

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for ICTs in Education

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People - not methods, structures and procedures - are the basis for successful partnerships and participation.

[Taken from: <http://partnerships.typepad.com/civic/2006/06/relationshipbas.html> : Relationship - based engagement – David Wilcox]

Introduction

Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) and other partnerships e.g. public-private partnerships (PPPs) have become important vehicles for drawing together the resources and know-how needed to make progress in a specific field or area. They are formed to expand the reach, improve the quality, increase the supply, and/or improve accessibility of services to identified beneficiaries/communities.

Definition of multi-stakeholder partnerships

A multi-stakeholder partnership in the e-schools context¹ can broadly be defined as a partnership that exists when government officials or agencies join with the private sector, civil society², professional development and training institutions, technology and telecommunication providers, educational content and ICT application developers, teachers, parents and learners to work towards and attain a shared goal.³

Such partnerships may have the following characteristics:

- Bring together diverse partners representing different groups and/or interests

¹ For the purposes of this paper, multi-stakeholder partnerships are examined in the context of e-schools initiatives but may apply to other initiatives as well.

² *Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, [trade unions](#), self-help groups, [social movements](#), business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.* [Wikipedia: London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society]

³ In this context to transform national education systems in the long term through ICT integration.

- Partners work together, have a shared vision, and work towards common goals and objectives
- Partners have a comprehensive and coordinated approach
- Each partner contributes something to the process, e.g. time, funding, expertise, and/or other resources
- Decision-making and management responsibilities are shared (though there may be a secretariat coordinating and monitoring the activities of various partners).

Rationale for multi-stakeholder partnerships

Multi-stakeholder (and others, e.g. public-private) partnerships have become an increasingly viable and popular strategy for improving the accessibility and reach of services and the quality of services and service provision. Such partnerships are formed for a variety of reasons, particularly due to the realization that no one sector or group can effectively address, cater for, or resource the range of needs to be met in the e-school context. It is important to recognize that each prospective partner has a unique set of reasons for participating, and while some may not directly contribute in terms of tangible resources or expertise, their inclusion in the partnership is vital as they will contribute in terms of their expectations, experiences, perspectives and knowledge of the local environment. The most successful partnerships understand and accommodate the motivations of every partner, and shape partnership goals and activities to benefit all of the partners.

What multi-stakeholders partnerships can do

Multi-stakeholder partnerships can bring together a number of diverse partners with different interests but within the framework of a shared vision and broad common goals. By their very nature (diverse groups with diverse interests, expertise, skills mixes, etc.) they can develop new and innovative ways of dealing with issues since ‘business-as-usual’ cannot apply. They can leverage and mobilize more resources than one entity would be able to, and their joint collaboration can increase the impact of the programme/activity. However, for this to happen, there needs to be a framework within which the roles and responsibilities of each partner is clear and understood by every other partner, clear and attainable targets are set within realistic timeframes, and strong leadership and supervision are provided by a central body/unit.

Well-structured and coordinated partnerships can achieve the following:

- Provide comprehensive and coordinated coverage of needs (end-to-end approach)
- Ensure involvement of major players (not just last-minute and/or ‘superficial consultation’)
- Improve quality of interventions and thereby ensure greater impact

- Ensure reliable and valid data on which to base their planning and measure their progress
- Disseminate data strategically in a user-friendly format and seek media attention to increase the impact of data on policymakers and the public
- Target their work on multiple levels and mobilize effective change agents at each level
- Create new solutions to ‘old problems’ of access to and quality of education
- Increase accessibility and reach of services (scalability)
- Mobilize more resources and raise more revenue
- Provide expertise and technical assistance on an on-going basis.

Principles for successful multi-stakeholder partnerships

There are many factors contributing to successful partnerships in general, but there are 10 guiding principles⁴ which ensure effective and productive partnerships. Successful partnerships portray the following:

- *Clear and mutually agreed upon goals.* Goals are defined at the outset to ensure understanding among partners that will help guide the partnership through obstacles and challenges which are bound to be there in complex endeavours like e-schools initiatives
- *Involve the clients* (schools: teachers, students and parents⁵) and account for their needs and preferences when developing programmes and services. They are the ultimate consumers of the programmes/services and therefore their involvement is critical.
- *Broad-based and inclusive of all stakeholders from the beginning.* Partnerships are most effective when they are able to draw from a broad range of perspectives, resources and expertise. Partnerships can gain broader public and private support for their efforts through the constituencies each partner represents and supports.
- *Involvement of powerful champions that make their initiatives visible to the public.* Success requires leaders who act as change agents by clearly communicating the goals of the partnership and building a broad base of support.
- *Aim to achieve positive results and regularly measure their progress.* Measuring results regularly allows partnerships to assess what goals and strategies are achieving the intended results and what changes should be made to make the partnership more effective.

⁴ Taken and adapted from: <http://nccic.org/ccpartnerships/principles.htm>

⁵ Parents, like other partners, will get involved in partnerships when they believe that their participation is essential and that they can make a difference in children’s lives. An environment where parents feel supported, respected, and appreciated for their time and effort is essential to continued parent participation. [<http://nccic.org/ccpartnerships/facts/fs9.htm>]

- *Clear governance structures that define partner roles and responsibilities.* Establishing an effective governance structure is essential for the successful management of the partnership. It is equally important to define the various roles partners will play and to make sure that all the partners understand and accept these roles.
- *Set and adhere to a set of ground rules that guide the partnership in its work.* Partnerships should begin with a mutually agreed on set of ground rules to help partners communicate and make decisions.
- *Flexibility, adoption of an entrepreneurial mindset, and adaptation to changing conditions and resources.* Partnerships should have a flexible and entrepreneurial mindset that allows for change as opportunities arise that will increase the resources and impact of the partnership.
- *Draw on the strengths and contributions of all partners and enable all partners to benefit.* Each partner brings different strengths, knowledge, and resources to the partnership and sensitivity to these will cement the working relationship of the partners.
- *Work to maintain momentum and sustain work over time.* The most successful partnerships plan for how they will maintain momentum and sustain their efforts from the beginning. A shared ownership and sense of collective purpose increases the likelihood that partners will stay involved over the long run.