

THE COLLABORATIVE PARADIGM

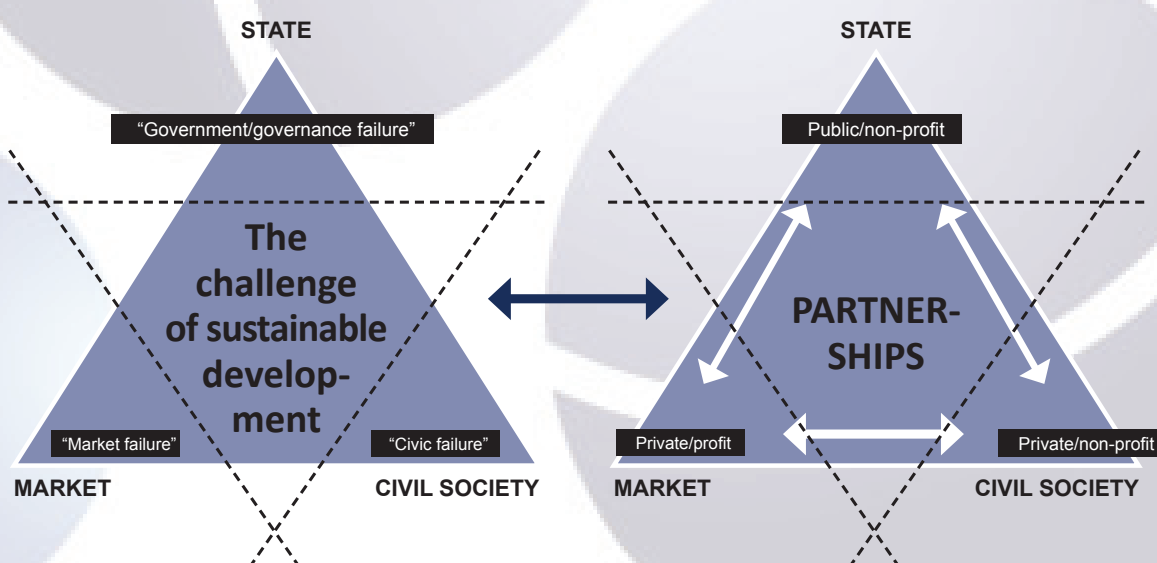
Dealing with the increasing role of partnerships in sustainable development

In the past sixty years thinking about (sustainable) development has been prone to some intense intellectual and practical turmoil. Especially in the first forty years, thereby, markets and firms were seen rather as part of the development problem than as part of its solution. Since the start of the 21st century however, awareness has grown that the complexity of the worlds sustainability and development problems, asks for joint approaches. Markets and firms, governments and NGOs, as well as firms and NGOs should work together to address those wicked problems.

History in development thinking

Four phases in the development and sustainability agenda can be distinguished. In the fifty's and sixty's the development agenda was primarily formulated by governments and aimed at the provision of public goods. The development problem was framed as a lack of public goods provision. In the following two decades civil society emerged as a complementary important actor in development processes, aiming their aid via 'club goods' directly at people themselves instead of from government to government. In the nineties as one of the consequences of globalization, many of the former plan-economies integrated in the world market. The role of foreign direct investment and multinational corporations became increasingly important, and bilateral investment treaties were developed. The Washington consensus became prevalent in thinking about development claiming for instance that liberalization of trade was a way to development. The lack of private good provision became the leading theme in development thinking. However in the start of the 21st century awareness rose that none of the above mentioned actors could claim their role as primary agent to development. All of them had shown examples of failure in their response to development issues. Development is the challenge of finding the right balance between private (individual), public (common) and club (social/group) interests. Consequently, sustainable development is confronted with a considerable national and international 'institutional void' or 'governance gap' and takes the characteristics of a 'stuck in the middle' problem. The three societal institutions are all needed to properly address this (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – from void to opportunity in development thinking



Partnering is the answer to the institutional void left by the failure of the three traditional sectors. The challenge (void) becomes an ambition (partnering space).

Since the notion is apparent that development problems are too complicated to be resolved by one of the sectors on its own, how then to address them in joint approaches?

The approach of cross sector partnerships in which development and sustainability are to be conceptualized and implemented, has altered. The western pathway to development for example, is no longer taken as a blueprint for other places worldwide. Four principles can be used to delineate a new perspective:

- ☒ From one size-fits-all mode to tailor made solutions to meet the specific needs of an issue
- ☒ Using multilateral co-operations instead of unilateral approaches to development
- ☒ Taking a meso- and micro-level instead of a macro approach to development by increasing the involvement of individual partners/actors
- ☒ Aligning development and poverty alleviation into the strategy of corporations

This new approach also involves new levels of research and analysis. However the actual knowledge on the nature, dynamism and effectiveness of development partnerships at the moment is rather limited, and the number of partnerships studies leaves room for further expansion. This is further complicated because partnerships come in a variety of forms. Four basic types of partnerships can be distinguished.

Bilateral	PPP	Public-private partnerships which address the inadequate provision of public goods, like water, energy, health, and education.
	PnP	Private (companies)- non profit partnerships which address the underinvestment of ‘social capital of a country and helps firms in building up ‘inclusive’ business models. In commodity-chains like coffee, cocoa and cotton partnerships of this type can be found.
	nPPP	non-profit Public-Private Partnerships which deals with an inadequate involvement of civil society in the provision of either public goods or the build-up of social capital. The partnerships are aimed for instance at advocacy or community development.
Trilateral	TPP	Tripartite Public-Private Partnerships, includes all three parties that focus in particular on problems that result from institutional voids. Tripartite partnerships have been found for Palm Oil, malnutrition, water and sanitation and ecology.

Profit-Non-profit partnerships



Trilateral partnerships: Water and sanitation (left) and sustainable palm oil (right)



Monitoring and evaluation; first lessons learned

A new model for monitoring and evaluating cross sector partnerships; first lessons learned in years past, evaluation protocols were developed and monitoring missions were undertaken to a large number of locations (see below for further details). Major barriers to effective partnering were identified, which all include either one or a combination of the following five 'unclarity' factors:

1. Role(s): if the roles are not well specified in the partnership, identities can easily become confused; financier, broker, sponsor, facilitator. This relates to the usual roles adopted by the partners; which may require adjustment to make the partnership effective.
2. Interests: lack of clear goals for the partnership in advance creates problems; in case the partnership does not lead to 'goal alignment' the partnership runs into problems; lack of clear understanding of why a partnership is needed ('failure factors') has a strong negative influence on the effectiveness of the partnership; defining the five-year business model helps in the process of goal alignment.
3. Phasing: roles in partnership (need to) change over time in order to render the partnership effective. Most of the time entry conditions have been specified, but the 'exit conditions' remain obscure. This omission affects the dynamism of the partnership long before its actual termination.
4. Monitoring: partnerships that do not make a 'zero-measurement' or try to define what they consider to be 'effectiveness' are impossible to monitor and consequently much more difficult to manage. A number of the most important 'value added' factors of the partnership, however, are not measurable in a quantitative sense, e.g. 'learning', 'capacity building', 'goal alignment'. But this should never be an excuse not to address them.
5. Trust: a much overrated dimension. Partners from complementary sectors will likely have a low degree of trust in and understanding of each other. The partnering, however, should teach them the conditions under which to trust and/or collaborate with each other. The dictum should not be 'we collaborate because we trust each other', but 'we trust each other because we collaborate'.
6. Ownership: a successful partnership first starts with a shared 'problem/issue-ownership'; aligning the problem/issue to the choice of partners is vital; next, most development partnerships bring unequal partners together which creates the challenge how to make the project move from 'donor ownership' to one of 'local ownership'. The actual lesson learned is that this can be achieved in the throughput phase by applying techniques that facilitate 'co-ownership'.

Making it practical

In October 2009, a group of leading NGOs, companies, ministries of the Dutch government and knowledge institutions came together to facilitate further progress in the new area of development thinking. They founded the Partnerships Resource Centre. This open resource centre strives to facilitate further knowledge accumulation and learning in the area of development partnerships. For more information: (insert link to website)