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## ENGAGE WITH RELEVANT ACTORS AND SECTORS THROUGH MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS AND JOINT ACTION



Complex societal challenges cannot be resolved by any single individual or institution, as their scale and multiple overlapping causal factors necessitates collective action. To address them, we must find ways for philanthropic organisations to collaborate and coordinate effectively, both with each other and with public and private sector stakeholders. If we develop models that enable this, then organisations will be able to leverage their unique expertise, resources, and networks of partners to achieve heightened collective impact. Partnering with and enabling other sectors is necessary and central when it comes to multiplying change and scaling solutions to tackle systemic issues.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships take many forms. At the more complex and sophisticated end of the spectrum are public-private-philanthropy partnerships (PPPPs) for development, cross-sector collaboration, joint programming, and resource pooling. PPPPs, in particular, have risen to the forefront recently, and are defined as formalised collaborations among entities from each of the public, private and philanthropy sectors, aligning each party's resources to enable transformation. These partnerships are most useful in tackling issues that cannot be addressed by any one industry alone, or even by partnerships that involve only two out of the three sectors. Organisations can either participate in, support, or become drivers of such multi-stakeholder collaborations (see Principle 7). These approaches require significant investments in time and resources, as well as a strong commitment to building trust, communication, and accountability among partners.

More basic forms of multi-stakeholder partnerships can also be highly impactful, and are often accessible to smaller philanthropic organisations or those that have limited resources. Approaches like networking, information-sharing and engaging with local governments or community groups can be done with limited investment or coordinated action, yet yield critical insights into stakeholder needs and priorities, leverage collective knowledge, and open doors for future collaboration. Organisations can consider other forms of collective action with varying degrees of commitment and complexity, such as taking a multi-sectoral engagement approach, loose consortiums, and coalitions<sup>12</sup>. Funder collaboratives, thematic networks and philanthropy associations further provide a safe space to connect and learn from peers, and exchange best practices that build on the strengths of different actors, while avoiding duplication of efforts. These PSOs can also build bridges with other actors and sectors for greater coordination,

12 Kingston, Stern, and Ke (2016). [Are You Sure You Should Be Launching Another Partnership?](#)



alignment and pooled funding, where relevant. For example, the *SDG Partnership Platform, Kenya*<sup>13</sup> provides a vector for forming multi-stakeholder partnerships that unlock private, philanthropic and intellectual capital. Running from 2018 to 2022, as part of the 1.9 billion USD collaboration between the Kenyan government and the United Nations, the SDG platform was identified as one of three best practice platforms for SDG financing.

Foundations themselves can also play valuable roles as conveners and bridge-builders, bringing together different stakeholder groups who otherwise might not engage with each other. Governments, academic institutions, and corporations, for instance, do not always engage directly with social movement organisations, civil society organisations, and local communities. The Partnering Initiative<sup>14</sup> is just one example of how philanthropic organisations can play a role in overcoming these barriers, by connecting and enabling collaboration between their partners for greater impact.

While multi-stakeholder partnerships and joint action are essential for philanthropy to create greater impact, debates and tensions exist around how to establish and manage these collaborations. Some organisations may view partnerships as a means to access additional resources without sharing decision-making power, which can lead to unequal power dynamics among key stakeholders. This particularly pertains to those funders who find themselves dealing with governments or large-scale private sector actors. Others may question the motivations, accountability and transparency of the other actors involved in partnerships, especially when the private sector is involved. Additionally, partnerships often require significant investments of time and financial or human resources, which may be unfeasible for smaller or more constrained philanthropy organisations.

Establishing effective multi-stakeholder partnerships and joint action requires overcoming several challenges, including identifying the right partners and building confidence and trust among them. This involves engaging with diverse stakeholders and understanding their perspectives, values, and interests. It also requires investing in relationship-building, communication, and conflict resolution. Another challenge is ensuring that partnerships are based on mutual benefit and shared values. Partnerships should be built on a shared vision, values and objectives, and involve all partners in decision-making processes. This requires open and transparent communication, mutual respect, and a willingness to learn and adapt as necessary.

## Recommended practices for implementation:

How to get started:

- ✓ Map your organisation's landscape of relevant stakeholders already involved in your field, and document potential connections to your mission and initiatives.
- ✓ Engage in existing spaces, networks and mechanisms for collaboration with other actors in your geographical and/or thematic areas.
- ✓ Catalogue your organisation's spheres of influence and assess the amount of change that is realistically possible through collaboration.
  - Use this assessment to set reasonable expectations around partnerships, barriers, and power dynamics.

13 WINGS (2019). [Arif Neki on the SDG Partnership Platform, Kenya](#).

14 The Partnering Initiative, Johnson & Johnson Foundation and Zurich Foundation (2021). [Partnering for Philanthropic Impact](#).



- Build buy-in with your organisation’s leadership and Board to disperse some control and invest in collaboration.
- ✓ Share your mission and work publicly to enable others to discover and engage with your organisation for potential collaborations.
  - Consider opportunities to work via virtual channels like your website, blog or social media and, where possible, take the opportunity to attend conferences or publish case studies.
- ✓ Embrace opportunities for stakeholder engagement, including regular meetings with local governments, networks, and communities.
  - Your team can also engage with peer organisations to share knowledge, initiatives and proactively identify connections, synergies and complementarities.
- ✓ Support the initiatives of others where possible, even by simply sharing information on social media channels.
- ✓ Consider acting as a convenor to connect disparate groups of stakeholders in conversation and collaboration, including government, corporations, academics, social movement organisations and community representatives.
- ✓ Analyse the resources you can offer as a partner beyond the financial – including knowledge, relationships, or reputational clout.

To go beyond:

- ✓ Explore more complex forms of partnerships including public-private-philanthropy partnerships (such as the recent GAEA partnership for climate and nature<sup>15</sup>).
- ✓ Have a clear and simple vision, and cultivate collaborative partnerships that share responsibility, risk, and decision-making.
  - Consider where factors beyond the immediate issue may have a potential impact on your effectiveness in delivering on your mission – e.g. policy reform or government engagement.
  - Set clear roles, responsibilities and a co-developed framework for ways of working between partners.
- ✓ Where feasible and sensible, align your work with regional or national development priorities as defined by governments or international bodies (e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals).
- ✓ Support and contribute to collective action by joining initiatives led by others, and coordinating activities where there is alignment to maximise impact and reach.
  - Consider creating or joining a pooled fund or investing in a permanent multi-stakeholder

15 WEF (2023). [Press Conference: Philanthropic-Public-Private Partnerships for climate & nature \(GAEA\)](#).



partnership mechanism, even at the local level.

- ✓ Map the landscape for partnerships infrastructure, identifying existing mechanisms for collaboration, coordination and defining what is missing, to better understand the gaps and investments needed to address them.
  - Explore the possibility of investing, ideally with others, in creating infrastructure for partnerships and collaboration.
- ✓ Continuously monitor, review and revise partnerships, including current collaborations where mutual impact-creation or alignment is no longer viable.
  - Support the building of local networks through partnerships, creating the conditions for local organisations to leverage their impact through the collaborations, to ensure better alignment over the long-term.
  - If resources are available, develop a specific partnerships or external engagement team to explore, foster and maintain partnerships for your organisation.







## Potential obstacles





## Suggested solutions





 All parties involved in a collaboration will have specific goals aligned with their respective missions; sometimes this causes friction among the partnering organisations.

 Any philanthropic collaboration or partnership should be built on agreed-upon values and a set of terms and conditions, which all parties sign. Despite the realities of unequal power dynamics, all stakeholders should ensure that adequate training and resources are available to enhance collaborations, particularly for those partners who are most resource-constrained and rarely have an equal voice in any agreement.

 Working in collaboration or partnership with governments can be notoriously challenging and political, affecting the broader impact of the intended programme and scope of the organisation's focus.

 Organisations seeking collaborations with government bodies, specific policymakers or local leaders must do sufficient research, networking, and liaising well in advance of a potential collaboration to have the clearest idea of how a partnership will function in practice. An initial decision should be taken as to whether building such a partnership is indeed worth the long-term resources and efforts.

 Sometimes partnerships will come to a natural close whereas, in other cases, a certain organisation may need to conclude a collaboration before other stakeholders.

 A partnership's terms and conditions must make clear the goal and eventual changes all parties wish to see, and detail 'sunset clauses' on how an organisation can leave a collaboration agreement. Stakeholders should discuss how financially binding a partnership is, for how long, and if there are potentially damaging impacts to any partner terminating their collaboration prematurely, to ensure minimal disruption later in the relationship. Beyond this, collaborations must be developed and implemented in good faith among all partners. If necessary, legal counsel can be sought on any partnership documentation.



# Resources

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