



## **PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDIES IN CONTEXT**

**Leda Stott**

This essay is part of a series of papers commissioned by The Partnering Initiative through its Case Study Project to develop insights into the process of researching/writing partnership case studies as tools for change.

Copyright for each paper is shared between The Partnering Initiative, the author and / or their employing organisation.

## Scene Setting

There is a pressing need for more incisive information on if, how and in what circumstances, cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development work. As the partnership development paradigm grows in scale and importance, material that shares lessons about the processes involved in such collaboration is required by practitioners, planners and policy makers so that both its reach and capacity are improved. Case studies have real potential to fill gaps in our knowledge about how partnerships function and ensure that an understanding of what works, and what does not, is disseminated more widely. Opportunities for genuine learning to date have been minimal as most partnering case studies are, at best, too sector-focussed and, at worst, inadequate in coverage and style. New and more innovative research indicates that deeper investigation into partnerships relies upon the consideration of a number of key issues which, if taken carefully into account, can assist in generating a richer and more dynamic picture of partnerships that also serve as effective learning tools.

This essay outlines why more substantial material on partnerships in practice is so necessary and why the case study offers an excellent model for research into them. It provides an overview of partnering case studies to date, highlighting issues such as style, scope and accessibility. From this information a series of key issues that emerge when producing and sharing partnering case studies are extracted. These themes include matters relating to partnership context, research time spans, appropriate entry points and power dynamics as well as the role of the researcher and appropriate tools and methods for data collection and dissemination. A final section emphasises what kind of learning we might expect to gain when these topics are fully considered by partnership researchers.

## Why we need better partnership information

Cross-sector partnering is being promoted internationally as a vehicle for addressing development challenges. Recognising the possibilities of initiatives that are “imaginative, coherent and integrated enough to tackle the most intractable problems”<sup>1</sup>, international agencies such as the UN, the World Bank and the European Commission, as well as a growing number of businesses, government agencies and NGOs, have made partnerships central to their work.<sup>2</sup> Partnering, it seems, offers different organisations, groups and networks the prospect of joining forces to tackle development challenges while simultaneously reaping organisational benefits for partners that exceed the costs of their participation.<sup>3</sup>

As interest in cross-sector partnerships has increased over the last decade, so has the need for information that investigates these complex collaborations in a “more evidential” and “less anecdotal” manner.<sup>4</sup> This material is sought after by a range of different audiences, from policy makers and partnership practitioners to academic institutions and community groups, in order to assess and explore the realities and the usefulness of partnerships in addressing development

---

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson (2004), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the UN’s Global Compact <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Portal/Default.asp?> (accessed June 3, 2005); UNDP Partnerships for Sustainable Development <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships.htm> (accessed October 10, 2005); World Bank Partnerships <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/OPPORTUNITIES/0,,contentMDK:20061765~menuPK:95667~pagePK:95645~piPK:95672~theSitePK:95480,00.html> (accessed October 10, 2005) and EC Partnerships [http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/body/theme/social/partnership\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/body/theme/social/partnership_en.htm) (accessed October 10, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Otiso, (2003), p. 225.

<sup>4</sup> El-Ansari et al. (2001) p.216.

concerns. The learning from different partnership experiences can then be integrated at the levels of both policy and practice to ensure that working in this way is effective, efficient and scaled up more vigorously.

Partnerships are evolving entities which, as they grow and develop, face both internal and external challenges that impact upon their value as a development model. Authors such as Tennyson have described some of the generic issues faced by partnerships as they navigate their way through a series of developmental phases.<sup>5</sup> There is, however, sparse documentary evidence of how these partnering processes have been played out in diverse contextual settings over time: How do partners work through different phases and find common ground? What issues and challenges do they confront? What tools and mechanisms are adopted to address them? How is the learning from this fed back into the partnership and beyond? These details are crucial to a more profound comprehension of partnering and they can only be obtained by researching partnerships more closely. As El-Ansari et al. point out, "With a social intervention as complex as collaboration, it is important to know more than whether it works if the evidence is to be of practical use.... In other words, *the chemistry* (my italics) needs to be revealed and this can only be done in the field."<sup>6</sup>

### **Partnerships and the case study model**

A case study approach offers an excellent model for deepening research into partnerships. In spite of arguments that general and reliable lessons cannot be made from this single focus approach and that findings may be biased by "intense exposure" to the research topic,<sup>7</sup> the case study model is, according to Tellis, "an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed."<sup>8</sup> It enables the detailed examination of a project in relation to its particular context through a range of data collection techniques such as observation, review and analysis of documents.<sup>9</sup> According to Yin, "In general case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context."<sup>10</sup>

Although qualitative and participatory research methods are at the core of case study work, the opportunity for integrating these with quantitative knowledge is also possible.<sup>11</sup> It is thus an approach that facilitates an exploration of the processes involved in a partnership's development, what works effectively and what does not, as well as an investigation of partnership outputs and outcomes, some of which may be unexpected. Tellis also observes that,

*Case studies are multi-perspectival analyses. This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This one aspect is a salient point in the characteristic that case studies possess. They give a voice to the powerless and voiceless.*<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> See for example Tennyson (1998), (2003) and (2004)

<sup>6</sup> El-Ansari et al. (2001) p.218.

<sup>7</sup> Tellis (1997a); Palmquist (1997)

<sup>8</sup> Tellis (1997b)

<sup>9</sup> Zwick & Brown (1994); Yin (1994)

<sup>10</sup> Yin (2003a) p.1.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Scholz & Tietje (2002)

<sup>12</sup> Tellis (1997b)

An action research methodology<sup>13</sup> is particularly appropriate for case study investigation into partnerships as it enables:

- An emphasis on understanding the context in which a partnership operates and how this evolves and interacts with its development over time;
- The reflection of multiple approaches and perspectives so that the varied views and opinions of different partners and stakeholders are explored;
- An 'interactive' rather than a 'detached' form of research with active engagement between 'the researcher' and 'the researched' in a cycle linking experience, reflection, learning and action;<sup>14</sup> and,
- The use of a wide range of data collection methods including qualitative approaches such as participant/direct observation; semi-structured or in-depth interviews; focused group discussions and workshops. These can be supplemented with wider sources such as literature, partnership documentation and statistical reviews.

Disseminating information about partnerships through case studies offers the possibility of reaching a wide audience as three different levels of data collection may be acquired and shared; at individual partnership project-level where development issues are identified; through groups or 'clusters' of case studies from which common themes may be extracted; and at macro-level, where strategic cross-cutting strands may assist decision-making at policy level.<sup>15</sup> In this way case studies can expand knowledge by assisting partners in their work; generate new partnership ventures and determine policy direction. As Palmquist neatly summarises, "Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research."<sup>16</sup>

### **Partnership case studies – the evidence to date**

Good quality and informative case studies that address the process of partnering are difficult to find. This is partly because partnerships are relatively new and extensive research into them has been limited. However, their investigation may also be daunting as researcher/s are confronted by an array of sectoral and organisational relationships and different levels of accountability towards partners, beneficiaries and donors.<sup>17</sup>

Much of the partnership case study material that has been produced to date has centred on private sector engagement, particularly that of large corporations, with other sectors. Snapshots of different projects have been offered with a view to promoting the case for business involvement in the development process.<sup>18</sup> This material is attractively presented and easily accessible and there is clear recognition of the value of sharing different partnership experiences. However, it tends to be anecdotal in nature with an emphasis on partnering outputs, rather than processes or outcomes. It also focuses primarily on 'success factors' in order to demonstrate what 'works', as opposed to analysis of what has not been effective and why. The extent of research engagement

---

<sup>13</sup> For more on action research see Greenwood & Levin (1998) & Reason (1994)

<sup>14</sup> Zwick & Brown (1994) p.3.

<sup>15</sup> El Ansari et al. (2001) p. 219.

<sup>16</sup> Palmquist (1997)

<sup>17</sup> Vargas, (2002), p. 1542 & Tennyson (2003), p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> See for example the studies included in Nelson (1997); Forstater, M., MacDonald, J. & Raynard, P. (2002); SustainAbility, IFC & Ethos (2002); Business in the Community Partnership Academy case studies [http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/programme\\_directory/partnership\\_academy/casestudies.html](http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/programme_directory/partnership_academy/casestudies.html) (accessed October 11, 2005); World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) <http://www.wbcsd.org/templates/TemplateWBCSD5/layout.asp?type=p&MenuId=ODY&doOpen=1&ClickMenu=RightMenu> (accessed October 9, 2005)

with different partnerships is unclear. Much of the material appears to have been gathered from secondary sources or interviews with a limited number of partnership members. In addition, although the studies may catch a reader's interest, their journalistic style can be viewed as lacking in "substance and credibility".<sup>19</sup> Thus, while this material may usefully showcase partnerships for publicity purposes, it does not provide a complete picture of the dynamic nature of partnering and its full potential for wider impact.

A number of partnership case studies have also been compiled by academics.<sup>20</sup> They provide penetrating assessments of the usefulness of partnerships as a development model and raise a number of important issues relating to their growth. Most give a detailed examination of the particular context in which the partnership under study operates. This is extremely helpful in evaluating partnering prospects within a specific environment. Yakovleva and Alabaster<sup>21</sup>, for example, offer a case study of a partnership seeking to support community development in the diamond mining province of Sakha (Yakutia) in the Russian Federation. They examine issues relating to the organisation and structure of the partnership that are closely intertwined with economic and political changes affecting the mining sector. In a similar vein, Otiso's case study of an ongoing slum upgrading and service delivery project in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, captures some of the challenges relating to different sector incentives and engagement over time.<sup>22</sup>

Other academic case studies successfully pull out linkages between context and process issues in relation to power dynamics. Gender empowerment, for example, is investigated by Vargas in a case study in Costa Rica. She stresses that she has produced her study specifically "to take partnerships seriously" by analysing the roles that women might play within them in addressing sustainable development issues<sup>23</sup>. Meanwhile, Harrison<sup>24</sup> and Mercer<sup>25</sup> use case studies from Ethiopia and Tanzania respectively, to raise concerns about the gap between partnership theory and practice when international and local partners or beneficiaries "...are positioned within an asymmetrical framework of power relations."<sup>26</sup>

Although these studies have important learning implications for a variety of audiences, their perspectives are rooted in distinct academic disciplinary areas and published in specialised journals. As a result their accessibility to a wider audience, in terms of both style and circulation, is limited.<sup>27</sup> In the last five or six years, however, a number of institutions from, and with links to, international agencies have produced case studies that have examined partnerships with greater rigour and shared this work more widely. They have experimented with cross-disciplinary approaches and action research methodologies and sought to address the needs of specific sector audiences, policy makers and partnership practitioners, by targeting their findings and making them easily available.

In 1998 the World Bank established the Business Partners for Development (BPD) programme, a project-based initiative to study, support and promote strategic examples of cross-sector

---

<sup>19</sup> Drescher Mayse (1994)

<sup>20</sup> See for example El-Ansari et al. (2004); Harrison (2002); Mercer (2003); Nhantumbo et al. (2001); Otiso (2003); Vargas (2002) and Yakovleva & Alabaster (2003)

<sup>21</sup> Yakovleva & Alabaster (2003)

<sup>22</sup> Otiso (2003)

<sup>23</sup> Vargas (2002) p.1555

<sup>24</sup> Harrison (2002)

<sup>25</sup> Mercer (2003)

<sup>26</sup> Mercer (2003) p.759

<sup>27</sup> Case studies written in an academic format can also be perceived as dry and difficult to retain an interest in. See Drescher Mayse (1994).

partnerships working for development. Its activities were divided into industry-based clusters and theme-based partnerships which included the Natural Resources Cluster, the Water and Sanitation Cluster, the Global Road Safety Partnership and the Global Partnership for Youth Development. Both the Natural Resources and Water and Sanitation Clusters conducted extensive research into partnerships. The case studies compiled by BPD Natural Resources cover partnerships in Azerbaijan, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Venezuela, Tanzania and Zambia. They were designed specifically to, “explore the role of tri-sector partnerships in providing answers to the unresolved social management and sustainable development challenges confronting non-renewable natural resource (oil, gas and mining) projects.”<sup>28</sup> Adopting a ‘learning by doing’ methodology, they sought to identify where partnerships might add-value and to share lessons on their impact.<sup>29</sup> The case studies, which are attractively presented and easily accessible electronically, provide comprehensive contextual overviews, particularly from the business point of view; information on how the partnerships were formed; the activities they have undertaken and their business and developmental impact to date. The lessons from these studies are explored in detail in the book *Putting Partnerships to Work: Strategic Alliances for Development between Government, the Private Sector and Civil Society* which seeks to look beyond ‘good partnership practice’ by examining positive outcomes as well as risks and costs when things have not worked.<sup>30</sup>

A further set of studies have been collated by BPD’s Water and Sanitation Cluster.<sup>31</sup> Lessons from different partnering experiences in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Haiti, Indonesia, Senegal and South Africa, are included in the report *Flexibility by Design: Lessons from Multi-Sector Partnerships in Water and Sanitation Projects* which assesses whether partnerships have provided the poor with improved water and sanitation services, as well as processes through which they have a sustainable voice.<sup>32</sup> This cluster eventually became Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation (BPD)<sup>33</sup>, an informal network promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships to improve access to safe water and effective sanitation for the poor, and it has continued to conduct case study reviews with a range of partnerships in different regions of the world. These *Partnership Analysis Reports* are primarily aimed at assisting partners to work through partnering issues and foster cross-project learning. BPD manages a process between researchers and projects in which the latter are, “...treated as the ultimate source of analysis rather than outside consultants looking in.”<sup>34</sup> Although impact analysis is covered, concentration has mostly been on, “...issues that different partners and the partnership as a whole need to focus on to maximise their relationships.”<sup>35</sup> The primary audience has been the partners themselves, for whom a confidential document is produced. Other audiences include partnership practitioners, policy and decision-makers who are provided with electronically available summary reports that draw together the lessons from the case studies researched.<sup>36</sup>

The case studies compiled for UNDP’s Public Private Partnerships for the Urban Environment (PPPUE)<sup>37</sup> also review a range of water and sanitation partnerships in Africa, Asia and Latin America through in-depth case studies based on interviews and document analyses. The main

---

<sup>28</sup> See ODI BPD/NRC website <http://www.bpd-naturalresources.org/> (accessed October 25, 2005)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. <http://www.bpd-naturalresources.org/> (accessed October 25, 2005)

<sup>30</sup> Warner & Sullivan (2004) Preface p.11

<sup>31</sup> Caplan (2002) p.2.

<sup>32</sup> Caplan et al.(2001) p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> See [www.bpdws.org](http://www.bpdws.org) (accessed October 5th, 2005)

<sup>34</sup> Caplan et al.(2002)

<sup>35</sup> Caplan et al.(supra)

<sup>36</sup> See Caplan et al. (2001)

<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.undp.org/ppp/gln/case.htm> (accessed October 6th 2005)

emphasis is on the role of the private sector in assisting the building of municipal capacity but attitudes and perceptions among the different partners and stakeholders are also examined, as well as some of the obstacles facing the partnerships as they have developed. Ample empirical information is provided so that the partnership is understood in relation to specific contextual issues. These studies have been included in a larger survey of partnerships from which key lessons have been distilled for the benefit of public sector audiences working to capacity-build municipalities to improve service provision.<sup>38</sup>

Another interesting series of case studies have been provided by Local Partnerships in Europe (LPE)<sup>39</sup>. Initiated by The Copenhagen Centre, an organisation led and financed by the Danish public sector, LPE was a three-year project that began in 2000. It aimed to provide guidance to European governments and policy planners by testing out the assumption that new social partnerships were a better solution than other options to social and labour market inclusion. Adopting an action research methodology, with outside researchers working directly with local partnership practitioners, it focussed specifically on understanding partnership process development. As this work progressed the six partnerships studied were able to dialogue with one another as well as engage in critical analysis and debate with the case study researchers. In this way the project provided an opportunity for mutual learning experiences.<sup>40</sup> A book summarising the learning from this project and reports compiled at different stages of its development are available in both hard copy and electronic formats.<sup>41</sup>

A similar form of interaction was promoted in a shorter 3-month learning project with the European Commission's EQUAL Development and Transnational Partnerships which work to prevent discrimination in the labour market.<sup>42</sup> Based on eight case studies from widely different partnerships across Europe, the project aimed to identify and explore preliminary learning experiences about partnerships, assess what had worked and what had not, and then make recommendations for other EQUAL partnerships. The research was conducted through document analysis, a questionnaire, individual and group interviews and the establishment of a Partnership Learning Group in which partner representatives were encouraged to share and reflect upon the issues and challenges they faced as they worked through different partnering processes. The material gathered has been worked into an easily accessible electronic guidebook.<sup>43</sup>

EC-PREP, a research collaboration between the European Commission and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded a two-year academia-led research project to examine the phenomenon of cross-sector partnership and its impact on poverty eradication.<sup>44</sup> Through case studies, it aimed to capture and disseminate lessons from six partnerships in Zambia and South Africa which could be of use to others in establishing and adapting similar models. Data was collected through a literature review, observation, site visits, interviews and focus groups meetings. The bulk of this work was carried out by country resident research teams working in close consultation with the various members of the partnerships under study. Research findings were reviewed and shared with partner representatives and an external panel of 'critical friends' from different academic disciplines and countries. The resulting information has

---

<sup>38</sup> Plummer (2003)

<sup>39</sup> Kjaer (2003)

<sup>40</sup> Kjaer (2003) pp103-106.

<sup>41</sup> See <http://www.copenhagencentre.org/sw1236.asp> (accessed October 12, 2005)

<sup>42</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/about/index\\_en.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/about/index_en.cfm) (accessed October 12, 2005)

<sup>43</sup> EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/partnerguide-lo\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/data/document/partnerguide-lo_en.pdf) (accessed October 12, 2005)

<sup>44</sup> Rein et al. (2005)

been targeted at different audiences through a detailed book *Working Together, A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa*.<sup>45</sup>

Other case studies, both completed and in progress, have also begun to analyse the manner in which partnerships work more deeply and disseminate this more effectively.<sup>46</sup> The material garnered from this research offers a colourful patchwork of different partnering experiences with important lessons for those who wish to develop, improve and expand this way of working. At the same time the creative use of such studies as learning tools is growing as information and training materials are being developed from them. A particular example of this is provided by Tennyson in *Institutionalising Partnerships*. Here the author draws on meeting notes, documents and her own 'off the record' logbooks to explore three partnerships with which she has been involved; an initiating partnership, a partnership delivery mechanism and a learning partnership.<sup>47</sup> These experiences neatly illustrate some of the issues that arise in relation to people, procedures, productivity and progress during the process of partnership institutionalisation and serve as an effective prompt for generic learning.<sup>48</sup>

### **Emerging issues for partnership case study research**

The case study projects outlined above highlight a number of issues that need to be taken into account when carrying out research among multiple groups from different organisational and cultural backgrounds. These include:

#### Understanding the context

The importance of studying a partnership's context has been emphasised by a number of writers and researchers.<sup>49</sup> All stress that partnerships are conditioned by the particular environments in which they operate. Within these contexts the existence of "systemic drivers" and "specific triggers" can positively influence partnership development while their absence can limit such potential.<sup>50</sup> Studying a partnership's historical, political, socio-economic and cultural environment and the relationship between context, partnership, processes and outcomes enables us to question, "...how does this intervention make a difference in this particular situation? (rather than just asking does it work?) and why it might work over here and not over there."<sup>51</sup> This emphasis is further reinforced by Harrison, who suggests that partnership effectiveness is "closely related to a nuanced understanding of both social and political context."<sup>52</sup>

#### Considering time

Limitations of time will always condition case study research and decisions thus need to be made about how best to work within a particular time span.<sup>53</sup> Tennyson has shown that each developmental phase of a partnership has distinctive features that will inevitably impact the

---

<sup>45</sup> Rein et al. (2005)

<sup>46</sup> See for example The Seed Initiative (Supporting Entrepreneurs in Environment and Development) <http://seedinit.org/>; OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), <http://www.oecd.org/> (accessed October 12, 2005) and the Civil Society Partnership Programme of ODI (Overseas Development Institute) <http://www.odi.org.uk/cspp/Index.html> (accessed November 16, 2005)

<sup>47</sup> Tennyson (2003)

<sup>48</sup> Tennyson (2003) p.7

<sup>49</sup> See for example Caplan et al. (2001) p.5., Kjaer (2003) p.33; Nelson & Zadek (2000), p.33. and Rein et al. (2005) p.8.

<sup>50</sup> Nelson & Zadek (2000), p.33; Kjaer (2003) p.33.

<sup>51</sup> El-Ansari (2001) p.218.

<sup>52</sup> Harrison (2002), p. 607.

<sup>53</sup> Stake (1995) p.4.

research process.<sup>54</sup> It is therefore important to make careful choices about when in the lifetime of a partnership evidence is collected and how often. This is further complicated by the overlapping of different partnership development phases and the fact that their progression may not always be linear or cyclical.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, an understanding of how perspectives may change over time is vitally important as, “Viewed chronologically...today’s barriers and obstacles...if challenged and crossed, become tomorrow’s positive outcomes.”<sup>56</sup>

#### Locating the right ‘entry point’

Determining both where and how the case study research process commences can be testing. Different research entry points, as discussed above, will depend upon the phase of a partnership’s development as well as the length of time the partnership has been operating. A range of internal and external drivers will also influence options here. The wider context may, for example, determine when the case study begins as may the different requirements and perspectives of the researcher/s, partners and stakeholders and audience/s. Research design approaches therefore need to assess entry points carefully with thorough deliberation on how to begin working with different groups and the use of appropriate ‘participatory’ tools and methods.

#### Finding the ‘right’ researcher/s

The role of the researcher is pivotal to the case study process. Important considerations include whether researchers are internal or external to the partnership, and how ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ they might be, as well as whether an individual or research team should be used. While the different knowledge and expertise bases of a team may enhance the research process it may also be unwieldy to work in this way and more intrusive to the partnership. Whatever choices are made, a key tenet for all case study researchers is that they are open to learning from those with whom they are working, “...we enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn.”<sup>57</sup> Such a stance encourages the development of a reciprocal learning process between ‘the researcher’ and ‘the researched’.

#### Drawing on different disciplines

Case study researchers can come from a range of disciplinary and professional backgrounds and it is important to consider the impact that these may have on partnership case study research in more detail. El-Ansari et al. note that public health partnership research crosses disciplines such as, “organisational management, health promotion, psychology, public health, sociology and public administration.”<sup>58</sup> They suggest that a cross-disciplinary and “eclectic” approach, with the combining of different perspectives and viewpoints, can facilitate a more rounded exploration of partnering.<sup>59</sup> Such a strategy involves “mixed-methods investigations and observational studies” that take diverse standpoints into account in order to obtain an overall picture.<sup>60</sup>

#### Using appropriate methods and tools

Case studies require the careful collection of data which then needs to be organised, analysed and disseminated. A shared understanding between the researcher/s, the partners and stakeholders of what the case study will cover, who it is for and how the data will be used is crucial.<sup>61</sup> Because partnerships are not static entities, the information-gathering process needs to

---

<sup>54</sup> Tennyson (2004) p.4

<sup>55</sup> Tennyson (2004) p.4; Stott & Keatman (2005) p.8.

<sup>56</sup> El-Ansari et al. p. 218.

<sup>57</sup> Stake (1995) p.1.

<sup>58</sup> El Ansari et al. (2001) p. 217.

<sup>59</sup> El-Ansari et al. (supra) p. 223.

<sup>60</sup> El Ansari et al (supra) p. 223.

<sup>61</sup> Rein et al. (2005) p.12.

be flexible enough to capture elements of a partnership that change as well as those that remain constant.<sup>62</sup> Deciding which data collection and review methodologies are best suited to particular groups is important, as is an assurance of confidentiality for those who may have controversial or critical views and be afraid to speak out. This is linked to the need to look out for perspectives that may be marginalised, or even excluded, due to power imbalances. To quote El-Ansari et al. again, “Only through the purposeful combination of tools and measures and by examining the questions that are being left out can the evidence-base of collaboration be enriched and the practice of and partnerships be taken forward.”<sup>63</sup>

### Unpacking power relations

An awareness of power relations and dynamics is important when considering appropriate case study research methods. Conflicting and changing loyalties and demands can influence both the manner and the extent of a partnership’s accountability to its partners and stakeholders. In consequence a researcher needs to be attentive to the visibility, or invisibility, of different individuals and groups, assess what power hierarchies are in place and when, and examine whether issues such as gender, religion, race etc might limit or augment involvement in the research process.<sup>64</sup> Use of language is also important when analysing power relations. Harrison, for example, suggests that “...the blanket use of participatory language may hide the complex interaction of history and individual positioning that make the meaning of participation so variable.”<sup>65</sup>

### Targeting the case study audience/s

Tailoring case study data effectively and taking into account sectoral, contextual and cultural variables are vital if partnering knowledge and skills are to be spread and sharpened. In order to ensure that the information collated and disseminated is ‘fit for purpose’ the learning needs of different audiences need to be carefully identified. Tennyson usefully distinguishes between ‘internal’ audiences, such as partnership beneficiaries, partner representatives and staff from partner organisations, and ‘external audiences’ that encompass donors, policy makers, the media and members of the general public.<sup>66</sup> Each of these groups will have different preferences for the format and presentation of partnership case studies. So, for example, “An external donor will expect a formal report. The public will welcome a story with a personal dimension. Policymakers will like statistics. Potential partners will want to know how current partners have benefited from their involvement.”<sup>67</sup> Selecting the ‘right’ presentation and dissemination options for each of these audiences will ultimately inform the effectiveness of the case study as a learning vehicle.<sup>68</sup>

## **Taking the issues on board**

An effective case study can be an invaluable tool for learning and change within the partnership itself. It presents the opportunity for a genuine exploration of the various skills, mechanisms and tools employed to deal with the range of issues and concerns that emerge during a partnership’s lifetime while also permitting greater scrutiny of the external issues that influence its development. Case studies, when carefully crafted, may thus contribute to significant change at the levels of

---

<sup>62</sup> Stott (2004) and see also Rein et al. (2005) p.12.

<sup>63</sup> El Ansari et al (supra) p. 224

<sup>64</sup> See Stott & Keatman (2005) for discussion of community engagement in partnerships.

<sup>65</sup> Harrison (2002), p. 593.

<sup>66</sup> Tennyson (2004) p.35.

<sup>67</sup> Tennyson (2004) p.35.

<sup>68</sup> See Drescher Mayse (1994)

both policy and practice. Their impact may be both vertical; moving between individual, organisation and policy levels; and, horizontal; within, between and across organisations.

## **Conclusion**

It is suggested here that carefully researched case studies can promote a stronger understanding of partnerships. In enabling an investigation of what is involved in the process of partnering as well as what has worked and what has not, case studies are able to facilitate important data on how these complex entities are built, managed, reviewed, revised and sustained. Capturing the richness and complexity of the partnering process is not an easy task. In his book, *InterViews*, Kvale suggests two metaphors for the research interviewer that are apt for partnership case study research<sup>69</sup>; that of 'the miner', who strips away at different surface levels, digging ever more deeply in order to extract the valuable material waiting to be uncovered below; and that of the 'the traveller' who gathers information on a journey through unknown lands in order to relate a story upon returning home. The story may not only pass on new knowledge but also encourage the traveller to reflect and change. It is the skilful blending of these two research approaches that will support both deeper exploration of partnerships and wider sharing of the learning from them. This is essential if the validity of cross-sector partnering as a development approach and its potential for engendering both systemic and systematic change is to be truly understood and, ultimately, enhanced.

---

<sup>69</sup> Kvale (1996) pp3-4.

## References

- Caplan, K., Kjaer, L. & Stott, L. (2002) *Action Learning Session*, PCCP, Residential 1 presentation, March 20th
- Caplan, K. (2002) *BPD Water and Sanitation Cluster, Overview of a Three Year Initiative*, ((London, Business Partners for Development, Water and Sanitation Cluster)  
<http://www.bpdws.org/english/docs/overview.pdf> (accessed October 25, 2005)
- Caplan, K., Heap S., Nicol A., Plummer, J., Simpson S. & Weiser J. (2001) *Flexibility by Design: Lessons from Multi-Sector Partnerships in Water and Sanitation Projects*, (London, Business Partners for Development, Water and Sanitation Cluster)  
<http://www.bpdws.org/english/docs/flexibility.pdf> (accessed October 12, 2005)
- Drescher Mayse, A. (1994) 'Are Case Studies Useful?' in *Sustainable Agriculture and Research Program (SAREP)*, Vol.6, No. 1, Winter (University of California)
- El Ansari, W., Phillips, C. J. & Hammick, M. (2001) 'Collaboration and partnerships: developing the evidence base', *Health and Social Care in the Community*, (4), 9 pp. 215-227.
- El Ansari, W., Phillips, C. J. & Zwi, A. B. (2004) 'Public Health Nurses' Perspectives on Collaborative Partnerships in South Africa', *Public Health Nursing*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 277-286.
- European Commission (2004) *Learning from the experience of EQUAL partnerships* (Brussels, European Commission)  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/partnerguide-lo\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/data/document/partnerguide-lo_en.pdf) (accessed October 12, 2005)
- Forstater, M., MacDonald, J. & Raynard, P. (2002) *Business and Poverty: Bridging the Gap* (London, IBLF)
- Greenwood, D & Levin, M. (1988) *Introduction to Action Research, Social Research for Social Change* (London, Sage Publications)
- Harrison, E., (2002) 'The Problem with the Locals' Partnership and Participation in Ethiopia' *Development and Change* 33 (4), pp. 587-610.
- Kjaer, L. (2003) *Local Partnerships in Europe* (Copenhagen, The Copenhagen Centre).  
[http://www.copenhagencentre.org/graphics/CopenhagenCentre/Publications/LPE\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.copenhagencentre.org/graphics/CopenhagenCentre/Publications/LPE_Final_Report.pdf) (accessed October 12, 2005)
- Kvale, S. (1996) *InterViews, An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (London, Sage Publications)
- Mercer, C. (2003) 'Performing partnership: civil society and the illusions of good governance in Tanzania' in *Political Geography* 22, pp741-763
- Nelson, J. & Zadek, S. (2000) *Partnership Alchemy*, (Copenhagen, The Copenhagen Centre)

- Nelson, J. (1997) *Business as Partners for Development, Creating wealth for countries, companies and communities* (London, PWBLF)
- Nhantumbo, I., Dent, J.B. & Kowero, G. (2001) 'Goal programming: Application in the management of the miombo woodland in Mozambique,' in *European Journal of Operational Research*, 133 pp 310-322
- Otiso, K.M. (2003) 'State, voluntary and private sector partnerships for slum upgrading and basic service delivery in Nairobi City, Kenya', *Cities*, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 221–229
- Palmquist, R. A (1997) 'The Case Study as a Research Method', *Uses and Users of Information*, LIS 391D.1, University of Texas, Austin  
<http://fiat.gslis.utexas.edu/~ssoy/usesusers/l391d1b.htm> (accessed October 6th, 2005)
- Plummer, J. (2002) *Focussing Partnerships, A Sourcebook for Municipal Capacity Building in Public-Private Partnerships* (London, Earthscan)
- Reason, P., Ed. (1988) *Human Enquiry in Action: Developments in New Paradigm Research* (London, Sage Publications)
- Rein, M., Stott, L., Yambayamba, K., Hardman, S. & Reid, S. (2005) *Working Together, A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa*, (Cambridge, University of Cambridge Programme for Industry)
- Scholz, R. W. & Tietje, O. (2002) *Embedded Case Study Methods, Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Knowledge* (London, Sage Publications)
- Stake, R.E (1995) *The Art Of Case Study Research* (London, Sage Publications)
- Stott, L. & Keatman, T. (2005) 'Tools for Measuring Community Engagement in Partnerships', *BPD Practitioner Note* (London, BPD Water and Sanitation)
- Stott, L. (2004) 'Draft discussion paper on evaluating partnerships', *Paper produced for Postgraduate Certificate in Cross Sector Partnership*, (University of Cambridge Programme for Industry, International Business Leaders Forum) Unpublished.
- SustainAbility, IFC & Ethos (2002) *Developing Value, The business case for sustainability in emerging markets* (London, SustainAbility)
- Tellis, W. (1997a) 'Introduction to case study', *The Qualitative Report*, 3 (2). July.  
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-2/tellis1.html> (accessed October 11, 2005)
- Tellis, W. (1997b) 'Application of a case study methodology', *The Qualitative Report*, 3 (3). September.  
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-3/tellis2.html> (accessed October 11, 2005)
- Tennyson, R. (2004) *The Partnering Toolbook*, (London & Geneva, IBLF & GAIN)
- Tennyson, R. (2003) *Institutionalising Partnerships: Lessons from the frontline* (London, IBLF)

Tennyson, R. (1998) *Managing Partnerships, Tools for mobilising the public sector, business and civil society as partners in development* (London, PWBLF)

Vargas, C.M (2002) 'Women in Sustainable Development: Empowerment through Partnerships for Healthy Living', *World Development*, Vol.30, No.9 pp 1539-1560

Warner, M. & Sullivan, R. ed. (2004) *Putting Partnerships to Work Strategic Alliances for Development between Government, the Private Sector and Civil Society* (Sheffield, Greenleaf Publishing Ltd.).

Yakovleva, N. & Alabaster, T. (2003) 'Tri-sector partnership for community development in mining: a case study of the SAPI Foundation and Target Fund in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)', *Resources Policy* 29, pp83–98

Yin, R.K. (2003a) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Applied Social Research Methods, 3rd Edition (London, Sage Publications)

Yin, R.K. (2003b) *Applications of Case Study Research*, Applied Social Research Methods, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London, Sage Publications)

Zwick, E. & Brown, D. L. (1994) 'Writing and Facilitating Cases for Development Activists,' *Institute for Development Research (IDR) Reports*, Vol. 11, No.4.

## AUTHOR'S PROFILE



**LEDA STOTT**

Leda is an independent consultant specialising in cross-sector partnerships and development issues. Over the last ten years she has designed, developed and evaluated partnership programmes in Africa, Europe and Latin America. She is a Senior Associate of The Partnering Initiative, tutor on the Postgraduate Certificate in Cross-Sector Partnership at Cambridge University and editor of the journal *Partnership Matters*. She has recently co-authored *Working Together, A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa* (2005) and the European Commission's *EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships* (2004).

