Knowledge and capacity of each partner
- Areas of organisational flexibility and inflexibility which may affect the partnership
- Risks associated with the proposed partnership



EXAMPLE TOOL Partnership Agreement

Preparing a Partnership Agreement is a valuable milestone in establishing the foundation for partnership.

A partnership agreement can cover off a number of topics as outlined below and provides an opportunity to establish a shared understanding and joint commitments. Topics can include:

- ▶ Research partnership objectives
- ▶ Strengths and contributions of each partner to the research and the partnership
- ▶ Roles and responsibilities within the research
- ▶ Ethics in research
- ▶ Mutual and individual accountabilities
- ▶ Business processes or rules of engagement around key activities and research outputs
- ▶ Institutional support in place for partnership
- ▶ Ways of working and example behaviours that illustrate what these mean
- ▶ Business processes or rules of engagement around key activities and research outputs
- ▶ Management strategy for dealing with any challenges or disagreements
- ▶ Management strategy for dealing with transition of people involved (orientation to the research partnership)
- ▶ Focal points for partnership and communications
- ▶ Management strategy for dealing with transition of people involved (orientation to the research partnership)
- ▶ Protocols for communication within the partnership
- ▶ Expected time and cost inputs for each partner
- ▶ What successful partnership looks like
- ▶ Branding and communications
- ▶ Expected research outputs
- ▶ Authorship
- ▶ Intellectual property
- ▶ Communications and dissemination of research findings



Be prepared if things don't go to plan

The Partnership Agreement should also include protocols to manage any grievances or issues that come up through the process. You need to be prepared to have difficult or uncomfortable conversations. In preparing the Partnership Agreement you can explore what might go wrong and prepare for such scenarios.



EXAMPLE TOOL Partnership kick off / initial meeting

A workshop or meeting with representatives from all organisations is a great way to start the research partnership. You may need some seed funding to do this.

Key questions you could ask to start a conversation about working together include:

- ▶ Based on your experience of past research partnerships, what are good and bad partnership?
- ▶ What are your suggested ways to avoid or reduce bad practices for this research?
- ▶ What are the principles to guide our partnership?
- ▶ What are the work practices which will demonstrate the principles in action?
- ▶ What practices will we carry out together?

Offer opportunity for reflection, for every partner to share their voices, and provide space for conversation and negotiation to finalise your joint commitments.

This exercise was done recently by ISF and partners to set up a new research activity.

Principles of practice they identified together included:

- *Trust and respect*
- *Mutual support and accountability*
- *Sharing and learning together*
- *Coordinated efforts to avoid duplication*
- *Capacity building and capacity transfer*
- *Flexibility*
- *Work to achieve sustainability outcomes*

It's valuable to identify behaviours which will demonstrate the principles in practice. Understandings of principles such as 'trust' and 'respect' can be subjective and mean different things to different partners. By identifying behaviours you will be able to monitor your partnership and make sure your principles are being lived out in practice.

Practitioners shared their experience of an inception meeting and the value of good practices:

"I have vivid recollection of some early meetings in developing the proposal together – we sat around a table together. We built from insights and strengths of players around the table. We set out the plan in a highly participatory way. With a bit of hindsight, the whole process of setting up the partnership like this, has become a model of what good partnership looks like."



Build capacity for partnership

Building internal capacity for partnership is key to establishing a good foundation. You could also consider using an external / expert partnership broker to assist in properly understanding different institutional expectations and priorities (see Terminology section for more details).

It is paramount for partners to recognise, identify and be transparent about what they see as the flexible and inflexible aspects of a research project and potential partnership.



Are we talking the same language?

Development practitioners and researchers might use different concepts and terms to explain the same ideas.

Start conversations early and take time to understand each other's language and motivations and interests in the research.

"We don't realise it but we are cultured by our own organisations and we need to understand how others might see us and how we will work with them" (in-country NGO worker).

Establish working relationships to carry out the research

As you prepare for your research, you are not just building the partnership, but also designing the research and working out how you are all going to do it together!

Setting out the research activities and role divisions can ensure transparency and accountability between the partners. Having a clear statement of roles can also be used as a resource to manage any issues that may arise in the future.

Key aspects of the working relationship and roles and responsibilities may include:

- Research design
- Data collection
- Ethics
- Analysis and sense making of research findings
- Production of research outputs
- Communication and dissemination of research findings



EXAMPLE TOOL Responsibility Assignment Matrix

A more detailed work schedule or 'responsibility assignment matrix' can be used to document the working relationships and contributions of each partner to the research activities.

A variety of definitions can be used to assign responsibilities. One example is the **RACI** Model (**R**esponsible; **A**ccountable; **C**onsulted and **I**nformed).

An example is provided below.

Task /Role / Responsibility	Australian Research Institute	ANGO	In-country NGO	In-country Research Institute
Overall project management	C	R	C	I
Overall project coordination	C	R	C	I
In-country coordination	C	C	R	C
Assurance of research quality	R	C	C	C
Quality assurance of deliverables	C	R	I	I
And the list continues....				



It all takes time!

Establishing the foundation for partnership and setting up the working arrangements can take longer than you expect.

Often researchers and particularly academics are under time pressures. Similarly, NGO staff are already busy with multiple responsibilities and program implementation.

Some tips to manage time and your relationships well include:

- ▶ Set out availability of time and expectations from all partners
- ▶ Have open communications and be honest about how much time you can commit
- ▶ Be proactive to establish relationships and build trust – spend time in each other's organisations – take turns to host meetings

Recognising the time required to establish relationships, longer-term relationships are more efficient and efficient. However, we know that funding tends to be project bound.

In order to capitalise on all your partnership investments, it's suggested you make serious attempts to build long term research partnerships and build from past projects together. Collectively look for funds and work project by project to build on existing relationships.



Strategies to sustain successful and respectful development research partnerships

- ▶ Nurture communication as a partnership cornerstone
- ▶ Promote transparency in decision making
- ▶ Promote mutual respect and reciprocity within partnerships
- ▶ Value reciprocity to contribute to respect between partners
- ▶ Work through collaborative practice – partnerships are strengthened when individual partners acknowledge the contributions that others make to the research process, and are willing to adapt their usual mode of working



EXAMPLE TOOL Ethics in partnership research

As noted in ACFID / RDI Network's *Principles and Guidelines for ethical research and evaluation in development (updated July 2017)*, research partnerships in international development pose distinct ethical, moral and political issues and dilemmas.

This document establishes four key principles:

Respect for human beings: this means to be mindful of differences in culture, power, language and worldview and how these will affect efforts to co-design and co-own the research process and results.

Research merit and integrity: this requires collaborative efforts to adapt research tools to the local context and to be explicit about skills each partner can bring to the research and the areas where capacity development may be useful.

Beneficence: this requires researchers from Australia to be led by local researchers and partners who are better placed to determine benefits of the research for themselves and the communities involved.

Justice: partners need to ensure transparency about the agendas they bring to the research, their motivations for taking part and the funding arrangements for the research so that accountability can be shared.

In ethical research partnerships, each partner plays a complementary role to enact these principles, which apply, not just to the relationship between researchers and research participants, but to the relationship between different partners – particularly Australian organisations and in-country partners.

Conducting ethical research which enacts these four principles through good collaborative practice ensures quality research that can also have positive impacts on the partners and communities involved.



EXAMPLE TOOL Build your skills in ethical research

You can find resources on ethical practice in development research and evaluation for researchers and practitioners alike on this website.

<https://rdinetwork.org.au/effective-ethical-research-evaluation/>

On this site you will find:

- ▶ *The Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Research and Evaluation in Development*
- ▶ Case studies demonstrating learnings from real-world examples of research and evaluation.
- ▶ Basic self-training tools including an online practice Starter Kit.
- ▶ Opportunities to undertake further learning and training in the practice of effective and ethical research and evaluation.

Define research outputs and communication for impact

Research outputs

Negotiations at the beginning of the partnership need to be rigorous, and conversations need to be explicit about intellectual property, authorship and use of outputs.

In relation to all research outputs you will need to decide within your partnership responsibility for:

- Authorship
- Response to reviews and final submissions
- Ethics and legal implications
- Communication and dissemination of research findings
- Branding and associated risks

Certain frameworks, such as risk management thinking, can be applied to Intellectual Property, and should be factored into the output dissemination phase.

Roles and responsibilities for preparing and publishing research outputs can be shared amongst the research partners – recognising and building from unique strengths of each partner.

For example, see the Case Study on Gender in Pacific WASH (Part 6) which describes how outputs focused on in-country practitioners were led by the ANGO partner and research findings which were focused at the sector more broadly were led by Australian-based researchers.



Consider the need and value of multiple research outputs

It is likely that there will be more than one output from research undertaken in partnership since there may be different expectations for academic and practitioner focused outputs.

It is worth remembering that NGOs and academics may have very different interests in terms of research outputs.

- ▶ Academics need to publish in peer-reviewed, academic journals. This is often a long process with findings often embargoed until publication.
- ▶ For NGOs, the goal may be rapid dissemination of findings in easily accessible formats as this is the way to influence improved programming practice and policy.

Careful planning should allow the incorporation of both these priorities.

Partnership members should also be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances, where there is a need or opportunity to produce further outputs from the research.

Often you will find your research lives on through conferences, development practitioner workshops and invitations to submit journal articles, long after the research activity has finished. Make the most of the opportunity to influence policy and practice!



Sharing power in knowledge co production

Many authors have written about the issues of loss of researchers power and autonomy that necessarily accompanies the greater inclusivity arising from co-production of research findings.

As part of your partnership practice you will need to:

- Address power relations between different actors – and agree to roles and responsibilities as part of the process
- Decide lead authorship based on allocated roles and responsibilities
- Share authorship and contribution from all partners as appropriate
- Ensure that a common understanding of research findings emerges
- Give opportunity to pre-approve publications

This all needs to be set up in the start!! Don't leave it until you are just about to prepare your research findings report.



Communication to influence change

To have real development impact from your research, you need to translate and communicate your findings in order to influence change.

Research that is translated for a variety of audiences and that has relevance to policy and practice is better placed to create change and impact for sustainable development. The efforts to translate and communicate research need to be planned into the research process from the beginning.

Different partners will be differently placed to communicate to various of audiences. In the spirit of partnership and to value all resource, you can utilise all partners in the process of communicating and disseminating your findings, based on the unique value of each partner and their established links to relevant networks and audiences.

Messages will need to be tailored differently for policy-makers, practitioners, communities, research participants, activists, businesses and for different country/cultural contexts.

Research needs to be 'translated' into a variety of languages, formats and styles in order for it to be relevant to the 'end-users' of the research.

There is also an ethical imperative to ensure that research findings provide beneficence to the people who participated in the research. Providing research findings in an accessible way back to communities is good practice within international development.



Beneficence and communicating findings to research participants

An important principle in ethical research practice is beneficence – ensuring that research is done for the benefit of others.

This is particularly important for research participants - ensuring that the expected benefit justifies any risk or harm or discomfort to participants.

A key aspect of ethical research, and in particular beneficence, is ensuring that learning outcomes from the research are communicated back to the community to support ongoing development.

You will need to consider roles and responsibilities within your partnership to communicate findings. In-country development practitioners are probably best placed to communicate findings back to communities, recognising their continuing relationships on the ground. Ensure that you plan, budget and up-skill local staff to communicate findings effectively.

As noted by a representative of an in-country NGO there is still more to be done to prioritise this practice and you should keep it front of mind in your consideration and planning.

“The cycle of information going back to the community, closing the feedback to community, and giving back to community – this is closing. We need to do more of it.”

MANAGE



Attention in the research partnership cycle is often focused on actually setting up the partnership, rather than ways to manage the partnership once it has been established. This is based on the recognition that it takes so much time and investment to prepare an effective partnership.

However, managing your partnership is just as important and includes a number of steps as outlined in this section of the Guide:

- Measure and reflect on your milestones
- Manage any emerging challenges to your partnership
- Conduct partnership health checks

Measure and reflect on your milestones

As partnerships develop, there is a need to review them - to ensure they are delivering on the objectives agreed to by the partners.

As you continue to carry out the work, you will need to take account of any changing circumstances, manage expectations (which often shift along the way), adjust and work in ways that enable both organisations and individuals to stay engaged.

Measuring the milestones of your partnership is focused on reviewing the working relationship of your partnership. Measuring the milestone of your partnership is different (but complementary) to measuring the actions of carrying out your research, such as data collection, analysis and production of findings.

Remember to keep your investment in line with the overall scope of your research. There is no point putting all your time and effort into reflecting on milestones, and not having enough capacity to carry out your research!

You may like to consider measuring milestones of your partnership within ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks if your research is connected to long-term project implementation.



EXAMPLE TOOL Measure and reflect on your milestones

Key aspects of measuring milestones and reflecting on the working relationship of your partnership along the way could include:

- ▶ Debrief and review following each stage of the research
- ▶ Document partner experiences and share through group meetings
- ▶ Document and reflect on each partner organisation ways of working
- ▶ Clearly document the time associated with each project activity, as well as the associated costs
- ▶ Ensure that the benefits of the partnership and the business case within each organisation, is communicated



Manage any emerging challenges to your partnership

Of course, you should pre-empt any challenges to your partnership right from the start – and prepare and plan accordingly to reduce or mitigate these. Once you are underway you will need to keep an eye open to any emerging issues and manage effectively.

Remember to keep your partnership principles in mind as you work to resolve any issues or challenges. Open communication is key. You might also like to consider the use of a partnership broker to mediate conversations.

Some common challenges within partnerships to look out for are noted in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Challenges partners commonly face in partnership

Challenges related to individuals in the partnership	Challenges resulting from partnership diversity	Challenges resulting from partnership process
Competitiveness between individuals	Different drivers and motivations for each partner organisation	Unable to break away from existing structures or systems (hierarchical) that impede partnership
Key personnel changing roles and moving from the partnership / needing to orientate new staff	Making inaccurate assumptions about other's organisational priorities	Overly lengthy or not lengthy enough consultation processes
Lack of appropriate leadership	Unwillingness to take on board each other's priorities	Low levels of commitment for partnership goal and objectives
Lack of appropriate skills / competencies of individuals involved	Hidden agendas	Failure of organisations / staff to complete agreed tasks
	Absence of genuinely shared goal and objectives	Over reliance on some partner organisations / staff
	Power imbalances (real or perceived)	
	Over emphasis on money rather than recognition of other resource contributions	
	Lack of shared understanding of research approach	
	Different interpretations of research data and different views of what to communicate	

Source: Partnership Brokers Association



Conduct partnership health checks

Adopting a phased approach to partnership building, factoring in health checks and evaluations as a part of the research design and practice is a recommended practice.

The nature of partnership changes over time and it is useful to reflect to make sure that plans and expectations are being met as set out at the start.

Remember: Invest in a partnership health check proportionate to the size of the partnership. This may be more relevant for a longer-term activity – rather than a short-term research study that may only run for 3 months.

Reflective practice supports organisational and individual skill development in partnership practice and offers an opportunity to refine ways of working together over time.

You might want to review and consider the extent to which principles and practices as set out within a Partnership Agreement are being operationalised in practice.

For example, principles and practices of partnership as earlier defined could be reviewed as a collective exercise. Measures or indicators could be defined over time to demonstrate and articulate the practice of partnership.

- How are we tracking against our own commitment to principles and practices of partnership?
- What are examples of our principles of practice being operationalised?
- What areas do we need to strengthen in order to best meet our practices and principles of partnership?



EXAMPLE TOOL Partnership health checks

There are multiple ways that you can conduct a partnership health check; devise an approach that works best for you, remembering that individual and group processes, open communication and dialogue, and collective planning for the future are important partnership practices.

A partnership health check may include:

- ▶ Self-assessment (simple survey using rating or scores)
- ▶ Facilitated group process
- ▶ Collective decision making about future partnership practice
- ▶ Periodic collective reflection processes, such as six monthly or annual processes

There are a variety of existing resources that you can use or adapt for your own practice. Remember, make sure the assessment best supports your own purposes and organisations (see Part 5 for a list of resources).

REVIEW



The end of a research partnership is just as important as the start. There are two major areas to consider towards the end of your research partnership:

- Measure the impact of the partnership
- Build ongoing partnerships

You really need to think about these topics at the start of your research partnership and plan accordingly to prioritise and resource – but it's after the research findings have been produced that you put it all into action.

Measure the value impact of the partnership

Measuring impact of our work as both development practitioners and researchers is important. NGOs and also universities are increasingly not just interested in the production of research outputs, but the impact of the research and its influence on multiple audiences.

We recommend that a knowledge management system is developed to measure the value of your partnership. We suggest you identify a small number of simple metrics to track the progress and impact of your work together. For example, you may like to consider how your 'principles of practice' have been demonstrated through the research (see section on Prepare). You may also be interested in developing a register of communications / dissemination showing where and who your research has reached and policy or programming that resulted.

Principles of practice you may consider reviewing in order to demonstrate the value of your research

- Trust and respect
- Mutual support and accountability
- Sharing and learning together
- Coordinated efforts to avoid duplication
- Capacity building and capacity transfer
- Flexibility
- Work to achieve sustainability outcomes

As noted above (see text for Prepare), you will be able to assess your 'principles of practice' by identifying the behaviours of each party and how each has been working together.

It is valuable to consider the shared objectives of the research and track progress towards achieving these. Tracking and communicating your research will be valuable to motivate the partnership group and also ensure your research and research partnerships more generally maintain organisational support from senior leadership.

Considering that research impact often happens well after the actual research has been carried out, you will need to consider how to track value and impact beyond the life of the research. You may like to consider joint or single organisation effort to track the outcomes and influence of the research and ensure open lines of communication to share between organisations.



Measure impact of your partnership

Reporting on the impact of your research is increasingly critical for both upward and downward accountability.

It is valuable to measure the impact of the research for your own research team as well as external stakeholders. What value are individuals and organisations gaining from the partnership: For example: skills development in research skills training and facilitation practice of data collection tools and analysis; new knowledge creation; and production of reports, briefs and journal publications for dissemination to a wider audience.

Document your partnership, keep track of the evolution, and share with a wide range of stakeholders in the sector.

Build ongoing partnerships

Considering all that has been invested in preparing and maintaining a research partnership it is valuable to leverage your existing partnership for future activities.

As already stated, preparing and maintaining a research partnership requires time and investment from both individual and organisational perspectives. In the case that your partnership was successful, why not consider future opportunities to work together.

There are opportunities to build on existing partnerships through single research project activities or longer term commitments to explore opportunities for future collaborations. The case studies in Part 6 highlight the benefit of longer term commitments.



Part 4: A checklist for research partnerships



CHECKLIST	CHECK
PREPARE	
Do you have organisational and individual clarity on the reason(s) to partner?	
Have you found a partner that is going to work best with your organisation and you?	
Have you defined what type of partnership you will form?	
Have you allowed time and budget to support the establishment of the partnership?	
Have you established a partnership agreement which sets out principles, values, ways of working and shared objectives and goal?	
Have you set out roles and responsibilities to carry out the research activities?	
Have you defined your research outputs, the key audiences and expected impact from each?	
Have you defined how research outputs are to prepared, authorship, intellectual property?	
MANAGE	
Do you have a plan to measure and reflect on milestones?	
Have you established space to identify and manage any emerging issues?	
Do you have plans to conduct a partnership health check?	
REVIEW	
Do you have plans to measure the impact and value of the research partnership?	
Do you have plans to build on this partnership for future research?	

Part 5: References / Additional resources

This guide was informed by the following references. If you want to develop a deeper understanding of research partnerships, dive in!

Carbonnier, G., & Kontinen, T. (2014). 'North-South Research Partnership: Academia Meets Development?' European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes.

http://www.academia.edu/10338110/North-South_Research_Partnerships_Academia_Meets_Development

This working paper examines recent experiences in North-South research partnerships, identifying worst and best practices. It draws on work undertaken over a two year period including an online survey, face-to-face interviews and roundtable discussions. The working paper notes that research partnerships are not immune to the typically unequal, biased donor-recipient relations that have plagued international development cooperation for decades. Despite improvements in recent years, entrenched behaviour and enduring practices still affect the quality and effectiveness of research partnerships. Power relations influence the ability to combine capacity-building aspirations with the drive for academic excellence. Mounting pressure to publish research outcomes fast in disciplinary journals edited in the North combined with harsh competition for funding seriously limit the time and scope available to establish equitable partnership frameworks and support institutional capacities. This calls for addressing funding, knowledge and power issues in development research partnerships that involve an ever-greater diversity of actors and modalities.

Cornish, H. Fransman, J. and Newman, K. (2017). Rethinking Research Partnerships: Discussion and Toolkit, Christian Aid, ESRC and the Open University.

This discussion guide and toolkit provides ideas and approaches to enable you to think through your research partnerships; to encourage you to critically engage with issues such as the roles different actors play in partnership; and what types of evidence are valued, used and produced. Christian Aid co-led with the Open University on the production of this resource, drawing from a seminar series that brought together academics and NGO staff to reflect on their experiences of research partnerships. It was funded by the ESRC and this publication is one of the outputs of the series.

Evaluation Support Scotland (2016)., Collaborating with academics: An evidence for success supplementary guide, Edinburgh Scotland

<http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/our-work-partners/knowledge-translation-network/collaborating-academics-evidence-success-supplement/>

This is a practical short guide aimed at the 'third sector' (Scottish-based NGOs) and academics with an interest to foster links between academics and third sector 'to generate and use evidence to influence policy and practice'. The guide sets out guidance on establishing and maintaining a partnership; identifying the right partner; and also, extra resources and references. The content set out within the guide can also be relevant to partnerships for development research.

Hanley, T., & Vogel. (undated). Guide to constructing effective partnerships; Enhancing learning and research for humanitarian assistance, ELRA, hosted by Save the Children UK

<http://www.elra.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/effective-partnerships-report.pdf>

This guide aims to support collaboration between humanitarian and academic organisations. The document sets out steps on 'The How' to collaborate; presents case studies of collaborations; and offers reflections on collaborations between humanitarian organisations and universities. It offers broad guidance which would be applicable to all actors engaged in the aid/development sector.

Leege, D. M., & Mcmillan, D. E. (2016). Building More Robust NGO-University Partnerships in Development: Lessons Learned from Catholic Relief Services. Journal of Poverty Alleviation & International Development, 7(2).

This is an academic journal article. It explores the approach taken by the US-based Catholic Relief Services to engage with US-based universities. It describes a model that goes beyond project driven collaborations. The paper provides six cross cutting lessons to guide NGOs and universities who may want to employ a similar approach.

Partnership Brokers Association

<http://partnershipbrokers.org>

The Partnership Brokers Association is the international professional body for those managing and developing collaboration processes. The Association provides training, support and accreditation to brokers.

Roche, C., & Kelly, L. (2014). Partnerships for effective development. Australian Council for International Development.

https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/Partnerships-for-Effective-Development.pdf

This paper outlines research conducted on behalf of ACFID and offers recommendations to the Australian NGO sector on ways to strengthen partnership practice. The paper presents the case for partnership noting that complexity of development issues requires joint efforts to create solutions that are locally created and owned and also reach across national borders. Though the paper is not specifically focused on NGO-academic partnerships it provides insights into challenges and opportunities that exist within the Australian NGO sector.

Schaaf, R. (2015). *The rhetoric and reality of partnerships for international development*, *Geography Compass*, 9(2), 68-80.

This is an academic journal article which reviews the contemporary nature of partnerships for international development and considers their role in achieving more effective development cooperation. The author explores literature on the terminology of partnership within the broad scope of international development. The paper concludes that a much more critical perspective is needed on the role of partnerships in achieving effective development cooperation.

Schoen, V., Durrant, R., Fishpool, M., & Dooris, M. (2017). *CSO–academic collaboration: theory and practice*. Food Research Collaboration Policy Brief

<http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/66147>

This briefing paper examines the literature on collaboration, co-production and partnership working largely between academics or research organisations and CSOs (civil society organisations). It also provides case studies presented at a workshop in October 2016. The focus is on the UK food sector, though some insights on partnership are transferable to the international development sector.

Shucksmith, M. (2016). *'InterAction: How can academics and the third sector work together to influence policy and practice?* Carnegie United Kingdom Trust

<https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/interaction/>

This is a guide aimed at the third sector (UK-based NGOs) and academics and was informed by literature and four round tables held in the UK. It has a focus on how knowledge and the co-production of knowledge through NGO-academic collaboration can influence policy. It considers and offers recommendations to ensure research best influences policy and practice.

Thom, V. & Cope, A. (2016). *Partnering for sustainable development: Challenges and pathways for building cross-sector partnerships*. UN Global Compact Issues Paper.

<http://www.unglobalcompact.org.au/new/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Issues-Paper-Cross-Sector-Partnering-for-Sustainable-Development-FINAL.pdf>

This issues paper was commissioned by the Global Compact Network Australia in response to the growing interest in cross-sector partnering as a way to drive sustainable development, including implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The purpose of the paper is to understand current practice and challenges arising from collaborating across sectors for sustainable development, and identify pathways to support effective partnering toward sustainable development.

Tennyson, R. (2003). *The Partnering Toolkit: An essential guide to cross-sector partnering*, The Partnering Initiative.

<https://thepartneringinitiative.org/publications/toolbook-series/>

This resource offers more generic guidance on partnerships for public sector, business and civil society. It sets the opportunities, challenges, how to partner and provides detailed phases within a partnering process. The last section of the guide provides useful tools to set up and manage a partnership. Whilst not focused on research partnerships (and within an international development context), the material is applicable to such contexts. You can also find more toolbooks from The Partnering Initiative on their website.

Thorburn, T. (2015). *Learning and development note: Research partnerships in Practice*. Australian Council for International Development

https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/research-partnerships-l-d-note-feb-2015.pdf

<https://rdinetwork.org.au/resources/partnerships-in-practice/>

The purpose of this Learning and Development Note is to capture the discussions, lessons and reflections shared during a workshop focused on Research Partnerships in Practice, held on Wednesday 12 November 2014. In particular, the Note is based on the contributions from workshop participants discussing why NGOs and universities partner, common challenges and successes experienced, and some recommendations for NGO-academic partnerships in Australia. With this information and insight, the Note aims to map out key issues that can help inform existing or future partnerships of this kind.

VCOSS (2011). *Partnership Practice Guides*, Victoria Council of Social Services, Melbourne, Australia.

<http://vcoss.org.au/strong-sector/partnerships-decd/partnering-guides/>

The Partnering in Progress report has led to the development of four Partnership Practice Guides. These guides provide information, tools and resources that examine the three stages of partnering: preparing to partner; commencing the partnership; and, sustaining the partnership. It is anticipated that these resources will further strengthen and support partnerships across Victoria; and provide an overview of governance, partnership models and leadership.



Part 6:

Research Partnership Case Studies

- ▶ Gia Lai Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Project
 - ▶ Gender in Pacific WASH
 - ▶ Oxfam Monash Partnership
- 

Research Partnership Case Studies

Gia Lai Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Project

Background to the research:

Plan in Vietnam is implementing an Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) project in seven communes in Gia Lai province, Vietnam, between 2012-2018.

To measure the impact of the project and to build an evidence base for advocating to donors, government and partners on the importance of ECCD for education outcomes and reducing inequality, a three-year research study is being led by a team of six academics from Monash University, Melbourne, and the University of Auckland, working in partnership with Plan International Australia and Plan International Vietnam. The project is funded by the New Zealand Aid Program (NZAP), with support from Australian Aid.

The research aims to identify the strengths and limitations of the project with a view to improving components that will have a larger impact on children's development and learning skills needed for primary school. The study will also form part of the final evaluation of the project and will be the basis for developing policy papers on key areas of need in the Vietnam context, to help strengthen government understanding of, and commitment to, holistic and integrated ECCD in Vietnam.

Interest in the research partnership:

Contribution to achieving development impact is a key focus of all partners involved in this research.

Focus on improving lives of the most marginalised children and their families is a key focus of the research. Ensuring quality outcomes and demonstrating impact in order to influence policy and replication of the project is a priority for Plan International Vietnam and Plan International Australia. This is especially important for Plan International Australia, which sees the project as a significant investment, and demonstrating impact and influencing policy as an important means of leveraging the initial investment. Likewise, for Plan International Vietnam, ECCD is a big program within the country and the research is viewed as a way to inform policy: *"We want to use strong research outcomes from the project, to have strong evidence for policy influence"* (Plan International Vietnam).

For research partners, the research offers a means to achieve university goals of *"involvement and contribution in community initiatives."* Recognising funding constraints, researchers have reduced rates and provided in-kind resources to support the research. Researchers share similar interests to Plan International Australia and Plan International Vietnam and want the research to contribute to practical positive change.



Children are participating in Plan-supported early learning programs in Gia Lai province, Vietnam. Credit Monash University.

Outcomes of the research

Whilst only part way through, the research has already achieved numerous outcomes:

Research findings have informed program adjustments and achievement of improved outcomes.

Informed by the first year research findings, program activities were adjusted in a number of communes, which resulted in improved outcomes for children, as evidenced by the results of second year data.

Contribution to stocks and flows of knowledge.

Two journal papers have been written, informed by the research practice and inclusive of authorship from Plan International Vietnam staff. Mentoring local staff in journal publications was a key feature of the Monash research proposal (see further below).

Influencing government policy in ECCD.

A key intent of the research is to influence government policy and practice, already that is happening. Implementation started in seven communes, government leaders have since decided to replicate project components: from seven communes to now 200. Change has been influenced by participation of local partners in the research. The research is also described as convincing since *“it shows ownership of local people of the study, this is their own study. You can show to authorities, it’s not from Plan and not from outside”* (Plan International Vietnam).

Learning for both development practitioners and researchers.

The research has resulted in increased capacity of Plan International Vietnam and their partners in research processes. Similarly, international researchers have gained insights into ECCD in this unique context.

The practice of partnership

Key aspects of the research partnership are:

The research agenda was defined by Plan International Australia.

“It’s kind of a luxury – money is always tight, you have to do it from the start to have enough money for research” (Plan International Australia).

The research was proposed by Plan International Australia as part of a project proposal for NZAP funding. Plan established a Terms of Reference and Monash successfully responded to a Request for Proposals. A researcher from the University of Auckland was added to complement the group of researchers.

The research approach of collaborative and mentoring practice was defined by the researchers and was in line with the development approach of Plan.

Within their successful proposal, the researchers defined a collaborative practice of working with the local team in research design and development of the research tools and sought to mentor local staff in the preparation of academic papers.

“They put it in as their approach – collaborative and mentoring. It wasn’t something that we put in the TOR but is something that we were looking for. We didn’t want it to be extractive, we wanted it to be about mentoring: we know things: how to work in context; they know things: how to do research. So we share knowledge” (Plan International Australia).

Ongoing and organic communication between research partners.

Existing relationships between Plan International Australia and international researchers laid a foundation for the research. Plan International Australia provides a Brokers role between Plan International Vietnam and the research team and supports overall management of the activities. Similarly, Plan International Vietnam play an ‘in-between role’ between local and international researchers:

“sometimes as coordinator, sometimes as translator” (Plan International Vietnam).

Communications have been regular and all partners are 'cc'd' into emails, ensuring that everyone is up to date on progress. In the first instance, communication was remote and via skype. After the in-country training, communications are enabled through email and skype.

Managing expectations of different research partners is a key aspect of regular communications, as Plan International Vietnam and the research team sometimes have different expectations, for example timing of key deliverables.

Knowing the context and ensuring a participatory process is key to ensuring tools are appropriate for people and place.

"Look, listen, be humble. You are there to learn in the first instance – otherwise what you have, can't be shared" (Researcher).

The researchers started by getting to know the people and place of the research locations. Three days were spent in the remote communes, meeting with teachers, parents and children. Then another three days were spent with the research team to develop the research tools – this was critical to ensure the tools were fit-for-purpose and appropriate for local researchers and communities. The researchers described their role as facilitators of this process:

"We have the knowledge of tools, you have knowledge of context. Our role was to be the facilitator, asking them to think about the tools in the local context, they are to develop their own tool" (Researcher).

Collaborative research is in line with interest of development impact and skill development of local staff and community.

Collaborative research practice is valued by all the partners of this research. This is demonstrated by Plan International Vietnam and their partners taking an active role in the research design, development of research tools, data collection and analysis and mentoring local staff in the practice of research. Whilst recognising the value of 'stand-alone' researchers, this doesn't suit every context – and within this current research activity a collaborative approach is viewed as better.

"This one is very different, collaboration and partnership, in that way this one is different; it's been successful, not only the research outcomes, but capacity in country and also policy perspective in country is important" (Plan International Australia).

A key to this collaborative practice is recognising and valuing different types of power of the research partners, as noted by one international researcher:

"The question is about how equal are partners– but what is the experience of each, appreciating each other's mutual expertise and finding a way to work together. All are different – all have different powers" (Researcher).



Children attend a pre-school supported by the Plan project in Gia Lai. Credit: Monash University.



Plan's ECCD project has helped teachers and schools to improve the quality of the learning environment and interactions with children. Credit: Monash University.

Within the research, each partner has a clear role and leads different aspects of the research – from contract management; research set up and training of local researchers; coordination of data collection and collation; analysis and reporting back. All roles are critical and valued.

Research rigour in data collection.

Collaborative practice is not without its challenges. This research partnership has lived experience of a few of these: recruiting and training local researchers in complex concepts and research practices; ensuring ongoing availability of researchers, especially over multi-year period; and ensuring good data collection practices. As noted by Plan International Vietnam, issues have arisen and adjustments made along the way:

“During the collection of data we found that some of them (local researchers) could not perform well, in that case – we discussed with the research assistant team how to address. We asked them to share experiences of how to perform well, and to set up a back-up plan within the team. If one person was not doing the job well how to respond to this”
(Plan International Vietnam).

Connecting data collection to collation and analysis is a key part of the research process and a learning from the research has been to review data collection in real time. Again, as noted by Plan International Vietnam:

“We need some review of the data as they are collecting it so that they can improve the ongoing data collection process – rather than only finding out at the end that the data is not good”
(Plan International Vietnam).

Building in multiple avenues for communicating research findings and ensuring contribution back to partners and communities where the research happens.

The research design includes multiple platforms for communicating research findings including to research partners and communities where the research was carried out. Already, two journal publications have been prepared providing knowledge to the broader sector. Contribution to local programming and policy influence within Vietnam is also a high priority for research partners. Plan International Vietnam have translated the first-year research findings into Vietnamese to share with local stakeholders and will do so for future reports. The researchers, working with Plan International Vietnam, are also planning to develop a process for, and version of the reports that are ‘child friendly’ so that findings can be shared with and validated by children and communities. Sharing back research findings is intended to empower communities, informed by the knowledge of what they have been doing to support ECCD.

Flexibility to weave in a research project within the variety of other competing demands.

All the research partners are managing multiple projects and fitting the research within existing and full workloads. Flexibility was described as a key attribute of the research as plans shift and timelines get extended.

Advice from the experienced

Informed by their research partnership experience, here are a few words of advice from the research team:

- ▶ Include research within a project proposal as a way to get funding for research in resource scarce environments
- ▶ Tick the boxes to ensure you have a Terms of Reference and establish all the contractual arrangements, but also have a sense of partnership and collaboration. Shared understanding of what you want to achieve, shared understanding of ways of working and everyone's expectations need to be understood
- ▶ Ensure you have open channels of communication within and across all partners and ensure focal points are known to all partners
- ▶ Plans will change, especially over a multi-year project – be flexible and adapt. Be open to organic practices but also write key things down so that key decisions can be captured and communicated to everyone
- ▶ Ensure there is budget and take the time for researchers to be in-country to learn about the context
- ▶ Don't get lost in translation! Technical concepts and terms can easily get lost – especially when working through multiple translation to local dialects. Ensure you have professional and quality translation
- ▶ Tweak your formal ethics practice to the local context and ensure it's relevant to the local researchers and can be carried out easily
- ▶ Listen and learn from each other, respecting the mutual contribution of each partner

Insights and lessons learned on research in-country

- ▶ Ensure the researchers know the local context, “so that they can provide practical and useful recommendations”
- ▶ Training local researchers involves more than a once-off training – coaching and mentoring is just as important as training
- ▶ Within a multi-year research project, ensure you have a back-up plan to deal with turnover of your trained local researchers
- ▶ To strengthen data collection – link local researcher knowledge about data collection to analysis and the overall research design
- ▶ Conduct your research training and then get out and use it! – before people forget what you have taught them – and before they get busy doing other things or move away

Journal publications related to the research

Fleer, Marilyn; Hedges, Helen; Fleer-Stout, Freya & Hanh, Le Thi Bich (2016): *Researcher inter subjectivity: a methodology for jointly building an interactive electronic early childhood quality involvement/rating scale*, International Journal of Research & Method in Education, DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2016.1219982

Hedges, Helen; Fleer, Marilyn; Fleer-Stout, Freya; Hanh, Le Thi Bich (2016): *Aspiring to Quality Teacher-Parent Partnerships in Vietnam: Building Localised Funds of Knowledge*, International Research in Early Childhood Education, v7 n3 p49-68

Research Partnership Case Studies

Gender in Pacific WASH

Background to the research:

The Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS) and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) were successfully awarded a grant from the then Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) to investigate success, enablers and measures of gender outcomes in water and sanitation initiatives in the Pacific, to inform policy and practice. The research was carried out from 2009-2011.

ISF-UTS and IWDA worked in partnership with Live and Learn Environmental Education (LLEE) in Fiji and World Vision in Vanuatu. The research focused on two Pacific case studies that incorporate participatory strategies and support community decision making processes as part of water and sanitation initiatives, but were not focused on gender equality as a primary outcome: World Vision's Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) initiatives in rural Vanuatu and Live and Learns water governance and sustainable communities projects in Fiji.

The field research used a strengths-based approach that was informed by principles of empowerment, appreciation and participation. The intention was for the research to build on existing strengths and be a learning process for all involved. For participant organisations, documenting successes and enablers was hoped to lead to a stronger focus on gender, and increased capability to integrate gender into water and sanitation projects. At a strategic level, the research aimed to support integration of gender in a sector with significant potential to contribute to gender equality.

The research findings have been translated into a set of guidance materials for organisations undertaking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities, to enable uptake of practical strategies to incorporate gender into WASH initiatives, and assist non-specialist practitioners to understand what positive gender outcomes 'look like'.

<http://www.genderinpacificwash.info/index.html>



Women exploring their experience of WASH activities in their community. Source ISF – UTS

Interest in the research partnership

All partners engaged in this research expressed multiple interests, highlighting that the value of research needs to be understood through different organisational perspectives.

For in-country partners (World Vision Vanuatu and LLEE) the research offered an opportunity to:

- ▶ Highlight the work of local organisations and their programming to the broader sector – research outcomes can be used as an evidence base to seek future funding
- ▶ Strengthen programming, based on lessons learned from the research
- ▶ Develop the skills of local implementing teams

From the perspective of the ANGO (IWDA), interest in the research was to:

- ▶ Contribute to strengthening practice of in-country partners
- ▶ Contribute to knowledge in the sector, with specific Pacific examples (recognising the dominance of Asia and Africa examples at that point in time)
- ▶ Document outcomes and learning to generate an evidence base from programming, and evidence to strengthen future work
- ▶ Learn from the collaboration with academics

Similar to ANGO interest, researchers' (ISF-UTS) interest was also to contribute to the sector, recognising the need and evidence gap regarding the benefit of integrating gender considerations in WASH programming.

So how and why does a research collaboration get started? As noted by one partner – the research built from individual passion and interests, which catalysed organisational interest and commitment to contribute to the sector, and then the establishment of broader institutional arrangements which enabled this.

Outcomes of the research:

Research partners identified common themes, highlighting how research partnerships can support complementary and mutually reinforcing benefit for staff and organisations involved in research.

Staff and organisational development.

All partners stated the value of building staff and organisational learning through the research, this was particularly evident for in-country partners and IWDA who gained confidence through the research process.

“Research – we have thought oh scary they are coming to see what we have done, what we haven't – but now we don't have that view. As an organisation, we have learnt – It is ok if we haven't done much – we still value the learning and gain knowledge to improve” (In-country NGO).

“We were seen to be capable by an international research team, seen as equals in the research, That was very valuable for us” (In-country partner).

“The research built up confidence in working with research partners” (IWDA).

Skills transfer was an important outcome through the research and valued by in-country partners. These skills have since been translated and adopted by local staff and applied to different settings.

“The research work helped me to develop my own research skills” (In-country NGO).

“Then we localise the tools, beyond the research, we weave these tool into other programs” (In-country NGO).

A contributing factor to staff development and increased confidence was the style of researcher engagement:

“They were very respectful to local culture and local team. It gave us confidence to give our views and thoughts and we were able to provide that. Some consultants – you get the air that they know more than the local staff. You feel like as local person, ‘I can't say this in case it's wrong’. This wasn't the experience with them the researchers in this activity” (In-country NGO).

Organisational credibility:

The research built organisational credibility for all research partners.

As noted by an in-country partner representative:

“The research, it helped put us at a different level again. We had lots of interest in our work following the research. We were approached by other organisations in country to conduct training for them” (In-country partner).

Following the research, further commissioned work as well as successful grant applications were also accessed by ISF-UTS, IWDA and LLEE.

“The research helped us in a role we wanted to play – to influence change in the sector and expand what we were able to achieve by working with other development organisations towards change” (IWDA).

“The research was a catalyst for ongoing work and enabled us to contribute to thought leadership in this area, including right up until now” (ISF-UTS).

The research also provided a foundation for more research focused on WASH in Vanuatu, informed by the foundation of this research.

“After this research there’s been other research done with WV WASH in Vanuatu and I believe that is to do with the report that was produced from this research and the publication of the report” (In-country NGO).

Longevity of multiple research outputs and influence in the sector:

A variety of research outputs were produced for multiple audiences relevant to influencing policy and practice. Importantly the research outputs have had longevity and continue to influence the sector. Outputs included:

- ▶ Practical Resource Guide (including flash cards, poster) – local relevance strengthened by co-creation with all research partners and use of a local artist to illustrate key messages
- ▶ Country Case Study reports
- ▶ Short form ‘Case Study Snapshot’ for each country
- ▶ PowerPoint presentations to conferences, workshops and symposia
- ▶ Publication of journal articles

The knowledge produced through the partnership has also been taken up by others in the sector and flowed on to influence a focus on gender and WASH. Examples include:

- ▶ Replication of the research approach by WaterAID in Timor Leste
- ▶ Development of a Gender WASH Monitoring Tool by Plan International Australia first in Indonesia and Vietnam and now used globally
- ▶ Use of the Resource Guide as a key resource to inform the CS WASH Western Pacific Sanitation Marketing and Innovation Project (IWDA, Live & Learn International, International Water Centre).

The research also influenced the development of a DFAT aggregate indicator on women’s leadership at community level. The research was part of an early agenda for gender and WASH and demonstrated a strong appetite for this topic. The research was one piece amongst others that has served as a foundation for the design of DFAT’s \$110 million Water for Women fund <http://dfat.gov.au/news/news/Pages/water-for-women.aspx>, as well as a paper for the High-Level Panel for Water at the global level.

The practice of partnership

All partners had only good things to say about the partnership, and lessons learned from the experience have informed ongoing practice of research partnerships.

“With a bit of hindsight, the whole process of setting up the partnership became a model of what good partnership looks like” (IWDA).

Informed by the partner recollections some key steps along the way included the following:

Joint proposal preparation by ISF and IWDA.

ISF-UTS and IWDA worked on preparing the proposal, but due to restricted timing and no budget being available, in-country partners only became involved once the proposal was won. Because of the funding arrangements, local partners were not able to be part of the research conceptualisation, though this would have been the preference of IWDA and ISF.

Establishing the partnership face-to-face.

A whole day meeting between ISF-UTS and IWDA was described as foundational in setting up shared understanding of research objectives and ways of working together. Preparatory meetings were held in country with in-country partners.

Co-creation through respect and drawing on strengths of each partner.

Respect and appreciation of each partners' contribution to the research was echoed by all partners. This involved:

- ▶ Building from insights and strengths of players around the table
- ▶ Enabling, sense of equity, not privileging of different types of knowledge, non-hierarchical approach
- ▶ The international teams really recognised the local partners, local knowledge was appreciated and respected
- ▶ Local staff of the organisation were involved in the research, getting local staff to be part of planning implementation, this is what really mattered for us
- ▶ Leveraging the different strengths of each partner

Advice from the experienced:

Informed by their research partnership experience, here are a few words of advice from the research team:

- ▶ Create enough space for relationships to be formed through the partnership – this creates trust, essential for working relationships, and importantly good research outcomes



Research participants in Vanuatu discuss results of a participatory voting activity. Credit: International Women's Development Agency.

- ▶ Where appropriate, take a strengths-based approach within the research to address fears or concerns about research
- ▶ Ensure access to good data collectors and facilitators – best to draw on local staff or partners who have established relationships with the community and who importantly understand community dynamics that may need to be navigated as part of the research. This is also the ethical approach
- ▶ Factor in a translation phase within your overall research process – not just practical translation – but sense making with all the partners about what the research findings mean, and how these can be best communicated to different stakeholders. In this project, this included local partners trialling the Resource Guide and then revising for publication
- ▶ The researchers don't have to be the only ones responsible for producing research outputs – development practitioners can also take the lead and might be best placed to translate research findings into practical guidance
- ▶ Choose your partner(s) wisely – based on shared values, interest and commitment in the research focus. Build in fun and nurture your relationships, and be patient and open – it takes time to really understand organisational strengths and cultures
- ▶ Ensure there are outcomes of skill development for local teams – think about what is the added value for local research teams, and what expertise can be left from the research

Insights on communicating research findings:

Ensure research is communicated back to the community in creative and engaging ways – pictures, diagrams and video.

“80% of the team and community aren’t going to read” (In-country partner).

“Cycle of information going back to the community, closing the feedback to community, and giving back to community; this is closing. We need to do more of it” (In-country partner).

Ensure all partners are involved in the data analysis – to build local skills in data analysis and importantly make sense together about what the research findings mean to local programming practice and policy.

“To be involved in data analysis is also important. Collection is easy - what you do – and how you make sense of this work – that is really important as well. Data analysis and meaningful analysis with local staff is really important. We have had experience to talk together about the data and to make sense of it together” (In-country NGO).

Insights on collaboration from the perspective of in-country partners:

Budget for as much time as you can to be together in-country – of course budgets often don’t allow for this, but see how far you can push the budget!

For international partner(s):

▶ respect and learn from your in-country partners

“Of course, they have technical know-how. Whilst having technical knowledge and expertise, it’s still good to have an eye and ear on what will be provided from local staff and local people - using local expertise and local knowledge to complement/ supplement the technical know-how from the external researchers?” (In-country partner)

▶ build relationships with in-country partners – spend time in country

“To engage in a more open and confident way, we need to know who we are going to be working with. Partners are working from a distance. We should encourage time to spend together. Face to face is important. To be able to explore challenges, capacity, context. To be able to get good value – time together – face to face is really important” (In-country partner).

▶ local teams to be part of early stages of the research design

▶ support skill development of in-country partners to enable participation

“The tools are sent across – we are asked to provide comment. We need more skills in developing research areas in order to be able to provide that input. This kind of thing should take place at earlier stages – this is especially important” (In-country partner).

For local partner(s):

▶ have confidence to speak up and value your own contribution to the research

“Local offices need to build confidence. Confidence has a big role in having conversations. Could be daunting but it is important. To know place in the local environment; to know our strengths. Also important to understand limitations and to be honest about it: ‘this is who we are, this is what we tried’, to also be honest to acknowledge what we need to build on” (In-country partner).

▶ know your organisational strengths and limitations and share openly

▶ be clear about your interest in the research and expected outcomes

▶ Research TORs should be clearly state what each partner is responsible and also where responsibilities are shared.

“Be clear from the beginning, the ways of working together. What do you want to get out of it? Which organisation is a good fit – in terms of culture, agenda, resources, and leverage from this? What you are trying to understand through the research? Ask the question, ‘why you are doing this? What is the value of it? Don’t be pre-conceived about it. Be open to researchers bringing into it their own thinking” (In-country partner).



Men exploring their experience of WASH activities in their community. Credit ISF - UTS.

Lessons learned:

Insights from the case study resonate with broader perspectives on research partnerships:

- ▶ Choose your partner wisely – do you share the same interest in the topic of interest and passion for your research to contribute?
- ▶ Take the time to meet face to face and form an understanding of ways of working and what partners want out of the partnership
- ▶ Budget for time in country with partners to co-create research design, implement the research together and make sense of findings together
- ▶ Build in skill development of local people as a key outcome of your research
- ▶ Plan multiple research outputs to maximise value for multiple stakeholders – what is the beneficence for the community (research participants); local organisations and partners, ANGO, researchers and the sector more broadly?
- ▶ Keep promoting research outputs – the volume of information in the 21st century means that good, relevant resources can become invisible to web searches quite quickly!

Journal publications and other resources related to the research:

- Carrard, N.R., Crawford, J., Halcrow, G., Rowland, C. & Willetts, J.R. 2013, 'A framework for exploring gender equality outcomes from WASH programmes', *Waterlines: international journal of water, sanitation and waste*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 315-333.
- Willetts, J., Halcrow, G., Carrard, N., Rowland, C. and Crawford, C 2010, *Addressing two critical MDGs together: gender in water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives*, Pacific Economic Bulletin Volume 25 Number 1
- Willetts, J.R., Carrard, N.R., Crawford J., Rowland, C. & Halcrow, G. 2013, 'Working from strengths to assess changes in gender equality', *Development in Practice*, vol. 23, no. 8, pp. 991-1006.
- Willetts J, Halcrow G, Carrard N, Rowland C and Crawford J, 2010, 'Addressing two critical MDGs together: gender in water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives', Pacific Economic Bulletin , vol. 25, no. 1, p. 162.

- http://www.genderinpacificwash.info/system/resources/m/isf_iwda_vanuatu-case-study.pdf
- <https://www.iwda.org.au/assets/files/Gender-Matters-1.pdf>
- <http://www.genderinpacificwash.info/guidance-material>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSfSPXnqP4U>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyswiCLAH7U>

Research Partnership Case Studies

Oxfam Monash Partnership

Background to the research:

Since 2010, the Oxfam Monash Partnership (OMP) has paired academics with Oxfam's field-based teams and communities – combining world-class research and development experiences to address the root causes of poverty that affect people around the world.

Academics from Monash University and staff from Oxfam Australia were already engaging with each other since 2008 (through a Memorandum of Understanding), but in reality, the OMP took off when funding through a philanthropic donation secured support for the partnership in 2010.

Research partnerships is only one area of interest within the OMP. Other areas of focus include student engagement and practitioner development and learning events. The focus of this case study is on research partnerships.

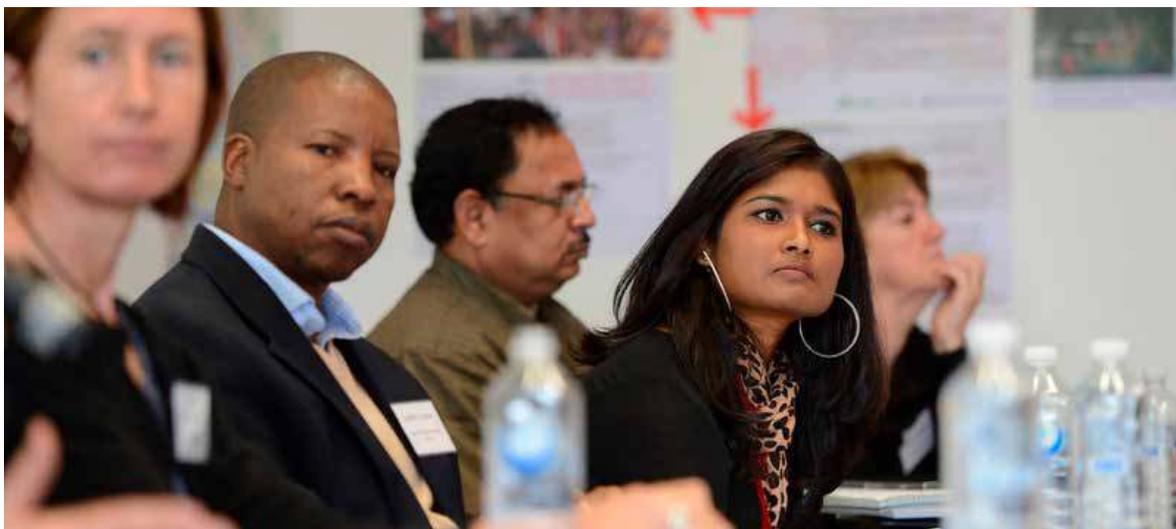
The OMP describes its mission: *The mission of the Oxfam-Monash Partnership is to improve development practice and its outcomes for communities. More specifically, the Partnership aims to bring together the differing yet complementary resources of the NGO and academic sectors, and combine these resources to achieve greater development impact than would otherwise be possible.*

Interest in the research partnership:

Both Oxfam and Monash share an interest in research that has real world impact. Oxfam is interested in the evidence base to inform and drive connection between programming and public policy.

As described by Monash: *“Monash is keen to support identified needs in the sector. Oxfam is in the best position to articulate these needs and can bring this understanding to Monash.”*

The value of the partnership was described in relation to bringing multiple forces together, bringing *together talents from two sectors* with shared interest to address intractable issues of development and to inform public policy.



Oxfam-Monash Partnership Research Symposium "Learning Through Partnership" Credit: Carla Gottgens/OxfamAUS.

Outcomes of the research:

The OMP has not just generated learning from specific research activities but also contributed to broader perspectives on knowledge and learning. This is described from the perspective of Oxfam:

This partnership has influenced our thinking a great deal, especially in terms of how we understand our work and apply knowledge in the organisation. Both are key priorities for the organisation.

The practice of partnership:

Key dimensions of the partnership described by both Oxfam and Monash are noted below.

Long term perspective.

The research partnership is uniquely long term and sits above research often focused at program or project level.

As described by the partners, there is value in this longer-term perspective, which:

- ▶ addresses longer-term horizon needs within the sector
- ▶ enables maturity in conversations
- ▶ builds and is informed from relationships which take time to develop.

“You have to be realistic about the partnerships – it’s not just smooth sailing. There are different perspectives, time frames. The length of partnership means that challenges can be discussed and put on the table. There is a willingness to find a way forward.”

Senior leadership commitment.

A governance committee with representatives from each organisation supports the partnership and provides an enabling environment for staff from both organisations to work within the partnership.

“The governance committee is part of the enabling environment for the partnership. You need to have representatives from both organisations who are invested in the work and provide a supporting environment to the staff.”

The governance committee was described by partners as being able to address organisational challenges which may impede the partnership working. As described by one partner: *“Organisations have their own ways of working, which may impede the partnership practice. The role of the governance committee is critical to ensuring that organisations can collaborate despite their different institutional arrangements.”*

Review and renewal of the partnership.

The partnership has been strengthened through continuous review and reflection. A five-year partnership agreement was established in 2010. To support a next phase of the partnership a review and planning process was carried out in 2015, which was supported by an external facilitator and resulted in a renewed commitment to partnership. Following this review process, a strategic statement of intent was formed and principles and objectives of the partnership were committed to for the next five years. As described by one partner, this process enabled *“An expression of what each organisation wants to achieve and what the partnership wants to do together.”*

Built from values perspectives and shared interest.

The foundation of ‘shared values’ was reconsidered during the most recent partnership review in 2015. The values perspective and establishing shared interests prompted discussion on key questions such as: *what shared values do we hold? What are our combined aims? Why would we want to work together as entities?*

Annual cycles of planning, review and reporting are also established. These offer the means to share the partnership work and the value of the partnership to a broad range of stakeholders both within the partners but also externally.

Partnership Lead.

A unique feature of the OMP is that the funding supports the position of a Program Lead, with the “role of working between but also within both organisations”. In-kind resources from both Oxfam and Monash are also provided to support the work.

The Program Lead is a valued resource and is described by partners as essential to making the partnership work. Being part of multiple conversations and knowing when to bring parties together is described as key to the partnership. As described by one partner: *“I don’t think the Partnership would have been successful without this role. To be able to work between both organisations it’s fundamental to understand the two contexts: the research and development sectors. And to not just understand them but have a passion for both sectors. Valuing an evidence base to inform policy and practice is at the heart of the partnership, and also to the success of the role.”*

Connecting different perspectives.

Both organisations recognised that they needed to know their own organisational interests first and then consider where they overlapped to identify complementary perspectives and agendas. This process of articulating the respective organisational needs was re-examined as a part of the 2015 review. As described by a partner:

“To manage the surface area between the partners, we try to overlap (the organisational) circles. As part of the process of partnership, we are getting to know different faculties of Monash University, and the faculties are trying to understand the different parts of Oxfam.”

Over time, the OMP has learned that it is important to regularly revisit the opportunities for joint work to ensure complementarity.

Identifying research focus.

Following the 2015 review, a new approach for the research partnership is that Oxfam leads the identification of its research needs. This is a shift from previous open calls for proposals from Monash academics which were then matched to Oxfam staff. This enables Oxfam staff to identify the priorities and bring them to the Partnership.

Co-design of research.

Once research priorities are decided the actual research approach is one of collaboration between Monash researchers and Oxfam staff.

“It’s something that may be unique, but we take it for granted that we co-design the research. It’s sort of our natural way of working. Because we are interested in translational research, we engage with industry and civil society, and there is a feedback loop – to relate the research to real world issues.”

Advice from the experienced:

Informed by their research partnership experience, here are a few words of advice on how to best support research partnerships:

▶ Streamline your partnership processes (such as administration, finance, communications) as much as possible, recognising that organisations work in different ways.

“Organisations come with their own sets of working arrangements. They operate on their own set time frames, systems and processes. You have to be mindful that in a partnership like this, things take longer than in a single organisation.”

▶ Recognise that organisations and staff have different incentives for research partnerships, identify these and make explicit in order to effectively manage.

“Individual and organisational priorities are different at different points in time. Academics are required to demonstrate research income and how much they are publishing. This doesn’t necessarily have bearing for humanitarian workers who may not be aware of the time investment required to get research published.”

- ▶ Recognise that relationships matter and take time to develop.

“Good relationships are resource intensive – the Program Lead is a key part of building and maintaining the relationships that are the key to the success of the partnership.”

- ▶ Both academics and practitioners place a high value on research translation and uptake, however, each group may interpret and value these activities differently. To recognise the investment of research participants, researchers, NGO and community-based staff, it is integral to have clear and agreed plans for research uptake...

“The traditional processes of research dissemination through academic journals doesn’t always reach communities in a timely way – if we are able to agree on who the key audiences are for our research – together and in advance - then our work has a greater direct impact on those who would most value its findings and recommendations.”

Lessons learned:

Insights from the case study resonate with broader perspectives on research partnerships:

- ▶ Build relationships as an essential foundation of your partnerships and this takes time and resources
- ▶ Identify both individual and shared interests, of each organisation and individuals involved in order to then identify shared interests and complementary value of working together
- ▶ Consider a long-term perspective recognising how long it takes to prepare and set up a partnership
- ▶ Conduct regular reviews for your partnership in order to reflect and improve on practice based on lessons emerging
- ▶ Ensure you have organisational support to create an enabling environment for your partnership
- ▶ Secure resources to manage the working relationships and business processes of partnership

Journal publications and other resources related to the research:

Numerous reports related to the OMP are found on the partnership website.

See website: <https://www.monash.edu/oxfam>

Reports related to specific research areas are also found on the website highlighting specific research activities, including in the area of gender in Sri Lanka; accountability in Cambodia and South Africa; gender and climate change in Bangladesh.



Oxfam-Monash Partnership Research Symposium “Learning Through Partnership”. Credit: Carla Gottgens/OxfamAUS.



Find out more: www.rdinetwork.org.au

