

ANNUAL REVIEW OF  
**SOCIAL**  
**PARTNERSHIPS**

**2018**

DECEMBER 2018 | ISSUE 13

An International Edition  
on Cross-Sector Social Interactions

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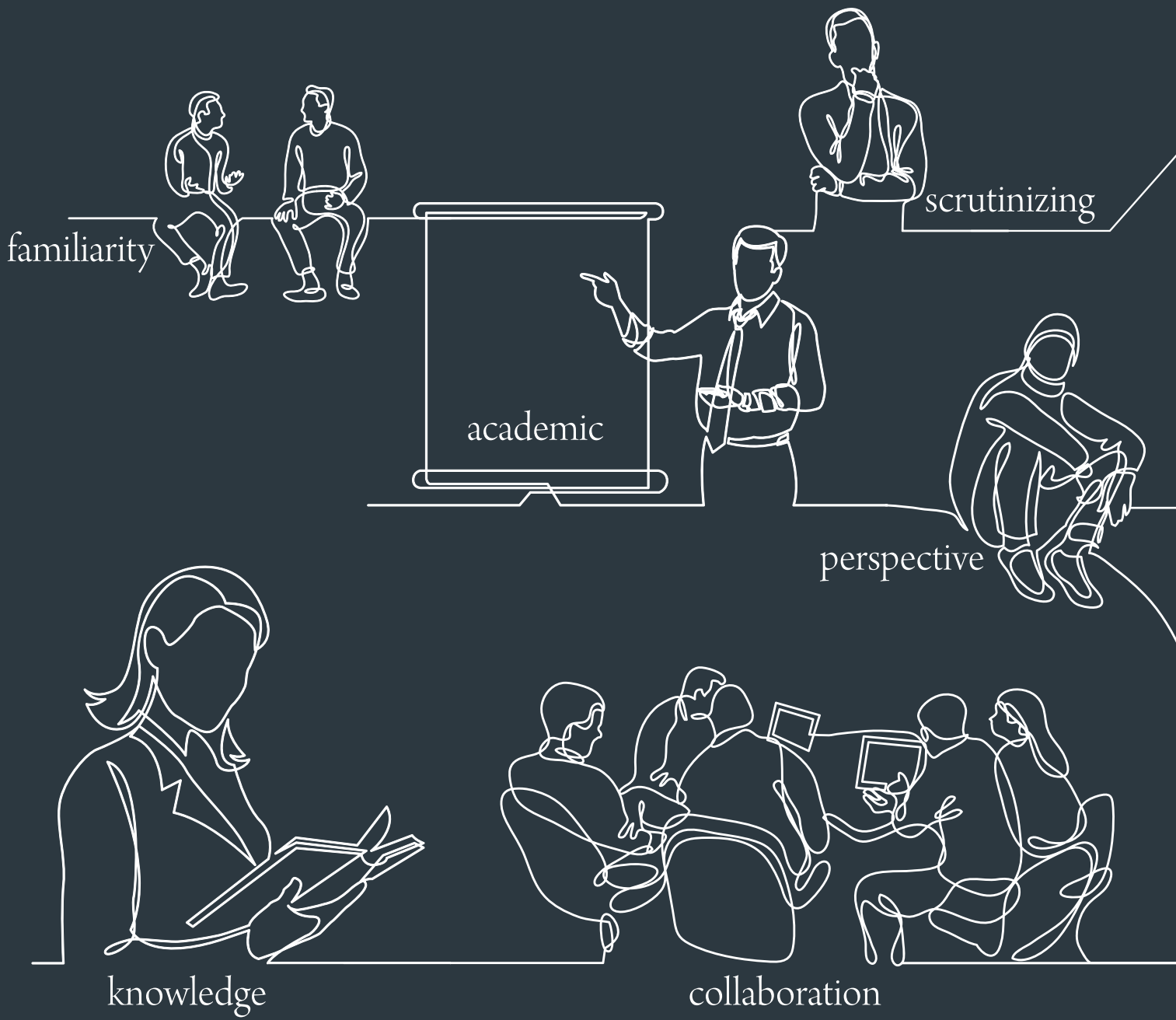
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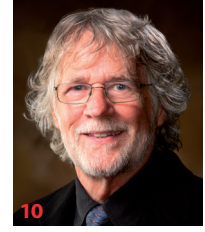
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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full Term</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>ARSP</b>	<i>Annual Review of Social Partnerships*</i>	The ARSP is the free online journal on cross-sector social interactions that you are currently reading.
<b>AOM</b>	<i>Academy of Management*</i>	The AOM is the preeminent professional association for scholars dedicated to the advancement of management.
<b>BoP</b>	<b>Base of the Pyramid / Bottom of the Pyramid</b>	The term BoP refers to the largest, but poorest, socio-economic group.
<b>CEO</b>	<b>Chief Executive Officer</b>	The CEO is the most senior corporate officer in charge of managing a for-profit or nonprofit organization.
<b>CSP / CSSP</b>	<b>Cross-Sector Partnership / Cross-Sector Social Partnership</b>	The term CSP indicates a (social) partnership between actors from the business, public, and/or civil society sectors. The terms CSP and CSSP are here used synonymously.
<b>CSSI</b>	<b>Cross-Sector Social Interactions</b>	This term was introduced at the first International Scoping Symposium on cross-sector interactions in 2007. It responds to the need for a distinctive and 'un-charged' term that provides a wide enough spectrum to encompass past practices, as well as future ones, emerging at the intersection of the business, public, and civil society sectors.
<b>CR / CSR</b>	<b>Corporate Responsibility / Corporate Social Responsibility</b>	CR / CSR denotes a concept and practice whereby companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders. Overall, the term refers to a company's responsibility for its impacts on society. The terms CR and CSR are here used synonymously.
<b>DJSI</b>	<i>Dow Jones Sustainability Indices*</i>	The DJSI are a family of indices evaluating the sustainability performance of the largest 2,500 companies listed on the Dow Jones Global Total Stock Market Index.
<b>FTSE4GOOD</b>	<i>FTSE4GOOD*</i>	The FTSE4Good Index Series are ethical investment stock market indices that the FTSE Group launched in 2001. They are designed to measure the performance of companies demonstrating strong environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices.

*\*All words in italics throughout the ARSP incorporate hyperlinks directly linking to original sources for more information.*

Acronym	Full Term	Explanation
<b>HR</b>	<b>Human Resources</b>	HR relates to the set of individuals who make up an organization's workforce. The term is often also used for an organization's division focused on employee-related activities.
<b>ISO 14001</b>	<i>ISO Standard for Environmental Management Systems*</i>	The ISO standard sets the criteria for an environmental management system. It does not state specific requirements for environmental performance, but maps out a framework that an organization can follow to set up an effective environmental management system.
<b>ISO 26000</b>	<i>ISO Standard for Social Responsibility*</i>	This standard provides guidance on how organizations can operate in a socially responsible way; that is, acting in an ethical and transparent way that contributes to the health and welfare of society.
<b>MDG</b>	<i>Millennium Development Goal*</i>	The United Nations MDGs involved eight development goals set for 2015, on which all countries and leading development institutions had agreed.
<b>MoU</b>	<b>Memorandum of Understanding</b>	An MoU is a partnering agreement that partner organizations enter into voluntarily.
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-Governmental Organization</b>	An NGO is a nonprofit organization (hence it is neither part of a government, nor a for-profit business) that excludes government representatives from its membership.
<b>NPO</b>	<b>Nonprofit Organization</b>	An NPO is an organization serving a charitable purpose, such as education, culture, religion, health, society, or sports, and raises funds to serve the social good rather than to profit individuals.
<b>PPP</b>	<b>Public-Private Partnership</b>	A PPP is a type of CSSP between companies and public sector organizations / governments, often focused on infrastructure development and public services.
<b>SA8000</b>	<i>Social Accountability International / SA8000 Standard*</i>	SA8000 is an auditable certification standard that encourages organizations to develop, maintain, and apply socially acceptable practices in the workplace.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Full Term	Explanation
<b>SDG</b>	<i>Sustainable Development Goals*</i>	The SDGs are an intergovernmental set of 17 goals to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change. The SDGs build on the MDGs and have been adopted by world leaders at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
<b>SIM</b>	<i>Social Issues in Management*</i>	The term SIM describes a field of study that, initially focused on social problems and corporate disasters, later developed streams of research and theory on the relationships between business and society, and the contributions each can make to a better quality of life for all people. Further, SIM denotes a special interest group formed within the AOM in 1972, which is interested in the exploration and analysis of various environmental and stakeholder impacts on the organization and the organization's effect on stakeholders.
<b>UN</b>	<i>United Nations*</i>	The UN is an international organization of countries set up in 1945 to promote international peace, security, and cooperation.
<b>UN PRME</b>	<i>UN Principles for Responsible Management Education*</i>	The PRME is the first organized relationship between the UN and business schools, with the PRME Secretariat housed in the UN Global Compact Office. The PRME's mission is to globally inspire and champion responsible management education, research, and thought leadership on the basis of six core principles.
<b>UNGC</b>	<i>United Nations Global Compact*</i>	The UNGC is a United Nations strategic policy initiative for businesses committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption.

*\*All words in italics throughout the ARSP incorporate hyperlinks directly linking to original sources for more information.*

*This list was compiled by Lea Stadler with helpful feedback by Jennifer Leigh, May Seitani, and Arno Kourula. Our goal is to achieve clarity and facilitate the development of collectively agreed definitions that will help us avoid misunderstandings and facilitate communication between academics and practitioners. In the process of collectively extending and improving this document we would much welcome your comments. Please contact [Lea.Stadler\(at\)grenoble-em.com](mailto:Lea.Stadler(at)grenoble-em.com)*

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# In Flux: ARSP and the Partnership Landscape

Welcome to the 13th edition of the Annual Review of Social Partnerships! This is the shared product of a diverse community seeking to set the global benchmark on bridging partnership theory and practice by means of innovative and boundary-spanning knowledge sharing, knowledge co-creation, and knowledge curation.

All around us, we witness the growing importance of cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) in practice. New collaborative arrangements comprising a diverse range of actors across multiple settings and sectors take many forms, including public-private partnerships, multi-stakeholder initiatives, business-NGO collaboration, and many more. Partnerships have even ‘made it’ as a distinct Sustainable Development Goal in their own right. With considerable outputs so far: the United Nations **Partnerships for the SDG Platform** lists 4030 partnership commitments (state 11/2018).

Partnerships are everywhere, catching not only the interest of practitioners, but equally awakening the curiosity of researchers. Many disciplines, including management, political science, economics, organisation studies, development studies, and environmental studies are increasingly scrutinizing, analysing and theorising on CSPs. Just recently, a series of special issues of academic top journals has drawn attention to the challenges and opportunities of cross-sector collaboration<sup>1</sup>.

More partnerships in practice and in theory have created a diverse community of partnership experts and interested parties worldwide. But also a highly dispersed community in terms of geographies, sectors, disciplines and cultures. It has always been the aim of the editorial team at the Annual Review of Social Partnerships to bring this community together for shared learning, reflection and – ultimately – impacts in terms of improved partnership processes and outcomes. But what is the best way of doing this, of actually achieving our aims?

Thirteen is the start of teen and identity exploration, or, in the language of start-up life cycles, it’s about “morphing<sup>2</sup>” – time to figure out what works and what doesn’t. In engaging with our community, we, as the

team behind the ARSP, seek to consider the means, direction and impact of our efforts. As the context around us changes, so do we, adapting and responding. What this implies, on a very practical basis, is an inevitably iterative, reflexive process of managing change and transition, deliberately leaving open the question of whether this takes place over a shorter period of time of months or entails a longer term perspective. As a self-organising team without an institutionalised basis, perhaps our greatest strength is our flexibility in management, which creates space for innovation in ways of working together and accommodating behaviour.

Our dreams emerging in this transition are bold. What possible directions can we offer at this stage? Well, we will remain committed to keep some of the ongoing curation open access—one of our core enduring values! But moving beyond, think about webinars bringing together scholars and practitioners internationally, and possibly also regionally, the development of joint workshops as we have done in the past, continuing our important knowledge sharing work, and promoting network events in which people with different links to social partnerships thrive and experience familiarity in diversity. Yes, we're going back to the drawing board to determine the goals of our transition to the next form as the ARSP. We will keep you posted by our social media platforms [@ARSPnews](#) (twitter) and <https://www.facebook.com/ARSPinternational/> about what the ARSP will become in the future.

From the future to the present, more specifically the ARSP no. 13: We are happy to present you a rich variety of articles covering latest publications, pedagogy ideas, research insights, and community reflections.

### Section Preview

This year's **Publications Section** examines the most recent academic articles on CSPs from the point of view of business, civil society and government as well as from a systemic perspective. In addition, the section also reviews most recent pracademic (i.e. bridging practitioner and academic) publications. As a valuable tool for scholars and practitioners alike, we provide a list of all of the most recent publications in this area. Furthermore, Professors Barbara Gray and Jill Purdy offer insightful ideas about the future of partnerships.

The **Pedagogy Section** brings your attention to the assumptions we make – as instructors of CSP-related courses

or workshops and as actors engaging in CSPs – whether it relates to the societal problem to be collaboratively addressed, our own role, views, and capabilities, and those of critical stakeholders. In this context, the Pedagogy Team presents you a portfolio of personal accounts and suggestions around dealing with assumptions, a related case study for teaching and practice, a practitioner interview, and a teaching innovation to uncover assumptions based on **The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®** Method.

The **Research Section** and the **Thought Gallery** present the most recent insights in partnerships from the academic sphere and beyond. The former describes the key findings of a research project on the meta-governance of CSPs and the challenges of a large collaborative research program on climate change, agriculture and food security. Our team interviews the Director of a social enterprise called Proudly Made in Africa, reflecting on the organisation's partnerships from a research perspective, as well as the Head of the Private Sector Team at Oxfam GB on the role of academic research. The Thought Gallery is written by Prof. Pieter Glasbergen, the 2018 winner of the Cross-Sector Social Interactions (**CSSI**) **Life Time Achievement Award**. He develops insightful ideas about partnerships as governance mechanisms for sustainable change.

The **Community Section** focuses on the challenges and opportunities of CSPs as an alternative to address human exploitation in businesses. The section starts with insights into CSPs and modern slavery, experiences based on the boundary-spanning West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network in the UK, and directs your attention to the role of big data in bringing actors together and causing new challenges. As each year, we close this section with an overview of new members of the ARSP community.

We thank all our contributors and hope you enjoy the reading!

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1. See e.g. (1) Special Issue: **Public-Private Collaboration, Hybrid Organizational Design and Social Value**, *Journal of Management Studies*, 54(7), 763-959, September 2017; (2) Special Issue: **Value Creation and Value Appropriation in the Context of Public and Non-Profit Organizations**, *Strategic Management Journal*, forthcoming; (3) Special Issue: **Collaborative Cross-Sector Business Models for Sustainability**, *Business & Society*, forthcoming; (4) Special Symposium: **Collaborative Societal Governance: Orchestrating Cross-Sector Social Partnerships for Social Welfare**, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, forthcoming.
2. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/282467>





ANNUAL REVIEW OF  
**SOCIAL**  
**PARTNERSHIPS**

# PUBLICATIONS

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# The Latest in Cross-Sector Partnership Publications

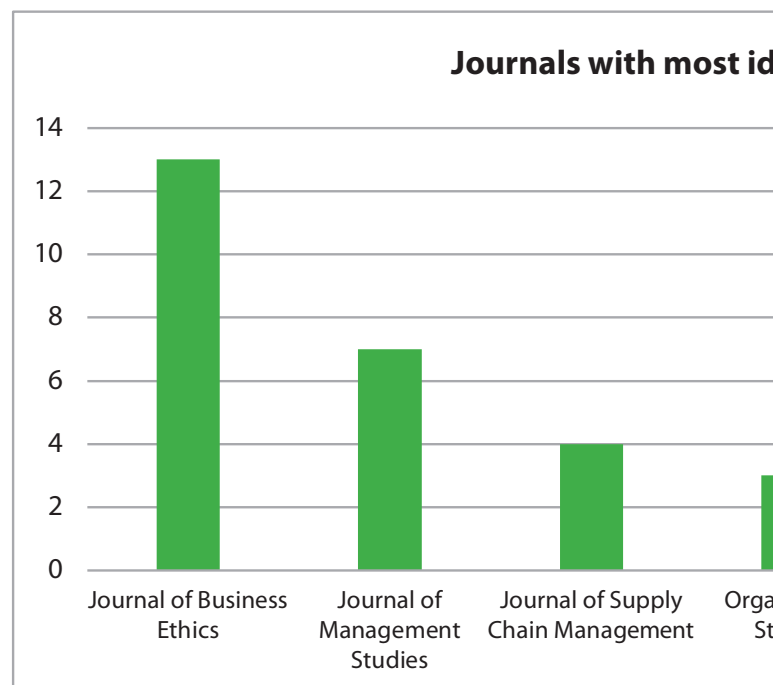
by Stella Pfisterer

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It is my pleasure to introduce the publications section of the 13<sup>th</sup> ARSP. This year's edition is prepared by a rather new team; we welcome four new associate editors: Jill Bogie from The Gordon Institute of Business Science (South Africa), Anne Quarshie from LUT University (Finland), Omar Al-Tabbaa from University of Kent (UK) and Iteke van Hille from VU University (Netherlands).

As in previous years, the objectives of the ARSP's publications section are to list, highlight and discuss a selection of recent publications. This year, we started our review by conducting a key-word search of databases and more systematic reviews of specific journals searching for relevant articles that were published between 2017 and summer 2018 (or currently in press). In principle, we are interested in publications that discuss the phenomenon of 'cross-sector partnering' in a wide sense: we searched for interactions, collaborations and partnerships involving organizations from different societal spheres. We found 97 articles in total, however, the list should by no means be considered as a comprehensive account of available recent research. We strive to achieve inclusion and representation of "the field". It appears that publications that discuss 'cross-sector partnering' are still scattered in diverse journals in various disciplines. Most publications are identified in the *Journal of Business Ethics* followed by the *Journal of Management Studies*. This can partly be explained that both journals published special issues related to cross-sector partnerships in the investigated time-period.

We used this overview as a basis and, similar to the past years, we divided the task of providing a review of the recent academic literature on cross-sector interactions from different perspectives: the business perspective (covering management and other fields), the civil society perspective (covering non-profit research) and the government perspective (covering public management & administration literature). In addition to these three 'actor' perspectives, we included a review of multi-sector collaboration to the publications section. We recognized a growth of publications that discuss cross-sector, multi-actor





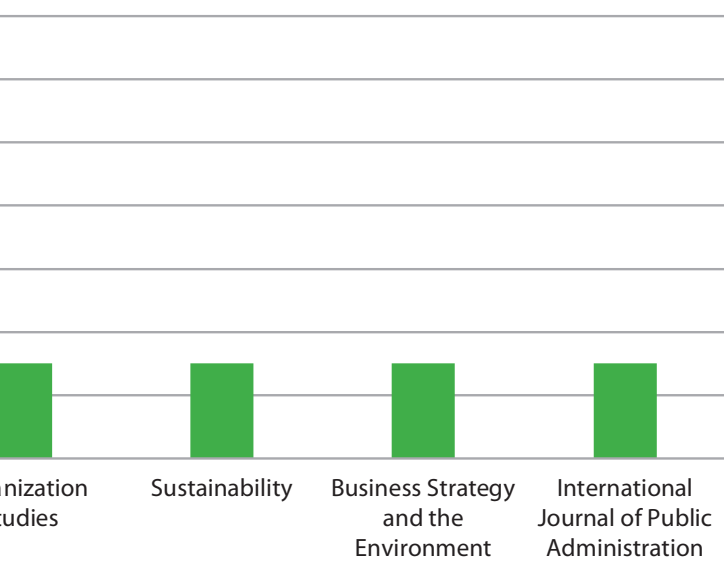
collaborations that could not be pinpointed to a certain actor-perspective. Next to these four academic perspectives, we also reviewed and discussed recent publications by ‘pracademics’, that means not peer-reviewed publications. In addition, we provide a list of recent contributions by publication type, including peer-reviewed articles, pracademic publications, journal special issues, books, and doctoral dissertations. Finally, the section provides insights on problems and potential of multi-stakeholder partnerships for solving the tough issues faced by government, society and organisations by an interview with Prof. Barbara Gray and Prof. Jill Purdy. Both are leading academics in the field of cross-sector partnering and have more than 30 years of experience in the field. Therefore, we are very honored to discuss with them their recently published book *“Collaborating for our Future: Multistakeholder Partnerships for Solving Complex Problems”*.

The focus on solving complex problems is a trend we recognize in the broader literature. Despite the diversity of topics and research focuses of the identified academic and pracademic publications, many publications aim to understand better how cross-sector partnerships and the involved organizations can contribute to grand challenges, such as those addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals. For the rich knowledge on cross-sector partnerships, it would be on our wish list that stronger

ties will develop between various scholarly communities within the cross-disciplinary research field and across academia and practice. This might help to develop further concepts, and bundle research insights across disciplines in order to help make a difference with our research for the complex challenges that practice is facing.

As editors of the Publications Section, we are grateful to the sponsoring of this section by the *Geneva Public-Private Partnership Center*. We hope that this year’s publications’ overview and reflections will provide the ARSP community with a helpful snapshot of the state of the art of the field of cross-sector partnerships. We are already looking forward to investigating how the field will develop in the coming year. Please help us so that we will not miss out important contributions by sending them to us.

**Identified publications**





by Moira Faul

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The Geneva Public-Private Partnerships Center is proud to sponsor the 2018 ARSP Publications Section. This is an important platform for sharing knowledge and research about cross-sector collaboration and keeping up-to-date with recent publications.

At the **Public-Private Partnerships Center** at GSEM, University of Geneva, we are committed to multi-stakeholder cooperation, and particularly research into cross-sectoral social partnerships. Our recent research examines the role of identity, emotions and time in partnering, and the ways in which partnership governance boards construct a partnership ‘space between fields.’<sup>1</sup>

We are currently collaborating with a number of international and multi-disciplinary partners on a project, funded by the Swiss Network of International Studies, investigating the effectiveness of partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs, introduced in 2015<sup>2</sup>, gave a clear impetus to partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors in solving the significant – and complexly interrelated<sup>3</sup> – challenges faced by societies across the globe.

Partnership is foregrounded as one of the five principles which support the SDGs, as well as being included in SDG17. Although Goal 17 tends to be seen as ‘the partnership goal’, it actually covers a lot more ground. Five aspects of Goal 17 are listed in the SDGs policy document: financing, technology, trade, capacity building, and systemic issues. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are then one of three sub-headings under ‘systemic issues’ (alongside data, monitoring and accountability, and policy and institutions). The role of partnerships is defined as to ‘mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial

# Sponsorship



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resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries.’

The five aspects of SDG17 are presented as a simple list in the UN Resolution, which makes it look as though each can be treated as a separate phenomenon. This disconnection is also reflected in much academic and policy research. Yet, there are systemic linkages between these different aspects of Goal 17 that cannot be ignored if we seek to retain clarity about the role of multi-stakeholder collaboration as a means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We explore these inter-linkages in greater depth on our **Public-Private Partnership Center’s** website.

With this deep dive into SDG17, we do not seek to underplay the importance of partnerships and partnership research. Rather, we hope to (1) illuminate the policy and practice contexts in which partnerships are expected to contribute to the SDGs and (2) clarify that SDG17 is not solely the ‘partnership goal’, highlighting that partnerships are one (important) piece in a complex puzzle of solutions to achieve a more sustainable world.

You may like to keep the inter-linkages of partnerships and the other aspects of SDG17 in mind when learning about the recent CSSP publications presented in this year’s Publications Section. Happy reading!

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by Anne Quarshie

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# Cross-Sector Partnership Research from a Business Perspective: Insights into Sustainable Development and Supply Chain Challenges

In business practice, partnering and interacting with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies, and other stakeholders has recently become increasingly critical in many contexts. For example, in the area of corporate responsibility in my home country, Finland, companies today especially focus on incorporating sustainability considerations in their core business strategies and activities, as well as embedding sustainability in supply chains<sup>1</sup>. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become an important framework also for managers, and 41 percent of Finnish firms already take the SDGs into account in their activities. Similarly, across the globe, a rapidly growing number of (large) firms are reinventing their strategies, operations and supply chains by integrating the SDGs or other sustainability considerations in them. In doing so, many firms realize the need for new types of expertise, resources and

partners. My review of the recent cross-sector partnership (CSP) literature suggests that academic research can also help inform these activities and developments.

## **Sustainable Development Goals and Sustainability Integration**

As for the integration of the SDGs or other sustainability considerations in core business strategies and activities, CSP research has recently focused increasingly on actions and interactions through which firms and other entities can seek to transform their organizations or the broader systems within which they operate<sup>2</sup>. While the SDG framework is not yet commonly applied in CSP research, recent studies have focused on a variety of environmental, social and economic issues that are incorporated in the 17 Goals, including biodiversity, water and education issues<sup>3</sup>, and examined how the issues could be effectively

## LOOKING THROUGH THE ACADEMIC GLASS

addressed through cross-sector partnerships involving businesses. Additionally, a study by MacDonald, Clarke and Huang<sup>4</sup>, which empirically investigates the designing of decision-making processes in 94 sustainability-related multi-stakeholder partnerships in a multi-country setting, explicitly connects local partnerships to the global UN sustainable development agenda. The authors find that collaborative decision-making has an indirect and positive effect on partnership capacity, which likely aids the achievement of the partnership's objectives and the participating firm's sustainability goals. At the same time, the quantitative study adds to the methodological variety of the research area.

### Embedding Sustainability in Supply Chains

For several years already, supply chain management, corporate responsibility, and other scholars have recognized that NGOs, government agencies and other partners can help companies create more sustainable supply chains. The recent CSP literature further advances our understanding of such activities and collaboration processes. For example, Liu et al.'s<sup>5</sup> investigation of sustainable supplier development practices classifies contributing organizations (e.g. NGOs and other stakeholders) as drivers, facilitators and inspectors, all of whom work closely with buyers and suppliers to develop and implement supplier development activities. As a more recent turn in sustainable supply chain literature, scholars have begun to explore cross-sector supply chains and networks of NGOs and other not-for-profit actors as well. For example, the Emerging Discourse Incubator of the *Journal of Supply Chain Management* on 'research where the focal actor in the network is not a for-profit firm' considers firms primarily as suppliers (or network partners) to other organizations in cross-sector contexts<sup>6</sup>. In one of the special issue articles, Johnson et al.<sup>7</sup> theorize on social capital between environmental NGOs and businesses in cross-sector supply chains, focusing especially on the potential of such collaborations to achieve progress toward sustainability. Jointly taken, the special issue articles and other recent CSP studies not only help managers to create more sustainable or effective supply chains, but are also important steps toward developing (and testing) CSP theories that apply to supply chains and other complex networks. In addition, these studies help to build stronger ties between previously loosely connected parts of the broader CSP research area within business and management studies.

### Other Themes and Developments

Another relevant special issue on public-private partnerships (PPPs) and collaboration, hybridity and social value creation in the *Journal of Management Studies*<sup>8</sup> seeks to connect the debates on these topics across multiple academic fields. These include business, management and economics, but also public administration and other disciplines. Several of the special issue articles are also relevant

While the SDG framework is not yet commonly applied in CSP research, recent studies have focused on a variety of environmental, social and economic issues that are incorporated in the 17 Goals.

from a business perspective. For example, Rivera-Santos, Rufin and Wassmer<sup>9</sup> examine the main sources of agency problems and their potential mitigation mechanisms in business-NGO alliances. Their analysis can help company managers in alliance employee selection, for instance, as the authors propose that companies hire altruistic (rather than self-interested) individuals to manage the alliance in order to mitigate potential alliance problems. In another example, Villani, Greco and Phillips<sup>10</sup> investigate the establishment of, and value-creation in, two cases of PPPs in the health care sector in Italy. They contend that the manner strategic choices and organizational arrangements are determined during the establishment stage significantly impacts the ability of the partnership to create value.

Several additional developments that are relevant from a business perspective also caught my eye in the CSP literature. First, scholars have increasingly explored how companies and other organizations can implement, sustain, and navigate CSPs involving various dynamics over time<sup>11</sup>, which seems to be a valuable development as previously much of the focus has been on partnership formation and collaborative partnering processes. Using a case-based approach, Klitsie, Ansari and Volberda<sup>11</sup> develop a grounded model for partner frame evolution resulting in optimal frame plurality. They find that differing or even opposing

frames can be maintained side by side by the various participants if the partners agree on the collaboration's main aim. As for other topic areas, CSP researchers have recently analyzed how partnerships involving firms are presented to the public<sup>12</sup> or legitimized by the partnering organizations<sup>13</sup>. Finally, research focus has been directed at a variety of other topics that are relevant to managers, including knowledge sharing and learning<sup>14</sup>, the 'why', 'how' and 'when' of partnering<sup>15</sup>, and partnership success factors<sup>16</sup>.

In sum, I believe that the recent literature helps to fill many prior gaps in our knowledge of firms' partnerships and interactions with entities from other sectors in sustainability and other contexts, as well as builds stronger ties between various scholarly communities within the cross-disciplinary research field. There nevertheless remains room for future studies to enhance our understanding of how organizations and managers can respond to sustainable development and other challenges and opportunities requiring interaction that crosses sector boundaries.

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# Cross-Sector Partnership Research from a Civil Society Perspective: Two Current Trends

It is conspicuous that research on cross-sector collaboration is increasingly dedicating attention to assessing the perspective of civil society, a sector that comprises a wide array of organizations that are independent from the government, pursue a social or environmental cause, and have no profit-centric motives<sup>1</sup>. Proponents of this perspective claim that “model[s] framed by theories of the public and private sectors often lack sufficient appreciation for the exigent circumstances of nonprofit partnerships (p. 2)”<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to provide an overview of research that has emerged since 2017 which focuses primarily on the perspective of civil society organizations (CSOs) as a key actor in cross-sector partnership (CSP). Yet, the focus is made only on studies that consider the CSOs as the core research theme or where the CSO is considered as the main unit of analysis. Interestingly, examining this body of literature has indicated two salient research trends: the effect of CSP on CSOs performance and the impact of CSOs on the effectiveness of CSP.

Examining this body of literature has indicated two salient research trends: the effect of cross-sector partnership on civil society organizations performance and the impact of civil society organisations on the effectiveness of cross-sector partnerships.

Regarding the first trend, there is an increasing interest in assessing the extent to which CSOs can actually benefit from the involvement in CSPs. In fact, this interest is driven by the assumption that value generated from CSPs is ‘multifaceted’<sup>3</sup>, which mirrors the view that CSPs can create value at different levels inducing macro (society) and meso (organization). While the macro-level relates to the co-creation of societal value, which is the impact of conjoined actions of the collaborators to enact powerful solutions to enduring socioeconomic problems, the meso-level concerns collaborators’ ability to capture and retain value from their collaborating activity<sup>4</sup>. Research comprising this latter perspective examines how the CSP can become instrumental in delivering organizational advantages to the partners involved. For CSOs, a value can be derived by attaining tangible and intangible assets, achieving higher visibility, and building organizational capacity, which all are fundamental for their survival and growth<sup>5</sup>. Examples of this value (or advantages) include increasing the transparency of CSOs operations<sup>6</sup>, enhancing organizational learning<sup>7</sup>, and building internal capacity in environmental management aspects<sup>8</sup>. Despite these expected advantages to CSOs, researchers recently started to question the extent to which these expectations can actually materialize<sup>9</sup>, and also to identify the factors and understand the mechanisms that might enhance or restrict their potential to capture value. For example, a recent study examines the actual effect of CSPs on the management capacities of nonprofits<sup>10</sup>. Interestingly, the authors found that engaging in CSPs is not necessarily useful in building organizational capacity (e.g., financial management, strategic planning, and board leadership).





Yet the duration of the relationship emerged as a strong moderator (i.e. a more enduring relationship can systematically yield better capacity building). Other researchers sought to understand how CSOs can capture value from CSPs using the alliance management capability view<sup>11</sup>. They identify a set of capabilities (including pre, post, and hybrid) that are essential for CSOs to embrace CSPs as a strategic option to support their survival. Together, this stream of research emphasizes the need to differentiate between value created for society and value captured by the individual collaborators. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of reconciling the potentially contradictory self-interests of each partner vis-a-vis the overall CSP agenda. Ignoring such issues is likely to complicate CSP implementation by generating tensions and opportunistic claims following the establishment of the relationship<sup>12</sup>. This can open the door for new research directions to explore the conditions that can enable a change in CSOs practice from being opportunistic (or reacting to business offering) to targeting strategically prospect partners. In fact, the challenging environment in which CSOs operate, uncertainty over government funding and the rise of competition within the sector, provide support for this direction.

The second research trend concerns studies that investigate the role of CSOs in enhancing the potential of the collaborating entities to co-create societal value<sup>13</sup>. As one example, Chapman and Varda<sup>14</sup> empirically demonstrate how the inclusion of CSOs is influential in yielding better CSP outcomes. This result has been attributed to the resource uniqueness of nonprofit partners, and the strong alignment between their mission and the CSP aim which enhance the mutual trust across all relevant stakeholders. Focusing on social enterprises (SEs), Huybrechts et al.<sup>15</sup> reveal that SEs have developed three different patterns to manage the paradox of being 'in and against the market'; and strategies to manage inter-organizational market collaborations. Specifically, these enterprises could be against CSPs, welcoming CSPs, or cautious towards CSPs. Importantly, how these enterprises envision their social mission emerged as fundamental in determining the enterprise collaboration strategy. Other researchers took a broader perspective by investigating CSOs when participating as a network. For instance, by using social network analysis, Jones et al.<sup>16</sup> and Jones et al.<sup>17</sup> examine the role of a network of sports nonprofits when collaborating with the public and private sectors. Importantly, they reveal that a lack of balance and coordination between these

## LOOKING THROUGH THE ACADEMIC GLASS

nonprofits is negatively affecting the potential to create collective value from the collaboration. In sum, this research trend sheds light on the role of CSOs as a vital player in the CSP. To be specific, it signals that the effectiveness of these initiatives depends, in addition to other factors, on the careful consideration of CSOs as distinct organizational actors and also on the alignment of their objectives with the overall aim of the CSP. Accordingly, this indicates the need to examine in greater detail the perspective of CSOs as a key success factor to CSPs.

In conclusion, this editorial demonstrates that the perspective of CSOs is gaining more attention and becoming a distinct research direction in the CSP literature. As in the identified trends, researchers are seeking to examine the relationship between CSOs and CSP as instrumental to two ways directions. However, the limited and incomplete evidence on this topic suggests that we still lack a comprehensive understanding of the contingencies that can control the realization of the expected value created (how CSOs can drive CSP effectiveness) or captured (how CSOs can derive benefits from CSPs). In turn, this highlights important research directions that are necessary to complement our understanding of the cross-sector collaboration phenomenon.

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# Cross-Sector Partnership Research from a Government Perspective: Three Trends in the Literature

Governments explore new ways to collaborate with non-state actors to deal with pressing societal issues. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are one key type of CSPs investigated from a government perspective. Increasingly, governments want to go beyond the traditional principal-agent relation in PPPs<sup>1</sup>. This means that the traditional approach where arrangements are designed to delegate the provision of public services to the private sector is extended with a collaborative perspective<sup>2</sup>. In this context, public management and administration scholars focus on the key question how governments and public actors do work in CSPs. Three main topics linked to this question are identified in the reviewed publications: first, the effects of CSPs on public sector objectives; second, partnering processes with public actor involvement, and third, factors that affect the involvement of public managers in CSPs.

To start with, the reviewed literature aims to gain evidence on the effects of CSPs for public sector objectives. Innovation is a prominent objective that governments aim to stimulate through CSPs. However, a research project on 275 European Union funded projects highlights that only

few projects have produced innovation<sup>3</sup>. Stimulating sustainability through CSPs can be another objective of governments; however research is inconclusive on the contribution of CSPs to the accomplishment of sustainability-related objectives<sup>4</sup>. The same study suggests however that various success factors show the potential of partnerships, if appropriately managed<sup>5</sup>.

Second, process oriented studies explore key themes such as governance, roles and capabilities. Partnering processes are far from easy and require much effort from the parties involved to make the collaboration work and establish a culture based on trust, as an empirical study on CSP cases in Sweden concluded<sup>6</sup>. CSPs with public involvement often face governance tensions. These tensions are conceptually explored in the field of development cooperation<sup>7</sup> and empirically in the Italian health-care services<sup>8</sup>. Public managers have a certain degree of discretion in determining how and when to structure public involvement in PPPs. For example, a recent study reveals that public managers favor sequenced public participation early on in PPPs to gauge public support for the project and wide involvement during implementation of

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services to improve project accountability<sup>9</sup>. Governmental actors, through PPPs, are able to shape governance within value chains, influencing the relative skills, knowledge, and resources that different actors possess, and the attributes of procedural justice reflected in the arrangements. This was revealed by a study on agricultural value chains and smallholder inclusion. The study concludes that governments should be involved in facilitating relationships in CSPs<sup>10</sup>. When facilitation is chosen as a strategy by governments, it is however often unclear what governments aim to achieve through the CSP and what they have to offer in terms of facilitation<sup>11</sup>.

For public managers partnering means moving out of their “comfort zone”. They therefore prefer to partner with other public sector institutions rather than with private organizations<sup>12</sup>.

Third, research investigates factors that affect government involvement in CSPs. A study on US government employees’ support for PPPs claims that male government employees seem to be less supportive of PPPs than female government employees. Factors such as public opinion and appointed agency heads positively influence government employees view on PPPs<sup>13</sup>. A publication on how local governments interact with entrepreneurs in China highlights three factors of the organizational and institutional environment that enable local governments to take action for CSPs: functional and political pressures faced by local government, the entrepreneurial opportunity presented for the local government, and the ability of local government to mobilize resources. In addition, it is the initial role of local governments to establish the necessary institutional arrangements capable of bringing about the institutional changes<sup>14</sup>.

To sum up, recent publications in CSPs from a government perspective aim to understand how governments and public actors do work in CSPs. Future research could develop more nuanced and in-depth insights on how collaboration works for the diversity of governmental actors and various contexts and industries where CSPs operate. Comparative case studies might be relevant to identify similar or diverse patterns. The insights from recent publications have also implications for practice: externally, governments need to communicate clearly what they can offer and what potential partners can expect from a collaboration with government actor involvement. It may also

Increasingly, governments want to go beyond the traditional principal-agent relation in partnerships.

help to become more explicit about whether and how CSPs contribute to government’s objectives. Internally, governments need to pay attention towards their internal processes and staff development regarding CSPs.

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# Cross-Sector Partnership Research from a Multi-Stakeholder Perspective: Systemic and Networked Forms of Collaborative Interaction to Address Complex Social and Environmental Issues

In recent years, research on partnerships, collaboration and other forms of cross-sector interaction has extended to more systemic conceptions of collaborative interactions for large-scale change and transformation. While these ideas are not new in the organisational or the institutional literature, these concepts are now infusing the literature on cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) and they demonstrate the growing range of literature that adopts a systemic approach. We have identified this as an emerging new stream of work that complements and builds on the existing body of literature on cross-sector social partnerships.

This is illustrated in two themes that stand out in this CSP literature from a multi-stakeholder perspective. The first is a broad conceptualisation of cross-sector partnering and interactions as networks or as interventions at a systemic level, which stands in contrast to institutional approaches in which partnerships are conceived as entities. Partnering as a process is described in recent research and while governance is still a key subject area, it is conceptualised at a broader level or in multiple forms. The second theme is the diversity of applications and settings.

## Systemic Approaches and Networks for Large-Scale Change and Transformation

These following studies highlight the processes of transformation and change and show how the partnering process can include a role for beneficiaries as active participants rather than passive recipients. Social movements, activism and grass-roots organising were examined in a 20-year longitudinal study of systemic change and societal transformation<sup>1</sup>. The study found that over time, different forms of networked organisations could affect change. In the initial stages, collective action initiatives were established around broad societal goals. These activities were highly centralised and dependent on a few key leaders, but over time they did not lead to lasting change and new networks developed. Another study considered the value created for beneficiaries, and their role and capacity to contribute to collective action. It concluded that cross-sector collaboration could provide bridging and mediating mechanisms<sup>2</sup>, offer support in the form of knowledge and expertise, and help beneficiaries to establish credibility and capacity to undertake larger projects.

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Elsewhere in the literature, new forms of governance are considered. Albareda and Waddock<sup>3</sup> apply a whole network approach to develop a metagovernance framework directed towards corporate social responsibility initiatives. They highlight different levels of analysis in the network and conclude that the relevance of the framework is in the actions of the network itself towards its goals, how it learns as a collective, and how it evolves. To illustrate the complexity of governance mechanisms in CSPs, Dentoni, Bitzer & Schouten<sup>4</sup> explore multiple governance processes and how these can be applied in an iterative manner and at different phases in the development of a CSP. New forms of governance in another CSP context reflect the social nature of the collaborative processes. An integrated risk management process provides a change from hierarchical decision-making to a more inclusive governance approach<sup>5</sup>. This strengthens the effectiveness of actions and responses for all members of society with the potential for continued collaboration over the long-term.

### A Diversity of Settings and Applications

In the current review period of mid-2017 to mid-2018, it is notable that research is based on cases and settings in many countries, and not only in Europe and North America. Subject areas explored in different country settings include the dynamics of conflicting interests among partner organisations, the interdependence of multiple stakeholders, supply chain partnerships and the involvement of local communities. There is also diversity in the application of networks and systemic approaches and this is illustrated in one specific area of practice, namely disaster response and emergency management.

### Conflicting Interests and Interdependencies

The complex dynamics around differences and conflicting perspectives is both theoretically important and relevant in practice and can change through the different phases of a partnering process<sup>6</sup>. Mechanisms can be applied to integrate the competitive drive of organisations, to identify their common interests and interdependencies and to drive a greater commitment and contribution to social objectives<sup>7</sup>. Rather than avoid or minimise competitive tensions, some collaborations identify and leverage these dynamics to foster and build partnering activities. One study explored how conflicting interests could enable or constrain the ability of the CSP to address social challenges<sup>8</sup>. Another study found that interdependencies between

partner organisations could moderate the adverse effects of conflicting institutional logics and power imbalances<sup>9</sup>. It concluded that where there was a high-level of interdependence it was more likely that the partnership would persevere.

### Supply Chain Partnerships and Community Involvement

Supply chain partnerships offer varied perspectives from governance to transformation. Gualandris and Klassen explore the case of an international nonprofit that uses its advocacy and influence to create transformation in global supply chains<sup>10</sup> and how it interacts with global companies, other nonprofit organisations, and consumers. The authors illustrate how these CSPs are able to support local communities and small-scale farmers by providing training and helping them to petition local African governments to change agricultural policies. Other examples of studies where local communities engage in partnering activities include studies as far afield as rural China, Africa and South America. Here, it is the dynamics of partnering interactions that are the main focus of interest. A particular study around a recycling initiative<sup>11</sup> explores the extent to which the workers, in this case, the recyclers, are included in collaborative goal-setting, implementation processes and outcomes. It considers power imbalances and the political dimensions of partnership activities by exploring the perspective of the recyclers, their perceptions and recommendations to improve their socio-economic conditions.

### Applying a Systemic Approach to Disaster Response, Emergency Management

A number of recent studies explore systemic perspectives around disaster response and emergency management. Some insights from these studies highlight that:

- collaborative interactions can evolve towards broader networked forms of collaboration when affected communities share responsibility and remain involved in ongoing change processes<sup>12</sup>;
- the involvement of communities can improve the effectiveness of disaster response CSPs<sup>13</sup>;
- bridging organisations can face many difficulties in managing and maintaining key relationships and find that they need to create new relationships<sup>14</sup>;
- networked forms of collaboration may be fragile so that relationships could change rapidly during a disaster response<sup>14</sup> and collaborative strategies could change

multiple times during the course of a disaster response, leading to significant change in the interorganisational networks;

defined best practices should be applied with caution as they may constrain stakeholder interactions and exacerbate tensions and power dynamics<sup>15</sup>, rendering a partnership ineffective.

Collaborative interactions can evolve towards broader networked forms of collaboration when affected communities share responsibility and remain involved in ongoing change processes.

### In Conclusion

The recent research offers many new insights and yet there is still much to be learnt about the dynamics of CSPs and how they can be mobilised to deliver systemic change. Clarke and Crane<sup>16</sup> recommend that future research give greater attention to defining constructs such as systemic change and transformation and to developing research methods that are more theoretically challenging and robust. While stronger theory is essential, it must also be relevant in practice so that CSPs create social impact and realise systemic change for the social and environmental issues as well as for the partner organisations.



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# How to Develop Win-Win Situations in Cross-Sector Partnerships? Some “Pracademic” Insights

This review builds on recent practitioner reports and academic papers exploring cross-sector partnerships' (CSPs) main opportunities and challenges. The term “pracademic” refers to such a combined analytical perspective. This past year's publications focused on the key role of value co-creation and social innovation for CSPs' long term success. This essay summarizes the main win-win strategic elements a CSP needs to follow to be long-standing and successful. A particular emphasis is on the initial stage of a partnership – which represents one of the most delicate phases of a CSP – and the importance of partners to focus on reciprocal exchanges of information, mutual expectations, and main motivations<sup>1</sup>. Actually, more and more practitioner tools and guidebooks are attempting to support CSPs' managers in co-creating social and economic value<sup>2</sup>.

“There is nothing in business today that provides as much economic and social benefit, on as many levels, to as many stakeholders, as a strategic partnership between any combination of the nonprofit, for-profit, education and government sectors when focused on the greater good. Nothing else comes even close.” (Bruce Burtch<sup>3</sup>)

It's becoming clear that partners engaged in CSPs – especially companies – need to receive mutual benefits from such an engagement. For example, nonprofit organizations are requested to provide an effective and consistent Business Value Proposition that outlines partnership's objectives, expected benefits, social impact, economic value creation, and partners' recognition<sup>4</sup>. In fact, a recent Canvas Model has been specifically created for cross-sector partnerships, emphasizing the key resources leading to value creation<sup>5</sup>. It is important to stress the expectation of employee engagement, the increase in sales and customers, media attention, shareholder return, and new alliances attraction. Practitioners recently introduced the notion of “growth-value proposition” in CSPs<sup>6</sup>. First, building common ground creates effective results for partners to satisfy the respective stakeholders' expectations, strengthen external relationships, and exploit overlapping expertise and know-how. Growth-value CSPs require high levels of trust, competence, expectations alignment, and team play. To this purpose, one of the main efforts a partner should invest in is to make the other partners believe they will get as much socio-economic value as possible through the alliance. In the nascent phases of the partnership, it is fundamental to show competence not only to effectively set realistic expectations, but also to ensure that social value creation will be concretely accomplished from ideas to practice. CSPs can be unique and rare if managed in this effective way. Actually, growth-value partnerships do not follow the mass production rules, on the contrary they need *ad hoc* assessment and hands-on customization. This is essential to build long-term interactions that





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will naturally cope with unexpected and unpredictable events, which require more and more team-play attitudes as time passes. Hence, planning and monitoring are inevitable steps a successful growth-value CSP needs to pay attention to<sup>7</sup>.

Recently, vital must-haves to strengthen CSPs have been outlined<sup>8</sup>, including: (1) *inclusionary criteria*, which refer to a sort of initial “wish list” aimed at assessing partners’ interests, habits, goals, and expectations complementarity; (2) *meaningful purpose*, referring to the main “why” of the CSP, plays a crucial role in understanding what the partners are simultaneously attempting to accomplish through the alliance in order to be aligned toward the same objective; (3) *exclusionary criteria*, by which NPOs exclude potentially controversial categories of industries – such as tobacco, gambling, spirits or oil and gas, pharma, fast food – carefully assessing the mission and business plan of the for-profit partner; (4) *scenario planning*, this is extremely important to avoid/prevent possible failures in the future; an effective way to do this is to evaluate a corporate-nonprofits partnership “*premortems*”; (5) *out clauses*, which are an important “way out” allowing partners to protect their image and reputation whether failures happen. In this sense, precise terms of agreement covering a wide set of both best and worst scenarios seem crucial<sup>9</sup>. These must-haves represent core elements allowing a win-win strategy for CSPs, which is increasingly requested by funders, companies and nonprofit management<sup>10</sup>. To do so, it appears fundamental to identify collaboration opportunities at the beginning of the alliance setting stages, to mutually establish relationship building and trust that will last during the entire partnership.

Finally, four main key points are reported in the form of questions and solutions that CSPs’ managers have to think about before engaging in the alliance<sup>11</sup>: (a) KNOWLEDGE: Do we have a nuanced understanding of the potential role of the partner in our socio-economic mission? (*possible solution*: accurate mapping of initial stakeholders); (b) MOTIVATION: What are the different incentives we may rely on for effectively involving the partner in our business/mission? (*possible solution*: constant mapping of strategic resources); (c) TRUST: How do we convince our partner to bring its competence and expertise into the alliance? (*possible solution*: iterative planning of partnering); (d) ALIGNMENT: How will we and our partner cope with

inevitable conflicts of interest and unexpected problems during the partnership? (*possible solution*: collaboration agreement template).

Overall, these “pracademic” insights stress the importance for partners to accurately prepare the initiation phase of the CSP, which represents one of the most delicate stages of the partnership. Particularly, in order to establish sustainable win-win situations, it is important to mutually set out a “wish list” of the involved partners, especially taking into consideration all the stakeholders interests, expectations, and possible conflicts and misalignments. Moreover, the need for CSPs managers to regularly set out, follow, monitor, and eventually adapt to precise “rules” of behavior that are needed for successful enduring partnerships emerged as crucial elements. In this way, long-term sustainable opportunities of social value creation may be accomplished. Otherwise, due to unpredictable and unexpected drawbacks, CSPs are likely to become inconvenient failures.

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## ARSP: Doctoral Theses

**DÍAZ RAMÍREZ, J. H.** 2018. *The formation of alliances of small business with non-profit organizations: Reasons and conditions*. Universidad de los Andes. Available from: <https://biblioteca.uniandes.edu.co/index.php?lang=es>

Abstract: This dissertation studies the motives of Small Businesses (SBs) to ally with Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) and the influence of the level of munificence in the environment in the formation of these social partnerships. Initially, it is stated that the feasibility of establishing these partnerships is low when the Owner-Manager (OM) motivations are utilitarian or related to efficiency. However, in those cases their feasibility increases in conditions of abundance. When the motivations are of reciprocity, legitimacy or adaptability, the feasibility of partnering is greater in scarcity environments in comparison with abundance environments. When the motivations are altruistic, the alliance is feasible regardless of the level of munificence in the environment. The results show that in both scenarios of abundance and also of scarcity, partnerships are favored by the reasons studied and by other emerging ones that were also identified and explained. Thus, the nature of each motive helps to understand how the level of munificence affects the formation of social partnerships. Additionally, some inhibitors for the formation of those partnerships were identified. Finally, a descriptive model is proposed to locate the inhibitors in different spheres involved in alliances. This study is framed in the literatures of inter-organizational relations, cross-sector partnerships and small business. The research uses a qualitative methodology based on case studies. The study is focused on the food sector in Colombia.

**QUARSHIE, A. M.** 2017. *Sustainability and transformational change: A review, conceptualization, and empirical investigation*. Aalto University School of

Business. Available from: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-60-7330-9>

Abstract: Sustainability has become an important research field in business and management research. Nevertheless, important gaps still exist in the understanding of how firms can sufficiently address significant sustainability challenges and other 'wicked problems'. As a large share of the existing research in this area has focused on relatively incremental or mainstream corporate activities and approaches toward sustainability, we remain somewhat limited in our knowledge of more transformational sustainability efforts. A key purpose of this essay-based dissertation is to advance a scholarly understanding of how firms can bring about or participate in transformational change that pursues sustainability within their own organizations or as part of broader networks, supply chains, and systems. The first essay presents an extensive, systematic review of sustainability and corporate social responsibility literature related to supply chains. The study establishes the need to further study transformational corporate sustainability efforts. The second essay explores the theme of transformational change toward sustainability in more detail, and develops a conceptual framework of four corporate approaches to change toward sustainability. Finally, essay three is a qualitative study on the inter-linkages between cross-sector social interaction and systemic change in US national disaster preparedness system, conducted in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in New Jersey. Importantly, our study shows that considerable changes to the disaster preparedness system have been catalyzed by experiences from major disasters, especially the successes and failures of cross-sector interaction. These have led to systemic impacts across the system as part of a long-term process.

## Books on Cross-Sector Partnerships and Collaborations

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Interview by  
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# Collaborating For Our Future: Although the Most Promising, Not the Easiest Road Ahead

## Prof. Barbara Gray

Professor of Organizational Behavior & Smeal Executive Programs Faculty Fellow, Emerita at The Pennsylvania State University.

## Prof. Jill Purdy

Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs at the University of Washington Tacoma and a Professor of Management in the Milgard School of Business.



Almost 30 years after the publication of her influential book *“Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multi-party Problems”* (1989), Prof. Barbara Gray has joined forces with long-time colleague and co-author on various publications Prof. Jill Purdy. Together, they published the sequel *“Collaborating for our Future: Multistakeholder Partnerships for Solving Complex Problems”*. It is a great opportunity for ARSP to speak to these two thought leaders and learn about the problems and potential of multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs) for solving the tough issues faced by government, society and organisations today. Although fierce advocates of collaboration themselves, their book comes with a warning: *“partnerships are not panaceas”*. Time to find out why.

## INTERVIEW

**Iteke van Hille (IvH):** In the preface, the book is introduced as a sequel to Barbara’s earlier book “Collaborating” (1989). Why did you think this was the right time to publish a sequel?

**Barbara Gray (BG):** It should probably have been written at least 10 years ago. The previous book focused largely on the US and originated out of an interest in conflict management and dispute resolution. However, since then the world has changed dramatically and there are a lot of dire problems that have catapulted partnerships to center stage. For example sustainability issues, inequality, and human trafficking. We can go on and on about the global problems that scholars are now beginning to try to address in our field.

**Jill Purdy (JP):** Another reason is the growth in attention to different forms of cross-sector partnerships in various literatures, which unfortunately tended to happen in silos. Both Barbara and I felt a bit of frustration from time to time that there was not a place where all these conversations were gathered together. We agreed that both scholars and practitioners would benefit from some robust theorizing about cross-sector partnerships. Also, much of the work over the past years tends to have a topical orientation, not always strongly rooted in a coherent theoretical background. Embedding the topic in institutional theory – as we do in our book – will hopefully offer more explanatory power and a framework that has the potential to be used across all these different focal areas.

**BG:** I agree it’s important to have a theoretical perspective on partnerships. I don’t think the book is a theory of partnerships, as much as it’s a theory of how partnerships are influencing fields and how fields have effects on partnerships. That is why we drew on institutional theory in the book.

**IvH:** You mention that the world has changed dramatically over the past decades. What do you consider to be the major changes or shifts in partnership-thinking, research and practice since *Collaborating*?

**JP:** Last year we attended a conference about multi-stakeholder initiatives, where we met with many people who are working in this area, spearheading or leading partnerships, supporting or evaluating them. We found they were hungry for theory to support their work. We did not set

out to develop the grand theory of partnerships, but the theoretical contribution of our book is important – to provide a framework that would help them understand some of the deeper dynamics that they were encountering.

In terms of practice, the world has also changed. We have seen a rise in transnational partnerships, which is the main partnership type we focus on in the book. In these partnerships it is important to understand how dynamics that might be global and transnational are interconnected with more national and local efforts. These issues make partnerships different from what we have discussed in literature so far, and they expand the horizons of what we might talk about.

**BG:** In terms of research, much has happened since *Collaborating*. There was an incredible amount of work for us to synthesize this time. In the first book, I was







generating a lot of ideas and pulling together some empirical work that had been done in dispute resolution and management. This time we had a wealth of examples to draw from, however not a real overarching theoretical framework within which to make sense out of these. So that's what we've been trying to contribute with this book, which was really rewritten from top to bottom. I think we have a total of perhaps five to seven pages worth of material that came from my previous book.

**IvH:** You mention the rise in transnational partnerships. Can you elaborate on how these differ from what we know so far about multi-stakeholder partnerships?

**BG:** One critical issue that arises when talking about transnational partnerships is the issue of different levels included in the partnership – which we devote a full chapter to in this new book. Partnering across levels has consequences

for example when talking about the question of impact. For example, international sustainability standards may work well for the businesses involved. But looking at the impact of these standards for the farmers on the very lowest level of the partnership, impact is not always there or might even be adverse. Farmers have to make trade-offs: but the time it takes to learn and develop these techniques for sustainable farming might impact their income negatively, or may increase their work load. So looking at the differential impacts of partnerships at different levels has generated an important topic for further research.

**JP:** Transnational partnerships are often about sustainability challenges, which are some of the most fundamental challenges we face globally. There is also a separate chapter in our book on partnerships for sustainability, which builds on the systematic review Barbara conducted with Jenna Stites back in 2013 (published by nbs.net). In some ways, their review was a catalyst for our book overall, as they gathered together basically all that is known about partnerships in that area which helped us to widen our lens for the book and look at what we could learn from these partnerships. The practice around sustainability is perhaps a more coherent field, and therefore presenting this as a separate chapter allows readers to get a different view, compared to the topical sweep or case focus that you find in other parts of our book.

**BG:** Many of the partnerships on sustainability that Jenna and I found in that systematic review were bilateral exchange relationships between NGOs and businesses, and do not qualify as multistakeholder partnerships in the definition that Jill and I adopt in our book.

However, if sustainability partnerships become cross-sectoral, dig deeper and start to change supply chains, they have a greater chance of impact and are more interesting to us as scholars. There are many sustainability partnerships operating at the transnational level, which makes it important to address the issue of impact and how impact may differ across the different levels.

**IvH:** During the 2016 CSSP Symposium in Toronto, Barbara you presented a keynote speech, in which you mentioned the importance of understanding the role of power, how it is displayed in partnerships and the need for more research in this area. Could you tell us more about (the importance of) power dynamics in



## INTERVIEW

**transnational partnerships that address global sustainability issues?**

**BG:** I'm going to let Jill take the first cut at this one since she was the lead author on the power chapter.

**JP:** Absolutely, power has been a theme of my work with Barbara for many years, and it is of such obvious importance in partnerships. One of the things that we really wanted to bring to the table was the idea of episodic versus systemic power. Episodic is what you might feel or experience in a partnership, for example, leverage or power sources you can use to wield influence in negotiations. Systemic draws more heavily on an institutional theory approach and considers the dynamics that are already embedded in the systems that we are living in and that have become taken for granted. Systemic power may not be felt by partners, or may not be visible but by all means it does shape the fundamental aspects of partnerships. It relates also to Barbara's earlier comment on impact: powerful partners may walk away from a partnership feeling satisfied, but those stakeholders with lower status within a society may not reap the benefits, or may face additional pressure as a result of an apparently successful partnership.

**BG:** Indeed, and this issue of systemic power also comes back in our final chapter, where we develop a framework in which we identify four different types of fields that take into consideration the degree to which power among the field's actors is skewed. We use a case example from Ecuador, where the indigenous people had been defined as non-citizens and therefore did not consider themselves to be stakeholders in the issue and weren't considered in decisions about their future. It took conscious raising by NGOs to convince them of their opportunity and right to express their voice – but this process has to take place before the partnership can be successfully implemented.

This example shows how many partnerships are initiated at tipped tables, and it is important to understand the difference between what collaboration among relative equals can be versus attempting to collaborate when you have huge power differences which we don't believe is possible. So we looked at what sort of processes are necessary to move parties to a starting place where collaboration could have some chance of success. This means that

we have to move from a tipped-table situation (in a field where power disparities are large), to a situation where the parties may perhaps see the world differently, but they both have enough voice that they can talk with sufficient power to engage one another. So we identified these different pathways that we feel must precede collaboration in order to achieve the desired outcomes.



**lvH:** Government also has a role to play in partnerships. Can you elaborate on how collaborative governance differs from multi-stakeholder partnerships (involving only businesses and NGOs)?

**JP:** One way in which collaborative governance differs, is because governments have a different source of power or legitimacy compared to NGOs or business: we expect the government to act in the best interest or quality of life of its citizens, the people they govern. Particularly when the government is leading the partnership, this makes a big difference compared to partnerships in which government is not included.

We also wanted to capture some shifts in public administration theory acknowledging that government may not have the capacity to tackle certain challenges or issues anymore, and they have to collaborate with business and NGOs – which is very evident in the world of practice in order to get things done. There is an increasing recognition of some of the government failures in addressing large scale problems that fall in their laps, and their need for resources to come from other sectors of society. This, however, also works the other way around. Sometimes, governments have a status or authority that allows them to convene, or requires them to participate in issues that cannot be tackled by the private or non-profit sectors alone.



**BG:** Of course it can also be difficult to work with government, especially in those countries where governments are less stable. In any situation where the government has the ability to shut down the partnership, it is prudent to have some kind of connection with the government. They do not necessarily need to convene or lead the partnership, but at least endorse it. This is something that other parties have to think about when starting multistakeholder partnerships in those countries.

Cross-level dynamics are also at play within collaborative governance. For example, when talking about transnational standard setting there is no national government that can convene, and consequently you have to look for a UN-type format, including representatives from multiple governments, and an international steering committee that manages the partnership. However, this makes for extremely complex partnership designs, and that is one of the reasons why they are often not as effective as we would like them to be.

**JP:** I would add to that, that challenges with regard to the role and position of government don't necessarily get a lot easier just because you are in a situation of stability. There are always power dynamics that need to be navigated. Especially when working on multiple levels questions of jurisdiction, rights of decision making and accountability will come in – what is required is clarity about where the boundaries are and who is responsible for what.

**lvH:** Finally, I want to ask you to take a peek into the future: what do you think are the trends in partnership thinking that need further attention, both in research and practice, and why do you think those trends are going to be important going forward?

**BG:** On a positive note, I think there is a lot of potential to develop new skills as a society. I have an example where I started as an activist back in the sixties, what then became a dialogue at the collaborative table, and eventually led to small policy changes: and I heard about three months ago that this law is still in place. I think it will be the millennials and young people that have to carry the flag with these new skills. So yes, we will all learn better ways to work together, and that is going to be imperative. But my pessimistic side says, the world has never gotten to that point in the past. Instead, we tend to go in cycles.

We have golden periods and horrendous periods. And it is not looking great at the moment, from a leadership standpoint. I have never felt really confident in predicting the success of collaborations over time, especially now. But I would certainly like to believe that we can begin to change people's minds about what is necessary to have the kind of quality of life for everyone that we, in our loftiest moments, aspire to.

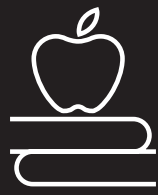
**JP:** I would hope that we would be able to discuss impact, and look more carefully at how disenfranchised people and these different social structures that we have built in places around the world are favored or disfavored by the partnership work that's being done. But also see the impact on the burning questions or problems that bring us together in the first place.

**BG:** There are large expectations of multistakeholder partnerships, however it is crucial that practitioners do not move ahead with this lofty idea that all we have to do is to sit down and work together and things will be fine. That is what I tried to say in the first book very clearly: partnerships are not a panacea, and that is one of the things we repeated from that book. We have to understand the dynamics that can get in the way, that can unravel collaboration. We have to understand how to handle power differences and conflict effectively and be careful not to leave stakeholders out who should be at the table. It is easy to get hyped up about the value of partnerships, and I don't know that there is another viable option. However, we have to be careful that we don't count our success without checking the actual outcomes for all stakeholders at differing levels.

**lvH:** Thank you very much Barbara and Jill for this inspiring and informative interview.

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ANNUAL REVIEW OF  
**SOCIAL**  
**PARTNERSHIPS**

# PEDAGOGY

## SECTION CONTENTS

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by Lea Stadler  
*Associate Professor, Grenoble  
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# Uncovering the Assumptions We Make

**W**elcome to the Pedagogy Section! Our goal is to create a space for presenting teaching and learning resources and ideas relevant for individual learning, the academic classroom, and practitioner workshops. This includes sharing innovative pedagogy, curriculum, course design, assessments, and exercises, as well as highlighting the wisdom of cross-sectoral thought-leaders for CSSP-related teaching and learning.

This year's section is focused on assumptions – the many things we consider and accept as true without question or proof. In the context of CSSP pedagogy, this applies to the countless assumptions we make as teachers or CSSP workshop instructors about the participants, about the way they may perceive us, and about how the teaching content may apply to different contexts. Against this backdrop, Helena H. Knight reached out to her network of international scholars and practitioners, and, in this section's first contribution, alerts us to the assumption-relat-





ed pitfalls that arise when teaching or discussing CSSP-related topics internationally. You will learn about a varied set of experiences, highlighting that differences across cultural, socio-economic, and political settings, sector-related perspectives, and the program context indeed matter and suggesting ways to address this challenge.

But managing assumptions is also a central topic in the CSSP practice, including the partners' (often different) assumptions about the focal societal problem and potential solutions, assumptions about themselves and the other collaboration partners, as well as about how to interact and work together<sup>1</sup>. In the second article, Lili Mundle and David Hyatt introduce a case study on the partnership

This year's section is focused on assumptions – the many things we consider and accept as true without question or proof.

between Walmart and the Environmental Defense Fund as a baseline for addressing this topic in classrooms and workshop settings. Presenting the case study as a discussion starter, they provide a set of concrete ideas, tools, and resources for encouraging assumption-related reflection and learning.

Assumptions yet play an important cognitive role, as Minu Hemmati, founder of the **Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Sustainable Development eV**, explains in a complementary interview with Lili. You will further learn about her experience with and practical recommendations for dealing with assumptions.

The section then closes with an invitation to combine fun and reflection in classroom and workshop settings: Adriane MacDonald and Stephen Dann describe how to use **Lego Serious Play™** for participants to uncover CSSP-related assumptions. Lego Serious Play is a facilitation method to foster creative thinking through team building metaphors of identities and experiences using Lego bricks. And while many of us associate Lego with childhood games, the here presented exercise shows

how purposeful play can help create a shared environment for exploring real-world problems.

As these contributions suggest, the way forward to managing assumptions as a teacher, workshop facilitator, or CSSP practitioner is probably creating awareness, active listening, and questioning. This aligns with recent insights from Alison Wood Brooks and Leslie K. John<sup>ii</sup> portraying the art of questioning as a uniquely powerful tool for unlocking value: "It spurs learning and the exchange of ideas, it fuels innovation and performance improvement, it builds rapport and trust among team members."

The Pedagogy Section 2018 provides a modest, yet diverse collection of assumption-related resources – including narratives, a teaching case, an interview, and a teaching innovation to start a conversation. Presenting these different contributions would not have been possible without our new sponsor, **Partnerships2030**. We would like to express our gratitude for this support, and invite you to learn more about their work on page 48.

Enjoy reading this year's pedagogy collection and please let me know if you have ideas, tools, and resources to share: lea.stadlter(at)grenoble-em.com.

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1. See e.g. **McManus, S., & Tennyson, R.** 2005. *Talking the Walk*. International Business Leaders Forum / The Partnering Initiative. p. 13-14 on assumptions in CSSP communication.
2. See **Wood Brooks, A., & John, L. K.** 2018. *The Surprising Power of Questions*. Harvard Business Review, May-June, 60-67. Also available as an audio HBR *Ideacast* (#631)

The Pedagogy Section 2018 provides a modest, yet diverse collection of assumption-related resources – including narratives, a teaching case, an interview, and a teaching innovation to start a conversation.



On behalf of



# Partnerships2030: Fostering Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development

The German platform *Partnerships2030* is proud to sponsor this year's Pedagogy Section. As a broker, facilitator, and educator in the field of multi-stakeholder partnerships, we are aware of the importance of strengthening people's ability to partner. We see the opportunity to support the section as an important contribution for strengthening partnering competencies around the world.

## Who Are We?

*Partnerships2030* is a German national platform fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) for sustainable development in line with the United Nations' *2030 Agenda*. Founded in 2015, a team of six consultants pools the expertise and experience of the *GIZ* and *Engagement Global – bengo* on behalf of the *German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)*. The services provided by these organizations help diverse partners to successfully work together to pursue sustainable development.

## MSPs in Germany?

There are currently more than 40 MSPs with German partners striving for a more sustainable world. Partners from diverse sectors work in Germany and abroad to transform supply chains, fight corruption, or provide health-care services. Want to know more? Go to the *profiles* of MSPs with German partners.

## What Do We Do?

We are aware that a successful partnership requires a great deal of time, know-how and resources. This is why we offer diverse support services for MSPs, which include:

- **Hosting workshops** to develop new MSP ideas;
- **Advising** new and existing MSPs on their particular concerns;
- **Connecting potential partners** to develop new MSPs;
- **Facilitating peer-learning** forums for partners working in MSPs as well as other practitioners supporting such partnerships;
- **Providing funding** for German civil society organizations working in MSPs through *Engagement Global – bengo*;
- **Informing** on the latest MSP news and know-how. For example, get practical *tips and tricks* or read a *study* on success factors of MSPs.

Want to learn more about *our services* or get involved? Visit us at [www.partnerships2030.com](http://www.partnerships2030.com).

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by Helena H. Knight

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# Taking Stock of Teaching CSSI across Institutional Settings: Contextualising Unconscious Bias

Do you know the sinking feeling of seeing vacant expressions on your students' or workshop participants' faces, having just given it your best—your ego in freefall? The dreaded worry of 'losing touch' creeps in from the shadows of our conscience. But in cross-sector social interactions (CSSI), a discipline where even the underpinning concepts remain contested, could this form of self-reflection be misguided? Could it simply be another case of 'unconscious bias' that has emerged unashamedly to shake up our routines in recent years? No, not quite the infamous unconscious bias that prompted Starbucks' racial-bias employee training, but rather the personal 'baggage' that may slip into our professional lives as CSSI instructors and trainers. As Lauren McCarthy writes in *ARSP 11* on teaching gender against the backdrop of CSSI, how gender is framed, its historical positioning, and the impact of multicultural perspectives, among others, bear significantly on teaching gender. With this piece, I hope to start a conversation about unconscious biases in teaching or giving workshops on CSSI. The aim is to propose an initial roadmap of how to tackle at least some of the pitfalls lurking in the assumptions that we make when teaching CSSI to different audiences. And who better to ask than the wider CSSI community to share their experiences of becoming aware of their own unconscious biases in teaching CSSI.

It's easy to assume ubiquitous 'general' knowledge of the whats, hows and whys of CSSI, especially as the literature tells us that cross-sector partnering has established itself as a 21<sup>st</sup> century governance approach confronting the

increasingly 'wicked' social problems across the globe'. Recycling, purchasing products in cause-related campaigns, buying fair trade products, and rewarding 'good' corporate practices are all part and parcel of our daily lives. As academics or practitioner trainers, like everyone else, we naturally construct our assumptions about the world and our discipline against the backdrop of our daily lives.

Academia and the market for CSSI training though has become a global affair, and many instructors have found themselves dispatched from their home country to deliver CSSI content abroad, or at the very least have welcomed international students in their sessions. And as we roam, we naturally carry our unconscious biases with us to these 'new' audiences, which are often marked by a unique and vastly different grounding. To account for the obvious differences, the study materials are duly updated with more contextualised cases, ready to share our expertise. At least until the moment of panic in the face of vacant gazes alluded to in the opening sentence. Is it time to take stock of our assumptions, not just the cases?

This was the reality I came to face as I arrived fresh from the UK to an Omani university a few years ago. My first time in the Middle East, I had prepared and was armed with local examples and what cases I could find, and things got off to a good start. Until the discussion reached the point of marketing ethics. To illustrate the point of cross-sector collaboration as one of the approaches to integrating ethics into marketing, I described cause-related

‘Good’ business was associated with quality products, and at a push, with donations to the needy.

marketing campaigns where business joins forces with a non-profit by linking the company’s sales to the non-profit’s cause. Enter the blank stares. Not even the carefully chosen, locally relevant example video, *Toms’ ‘Buy a pair, give a pair’*, changed the glaringly obvious: Most of my students had no idea what I was talking about. And as very soon transpired in further discussions, many of my Omani students were largely unaware of the concepts of corporate social responsibility, or ethical business. ‘Good’ business was associated with quality products, and at a push, with donations to the needy.

My ‘unchecked’ personal assumption that the Omani students shared the same degree of awareness and understanding of ethics and social responsibility in business as students in the UK shows the need to consider the impact of multicultural perspectives in teaching CSSI. And as I was re-writing the syllabus to better reflect the Omani environment, I kept thinking about what other assumptions we are guilty of when sharing our CSSI knowledge with our audiences. So, I decided to reach out to the CSSI community to find out more about their experiences of unconscious bias in teaching CSSI. Here are our initial thoughts.

### Macroenvironment and Knowledge about CSSI and Its Major Concepts

A recent *United Nation’s World Economic Prospect report*<sup>2</sup> shows that as we travel south and east from Europe, we largely encounter countries that face significant developmental challenges. In considering that finding solutions to ‘wicked’ developmental issues is the premise of CSSI, developing countries are commonly the destination to which CSSI instructors travel. The sharing of related teaching experiences can be hugely beneficial to help secure sustainable development, so long as we engage in what Ann Cunliffe (2004)<sup>3</sup> refers to as critically reflexive practice. The starting point for critically reflecting on the unconscious biases we may carry are thus the regional variations of partnership priorities due to different macro environmental forces that bear upon them as reported recently by

the *Partnership Resource Centre*<sup>4</sup>. The Hague Centre’s<sup>5</sup> multipolar priorities and interpretations of sustainable development (SD) as an outcome of noteworthy economic, environmental, social and political disparities give further weight to the importance of critical reflexive practice in teaching CSSI globally. So how does the multipolarity of understanding SD translate to improving CSSI pedagogy and training?

### Understanding Structural Factors that Influence the Audience’s Awareness, Knowledge and Experience

Firstly, varied institutional practices may influence the quality and quantity of information about CSSI-related concepts available to people in the different contexts, and their ability to develop appropriate knowledge of the subject. In developing countries, such information is much less accessible<sup>6</sup>. My own experience in Oman is shared by others as I found out when I reached out to the community. For example, Frea Haandrikman, a Faculty Liaison at Erasmus University, recollected a similar experience when she worked as a Lecturer in Sustainable Development at MEF University in Turkey:

*“One of my invited guest speakers focused on businesses in partnerships, and the students were completely unaware of the possibility of businesses actually caring, or having to care about sustainable development. Before starting the course, they see it as a state or civil society thing.”*

You might think that you can escape this issue if you stay in the comforts of your home institutions. But as Professor Ken Peattie from Cardiff Business School in the UK explains, you may be caught short. Ken has found that in

The starting point for critically reflecting on the unconscious biases we may carry are thus the regional variations of partnership priorities due to different macro environmental forces that bear upon them.



teaching sustainability to students from developing countries at Cardiff, although these students are often *“quite into sustainability issues, they have a very ‘green’ environmental, rather than social perspective, on what sustainability entails”*. Therefore, we need to consider that aside from a shortage of relevant information, people in different contexts may lack the opportunity to develop knowledge from observing CSSIs in practice or they may be prevented from accessing essential information.

### **Macroenvironment and Conflicting Worldviews: Understanding the Influence of Contextual and Cultural Assumptions on Values, Beliefs and Priorities**

All of us are products of our environment, yet our environmental cues can sometimes be diametrically opposed. Professor John Ickes from INCAE Business School in Costa Rica suggests that a lack of understanding of the nuanced contextual and cultural aspects may take us by surprise when we travel as teachers, trainers, advisors and practitioners of CSSI:

*“What is irrelevant in a US company is not necessarily so in a Central American country emerging from civil war... Shortly after the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979, the INCAE Business School was asked by the Ford Foundation to put together a series of management seminars for the recently-appointed managers of state agricultural enterprises, most of whom were former guerrillas with no management experience. Among the professors recruited was a well-known Harvard Business School accounting professor. On one trip to a state rice farm, he noted that the company’s balance sheet included such details as the number of hand-held calculators. He suggested that they simplify the financial statements and focus on the important expense items. The manager’s response was “Here, calculators are among the most precious items...”*

Understanding specific contexts, how things work and why, whether it is related to economic situation or cultural values and beliefs, can prevent unnecessary ‘sticky’ situations in engaging our audiences. So get that ‘handshake’ right!

### **Knowing Your Audience**

How we go about delivering CSSI content can differ significantly on the type of audience we work with. In undergraduate teaching, we often work with a blank slate,

Understanding specific contexts, how things work and why, whether it is related to economic situation or cultural values and beliefs, can prevent unnecessary ‘sticky’ situations in engaging our audiences.

building knowledge from scratch, whilst correcting some lived ‘unconscious biases.’ Professor Ken Peattie explains that the very ‘green’ sustainability exists among undergraduates more generally: *“when we did a 20th Birthday Celebration for the Brundtland Report, we got 20 UK undergraduates to talk about what sustainability meant to them, and it was all about recycling, saving energy, organic food etc.”* Hence, although using contextually-relevant examples may help build sound knowledge bottom-up and ensure our students are better informed to critically analyse cases, as some colleagues discovered in ‘new’ contexts, we first need to make sure that students possess relevant skills:

*“To be able to think, analyse, and work in the field of SD, partnerships, etc. you need critical thinking skills. Turkish students are often not taught these in high school! So I designed two sets of goals for the course: topic-related knowledge goals and a list of SKILLS related goals. My Turkish students also had major issues with understanding what a problem was and that looking at OTHER solutions was okay! So the final project included: ‘mention a solution that has been tried before.’”*

(Frea Haandrikman)

Therefore, to successfully transfer knowledge, in our reflections we need to ensure that the groundwork for grasping the complexities of CSSI exists.

And this brings us to the final point, the much bemoaned disconnect between academia and real-world. At the recent **CSSI symposium in Copenhagen**, I observed this disconnect during a presentation on addressing SD. A practitioner asked the presenting academic a simple question that turned out to be looming: *“What do you mean by sustainable development, because in academia, you seem to be*

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN CSSI PEDAGOGY

For CSSI pedagogy to truly flourish, the time has come to take stock of our unconscious biases.

*talking about it differently to us?"* This simple question of 'are we speaking the same language?' signals a critical alert for CSSI trainers. Brian McCollow, Founder and CEO of Infinity Squared, deliberated on this issue:

*"I am intrigued at the focus on defining 'it' [panacea of CSSIs] in academia... 'it' is irrelevant when compared to the overall picture! Because it means so incredibly many different things at different times and in different contexts. But then again, it reveals the larger picture as being totally incoherent."*

Brian further reflected on his experience advising on complex partnerships in global development and policy harmonization as full of surprises and 'crazy zig-zags'. Owing to divergent organising logics that cross-sector partners bring to the table, effective decision making sometimes suffers. Moreover, such lack of coherence in framing among different CSSI constituents carries significant implications for CSSI pedagogy. As CSSI instructors we need to reflect on who the members of our audience are when preparing course materials to try to overcome potential issues and misunderstandings of the different logics that not only different audiences but also different participants within the same audience may operate within.

One approach to keeping this last (in this series) unconscious bias in check may be boundary-spanning CSSI reflection sessions which, together with ARSP, would act as the stepping stones towards 'gelling' the communities and developing a common framework. As concluded by Brian McCollow:

*"... There is so much more collaboration that can exist from natural partners – if only we bring together experts who cross fields and jurisdictions and organizational types. We need to bring more 'IT' to the table!"*

Many of us teach CSSI to express our enthusiasm for co-creating solutions to those wicked social problems. We develop our courses with every intention to design inclusive learning environments by building on our knowledge. Yet,

unless we take stock of what our audiences bring to the table, we remain stuck in the 'sole creation' mode, which our overarching CSSI theory suggests only produces marginal value. For CSSI pedagogy to truly flourish, the time has come to take stock of our unconscious biases. The experiences presented here strive to be the initial step to developing a full framework for pan-contextual CSSI pedagogy, with the rest waiting for further insights from the CSSI community, perhaps starting with your experience. So please connect: helenahknight(at)gmail.com

**Thanks to the following colleagues for sharing their experiences and providing introductions:**

**Professor Ken Peattie**, Professor of Marketing and Strategy, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff, United Kingdom  
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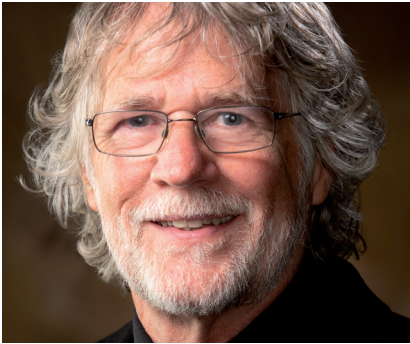
**Mr Brian McCollow**, Founder and CEO, Infinity Squared, USA

**Dr Fahri Benli**, Assistant Professor, College of Economics and Political Science, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman

**Professor James Austin**, Eliot I. Snider and Family Professor of Business Administration, Emeritus, Harvard Business School, USA

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# A Pedagogy for Uncovering Assumptions in Cross-Sector Partnerships

**T**hat people and organizations from different sectors often have difficulty collaborating is not surprising. After all, they come with fundamentally different organizing logics and organizational purpose and sometimes even from differing cultural backgrounds<sup>1</sup>. Collaborations however become problematic when the participants have different assumptions about the purpose for collaborating<sup>2</sup>, or when they have different assumptions about the logics or operations of their partner and don't know what to expect from the other side<sup>3</sup>. In this contribution we introduce a case study that can be used as teaching or training material, or shared among partners for discussion to illustrate some examples of these assumptions. We explore assumptions, both about the partners and the partnership, in particular when they become problematic for the partnership. Following the case, we present additional assumption-related teaching and practice tools.

## **What are Assumptions?**

While assumptions can often be explicit and expressed without requirements of supporting evidence, we often think of them as unconscious beliefs that we have about other people, organizations, or situations<sup>4</sup>. They are a way in which our brain streamlines decision and learning processes. Our assumptions can potentially work in our favor, if the assumptions are formed by being constantly exposed to a particular situation and then later applied to a similar situation. Cross-sector partnerships often involve decision-making in unfamiliar situations with unfamiliar partners, and assumptions we bring to the table can hinder the partnering process.

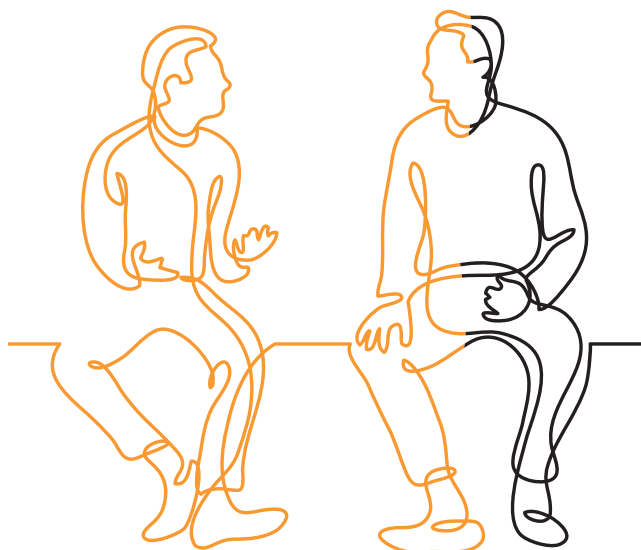
## **What is this Case About?**

This case study presents a view of an ongoing partnership between the giant retailer Walmart and the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Environmental Defense Fund,

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Cross-sector partnerships often involve decision-making in unfamiliar situations with unfamiliar partners, and assumptions we bring to the table can hinder the partnering process.

from the perspective of three individuals managing the relationship in its early years<sup>5</sup>. The case study illustrates what assumptions can arise in partnerships between business and NGOs when partnering, such as assumptions about the relative influence of partners, assumptions about intentions and abilities, assumptions about strategy and project prioritization, and assumptions about values. The case highlights especially the assumptions that the Environmental Defense Fund had made about Walmart as it sought to influence its business practices.



Case Study:

**The Environmental Defense Fund and Walmart**



**Aspirations.** In 2007 the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) established an office in Bentonville Arkansas, just down the street from the headquarters of the largest corporations in the world, Walmart. EDF staff were working from a powerful and hopeful assumption:

*...think of Walmart as a train moving by and the goal was to grab on any place you could get a handhold and work your way up toward the engine, and if you did it right by the time you got up to the engine they'd let you start to steer.*

Michelle Harvey, Project Director, EDF

The office opened just two years after leaders in the environmental group had taken then Walmart CEO Lee Scott to the top of Mount Washington to see first-hand the effects of climate change. Shortly after the trip, Scott launched the company on a journey to improve its own environmental impact through three aspirational goals: to be supplied 100 percent by renewable energy, to produce zero waste, and to sell products that sustained people and the environment.



**Business Opportunities.** By 2008 the company, known earlier for its insularity and inward focus, was engaged in relationships with hundreds of NGOs. But many of these relationships were problematic because of assumptions some NGOs were making about Walmart's intentions and abilities. Rand Waddoups, Walmart's then director of sustainability, described the problem:

*The real opportunity here is to create situations where there is value creation. If you have a social or environmental need, and you have a business opportunity, and then you have an NGO with an agenda, when those three things merge, there's an extraordinary opportunity. When they don't, the relationship will fail, or it probably should never have started at all. It's crazy how frequently people believe that you only need one or two of these connection points.*

Rand Waddoups, Project Director, Walmart

Waddoups pointed to latent assumptions held by staff in some NGOs that if only they could make corporations understand the problem and how the corporation impacted the problem, then the corporation could set about working on the problem. Related to this, some NGO partnership agendas would languish for years at Walmart because the NGO brought few capabilities to the table. These groups, frustrated at the lack of progress, had again assumed that a compelling issue should be enough for Walmart to take action, but the company was constrained by its own lack of expertise. Thus NGO capabilities in both identifying business opportunities in sustainability and then helping to develop and execute those opportunities were important. As CEO Lee Scott described it in a 2008 Wall Street Journal interview: *"We have no scientists. We are a retailer, and we operate stores that serve customers."*<sup>6</sup>

Other NGOs, such as EDF that did have scientists and that did bring business opportunities and capabilities to the table, had flawed assumptions as well. One of their assumptions was that by being so organized, including the placement of a nearby office, it would mean that progress could be made on multiple fronts simultaneously. However, because Walmart's approach was to embed sustainability into its core business practices, NGO partners would have to account for the nuances and complexity of business strategy:

*In retrospect, we were a little unrealistic about the things we thought Walmart could do and should do right away. As much as our staff had learned about win-win opportunities from past partnerships and other professional experience, there was a lot of complexity at Walmart that we didn't take into consideration. That company is massive and we wanted them to move extraordinarily fast. We knew they had unmatched leverage – but we misunderstood how to best pull the levers to make things happen.*

Andrew Hutson, Project Manager, EDF

### **Flexibility and Developing a Deep Understanding.**

Part of the issue was understanding how the company prioritized projects and getting beyond assumptions that all good ideas would get traction as sustainability projects in the company, especially as the company gained expertise on its own.

*Something we learned really early on was that in our traditional partnerships, we have a goal, we get you to buy into the goal and then we achieve it. In the Walmart work we found that we couldn't go in and say we want to work on this, because Walmart might say, well, that's good, but we don't want to work on that right now, we want to work on something else. So it's taught us to be much more flexible.* M. Harvey, EDF

These assumptions about how the partners worked provided learning opportunities in both directions. Although Walmart and EDF had been talking and working together for several years, there were still misunderstandings and flawed assumptions about the other. For instance, where Walmart may have assumed EDF was making unreasonable demands, from

As much as our staff had learned about win-win opportunities from past partnerships and other professional experience, there was a lot of complexity at Walmart that we didn't take into consideration.

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EDF's perspective they were working on areas of high opportunity:

*There has been a lot of learning. On our side, we fundamentally misunderstood some aspects of their culture and values as a company. On their side, Walmart executives and staff did not really know what we wanted or how we work. They didn't seem to understand that if we seemed unreasonable it was because we were pushing them to do really hard things knowing that the hard stuff is where you find the big payoff.* A. Hutson, EDF

Another key learning for EDF came from getting past assumptions about the ability to change the mindset of the partner to be consistent with its own values. Such a perspective meant that progress made had less value unless it involved a mindset shift of the partner. That assumption, however, could get in the way of success. A better approach was to get beyond ideology and focus on results:

*I've been involved in partnerships where some of the partners felt that it was only legitimate for you to be involved if you believed what they believed. And what we have found is that as long as people want to move it from here to there, 99% of the time that's enough. They don't have to want to move it for the same reason, they just have to want to move it. And if I have a reason for doing it and you have a reason for doing it and it's mutually beneficial then that's good enough.*

M. Harvey, EDF

**Way Forward.** As members of the two different organizations developed social capital that enabled ongoing dialog, both developed a better understanding of the other's intentions, objectives, and strategy. For instance, EDF staff were given Walmart badges and had open access to anyone in the company. Oftentimes, EDF staff served as sources of sustainability institutional knowledge in the context of Walmart's penchant for frequent staff transfers. EDF's location of a nearby office signaled organizational commitment. Staff from both organizations often traveled to conferences together to co-present. Such interactions ultimately led them to better cooperation and a focus on the projects of shared interest:

*I think that now they understand that when we're pushing them really hard it's for a reason. We're not asking them to do things that are unrealistic or that are not ultimately good for their business. The environment is our primary interest, but we also understand that they have to have a sustainable economic model if they're going to remain in business. They seem to get that now. In turn, we understand, at least most of the time, that when they're not moving on something we find important, that there's sometimes a really good reason for it that we're not seeing. ...With this increased understanding of one another we are better able to focus on the areas where we can see a lot of progress, and can prevent butting heads in areas where we're not. And those areas that we do butt heads, we try to find alternative solutions that can be perhaps more effective.*

A. Hutson, EDF

**Summary.** By 2018, the partnership was still growing. EDF had worked with the company on a variety of projects, including Walmart's **Project Gigaton** greenhouse gas reduction initiative and its initiative to reduce harmful chemicals in consumer products. Yet, their history didn't mean that the relationship should be taken-for-granted. Kathleen McLaughlin, Walmart chief sustainability officer and Walmart Foundation president stressed the importance of personal relationships: "...anytime you engage across sectors, there is a cultural difference."<sup>7</sup>







### Dealing with Assumptions: Case-Specific and General Suggestions for Classrooms and Training Programs.

This short case could be used in both a classroom or professional setting to illustrate how assumptions (here with a specific focus on the NGO perspective) can potentially be problematic but can be overcome. The instructor or facilitator might ask participants to read the case and lead a group discussion on some assigned questions, such as: Where did assumptions clash? What did the partners do to overcome these differences? Why is this so difficult? What conclusions can be drawn?

The case indicates instances where NGO partnerships with Walmart do not progress because the actors do not or cannot overcome the obstacles of their assumptions about the other. On the other hand, the case illustrates how EDF staff learned from their experiences and subsequently adapted, changing their expectations and developing more accurate assumptions on which to judge Walmart's behavior. As such, the case illustrates double-loop learning—evaluating decision processes and initiatives and asking: “What patterns do we observe?” As Brouwer and colleagues indicate in their guide to multistakeholder stakeholder partnerships (MSPs), “Understanding the patterns helps us to change the way we make decisions and deepens our understanding of our assumptions.”<sup>8</sup> For them, double-loop learnings are necessary, formalized activities in the MSP.

Differing institutional logics/core business goals are a fundamental cause for assumptions and strife between partners. An NGO's core business of bringing about social or environmental change is very different than that of an academic institution or a company. Coming together to partner does require a certain level of flexibility to meaningfully engage, but neither party will change their core logics. The case illustrates how the partners recognize this explicitly. (See the section on triple-loop learning below.) Harvey indicates that she has gotten past assumptions that both actors have to have the same motivation for achieving project goals, indicating that acting on harmful or unnecessary assumptions can lead to partnership failure. McLaughlin realizes that the divergent cultures must continuously be taken into account. However, implicitly both parties know that if there isn't sufficient win-win in the partnership, then it will fail despite accurate assumptions.

One approach to raise awareness suggested by the case is how talking and working together provides learning opportunities. In fact, studies have found that working together on a common activity is the best strategy for overcoming assumptions<sup>9</sup>. While the case illustrates this finding, there are other methods that may also help uncover assumptions regarding both partners as well as the problem/solution at hand, often even faster and more explicitly. Below is a selection of six such methods. For classroom use, try to identify where in the case study such a tool would have been helpful. For practitioners, try applying them during training or partnering activities, especially when goals are still being negotiated, as well as during conflictive partnership processes.

The following four tools are primarily to uncover and deal with assumptions regarding the partners. However, they can be applied for

1. **Tracking surprise:** When our assumptions don't hold true we often feel surprised. Tracking when this feeling arises during the partnering process and writing it down to reflect on your own and/or to speak with partners about it can be an effective long-term method of being aware of and dealing with assumptions.
2. **When not in doubt, ask:** Asking your partner what he or she wants, requires, likes, etc. is one of the most powerful tools to overcome assumptions. It may sound simple, but it is often harder than expected because assumptions give us exactly the feeling that we don't need to ask. But it is in these moments that we should ask, because it probably means we are in fact assuming something about the partners and/or the situation.

The case illustrates how EDF staff learned from their experiences and subsequently adapted, changing their expectations and developing more accurate assumptions on which to judge Walmart's behavior.

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3. **The imagined conversation:** This exercise can be done all on your own and serves as a map to uncovering assumptions. By asking oneself multiple questions in the four diverse categories “Why...”, “What if...”, “What...”, and “What next...” certain logics and thereby assumptions can come to light. For an in-depth explanation of this tool see page 44 of McManus and Tennyson’s “Talking the Walk.”<sup>10</sup>

4. **Left-Hand Column exercise:** This exercise serves as a way to analyze a (usually unsatisfying) conversation to uncover assumptions and identify where they may have led the conversation astray. The basic thought behind the exercise is that there are always two conversations taking place: the audible one between partners and the in-audible one that holds the partners’ assumptions, ideas, and feelings. In this exercise, you take a piece of paper and divide it into two columns. In the right hand column you write down what was said during the conversation (as well as you can remember it). In the left hand column you write what you were thinking during the conversation. You

can thereby see what assumptions you are working with and if necessary, plan on how to deal with them in future conversations. See Peter Senge et al (page 246) for an example and further explanation of the Left Hand Column.<sup>11</sup>

While the above methods can apply to assumptions about partners and the relational challenges to be addressed, the following two methods focus on the assumptions regarding the problem itself. Of course, in the process, assumptions about and specific to partners will arise, but the focus lies first with the problem for which the partnership was created.

5. **Problem definition worksheet:** By answering five questions on a problem definition worksheet about the problem the partnership seeks to address, the partners can uncover both individually as well as collectively what it is that is driving them to collaborate. (See [DIYToolkit.org](http://DIYToolkit.org) for a template.) The questions will allow the individuals to reflect upon their understanding of the problem at hand and, when the





We cannot do away with assumptions, but we can learn how to work with them. The most important thing we can do is to be aware of them.

individuals compare their answers within the group, they can see the similarities and differences to others' understanding. By exploring these, a greater understanding of the problem as well as the partners can evolve.

6. **Triple-Loop Learning:** Above, we briefly described how members of Walmart and EDF used double-loop learning to uncover assumptions regarding the strategies of their partners. But partners can go beyond a double loop learning and establish processes to "learn how to learn." This activity—triple-loop learning—can be a useful tool in the planning stages or when a partnership has already begun implementing its activities. It is especially useful if problems persist in a partnership and there isn't any improvement by adjusting how and what activities are being implemented. Triple-loop learning builds on double loop learning to evaluate the assumptions regarding mission, vision, and paradigms that drive organizational behavior, asking "How do we decide what is right?" By delving deep into these assumptions, the proposed/applied solution can be analyzed in that context and in turn addressed. As we note earlier, partner commitment to questioning their assumptions and the context in which they operate is essential to effective collaboration. See Gordijn and colleagues' Reflection Methods, pages 18-19, for more information and a diagram illustrating single-, double-, and triple-loop learning.<sup>12</sup>

Want to learn more about methods to deal with assumptions and implementing them in practice? Then read the interview with Dr. Minu Hemmati (see page 60).

## Conclusion

We cannot do away with assumptions, but we can learn how to work with them. The most important thing we can do is to be aware of them. And it is important to keep

in mind that challenging assumptions is a never-ending process. As Andrew Hutson notes in the case study, adaptations of key assumptions in earlier partnerships did not seem to apply at Walmart. And, even after intended collaboration when you do start to "speak and act in the 'language' of your partner", the assumption journey isn't over. The case illustrates that there are continual learning opportunities regarding assumptions. Working together despite differences and implementing various reflection methods are challenging yet necessary steps to overcoming assumptions and working together in a successful partnership.

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# Understanding and Dealing with Assumptions: An Interview with Dr. Minu Hemmati

Assumptions are both a blessing and a curse when it comes to decision-making. On the one hand, they allow us to make decisions quickly. On the other hand, they can mislead us. This can especially be the case in partnerships, where people and organizations often work in situations and with partners they are unfamiliar with. In the following interview, Dr. Minu Hemmati explains what these various assumptions can be, what their possible consequences are if not addressed, and how to deal with them.

**Lili Mundle (LM): What are the most common assumptions you find among partners working in multi-stakeholder partnerships?**

Minu Hemmati (MH): I don't think there is anything they don't have assumptions about, and stereotypical assumptions. This is normal because it's our brain's way of being efficient, that's why our cognitive system does it. We can't spend the time we would need to actively decide every piece of information we process every second of the day. It would simply take too long! And of course you see this in the partnering process. But the great thing about working in a partnership is that ideally you get to work with all of these assumptions.

The great thing about working in a partnership is that ideally you get to work with all of these assumptions.



Photo by Jan Rottler

Dr. Minu Hemmati is a clinical psychologist with a doctorate in Organizational and Environmental Psychology. Consulting since 1998 with governments, international organizations, women's networks, NGOs, corporations, and research institutions, Dr. Hemmati has experience with multi-stakeholder processes at all levels. Her work includes designing and facilitating change processes, bringing together diverse groups of people in dialogue and collaboration, as well as training, research and advocacy. In 2016, she co-founded the **MSP Institute – Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Sustainable Development eV**, an international charitable association. She has published two books and co-authored another, and has written over 50 articles, book chapters, and reports.



## INTERVIEW: UNDERSTANDING ASSUMPTIONS

So on the one hand, partners have assumptions about each other. This can be made visible in creative and playful ways through exercises like “*Rich Picture*” when they’re asked to draw representations of industry or civil society. They make assumptions about the motives, goals, trustworthiness, or the speed by which others operate. They also have assumptions about themselves and how they come across: ‘I know how I react in conflict,’ or ‘I know what others think of me,’ etc. are common.

The second set of assumptions concerns the facilitator. Here assumptions are raised regarding why or how the practitioner is doing his or her work. Also common here are assumptions about what makes a good or bad facilitator. Some of these are based on experience, others are not.

The third set of assumptions is about the process and the partnership itself. Assumptions arise concerning what is good for the partnership, how to proceed with the partnership, or the main problem to be addressed. Especially the partners’ understanding of why they are actually working together and “what the problem is” can be filled with assumptions. Take the case of corruption, for example: the partners can all agree on the fact they’ve come together to talk about corruption. However, make sure to have a conversation about what they think actually corruption is. Because you’re guaranteed to have as many different understandings of corruption and its underlying causes as you have partners in the room. If you don’t unearth these differences in the beginning, people can go a long time assuming they’re talking about the same thing. The longer this goes on the stronger the emotions and the bigger the conflict will be when these differing perspectives are revealed. Therefore, making perspectives visible early on really helps avoid frustration later on.

**LM: How do you, in your role deal with these assumptions? What methods do you employ?**

MH: Essentially it’s about using diverse opportunities to make visible that everyone brings knowledge and assumptions to the table. And they are most likely different. How to make this visible depends on the context in which you’re working. For instance, I like to use playful methods such as “*Rich Picture*” where the partners work in groups to draw a comical character that represents a group in the room, like the United Nations, or business,

or civil society. These groups can be random or assigned, depending on the setting. By allowing them to draw and introduce these representations you can make the invisible elephant in the room visible.

Another method is to invite short introductory statements about each stakeholder’s perspective about what the problem is. So for example, using the case of corruption, each representative gets five minutes to talk about the root cause of corruption in a particular case. You’re likely to get very different answers and this prompts the group to understand that these viewpoints are all valuable insights and are the building blocks of the solution. So they can understand that if none of us are wrong, then we need to integrate all these perspectives to come up with a creative solution that encompasses this diversity of viewpoints.’ The diverse insights also inform how you have to design the process of the partnership.

These two exercises help to illustrate the stereotyping we all do. However, people tend to react badly to being told they’re stereotyping. Therefore, it can be helpful to have someone give a speech at the beginning about stereotyping and what we know about social cognition in this regard, and/or share a story that shows how we use stereotypes. This allows people to be more open to the whole process of dealing with their (stereotypical) assumptions.

**LM: How do the partners react to such methods?**

MH: Generally, if people understand and agree with the purpose of an activity, they react positively. And then, of course, it depends on how the methods are adapted to the culture in which the partnership is operating. So for example, if the setting is more formal, then it would be more appropriate to have a scientific keynote speaker to

They can understand that if none of us are wrong, then we need to integrate all these perspectives to come up with a creative solution that encompasses this diversity of viewpoints.’

## INTERVIEW: UNDERSTANDING ASSUMPTIONS

address the topic of assumptions at the beginning of the meeting. However, if there's a casual dinner the evening before, you can tell a story about assumptions by the fire-side. And make sure it fits the stakeholders' speed. Private sector stakeholders usually have a much shorter time frame in which they operate in comparison to some other groups. I find that speed is one of the biggest differences between stakeholders.

**LM: As a practitioner, what would you say are the most important skills that you have to successfully support partners in working with their assumptions?**

MH: Self awareness. I have to be aware of my own assumptions and that they are assumptions. In doing so, I metaphorically open the door to other perspectives and allow myself to fully comprehend that everyone lives in their own universe. Because we often assume we're living in the same universe – which is largely true as we obviously function in relationships and groups. But in working

with assumptions we realize that we can be very different and it helps to appreciate these perspectives for what they are: neither true nor false. Just perspectives, pieces of the puzzle.

It's not enough to think that, however, you have to exemplify, or project it, too. Projecting this attitude along with the feeling of trust shows the participants that you appreciate their assumptions, their knowledge, and their perspectives, and it helps them do the same in turn. This isn't always easy because it has to come from the heart, the gut and the mind.

### Endnotes

1. <http://www.mspguide.org/msp-guide>
2. A Rich Picture is a way to explore, acknowledge, and define a situation and express it through diagrams to create a preliminary mental model. See this website for more on the use of rich pictures in the MSP context: <http://www.mspguide.org/tool/rich-picture>.

### Suggestions for Applying Dr. Hemmati's Knowledge

1. In a classroom or practitioner setting, the interview can be shared with participants, combined with an invitation to think about the main insights and discuss them in small groups. What is the most striking?

2. Whether an instructor, practitioner or student, dealing with assumptions starts with self-reflection. To get an idea of one's own assumptions, exercises such as the Rich Picture exercise can be used individually or in a classroom or training context as a baseline to analyze how one reacts to a given person or situation. You will find a step-by-step description of this exercise at <http://www.mspguide.org/tool/rich-picture>.

Beyond self-reflection, a classroom setting is an ideal laboratory to test how assumptions effect decision-making. Specifically, the Rich Picture exercise can easily show students the prevalence of assumptions concerning even the simplest of topics. The exercise can hence be applied to uncover assumptions concerning roles of different people or organizations, the problem that should be addressed, or even the role of the instructor in a classroom setting.

For practitioners, testing this method in a group of practitioner peers first may be helpful to understand when, where, and how to apply this exercise in facilitating partnering processes. Receiving and incorporating feedback on the implementation is advisable as overcoming assumptions is a vital, yet sensitive part of partnership building.



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# Using Lego® Serious Play™ to Build Cross-Sector Communication Practices

This teaching innovation focuses on the challenge of how to teach participants the importance of recognizing any absence of shared understanding among partners in cross-sector social partnerships, and how to establish shared understanding among partners before initiating the process of problem solving.

**The Challenge:** Some concepts can't be taught through lecture alone. That is, concepts such as shared understanding are typically dismissed as 'common sense', but in fact require experience and complex tacit skillsets to understand. In cross-sector social partnerships, the need to establish shared understanding—i.e. when all members of a partnership agree on the definition of the problem that they are trying to address—appears obvious. However, research on interdisciplinary collaboration shows that inconsistencies among individuals' definitions of the targeted problem is a common challenge that can cause coordination problems and team conflict<sup>1</sup>. Learning how to surface inconsistencies in partner problem definitions and assumptions, and knowing how to manage disputes once inconsistencies are surfaced, requires

the development of tacit skills (see *ARSP 12*, p. 12-49 for our cross-sector skillset steering wheels) that are built through experience. Hence, alternative rather than conventional pedagogical approaches may help to achieve these learning objectives.

**The Teaching Innovation:** The proposed teaching innovation is an experiential activity that allows participants to engage in a simulated situation where collaboration is needed, but there is a lack of shared understanding among collaborators. This exercise allows participants to (1) experience how easy it is to assume that shared understanding exists when it does not, (2) sense tension when shared understanding is not present in collaboration, (3) feel relief when shared understanding is achieved, and (4)

## LEGO SERIOUS PLAY™ FOR CSSI

This exercise allows participants to experiment with tools that help surface implicit assumptions among partners, communicate complex ideas, and listen for comprehension.

experiment with tools that help surface implicit assumptions among partners, communicate complex ideas, and listen for comprehension.

**Materials:**

1. One **Starter Kit** for two to four participants or one Lego Serious Play **Identity and Landscape Kit** and one **Connections Kit** divided among participant groups in equal volume
2. One 'Lego duck' per participant (four yellow bricks, two red plates)
3. Mission cards (one set for each team of two)
4. PowerPoint presentation slides

**Timing:** 75-80 minutes

**Target Audiences**

- Students learning about stakeholder management and cross-sector interactions, engaging with work-integrated learning, or real life clients. This exercise is appropriate for students at both undergraduate and graduate levels. However, the discussion about 'wicked problems' is introductory, so the instructor may wish to adapt this part of the lesson depending on the level of familiarity that students have with this concept.
- Practitioner groups engaging in problem identification and problem reconciliation between a range of stakeholders with divergent views on problems, solutions, or even the presence of a problem. Note: Practitioner groups can use this exercise to practice surfacing and managing inconsistencies in problem definitions on a neutral problem (i.e., the simulated problem) or they may choose to by-pass the part of this exercise where conflict is simulated, and instead apply the Lego Serious Play problem exploration approaches presented here to their existing challenges.

**Phase 1: Framing the Simulation Activity (15 Minutes)**

Participants are assigned the reading '**Building shared understanding of wicked problems**'<sup>2</sup>. The class/workshop begins with a brief lesson on 'wicked problems':

*What Is a Wicked Problem?* Use the 'six characteristics of wicked problems' presented in the reading to discuss 'wicked problems.'

*Examples:* Participants are asked to think of and share with the group examples of wicked problems. We recommend that the instructor provides one or two examples of wicked problems (e.g., climate change) before participants are called on to share their examples with the group.

*How Are Wicked Problems Addressed?* Facilitate a brief discussion on cross-sector collaboration and its role in addressing wicked problems by engaging stakeholders in a process of problem-solving.

*Challenges to Addressing Wicked Problems:* Introduce participants to concepts covered in the reading, including social complexity, fragmentation, and lack of shared understanding.

**Phase 2: The Simulation (45-50 Minutes)**

**The Warmup.** During the warmup, participants are introduced to the use of Lego as a communication tool.

*15 Minutes:* Each participant is issued a **six brick kit** (four yellow bricks, two red plates) and instructed to construct a duck individually. Participants are then asked to get into teams of two, so that they can explain to each other why their model represents 'a duck.' Over subsequent rounds, participants are invited to remove two pieces from the model, then re-explain how their model is still a duck at four pieces, and then two pieces. This activity introduces participants to the idea of 'ownership of meaning,' whereby what the model owner says a Lego model (a duck) is what the Lego model becomes. As speakers, participants learn that they ascribe meaning to their models. As listeners, they learn that they may not ascribe meaning to someone else's model. The warmup exercise also grants the participants permission to use Lego as a visual



metaphor for an idea, rather than restricting themselves to thinking of Lego models as visual recreations of ‘real’ objects.

**The Scenario.** Participants are introduced to building and communicating their ideas with Lego, stories, and metaphor.

*5 Minutes:* Participants are asked to form teams of two. Partner A and Partner B are each given a different ‘mission card.’ Participants are instructed to keep their mission card and its contents secret from their partner until ‘The Ah-ha Reveal Moment’ when they are given permission to swap their card with their partner. We recommend that the instructor reminds the participants of this rule at different points throughout the session. As the participants are reading their mission cards, the instructor will place packages of Lego at each table.

*5 Minutes:* Participants are then asked to respond to their mission by using the Lego at their tables to build a solution to the problem they have just been given. At this point in the simulation participants are working individually.

*2 Minutes:* Participants are then asked to use their Lego model to explain their solution to their partner. Each partner is given one minute to discuss their model, the speaking partner has 30 seconds to share their story, and the listening partner has 30 seconds to ask questions of the speaker’s model. Then partners switch roles so that both partners get to be the speaker and listener.

Participants are reminded of the activity conditions—that the builder ascribes meaning to the model, and that meaning cannot be placed on someone else’s model. Participants are invited to ask questions about their partner’s model in the style of ‘What does a piece mean? What does a colour represent?’ in order to hear more of the builder’s interpretation of their model. Questions which place meaning, such as ‘So that piece represents X, right?’ are discouraged to prevent listeners from placing meaning on someone else’s through their interpretation of the speaker’s explanation.

**The Conflict.** Tension is simulated by having participants work toward the same objective from contrasting positions (e.g., one believes that the local economy can be saved by creating higher paying jobs, while the other believes it can be saved by using technology to reduce costs of making products). This part of the exercise helps participants to understand how different stakeholders can hold different perspectives on the same problem.

*5 Minutes:* Participants are instructed to work with their partner to build a new shared model that combines both their solutions to the problems (i.e. mission cards) they have been given.

*3 Minutes:* Ask the participants to double check that their shared model meets the objectives of both partners. If they believe they have successfully achieved both partner objectives, they are asked to explain how, and if not, they are asked to identify the missing elements and rectify the circumstances.

During the conflict simulation round, it is necessary to observe the participants and call a halt to the simulation if tension is visible through body language, posturing or raised voices. When a participant leaves their seat to enunciate their point more forcefully, the simulation has more than achieved the desired outcome and should move to the final reveal stage.



## LEGO SERIOUS PLAY™ FOR CSSI

**The ‘A-ha!’ Reveal Moment.** The objective of this ‘reveal’ moment is to simulate the relief of collaborating after shared understanding is achieved, in contrast to collaborating in the absence of shared understanding.

*3 Minutes:* At this point, the participants are instructed to share their mission card with their partner and given time to read their partner’s card. This should result in conversation on shared realisation, shared goals and how both participants sought the same result from different directions.

*5 Minutes:* Teams are asked to build a new Lego model based on the insight they have just gained from reading their partner’s mission card.

Following the activity, one or more participant groups can be invited to share their combined model with the group (2-5 minutes depending on time available).

### Phase 3: Making Sense of the Simulation Activity (10 Minutes)

At the end of the simulation, a discussion is required to explain the processes, the deception, and to defuse any residual tensions raised by the simulated conflict. Specifically, the simulation involves three aspects that may seem unfamiliar to participants (1) explanation–constructionism, (2) non-judgemental communication, and (3) the experience of simulated conflict. Constructionism is the dual process of making a physical object to represent an idea through building with the hands and mind<sup>3</sup>. The concept and experience of hand-mind coordination is often unfamiliar to participants. Thus this process is debriefed to recognize that it may result in participants having experienced a new way of thinking. Participants are presented with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in community with their peers and the facilitator, and to discuss the experience with peers. Second, the simulation process uses non-judgemental communication strategies whereby the participants cannot place meaning, interpretation or judgement on the constructions of other participants. This process is unusual in communications, and can be both challenging and beneficial to the participants, particularly those coming from an empathic communication strategy that repeats back the speaker’s words to build shared rapport. Third, the experience of using structured play is raised for discussion, to

give participants an opportunity to express their understanding of the event. Guiding questions may include.

- Was there a time during the process where you felt frustrated? When? Why do you think that was?
- Inspired or excited? When? Why do you think that was?
- What are three things that you will ‘take-away’ from this exercise?

### Phase 4: Connecting the Dots: Helping Participants to Make Meaning of Their Experience (5 Minutes)

Finally, the instructor will close the class/workshop by helping participants to make meaning of their experience by connecting course concepts (i.e. wicked problems, cross-sector collaboration, shared understanding, etc.) to the simulation exercise. For example, the instructor should reiterate that the primary objectives of this exercise are to provide participants with an experience that demonstrates the following:

1. It is a common mistake in cross-sector collaboration to assume shared understanding of a ‘wicked problem.’
2. This miscommunication often results in conflict and collaborative inertia. Thus it is essential to surface implicit assumptions about what the problem is and how to solve it before effective collaborative problem solving can take place.
3. The *Lego Serious Play* platform is a tool that can help individuals to ‘model their complex ideas for better explanation,’ ‘listen for understanding,’ and ‘ask clarifying questions.’
4. It is also important during the debrief to reiterate that the Lego Serious Play process does result in people thinking differently and that it is okay to have ideas, emotions and thoughts surface as a consequence of using the hand-mind connection.

Materials for this simulation can be downloaded [here](#).

### Endnotes

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ANNUAL REVIEW OF  
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**PARTNERSHIPS**

## RESEARCH

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Theory-Practice



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# The Transformative Potential of Research

Welcome to the research section of the ARSP, which aims to increase discussion about the impact of scholarly research on partnering practices and vice versa by profiling research projects on cross-sector partnerships, new methodological insights, and interviews with leading practitioners and academics from around the world. This year's section provides in-depth food for thought on the transformative potential of (academic) research for partnering practices and the other way around. Our stellar team shows that mobilizing this transformative potential remains a complicated endeavour in which many challenges need to be overcome.

First, we have a guest contribution by Marianne Beisheim and Anne Ellersiek who present the results of their recently concluded research project titled 'Partnerships for Sustainable Development in Areas of Limited Statehood: Impact, Conditions for Success, and Meta-Governance'. They highlight the importance, potential and challenges of different meta-governance strategies. Meta-governance refers to the management of a plurality of partnerships with the aim to induce more coherence in the governance of an issue area can thus be considered as the "governing of governing" or "organization of self-organization". Second, our new Associate Editor Marijn Faling interviews Bruce Campbell and Philip Thornton, both working for the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), on the challenging

balancing act that is required of research organizations engaging in cross-sector partnerships. She presents the main challenges and related responses that are required to make these partnerships transformative. Third, our Associate Editors Adolf Acquaye and Fred Yamoah (University of Kent) present an interview with Vikki Brennan, Director of Proudly Made in Africa (PMIA). The interview sheds light on the nature of PMIA's partnerships with different stakeholder groups and details how these partnerships address the enhancement of socio-economic transformation of agricultural producers in sub-Saharan Africa. Throughout the interview, the authors provide reflections on the various issues that arise from the discussion using the extant management and cross-sector partnership literature. Fourth, Associate Editor Lauren McCarthy interviews Erinch Sahan, Head of Private Sector Team at Oxfam GB, on his experiences with cross-sector partnership. Together with Lauren, Erinch reflects on how academic research on cross-sector partnerships could be used in a more transformative way.

We would like to acknowledge and are grateful for the sponsorship of this section by the **Partnerships Resource Centre (PrC)**, part of the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. PrC aims to connect scientifically sound research and practitioner experience of cross-sector partnerships to aid sustainable and inclusive development. If you would like to suggest projects, profiles, methodologies or themes for next year's section, please contact me at: [Schouten@rsm.nl](mailto:Schouten@rsm.nl)



# Creating, Sharing and Connecting Knowledge



## THE PARTNERSHIPS RESOURCE CENTRE

ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT  
ERASMUS UNIVERSITY



**A**s in previous years, *The Partnerships Resource Centre* (PrC) is happy to sponsor the ARSP Research Section. We are a specialist research centre at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. We envision a more sustainable and inclusive world in which business, civil society and governments each play an important role to create collaborative and inclusive solutions for complex societal issues. Our aim is to connect scientifically sound research and practitioner experience of cross-sector partnerships to aid sustainable and inclusive development.

### How Do We Go about Doing That?

We create, share and connect knowledge on partnerships for sustainable development. Knowledge is created in our research projects, shared in our training and learning programs, and connected through our network. The ARSP community is a vital part of this network. We are very happy to be part of this group, with which we share so much interests, ambitions and motivations.

To give you a taste of what we do: in the past year, we have published several academic articles on partnerships and related issues, we have been active in the Dutch *PPPLab*, we have evaluated the Rabobank-WWF partnership, have taught several workshops and courses, and we have participated in the *Remote Partnering project* with the *Partnership Brokers Association*. And this is just a sample – find out more on [www.rsm.nl/prc](http://www.rsm.nl/prc).

We gladly welcome engagement in current and future projects from the ARSP community all over the world. Contact Managing Director Marieke de Wal to discuss opportunities for interaction: [mwal@rsm.nl](mailto:mwal@rsm.nl). Follow us on Twitter: [@RSM\\_PrC](https://twitter.com/RSM_PrC)



**THE PARTNERSHIPS RESOURCE CENTRE**  
Understanding partnerships for sustainable development



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# Towards Quality Partnerships for the SDGs

## Researching Meta-Governance for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

In this article, we feature a recently concluded research project on Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development. The project had three phases, analyzing the effectiveness of transnational partnerships (2006-2009), researching their local-level projects in fragile areas (2010-2013), as well as identifying lessons learned and meta-governance for partnerships (2014-17). The project was part of the DFG-funded collaborative research center SFB700 on 'Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood' and was hosted by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) Berlin. More information can be found [here](#) (SFB 700) and [here](#) (SWP).

### Early Findings

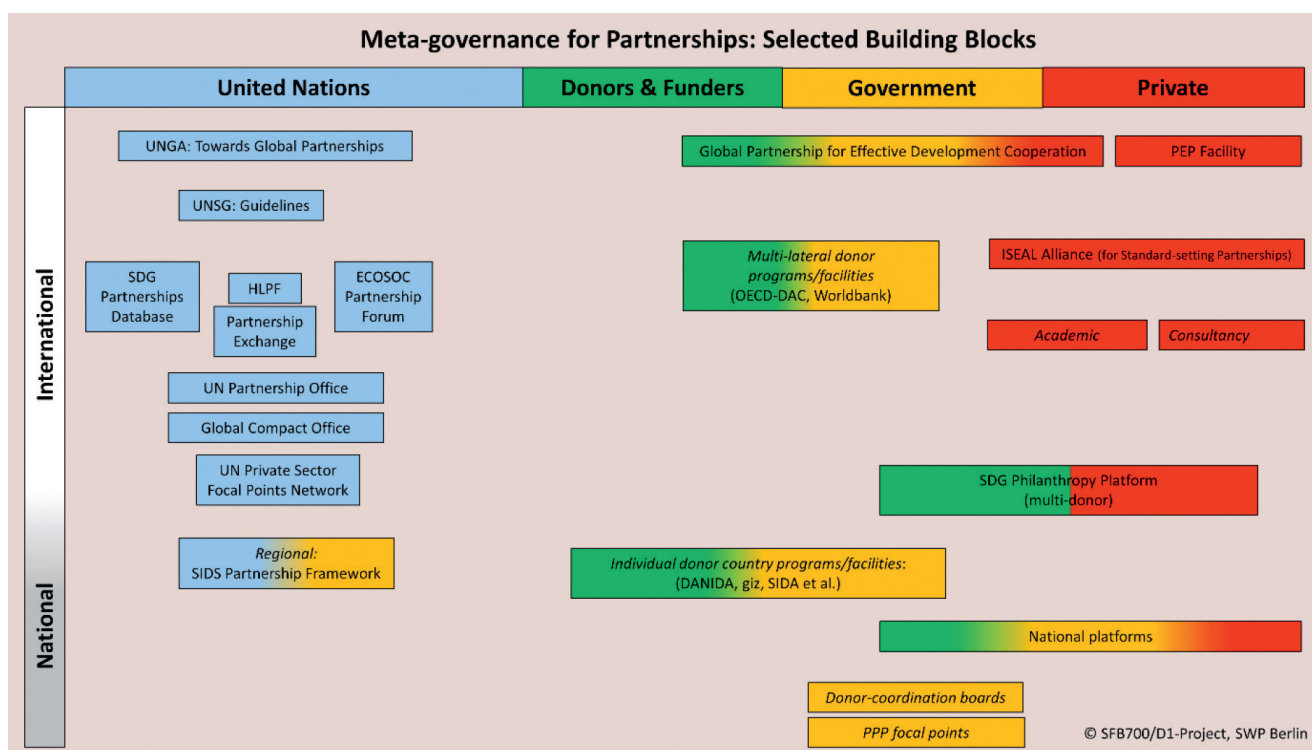
Following the surge of partnerships after the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 2002, this research project started by exploring the effectiveness of 21 transnational multi-stakeholder partnerships in delivering governance services (covering environmental, health and social issues). The findings of the first two phases of our inquiry posit partnership effectiveness as contingent on the institutional design and – as field research in South Asia and East Africa revealed – the partnerships' fit to local context<sup>1</sup>.

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) renew commitment to partnerships, with SDG 17 postulating effective partnerships as one key means of implementation. Moreover, the 2030 Agenda's objective of "Transforming our World" elevates aspirations

towards their performance. Partnerships are expected to not only reflect on structural systemic deficits, but also to provide "fit-for-purpose" solutions, for example by transforming markets and "leaving no one behind." Next to being inclusive, the 2030 Agenda calls on partnerships to become more accountable, in particular regarding their contribution to national development priorities. These aspirations thus beg the question of how previous experiences may inform partnerships to build and strengthen these qualities.

### Lessons Learned and Meta-Governance for Partnerships

In the third and final phase of the project, we took up upon this question and asked whether and how relevant actors turn lessons learned into "meta-governance" to assist partnerships in becoming fit for implementing



the SDGs. We drew on scholarly concepts that define meta-governance as “governing of governing” or “organization of self-organization”. In particular, we focus on institutionalized frameworks, such as principles, (funding) criteria, guidelines, or other standards and rules for partnerships and their activities, which can be both, enabling and ensuring the quality of partnerships, and carried out at different levels, by state, intergovernmental as well as non-state actors<sup>2</sup>. We analyzed if and how actors adapt existing or design new meta-governance frameworks, comprising overarching rules intended to guide, accompany and evaluate partnerships.

Our empirical research focused on views and activities by actors (1) at the UN level, (2) by donors and funders, (3) by actors at the national level, using Kenya as an example, and (4) by private initiatives. We conducted interviews with about 60 institutional actors<sup>3</sup>, analyzed documents (e.g. project information or evaluations), and participated as observers in several events (e.g. partnership fora).

### The Reality of Meta-Governance: A Patchwork

Our respondents concurred that better partnerships are needed for realizing the SDGs (except for a few interviewees that reject partnerships altogether). Incidents of partnership meta-governance can be found at different levels

and for different kinds of partnerships (see figure 1). Overall, they portray a patchy picture rather than a coherent multi-level meta-governance framework.

Representatives from the UN system and member states frequently ask for better support for partnerships and increased accountability measures to deal with reputational concerns. UN Secretary-General Guterres seeks to strengthen support of member states in fostering partnerships by the UN Office of Partnerships (UNOP) and the UN country teams. As for accountability, partnerships from outside the UN system are asked to voluntarily self-register with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)’s online platform “Partnerships for the SDGs”. They are requested to observe the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resource-based, with Time-based deliverables), to submit annual reports, and invited to present during an annual “Partnership Exchange”.

Our project presented practical suggestions for improvements at the 2016 Partnership Forum of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the 2016 Partnership Exchange during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)<sup>4</sup>.

## FEATURED PROJECT

For example:

- > Member states should review and update existing principles and guidelines for UN-led partnerships that then should be applied coherently throughout the UN system;
- > Mandatory reporting requirements could be developed for partnerships with direct involvement of UN agencies;
- > For all other partnerships, existing voluntary measures should be strengthened.

Donors and funders started to align existing and develop new funding frameworks and services to better assist partnerships in implementing the SDGs<sup>5</sup>. The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, for example, launched the “Promoting Effective Partnering” (PEP) Facility to support quality partnering. Other donors and funders document efforts to help partnerships overcoming challenges regarding government ownership, accountability and inclusiveness. The Danish development agency’s (DANIDA) new market development program, for example, directly funds local partners, and asks partnerships to leverage domestic resources and foster closer collaboration with national governments.

Such support seems necessary as we could identify only a few national governments that actively set-up platforms or guidelines to make better use of partnerships for attaining national and sub-national development priorities, some of them with the help of the SDG Philanthropy Platform, a multi-donor initiative. Illustrated by the cases of two water partnerships operating in the Kenyan water sector our analysis points at the potential benefits derived from national-level meta-governance, in particular with regard to gaining government or local ownership and scale for successful projects<sup>6</sup>.

We found several private initiatives that seek to elevate “best partnering practice” through promotion of broadly applicable principles and standards. For example, the ISEAL Alliance developed three Codes of Good Practice that help standard-setting partnerships to develop high-quality processes and systems based on reciprocal learning processes<sup>7</sup>. Finances, however, are a critical issue for private initiatives. Those that are organized as exclusive “clubs” stand independently because members are willing to pay for the distinction granted by membership (the “gold standard”). Where minimum standards with broader impact are concerned, it is more difficult to sustain financial back-up.







## Persisting Challenges

Despite the potential of meta-governance to enhance partnership practice, several shortcomings of both, technical and political nature, persist:

- > The primary evaluation criterion for meta-governance frameworks often remains the number of newly launched partnership initiatives rather than their quality.
- > A primary view on partnerships and their meta-governance as instruments to leverage investment persists. For example, donors' meta-governance for partnerships often continues to dedicate more resources and consideration to provisions for mitigating investment risks rather than for ensuring inclusive processes and accountability to local partners and beneficiaries.
- > Only very few meta-governance measures are integrated and embedded in a coherent implementation strategy backed up by local authority and resources.

Accordingly, the overall rather fragmented meta-governance for partnerships fails to have a major, let alone transformative impact. Finally, the present lack of coordination across individual meta-governance frameworks risks to create further fragmentation.

Overall, our findings indicate that these problems are not due to a lack of experience and knowledge but ultimately of political will and leadership. For all the debate and adaptations by the UN and donor institutions, only a few governments have seriously addressed the issue – although both, our interviews as well as current policy debate emphasize that the biggest potential for governing partnerships is at the national level. This way, current debates tend to get stuck at rather generic principles, while the details for implementation are politically controversial at both, international and national levels. This is due to disputes on principled support or opposition to the partnership approach, or on the cost-benefit ratio of regulation versus flexibility, as well as turf battles about influence and resources. Yet, without coherent meta-governance it is unlikely that partnerships will learn from past mistakes. Without that, chances are slim that partnerships will live up to the promise of “transforming our world”. Future research should explore which components of meta-governance are key for achieving transformative impact in different (national) contexts, keeping in mind barriers such as diverse and vested interests or organizational and coordination challenges.

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# Partnering as a Research Organization: a Balancing Act

**A**lthough partnerships are believed to tackle most pressing societal challenges such as climate change and food security, they usually come with various challenges like illustrated in this article on the work of the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS). The interviews with Bruce Campbell, CCAFS Program Director, and Philip Thornton, CCAFS Flagship Leader and Principal Scientist, highlight the balancing act when a research organization engages in partnerships. CCAFS research organizations have to dedicate resources to building partnerships without losing focus on actual research, loosen their standards without compromising reputation, and meet targets without skimping on the more complex and longer-term activities.

CCAFS is the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security. CCAFS is a global agriculture research partnership to 'promote climate-smart policies, practices, and services that enable agriculture to meet the triple goals of food security, climate change adaptation and food security' (*CGIAR website*). Bruce Campbell is Program Director of CCAFS and a staff member of the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). Philip Thornton is Flagship Leader of the "Institutions and Policies for Climate-Resilient Food Systems" Flagship.



*Bruce Campbell*



*Philip Thornton*



## Introduction

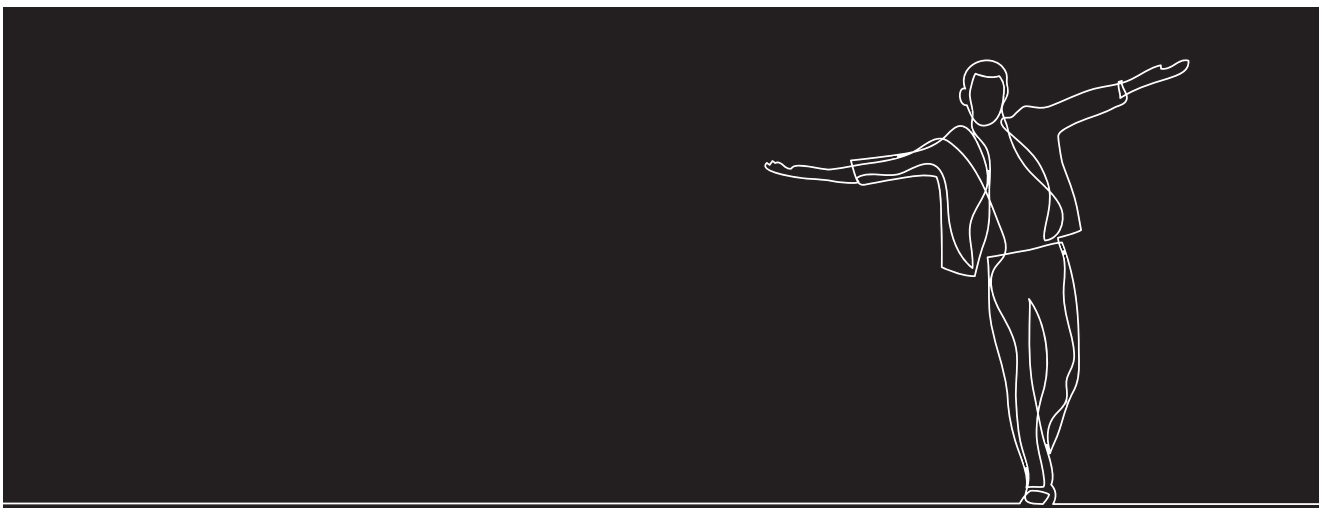
Climate change and food (in)security are among the most pressing challenges of this era. These problems are complex in nature, and affect actors and institutions across various sectors and scales<sup>1</sup>. As with many issues, partnerships are oftentimes presented as panacea to these challenges. For example, the **UN-FCCC secretariat** states: “In recognition of the powerful potential of partnerships, the UNFCCC secretariat welcomes the opportunity to engage and collaborate with all stakeholders to achieve the aims and ambitions of the Paris Agreement, Convention and Kyoto Protocol”. The **UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** on its website similarly argues that “partnerships are at the heart of FAO’s mission to help build consensus for a world without hunger”.

Despite the deep-rooted belief that partnerships can help tackle our most pressing societal challenges, partnerships should not be uncritically embraced. Organizations often have differing agendas, speak different languages. Working in partnerships thus inevitably requires harmonization, trust, and explicating aims and agendas. A fine balance consequently needs to be struck between gaining the benefits of collaboration while keeping in check several organizational challenges<sup>2</sup>. Research partnerships can be specifically challenging, for instance because time frames between research organizations and other organizations may differ, and researchers may be required to undertake additional non-research activities.<sup>3</sup> Research partnerships thus need to embrace certain methodologies and approaches to make the most out of collaborations.

The main message from the conversations is that partnering as a research organization is a continuous balancing act.

To learn about the management of these issues by research organizations and their collaboration with other partners, I explored the activities of the largest research consortium in the field of agriculture and climate change: The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS). CCAFS consists of 15 collaborating Research Centres across the globe, which are all engaged in numerous partnerships with governments, businesses, and civil society for the implementation of its research to realize an impact on local communities and the environment. I spoke to Bruce Campbell, Program Director of CCAFS, and Philip Thornton, Flagship Leader and Principal Scientist with CCAFS.

My conversations with Campbell and Thornton revealed four main challenges and related responses in order to make research partnerships around agriculture and climate change work: planning and agendas, capacity differences, research and other activities, and context specificity and results based management. The main message from the conversations is that partnering as a research organization is a continuous balancing act: dedicating resources to building partnerships without losing focus on



## FEATURED ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP

actual research, loosening standards without compromising reputation, and meeting targets without skimping on the more complex and longer-term activities.

### Planning and Agendas

Within partnerships, agendas and planning need to be streamlined, at least to some extent. Different organizations have different time horizons, agendas, and deadlines. Partners may organize meetings on their own initiative, in which other partners are expected to participate. Power and resource differences play an important role here; the agenda of a large institution like the World Bank is more inflexible compared to a local NGO's planning. The most powerful partner generally seems to be in the best position to orchestrate the agenda of the other partners. As each organization has its own agenda, CCAFS Centres reckon in certain 'transaction costs' – time and resources – for joint problem definition and trust-building among partners, although this might reduce resources available for actual research. Even the concept of climate change can have completely different meanings for each partner. Campbell explains that having a joint understanding of the problem is key to successful collaboration. Therefore it can be advantageous for the Research Centres to be choosy in the actors they engage in partnerships with, as interest alignment and trust-building is easier among actors that are acquainted and get along well.

Because research generally requires a relatively long time horizon, planning can be particularly challenging and important for research organizations. The time frame to achieve outcomes and impacts for CCAFS Centres consequently needs to be often quite opportunistic. This requires flexibility to adapt plans and preferences if needed, and change from X to Y because Y will bear more fruit. But CCAFS is sometimes still more rigid and inflexible than desired. Thornton: "When there is a really good opportunity, there is often sort of inertia in the system that makes it a bit hard to jump on something new." Like Campbell states: "For researchers [this flexibility] is sometimes really difficult because they worked on X for their whole life and don't like to change to Y". Thornton emphasizes that team

composition can be helpful in this regard: people should build teams composed of people with different qualities, in order to remain flexible and keep up with wider developments.

### Disseminating Scientific Findings

For research organizations like the CCAFS Centres scientific data is their means of existence. Collaboration naturally means engaging with partners who have differing capacities and different levels of appreciation of scientific data. One way for CCAFS researchers is to be pragmatic and loosen their preferences and standards at times in order to have an impact. This is a challenge, as the Centres also have to stay close to their core tasks. CCAFS is known worldwide for its excellent research, and this valuable reputation should be preserved in order not to compromise its success. Thornton: "It is a true balancing act. We do need good quality science, because if CCAFS is no longer seen as provider of good quality science, everything else will fall into pieces". Often CCAFS engages in partnerships with governments and consequently has to deal with policymakers with limited time for in-depth studies or limited interest in scientific data. In that case, CCAFS researchers have to make their results "impossible to resist", in the words of Thornton, with which he means that researchers have to frame their findings in an attractive way. "Try to understand what your potential purchasers of information are really interested in, to learn what you can do to raise their interest".

In partnerships CCAFS Centres are often entrusted with capacity building, also within partnerships. However, CCAFS staff can never be sure about the maintenance of capacity during and after projects, due to the risk of staff turnover both within CCAFS and in partner institutions. Campbell explains how rapid staff turnover is a problem because it means having to start again. Again, CCAFS Centres can proactively counterbalance this risk by factoring in "transaction costs" for capacity building purposes throughout the partnership. Furthermore, to limit the extra costs involved in staff turnover and limit the risk of losing institutional memory, Thornton mentions how talking to different people on a regular basis might enhance involvement and acquaintance with the project. In addition, CCAFS regularly organizes outreach activities including communications, webinars, and meetings to enhance support for and knowledge about projects among

CCAFS researchers have to make their results "impossible to resist".

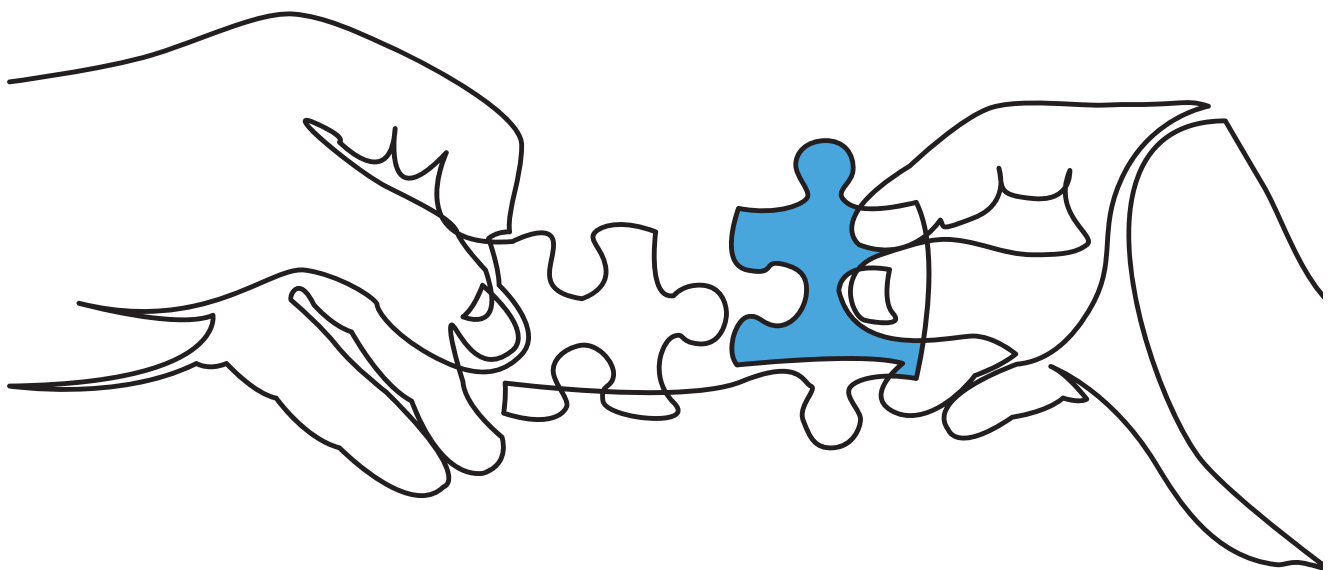


organizations and individuals involved. Again, however, this needs to be done carefully, as it is simultaneously undesirable to involve too many people, as this makes the partnership very heavy and might kill the project.

### Research Alone is not Enough

Although research is CCAFS' core business, exclusively undertaking research is insufficient as scientific papers do not automatically translate in changes on the ground. In the words of Campbell there is an important ethical reason for working in partnerships: "We receive money from development funds, this should be committed to where the development happens, by means of partnerships with local partners." Furthermore, he argues, research organizations should work back from the situation on the ground and start from what is required in terms of research and partners to address the problem. Partnerships can help in that regard. Apart from being a challenge, the interviewees also highlight how working in partnership is a highly fascinating and useful undertaking. Partnerships are worth the effort, according to the interviewees, as they help to bring important research findings to the ground. CCAFS is one of the few entities which actually successfully links academic research to activities on the ground, according to the interviewees.

To link research to reality, Campbell explains how CCAFS works according to the so-called 'three-thirds' principle: "If you want to achieve outcomes, you should spend a third of your time building relationships, understanding the problem and coming up with a product to address the problem, a third on the actual research, and a third at the end on getting the message out and strengthening capacity to use the research results." The challenge however is that academic institutions traditionally struggle with building relationships and dissemination, as they are set-up to deliver mainly on publishing in high-end journals such as Nature and Science. To succeed in achieving outcomes and impact, Thornton explains how the Centres strategically compose their teams of people who have different competencies, which need to be more diverse than pure academic research. "This is massively challenging, but it can be very rewarding as well". In addition, CCAFS strategically forms teams by putting together actors that complement each other. This goes both for complementing partners within partnerships as well as for individuals within CCAFS. As such, the partnership becomes like a mosaic wherein some actors specialize in research, while others invest in relationship-building or focus on information dissemination.



Partnerships are like a mosaic wherein some actors specialize in research, while others invest in relationship-building or focus on information dissemination.

### Context-Specificity and Result-Based Management

Although CCAFS has a vast institutional experience in partnering, the institution does not work with general guidelines for all CCAFS Centres. However, the management team comes together regularly to discuss lessons learned. In the words of Campbell: "One could spend a lot of time on drafting guidelines on capacity building, partnerships, et cetera, up to the point where this becomes an end in itself, rather than actually getting out in the field and doing something". In addition, general guidelines are useless due to great differences in contextual contingencies. For instance, partnership dynamics are completely different in countries with highly centralized governments and little space for civil society as compared to more open and decentralized systems. CCAFS thus adopted results-based management. Each Centre has the freedom to organize its activities as it likes, as long as it delivers on its results. If not, the CCAFS management team cuts the budget. To succeed, partners on the ground must understand the local context, political situation, and the landscape of players. Strategic selection of partners thus is a prerequisite for success, and therefore very important.

The advantage of a results-based form of management is that it provides a rather transparent and objective way to evaluate projects. This allows for accountability of the project towards its financiers: taxpayers all over the world. Furthermore, it makes the Centres attractive potential partners for other organizations because it allows the Centres to demonstrate their impact and their value. The potential downside of a results-based approach is that it encourages a preference for the easier, short-term projects at the expense of more complex and longer-term activities with uncertain outcomes. Thornton explains how he tries to create a mix of different projects: "This is a bal-

ance that needs to be found [...] we try and take a portfolio approach with a good mix of all sorts of projects".

### Conclusions

Partnerships to address climate change and food insecurity are a challenge to research organizations, but can be very rewarding as well. The conversation with Bruce Campbell and Philip Thornton demonstrates that a partnership approach becomes more feasible and workable when taking into account various matters. The most important lessons include that flexibility and strategy are required. Furthermore, working in collaborations come with certain transactions costs – extra time, money, and additional activities – that need to be factored in for every project. To limit these transaction costs organizations should pick the right partners and put the right people in the right positions. Strategic selection of partners and individuals contributes to creating a complementary team, increasing knowledge of the local context, and limiting time needed for trust-building and streamlining goals and preferences. Working in partnerships is a constant search for trade-offs, and can therefore be considered a true balancing act.

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**PROUDLY  
MADE IN  
AFRICA**

# Why Now, More than Ever, We Need to Get it Right

An Interview with Vikki Brennan, Director of Proudly Made in Africa

## Introduction

Fred Yamoah (FY) and Adolf Acquaye (AA) interview Vikki Brennan (VB), Director of Proudly Made in Africa (PMIA). The interview seeks to shed light on the nature of PMIA's partnerships with stakeholder groups across different sectors and how these partnerships address inherent barriers limiting the enhancement of socio-economic sustainability of agricultural producers in sub-Saharan Africa. Throughout the interview, Fred Yamoah and Adolf Acquaye provide reflections on the various issues that arise from the discussion. The aim is to reflect on practice using the extant management and cross-sector partnership literature.

## Interview

**FY/AA:** Thank you Vikki Brennan for accepting to talk to ARSP about PMIA. To start, please provide us a brief background of Proudly Made in Africa.

**VB:** Proudly Made in Africa is 10 years old this year. We started in 2008 as a social enterprise called Value Added in Africa and so, we adopted very much a "trade not aid"



Image: Vikki Brennan

## THEORY-PRACTICE INTERFACE

business model. We consider ourselves as trade facilitators. We are registered as a charity in Ireland and incorporated in the UK as a non-profit organisation.

Our work is three pronged. We do a lot of capacity building with agricultural producers on the ground. Then we do a lot of buyer-facing activities to build demand in markets in Europe. The third angle is dissemination of information amongst the general population in Europe and business circles in Europe and Africa.

We focus on Africa because we are trying to build markets and build demand for value-added African products in Europe. PMIA's ultimate vision is that, we hope to foster an enterprise culture that will mean that trade facilitators like ourselves become obsolete in the future because trade relationships would have been naturally built between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe.

**FY/AA:** Please provide us some background to the conditions or reasons leading to the formation of PMIA. What were the main drivers?

**VB:** Our founders, who come from a development education background, felt that development, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa did not seem to be making inroads as quickly as it needed and that although people in the region were gaining good education, there was still lack of employment opportunities for them. PMIA felt that, the best way to eradicate poverty and have lasting and sustainable development is through job creation via sustainable trade relationships so that people have a chance to earn their own livelihoods and lift themselves out of poverty.

**Theoretical Reflection:** It a long-held view that inter-organisational partnerships evolve as a response to certain external environmental conditions<sup>1-3</sup> such as competitive pressures<sup>4</sup> and power dynamics in supply chains and institutional pressures<sup>5</sup> like international trade barriers. Unlike typical organisations that are driven by these pressures to explore partnerships for survival, PMIA was started by founders with development education background who found the existing international trading system unfavourable to developing country partners. Rather than the drive to resolve public problems due to sector failure, PMIA's approach was initiated on the founders' passion to

The best way to eradicate poverty and have lasting and sustainable development is through job creation via sustainable trade relationships so that people have a chance to earn their own livelihoods and lift themselves out of poverty.

contribute to development by way of collaborating with sub-Saharan African partners and their developed country stakeholders. Given this rationale for setting up PMIA, it can be deduced that it is not the case that all social partnerships are directly formed as a response to the prevailing environmental conditions and sector failure.

**FY/AA:** Who are PMIA's key stakeholders? What is your relationship with them and PMIA's role in the entire partnership?

**VB:** Our key stakeholders are diverse, but the main ones are: Producers on the ground in sub-Saharan Africa and Europe-based Retailers. We get the retailers interested in what we do through big conferences, seminars, debates and trade shows. We use other stakeholders, like the Ethical Trading Initiative (an NGO that promotes respect for workers' rights around the globe) to also get the necessary exposure. We also run trade shows where we bring African producers to Europe to talk about their products. Our other key stakeholders are universities in Ireland such as University College Dublin, who host our PMIA Fel-







lowship in Business and Development. This partnership provides our programme with academic credibility. This fellowship programme, which is about six years old seeks to stimulate interest on business and development in sub-Saharan Africa amongst business schools in Ireland.

Finally, we also consider our funders (mainly Irish Aid and individual donors), the general public in Europe and business circles in Europe and Africa, trade promotion boards across many African countries, the European Union and national governments as a part of our primary stakeholders.

**Theoretical Reflection:** One important inference that can be drawn from the responses regarding stakeholder relationships and the role of PMIA is that such multi cross-sector partnerships are succeeding because PMIA is a legitimate convenor (see<sup>6,7</sup>) that clearly understands the problem and how to address it. It is shown that the success story so far in these relationships is not because of other antecedents in the literature such as the presence of existing networks<sup>8</sup> and powerful sponsors<sup>9</sup>.

**FY/AA:** What was the rationale for pursuing these partnerships with these stakeholders and how has PMIA gone about forging agreements? Could you also describe types of agreements?

**VB:** PMIA is a facilitator but it cannot do everything. If you are going to bring a second or a third-party facilitator in, they have to be adding something that we cannot do ourselves. PMIA does not have bodies on the ground. Our network is strongest in East Africa, because that is where the majority of our good producers are located although we do not have people based in Kenya or Uganda or Tanzania. Therefore, what we do is we look for partners who are either local and based full time in-region or have a strong presence on the ground.

We also use individual contractors and subject-matter experts, especially in Kenya and Malawi where we often work with some locals such as young graduates. We prefer our partnerships to happen organically and that is why we do so much work on dissemination in order to get our name out there.

We also build relationships using the existing networks of people, who come into contact with PMIA and so we

## We prefer our partnerships to happen organically.

build on their knowledge, expertise and their contacts as these help to give us leads in certain directions.

**Theoretical Reflection:** PMIA's model on forging agreements and building relationships reinforces the existing literature that suggests the need for different types of agreements<sup>10</sup> and subsequent review of agreements as the terms of engagement change overtime. A unique difference in the PMIA model however is that contrary to the view that initial agreements are more likely to be reviewed as collaborations grow in order to cover far away partners and diverse actors<sup>11</sup>, the key collaborators for PMIA, right from the onset were diverse actors and geographically dispersed producers in sub-Saharan Africa.

**FY/AA:** Based on how the partnership works, can we describe it as project-led partnership relationships spear-headed by PMIA?

**VB:** Yes, that will probably be a pretty accurate way of describing it. We do talk to producer partners about what their goals are. So anytime a producer approaches us and says, "I'm interested in international export", we ask them why they are interested just to make sure that we can manage their expectations. Some of them think that, "I want to get to the export market because I want more money". Often the export market would not yield more money, but it might yield more sustainable way of doing business. Exporting may even out a business' peaks and troughs, enabling you to plan better, have a more consistent income and meaning that you can, for example, have regular employment of the workforce, so you are not scrambling for labour every time an order comes in. Once the goals of the organisation are aligned with what we think is realistic for the size of the organisation, then we agree to work with them. This is very much producer-led. Then the needed capacity building activities can be established.

**Theoretical Reflection:** Juxtaposing the processes and organisational structure of the PMIA-led cross-sector partnerships on its decade-long success story confirms the

## THEORY-PRACTICE INTERFACE

research evidence that the chances of cross-sector partnerships to success is very high when they have dedicated benefactors and effective champions at many levels who provide both formal and informal leadership<sup>9</sup>. The extant literature also confirms that collaborative partners (a group or individuals) require both “formal and informal authority, vision, long-term commitment to the collaboration, integrity, and relational and political skills”<sup>6,7,9</sup>. In the case of the PMIA-led cross-sector partnerships it appears that the role of the Chief Executive Officer and key Funders like Irish Aid and the University College Dublin perfectly fit Crosby and Bryson’s<sup>9</sup> description of two critical leadership roles (Champions and Sponsors) that enable collaborations to achieve its goals. Champion (PMIA CEO – “focus intently on keeping the collaboration going and use process skills” and Sponsors (Irish Aid and the University College Dublin) - have considerable prestige, authority, and access to resources they can use on behalf of the collaboration, even if they are not closely involved in the day-to-day collaborative work.

**FY/AA:** Describe the governance structure of the partnerships. Do you adopt more of self-governing structures in which decision-making occurs through regular meetings of members or through informal and frequent interactions?

**VB:** I think the biggest challenge for us when we are managing our networks and our relationships and even the governance of those networks and relationships is that we are not on the ground where those networks are. So our biggest challenge is getting the time for personal interaction with the producers, because once you sit face-to-face with someone you can explain things much easier and build the necessary trust and partnership. So that to me is the biggest challenge. Another constraint is getting funding to get out into the producer regions.

**Theoretical Reflection:** The type of governance structure influences cross-sector partners effectiveness<sup>12</sup>. The choice of a lead organisation (PMIA) that oversees major partnership decision-making and coordinating operations instead of adopting self-governing structures or a network administrative organisation as proposed by Crosby and Bryson<sup>9</sup> is rather obvious, judging by the history of the cross-sector partnerships. Indeed, “trusting relationships are often depicted as the essence of collab-

oration”, say Crosby and Bryson<sup>9</sup> and PMIA-led cross-sector partnership takes building trust seriously. It is very interesting to note that with the PMIA model, building trust is also used as a critical tool to sustain engagement with networks that are geographically dispersed from the lead facilitator – PMIA based in Dublin, Ireland. It can be proposed from this successful working practice that trust overcome distance when it comes to managing widely dispersed cross-sector partnerships.

**FY/AA:** How do you measure partnership performance? Do you use any specific performance indicators and what accountability systems do you have in place to ensure that inputs, partnership activities, and outcomes are built on transparent and professional relationships?

**VB:** We have two big performance measurements metrics. Firstly, successes are measured in terms of the value of export orders landed by the producers. Just to take



a step backwards, at the start of a three-year cycle, we will identify producers that we are going to work with for those three years and we will break it down into the activities that we are going to do with them.

For me, the bigger performance measures are in terms of the value of the export orders year-on-year and how does that translate into job creation? These would be the two biggest measures because they are the ones that are directly tied to SDG8 (our core focus) and the jobs created in the regions we operate.

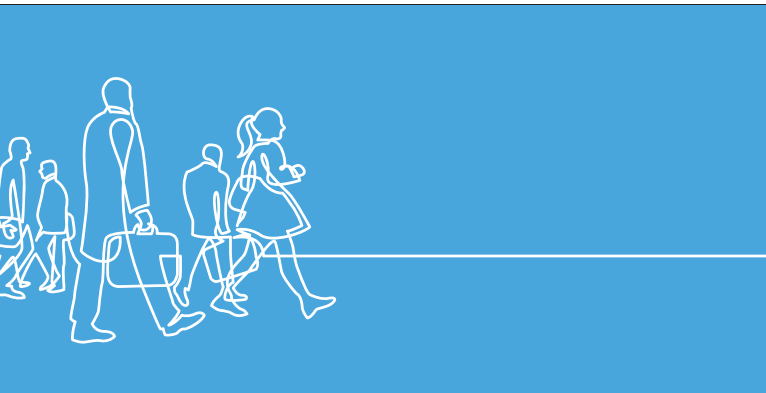
**Theoretical Reflection:** Social partnerships require effective performance and accountability systems to track processes and outcomes<sup>13</sup>. The evidence adduced to above points to the existence of measurement metrics

## We are not what I call a ‘sexy charity’.

and accountability systems between various partners and at different levels of the network and very likely to have contributed to its success over the decade of its existence and operation.

**FY/AA:** Do you also look at other KPIs, such as new networks formed or new partners who have joined in?

**VB:** We used to have that as one of the major indicators when we were growing the network but while we do not consider ourselves to be fully mature just yet, we are definitely out of that initial start-up phase. It’s less about bringing new partners into the network now and more about working for the partners that are in the network already to get them established and to get their goals achieved.



**FY/AA:** Are there any additional information or any area that you think will be useful to let the readers of ARSP know about the work of PMIA, or something we are yet to cover that you think will be interesting to capture?

**VB:** I suppose the biggest thing for us is we are funder reliant. We are not what I call a “sexy charity” as we are not building hospitals or sending kids to school or curing sickness. Everything we do goes back to the goal of the organisation, which is to create employment so that people can lift themselves out of poverty. Once that happens, the concept of charity changes and then hopefully the old charity model becomes just as obsolete as the trade facilitators that supported changing it. This is our ultimate goal.

**Theoretical Reflection:** Drawing from the tenets of institutional theory, “an organization that seeks to acquire the resources necessary for survival must build legitimacy by making use of structures, processes, and strategies that are appropriate for the institutional environment”<sup>14</sup>. The way PMIA-led cross-sector partnerships leverage the apparent weaknesses and the seeming fatigue on the part of contributors to charities as well as the general ineffectiveness of international aid to engender global development is an interesting, rational and laudable means of justifying the existence of the network. Simply put, it operates to facilitate trade towards achieving the SGD 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all).

**FY/AA:** Thank you very much. It has been very insightful.

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# “Use that Power”: How Academic Research on CSPs Can Be Used to Transform Systems

An Interview with Erinch Sahan, Head of the Private Sector Team at Oxfam GB.

Until April 2018 Erinch Sahan was the Head of the Private Sector Team at Oxfam GB. Reflecting on his experiences as he prepared for a new role heading up the World Fairtrade Organization, here he talks to Lauren McCarthy about how he works across sectors, including large NGOs, grassroots organisations, the private sector and government, and how NGO-business interactions have changed over the years. Erinch further reflects on how academic research into CSPs could be used in a more transformative way- to push agendas and influence key change makers.

**Lauren McCarthy (LM):** How does Oxfam GB engage in cross-sector partnerships?

**Erinch Sahan (ES):** Our starting point is always where can we make transformations, and have impact for people living in poverty. We’re operating in a very complex system where so many actors and stakeholders are impacting the issues that we care about. So they might be women’s



Image: Erinch Sahan



empowerment in developing countries, or workers' rights in supply chains, or smallholder livelihoods, or deforestation... there are all these issues, so we work with a mix of businesses, sometimes government organisations, other NGOs, and almost always local organisations, to figure out how we can move the needle on these issues. And it will depend on who we think will be the most impactful, and who's in the position to be a bit more bold and ambitious in the changes we want to try.

**LM:** In the seven years you've been working at Oxfam, how do you think the ways NGOs work with private sector organisations has changed?

**ES:** It's changed immensely. And there are probably two separate drivers for that. One is to drive impacts and transformations. So if you want to impact the lives of people living in developing countries you need to recognise that it's often the businesses around them that impact them, and that we can influence and work with. That area has definitely grown, collaboration between NGOs and businesses, where sometimes there's a joint incentive. The second driver is that there has been an increase in funding relationships [between NGOs and businesses]. Even though philanthropy has always been there, what's grown is that in the last five to ten years we've had aid budgets that insist, often, that business be part of the solution. And that has meant that the development agenda has moved in that direction. The biggest fear, for most development practitioners, is to be labelled anti-private sector. Often a lot of government funding has hinged on the ability of an NGO to work with businesses, and demonstrate that they are commercially savvy enough, and realistic enough, to work nimbly with certain companies.

**LM:** And how did you yourself get into working in this space?

**ES:** My journey's been a really complicated one. I started off in business, in Australia. Then I worked in corporate law, before going into Proctor and Gamble as a market strategy manager. I then got interested in development issues, so I volunteered in a refugee camp in Ghana. And that took me to the Australian government, where I worked for several years, again mostly on market-based solutions to poverty. And at Oxfam, my careers had all the flavours of the business-NGO crossover: everything from working with com-

panies on specific solutions where there's going to be a 'win-win'; to critiquing companies and challenging them very publically, sometimes very uncomfortably, on their impacts; to work on multi-stakeholder initiatives where I sit on various advisory committees. And I'm now going to be moving to The Netherlands for a new role leading the World Fairtrade Organisation!

**LM:** You are the poster-child for cross-sector partnerships! You've almost worked in every single version of organisational partnership role...

**ES:** I have... But if you are generally curious about what the role of business is, and how does business need to transform if we want to alleviate poverty, in a sustainable way, you end up dabbling.

**LM:** Moving to the role of academia in all this, do you partner with individual academic researchers, or institutions, to do any of your work? Or is it more likely that you'll pick up evidence online after it's been published?

**ES:** A lot of my Oxfam colleagues will have a network of academics who work on certain issues that they'll engage with, informally but very regularly. There are people who are asking questions in academia that benefit from what we're seeing in development, and where there might be case studies or places to focus their research on. And vice

The biggest fear, for most development practitioners, is to be labelled anti-private sector. Often a lot of government funding has hinged on the ability of an NGO to work with businesses, and demonstrate that they are commercially savvy enough, and realistic enough, to work nimbly with certain companies.



## INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICE

versa, we get loads out of keeping our finger on the academic pulse. And some academics have got an activist zeal to them, and some of them can be very tactful in the way in which they use that. For example, when academics use the research process itself to start shaping the agenda. When they're talking to business leaders, organisations, government figures, as part of their research, and they sometimes use that process to signal to people that this is important, this has been an overlooked issue.

And we do also have formal partnerships. We've done very specific research with academics on climate change, on women's empowerment, on business issues. I also speak at universities, so engaging with students too.

**LM:** It's a nice two-way process, then, when you reflect on it. How does your team use academic research in practice?

**ES:** We use it to legitimise issues, to make sure we're working on issues that are genuinely the problems that we think they are. In very complex situations, like women's empowerment, because it includes so many systems- social, political, economic, academic research helps us gain certainty and focus. But also on solutions as well. When we can point to academic evidence that a certain approach or business model has worked, that really adds a lot of wind to our sails. Whether that's through a campaign, or a pilot, a partnership or a grassroots programme. It's always harder for us because academic research tends to take a long time. And we need to know solutions a bit faster, so we'll do impact assessments that can happen a lot more quickly. But if we want bigger generalisations about an intervention we do look to academia. But I always hope it could be a bit quicker in giving us answers into the most topical, recent developments.

**LM:** So this leads us to some of the challenges in working with academic research...

**ES:** The most challenging bit is the ability of academics to, or the inability of academics, to focus on where the agendas have shifted. Questions that might have been important five years ago, have passed. It's unfortunate but it happens. For example modern slavery came up out of nowhere five years ago, then government became interested so it became a framing for a lot of supply chain issues. Academics who were already working on [supply

chains] were able to capitalise on that, but others could have maybe re-framed their approach to become more relevant for this slightly shifting agenda. They didn't and became less relevant as a result. So I think it's more about the extent to which researchers are able to reshape their focus in order to take advantage of where agendas have gone.

The second issue, and this is very much from my perspective, is that I think academics could be a bit more politically aware of some of the opportunities they have to influence individuals, agendas, etc. Sometimes just from writing a very simple blog, or a shorter piece that takes an element of someone's research and communicates it well. That might be a surprising fact, it might not be a main idea they want to showcase in academic circles, but in policy circles highlighting a particular thing might be very useful. So being able to see that, and then being able to use those processes of engagement and dissemination, to influence the agenda. I think there are so many opportunities on that front.

When we can point to academic evidence that a certain approach or business model has worked, that really adds a lot of wind to our sails. Whether that's through a campaign, or a pilot, a partnership or a grassroots programme.

**LM:** I agree, and I think sometimes what we academics don't realise is that something that seems obvious to us, or old-hat, if we take that learning to a new audience, or a new discipline, that's actually very interesting and potentially useful. So for example I've been doing work on unpaid care work and supply chains. Now, to a development audience this is old news, but when you start talking about this to a business audience it's relatively new. And so, I do think we need to get better at framing our work and communicating it to different audiences in a better way.

**ES:** There's a cartoon that was on a colleague's desk for a while, that demonstrated that. There's a bear and it's about to attack these two campers. And one of the campers leans over and starts putting their shoes on, and the other one says 'what are you doing, you're not going to out-run the bear?' And the other one says 'I don't need to out-run the bear, I need to out-run you'. And I think ideas are a bit like that. Ideas don't have to be perfect or completely fool-proof in every way, but they need to be better than the next one, and out there. And that will get traction. So in academia, you've already won that race. You've got the ideas, but now it's about HOW rather than the WHAT. And let's focus on that, because we have enough evidence, let's move on. Evidence itself is not always the thing that moves people, sad to say, they're not swayed by evidence alone, but what kind of ideas will resonate with that individual and that could feed into various structures. And that involves a level of political thinking that might be beyond the remit of academic, but if and when they incorporate it they could really shift the world.

The most challenging bit is the ability of academics to, or the inability of academics, to focus on where the agendas have shifted. Questions that might have been important five years ago, have passed.

**LM:** Absolutely, and academics tend to spend so much time and effort trying to prove something, presenting strong, water-tight evidence. But actually what a lot of NGOs are trying to do is communicate an often emotional message. To encourage people to think about a new issue, or donate. And they are very different ways of communicating. So I think we have a lot to learn in how academics work with NGOs.

**ES:** Yes, but I think perhaps not all academics do want to influence in that way, perhaps they do want to just dive deep into an area, producing more and more knowledge without thinking about how that knowledge is shaping

You've got the ideas- but now it's about HOW rather than the WHAT. And let's focus on that, because we have enough evidence, let's move on.

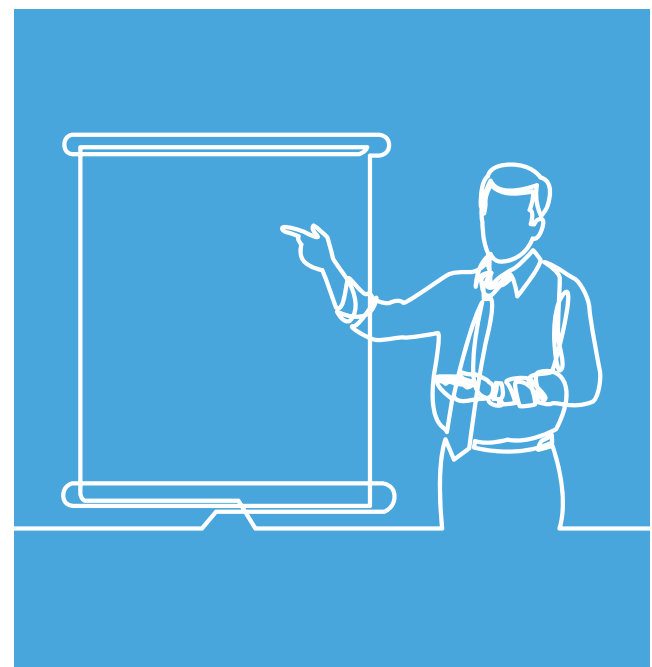
the future of our species and planet. But the academics who do shift into a more political mind set, can use that power, because they have a lot of influence, a lot of legitimacy, access, networks, and brand names, including the universities that they're associated with. They could use all that in a very nimble way to shape trajectories of where we're headed.

*You can read more about Oxfam's diverse work with the Private Sector [here](#).*

*Erinch also reflects on the collaborative/campaigning dichotomy in his [chapter](#) here.*

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# Partnerships as Governance Mechanisms for Sustainable Change<sup>1</sup>

## An Observation to Start With

Most of our partnership research efforts have gone in single or small-N case studies. At the PhD workshop of the 2018 CSSI symposium in Copenhagen I observed that this trend will most likely continue. Almost all of the PhD students presenting their papers focused their research on particular cases. The positive effect is that, through abstracting from this empirical research, we know a lot about the creation of value in cross-sector collaborations<sup>2</sup> and about the factors that contribute to the development of effective partnerships<sup>3</sup>. However, this is still a rather restrictive view on effectiveness. Partnerships are generally considered successful collaborative arrangements if the participants are able to utilize complementary resources and mobilize capabilities to address issues that they would not be able to deal with individually. But such research tells us little about partnerships as a new mode of socio-political management of societies, their potential as catalysts of progressive societal change, and their contribution to the governability of issue areas or sectors in the political economy. In this short paper I will share some of my observations on these topics based on a governance perspective on partnerships. From this perspective, cross-sector arrangements are seen as one element, among other intervention strategies, in a process of change. Thereby I will emphasize the importance of a problem-driven approach combined with a governance systems approach.

## Partnerships Take Part in Economic Struggles

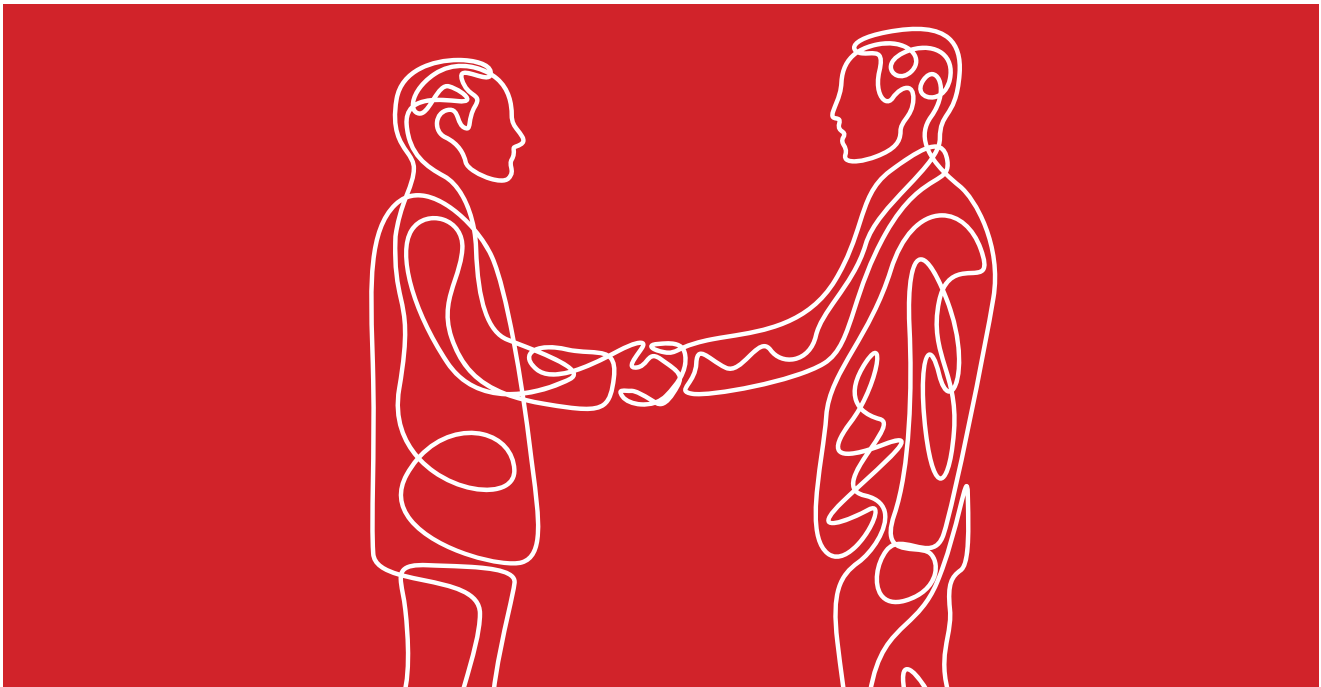
The 'partnership society'<sup>4</sup> has become a fact in little more than two decennia. Partnerships are commonplace now, they have introduced a new way of governing, and they intend to be important agents of social change. This is

particularly visible in issue areas such as forestry, fisheries, the production of agricultural commodities, tourism, public health, fairer labor conditions, protection of biodiversity, and energy transitions. Moreover, the global Sustainable Development Goals are supposed to be realized with the involvement of many cross-sector arrangements. However, if you look from the outside to the world of partnerships you can see that many arrangements were both initiated ad hoc and expanded ad hoc. Governments and international organizations still lack a strategic policy on partnerships. Competition, overlapping and duplicated ambitions are omnipresent, particularly in value chain partnerships. This competition might be assessed as a sign of vitality of liberal democracy, but the results up to now are more product differentiation and attractive niche markets for more sustainable specialties or practices, but not (yet) a fundamental change in the value chain or issue area. Here we see that partnerships are not neutral tools but have become part of the economic struggle for market power.

## Partnerships Pragmatically Accept Differences

As a mode of social-political management many partnerships aim 'to speak truth' to vested powers. However, the relationship between partnerships and governing authority is a complex topic. An interesting phenomenon is that the power possessed by certain partners (e.g. lead firms in value chains) is often the reason why other actors (NGOs) want to partner with them in the first place. Remarkable is also that almost all partnerships that I have studied are able to equalize power differentials *inside* their arrangement, at least temporarily. Yet, this may give a false impression





of power neutrality. The fact that power is exercised only becomes visible in an indirect way, especially in the feasible options that are considered for change and in what is not discussed. Particularly regarding business-NGO partnerships, we should realize that NGOs are participating in collaborative arrangements to change the practices of the market, not the other way around<sup>5</sup>. Thereby they often accept a pragmatic way forward in the hope for more stringent principles and practices later on. In many partnerships that I studied, collaboration was only possible by pragmatically accepting differences, refraining from what might easily turn into an ideological debate on sustainability, and leaving out controversial issues. Just a few examples: In the Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS), the debate about genetically modified production was neutralized by excluding the issue from the standard which the RTRS developed<sup>6</sup>. Crucial partners in the Kimberley Process refused to discuss human rights infringements, which are regularly connected to the production of rough diamonds in repressive states<sup>7</sup>. Partnerships thus tend to take a reformist approach to sustainability based on consensus that is not expected to harm economic interests, instead of a more radical interpretation of sustainability<sup>8</sup>.

In my view, we have entered a phase in which it is not the individual partnerships that are problematic, but the market of partly overlapping and competing standards that they produce. This is particularly visible in markets where

partnerships produce labels for sustainable production processes. When buying sustainable coffee, cocoa or tea, consumers expect to do something good for the environment and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. However, because of the variety of arrangements it has become impossible to understand the nuances of the different sustainability claims. Producers, particularly smallholders, also do not understand this diversity of standards anymore<sup>9</sup>.

### **Towards a Problem-Driven Approach**

In my latest research project with four Indonesian PhD students on the social and economic effects of palm oil, coffee and cocoa standard-setting and certifying partnerships in Indonesia, I struggled with the related question of whom we serve with our partnership research. A literature review showed that most research aims to answer

A problem-driven approach first analyzes the sustainability problem and then studies what partnerships might be able to contribute compared to other possible interventions.

the question how partnerships are formed and unfold in practice, and to what extent they are able to realize their objectives. Such, what I call, 'managerial' research seems to implicitly accept the problem definitions of the mainly Northern-based initiators of the partnerships. In the case of value chain partnerships, these are external actors to the specific realities, constraints and opportunities of farmers and other actors in developing countries, whose daily practices they aim to change. Recommendations for improvements based on this research generally address the question of how the partnerships can be improved. The relevance or desirability of partnerships as an instrument for change is therefore hardly scrutinized. In the Indonesian project I became aware that the vital question should not be how to optimize partnerships, but how to address a specific sustainability issue – in this case, how to realize sustainable agriculture which improves the livelihoods of farmers; with or without the incentive of partnerships. Such a problem-driven approach would first analyze the problems that smallholders struggle with, within the embedded context of the needs, interests and preferences of the farmers involved and then seek to answer the question of what partnerships might be able to contribute compared to other possible interventions<sup>10</sup>. In Indonesia, we found that smallholder farmers benefit little from the extra revenues of a certified product; they hardly understand the Western ideas about sustainability; they see certification primarily as a marketing tool; and the same positive sustainability effects on production can probably also be realized with a better training in good agricultural practices. This research made me aware that economic sustainability needs to be the basis of any sustainable change in value chains. Therefore, we first need incentives that improve farmers' production and income. Better environmental and social conditions contribute to this but are also opportunities that can only be realized with the creation of better economic prospects.

### **Towards a Governance System Approach**

This brings me to my last and related comment regarding the contribution of partnerships to the governability of issue areas or economic sectors. Governability addresses the question of the contribution of partnerships to problem solving. The term governance system refers to the set of actors and regulations that are related to an issue and often also to each other. Such a system demarcates how rules and policies are made, reformed, interpreted,

Framing partnerships as elements in a governance system shifts the focus to their relative contribution to problem solving in relation to and in interaction with other public and private regulatory responses.

implemented, and enforced. Framing partnerships as elements in a governance system shifts the focus to their relative contribution to problem solving in relation to and in interaction with other public and private regulatory responses. This also highlights their pathways to impact. Amidst other regulatory interventions partnerships may substitute, complement, reinforce or weaken a governance system. This information may help us to answer the question of which governing functions (e.g. agenda setting, policy development, implementation and metagovernance) partnerships fulfill and how they can be made an effective part of a larger governance system to enhance sustainable change. Or even to answer the question whether there are not more effective ways to invest in governance capacity than through partnerships. In my research, I observed that partnerships invariably do not replace existing regulatory arrangements but add institutional complexity. They do so in different ways in different governance systems. A governance system analysis may help to unravel the complexities and to develop more effective governance systems<sup>11</sup>.

### **A Single Message to End With**

I still regard cross-sector collaborative arrangements as promising mechanisms to initiate sustainable change. What I put on the table are some of my uncertainties. If there is any message that I want to convey, it is one of our identity as partnership researchers and practitioners. We are particularly robust as social engineers; in creating knowledge about the social technology to build partnership arrangements. Sometimes this comes at the expense of a critical and distanced appraisal. What we need to realize is that the partnership society is both a *fact* that we can study and sustain, and an *ideology*, which can be qualified as functionalistic and pragmatic and which we

The partnership society is both a fact that we can study and sustain, and an ideology, which can be qualified as functionalistic and pragmatic and which we do not necessarily need to accept uncritically.

do not necessarily need to accept uncritically. Accepting the partnership society can easily result in ignorance of the inherent political character of and tensions in strategic decision-making for crucial social problems, of which partnerships are part. The ultimate question is not how we can improve partnerships, but how we can make societal problems more manageable and solvable by working in and with partnerships as one of the crucial strategic choices for progressive change. I argue that there is a need for partnership research to pay greater attention to the governing capacity of cross-sector arrangements in interaction with other regulatory attempts in the same issue field.

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ANNUAL REVIEW OF  
**SOCIAL**  
**PARTNERSHIPS**

# COMMUNITY

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by Vivek Soundararajan

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# Cross-Sector Collaboration to Address Extreme Forms of Human Exploitation in Business

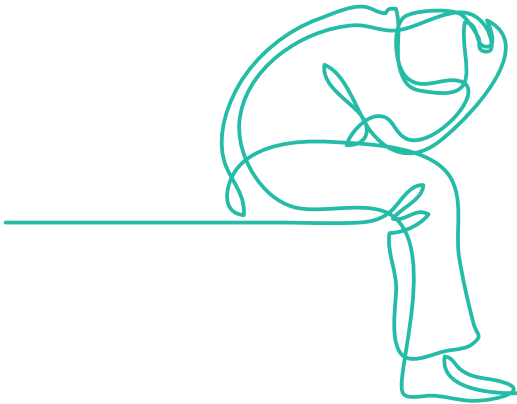
Extreme forms of human exploitation have reappeared in business practices in the form of forced labour, child slavery, human trafficking and debt bondage. A recent *estimate* by the International Labor Organization (ILO) suggests that there are around 25 million laborers experiencing extreme exploitation. Nearly 65% of them are exploited by private sector industries including construction, garment and agriculture, and around 16% are exploited by public sector industries.

Matters related to extreme human exploitation and their eradication are at the forefront of deliberations among academics, businesses and policy makers. There is an increasing pressure from the civil society, consumers and media (e.g. “Modern-day slavery in focus” section in the *Guardian*). Supra-national institutions such as the United Nations and ILO are introducing dictates to end forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking in member countries. The governments across the globe are developing and implementing regulatory measures (e.g. the modern slavery act in the UK). Businesses are increasingly adopting governance measures (e.g. codes of conduct and social auditing).

Notably, three eradication approaches have gained particular attention, namely international treaties and

conventions, regulations, and social audits. However, treaties and conventions will remain ineffective unless states create domestic laws and are willing to enforce human rights. Similarly, international regulations like the Modern Slavery Act (2015) in the UK will remain ineffective if they remain domestic and if the onus is on multi-national companies. Without coordination with other jurisdictions and other actors in the supply chain, these international regulations remain narrow in their application.

These contributions concurringly argue that cross-sector collaborations can be an effective alternative to other initiatives aimed at addressing extreme exploitation in businesses. Nevertheless, there are many practical challenges to bringing together actors across sectors.



Social audits have not been particularly successful in the arena of extreme human exploitation, as they are not legally binding and their implementation requires appropriate deliberation process and well-defined incentives.

And while it is rather impossible for any single actor to address human exploitation by themselves, every sector has unique resources and capabilities to contribute to the eradication of exploitation. For example, local community can help identify the location of extreme exploitation and its perpetrators; NGOs can help develop victim care programs; law enforcement officials can help enforce law and protect fieldworkers and victims. The list can go on.

Consequently, the argument put forward in this issue's community section is that cross-sector collaboration is a better alternative to identify and eradicate extreme forms of human exploitation in business. We present three distinct contributions from academics and practitioners to shed light on the opportunities and challenges for cross-sector collaboration aimed at addressing this complex, yet urgent issue.

In the first contribution, I interviewed Prof. Andrew Crane, a leading academic expert on the topic of modern slavery. In this interview, he talks about his interest in cross-sector collaboration and extreme human exploitation, and offers interesting insights on how cross-sector collaboration can help address the issue. He also talks about the challenges in making it work, especially as actors can have different interests and agendas. Overall, such initiatives still seem to be in an experimental mode. Finally, he highlights how business academics can add great value to research and practice related to addressing this complex issue.

In the second contribution, Md Nazmul Hasan interviews Robin Brierley, the Chair of the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network in the UK. In this interview, Robin talks about the establishment and evolution of West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network, and elaborates on interesting research-informed initiatives developed by this network. Further, he shares his reflections about the challenges around building such cross-sector networks and ways for addressing them. Last but not least, Mr. Brierley offers important insights on how consumers and academics can play a crucial role in addressing extreme exploitation in business.

In the final contribution, Dr. Sarah Glozer, a digital ethics expert, explains how big data can be useful in addressing human exploitation. She argues that through its descriptive, predictive, prescriptive and discursive functions, big data can bring together actors across sectors and help address complex issues like extreme exploitation, humanitarian crisis and poverty. Dr. Glozer concludes her piece by posing important questions about the dark side of big data.

Overall, these contributions concurringly argue that cross-sector collaborations can be an effective alternative to other initiatives aimed at addressing extreme exploitation in businesses. Nevertheless, there are many practical challenges to bringing together actors across sectors. The intentions and expectations of these actors may differ thus posing multiple challenges for the collaboration's effective engagement. As our experts mention, we are just beginning to understand how to make such initiatives work. We hope this section triggers more conversations around them!



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# Interview: Cross-Sector Collaborations to Eradicate Extreme Human Exploitation in Business

## Andrew Crane

**is a Professor of Business and Society at School of Management, University of Bath.** He is particularly known for his work on the changing role of the corporation in the global economy, where he has been influential in developing a new view of corporate citizenship that addresses the political roles and responsibilities of business. He also focused on how ideas of ethics, freedom, and responsibility are communicated and made meaningful by corporations, consumers and other stakeholders through talk and text. Finally, his work has also addressed specific application areas of corporate responsibility, such as forced labour and slavery, competitive intelligence, responsible marketing, nonprofit partnerships, and responsibilities to children. Vivek Soundararajan spoke to him about how and under what conditions cross-sector collaborations can help eradicate extreme human exploitation in business.







**Vivek Soundararajan (VS): Can you please tell me a bit about your experience in working on cross-sector collaborations and extreme human exploitation?**

Andy Crane (AC): I have been doing a research on cross-sector collaborations for basically my entire academic career. I started off during my PhD in the 1990s looking at some early forms of environmental cross-sector partnerships. Particularly, I was looking at the **Forest Stewardship Council** and its implementation in the UK through what was called the **WWF 95 Group** - a group of retailers working with the WWF to introduce sustainable wood, paper and pulp products. Suddenly, I was really interested and excited by this new phenomenon and I published a little bit on it in the late 1990s, early 2000s.

Then my interest stayed around and it became part of the environment in which we all did research on corporate social responsibility. I didn't do any specific projects around cross-sector partnerships until I started supervising May Seitanidi. May is very passionate about this subject and she has been a great thought leader in this space. So, working with May on her research, we developed some interesting ideas around that. For myself, it was constantly a theme in my research without necessarily being about specific projects.

In recent years, I have been interested in this phenomenon of labour exploitation, particularly extreme forms of forced labour or modern slavery. That started off as very phenomenon-based research with me bringing different theoretical resources to it. There is clearly an interconnection between the two – cross-sector collaboration and modern slavery. But frankly, it is not one that I have really mined that substantially. There is a constant cross-over, as clearly to deal with these problems of exploitation, partnerships are a part of the solution. But, we are just scratching the surface of this research around modern slavery and extreme exploitation from the management perspective at least. Partnerships is one of the areas that I'm very keen to develop in that space.

Maybe three or four years ago, I did one of these pecha-kucha style sessions on modern slavery and the opportunities for cross-sector partnerships research at the Academy of Management conference. I think that was

nice, as people around the table such as yourself got involved in this research. Now, there is an emerging group of people who are starting to research in this space.

**VS: Why is cross-sector collaboration important to address extreme human exploitation?**

AC: The obvious reason is that this is a complex and difficult problem. If we think about it simplistically, it is about a bunch of bad guys doing bad stuff. You can take a prosecution-type approach to get rid of them. But essentially, central questions here include: what are the conditions that lead to people being vulnerable to these forms of extreme exploitation? What are the conditions under which organizations or enterprises that are very resourceful start moving into more extreme forms of exploitation? It is not just about evil people; it is about contexts which make these things feasible. So, when we move towards that direction, we can see that people are vulnerable to these situations because of factors like poverty and discrimination. If you want to deal with those things, you can't just say, let's change the regulations or let's change the pricing structure of the company. These are difficult, complex intractable problems that we need to work across sectors to deal with. So, that is a straight forward answer. We have very a complex problem, so we have to have complex solutions across sectors.

Beyond that, I think pragmatically, it is clear that there are many different actors involved in this issue. 10 years ago, it was not even really on the agenda. People were talking about trafficking and companies were not really present in that conversation. Trafficking was an immigration issue primarily needing governmental responses. Lots of NGOs were involved. But now this is increasingly being talked about as forced labour, modern slavery and extreme labour exploitation. These are labour practices. These are things that are happening in organisations. So, we need to treat it as a business problem. Business has a stake in causing this and in solving it. So, empirically, we can see there are different actors who are all taking positions on this. And, the more collective the response to this problem, the more likely we are to succeed.

**VS: I agree cross-sector collaborations are very important to address such complex issues. So, what are the challenges in making it work?**



## INTERVIEW: ERADICATING HUMAN EXPLOITATION

AC: Yeah, the usual problems. I think with respect to this issue in particular, nobody would say, slavery could be a good thing. There is no doubt about it. But, it can be an attractive issue for some, and unattractive for others. For example, the UK government has been throwing its weight into this space because they see it as a way to deal with immigration issues and deal with something that everyone thinks is important without having to necessarily impose too much additional regulation on business. Some governments are very resistant, particularly in developing countries. For example, the Indian government would say that modern slavery does not happen in India. When you see the Global Slavery Index, India is a country with the most amount of slavery. Such rankings can have an impact on your trading status and aid status as a country. So, it becomes very important politically whether you are defined as having this problem or not.

Then, when it comes to business, on the one side, they are quite happy to engage with this issue, because like I say, it is modern slavery, it is a few criminal elements that are doing this outside of our normal business. We just need to cut out that little core of miscreants. So there is an attraction in that sense. But, on the other side, the fear of having their brand tainted with slavery means that even being involved in anti-slavery efforts might be an issue. So, it can be a challenge for really engaging with businesses.

Another challenge is that the NGO community and a variety of actors who are looking to be active in this space come with very different agendas. The religious right on one side is using the current attention to modern slavery to press their claims to, for example, eradicate prostitution completely. The far right is using it to eradicate immigration. Trade unions are using it to increase their influence in getting greater recognition for labour rights. Very different actors are using this same issue, the same phenomenon, to push their different agendas. With modern slavery, you can be against it, but have a very different idea about what "against it" should mean, depending on which side of the political spectrum you are on.

**VS: Are there any positive stories where it actually worked?**

AC: We are still in an experimental mode at the moment. But, there are some great projects done by organisations

such as *Verité*. They are doing some great research in this space, working with companies to identify some of the problems and start to deal with them. We have seen companies like *Patagonia* engaging with NGOs to try and identify the risks in their supply chain and also bringing on new policies around responsible recruitment. There are the *International Labour Organization* and the *International Organization for Migration* working with companies and with governments to start developing responsible recruitment schemes. What is really interesting in this space is that we can see a lot of private foundations funding research, initiatives and interventions to try and tackle the problems, which are often interventions designed by researchers, by NGOs, and sometimes by companies. So, there is a lot that is happening across sectors. And no company is going to enter the modern slavery space without partnering because it is just too risky.

**VS: My final question. What is the role of business academics in this issue?**

AC: You know in my previous work, I have always been the guy who – in the business school – was the ethics expert. I built a particular set of knowledge based on my understanding of corporate responsibility tools and theories to understanding business problems. In the space of modern slavery, I play a very different role. In this space, I am the business expert. I am bringing my expertise in business, strategy and organisation to understanding this phenomenon. That is quite a different set of tools and that is what is really necessary because lots of people are active in this space who know so much about some of the effects of exploitation, know so much about some of the other broader social turbulence that lead to it, know so much about regulation. But, what they don't know about is how businesses operate and why they need to engage in these types of extreme practices. It is not simply a labour cost solution. That is only one part of it. We miss the complexity of the problem. Business expertise, I think, is what we can bring to this issue rather than necessarily our expertise in corporate responsibility or ethics or sustainability. That is a different identity, but I think it is an exciting one as well, because we are bringing an understanding of what we know about business theory, management theory. It is about using management research for good.



By Md Nazmul Hasan  
*Lecturer in Strategic Management  
Faculty of Business and Law  
University of Northampton, UK.*

# Tackling Modern Slavery in the UK: What are the Challenges and Opportunities in Terms of Multi- Stakeholder Initiatives?

## Robin Brierley

is Chair of the **West Midlands Anti Slavery Network** (UK). He provides expertise in relation to Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Immigration to all sectors including the Public, Private and Third sector. Md Nazmul Hasan spoke with him about how the West Midlands Anti Slavery Network engages in multi-stakeholder partnerships to tackle modern slavery and some of the challenges it faces along the way.



## INTERVIEW: MODERN SLAVERY IN THE UK

**Md Nazmul Hasan (MNH): Why was the West Midlands Anti Slavery Network established? And what were the objectives?**

Robin Brierley (RB): The West Midlands Anti Slavery Network was established in about 2010 in response to a Methodist church funded project to look at human trafficking in Birmingham. It became an organisation in its own right three years ago, which is a not-for-profit community interest company.

Initially the objectives were very much victim focused. The Network relied heavily on those agencies that the Home Office had listed as being first responders, which included the police and the local authorities. They had to carry out their responsibilities in terms of being first respondents identifying victims. So, there was a huge training need at the beginning. It was initially thought that period would take just a couple of years whereas, in fact, the reality is that the local authorities have just started to recognise their obligations in the last two years.

**MNH: Tell me a bit about your role within the Network and the initiatives you are currently taking to tackle modern slavery in the area.**

RB: I am the executive director. We have a board within the organisation that consists of a professor of psychology from the University of Westminster, a director within HM Revenue & Customs, and a fundraiser who currently works for the University of Birmingham.

We received funding by the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner. We can also attract funding from other sources. Recently, we were funded by Public Health England to do research on the access to public health for female Albanian victims of trafficking. We did that in West

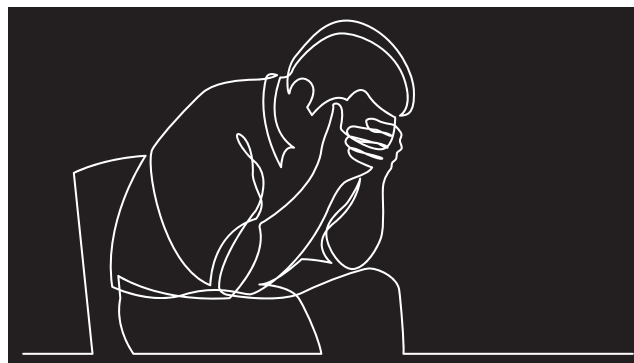
The second challenge is, engaging with a particular organisation or statutory sector organisation is very much down to the person as opposed to the organisation.

Midlands and we hope that the results will be published soon in the Public Health Journal.

**MNH: As an organisation the Network works with a range of stakeholders. For example, it works with West Midlands Police Service, the local authorities, Salvation Army and International Organisation for Migration (IOM). So what were the initial challenges around building partnerships with these stakeholders and how did you address them?**

RB: Initially there were a lot of challenges, and we have become quite good at overcoming them. For example, we have an effective membership scheme through which a large number of organisations attend meetings and are able to network and build knowledge including information exchange. However, attendance is not mandatory, which is different from the Counter Terrorism Act where it is mandatory for the police and local authorities to work in partnership. So that is the first challenge. The second challenge is, engaging with a particular organisation or statutory sector organisation is very much down to the person as opposed to the organisation. So you have to identify the right person. For example, there might be West Midlands fire service who are fortunate enough to be put in touch with a leading fire officer or a station commander who absolutely recognised the need that the fire service has got a role to play.

I think the other challenge is that modern slavery is probably the most complex subject or crime that I have ever encountered. I used to work for the Serious Organised Crime Agency and I am an independent consultant on trafficking immigration. I have managed large-scale drug trafficking investigations and covert investigations. But modern slavery is the most complex and challenging one [see below]. Part of our role is supporting those agencies



that potentially have a number of other roles and responsibilities as well as modern slavery in their agenda. Modern slavery is just one of them, whereas modern slavery and exploitation is our core work. So our key challenge is ensuring that we keep all our members up to date with legislation and policy and procedure changes and knowledge of modern slavery, and the different business areas within it.

**MNH: One of the common arguments on modern slavery is that it cannot be tackled if the demand side is not controlled or monitored. What are your thoughts on that? What initiatives need to be taken to make consumers more aware about the downside of modern slavery?**

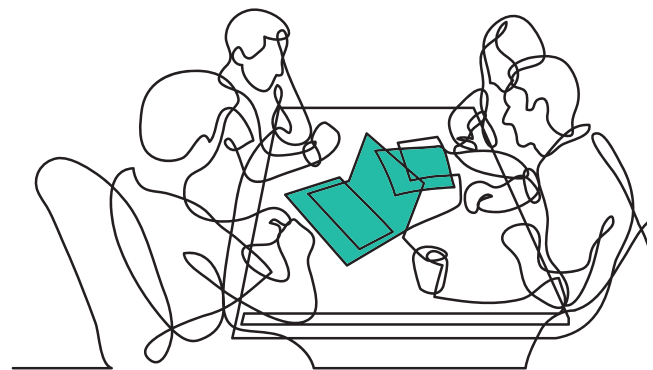
RB: I think we need to think specifically about who we mean by consumers because modern slavery does include domestic servitude, trafficking for criminal exploitation, and labour exploitation. The consumers for each one of those are vastly different, and in some cases are not connected whatsoever. If you were to choose one of those areas, that would be the one perhaps for labour exploitation.

So how do we influence the consumers? I guess the one way to address labour exploitation is within the Modern Slavery Act itself. It does have Section 54, which is the transparency in supply chains. Companies have to publish what they are doing to ensure slavery and exploitation does not feature in their supply chains. At the moment, in my opinion, that has no real teeth around it. But what it does do is give the consumer an option that if a particular company has written in their statement they are doing nothing, it does give the consumer the option not to shop there and to shop from a comparatively ethical company.

**MNH: How can the consumers practically support an organisation like the West Midlands Anti Slavery Network to tackle modern slavery?**

RB: We see the West Midlands Anti Slavery Network as being the one door of the many organisations. Whether somebody wants to contact somebody from law enforcement, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) or HM Revenue & Customs or Salvation Army, Red Cross. They can come to our Network and we can signpost them, and

All our work, whether it is from the law enforcement or the victim care perspective, there is a real role for academia to play, especially in evaluation of our work, not just partnership work but evaluation of the work in general in modern slavery.



ensure that they are getting the absolute right person with the knowledge of that business area as opposed to phoning a generic helpline for example. That also includes local authorities and community safety partnerships willing to help as well.

But again, kind of linking it to the previous question, who are the consumers? You might say consumers are actually companies themselves or industries. We are currently looking at how we engage better with industry and for what purpose and what that looks like. Industry includes self-employed plumber right up to multinational companies such

## INTERVIEW: MODERN SLAVERY IN THE UK

as KPMG who are based in the West Midlands too. So how do you engage with them? Whose role is it? Is that solely the responsibility of the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority or is it down to the law enforcement and police? And for what purpose? We are looking at that. But certainly for the consumers and the public, we try to publicize what we do, for example via our website ([www.westmidlandsantislavery.org](http://www.westmidlandsantislavery.org)) or social media.

**MNH: From your perspective, which role should academics (and academic organisations) play to tackle modern slavery?**

RB: I think academics play a big part in this. All our work, whether it is from the law enforcement or the victim care perspective, there is a real role for academia to play, especially in evaluation of our work, not just partnership work but evaluation of the work in general in modern slavery nationally and internationally. However, more academic contributions in this area are relevant to practitioners and add value to their work, especially in influencing legislation and policy change.

I would like to add one last piece on the role academic institutions can play to tackle modern slavery. After a recent conference, University of Birmingham approached us. They thought about offering employment opportunities to victims of trafficking. That was quite exceptional as I had not heard a university taking such initiatives. So that is a good opportunity for us as we know, academic establishment including the University of Birmingham is probably one of the biggest employers of that region.

I think this is a good opportunity to ensure that the universities' own supply chains are free from exploitations, and that in addition to research, they are looking at employment opportunities for victims of trafficking because they are such a diverse employer. There are not just nine till five academic type jobs, there are many jobs within the universities 24 hours a day that would accommodate victims of trafficking. I think that it would be dreadful if the universities were doing some amazing work on research into slavery, yet on their own doorsteps within their own organisation there was exploitation and trafficking.

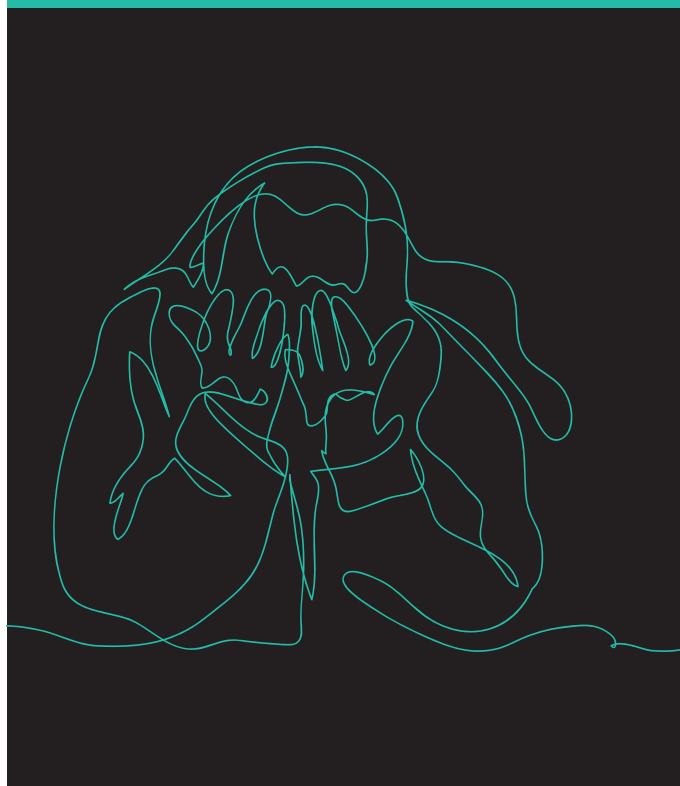
**MNH: Thank you for your time and support with this interview.**

**Information Box: Modern Slavery in the UK**

'The Home Office estimates there are 13,000 victims and survivors of modern slavery in the UK; 55% of these are female and 35% of all victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation' – *NHS England*

Modern slavery: Modern slavery is the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation. Individuals may be trafficked into, out of or within the UK, and they may be trafficked for a number of reasons including sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude and organ harvesting (*NHS England*).

**Modern Slavery Act 2015**, UK: The Modern Slavery Act gives law enforcement the tools to fight modern slavery, ensure perpetrators can receive suitably severe punishments for these appalling crimes and enhance support and protection for victims.





By Sarah Glozer

Associate Professor in Marketing,  
Business and Society, School of  
Management, University of Bath,  
United Kingdom.

# Casting the Spotlight on Human Exploitation: The Light and Dark Sides of Big Data

*Big data, broadly understood as high volume, velocity and variety information assets that demand cost-effective and innovative forms of decision making<sup>1</sup>, are increasingly shaping interactions between market, civil and state sectors. Against this backdrop, I explore the opportunities and risks of big data for social partnerships.*

Last year I joined the Andrew Crane and Dirk Matten author team on *Business Ethics: Managing Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability in the Age of Globalization*<sup>2</sup>, along with Laura Spence at Royal Holloway University of London. We are now halfway through updating the fifth edition of the textbook, bringing in new cases, contexts and conceptualisations.

It's been an enjoyable but steep learning curve; taking on a seminal text but adding in our own voices. It has also been a process that has encouraged me to reflect on my own interest in business ethics in the digital sphere, particularly how 'big data', or advanced 'data analytics'<sup>3</sup>, might help or hinder society's pressing issues, including human exploitation and disempowerment. I see this as the 'light' and 'dark' sides of big data.

Social partnerships have been a key focus of the book since its first edition in 2004 and as I work through the text, I have been considering how big data may facilitate new kinds of collaborations between government, business and civil society organisations (CSOs) for societal good (Figure 1). This is the 'light' side of big data. To unpack the benefits of multi-sector partnerships, I draw on the work of the **Data-Pop Alliance**, a global coalition that promotes a 'people-centred' approach to the big data 'revolution' and provides a useful four-part framework to understand big data for social good<sup>4</sup>.

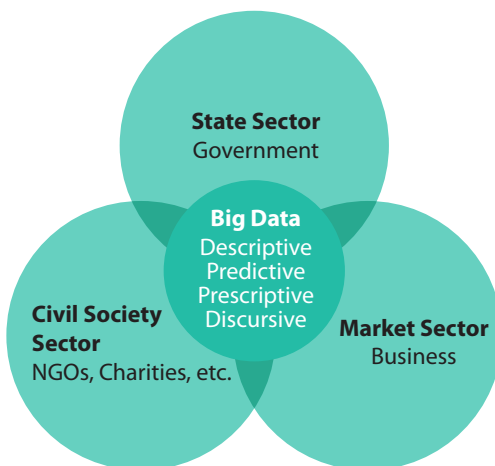


Figure 1: The light side of big data: Facilitating partnerships across market, civil and state sectors (adapted from Crane and Matten, 2016, p. 440).

## HUMAN EXPLOITATION AND BIG DATA

First, the *descriptive* function of big data involves early detection of humanitarian issues. A recent partnership under the 'Operation Red Alert' campaign has seen an Indian CSO, **My Choices Foundation**, and technology companies, come together to tackle human trafficking. Using advanced analytics applications, Indian census and additional socio-demographic data, villages in rural India that are most at risk of trafficking have been identified and preventive measures have been put in place. Here I see partnerships providing access to new information and empowering at-risk communities.

Second, the *predictive* function of big data permits 'now-casting'; making real-time inferences related to key social issues. The **Global Slavery Index**, for instance, provides an interactive map of the prevalence of modern slavery in different country contexts. Utilising data gathered across 167 countries, this visual aid helps to measure the global scale of slavery, forced labour and human trafficking. And with a large proportion of refugees being forced into slavery, the **World Food Programme (WFP)** and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have used such data to develop innovative ways to manage aid payments in collaboration with technological and financial companies. Today, in Jordan's Zaatari refugee camp, nearly 80,000 Syrian refugees are able to purchase food via eye scans instead of traditional cash or card payments. Here 'big' data inferences are translated into 'small' data support through biometric data and blockchain technology, benefitting vulnerable populations.

Third, the *prescriptive* (or diagnostic) function of big data goes beyond description to make recommendations on the basis of causal relations. As part of the US **Climate Data Initiative**, launched in 2014, a 'Social Vulnerability Index' tool was initiated to identify communities that may need support during change related natural disasters. Using U.S. census data, citizens were mapped in relation to factors including poverty, access to transportation and housing conditions and their subsequent risk levels in relation to extreme heat, precipitation and water-borne illness exposure. Promoting stronger data analysis and climate resilience, this initiative shows how preventive partnerships can avoid human suffering, economic loss, and potential avenues for exploitation.

Finally, the *discursive* function of big data sees dialogue

within and between key stakeholder groups identifying needs of vulnerable populations. **GSMA's Big Data for Social Good** initiative recognises that in disaster-prone zones, mobile operators can capture anonymised and aggregated mobile indicators, such as location, and enable relief agencies to direct resources efficiently during humanitarian crises. GSMA has developed a task force of mobile phone operators across 100 countries and an advisory panel from UN agencies and CSOs to leverage mobile operators' big data capabilities in addressing epidemics and humanitarian crises. This initiative is a living breathing example of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 (Partnership) in action, providing a clear societal vision for big data that realises the true potential of dialogue.

From these examples, it is clear that big data has the capacity to *empower, innovate, inform and advocate* for societal good across market, civil and state sectors. But what happens when our collaborators become adversaries, experiencing ethical conflict between their visions for big data? Indeed, despite such huge strides being made in the role of big data in society, scholarship is calling for new ways of thinking about governance in a digital age<sup>5</sup>. As mindful business and society scholars, what is the true cost of atomising individuals, communities and whole regions into data points? I see this as the 'dark' side of digital data and herein I see two counter-arguments to the ideas of big data for social good (Figure 2).

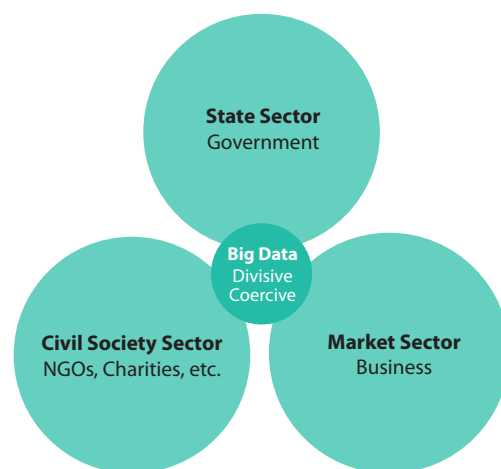


Figure 2: The dark side of big data: Destabilising partnerships across market, civil and state sectors (adapted from Crane and Matten, 2016, p. 440).





The only way to overcome the ‘tyranny’ of big data is to prioritise human-centred analytical approaches that advocate for user-centric data ownership and management, algorithmic transparency and ‘live’ experimentation with data-driven policies.

First, it has been argued that ‘big data is mistakenly framed as morally neutral<sup>6</sup> given an inclination to consider strategic and operational uses of data, as opposed to ethical appropriateness. As our reliance on data grows, and multi-sector collaborations continue, to what extent should we as citizens understand how data is shaping our daily lives? Let’s think about the ethics of ‘invisible’ algorithms here. While machine assisted learning can offer greater efficiency in understanding the potential impact of natural disasters on human health, such algorithms may also discriminate against marginalised populations<sup>7</sup>. Debate continues on the benefit of facial recognition technology, for instance, which is increasingly being used by police forces to profile criminals. Studies have proven that the tools are less reliable at profiling women and black people, leading to innocent people being placed at risk<sup>8</sup>. Such developments, or ‘imperfect biometrics’, may further entrench systemic inequalities, perhaps even exasperating extreme forms of human exploitation. Is big data *divisive*?

Second, the recent Cambridge Analytica furore has heightened public scepticism around the role of technology corporations in society, particularly in democratic processes. This case stretches our understanding of corporate citizenship, to reveal the politicisation of corporate players as powerful entities who determine what data is ‘public’ (open and accessible) and ‘private’ (intimate and secure). Here the commercial remit of much big data activity seeks to unbalance the power relations depicted in Figure 1. Indeed, within the multi-sector partnerships outlined above, where does accountability for collection, analysis, dissemination and storage of big data lie? The

new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)<sup>9</sup> which came into force in May across Europe aims to place control for data use back in the hands of citizens and governments. Yet as the commercialisation of attractive big data sets continues, we must ask: is big data *coercive*?

The only way to overcome the ‘tyranny’ of big data is to prioritise human-centred analytical approaches that advocate for user-centric data ownership and management, algorithmic transparency and ‘live’ experimentation with data-driven policies<sup>10</sup>. I invite scholars to explicitly investigate the interface between social partnerships and big data management further. I also encourage us all to interrogate the assumptions underlying the big data sets that we use, and to be more mindful of the darker sides of these attractive information sources in theorisation at the business and society interface. Practitioners and policy-makers have a role to play too. In pushing for greater ethical reflexivity in big data management, what would be the equivalent of an ethics review in an industry context? Only through more critical reflection might we begin to balance the the light and dark of sides of big data in social partnerships across market, civil and state sectors.

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# New Members



**MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD** is Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in International Development at the University of Bath. He is also a Research Associate at the Oxford Department of International Development and a Research Fellow at the Earth System Governance Project. Prior to his current position, Michael spent three

years as Departmental Lecturer in Global Governance at the University of Oxford. He has also taught at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), where he completed his PhD in International Relations. Michael's research focuses on global environmental politics with a particular interest in the role of business and civil society actors in the regulation of global supply chains. He is currently undertaking projects focused on diverse industries from gold to tea to garments. His work has appeared in leading academic journals, including *New Political Economy* and *Global Environmental Politics*, while his recently published MIT Press book, *Dirty Gold*, was launched at Chatham House in early 2017.



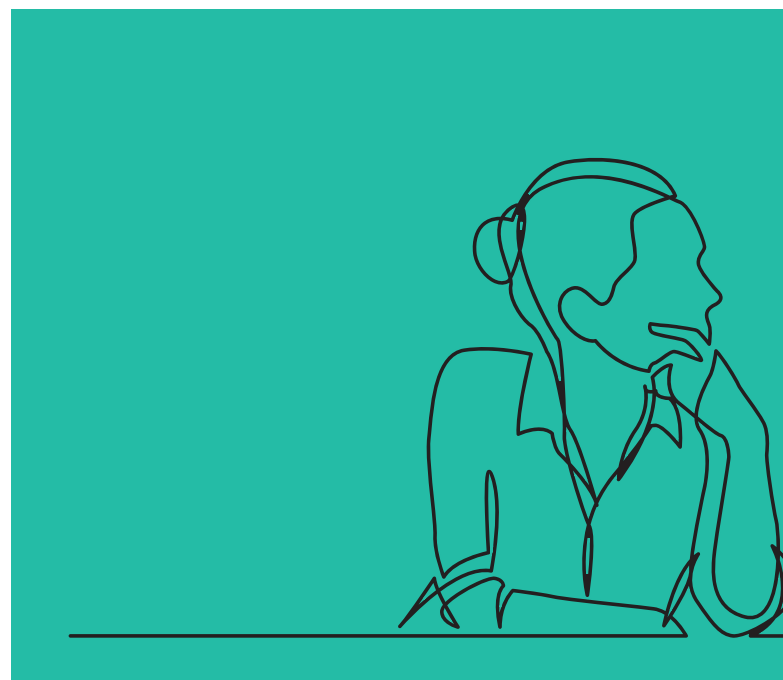
**ITEKE VAN HILLE** is a PhD student at the Department of Organization Sciences at the Faculty of Social Sciences, VU Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Focusing on multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) in the context of sustainable trade, her research interests include the role of conveners in MSPs and how

they contribute to MSP outcomes and impact. In her PhD research she applies a paradox lens to study how conveners navigate tensions at the individual, organizational and inter-organizational level within MSPs – comparing cases in the coffee, tea, and timber sectors. Prior to pursuing a PhD, she worked as a practitioner in the field of sustainable trade. Her PhD is funded by a Research Talent grant provided by the Dutch Science Council (NWO).



**SARAH GLOZER** is Associate Professor in Marketing, Business and Society in the School of Management at the University of Bath. She is also Deputy Director of the Centre for Business, Organisations and Society (CBOS). Sarah obtained her PhD from the International Centre of Corporate Social Responsibility

(ICCSR) at Nottingham University Business School and has held a number of industry positions in areas of Sustainability and Commercial/Marketing. Sarah researches and teaches on topics including corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, digital marketing and ethical markets and consumption and she has recently published work in *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Management Studies* and *Annals of Tourism Research*. Sarah is currently editing the fifth edition of *Business Ethics: Managing Corporate Citizenship in the Age of Globalization* (Crane, Matten, Glozer and Spence). She regularly tweets via her personal (@sarah\_CSR) and institutional (@BathCBOS) accounts.





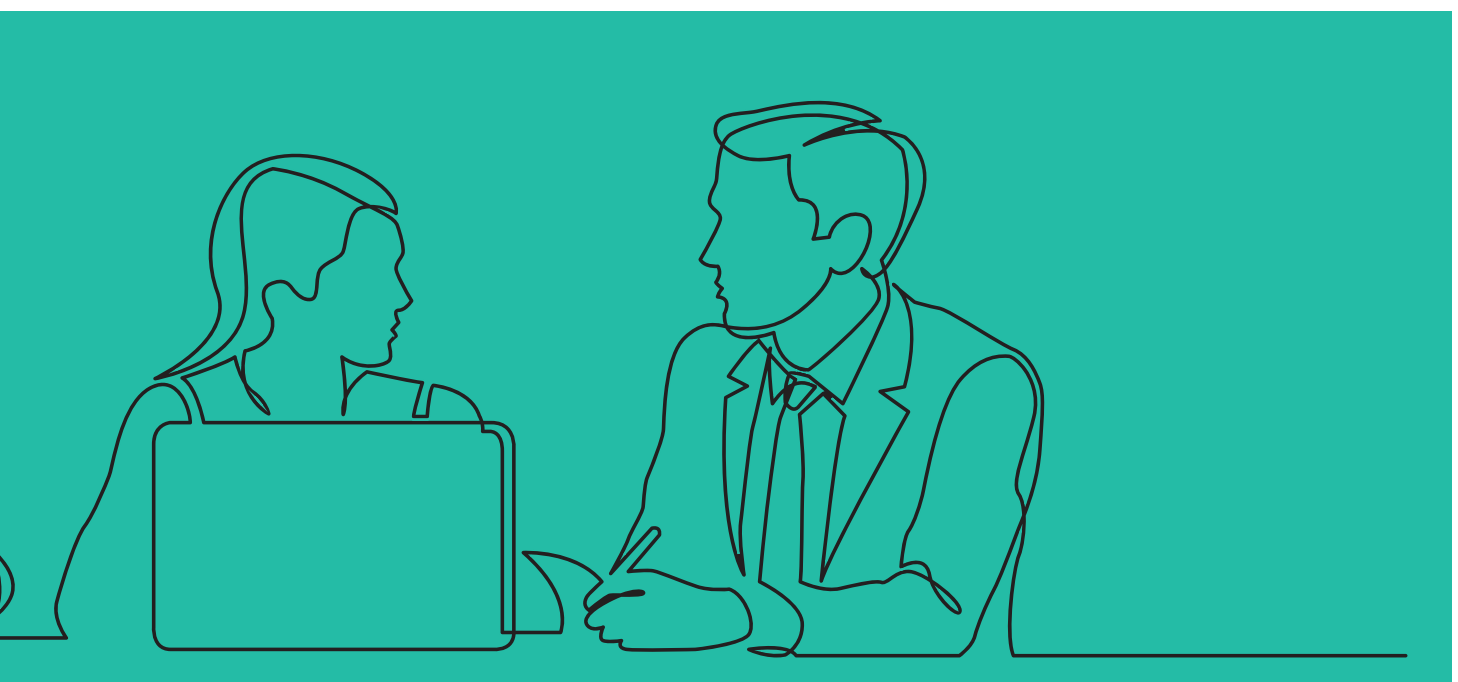
**ANNE QUARSHIE** is a Postdoctoral Researcher at LUT University, School of Business and Management in Finland. Her main research interests include cross-sector interactions, transformational change processes, and sustainable supply chain management. Her current research focuses on cross-sector interaction in the context of biodiversity preservation, in particular. Anne is an editorial review board member of the *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management* and an editorial team member of the *Annual Review of Social Partnerships*. Her research has appeared in the *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, among other outlets. She completed her doctoral degree in International Business at Aalto University School of Business in Finland in 2017. During her doctoral studies, she worked for two years as a Visiting Researcher at Rutgers Business School in New Jersey, USA. Before her academic career, she worked at Fairtrade Finland and Save the Children USA.



**DIANA TRUJILLO** is Assistant Professor at the University of Los Andes, School of Management in Colombia. She holds a PhD in Public Administration from New York University. Her main research focuses are related to power dynamics in collaborative governance, and the interactions between cross-sector

collaboration processes, outcomes, and impacts. She has also published on social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, and corporate social responsibility. She contributed to *Social Partnering in Latin America* (2004), *Effective Management of Social Enterprises* (2006), and *Socially Inclusive Business in Iberoamerica* (2010). She has published a number of teaching cases at HBSP, and her most recent paper *Multiparty Alliances and Systemic Change: The Role of Beneficiaries and Their Capacity for Collective Action* is published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*.

Thank you, Julia Días, for compiling this new member section!



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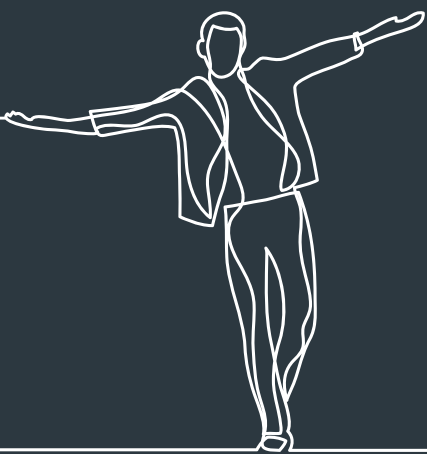
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