Partnerships

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Definition

A partnership is the establishment of alliances between two or more entities for the purpose of achieving common goals. The alliance stems from collaboration between the organisations. The resulting relationship is based on sharing of resources, information, assets and risks. It is a mutual relationship with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

In the humanitarian sector these types of relationships are common between local and national governments, NGO’s, relief organisations and more recently with the corporate social responsibility part of the private sector.

Objectives/Expected Results

Conduct a comprehensive review:

- seek out, retain and develop partnerships at the cutting edge of emergency response and ongoing projects;
- be more effective, for example: assistance in technical and specialized systems that can better help utilize resources and have updated systems and tools;
- create synergies to improve processes and add value to the supply chain;
- enhance ability to respond to humanitarian crises (resources and finances); and
- be pro-active/assist partners in building their institutional capacities.

Developing Partnerships

Successful partnerships are dependent on all things remaining constant. Effective partnerships rely on equitable participation, decision-making, taking and accepting responsibility. Such relationships contribute to achieving shared/common goals and are the key to the transition from emergency to rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Areas of Partnership

- Providing services – increases capacity to support those affected.
- Exchanging of ideas, knowledge and expertise – critical to the design of effective emergency response programmes.
- Advocating and influencing decisions makers – helps tackle political or social barriers to disaster recovery.
- Solidarity and professional support – particularly important for local NGOs in the face of trauma or insecurity.
- Access to and sharing of information – assists both international and local organisations in participating appropriately to an emergency.
- Building the capacity of civil society – is an integral aim of disaster response interventions and the basis for longer term sustainability.

Hints to identifying and negotiating partnerships

- What type of partnerships would strengthen your aims and capacity?
- What have you learned from current or previous partnerships?
- What information do you have about a potential partner? (strategy, length of establishment, reputation, capacity and governance)
- How compatible are you? (i.e. values, capacity, stakeholders)
- Is there organisational commitment on both sides?
- What can you offer and what are you looking for in a partner?
- What are your mutual expectations and understanding of what the partnership will involve? (e.g. term, purpose, roles, responsibilities, exit strategy, levels of accountability, participation, information sharing and control).
- What form of partnership agreement is needed? (including governance and conflict resolution strategies)
- Be aware of the cultural sensitivities and bias of both partners in assessing, negotiating and formulating a partnership.

Selecting a partner organisation

- Previous partnering experience with the organisation.
The organization's readiness and ability to work with other partners.
Whether the organization's objectives and operating principles are in line with your own organisation.
Whether the host government approves of the partnership.

Potential pitfalls of INGO: local NGO partnerships

- INGO role as donor and dependence on external funding.
- Mis-match in organisational capacity and culture.
- Unequal accountability demands and access to resources.
- Staff turnover and absence of organisational commitment.
- Contrasting values and stakeholder expectations.

Aspects of an effective partnerships

- Should not be used just to satisfy donor demands.
- Requires genuine commitment by both organisations.
- Requires on-going negotiation and compromise.
- Should be built on shared values, mutual trust, honesty and respect.
- Require clear and mutual understanding of purpose, roles and expectations.
- Is key to a developmental approach.

Humanitarian Sector/ Private Sector Collaboration

The private sector and humanitarian sector are driven by different motivators. The commercial sector is driven by profit and the humanitarian sector driven to meeting the needs of vulnerable people. However the emerging trend of corporate social responsibility policies in commercial entities and the desire to maximise limited resources, has brought a common focus to alleviation of poverty and suffering. The two sectors working together to find ways of collaborating to meet this objective.

Why should the humanitarian sector partner with the private sector?

Opportunities for collaboration, from a logistics perspective some of these would be:

- organisations should acknowledge that it is not possible to achieve the objectives on their own, for example, the use of commercial transport in emergencies;
- pre-positioning of stocks by vendors for easy accessibility by the humanitarian sector; and
- donation of lifesaving supplies as gifts-in-kind.

See Logistics Cluster topic.

What can you do to promote effective partnerships? Tips and practices

- Engage local NGOs, seek their input on strategies and priorities and find ways to transfer and build their capacity. Local NGOs often have, amongst other things, a comparative advantage in early response and operational planning due to their links with local communities and authorities.
- Establish regular dialogue between key actors, to reduce adverse institutional attitudes and suspicions, agree on standards of assistance and encourage teamwork and creative thinking.
- Adopt a “collaborative leadership” approach: view other organizations and their personnel as pathways to strengthening response in your sector, not as competitors or obstacles. Your ability to lead and coordinate will depend on the trust and relationships you build and the services or value you provide to cluster members, rather than on line authority (which you don’t have). Listen, ask and consult rather than direct or command.
- Be proactive. Personally invite key actors to participate in the cluster and contact those who aren’t to find out why they are not participating and what it would take to get them to participate.
- Consider various forms of humanitarian partnership: from close coordination and joint programming to looser associations based on the need to share information, avoid duplication and enhance complementarity.
- With large numbers of cluster participants, establish a strategic planning (or oversight) committee which is representative of the cluster participants and which guides the operational work of the cluster. Set-up interagency technical working groups to address technical issues.
- Concentrate on, and help cluster participants recognise their common goals, common interests and mutual interdependencies. Ensures that meetings provide added-value to those participating.
- Look to the appropriate UN OCHA country office to facilitate and provide coordination support to NGOs and cross-cluster coordination.
- Focus on solving common problems and developing cluster action plans. An action plan is necessary to guide the cluster participants and serves as a means of accountability and/or tracking progress.
- Base your partnerships on the following principles endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform
  - Equality: equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.
  - Transparency: transparency is achieved through dialogue (on an equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and early sharing of information. Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organizations.
  - Result-oriented approach: effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities.
  - Responsibility: humanitarian organizations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must make sure they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort.
• Complementarity: the diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other’s contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.
• Develop clear, simple TOR’s that will help the cluster work together in an effective and efficient manner and which clarify basic expectations and minimum requirements for participating in the cluster.
• Engage partners in assessing the effectiveness of the partnership and in providing feedback on how to strengthen it. Such an assessment can be done spontaneously and built upon the tips and principles noted above. The strength of a partnership comes from hard work and from continually applying the principles of collaboration. Routinely examining “what’s working” and “what’s not working” is essential to building and sustaining partnerships that can achieve humanitarian results.

Conclusion

Humanitarian partnerships are critical for effective emergency response as no single individual or group is capable of sufficiently responding to any crisis. Collaboration, consultation, building local knowledge and capacity strengthens preparedness and response to disasters of any type. Ignoring local capacity and local knowledge creates a risk of responding in ways that are inefficient and ineffective and which contribute to future dependencies and vulnerabilities.

Additional Information

• IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response, and Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads at the Country Level
• Enhancing the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Action: A Dialogue between UN and non-UN Humanitarian Organizations, Overview of Consolidated NGO Views, 10 July 2006. Link

References

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