

## REVIEWED PAPER

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**33rd WEDC International Conference, Accra, Ghana, 2008****ACCESS TO SANITATION AND SAFE WATER:  
GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCAL ACTIONS****Global strategic partnerships to share international  
and local expertise between private sector and NGOs**

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*The term 'partnership' can cover a wide range of relationships between different types of organisations. However, genuine partnerships between the private and NGO sectors are still relatively uncommon. The global consultancy firm Arup has developed a number of partnerships with NGOs in the water sector to bring international expertise to help solve local problems. This paper briefly reviews the partnership context and describes two water projects – one in Bangladesh and one in Ghana - where Arup staff have worked with local NGOs to develop locally appropriate solutions to technical problems. The paper explores the mutual benefits that both organisations can enjoy from this type of partnership.*

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**Introduction**

This paper provides an example of how Arup, a global consultancy specialising in the built environment, has developed a partnering initiative that provides international expertise to NGOs in local development settings. The paper sets out the partnering context in which this initiative sits, provides case study examples of projects within the partnership and concludes with a discussion on the benefits accruing to each of the partners and the future of the partnership initiative.

**The partnership context**

The term 'partnership' has become a popular word used to cover a broad spectrum of relationships. Both Brehm (2001) and Khoday (2003), in different ways, link its origin to the need to develop productive relationships between the state, private sector and civil society following the 1980s move away from the state led development paradigm. Regardless of the origin, the contemporary consensus is now one that sees cross sectoral partnerships as essential tools for achieving sustainable development. This is reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) where the creation of partnerships is listed as a goal in its own right (Graas et al., 2007). The 2002 Johannesburg Sustainable Development conference further reinforced this consensus. The basic principle of such partnerships is that they must be focused on people, commitments and objectives for the purpose of solving a problem or fulfilling a need (Graas et al, 2007:12).

Much of the recent literature on partnership models focuses on either public-private models, or north south partnerships, normally between NGOs. Models for the private sector in partnership with civil society, that are not mediated or enhanced by public sector agency involvement, are less common. One recent study that identifies a number of models for private sector partnerships is provided by Binder et al. (2007).

**The Arup approach**

Arup is a global knowledge based consultancy with more than 9000 staff located in over 40 countries. The firm is owned by three trusts on behalf of all employees, and social purpose is cited as a key aim of the firm, whose mission statement is to "shape a better world" (Arup, 1970). The core asset of Arup lies within its staff's expertise and analytical problem-solving approach; it is this that is successfully provided to a diverse range of commercial and public sector clients throughout the world. The challenge has been how to bring this expertise to local development organisations. Through an initiative called the Arup Cause, the firm has sought to harness this core strength to achieve poverty focused outcomes by developing long term relationships with local and international NGOs.

It could be argued that Arup's partnering relationship with NGOs bears a resemblance to the technical assistance programmes of major donors; there are however a number of important differences. The first

is that the focus is on facilitating high level technical expertise to locally based organisations who would not normally be able to access such resources. This could be regarded as a variation on a service contract (as argued by Caplan, 2003) that is initiated by the client (local NGO) but delivered and paid for by Arup. However, the key features of the Arup approach which set this apart are that:

- Projects are locally led as well as initiated;
- Costs are shared between partners;
- Learning is two way between the partners; and
- Lessons learnt by Arup are shared with other staff to contribute to learning on poverty and development.

Graas et al. (2007) suggest a number of partnership classification methods, one of which focuses on the breadth and depth of the partnership. This has been developed into Table 1 to show the partnership projects within the Arup Cause programme, These range from organisational capacity building through to technical inputs. Two case studies, a water treatment project with WaterAid Bangladesh and a water resources investigation in Ghana are described in the following section.

<b>Level of partnership</b>	<b>Institutional supporter</b> Holistic and with no limit	<b>Project supporter</b> Financial or capacity building for the whole organisation	<b>Development ally</b> Financial and training inputs on a project basis	<b>Partner</b> Exchange support advice
<b>Examples</b>	<b>WaterAid UK</b> Corporate strengthening inputs and fundraising	<b>Maji na Ufinisi</b> Non technical corporate capacity building  <b>Freshwater Action Network</b> Assistance with communications and messaging  <b>WaterAid Madagascar</b> Training and diagnostic on project selection process	<b>WaterAid Bangladesh</b> Technical assessment of water supply options  <b>Ashanti, Ghana</b> Water resource assessment  <b>WaterAid Zambia</b> Spring protection  <b>Paposo, Chile</b> Community water supply options	<b>Engineers Against Poverty</b> Joint working on poverty alleviation

**Case study: Arup and WaterAid Bangladesh (WAB)**

In June 2006 WAB started a water and sanitation program in the Satkhira district of south west Bangladesh. Through its local partner, NGO Shushilon, it identified that many communities had access only to saline water. WAB felt that desalination may be an answer but did not have the expertise to explore this potential solution. Under the umbrella of the global Arup WaterAid partnership a multidisciplinary Arup team was invited to work with WAB.

The project scope initially envisaged the pilot testing of a desalination system. This is usually a high cost solution and so the project team agreed that instead they would work on an overall assessment of the potential options. Together with WAB and its local partners, meetings were held with multiple stakeholders; these included local communities and wider groups such as government agencies, NGOs and academic institutions. The primary and secondary information gathered was analysed within the STEEP framework to understand the impact of the water supply options on these factors.

The subsequent conclusion was that a single option appropriate to all of the districts and villages did not exist and instead location-specific solutions needed to be developed on a village by village basis. Reverse osmosis (RO) desalination was one of several identified options. As a result both organizations are currently working to continue the project with the aim of developing RO as a viable option for rural communities in Bangladesh where other less costly and complex options have proved unfeasible. The potential global impacts of this are significant; throughout the world populations are expanding in areas where only saline water is available and RO may ultimately be the only available option in these situations.

One of the benefits that this partnership brought to WAB, its local partners and the local communities,

was the opportunity to access international consultancy expertise which provided “fresh eyes” on a difficult problem. In the development sector such access is traditionally the preserve of governments or major organisations through donor funded technical assistance programmes. WAB stated that it was delighted with the outcome and considered the final report a “*very helpful tool*” and were “*amazed with its richness*”. In turn, Arup was pleased to be able to achieve its aim of delivering its global technical expertise in the development context and the staff working on the project gained a wealth of experience and the opportunity to work directly with communities to solve local problems.

Follow-up discussions are now ongoing with regard to further possible work in the Chittagong Hills where Arup has been able to provide links to and involve an eminent Bangladeshi hydrologist at University College, London.

### **Case study: Arup and Ashanti Development, Ghana**

Ashanti Development is a small, recently established NGO based in London and Ghana that works at a local scale with communities around the town of Mampong in Ashanti Region, Ghana. Their focus is on relieving poverty and promoting health and development by various means, including the provision of safe and accessible water. They identified the need for a water resources survey of the local villages to establish the baseline conditions and inform their long-term sustainable water supply strategy. Lacking the technical capability within the team, they approached Arup in early 2007 to provide professional expertise. Arup provided, either within their team or amongst their local networks, two specialists on a 50% funded, 50% voluntary basis.

The partnership yielded noteworthy benefits for both partners. Ashanti Development received professional expertise that would otherwise have been unaffordable. As a result of Arup’s involvement, new relationships were established between Ashanti Development and national, regional and local water specialists in academic bodies, governmental institutes and local authorities. The project outputs that Arup developed included project-specific decision-making tools that can be applied by the NGO and their local partners on a village-by-village basis. They also received strategic advice on their future growth based on the range of Arup experiences with other NGOs. Mutual benefits were felt by the Arup team including: increased enthusiasm for encouraging others to become involved in development work; new internal connections between staff in different groups as a result of shared interest; a ‘feel good’ factor for the team for offering their time and experience on a voluntary basis, and a sense of achievement at having put their skills to practical use. In addition, the project will serve to strengthen Arup’s profile within the field of international development.

### **What are the benefits of global private sector-NGO partnerships?**

From the case studies above, and Arup’s experience elsewhere, it is possible to draw some more general conclusions on the benefits to all partners and stakeholders, as discussed below. Other NGO partnering experience includes work with WaterAid in Zambia, Madagascar and the UK, as well organisational capacity focused work with the Freshwater Action Network (FAN) and Maji na Ufinisi in Kenya.

#### ***Benefits to Arup***

- Opportunity to fulfil the corporate mission of working to ‘shape a better world’ with disadvantaged communities;
- Staff retention and motivation due to interest and challenge of working in new and unusual ways places;
- Building the knowledge and capacity of staff and firm to work in developing country contexts;
- Opportunity to work on small scale projects that are closely connected to communities. This is in contrast to much of Arup’s work where the technical experts are more remote from the project beneficiaries; and
- Opportunity to raise employee awareness of poverty reduction and development issues.

#### ***Benefits to NGO***

- Opportunity to access affordable, international technical assistance;
- A chance to have a “fresh pair of eyes” which may bring new thinking or solutions to old problems;
- A cultural exchange of ideas and experiences between northern and southern practitioners; and
- A catalyst to reinforcing existing or creating new relationships with other stakeholders.

**What are the keys to success for global private sector-NGO partnerships?**

The success of the WAB-Arup partnership can be attributed to equal partners offering complementary skills focused on resolving specific water supply issues. WAB provided years of experience in the Bangladesh situation and their local knowledge facilitated access to local people. Arup was able to bring a multi-disciplinary team to provide an in-depth analytical approach encompassing social, economic, technical and environmental issues, by drawing on the firm's global networks such as the Water Skills network, Sustainability network and Poverty Action Network.

The concept of Arup working in partnerships with NGOs is a key part of the Arup Cause which was initiated to mark Arup's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2006. As part of this initiative, a formalised three year partnership agreement was signed with WaterAid. This high-level buy-in has been important in developing strong and rewarding NGO relationships, both locally and internationally.

Traditionally, NGOs have been wary of engaging with the private sector and it is still common for a degree of mistrust to hinder the development of a truly equal, open and rewarding partnership. It takes an enlightened employee to step forward and test the idea of partnering with the "other side" when there may be concerns within their organisation. An open, two-way dialogue between potential partners and key staff is essential to share concerns and reach mutually acceptable solutions and understanding. In Arup's experience, once trust has been built and the benefits of such a partnership have been discovered there is often great enthusiasm and commitment on both sides to diversify and further expand the relationship.

**Conclusion**

Arup's approach to partnering with NGOs is still very much in its infancy but the projects to date contribute to the learning process and demonstrate the potential for long term impact. Progress so far has been both positive and challenging, with set-backs as well as successes, but this is what can be expected within a genuine partnership. As Harper and Tennyson note "*the partnering journey, whatever form it takes, can be exhilarating, inspiring, bewildering and exhausting....*"(2006:6). The challenges going forward will be similar to those experienced by other partnerships in the sector, notably scale, quality and accountability (see Zadek, 2004).

Arup remains committed to exploring ways of working in genuine partnerships with local and international organisations to provide much-needed technical expertise at both an organisational and project level. In this way the firm aims to keep innovating to contribute towards sustainable development.

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