# Ideas for a

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**PART 7b: DEVELOPMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS**

## Holding the tensions:
### the balancing act of partnerships

**OLIVE PUBLICATIONS**

This publication is part of the Ideas for a Change series developed between 1997 and 2001. The following titles have been published in this series so far:

**Overview: Ways of Seeing Organisations**

**Part 1: Strategic Processes**

**Part 2: Organisation Diagnosis**

**Part 3: Approaching Change**

**Part 4: Working with Resistance**

**Part 5: Developing Policy**

**Part 6: Capacity Development**

**Part 7: Developmental partnerships**

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ORGANISATION
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& TRAINING

## Acknowledgements:

# Ideas for a Change

## Part 7b

## Developmental Partnerships

### Holding the tensions – the balancing act of partnerships

# Contents

# What is "Ideas for a Change"?

This publication is a response to seven years of Olive's (organisation development and training) experience of working with organisations in the not-for-profit sector. These organisations have sought to survive in a dramatically changing environment, to do useful and important work, to strengthen and develop their people and their organisations and, ultimately, to be effective and sustainable.

The future of any organisation rests on the will, energy, experience and knowledge of its staff, its leaders and its supporters. People from outside of the organisation can only provide particular forms of support – be it a certain level of expertise, insight, or a knowledge base not present in the organisation at the time. Further, outsiders can provide developmental support to an organisation over a long period of time as it plans and manages change. While this is invaluable, it can be costly.

We have found that people in not-for-profit organisations are often exceptional in their knowledge of their sector and of the players in that sector. However, it should not be assumed that the same people have a strong grasp on how organisations grow, develop and change. After all, why should an engineer know how to run a company or a nurse a hospital? People's professional knowledge, whether in education, health, or human rights, does not necessarily include organisational knowledge and the capabilities needed for organisational management and change.

We know all too well that organisations are faced with immense challenges – political, economic, and cultural; shifts in donor policy; imperatives for affirmative action; measurable delivery; and staff development. We also know that organisations are cash-strapped and cannot easily afford external organisation development (OD) processes. Again, there is the reality that leaders in organisations, while strong on sectoral knowledge, are not necessarily strong on organisational issues. Consequently, a need for a publication that provides some "literacy" in OD and change has emerged.

The *Ideas for a Change* series is, of course, neither the beginning, nor the end, of what there is to say about organisational processes. Libraries and one's own experience (and reflection on that experience) are the key resources for this. Rather, this series seeks to explore what might be done to tackle various organisational issues and suggests how one might go about doing this. Therefore, we offer a selection of questions, approaches and techniques that can be drawn upon for specific processes. There is no one way to work with organisations. There are no formulae.

## So far...

*Overview: Ways of Seeing Organisations* (June 1998) explores, in broad brush strokes, some of the different views of the world (reality) as they have developed over time, how organisations have been viewed, and how they might be seen

focuses on the shift from a mechanistic way of seeing organisations, to considering the systems perspective of organisations.

*Part 1: Strategic Processes* (July 1997, 2nd edition – June 1999) focuses on strategic work as an important aspect of organisational practice. The publication highlights the need for strategic thinking to be built into the life of organisations. It further suggests that, once leadership has grasped the concepts, processes and tools for strategic work, this becomes a continuous, conscious process.

*Part 2: Organisation Diagnosis* (December 1997) aims to provide thoughts, ideas, questions and approaches to "reading" an organisation. It focuses on organisation diagnosis as an important step in finding out where an organisation is and where it has come from, in order to explore where it might go in the future.

*Part 3: Approaching Change* (December 1998) is an introduction to the concept of change and to a number of different perspectives on change. In a sense, this publication considers change "from the outside". It looks at theories of change, at how we at Olive approach it, and at how others have done so. The work of various authors, the assumptions underlying different approaches to change, and the forms of "intervening" in organisations, are also discussed.

*Part 4: Working with Resistance* (June 1999) explores, in the context of organisations, how people respond to change. The publication briefly sets out the context of change, considers how it is seen from different perspectives, and how different cultures are formed from these perspectives. It then focuses on the concept of "resistance", looks at how it is presented by different people, and offers some ideas on how leaders might approach and work with it.

*Part 5: Developing Policy* (December 1999) explores the idea of policy, how it is different from principles, procedure and practice, and how it relates to these. It also asks "why policy?" and "what is its value?". This publication offers some steps for preparing to develop policy. It then takes the reader, step by step, through the process of actually developing it. Issues around implementing and monitoring organisational policy are also briefly considered.

*Part 6: Capacity Development* (June 2000) explores the ideas of capacity building and capacity development and works with the questions: What is capacity? Where does it come from? What attitudes or perceptions constrain its development? The publication then sets out some conditions for more effective capacity building and development in organisations. It offers a framework for designing a capacity development effort, and suggests steps on how to design a capacity development plan. An exercise is also included.

# What is Part 7 all about?

The word "partnership" is rapidly becoming one of the most used phrases in the lexicon of development workers, business people and all tiers of government in South Africa today. We are all desperately striving to work in partnership, to establish partnerships, and, in some instances, to flee from dysfunctional partnerships.

*Ideas for a Change Parts 7a and 7b* emerged from an effort to come to grips with the notion of "partnership": its meaning; the strengths and considerations involved in working in partnership; the individual and organisational needs and resources upon which partnership draws; and emergent partnership "best practice".

In 2000, we[1] embarked on a unique partnership of our own to develop and deliver a learning programme for partnership development. *Parts 7a and 7b* draw on the experience of this two-module learning programme and the insights of both the facilitation and programme design team and the participants. .

*Part 7a: Developmental Partnerships – beginning to work together* (December 2000) explores the meaning of "partnership" and gives some insight into how we can begin to work together. The publication answers some key questions including:

- What are developmental partnerships?
- Why are they important and worthwhile?
- What do we need to know about ourselves before we enter into partnership with others?
- How do we know we have chosen "the right" partner/s?

*Part 7b: Developmental Partnerships – holding the tensions, the balancing act of partnership* (March 2001) focuses on learning and growing through the heart of the partnership and on the inevitable closure of a partnership. The publication encourages examination of:

- The relationships in the partnership, and asks what's being built, with whom;
- Monitoring different kinds of outputs and ensuring appropriate feedback;
- Devising ways to evaluate the strategies, processes and products of the partnership;
- Understanding and engaging in the closure of the partnership; and
- Preparing for new beginnings.

*Part 7b* thus completes the partnership cycle and lays particular emphasis on developing tools and practices for monitoring the process of the partnership and its products or outputs – both in the partnering organisations and the people.

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1. The partner organisations were Olive (KwaZulu Natal), Tlhavhama Training Initiative (Northern Province) and the Eastern Cape NGO Coalition.

# Section I: Introduction

Many non-governmental organisations have, in recent times, found that they are either pushed to work "in partnership" or have made strategic decisions to do so. Working with other organisations in a collaborative, learning process raises new challenges, but brings with it special rewards.

*Ideas for a Change Part 7a* (December 2000) explored some of the meaning of "partnership" and gave some insights into how we begin to work together. This publication, *Part 7b*, focuses on the next step: making the partnership work.

## Working in partnership

So, you find yourself "working in partnership." You have, perhaps, found people and another organisation to complement your abilities and values, and, who, in the context of a chosen programme/project, seek the same objectives as you do. Life is good! You're communicating, sharing, laughing… and about to get started.

Now the real work begins, and, as partners, you may begin to ask yourselves:
*   How do we maintain the degree of trust and sharing that sparked our desire to work together?
*   How do we know that the partnership is achieving its goals in the community, and in each organisation – that it's not just a convenient and convivial form for a few individuals?
*   How do we maintain energy and commitment when days and nights get long, deadlines loom, and/or the target group doesn't respond as we'd anticipated?

Many of these are questions we ask ourselves as we execute our daily duties in our own organisations. A partnership may exponentially complicate the answers to these questions because, now, instead of people bound by a common understanding of a single organisation, its rules, regulations, personalities, values and culture, we have people from at least one other organisation to contend with. One of the most vexing questions in partnerships must be: "How do we ensure that we respect each other's institutional boundaries, while exercising mutual accountability and development?"

This publication focuses on learning and growing through the "heart of the partnership" and on the inevitable closure of a particular partnership. We will look at some of the processes which can be employed to assist the maturation of the partnership into shared respect and joy after the honeymoon period – and to ensure that even in the most trying moments, it doesn't come crashing down in acrimony!

This implies further examination of:

- The relationships in the partnership, and asking what's being built, with whom;
- Monitoring different kinds of outputs, and ensuring appropriate feedback;
- Devising ways to evaluate the strategies, processes and products of the partnership;
- Understanding and engaging in the closure of the partnership; and
- Preparing for new beginnings.

*Ideas for a Change Part 7b* thus completes the partnership cycle, but lays particular emphasis on developing tools and practices for monitoring the process of the partnership and its products or outputs, both in the partnering organisations and people.

## A reminder: "How do we begin?"

Good development practice emphasises the (oft-neglected) need for rigorously conducted baseline assessments. These assessments are used to realistically portray the starting point of any initiative, to enable us to fully appreciate where we began, so that we can assess the extent of the change that has taken place as a result of our efforts.

A developmental partnership requires a baseline at various levels:

▶ Where am **I** – in my thinking about development/the content of our work together? In my abilities to work with others? In terms of technical skills?

▶ Where is **my organisation** – in terms of reputation and overall ability? In terms of systems, procedures, stages of development?

▶ Where is **the partnership** – in terms of our knowledge of – and respect for – each other? In terms of its stage of development, systems, procedures, and ideas for learning and growth?

▶ What's happening in **the community** that we wish to enhance or build? What's the current state of play? What do we dream of for the future?

Your partnership may have started with the identification of a particular opportunity or problem in a community, and you may have worked together to assess the extent and the dimensions of need, and, together with the community, conceptualised the intervention. As part of planning the partnership's work, you would have set objectives for the "deliverables" – the developmental change which you, and your beneficiaries, intend to achieve.

In preparation for the partnership, and its work, you would have assessed your own skills and readiness to work with others, as well as that of your organisation. *Ideas for a Change Part 7a* explored some tools to assist you to do so. Therefore, once the partnership has begun, you should have a fairly good idea of what you and your organisation bring to the relationship, and what you wish to gain. You may also have considered both the tangible (skills, networks, resources) and the intangible (culture, values, reputation). You may have thought about your own special contribution to the partnership. Finally, you may have given some thought to the different polarities or tensions that working in partnership may give rise to.

What you may not have considered, however, is the extent to which the form of partnership will affect you, your organisation, and your partners, or how you will work with the different polarities (see Section 2, page 13).

## The chosen path of partnership

We assume that your developmental partnership is born out of a mutually felt need to contribute meaningfully and developmentally to society, to your own individual growth and development as well as to the growth and development of your organisation. Deciding to work with others in a developmental relationship is a strategic choice – it implies that the combined wills and strengths of two (or more) committed organisations is greater than the sum of the individual parts. It requires time, shared values, respect, and forgiveness, amongst others. Many of the programmes that we build partnerships around could just as easily – perhaps more easily – be delivered without the added entanglements of another organisation.

Why then do we choose to work in this way? In the last *Ideas for a Change Part 7a* we explored the concept of developmental partnerships, as characterised by:

- their **redistributive nature**;
- a **high degree of mutuality** in decision-making, contribution and benefit; and
- the potential for **increased (deeper, more sustainable) impact** in communities through collective effort.

Making these ideals real requires not just the repetition of platitudes, but a conscious

## " We build the road, and the road builds us"

Sri Lankan saying

effort to work with the tensions that emerge in the process of the partnership (the extent to which the partners' voices are heard and honoured, and the mutual capacity building that results) and delivering a quality product (the developmental outcome, or community-felt impact). In terms of the partnership's outcomes, we need to be conscious of the extent to which interventions and the strategy of partnerships are both **empowering** and **efficient.**

The degree to which change, in terms of relative power and skill (redistribution and mutuality) and impact, can be quantified and measured is often subject to debate. However, by thoroughly analysing where we are when we start, and what we hope to improve, enhance, or change by the end of the partnership, we can begin to identify not only the **extent of change**, but also plan for the **mechanisms/processes** necessary for change. Using the opportunity of the partnership to identify and measure change within communities, organisations and people, requires further exploration of our motivation for partnership, and constant, simultaneous management of a number of polarities. The characteristics and benefits of developmental partnerships bring with them inherent tensions and the need to balance a variety of imperatives at once.

In *Ideas for a Change Part 7a* we introduced a number of polarities having to do with:

▶ **Motivation** – what we bring to, and take out of, partnerships;

▶ **Output Orientation** – which articulates the focus of the partnership (the work or the process);

▶ **Equity/Equality** – in which the notions of value, contribution, and the division of benefits are explored; and

▶ **Boundary Management** – where our identity as both autonomous and collective is housed.

In this publication we add two new polarities to our "basket of balance":

▶ **Openness/Control** – in which we explore the ways in which we need to both ensure deadlines are met, and allow for creativity and flexibility; and

▶ **Empowerment/Efficiency** – which focuses on the development and monitoring of indicators for project/partnership inputs, outputs, outcomes and processes.

Understanding and engaging with these polarities forms the basis for a coherent monitoring and evaluation framework that encompasses the process, the product, and the strategy of a partnership.

# Section 2: Working with polarities – striving for balance

Through the development and exploration of polarities, we are able to express and understand the competing impulses which tear at our lives. Polarities are a means of expressing, understanding, and, ultimately, finding ways to work with concepts which, at first glance, are diametrically opposed[1]. By posing these concepts as opposite ends of the same axis – as poles on a line of thought – we are able to recognise the need and possibility of achieving balance through embracing two different (often seemingly contradictory) emotions, issues or ideas. Working with polarities enables us to shift our orientation from "A or B" to "A and B."
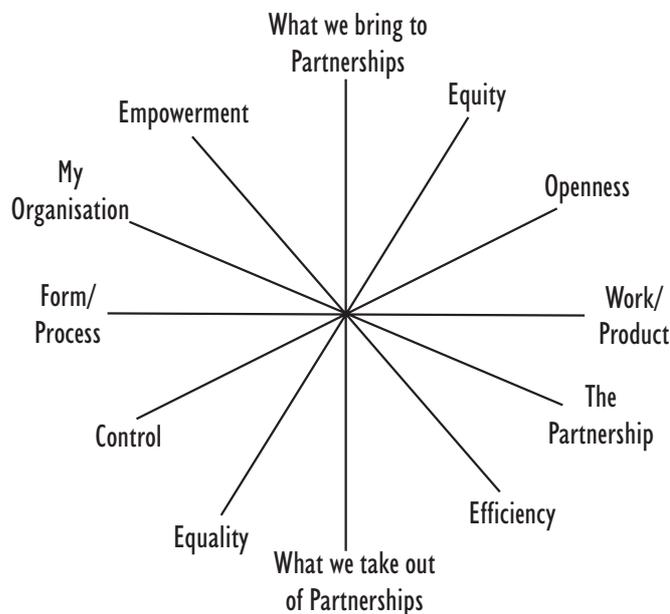


Most of our work in partnerships seems to be about identifying and maintaining a middle ground, and nurturing our ability to find balance in ourselves, in our organisations, and in our relationships with our partners.

In this section we will explore some of the polarities which come into play as we work with others. We also include some exercises which you may wish to use to develop your own, your organisation's and your partnership's understanding of and ability to work with the different polarities.

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1. We wish to acknowledge our colleague, Mario van Boeschoten, for introducing Olive to the concept of polarities. The specific "partnership polarities" included in *Ideas for a Change Part 7a* – and further explored in this publication – are adapted, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the work of Gavin Anderssen.

## Motivation Polarity

| **What we Bring to Partnerships** | **What we Take out of Partnerships** |
|---|---|
| • Our capacity as individuals and organisations<br>• Financial and material resources<br>• Expressed and unexpressed needs<br>• Credibility<br><br>**Shadow**<br>• Control, power-mongering, ego | • Fulfilled needs<br>• Developed capacity as individuals and as organisations<br>• Financial and material resources<br>• Credibility<br><br>**Shadow**<br>• Greed, opportunism |

**Point of Balance:**
What we build together

Clearly articulating what each partnering organisation has to offer to (and has to gain from) a partnership is the first step towards ensuring that partnerships encompass an element of "empowerment" and include a plan for growth and development.

We assume that your work with others – the reason you are considering a developmental partnership – is not only for the altruistic goals of improved sustainability and deepening impact in the community, but is also about what you (or your organisation) can learn, build and gain through a close, giving and mutually accountable relationship with another organisation. Giving to another, and ensuring that each partner gains what they expect therefore needs to be planned for and built into the partnership.

*Ideas for a Change Part 7a* explored what organisations bring to the partnership (this is one half of the polarity). For balance, we must also explore what individuals and organisations hope to gain from a collaborative relationship. While we are generally open about what we **bring** to partnerships, we may feel petty and selfish (and, as such, undesirable as partners) when we consider what we hope to **gain** from the relationship.

Unless we articulate our needs, it is quite likely that they will not be met.

By understanding where we are now, and what we want to build for ourselves and with others, we are able to set objectives for each partnering organisation, the individuals involved, and the partnership as a whole. From these objectives, processes can be designed.

# EXERCISE: What do we hope to gain through working in partnership?

Note: If you are an active member in the partnership and wish to lead your partners through this exercise, you may wish to read through the exercise first, and make notes for yourself on your own perceptions — it may be difficult to work with other partners while also trying to engage yourself in the exercise.

## Visioning

1.  Assemble your active partners — the people from each partnering organisation who are or will be directly involved in the partnership. You should also invite the leaders/managers of each partner (if they are not part of the "active" group). Inform the group that you will lead them through an exercise which will help all of you, together, to identify your hopes and needs to be met during the partnership.

2.  Ask participants to sit comfortably and close their eyes. Ask them to imagine that it is the end of the partnership. They are walking through their organisation, talking to other members of staff — those who have been active in the partnership, as well as those who have not been directly involved.
    *   What does the organisation look like?
    *   How are people working?
    *   What is new/different from the way it is now?

    Invite everyone to make a few notes for themselves — or to draw a quick sketch/image of what they see — they should try to represent people in the organisation who are actively involved in the partnership as well as those only indirectly/peripherally involved.

3.  Invite participants to, again, close their eyes. They are now in one of the last meetings of the partnership. Ask them to look around the meeting room, and consider:
    *   Who is there?
    *   Are the people there the same ones who started the partnership?
    *   Do people participate in the same ways as they did when the partnership started?
    *   What about the quality of relationships between partners? Their understanding of themselves and each other?
    *   What has changed in terms of the quality of interaction or engagement of each partner? What can this tell you about changes within the partner organisations?

    Invite participants to make a few notes for themselves — or to draw a quick sketch/image of what they see — ask them to try to represent all partner organisations.

4.  Ask participants to close their eyes again, and continue visualising the partnership meeting. Now invite them to focus on themselves and the way in which they are participating in the meeting and engaging with others in the partnership.

As they visualise leaving the meeting, ask them to consider:

- How has their participation in the meeting/partnership changed them – what has been added to their own capabilities, confidence, reputation, scope of work?
- What has their involvement in the partnership meant to them?

Invite participants to make a few notes for themselves – or to draw a quick sketch/image of what they see in themselves.

5. Ask each person to find a quiet space to work and using the notes they made, as well as materials such as coloured paper, pens, pictures cut from old magazines, to develop an image which shows how they (as people) and their organisations have emerged from the partnership. (If you have made notes for yourself prior to leading the group, use those notes to develop your own image of yourself and your organisation.)

6. Having developed that image, create small groups in which you can all share your images. Each person should share her/his image, noting what has changed personally and organisationally. Listen to what each person wishes to achieve – and listen for the will of that person. Once a person has described her/his image, others in the group should give feedback on how they envisaged that person's organisation to have changed over the time of the partnership.

## Planning

At the end of the visioning exercise, each person should be given some time to develop a short statement that clarifies:

- The change in yourself and your organisation. (the objective for you/your organisation – and one of the products of the partnership)

- What you (the artist) are willing to put into the relationship to build/develop the things identified. (what you are willing to give – part of the equity/equality polarity)

- What you would like from others in the partnership. If there is anyone in particular that you would like support or feedback from, name that person. (Consider what each organisation brings into the partnership when you do this!)

- What steps could be taken, within the "confines" of the partnership to enable you to achieve these goals. (outlining the process which will enable the achievement of the objective – or product)

By going through this exercise, you will have created an indicator for your personal growth, and the outline/beginning of a strategy for achieving it!

When people and organisations think back on their motivations for being in partnership – and the benefits they hope to realise through the partnership – many reflect the tensions and polarities introduced in this publication and in *Ideas for a Change Part 7a.*

These include:

▶ **More effective delivery** on the ground by bringing expanded skills, ideas and resources to bear on the project. Delivery and impact may be expanded through complementary interventions, linked by a common conceptualisation of both the "problem" and "solution," common values, practices and approaches, and a shared vision of the future.

This requires clear objectives and supporting contracts, and a balance of interventions, reflecting the diversity of capabilities that are brought into the project, as well as the importance of community empowerment in addition to the delivery of goods and services – *openness/control polarity, empowerment/ efficiency polarity, process/product polarity.*

▶ **Enhanced skills and capabilities** of partners through working with an organisation that has skills and abilities that we lack – but want to develop. This will require structured learning opportunities and forms in the *partnership – process/product polarity.*

▶ **New ways of seeing** the same issues or constituency – creating new ideas, insights, intervention ideas. We sometimes become over-familiar (and therefore blind) to the people with whom we work. A fresh look at a tired problem is almost always welcome and is often the spark that releases new energy and creativity. What opportunities do we create in our work to stop, and look at how each partner sees the same set of circumstances?

In order to realise these benefits, it is important for all partners to be involved in the conceptualisation of the project, and to maintain open, honest relationships – *equity/equality polarity, process/product polarity.*

▶ **More time** for other work through using the skills/capabilities of a key staff member in one of the partnering organisations[1].

This will require partners who are well-matched in terms of skill and ability so that one partner does not feel that the others are reliant on her/him – *equity/equality polarity.*

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1. Where the point above stresses building capacity within the partnership, this point is almost its opposite: enabling others to say "no," or take up new challenges.

▶ **New networks and donor contacts** can be gained through working in partnership. Working in partnership also creates the opportunity to source new funds for an idea or area, rather than drawing from the same donors who have always been active there.

This requires not only the willingness of all partners to share, but also a creative approach to financing the initiative and seeking opportunities which one organisation, acting alone, may not always have – *equity/equality polarity, autonomy/partnership polarity.*

▶ **Increased recognition** from our peers, our colleagues/co-workers, donors, government departments and the communities with whom we work. Through partnerships, we create for ourselves (and others) the opportunity to pilot and demonstrate new models. We also create a "new stage" for some of the partners – the introduction to new role players, approaches or geographical areas. All of this can enhance reputations.

Increasing recognition is, in itself, a factor that changes the balance of power in relationships and organisations. Ensuring "credit" is given to the partners, as individuals, as well as the partnership as a whole and ensuring that attribution and public acknowledgement is fair, deserved and appropriately ascribed, is a delicate dance indeed – *autonomy/partnership polarity, empowerment/efficiency polarity.*

## A word on barriers: what stops us from working in partnership?

Even with the best intentions, we find ourselves prey to untold barriers to undertaking our hearts' desires. Our barriers – like other forms of resistance – take the form of both "hard" and "soft" issues. "Hard" issues relate to concrete resources (computers, vehicles, funding) and tend to be relatively easily dispensed with. "Soft" issues, however, are frequently not only more prevalent, but also much more difficult to resolve – these are the barriers which we create ourselves through fear and resistance, and are translated into our beliefs, attitudes and practices.

Not only do we have different kinds of barriers, but we find barriers at different places – we have barriers within ourselves, our positions within organisations can create various limitations, and our organisations often reflect the collective resistances, attitudes and beliefs of those who work there.

Some commonly expressed hindrances to not engaging in developmental partnerships include the following:

▶ **My organisation**

- Fear of the unknown.

- Maturity – we don't know ourselves, or are unwilling to look too deeply at ourselves.

- "We have a bad reputation – who would want to work with us?"

- Lack of trust in other organisations.

- Selfishness or ownership of donors and/or communities – often resulting in "unhealthy competition".

- No clear strategy to work with others – the organisation places little value on collaborative work and/or sharing.

- Power relations – within the organisation and in terms of relationships with others.

- Lack of commitment – no organisational ownership of the partnership (it's seen to be one person's pet project).

**Remember:**
**You must be the change you wish to see!**

- Lack of communication within the organisation and with others.
- Incompatible management and information systems, making the mechanics of a partnership difficult.

▶ **Me**

- Insecurity – not confident in myself, my organisation, the partnership.
- Insufficient authority or power in the organisation to make/influence decisions,
- direction, resource allocation.
- Lack of skills/capacity to undertake the work that is required.
- Poor communication skills, limiting my ability to work effectively with others.
- No ownership of the partnership – "my boss told me to come to this meeting."
- No trust in the other partners' abilities.
- Time constraints, due to other commitments and duties.

Once the barriers to partnership are articulated, individual organisations (or potential partners) can begin to confront and interrogate the barriers – first decide which are hard barriers, and which are soft barriers. Consider how partnerships can be structured to overcome the barriers. What needs to be shared? What needs further discussion? How can new skills, abilities, attitudes be created?

## Exercise: Identifying blockages

Think back to the visioning exercise (see page 15) that helped you to identify your personal and organisational objectives for change. Consider the reality of your life and work, and make some notes for yourself in terms of **blockages**:

- What are blockages in you which may prevent you from achieving your goal?
- What are constraints posed by your position in the organisation?

You may choose to do this immediately following the visioning exercise, while you are all still in one room, or you may wish to ask each partner to consider these questions in their own time. You do not need to share your responses with anyone yet, but keep them – you may need to adapt your strategy to enable you to work with – and overcome – some of the blockages.

**Your goals, strategies and blockages will form an important part of negotiating the Output Orientation Polarity (page 21) and the Empowerment/Efficiency Polarity (page 23).**

## Output Orientation Polarity

**The Work/Product**
- Focus on benefits to community
- Tangible outcomes, services
- Sustainability of developmental benefits in the community

**Shadow**
- Absence of added value of collaborative work (partnership may actually "get in the way")
- Mechanistic; without regard for relationships

**The Form/Process**
- High value on relationships and means of working together
- Focus on (intangible) benefits to partners (e.g. enhanced capacity, less competition/duplication in communities)

**Shadow**
- Community needs get lost/are secondary
- Paralysed by introspection/group processes

**Point of Balance:**
Added value of collaboration

Often, we enter into partnerships in order to ensure certain deliverables. A partnership may ensure the sustainability of, for example, community water and sanitation programmes.

Such a partnership could be comprised of the following inter-related components:

- the development of infrastructure;
- a focus on changing the beneficiary group's behaviours and attitudes with respect to health and hygiene;
- a focus on working with communities to articulate and exercise their rights and responsibilities; and
- an income-generating activity that supports the infrastructure development.

These are all different **outputs,** or products, of the partnership as it engages with the development priorities of the community concerned. Because contracts with donors and government departments generally emphasise the "deliverables" (the **product** of the partnership) these get the most attention. The **process** of the partnership is disregarded – until or unless cracks begin to show in the relationships. In this sense, the output orientation of the partnership becomes an important consideration.

Monitoring and evaluation are concerned with assessing development interventions on various levels – context, inputs, processes and products. Current thinking on evaluation asserts that assessing the product (goods, services, benefits

to the target community) without understanding the process (systems, processes for engagement, relationships between communities and service providers) does not give a full picture of the nature and impact of the intervention. Assessing the context (the extent to which the intervention is attuned to the beneficiary community's needs) and the project's input (its strategy, in terms of the context) are also increasingly important.

The way the partners work together to achieve not only community development objectives, but some of the individual and organisational development objectives (which were articulated in the visioning exercise – page 15), is central to a **developmental** partnership. A partnership that focuses only on the desired goods and services for the community achieves only a portion of its goal.
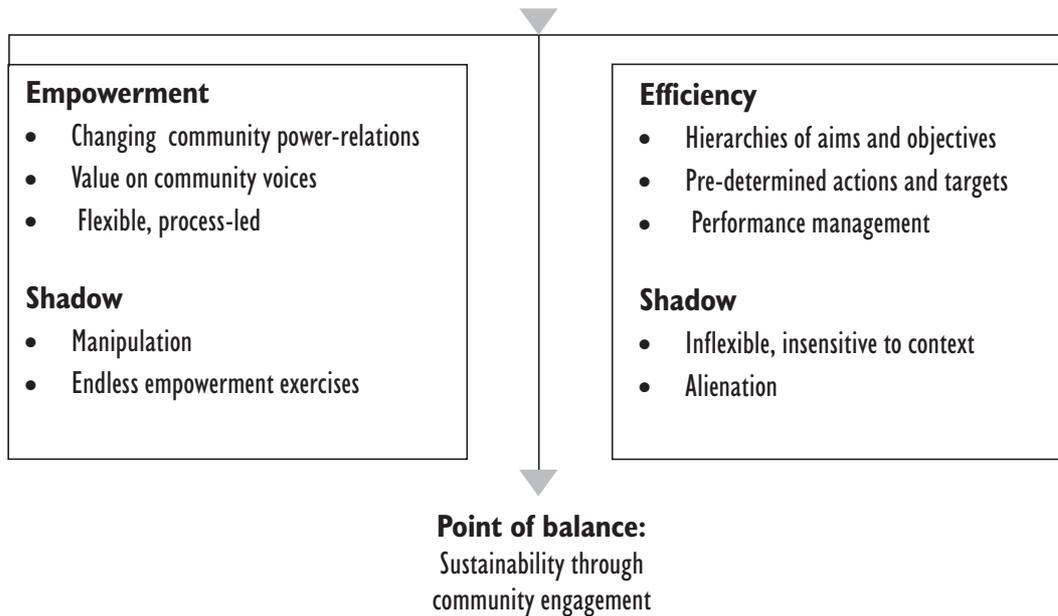
One of the desired outcomes of working in a developmental partnership is the building of more resilient organisations. Another stated goal of these partnerships is the development of more cohesive and coherent relationships between organisations, and between individuals and organisations, for the purpose of achieving the specified social good which formed the content of the partnership.

Like "conventional" development projects, the delivery of the product, and its future use and sustainability, is often the result of the **process of engagement**. That is to say, the degree to which development workers fully engage with and win the trust and confidence of the communities with whom they work has a direct relationship to how the "deliverables" are both perceived and used. This is true, also, for the development of partnerships.

*Ideas for a Change Part 7a* considered the importance of relationships in partnerships: relationships are the glue that holds a partnership together – but they are not created out of thin air. As much as development delivery requires time and effort, so does the development and maintenance of sound relationships. It is therefore important to plan for – and monitor – the process of working together, not just our achievements.

One of the best ways of ensuring this occurs is to honour one relationship, and see it as a concrete output of the partnership. In other words, allocate time, money and, where necessary, external facilitation, to the development and maintenance of this relationship.

## Empowerment/Efficiency Polarity

**Empowerment**
- Changing community power-relations
- Value on community voices
- Flexible, process-led

**Shadow**
- Manipulation
- Endless empowerment exercises

**Efficiency**
- Hierarchies of aims and objectives
- Pre-determined actions and targets
- Performance management

**Shadow**
- Inflexible, insensitive to context
- Alienation

**Point of balance:**
Sustainability through
community engagement

Closely linked to the Output Orientation Polarity is the Monitoring and Evaluation – or Empowerment/Efficiency – Polarity[1]. This polarity further explores the *kinds* of products/outputs of our work, and also looks at the *elements* of a project, programme or partnership that should be monitored and evaluated. The polarity focuses on achieving a balance between participatory ethos – **empowerment** – where the process of development is highly evolutionary, and a more clinical, static approach – **efficiency**. On the empowerment side, "the process of engagement and creation of indicators is at least as important as their accuracy or the cost-effectiveness of their use." Efficiency, on the other hand, focuses on targets, hierarchies of aims/objectives and rational plans.

Engaging with this polarity gives further weight to the Process/Product polarity – it implies that, even within the "Product" focus, all is not qualitative, tangible measurements and outcomes. Of equal importance and legitimacy is the extent to which development initiatives enable community voices to be heard, and result in shifts in skewed power relations. These important changes can be seen as **outputs**, and worth examining during monitoring and evaluation activities.

The table on page 24 illustrates the role that empowerment and efficiency play in ensuring the broad "success" of any development initiative, as well as the relative difficulty of monitoring or evaluating the different elements of a project or programme.

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1. Source of this polarity and the table on page 24: Simon Zadek and Peter Raynard, "Measuring for Development" in *Alliances,* the journal of the Charities Aid Foundation - September 2000.

| | |
|---|---|
| Process | Building a level playing field, overcoming power relations |
| Outcomes | Perceptions of data – how communities view and use the outputs |
| Outputs | Data – deliverables |
| Inputs | **Money, time, etc.** |

Increasing Importance

Increasing Difficulty

This table encompasses the need to measure both **empowerment** and **efficiency** in our monitoring and evaluation processes. It suggests that the aspects which deal with empowerment (the outcomes and processes) are of paramount importance in terms of sustainability of the immediate project (and, one could speculate, in terms of any target group's ability to engage in future development activities from a position of relative strength). They are, however, amongst the most difficult to measure.

The aspects of a development project which tell us about our efficiency are, conversely, less important to long-term sustainability, but relatively easy to understand and quantify.

## EXERCISE: Monitoring process and product, empowerment and efficiency

### I. Identify

The visioning exercise (page15) gave you an idea of what you want to achieve for yourself, your organisation and your partnership – as well as potential barriers to meeting your goals.

Incorporating the "barriers", develop broad objectives for the different things you would like this partnership to achieve – work individually first, and then share with others in your organisation and the partnership. Once a set of broad objectives are agreed, use the process/product polarity, to identify which outcomes are tangible products, and which are the intangible outcomes of a process of engagement.

For example:

| For Whom: | Process | Product |
|---|---|---|
| **Our Target Group** | Changed behaviour with respect to health and hygiene; Able to articulate and exercise rights | Potable water with household taps, VIP toilets |
| **The Partnership** | Engaging with trust and confidence | New methodologies |
| **My Organisation** | Enhanced reputation | Financial resources, new staff |
| **Me** | Acting with confidence, taking initiative, using new skills | New position in the organisation |

Check your chart: is there a healthy balance between what will be achieved, and tangibly measured, and the intangibles which describe changed behaviours and attitudes as a result of a process?

## 2. Developing indicators

Indicators are statements which describe, in some detail, the change we expect to see once the objective is achieved. An indicator can be likened to a snap-shot, which gives a detailed description of what will have been achieved if the objective has been reached. Your objective may be: "Potable water is provided to households in GaMaja," but your indicator will specify how many households, whether the water is provided by yard connection or to blocks of households, the water quality, the time-frame for delivery. Your indicator should be simple, measurable, accurate, relevant and time-bound, and include information about who is involved/benefiting, the quantity of the deliverable, its quality and where the change will occur.

When you were developing a project plan for the partnership, you probably developed indicators for your work in communities – check that this included both process and product outcomes and indicators.

For this exercise, focus on the outcomes and indicators for the partnership, your organisation, and yourself. In terms of the example above, consider which new skills you want to develop. In groups, you may wish to brainstorm what will show or prove that your organisation's reputation is enhanced, or how trust in the partnership will be manifested. Develop these into fairly detailed statements, once the principles have been agreed.

An indicator which may demonstrate that your organisation's reputation has been enhanced may focus on such things as the kinds of meetings and conferences you're invited to attend, your organisation's inclusion on different forums and/or the people who call on your organisation for advice or consulting work.

## 3. How can these be achieved?

Working first on each objective separately and then together, consider the kinds of activities which would need to be undertaken for each objective. You may wish to work with a matrix, or with cards, to build a picture of how you will work. For each activity, consider, and specify, who will be involved from each partner organisation.

| OBJECTIVES | More effective health & hygiene training methods developed. | Enhanced training & facilitation design skills. | Increased trust among partners. | Enhanced reputation of partners. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1st Quarter** | Research existing methods; Workshop with all partners to determine "best practice". | Work closely with more experienced trainers in partner organisation to learn how training is designed. | Assign clear guidelines and tasks for research process. Agree on values and principles which underpin "best practice". | Ensure that all staff have time and resources to prepare for meetings and workshops so they can participate effectively. |
| **2nd Quarter** | Develop pilot training programme with trainers from all partners; Pilot/Field test training. | Observe and co-facilitate aspects of pilot programme. Be an active part of the design and de-briefing process. Take lots of notes! | All partners share in keeping the focus on jointly decided "best practice" principles. Keep lines of communication open during field testing, for example, regular and thorough debriefings. | (same as above) |
| **3rd Quarter** | Debriefing workshop with trainers, management, external facilitator. | Actively participate in debriefing process - state clearly what I've observed. | Ensure "safe space" for people to voice their concerns or reservations. | (same as above) |
| **4th Quarter** | Revise methodology. Document methods and results. | Share my notes and insights with others to build the documentation exercise. Participate in sharing forums. | Ensure all have input and share ownership of new method and that the document acknowledges the contributions of all. | Ensure that the document acknowledges the contribution of all. Consider joint "launch" of programme and positive results. |

Note: The second column in this matrix is the "product" column, what the partnership will achieve that will be used by the beneficiaries. Columns 3, 4 and 5 describe "process" and "empowerment" indicators for the partnership.

## 4. How will we assess empowerment and efficiency?

Having described the change you are hoping to achieve, and the activities you will undertake, go back to the monitoring framework and consider:

▶ How will we monitor the inputs: the time, money and other resources that have gone into this objective?

▶ How will we monitor the outputs: what are the tangible products of our work?

▶ How will we monitor the outcomes: how our goods/services are perceived by our beneficiaries, how our skills are enhanced, and the qualitative change in how we work together?

▶ How will we assess the extent of the process/empowerment: the shift in the balance of power within the partnership — who leads? How are ideas valued?

By now you have identified broad objectives for what the partnership will deliver in the community and how the partnering people and organisations will grow and change over the course of the partnership. You have also formulated indicators which will assist you in assessing whether or not you are achieving your goals.

Considering these indicators prior to the start of the project and partnership does not mean that they will not change over time. It is important that as the partnership deepens, indicators and especially process objectives are updated and modified. Making a conscious effort to articulate, from the beginning, what each partner wants, and how their progress may be assessed, adds depth to the partnership.

Creating the space to regularly check progress towards the goals of product and process with both empowerment and efficiency considerations, strengthens the relationships and sense of purpose of the partnership.

## Equity/Equality Polarity

**Equity**

- Fairness — organisations put in what they are capable of. Need plays a role in determining the type of benefit which accrues to different partners, as does relative contribution to the partnership
- Different partners contribute and benefit differently, but within agreed parameters or frameworks
- Responsibilities are assigned and variable (access to rewards/benefits is frequently tied to responsibility)

**Shadow**

- Entrenched inequality and lopsided benefits (and contribution)
- Exploitation of either stronger or weaker partners

**Equality**

- Uniformity — all contribute and benefit in exactly the same manner; benefits are divided amongst partners irrespective of the relative contribution of each
- Rights — all partners share the same rights in the relationship, but these rights are divorced from responsibilities

**Shadow**

- Sameness — the absence of both risk and innovation

**Point of Balance:**
Mutually beneficial to all parties

The question of **equity** or **equality** in partnerships is, perhaps, the most vexing of them all. It requires that partners have sufficient respect for, and trust in, each other to confront the varied expectations of each partner with openness, and sensitivity. It is important to recognise that partners may be in different phases of development, and that this could influence the extent to which greater emphasis is given to either equity or equality.

Surfacing and working with issues of diversity also plays an important role in the development of respect and trust between the partners.

The principles of equity and equality are closely aligned to notions of "fairness," "democracy", "accountability" and "diversity". All of these principles are often used, but frequently with varying interpretations.
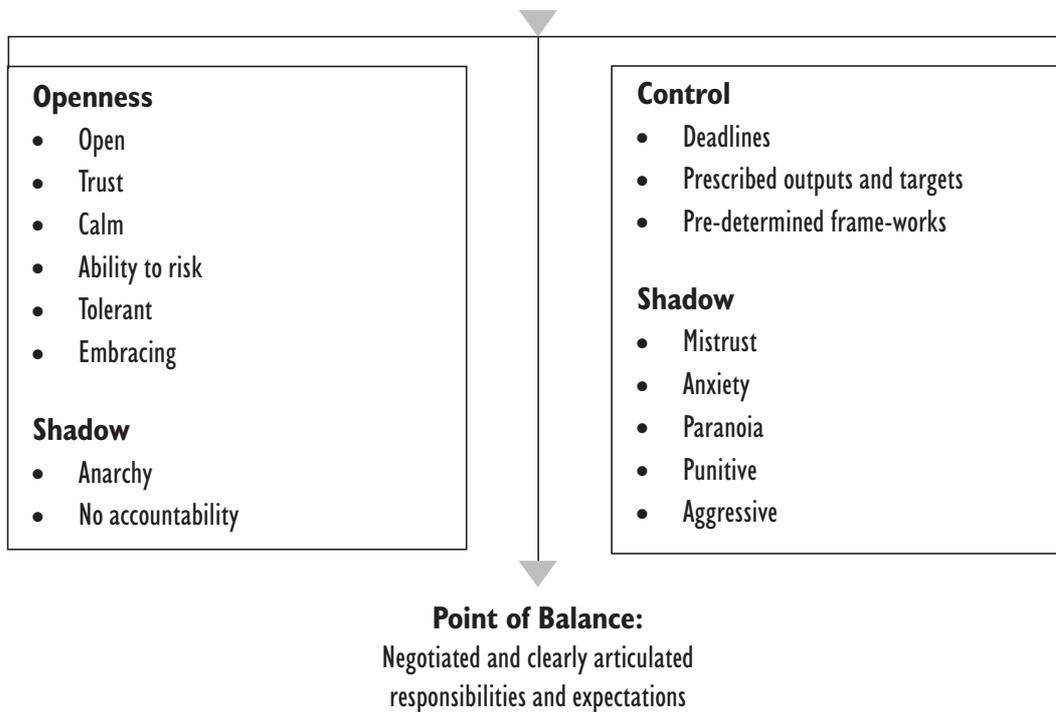
## Exercise: Working with equity and equality

1.  Assemble a group of all your active partners, and include, if possible, more than one person from each organisation. Put the words "Equity" and "Equality" on two different flip charts. Ask participants to QUICKLY brainstorm words/meanings — in English — which they associate with each word. You can either play the role of the facilitator and record the responses, or give people pens, and invite them to write directly on the flip chart (alternatively, people could write on cards, which could be posted on the different flip charts).

    Is there any overlap? Indicate that words/meanings can only belong to ONE of the flip charts. Set the duplicated words/meanings aside.

2.  Divide people into groups according to their home language/mother tongue (if all participants share a mother tongue, consider disaggregation by rural/urban, gender, age — or randomly divide groups — do not form groups of each organisation unless it is based on language. Ask each group to use their mother tongue and find a word or phrase that most closely means "equity" and one that most closely means "equality." Record these on a flip chart.

3.  Invite each group to share their translations, starting with "equity." After reading out the word/phrase that most closely means "equity," ask members of the group to translate that word/phrase back into English. Record this on the group's flip chart. Move to the next group. Repeat the same procedure for "equality." This should clarify how "equity" and "equality" are different.

4.  Create a new "polarity" using the translated inputs from the groups, and try to place any of the duplicated meanings on one or the other side of the polarity. Invite discussion on the "shadow" of each side of the polarity.

5.  Give each group member a number of stickers (for example, three — depending on how large the group is and how long the lists of characteristics are), and ask them to use these stickers to indicate the words/phrases/concepts that they would like to see reflected in the partnership — these can (and should) be drawn from both sides of the polarity. After narrowing down the number of characteristics, reach consensus on the most important and most commonly held ones.

6.  In mixed groups, formed of representatives from the different partners, ask participants to work with one characteristic, and develop a principle which shows how it will be operationalised in the partnership. If you are working with a group that has undertaken the visioning exercise on page 15, ask them to consider what they want to give to, and get out of, the partnership when developing the characteristics. Reach agreement on these principles, noting that they will form part of the way in which the partnership is assessed, and may change over time.
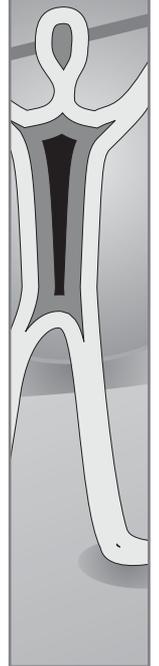
7.  Invite each group to present their characteristics and principles. Check that the principles are realistic, and agreeable to all. Remind the group that these principles should be applied to how the partnership does its work, and guide your partnership in answering questions such as:

    -   Who leads which processes? How often? For how long (For example: For the life of the project? For the first year?)

    -   Where do meetings take place? How frequently?

    -   How do we determine the remuneration of different partners for work done on the partnership? What criteria, in addition to our principles, do we employ?

    -   How do we ensure that those who contribute more skills/time are recognised? How do we quantify these contributions, and the benefits to those who are growing and developing?

    -   How do we ensure that the partnership does not become a burden to one or the other partner?

    -   How do we ensure that partners share their skills, and do not become greedy?

    -   How do we make time to deal with issues of relationship, communication and the maintenance/building of trust and respect?

    -   How do we celebrate successes and learn from these and our mistakes?

## Openness/Control Polarity

| **Openness** | **Control** |
|---|---|
| • Open | • Deadlines |
| • Trust | • Prescribed outputs and targets |
| • Calm | • Pre-determined frame-works |
| • Ability to risk | |
| • Tolerant | **Shadow** |
| • Embracing | • Mistrust |
| | • Anxiety |
| **Shadow** | • Paranoia |
| • Anarchy | • Punitive |
| • No accountability | • Aggressive |

**Point of Balance:**
Negotiated and clearly articulated
responsibilities and expectations

Having considered the role of equity and equality in our partnership relationships, and having confronted the possibility of selfishness and a lack of trust, your partnership may struggle to create a mechanism to ensure that all partners are respected, trusted and given the freedom of creativity, **and meet their deadlines and the expectations of others!**

The openness/control polarity helps to illustrate these competing needs and forces. Our principles insist on openness, while our donors – and our reputations – require the control that strict deadlines bring.
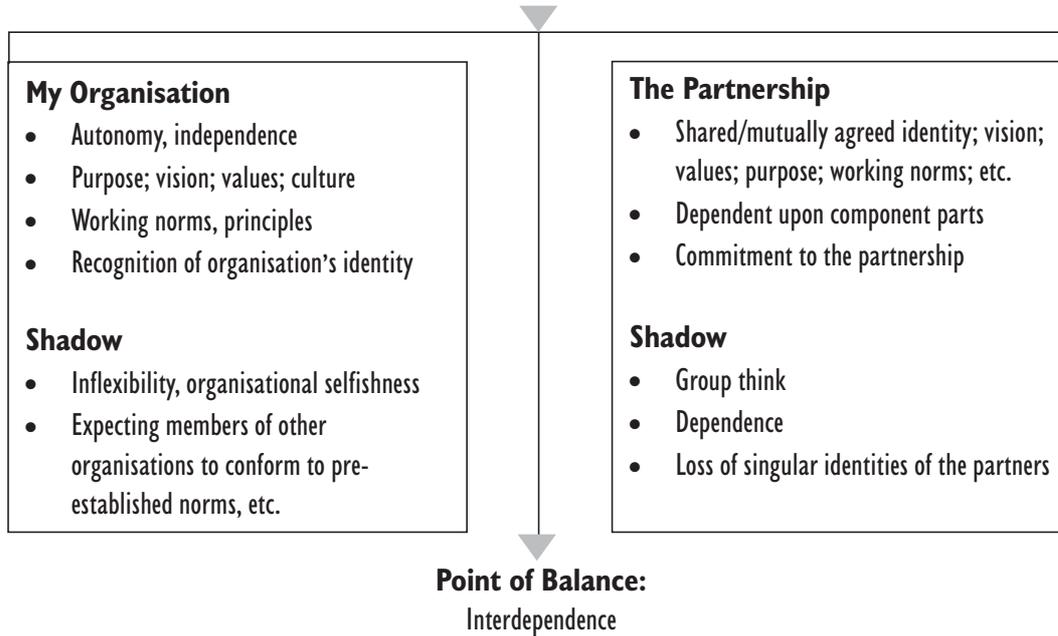
In our definition of developmental partnerships, presented in *Ideas for a Change Part 7a*, we suggested that contracts were the outcomes, not the heart of the partnership. Partnering organisations need to first clarify **what** they want to achieve internally (for the people, organisations or the partnership) and externally (in terms of the community) before developing a contract. Additionally, partners should be clear about their **values and principles**, and have come to some agreement in terms of the desired extent of **empowerment**, before these contracts can be drawn and signed.

The contract that binds the partnership is not an arbitrary document, specifying only the outcomes of the work. It should be a reflection of the soul as well as the body of the partnership, and should specify, amongst others:

- The shared vision of the partnership;

- The underpinning principles of the partnership;

- The rights and obligations of each partner;

- The expectations of each partner with respect to the others;

- The specific outputs of each partner in terms of achieving goals in the community;

- The specific outputs of each partner in terms of achieving goals in the partnership;

- The reporting and monitoring mechanisms and expectations;

- The frequency and purpose/content of meetings of the partnership – with provision made for monitoring the process/empowerment indicators as well as the product/efficiency ones;

- The frequency of meetings to maintain, affirm and renew relationships;

- Means of negotiating and discussing difference;

- Ownership of materials, reports and other project outcomes; and

- Budget allocations and reporting requirements.

The contract, like the indicators, should be a **living thing**. If, after one year, progress has not been what was anticipated, consider reviewing the contract, renegotiating, looking for creative solutions. Don't let your contract become the heart of the partnership – it is simply a formal expression of your ideals. In order to maintain momentum and work with change, the documentation that legally binds the partners must be given space to breathe, and an opportunity for adjustment.

## Boundary Management Polarity

| My Organisation | The Partnership |
|---|---|
| • Autonomy, independence | • Shared/mutually agreed identity; vision; values; purpose; working norms; etc. |
| • Purpose; vision; values; culture | • Dependent upon component parts |
| • Working norms, principles | • Commitment to the partnership |
| • Recognition of organisation's identity | |
| **Shadow** | **Shadow** |
| • Inflexibility, organisational selfishness | • Group think |
| • Expecting members of other organisations to conform to pre-established norms, etc. | • Dependence |
| | • Loss of singular identities of the partners |

**Point of Balance:**
Interdependence

As indicated at the beginning of this publication, maintaining organisational autonomy in the face of a developmental partnership may be a difficult task. It's an easy slip for independence and organisational identity to be subsumed into a partnership.

If one's partnership is delivering with a high degree of competence and recognition, it is tempting to allow the partnership to eclipse your organisation's identity outside of the partnership. Your organisation is gaining recognition, not as an independent being, but as a component of a larger initiative. You may find yourself using that status to try to open new doors – only to find that your organisation is not recognised outside the partnership. Your identity may have become reliant on the partnership.

Conversely, if your partnership is **not** performing, try as you may, it could be difficult to extricate your organisation from the morass of tarnished reputations. Outside observers have incredibly long and detailed memories when it comes to failure – although the detail rarely differentiates between the contributions and short-comings of the individual partners.

Another potential boundary management issue may arise when there is an imbalance in the institutional backdrop of partnership organisations. In an NGO-government partnership for example, or if a large, established NGO is working with a smaller, less robust community organisation, the dominant organisational culture (perhaps located outside of the partnership, at a higher level of the hierarchy) may demand conformity to institutional norms and values that are not

always appropriate to the partnership and what it is trying to achieve.

These cases illustrate the potential pitfalls of partnership. We may become more exalted, more respected, more trusted – but only in the context of the partnership. We may lose all that we have worked to build – through the partnership, but outside of it as well.

A Xhosa proverb illustrates this point:

> *Ukuthenga emithiyo ngenethole*
>
> "When exchanging a cow and a calf for a pregnant cow, you may double your returns and get twins, or you might lose and get a still-born calf."
>
> (Source: Lucky Malgas – ECNGOC)

It is therefore important that the partnering organisations, and the partnership as a whole, monitors where organisations stand in the boundary management polarity.

## EXERCISE: Tension Analysis

A tool which may assist people and organisations to gauge the extent to which the organisation expresses and asserts its identity is a Tension Analysis. This tool was originally presented in Ideas for a Change Part 1: Strategic Processes, but here it takes on the special role of assessing the levels of (dis)comfort that people and organisations may find in their partnerships. The Tension Analysis assists partners to identify potential areas of conflict, as well as new issues for the partnership to explore.

1. Working with a group of active partners, present the picture below.

**global**

**national**

**provincial**

**local**

**the partnership**

**my organisation**

**me in my work**

2. Ask participants to map issues of tension or conflict between these levels/layers. Ask, for example: "What tensions are there between your organisation and community needs?" Encourage people to work in small groups, and consider the following questions:

   - What tensions arise between the different people, and the partnership as a whole?

   - What tensions arise between their organisations and the partnership?

   - Are there tensions between the partnership and external role players – or between the organisation and external role players?

   Ask participants to write the tensions up clearly, on cards, and to physically post them between the relevant layers in the picture.

3. Use the tension analysis to discuss and review the partnership, with partners, and to strategise ways/means of resolving the tensions before there is conflict! Consider the following questions to guide your discussions:

   - What issues of power are at play? What personal agendas have not been surfaced and/or addressed?
   - Which tensions are resolvable? What could we do to resolve the tension (negotiate and change the implementation strategy, engage different members of staff from each organisation, communicate more frequently and with greater sensitivity to each other?)
   - Are there tensions between either the partnership or the organisation and external role players which seriously threaten the partnership? The partners as individuals? What can we do about these, now, before they become an even bigger issue?

   Are there ways that individuals, organisations or the partnership can be used to resolve tensions arising?

4. Identify the first three or five steps that your partnership, a particular organisation, or a person is able to take in order to work with one of the tensions which is pressing and/or resolvable. Consider what longer-term changes would be necessary in order to resolve this tension (consider how to allocate time and responsibility for working on this).

# Section 3: Enabling growth

## Keeping motivated – the Spiral of Renewal
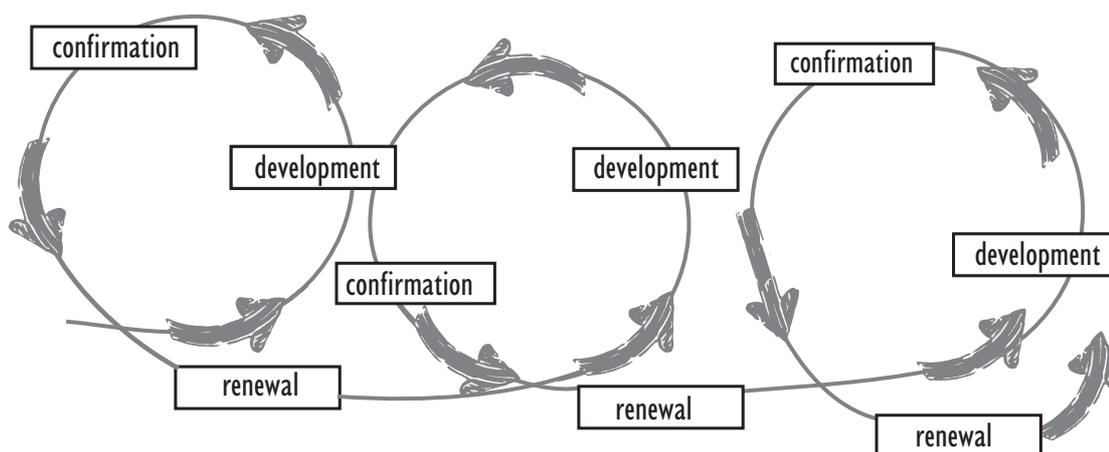


As you move through your partnership, you, and the others who are involved in the journey with you, are able to move through a continuous "spiral of renewal." The spiral of renewal recognises that, through the process of the partnership, growth and development is taking place. The challenge is for the partners to recognise and celebrate those developments, rather than to burn out or lose energy and focus.

The acknowledgement of our ability to **develop**, achieve and shift our visions and understandings is an important function of the partnership, and is manifested in **confirmation**. This is where the people who work within – and outside of – the partnership are recognised, appreciated and affirmed. We can also recognise teamwork, and celebrate our successes – as partners, as people and as organisations. We build a culture of caring and value, which enables **renewal**. Through renewal we hold the worth and value of people, but we also confront the areas which need further development and change. We release energy, which enables further development.

As you work in your partnership, you will, no doubt, find times when the spiral of renewal comes naturally and gracefully – you will find many causes for celebration and affirmation. You will also, however, find times when you (or your partners) are ready to surrender, when you regret your decision to work towards a developmental partnership, when you see little change in the field, and only negative influences in yourself and your own organisation. These are the times when we need to remind

ourselves of the need to stop, reflect and openly assess what is happening around us.

Many of the exercises offered in this publication present opportunities for your partnership to activate the spiral of renewal – to honour, to confront, to plan for growth and development, and to re-invigorate tired partners!

For example, reviewing and updating the tension analysis can help you and your partners determine the cause of dissatisfaction, and release new energy into resolving tensions. You may also find the opportunity to review some of the exercises and check if/how the people, the organisations or the partnership as a whole has shifted in terms of the various polarities. Sometimes, all that is needed is a break from the everyday, the routine, to create new energy – don't discount the value of doing something different, or swapping roles, even for a day!

End your experiments, however, with a positive reflection: find (renewed) value and appreciation in the people and organisations with whom you are working – help them to grow and achieve, and help yourself to be a "better" partner.
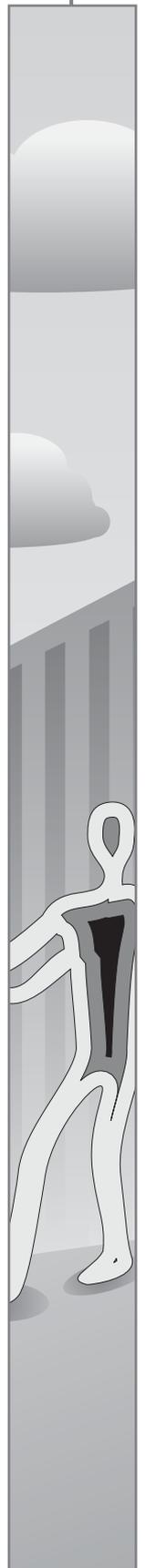
# Section 4: Closure

## Celebrating the past and the future

Finally we reach the point in our partnership when the community goals have been achieved. The project's life is over, but the organisations live on. How, or indeed why, do we say goodbye to our partners, our comrades, our brothers and sisters in arms?

The close of a partnership is as essential as the beginning of one. The partnership was formed to achieve something inside ourselves, our organisations, and the communities with whom we work. When that work is finished, so, then, must **this** partnership be.

However, the completion of one partnership creates the opportunity for a new one. We walk away from our positive and developmental partnership experiences as changed people and organisations. We have grown and developed. To shirk away from closing this partnership is to avoid acknowledging its impact on our lives. The best way to honour our partnerships, is to close them in celebration and friendship.

We're then able to look forward to our next engagement. We may meet the same organisations, but they will have grown and developed, as have we, so the next partnership will not be the same. We will bring something new and exciting to our next partnership, as we have left partners who will bring something new and exciting to **their** next partnership. We may expand the circle of our partnerships – seeking new opportunities to learn new things, new ways of working, new cultures.

Hopefully, we leave each engagement richer – and we leave those with whom we've engaged, richer as well. We move into the future, while holding the present and drawing on the past. It is our gift to our future partners.

## Navaho Night Chant

Happily may I walk
May it be beautiful
Before me
May it be beautiful
Behind me
May it be beautiful
Below me
May it be beautiful
Above me
May it be beautiful all around me
In beauty is it finished.

# Notes: