

PBA learning from experience

Towards more transformative partnering for combatting poverty in the Horn, East and Central Africa (HECA) region:

Lessons from a 5-year collaboration between
Oxfam and the Partnership Brokers Association

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NOTE:

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See: <https://youtu.be/l1DX25XQ4wE>

Abstract

Many organisations are using partnering approaches to transform their internal operations and their external relations with other organisations to improve performance and achieve greater impact when dealing with complex social sustainability challenges. With shrinking resources in the development and humanitarian fields, international NGOs such as Oxfam, are no exception.

Declarations to put partnering at the heart of operations going forwards that have been made by Oxfam and others are driven not only by an ambition to achieve more with less, but also a recognition that business-as-usual is failing to deliver results. Better partnering is coming to be seen as a means or pathway for achieving transformative change that is now being called for.

Transformative or transformational change is described by words such as 'make a marked change in the form, nature, or appearance of'; 'radical or dramatic change'; systems change, 'profound, fundamental and irreversible' and 'the creation of a whole new form function or structure'. It is about moving from current practice to something qualitatively new that is different and better as compared to what dominates today. Yet when looking at various change initiatives many start out by seeking transformation only to end up struggling for incremental change. Too often, hopes for large-scale systemic change end up as business-as-usual as current ways of working, power structures and processes get in the way and limit of what can be achieved.

The paper describes how a collaboration between the Partnership Brokers Association (PBA) and Oxfam in the Horn, East and Central Africa (HECA) region has sought to make Oxfam operations more effective and impactful in combatting poverty by working out a pathway for moving towards a more transformational form of partnering. The experiences, insights and lessons reported in the paper were accumulated through an Oxfam-PBA Transformative Partnering project (2018-2022).

Ten lessons are offered for moving towards a more transformational multi-stakeholder partnering that can enhance resilience and transform governance. These are: definitions matter, partnering must be fit for purpose, reflective partnership brokering is essential, principled partnering is key, focus on what the partnership needs rather than what partners need, partnering requires constant attention, experts don't have all the answers, individual partnering competencies build organisational capacities, record, share and learn from experience, co-creation underpins transformative partnering.

Introduction

In 2018, the HECA regional platform of Oxfam joined forces with the Partnership Brokers Association to help partnering in the 10 Oxfam country operations of the region to become more transformative.

The Transformative Partnering project was a response to shrinking resources on the one hand and a global Oxfam declaration to find ways of increasing the effectiveness and impact of its mission to reduce poverty by empowering local communities in line with:

- A global Oxfam 2020 Vision commitment to put partnering at the heart of its future strategy, which is coupled with a recognition that current partnering practices need to be subjected to external scrutiny in order to learn from those practices and change them for greater impact.
- A commitment to 'localisation', which requires implementing the humanitarian principles agreed at the Humanitarian Summit. This requires the transfer of at least 25% of funding received directly to local organisations in order to decentralise decision making to local levels and bring this as close as possible to communities of concern.
- The drive within Oxfam to re-frame the HQ / country relationship in ways that re-allocate power and increase the scope for initiative in operations at the country level.
- A recognition that business-as-usual translating into incremental change is insufficient for confronting the power structures that generate poverty and injustice. Transformational change is needed to transform power structures into more equitable forms.

The question posed at the outset was: in what ways does partnering offer a possible pathway for a novel, inclusive, equitable, context-sensitive way of delivering on the Oxfam mission of working for public good, peace and security?

Thus the term 'transformation' was taken to mean both transforming Oxfam's external relationships with existing partners and stakeholders and also transforming Oxfam operations by dropping unhelpful practices (no matter how dominant) and adopting new ways of working.

THE HECA REGION

Oxfam works in 10 countries in the Horn East and Central Africa (HECA) region with a vision for a transformed and stable region, where people exercise their right to challenge power and have dignity and security to drive transformative change in their lived experiences.



The HECA Regional Platform initiated the project by identifying partnering champions in each of the 10 Oxfam country offices and working with them to review current partnering practices and ways to integrate a more transformative partnering into Oxfam Country Strategies (OCS), procedures for monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) and other operational activities.

Assumptions

The starting assumption was that many different types of collaborations were already underway in the region, but that these were often ad hoc, not well understood, and with little strategic intent. Thus the approach was to start by capturing information and insights on current partnering practice as directly as possible from those involved in Oxfam partnering in the HECA region. It was important also to capture their perspectives as to the potential and form of partnering processes going forwards and to engage them in co-creating a more systematic, intentional and self-aware approach to partnering in the HECA region.

Conceptually, the approach was grounded in a recognition that every organisation, including Oxfam, is shaped by core assumptions, beliefs, values and norms that translate into organisation structures and procedures and shape individual and group behaviour. Organisations are cultures that are always in flux, adapting to internal pressures and to the changing external context in which they operate (Handy, 1987; Douglas, 1986). With this as a point of departure, 3 dimensions of organisational culture (in line with Schein, 1992; Hundal, 2015; and Lancaster, 2019) were addressed through the project:

- Declared values (mission, localisation, partnering principles, ways of working etc)
- Underlying assumptions (taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts & feelings etc.)
- Organisational structures and processes (Oxfam Country Strategies, Partnering Strategies, dedicated partnership coordinators etc.)

Approach

The approach was to be deliberately exploratory, participative and open-ended, but rooted in a conviction of a process that involves declared values or ways of working shaping individual and group behaviours, which in turn translate into actions or 'doing'. The focus was on helping partnership practitioners 'on the ground' to self-organise and understand better how they can translate partnering principles into pro-partnering behaviours and then into actions in their respective operating context.

Oxfam provided resources to the PBA as part of this process in the HECA region to make available experienced partnership practitioners as a resource. An important motivation was also to draw on, and contribute to, learning on how to make partnering practice more effective and impactful at the global or Confederation level, which has been part of an Oxfam and PBA collaboration that has been ongoing for several years.

Support for partnership practitioners from the HECA countries recruited to the Transformative Partnering project was not designed to be comprehensive, but rather as a venture in joint learning aimed at encouraging and enabling peer-to-peer learning and support that would -- in time --- become also self-organising, generating benefits for all those involved. The intention was also to help, at least some of those involved in partnering activities, to grow into a more pro-active partnership brokering role focused on initiating, managing and otherwise enabling more transformative partnering

in their country operations. In practical terms, the approach involved PBA and Oxfam Regional Platform staff:

- Providing individualized peer-to-peer support through reflective conversations and 'accompaniment' aimed at understanding better partnership brokering processes in relation to preparation of Oxfam Country Strategies and/or other formal documents, such as Partnering Strategies or Phasing Out strategies.
- Offering to active individuals more formalized PBA training support with options to pursue partnership brokering professional accreditation and engagement with peers operating as partnership brokers in other parts of the world both inside and outside of Oxfam,
- Providing feedback on documents, activities and events for mutual learning and support
- Encouraging and enabling peer-to-peer learning & reflection between partnership brokers operating in the HECA region, especially in relation to adapting partnering tools and approaches to needs, circumstances and opportunities of specific situations.
- Capturing insights and ideas concerning partnership brokering practice in the form of case studies, stories and a portfolio of conversations for learning and reflection.
- Workshops, meetings and other events to encourage and enable networking, sharing experience and learning from the experience of others.

Project results

A survey and in-depth interviews were carried out in July/August 2018 with programme directors and/or MEAL officers in all 10 HECA Oxfam country offices, as well as representatives from selected Oxfam affiliates and the Pan-Africa programme. The results were presented and discussed at a workshop held in September 2018 in Entebbe, Uganda, which brought together Oxfam partnering practitioners from across all 10 HECA countries. The challenges that needed to be overcome to bring about transformation of Oxfam partnering practice and transformation of the way Oxfam interacts with external organisations were formulated as follows:

- Most collaborations are **more transactional than transformative**
- Focus and effort is devoted largely on **implementation partners**, especially those who receive funding support. Comparatively less attention is devoted to other types of partners.
- The assumption that Oxfam's vision should be the organising framework for partnership building is at odds with the view that partnering is about **co-creating and equity** among partners
- There is a need to **document and communicate** the value of non-financial resource contributions, alongside value-for-money assessments
- Working to change relationships (and power balance) with implementation partners means opening up opportunities for **new forms of collaboration**
- Important to explore to what extent and in what situations **other INGOs are partners**, and in which they are competitors
- Explore opportunities for **sharing power with donors** – and sharing power as a donor – through new forms of collaboration
- New types of resourcing arrangements for supporting partnerships are needed, especially ones where **risk is shared** between the partners and not transferred to them

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- There is a need for a typology that distinguishes **different models of collaboration** can make it easier to ensure partnering processes are fit for purpose for specific scenarios and intentions, reserving the term 'partnership' for a specific type of interaction based on sharing costs, risks and benefits.
 - Dealing with **the bureaucratic nightmare**, which is a consequence of the need for compliance at all levels. This emanates partly from a need to cover personal risks. Due diligence actually means being 'clean' on paper, so that a staff member or a partner can justify her/himself and protect personal risk. There seems to be a disconnect between programmes on the one hand – where programme managers see first-hand the negative impact of bureaucracy, and others (eg the finance teams) in this regard, which is counter-productive to effective and coherent partnering approaches.

With respecting to more transformative partnering, the question posed at the outset was formulated as follows:

In what ways does partnering offer a possible pathway for a novel, inclusive, equitable, context-sensitive way of delivering on the Oxfam mission of working for public good, peace and security?

By 2022, the Transformative Partnering Project had enabled 41 individual partnership practitioners to participate in some form of formalised interaction with one another and with peers at the PBA and the HECA regional platform. Of these, 31 have benefited from more formal partnership brokering training that has introduced them to key partnering concepts, approaches and skills. Several have taken on a more pro-active partnership brokering role and 3 are pursuing PBA accreditation as partnership brokering professionals. In addition, informal peer-to-peer interactions were encouraged and nurtured through introductions, on-line meetings and other forms of communication.

It is worth noting that over half of those participating are no longer with Oxfam, having moved on to other organisations, whereas approx. 10% were Oxfam partners and so had never been Oxfam staff.

Of the 10 HECA countries, Oxfam offices are being closed in 5 countries (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sudan). In the remaining 6 countries, OCS plans for the period 2021-3 have been approved and associated partnering strategies are now being developed. Assigning responsibility for partnering and building partnering capacities, capabilities and competencies has been integrated into operations at the country level. In some countries, partnership training has been extended to include also NGO partners.

In terms of project results in relation to the 3 dimensions of organisational transformation, the project has drawn attention to partnering implementation dilemmas or contradictions that need to be managed (juggled) going forwards. They are dilemmas because there is no 'right' or 'wrong' solution in each case. Indeed, apparently contradictory solutions might both be appropriate depending on the situation. In each situation, it is invariably a case of managing ('juggling') rather than simply making a choice. The implication is that more transformative partnering requires Oxfam and partners to become adept at jointly navigating complex issues and apparent contradictions for the benefit of all concerned in an ongoing way.

Declared values.

- The dilemma relates to reconciling global coherence of Oxfam's partnering principles with local flexibility of operating according to principles that have meaning and benefit for

partners and the partnership of interest. It is clear (and understandable) that there is a strong drive to build Oxfam as a federated structure where there is consistency and where the 'brand' and the values it stands for is recognised as one associated with a strong and well-articulated approach no matter where in the world the organisation operates. Yet if the rhetoric of local ownership is to be a lived reality, partners and the partnership which they co-create must have the space to define its own identity, operating principles and perhaps even 'brand'.

- Oxfam's 6 partnering principles remain at the centre of public declarations and vision statements both at the global and the regional HECA level. But they are treated typically as part of a contracting process with NGO implementing partners, where they are presented as a 'take-it-or-leave-it' formality to be met. They have not been transposed into local languages and contexts and the potential for using them as part of a partnership building process that might see them reformulated in specific partnering situations is only slowly being recognised.
- The Transformative Partnering Project has certainly raised awareness of the Oxfam principles, drawing attention to their limitations if treated as non-negotiables or as a matter of compliance rather than opportunity for co-creating new ways of operating.

Underlying assumptions.

- The dilemma relates to reconciling due diligence with greater risk-taking and 'letting go'. Largely imposed by external donors and the (laudable) need to guard against corruption or any other mis-use of funds, there is an organisational culture of compliance and control whereas transformative partnering requires space for open-ended exploration, experimentation and risk-taking. If partners' experience of working with Oxfam has, to date, largely been one of compliance then it is asking a lot for them to risk the relationship (and possibly funding) by inviting them to think and act differently. Partnering relationships, based on principles of equity and openness, provide a different way of managing risks, by being honest about them and sharing them to provide courage and confidence to experiment.
- Talking about Oxfam as an advocacy organisation means that partnering is about something more than money-transfer, though there must be always recognition that partnerships must be resourced if they are to deliver results. In prioritising reflection and learning, the Transformative Partnering Project has helped build a recognition that Oxfam does not always have to be 'in charge' in partnering situations and that pro-partnering behaviours make a difference, such as always giving partners time and opportunity to present their perspectives.

Organisational processes.

- Financial accountability has been dominant organisational process, requiring linear and hierarchical compliance oriented reporting. This has translated into furthering 'obedient' behaviour ensuring that transactional arrangements take precedence over more horizontal co-created partnerships, in which partners are accountable to each other.
- The Transformative Partnering Project has furthered a recognition that as a partner, Oxfam is accountable not just to donors but also to partners and the communities served. Partnership

and partnering refers not just to NGO implementation partners financed by Oxfam, but also to a wide range of stakeholders, allies and other collaborators who are potential partners for realising Oxfam's mission.

- Good partnering behaviour entails partnership managers working as internal 'partnership brokers' and boundary spanners, breaking down silos. This requires a mind-set that is respectful of ethical norms and principles which is significantly different to a culture of compliance.
- Hitherto, Oxfam staff and Oxfam partners have had to work in alignment with Oxfam's tools, templates and principles and partners, having simply accept them if they wanted to 'partner' with Oxfam. The introduction of partnering frameworks, tools and approaches has provided scope for adapting those frameworks or co-creating new ones that are fit for purpose.

For those involved 'Transformative Partnering' came to mean for those involved in the project being:

- Open to the unexpected
- Willing to challenge unhelpful behaviours as well as systems
- Prepared to strive for inclusivity and genuinely equitable relationships
- Deeply committed to mutual accountability,
- Recognising that individuals taking on brokering roles can and do make a difference, and
- Always focused on co-creating with others.

During the life of the Transformative Partnering Project, several PBA frameworks and tools were introduced and adapted by individual practitioners as a basis for designing, planning, monitoring and assessing partnering actions in their Oxfam context, but also in the wider context of those seeking to work in partnership to combat problems caused by inequality in the countries of interest. The frameworks and tools were used in different ways and to different degrees, leading to a recognition that any tool or framework must be adapted to the context of concern. Many of these have been brought together in a Manual prepared for Oxfam (Tennyson, 2022). From a practice point of view the most important were:

- Transactional / Transformative continuum
- Key attributes of genuine partnerships
- What constitutes a 'resource contribution'?
- Valuing non-cash contributions
- The Partnering Cycle
- Potential for wide-ranging outcomes (beyond projects)
- Critical success factors in effective partnering
- Becoming more intentional in challenging the rules
- Partnership brokers – juggling contradictions
- Accompaniment and peer-to-peer learning approaches

The Transformative Partnering Project took on a life of its own both within Oxfam HECA and PBA, contributing to the transformation of both organisations. In this regard, it is important to note that

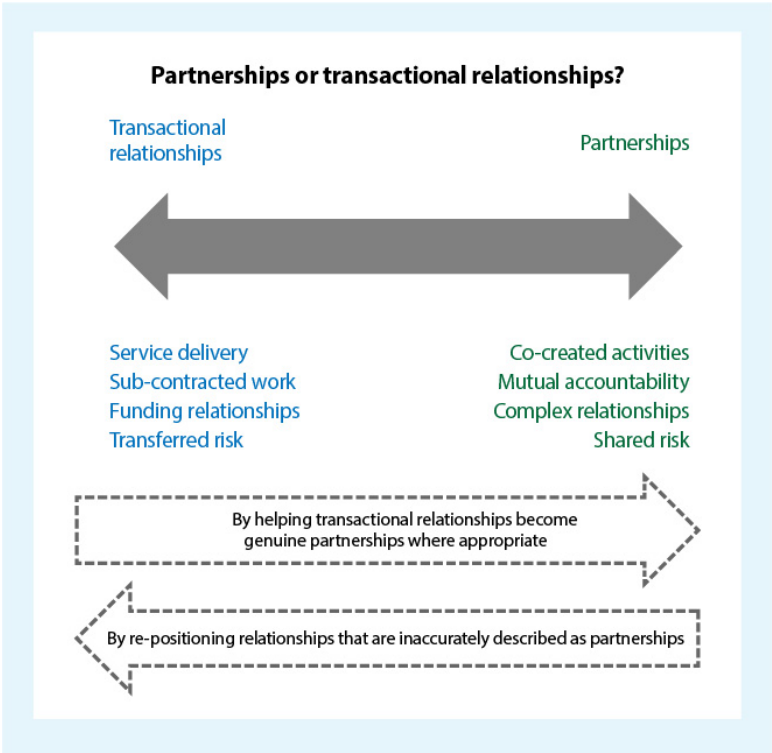
the Transformative Partnering Project itself was not designed as long-term undertaking and itself represents a journey of co-creation that has seen the PBA move from being a consultant to Oxfam to becoming an Oxfam partner who is sharing in the risks, costs and benefits.

But perhaps most importantly of all, the Transformative Partnering project itself has shifted focus away from helping to turn Oxfam into a more effective and sought after partner to a focus on Oxfam and other organisations investing in building in-country partnering capabilities, capacities and competencies that can support and serve partnership building in the region going forward. Partnership brokers operating within both Oxfam and PBA certainly now share an interest in promoting and enabling better partnering in the countries of interest as a means for advancing pro-poor policies, programmes and projects.

Insights about transformative partnering

When it comes to transformative change, identifying and dealing with 'blockers' is a key focus. The Oxfam HECA experience suggests that it is important not to try to change everything at once, but rather to create and hold 'space' for experimentation with new ways of working. This is in line with the experience of many partnership brokers (Serafin, 2006; Tennyson, 2012; Claessens, 2020).

A key insight about partnering was to think in terms of a continuum from transactive to transformative forms of collaboration. This meant appreciating different types of partnership in terms of their transformational potential. It also meant recognising that transformative partnerships are not intrinsically better than transactional arrangements as not all activities, processes and structures need to be transformed at a particular time and in a specific place. What matters is ensuring the collaborative arrangement is fit for purpose.



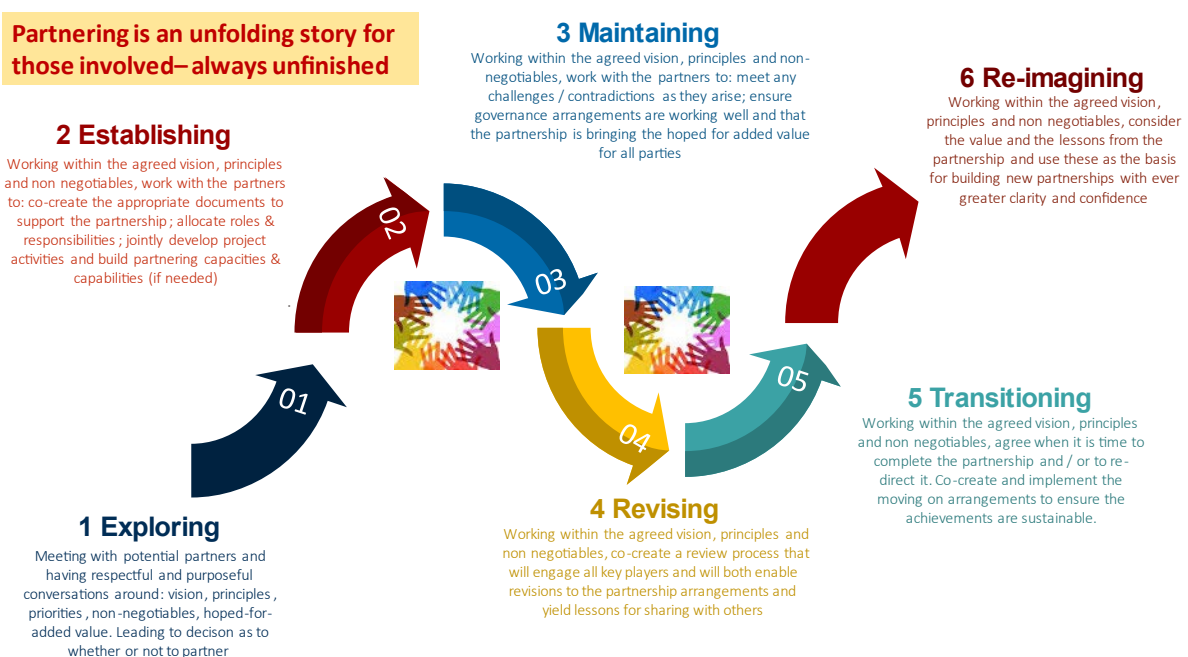
The implication of the partnering continuum is a recognition that not all collaborations are partnerships, if partnerships are characterised as those in which risks, costs and benefits are shared among those

involved. And there is no single organization or individual who is 'in charge'. Transformative partnerships have the potential to become more transactive and vice-versa.

Partnership processes can be managed as cycles – from initiation, to building, maintaining and to moving-on, when they have fulfilled their purpose (Tennyson, 2011; Mundy and Tennyson, 2019; Tennyson, 2022). Many partnerships are like journeys with individuals and organisations joining and leaving along the way. From this perspective, partnerships are always being imagined and re-imagined by those involved and affected. The important point is that partnership processes can be managed in a systematic and strategic way.

The Oxfam experience of the Transformative Partnering project suggests that moving from transactional to more transformational partnering requires:

- **(re) defining resourcing.** The focus on money transfers shifts to a focus on what really makes partnering effective – combining the different contributions that partners bring to the partnership and figuring out what is missing. Contributions can be mapped to identify what is missing from the partnership and so to identify who else to recruit to the partnership.
- **valuing non-cash contributions.** Non-cash contributions can and should be valued in any partnership that seeks to be more transformative and achieve its full potential.
- **looking for outcomes beyond projects.** Partnering offers potential for achieving completely new (and unexpected) outcomes when seen as a process that goes beyond projects. A focus on partnering processes rather than achieving a priori specified hoped-for-results provides the 'space' for identifying needs and solutions that could not have been defined at the outset.
- **identifying enablers and blockers.** Partnering becomes transformative when it builds self-awareness of how the processes involved can overcome 'blockers' and empower 'enablers' by focusing on adopting common approaches/principles, nurturing the right attitudes/competencies, assessing results/productivity, and measuring impact.



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- **becoming more intentional in challenging business-as-usual.** Partnering often draws attention to 'invisible' rules by making them 'visible', enabling those involved to challenge and change them in order to make a partnership more 'fit-for-purpose' and better able to achieve its potential in bringing benefits and hoped-for-results to those involved.
 - **partnership brokers juggling contradictions.** Partnership brokering is about individuals facilitating, intervening in and enabling partnering processes in ways that engage those involved and affected in joined up action. It is also about engaging with peer partnership brokers to promote and enable more reflective practice.

Lessons for Multi-Stakeholder Partnership (MSP) issue framing

Although the focus of the Transformative Partnering project was initially on Oxfam operations and on what it would take to make Oxfam a better partner in the HECA region, it soon became apparent that this framing was limiting or blocking the potential for more transformative partnering.

One of the important lessons learned for issue framing in multi-sector partnerships was that in a situation, where the goals and ways of achieving those goals are well-established, the transactive model as operated by Oxfam is highly effective in generating measurable OUTPUTS, for delivering humanitarian aid, for example. In fact it is fit-for-purpose for the current business-as-usual model that has been favoured by donors who demand measurable results. The need is to provide donor accountability in the form of financial inputs, activity OUTPUT milestones that can be monitored and assessed against plans. This kind of issue limitation has been explored in other partnering situations and contexts (Serafin, 2019).

But in terms of issue framing, the transactive model is not so good at addressing the OUTCOMES OF REDUCED POVERTY AND INJUSTICE or when the ambition is to address the underlying causes of humanitarian and development problems. This is where 'transformative partnering' comes in. The challenge and opportunity becomes working out a pathway for moving from the current transactional model, to something quite different that will be fit-for-purpose with the respect to desired OUTCOMES rather than programmed outputs.

Building multi-sectoral partnering arrangements that engage diverse partners and treat affected parties as partners rather than beneficiaries offers a way of moving to a more transformative model. In the Oxfam HECA case, this requires shifting the focus from Oxfam-centred partnering to Oxfam contributing as a partner in multi-stakeholder arrangements, in which Oxfam is no longer 'in charge'. The shift is from fund-transfer to resourcing partnering in ways that embrace financial and non-financial contributions.

Here are ten lessons from the HECA Region experience that may be helpful for those building and deploying multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP) for enhancing resilience and transforming governance:

1. **DEFINITIONS MATTER.** The term 'partnership' continues to be used in ways that are unhelpfully 'loose' and therefore do not encourage or push for positive change (transformation) – where change may be urgently needed. Many operations called 'partnerships' appear to be stuck in being highly transactional and top-down, whereas the potential for transformative bottom-up action remains unexplored. The implication is that if the desire is to use multi-stakeholder partnering to bring about transformational change, it is important to define partnering as a special type of collaboration in which costs, risks and benefits are shared and not shifted onto the weakest or least prepared partner.

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2. **PARTNERING MUST BE FIT FOR PURPOSE.** Multi-stakeholder partnering is a complex process that changes over time (i.e. the relationships involved can move from transactional to transformational, or vice versa) so it may be more helpful / more productive to think of 'partnering' (a journey) rather than 'partnership' (a model). It is important to note that both transactional and transformational partnerships have their role and place. Not every partnership needs to be transformative, but to be transformative, a multi-sector partnership needs to be designed and nurtured to be fit for purpose by those involved.
 3. **REFLECTIVE PARTNERSHIP BROKERING IS ESSENTIAL.** Partnership brokers are the individuals in any partnership situation, who are sensitive to partnering processes and seek to serve them and nurture them in a self-aware way. In multi-sector partnerships most of those involved come with their own needs, expectations and purposes, often seeking to extract maximum value from collaborative working. Only a few individuals will be focused on partnering processes. These are the partnership brokers who essential for helping partners deal with blockers and enablers of partnership processes, preventing the partnership from getting stuck in business-as-usual. Creating and holding 'space' for reflection by partners on partnering processes and the ways in which these enable transformation of prevailing structures and processes is a key contribution of partnership brokers. Reflective practice is about making 'visible' and legitimate processes that are often implicit or taken for granted both at the individual and the collective or organizational levels. It requires a commitment for the long run and asking probing questions about current practice, rather than advocating solutions.
 4. **PRINCIPLED PARTNERING IS KEY.** There is no single best way of partnering. In part this is because, all partnerships are unique in that they are always the product of specific individuals and organisations interacting with one another at specific times and places. Yet there do appear to be some common principles or patterns that are shared by successful partnerships – that is those that generate benefits for the partners involved and impact the particular problem of concern or focus.¹ This is important because transformative partnering requires collaborating with others in accordance with principles that are agreed and shared by those involved.

In a multi-stakeholder partnership, adopting a principled partnering can assure equity and transparency, a sharing of risks and costs, and nurture novel solutions that generate mutual benefits and enable those involved and affected to move beyond business-as-usual approaches that are failing to deliver results. With a focus on principles to guide interaction, the partnership can be open-ended in terms of results and so allow new solutions not anticipated at the outset to emerge. significant leadership and courage at every single level – including a willingness to have difficult conversations and to 'hold space' for innovative solutions to emerge rather than imposing a pre-conceived 'answer'.

5. **FOCUS ON WHAT THE PARTNERSHIP NEEDS RATHER THAN ON WHAT PARTNERS NEED.** Organisations join multi-stakeholder partnerships to realise a task or goal that they cannot achieve operating alone or in isolation. As a result, they look to other partners for ways to enhance, improve or otherwise strengthen their own operations. Experience from the Transformative Partnering project suggests that partners and partnerships get stuck in transactional relationships, if they focus primarily on their own needs. Partnership brokers are always asking not what partners need for a partnership to succeed, but what the partnership needs to succeed. Sometimes the partnership may need different or additional partners. Some partners may come to see that there is little or limited value from their participation. This may become apparent once the partnership

¹ See for example, PBA's partnering principles of: mutual benefit, equity, transparency and courage – www.partnershipbrokers.org

has been operating for some time. This is why asking the question: “what does the partnership need now?” is not a once-and-for-all question to be resolved, but part of a regular health check of the partnership.

6. **PARTNERING REQUIRES CONSTANT ATTENTION.** Partnership principles can very quickly become empty formulas. In other words, they need to be continually explored, reformulated and invigorated, especially when a multi-sector partnership expands to include new groups or individuals or when new partners are being sought. Transformative partnering does not happen on its own or because an organisation makes a declarations. There are always people involved and there is growing evidence to suggest that successful multi-sector partnerships include individuals who try to nurture and serve the partnership rather than one or other of the organisations coming together to form and work to maintain a partnership. A helpful solution is for partners to identify partnership brokers internal to a multi-sector partnership and appoint them to serve the partnership rather than individual partners.
7. **EXPERTS DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.** Those who ‘know best’ about any partnership are the partners themselves (though they may sometimes need outside help in understanding what it is they know and don't know). In multi-stakeholder partnerships, outside ‘experts’ can do real damage to partnerships unless they operate with a strongly facilitative mind-set and a deep understanding of what it takes to partner effectively. In any multi-sector partnering situations, the preference should always be to identify and nurture partnership brokering talent from among those involved in the partnership rather than look for external expertise in this regard.
8. **INDIVIDUAL PARTNERING COMPETENCIES ARE KEY TO BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITIES.** Partnering capacities, capabilities and competences are key to ensuring multi-stakeholder partnerships deliver on their transformational potential. The key is to identify and invest in individuals associated with partners in the partnership who are already *de facto* brokering. This can be in the form individual partnership skills training or other form of capacity-building, or a training that brings together a group of partnership champions from all partners involved in a multi-stakeholder partnership. The need and opportunity is for partnering champions to take on partnership brokering roles *inter alia* by adopting a common framework for assessing, monitoring and managing the partnership.
9. **RECORD , SHARE AND LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE.** Most organisations involved in multi-stakeholder partnering are engaged in many different types of collaborations. Typically, many of them are informal and linked to individuals, whereas others are more formal organisation-to-organisation arrangements. All have some potential for being transformative, but only some of them can be described as partnerships that involve sharing risks, costs and benefits with others. The diversity of partnering relationships, interactions and structures offers a learning opportunity for identifying possible solutions for partnering challenges that must be overcome in a specific multi-sector partnership. These might include challenges of resourcing, leadership, power-sharing or dealing with unhelpful behaviour. Learning from the diversity of partnering experience of partners involved in a multi-stakeholder partnership is a real asset and opportunity, especially where partners come from different sectors and organisational cultures. Recording, reflecting upon and learning from the experience of others can be an important way of identifying and overcoming blockers in the journey to more transformative partnering.
10. **CO-CREATION UNDERPINS TRANSFORMATIVE PARTNERING.** Partnering is a journey for those engaged and for those who join along the way, as well as those who are affected by the partnership. Co-creation is the glue that keeps the partnership together and allows it to grow into a multi-sectoral arrangement that can deliver transformative results. The term ‘co-creation’ signals

a clarity of purpose that requires those involved in a partnership (both individuals and organisations) to work out how best to share ideas, learnings and power and how to communicate in ways that invite collaboration rather than insist on compliance. The starting point is a shared recognition that the nature of the problems to be solved are beyond the capacity of any single individual or organisation – however knowledgeable, influential and well-resourced. The whole that results from working together is significantly greater than the sum of the parts – this is described as ‘added value’ and should always be the intention underpinning every multi-sectoral partnership. The process is always unfinished and in-process. At least 5 things seem to be important in partners co-creating their partnership:

- a. **Engaging with partners who will make a difference** – not just those who feel ‘safe’ but those who bring something new and / or something that meets a need that cannot be met by other means
- b. **Inspiring participation by jointly visualising** what the partnership might become and what it might achieve, and being ready to modify (or enlarge) the vision as the partnership unfolds or new partners join
- c. **Connecting individuals across the partner organisations** who are most likely to energise, innovate and be persistent in helping others in their organisations to see partnering as something that generates value and benefits
- d. **Sharing lessons as widely as possible** for adapting and responding to emerging and changing contexts and being excited about taking on board lessons from others
- e. **Building capacity for – and encouraging – self-organisation** and give all those involved opportunities for making their own unique contributions

Transformative partnering revisited

As a final reflection, it is important to consider what got transformed through the the Transformative Partnering Project as an indication of what is possible for other organisations seeking to become more transformative, generating new and better ways of operating as partners. An important reflection in this regard is the fact that at the outset, the project was designed as providing a space for exploration, reflection and learning rather than as an undertaking with specific milestones and deliverables. It was designed as a one-off project to review transformative partnering possibilities that transformed into a longer term undertaking through engagement of those involved in Oxfam, who came to recognise that partnering and partnering processes could be an intentional or systematic activity rather than a hit-or-miss affair.

Answers to the question posed at the outset: *In what ways does partnering offer a possible pathway for a novel, inclusive, equitable, context-sensitive way of delivering on the Oxfam mission of working for public good, peace and security?* should be considered in terms of what got transformed through the Partnering Project over the period 2018-2022.

First of all, PBA & Oxfam moved to from a (transactive) consultancy arrangement to more of a (transformative) collaboration. Just how a collaboration agreement and arrangement will look like remains to be seen as Oxfam merges its regional platforms, included HECA, into an Africa-wide platform, and PBA has nurtured an Africa network of partnership brokers dedicated to better partnering across Africa. Many of those involved engaged with the partnering agenda through Oxfam. The important thing is that both Oxfam and PBA recognise that a transactive consultancy arrangement is too limiting for an ambition to better partnering practice across Africa.

Secondly, both PBA and Oxfam have come to see improving partnering practice as something more than training and capacity-building – as an investment in more effective, more equitable and more transformative delivery mechanisms that can bring about hoped-for results. This is translating into a

shift in focus from Better Oxfam partnering to better partnering in the countries of operation, which in turn requires making available partnership brokering services to those who need them in business, government, academia and media, as well as in civil society.

Thirdly, a shift is taking place in thinking about fundraising, which historically has been closely tied to partnering where partner is a reference to funder with donors and funders perpetuating this way of operating by referring to themselves as partners as opposed to money-providers. Transforming partnering language to refer not to funding or fund-raising, but rather to resourcing completely changes or transforms the frame of reference. This is not because money is not needed (it is!), but that money-alone is not sufficient for designing and implementing effective partnering, especially if multiple stakeholders involved. Reourcing refers to all the non-monetary ingredients that are essential for partnering and represent tangible value (that often money cannot buy), such as enthusiasm and commitment, skills and competences, reputation, local knowledge and networks, social capital, infrastructure, communication and outreach and so forth. In short, resourcing does not equal funding. In partnering, all partners resource the partnership, through which they seek to share risks, costs and benefits. This means seeing NGOs, government agencies and informal groups not as beneficiaries, but as potential partners who bring specific, and often much needed, resources to the partnership. It also means seeing donors, funders and business as something more than money-providers.

Thus to further and strengthen transformative partnering in a multi-sectoral context, more research and interaction is needed with partnering practitioners from across all sectors on innovative ways of resourcing transformative partnering. This is a focus of PBA's Funders as Partners initiative (<https://fundersaspartners.org>). Key research questions for both practitioners and researchers are needed on such topics as:

- How can investment strategies for starting up and strengthening more transformative partnering value both monetary and non-monetary contributions? What are good practices in this regard?
- How can funders engage more effectively as partners in multi-stakeholder partnerships?
- What resources do cross-sector partnerships need? And what is good practice in terms of nurturing partnership brokering capacities and capabilities to get the most out of partnership actions?
- How to resource partnering initiators to set into motion partnership-building that can seek to engage diverse potential partners?

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