Stakeholder Engagement in Partnerships:

Who are the 'stakeholders' and how do we 'engage' with them?[1]

Author: Leda Stott
Date: May 2009

As partnerships require the commitment and consensus of a wide range of players the emphasis on 'stakeholder engagement' in much of the corresponding literature is logical.[2] However, while the idea is promoted as desirable and, in many cases necessary, a clear understanding of who partnership 'stakeholders' are, and how they might be appropriately 'engaged' in partnering activities is often absent. Unpacking what we mean by 'stakeholder engagement' is not easy. The expression is loose and all-embracing and, as such, finds a comfortable fit in the 'participatory language'[3] that is used in relation to partnerships; a language which, because of its general and positive nature, tends to gloss over the many challenges that partnership-building involves.[4] In the interests of achieving greater clarity in our use of such terminology, this paper attempts to define and explore the meaning of 'stakeholder engagement' in relation to partnerships. By providing a range of discussion tools it is hoped that such an inquiry will also assist deliberations around partner identification and selection; assessment of internal and external relationships; and examination of diverse and changing positions as a partnership develops.[5]

Defining a partnership stakeholder

The term 'stakeholder' refers to an individual or entity with a 'stake' in something. Dictionary definitions provide us with: one who holds the bets or stakes in a wager, game or contest; one who has a share, investment or interest in the success or failure of a project, industry or enterprise; and one who has control of money or property to which rival claims are made.[6] Implicit in these meanings are notions of power, interest, risk and benefit which, if applied to a partnering context, suggest that partnership stakeholders might be:

➢ Those individuals, groups, organisations and/or networks that have the power to influence a partnership and/or an interest in it; and,

➢ Those who may assume or bear risks for a partnership and/or stand to gain benefits from it.

These definitions are explored here in greater detail using a selection of matrices and pointers that have been developed for identifying and prioritising stakeholders in other fields. Before proceeding, however, it is worthwhile highlighting two underlying themes that are central to the arguments put forward in this paper. Firstly, that, in spite of frequent differentiation, partners are also stakeholders; and, secondly, that particular organisational and individual drivers will prompt diverse stakeholder positions over the lifetime of a partnership.

1 This paper builds upon materials from Caplan el al. (2007), Caplan & Stott (2008) and Stott & Keatman (2005 and 2006). For more information see the BPD Research Series. See www.bpdws.org.
2 See for example AccountAbility http://www.accountability21.net/, Tennyson (2004), Yakovleva & Alabasterb (2003)
3 Harrison (2002) p.593.
4 See Caplan & Stott (2008) p.27.
5 In a partnership, which aims to incorporate different sectors of society in its work, it may be helpful to structure stakeholder identification in terms of sectors. See http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy_Impact/Stakeholder_analysis.html (accessed 10.03.2009)
6 See http://www.thefreedictionary.com/stakeholder and http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stakeholder (both accessed 10.03. 2009) and The Dictionary of Sustainable Management http://www.sustainabilitydictionary.com/s/stakeholders.php (accessed 10.03.2009)

Partners and stakeholders

A distinction is often made in partnership literature between 'partners' and wider 'stakeholders'.[7] As partners are obviously also stakeholders it may thus be helpful to distinguish between internal and external stakeholders. Internal/primary stakeholders can be classified as recognised signed-up 'implementing' partners who have clearly agreed to contribute resources to a partnership, carry out concrete tasks on its behalf, and assume a level of risk in order to obtain benefits through working in this way. External/secondary stakeholders meanwhile are non-partners who, in line with their different priorities and concerns, may either exert an influence upon a partnership, or be influenced by it. They may also bear risks and access partnering benefits but not, we would assume, to the same degree as partners. As the discussion that follows suggests, however, these categorisations are not always straightforward and often require further analysis.

> **Defining Partnership**
>
> Partnerships involve two or more organisations that enter into a collaborative arrangement based on: (i) synergistic goals and opportunities that address particular issues or deliver specified tasks that single organisations cannot accomplish on their own as effectively; and (ii) situations where individual organisations cannot purchase the appropriate resources or competencies purely through a market transaction.
> *Sources: BPD and AccountAbility*

Partnership drivers

The central rationale for partnership is to assemble diverse types of organisational skills and resources in order to attend to an issue or task. Different organisational *raisons d'être* are therefore central to partnering.[8] Each stakeholder, be they internal or external, individual or organisational, can thus be expected to adopt particular stances because of the incentives that motivate their engagement and/or disincentives that demotivate their collaboration. Obligations to participate in partnering processes and/or the sanctions or negative consequences for failure to do so are also important to consider. These drivers are central to determining stakeholder positions in relation to partnerships.

Identifying and prioritising partnership stakeholders

In order to deepen our understanding of who partnership stakeholders might be, and how they could most appropriately be involved with a partnership, a series of discussion tools are offered below. These are intended as triggers for conversation and debate about different stakeholder positions during a partnership's development. They may be used in a variety of ways: for internal assessments of partner standpoints and/or explorations of wider relationships; by external stakeholders wishing to analyse partnership connections and possibilities for involvement; and by partnership researchers, reviewers and evaluators studying broader stakeholder situations and standpoints.

> **The importance of context**
>
> The engagement of stakeholders is conditioned by the context in which a partnership operates. Explorations of relevant connections and choices of who to involve need to be considered in relation to the particular historical / social / political / economic situation in which a partnership is being developed. In addition, it is likely that in many circumstances there may be little room for choice about who a partnership works with. It is also vital to remember that contexts are not static and that positions and interests, as well as perceptions of partnership risks and benefits, may change over time.
>
> *Sources: Tennyson (2005) p.9 and Caplan & Stott (2008) p. 30.*

Power and interest

A commonly used stakeholder engagement matrix adopts power and interest axes against which to analyse stakeholders.[9] In a partnership context power might be interpreted as the degree of importance, prominence or influence that different parties exert on a partnership, an identification

---

7 See for example Tennyson (2004) p.15 and p.26.
8 See Caplan & Stott (2008) p.33 and Caplan et al. (2007) pp.8-10.
9 See for example http://www.synesthesia.co.uk/msp/2006/05/09/the-stakeholder-powerimpact-matrix-in-practice/
   http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_07.htm, ODI Stakeholder Analysis
   http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy_Impact/Stakeholder_analysis.html (all accessed 10-03-2009)

of which assists scrutiny of how far they can further or impede its work.[10] Interest would relate to the extent to which parties may be affected by a partnership and its activities, and give insights into whose views or concerns need to be taken into account as a partnership develops. Plotting different stakeholders within these categories can also reveal stakeholder interrelationships, alliances and/or antagonistic positions towards a partnership and may be particularly useful in encouraging exchange among partners about how to appropriately 'manage' different parties (See Fig 1).[11]

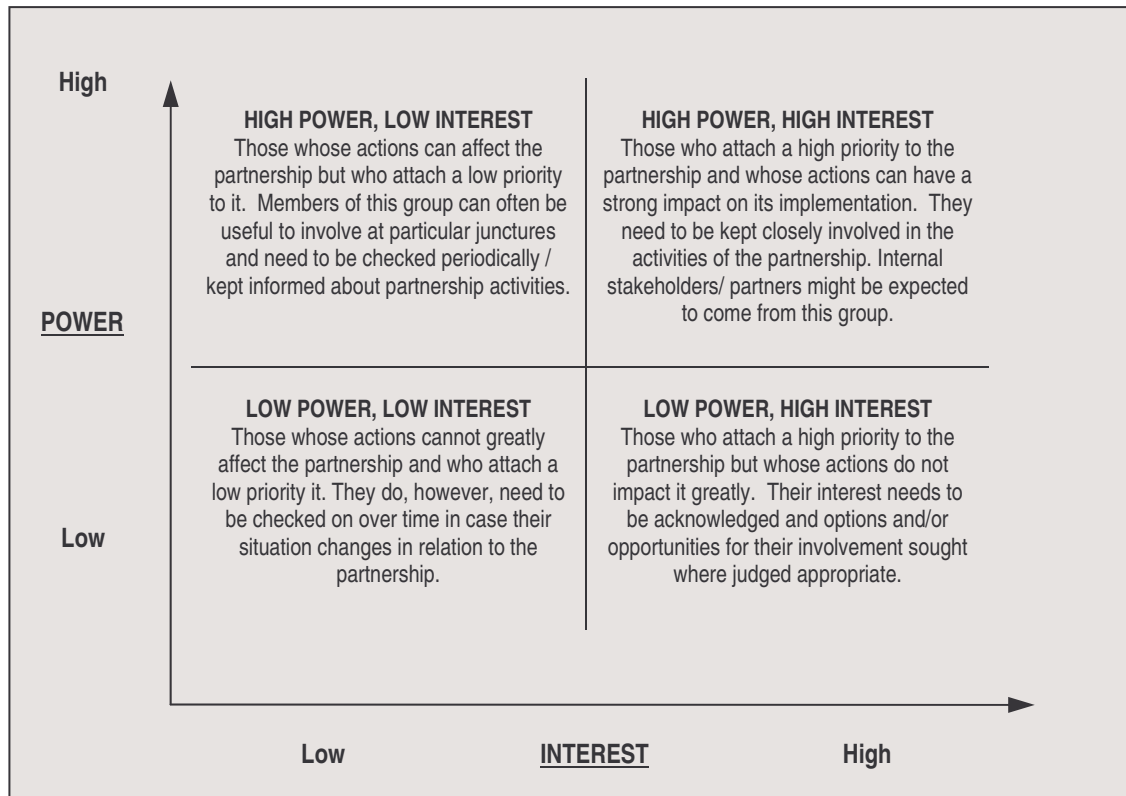|		
High	**HIGH POWER, LOW INTEREST** Those whose actions can affect the partnership but who attach a low priority to it. Members of this group can often be useful to involve at particular junctures and need to be checked periodically / kept informed about partnership activities.	**HIGH POWER, HIGH INTEREST** Those who attach a high priority to the partnership and whose actions can have a strong impact on its implementation. They need to be kept closely involved in the activities of the partnership. Internal stakeholders/ partners might be expected to come from this group.
POWER		
Low	**LOW POWER, LOW INTEREST** Those whose actions cannot greatly affect the partnership and who attach a low priority it. They do, however, need to be checked on over time in case their situation changes in relation to the partnership.	**LOW POWER, HIGH INTEREST** Those who attach a high priority to the partnership but whose actions do not impact it greatly. Their interest needs to be acknowledged and options and/or opportunities for their involvement sought where judged appropriate.
	Low **INTEREST** **High**	

Figure 1: Applying power/interest matrixes to partnership stakeholders

The power/interest matrix is helpful when undertaking an initial analysis of potential partnership players. Partners might be expected to come from the top right hand area of the quadrant as those who have both high power and high interest in a partnership. Interest is clearly linked to partnership drivers (see above) as we would expect those with weak incentives and low obligations not to be particularly attracted to the idea of working in partnership. However, external stakeholders such as donors, policymakers, opinion leaders, and organised pressure groups representing target constituencies, may also fall into this category. These groups require careful attention and options for their involvement in a partnership need to be methodically considered.

According to the European Commission (2007), stakeholders who are perceived as highly important (powerful) but not positively interested in an initiative, should be closely managed with the aim of increasing their level of interest or minimising their interference. It is suggested that,

> '...it is helpful to determine the benefits that the project can offer to them, and identify how those benefits can be sold to the stakeholder. It may also mean compelling them (e.g. by exerting authority).' [12]

---

10 European Commission (2007) p24;
  http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy_Impact/Stakeholder_analysis.html; Stakeholder Analysis, Winning support for your projects http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_07.htm; and
  http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/PoliticalEconomy/stakeholderanalysis.htm (accessed 10.03.2009)
11 European Commission (2007) p23.
12 Ibid. p.25.

As well as further reinforcing the importance of drivers, this statement also draws on the notion of a partnership stakeholder as a party that stands to gain benefits from the collaboration (discussed below). Adequate acknowledgement of those who fall into the category of high interest/low power, meanwhile, is essential as it may be necessary to encourage their further involvement in a partnership. Internally small and under-resourced partners may fall into this group, while external stakeholders might include target groups and/ beneficiaries who are perceived as fragile in nature. Discussion on how to position such groups closer to the centre of the matrix may include an assessment of where capacity-building efforts that encourage skills, resource and confidence-building are necessary. Naturally, the time and resources that such interventions may entail, and how far it is in a partnership's interest to engage in such support processes, will also need to be considered, particularly as these efforts may distract from the main partnership agenda. The last group of stakeholders, who are neither positively interested nor particularly powerful, should be checked upon from time to time in case their position in relation to the partnership changes.[13]

The matrix above can also be used as a monitoring device. Partners, for example, may want to verify their situation at particular junctures by conducting a self-assessment, or discussing perceptions of different partner positions. If a partner does not see themselves fitting comfortably in the high power/high interest box, questions might be asked about why this is so, and what might be done to change the situation. In relation to a decline in interest, it may be necessary to re-visit the particular incentives of an organisation in order to prompt a deeper connection to the partnership. A sense of not having power in a partnership, meanwhile, might suggest that there are inequities among partners which require attention. Solutions here could focus on capacity-building smaller or weaker partners and/or more open consideration of power dynamics may be necessary. The interest or power of external stakeholders can also change as a partnership develops and partners may need to accommodate this, perhaps by including them as partners or finding channels for working with them in a closer manner.

> ### Individuals and organisations
>
> Although partnerships are composed of organisational and institutional members from different sectors, they are initiated and driven by individuals acting on their behalf. Personal interest and commitment to a partnership may vary while individuals may often not fully represent/act on behalf of institutional interests and, in some cases, may not even be fully mandated to do so. As partnerships develop, organisational, as opposed to individual commitment, is crucial. Individuals partner representatives thus need to have a clear 'licence to operate' and speak authoritatively on their organisation's behalf. Such mandates need to be checked regularly. If authority appears limited, the partnership needs to find ways to deal with this. Similarly, partners may have to ensure that the mandate of external stakeholder representatives is legitimate and clear.
>
> *Source: Caplan et al: (2007) p.10.*

Risks and benefits

As well as encompassing power and interest, the word 'stakeholder' also implies the achievement of a potential benefit if a project or venture goes well, and/or an assumption of risk by making, or bearing, a commitment in pursuit of such benefit/s.[14] Post, Preston and Sachs (2002), for example, define corporate stakeholders as:

> '...…the individuals and constituencies that contribute, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to its wealth-creating capacity and activities, and that are therefore its *potential beneficiaries and/or risk bearers*' (my italics).[15]

Partnership is often referred to as a relationship in which members share risks and benefits in pursuit of a common goal.[16] Once again this concept links to the importance of investigating drivers and analysing the balance between incentives (potential benefits) and disincentives (risks) to partner. Tennyson (2004) suggests that partnership can offer common benefits such as professional development, better access to information and different networks, greater 'reach', improved operational efficiency, more appropriate and effective products and services, greater innovation, enhanced credibility and increased access to resources; as well as the satisfaction of

---

13 Ibid.
14 See the definition of 'stake' as something, esp. money, bet, as in a wager, game, or contest OR a reward given a winner, as in a race; prize http://www.yourdictionary.com/stake (accessed 28.08.2008)
15 Post, Preston & Sachs (2002) p.19.
16 DFID Business Partnership Unit, (undated), Tennyson, R. (1998) p7; Tennyson & Wilde (2000), p.12.

particular individual and organisational incentives. These, however, need to be considered in relation to the risks that partnership might pose in terms of reputation impact, loss of autonomy, conflicts of interest, drain on resources and implementation challenges.[17]

The matrix below allows us to explore partnership stakeholders from the perspective of risk and benefits (See Fig.2). Here we can examine whether partnership stakeholders are primarily potential beneficiaries, standing to gain from a partnership, or risk bearers who stand to lose from it.[18] We can also further explore differences between internal and external stakeholders. We might expect partners, for instance, to bear substantial risks on behalf of a partnership in order to achieve both common and individual benefits from it. Among partners the tool can also be helpful in exploring where there may be a sense of unequal risk/benefit balances and provide an opportunity for clarifying how this might be addressed.
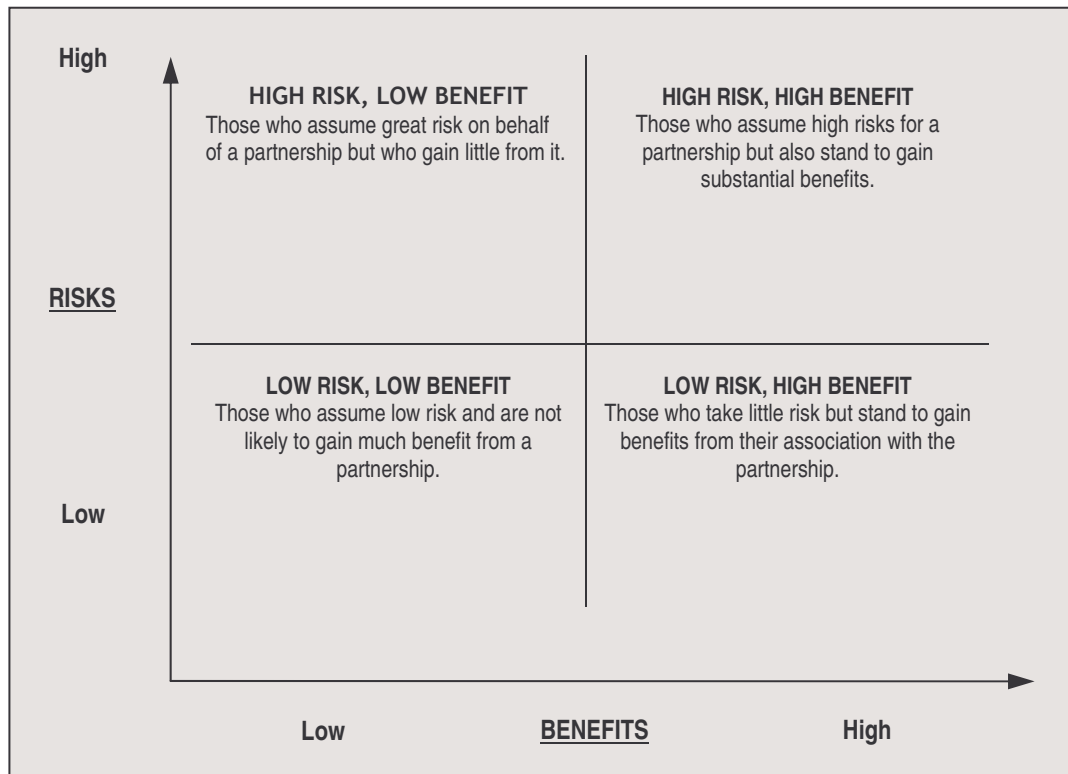

High

HIGH RISK, LOW BENEFIT
Those who assume great risk on behalf of a partnership but who gain little from it.

HIGH RISK, HIGH BENEFIT
Those who assume high risks for a partnership but also stand to gain substantial benefits.

RISKS

LOW RISK, LOW BENEFIT
Those who assume low risk and are not likely to gain much benefit from a partnership.

LOW RISK, HIGH BENEFIT
Those who take little risk but stand to gain benefits from their association with the partnership.

Low

Low   BENEFITS   High

Figure 2: Prioritising external stakeholders by risks and benefits

Perceptions of where target groups and donors are positioned can also be explored. Although target groups might theoretically stand to gain a great deal if a partnership succeeds, and may also bear enormous risks on its behalf, they are not usually considered as partners in their own right.[19] Conversely, donors, who are frequently categorised as partners, often assume considerably lower risks than other 'implementing partners' and may thus be placed in the low risk, high benefit area. In this connection, it is worth noting that although receiving a benefit from a partnership does not automatically qualify an organisation as a partner, this might not relate to risk-bearing but rather to how far they are integrated in the design and implementation of a partnership. Other groups may support high risks on behalf of a partnership which they are less able to control and from which benefits are uncertain. This category might include target groups/ community beneficiaries who take on extra work and activities for a partnership without clear recognition of the possible benefits.

---

17 Tennyson (2004) p.10.
18 Caplan et al. (2007) p.19.
19 While an assumption is often made that such groups are adequately represented by NGOs, concern has been raised about the 'voice accountability' of these groups (Slim, 2001), and whether or not they are accurately able to speak on behalf of those whose interests they claim to stand for (ibid & see also Fowler, 2000). Such legitimacy, as highlighted later in this paper, is often further complicated by power dynamics within target groups and the possibility that particular voices within them dominate and prevail over others.

Risk-bearing and resource inputs

Examining stakeholder inputs and assessing them in relation to risk-bearing may be of additional use. Financial resources are often prioritised within a partnership and carry the most 'weight', giving those that contribute them a particularly powerful partnering role, whether or not this is openly acknowledged. However, the risks of partners or donors who make cash contributions may not be the same as those of partners who devote unpaid staff time and commitment to a partnership. Appreciation of this, and some form of dialogue around the equitable valuing of different risks and resources (see Table 1) may thus be important for the development of solid partnering relationships.

Equipment	Computers, furniture, stationary, transport
Finance	Funds, grants
Knowledge	Contextual information, trends, market analysis
People	Qualified and experienced personnel with appropriate knowledge bases for partnership activities
Physical space	For partnership office, meetings, events etc.
Products	Project-related items/commodities produced by partner organisations
Relationships	Contacts with policy makers, wider networks, media, stakeholder groups etc.
Reputation	Convening power and leverage
Skills/expertise	Technical and 'soft' skills - communication, advocacy, mediation and capacity-building abilities

Table 1: Partnership resource inputs

Exploring risks and resources can also assist in determining partner status. Contributing financial resources, such as a donor or funding agency, may not be enough to meet the criteria for being a partner unless greater 'risk' is assumed with the input of other critical resources. We also need to be aware that risk bearers who do not contribute to a partnership will not have the same incentives to see a partnership succeed as those who do.

Power/ interest and risks/ resources

A discussion tool that overlays a power/interest axis and a risk/resource axis enables us to obtain further insights into partnership stakeholders. This can be used to facilitate discussion around perceptions of where different players are positioned over time and promote dialogue around necessary role modifications. Such conversations can also stimulate a review of the value of different relationships to a partnership in the light of changes in their contributions to it, or assumptions of new and greater risks on its behalf (see Fig 3).
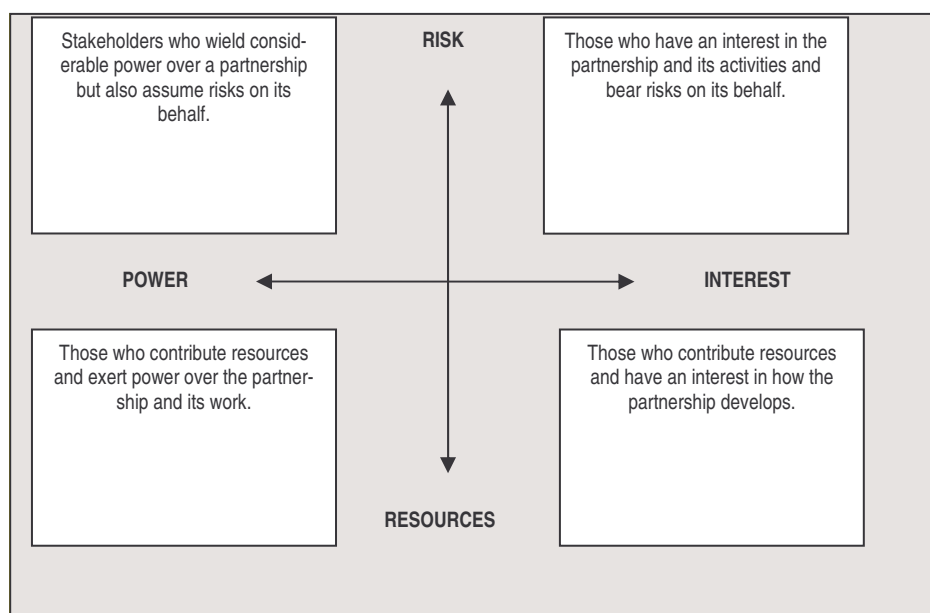

Figure 3: Matrix for identifying and prioritising partnership stakeholders

<div style="border:1px solid">

Phases of partnership development

As partnerships develop and change over time, it is important to examine and review stakeholder engagement in relation to the five broad phases of partnership development outlined below (in which monitoring and evaluation are implicit throughout).

1. **Scoping:** researching the contextual case for partnership, selecting partners by identifying and exploring incentives for working together.

2. **Initiating:** agreeing on core objectives and goals, different roles and responsibilities and appropriate partnership mechanisms.

3. **Implementing:** promoting accountable structures and procedures and ensuring appropriate engagement of partners and external stakeholders.

4. **Consolidating:** ensuring 'mainstreaming' of work within, between and across institutions, linking practice and policy levels.

5. **Sustaining/terminating:** agreeing on an appropriate conclusion to partnership or developing further work.

Source: Adapted from Stott & Keatman (2005) p.2

</div>

While internal stakeholders/partners may attach different weights to the matrix pointers, we would assume that they would be positioned near to the centre of the framework where interest and power, risk-bearing and resource commitments are most closely aligned. If this is not so, discussion about how to change this and whether the greater risk supported by particular partners requires adjustments and allowances may be useful e.g. should heavier bearing of risk permit greater influence in decision-making processes? Should those who do not assume the same risks as other partners take on additional responsibilities or commit more resources?

External/secondary stakeholders, who are likely to be found further from the centre of the matrix, can be grouped into high influencers or power brokers who will probably bear little risk if a partnership fails, and those with less power and influence who may ultimately bear a great deal more risk. Looking at a partnership's target group/s is instructive here as they often fall into this latter category and require particular attention with regard to 'engagement'.

Ultimately the idea is not just to recognise the resources that are put on the table but also to appreciate the different risks that a partnership imposes upon different stakeholders.

Exploring 'Engagement'

The concept of 'engagement', in common with terms such as 'involvement' and 'participation', is another elastic expression. According to the dictionary, 'engagement' is about taking part and/or sharing in the activities of a group. It also implies a moral commitment or binding promise. In a partnership context, engagement may best be understood by identifying in what ways different stakeholders might most appropriately take part in its work. This may vary, and require adjustment, according to time, context and partnership development stage.

Ascertaining appropriate levels of engagement

There is little material in the literature on partnership regarding how decisions should be made about the nature and degree of stakeholder participation. The extent of the involvement of different stakeholder groups in a partnership and its activities will, it may be assumed, relate to the perceived risks/benefits and power/interest factors outlined above. Participation may thus range anywhere between a limited or passive association to a more dynamic connection with a partnership in which the lead is taken in a decision or activity (see Table 2).

4	STEERS	Initiates or leads particular steps or activities
3	INFLUENCES	Participates directly in decision-making, has a vote
2	CONSULTED	Involved in discussion, able to express opinions & give feedback
1	INFORMED	Receives information

Table 2: Levels of stakeholder engagement in partnerships

These categories may be further broken down into the broad options identified below (Table 3). There are obviously many variances in these categories as different stakeholder groups will inevitably have divergent views and competing interests which will in turn be conditioned by specific, and changing, contexts. The scale represented does, however, provide the basis for a useful assessment of where engagement avenues for particular stakeholders can be built into partnership mechanisms, as well as where there may be possible gaps, concerns and options for

greater/lesser participation. A partner would expect to participate at the higher end of the scale. External stakeholders, meanwhile, may be 'engaged' at different levels depending on their connection to a partnership, their interest in it and the extent to which their involvement is sought in its work.[20]

8	**Steers** Directs / manages partnership
7	**Initiates action** Develops/manages particular steps /action points/plans
6	**Participates in decision-making** Is directly involved in decision-making and 'has a vote'
5	**Able to influence** Participates marginally in decision-making processes
4	**Involved in feedback loop** Regularly shares opinions / feedback on partnership
3	**Consulted** Able to express opinions and give feedback to partnership
2	**Informed** Receives information / messages from partnership
1	**Access to basic communication channels** Grievance / complaints mechanisms regarding partnership & its activities are available
0	**No involvement** No channels available for opinion

Table 3: Levels of stakeholder engagement in partnerships

The lower more passive levels in Table 3 may not necessarily be less worthy than those at the top, particularly with regard to the contribution of external stakeholders. What is important is to ensure that the most appropriate tools, practices and mechanisms for engagement are used for specific contexts, purposes and phases of a partnership's lifetime. Clearly, the chosen engagement option should not be contrived as a substitute for genuine participation. Accusations of 'manipulation' can be made when engagement focuses on simply ticking boxes or rubber stamping desired objectives without really involving stakeholders. A partnership may also de dismissed as 'tokenistic' if stakeholder engagement is 'allowed' but has no power or legitimacy, and when there is no guarantee that a stakeholder's voice will be heeded by a partnership.[21] Thus, if a basic communication channel (Level 1) is perceived as suitable, the emphasis might be on making it as accessible as possible; if the choice is to 'inform' (Level 2) efforts might focus on guaranteeing a good two-way information flow. With a consultation exercise (Level 3), on the other hand, prominence might be given to ensuring that clear information on the process for opinion gathering, and feedback on the results of this, is provided.

Engagement options

Availability of time and resources for chosen engagement options is crucial. While a range of different options may be employed (see Table 4) all need requisite planning and preparation.

---

20 The issue of what different stakeholders are offered and what they seek in terms of 'engagement' is interesting to explore here. Donors, for example, may wish to be simply kept informed about a partnership's progress but their power, based on expectations of what they may or may not want, and the possibility that funding may be withdrawn or not renewed, is often all pervasive and can be exerted without discussion about when/where it may be appropriate. In a different sense, an emphasis on offering target groups active participation may not always be necessary, welcome or possible (see Table 5. below).
21 See Arnstein (1969)

Where more in-depth engagement is considered necessary, careful budgeting for the costs and management of participatory forums and processes and capacity-building for them is important.

Discussion groups	Action Research
Focus groups	Participatory rapid appraisal
Interviews	Capacity building and support
Meetings (large and small)	Community animation & visioning
Surveys	Participatory Evaluation
	Participatory Budgeting
Campaigns and awareness-raising events	Needs analysis/assessment
Consultative Forums	PPRA methodology (social mapping)
Public Forums /events	
Steering Committees	Cultural events
Community conferences/ seminars	Educational programmes
Open house/space events	Media – videos, radios, newspapers, newsletters,
Community Advisory Panels	pamphlets
Citizen panels	Theatre / role-play
Local contact points / advice bureaux, branch	Graphic recording
offices, libraries	Interactive displays
Government networks	Story dialogue

Table 4: Possible options for engaging stakeholders [22]

Ensuring that chosen options are suited to contextual and cultural circumstances is also crucial to the effective promotion of partnerships. This can also elicit new and innovative 'stakeholder engagement' methodologies. Evans (2008), for example, describes three methods central to her partnership work with communities in Australia: the Indigenous Australian concept of *Dadirri*; dreaming the partnership, and the praxis approach.[23] Other options that have been suggested by partnership practitioners include public and consultative forums such as *Izimbizo* in South Africa, and strategic avenues such as the UNDP Civic Dialogue for Democratic Governance Project in Jamaica.[24]

Power dynamics

The visibility, and invisibility, of both individuals and organisations con-nected to a partnership need to be understood when exploring 'en-gagement'. Power relationships within a partnership are often a reflec-tion of wider socio-economic and contextual divisions, as well as cross-cutting issues such as gender, ethnicity, educational or political back-ground, race, age or religion etc. If a partnership's aim is to promote social inclusion, ensuring that those who may be marginalised or ex-cluded have a voice is important. This involves looking beyond indi-viduals and organisations who apparently 'speak' on behalf of a partner or stakeholder group, to those who do not. The over-valuing of, for example, a partner's financial input or an external stakeholder's public influence can, consciously or unconsciously, often grant them more power and voice in a partnership than smaller partners from, say, the non-governmental sector, whose resources may not be as highly 'val-ued'. The same can be true of individual partner representatives who are valued more highly than others because of perceptions of their status.
Source: Caplan & Stott (2008) p.32.

Motivating Engagement

As observed earlier, involving stakeholders in a partnership necessarily requires understanding their drivers for 'engaging'. If individuals and groups are motivated to work with a partnership because the incentives/obligations for doing so are clear, they are likely to participate within it more fully. If there are disincentives, however, stakeholders may remain detached and, in some cases, even seek to obstruct partnership activities. In order to assess incentives it is therefore useful to conduct a regular check on how

---

22 Drawn from list compiled by participants at BPD Workshop on *Community Engagement in Partnerships*, London, November, 2005

23 Evans describes three methods central to her work as a creative cultural partnership broker in Australia: The Indige-nous Australian concept of *Dadirri*; dreaming the partnership, and the praxis approach (see Evans & Stott, 2008).

24 The Imbizo programme in South Africa aims to 'take Government to the people' by giving the public access to those in authority and a platform for raising their concerns. See
http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/main.asp?include=izimbizo/main.html (accessed March 12, 2009). For more infor-mation on the UNDP Civic Dialogue for Democratic Governance Project in Jamaica see Brown (2004)

far a partnership is actually responding to the interests of both partners and wider stakeholders. Table 5 offers a checklist of possible, and often overlapping, reasons for low or non-engagement and some options for addressing these.

Low or non-participation could suggest that individuals/groups are:	In which case a partnership may need to:
Indifferent Benefits are unclear and / or there may be disinterest in efforts perceived as unlikely to yield results	Identify, clarify and review incentives for participation among these individuals/groups
Intimidated Feel unwelcome, lack confidence	Examine operational culture in order to find ways to encourage them
Disenfranchised Have no 'say' and have not been asked to participate in right way	Reassess partnership structures and channels of engagement
Unrecognised Invisible and unacknowledged, have not even been considered	Revise approach and activities in order to incorporate 'missing' stakeholders
Under-resourced Lack time, money, seniority, educational levels etc.	Examine implicit criteria for participating e.g. timing of activities, resources and capacity-building needs.
Waiting Need to be convinced that participation is worthwhile	Anticipate triggers for participation through focussed consultation and /or early tangible results
Distracted Preoccupied by more important issues/concerns	Review focus of partnership and how far it is a real priority / explore immediate context to see what is distracting
Hostile Unhappy with the idea of the partnership because it is seen as too risky or threatening to particular interests	Explore the historical context and related power dynamics to identify blockages and see if they can be addressed
Weary Tired of 'development' initiatives that have had little or no impact and of being 'researched'/ 'sensitised'	Change approach, explore incentives for participation and find ways of ensuring these groups have genuine 'voice'

Table 5: Reasons for low and non-engagement in partnerships [25]

The role that an intermediary or facilitator can play in motivating ways to bring in and enhance those whose voices may be 'unheard' is instructive here. A recent study focussing on partnering with fragile community groups in Mexico, Russia and Vietnam, suggests that drawing on the catalytic role of individuals who are able to promote awareness, consensus and mutual trust is vital.[26] The importance of this function is reinforced by Tennyson (2005) who states that a trusted 'partnership broker', acting as a go-between between different stakeholders, is invariably at the heart of successful partnering.[27]

Consideration of different stakeholder views is undoubtedly important for partnerships but their opinions should be understood in the context in which they are offered.[28] It is also vital to remember that standpoints are likely to change over the lifetime of a partnership. Conflicting and changing loyalties and demands, and the contextual issues that cut across these, can exert an enormous influence on both the manner and depth of participation. An appreciation of both the positive and negative effects of different levels of engagement is also a useful exercise. Positive effects may include the growth of a partner organisation's capacity, reach and skills, or the increase in confidence and voice of a hitherto marginalised stakeholder group. On the negative side, however, an over emphasis on participation of particular stakeholders may stifle

25 Adapted from Stott & Keatman (2005) with helpful contributions from Ken Caplan (BPD, UK), Kay O'Regan (Earthwatch Institute, UK), Anette Scoppetta (Centre for Social Innovation/ZSI, Austria) and Colleen Hayward (Kulunga Research Network, Australia).
26 Bok et al (2008)
27 Tennyson (2005) p.8.
28 See Caplan et al. (2007) p.18.

plurality by making 'engagement' a bureaucratic process or a simple box-ticking exercise designed to fulfil organisational reporting requirements. It may also allow certain groups, be they internal or external, to control a partnership or become its prime beneficiaries.[29]

Conclusion

This paper has sought to define and explore the term 'stakeholder engagement' in relation to partnerships. By offering some discussion matrices for assessing stakeholders in terms of their power, interest and risks, benefits and resource inputs, it suggests that we may be able to more easily identify potential partners, ascertain levels of interest among players, and look at how we might need to work with different groups. As both internal stakeholders and external stakeholders are likely to manifest varying levels of attention and commitment to a partnership over time, a monitoring process that checks on the link between the interest and involvement of different partnership players is proposed. Attitudes and positions will be conditioned by a partnership's purpose and scope, its operational environment, the phase of development in which it is working, and the availability of time and resources to support its activities. The ability to respond flexibly to different stakeholder incentives within particular and dynamic contexts should therefore be central to choices around appropriate forms of partnership 'engagement'.

References

AccountAbility http://www.accountability21.net/

Arnstein, S.R. (1969) 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', JAIP, Vol 35, NO 4, July pp 216-224.

Bok, L., Colless, L., Matveeva, V., Sabatini, E. & Webb, M. 'Key Principles for Initiating Successful Partnerships with Fragile Community Groups', *Learning Partnership Assignment*, PCCP, Cambridge Programme for Industry, (unpublished).

Brown, I. (2004) 'UNDP Civic Dialogue Project Healing Communities', *Jamaica Information Service*, (December 29)

Business Partners for Development http://www.bpdws.org/

Caplan, K. & Stott, L. (2008) 'Defining our terms and clarifying our language', in Svensson, L. & Nilsson, B. eds. *Partnership as a Strategy for Social Innovation and Sustainable Change*, Santérus Academic Press, Sweden, 2008

Caplan, K., Gomme, J., Mugabi, J & Stott. L. *Assessing Partnership Performance: Understanding the Drivers for Success*, BPD, London, 2007

Chambers, R. (1994) 'Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA): Analysis of Experience' in *World Development*, Vol.22, No.9 pp 1253-1268.

Chambers, R. (1997) *Whose Reality Counts: Putting the Last First*, IT Publications, London

Cooke, B. & Kothari, M. (2001) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* Zed Books, London

Department for International Development (DFID) Business Partnership Unit, (undated) 'Partnerships with Business'. http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/bpu-partners.pdf (accessed August 29, 2008).

European Commission (2007) *Sourcebook on sound planning of ESF programmes*, European Communities, Brussels

Evans, M & Stott, L. 'Partnership Inclusivity: Whose are the unheard voices?' in McManus, S. & Tennyson, R., *Talking the Walk: A Communication Manual for Partnership Practitioners*, IBLF, London, 2008

Fowler, A. (2000) *Civil Society, NGOs and Social Development*, UNRISD, Geneva

Harrison, E., (2002) 'The Problem with the Locals' Partnership and Participation in Ethiopia' *Development and Change* 33 (4), 587-610.

---

29 Kapoor (2004) p.126.

Kapoor, I. (2004) 'The Power of Participation, Participatory Development: A Promise Revisited'. In *Current Issues in Comparative Education [Online]*, Volume 6, No. 2, May 10, 2004 http://www.tc.columbia.edu/cice/ (accessed February 2, 2005).

Maguire, K. and Truscott, F. (2006) *Active Governance: The Value Added by Community Involvement in Governance through Local Strategic Partnerships*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, United Kingdom.

ODI Stakeholder Analysis
http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy_Impact/Stakeholder_analysis.html

OECD (2001) *Citizens as Partners OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making*, OECD, Paris.

Partnership Governance and Accountability Framework http://www.pgaframework.org/

Post, J. E., Preston, L. E., Sachs, S. (2002) *Redefining the Corporation – Stakeholder. Management and Organizational Wealth*, Stanford University Press

Rein, M., Stott, L., Yambayamba, M., Hardman, S., & Reid, S. (2005) *Working Together: A Critical Analysis of Cross-Sector Partnerships in Southern Africa*, University of Cambridge Programme for Industry.

Slim, H. (2002) 'By What Authority? The Legitimacy and Accountability of Non-governmental Organisations' *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, http://www.jha.ac/articles/a082.htm

Stott, L. & Keatman, T. (2006) *Balancing Competing Interests: Unpacking relationships in service delivery,* Field Study of Seven Cities in Latin America, BPD Research Series, London. (unpublished)

Stott, L. & Keatman, T. (2005) *Tools for Exploring Community Engagement in Partnerships,* BPD Water & Sanitation, London.

Tennyson, R. (2005) *The Brokering Guidebook*. International Business Leaders Forum, London

Tennyson, R. (2004) *The Partnering Toolbook*. International Business Leaders Forum & Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, London & Geneva.

Tennyson, R. & Wilde, L. (2000) *The Guiding Hand*. International Business Leaders Forum and United Nations Staff College, London & Geneva.

Vargas, C. M. (2002) 'Women in Sustainable Development: Empowerment through Partnerships for Healthy Living'. *World Development*, Vol. 30, No. 9 pp. 1539-1560.

World Bank Group Stakeholder Analysis
http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/PoliticalEconomy/stakeholderanalysis.htm

Yakovleva, N. & Alabasterb, T. (2003) 'Tri-sector partnership for community development in mining: a case study of the SAPI Foundation and Target Fund in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)'. *Resources Policy* 29, 83–98.

Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation (BPD) is a not-for-profit membership organisation that supports public, civil society and private sector decision-makers and practitioners engaged in partnerships that provide water and sanitation services in poor communities. Active since 1998, BPD focuses on how best to structure, manage and assess such multi-stakeholder collaborative arrangements.