

Partnership 101: An introduction to effective partnering for sustainable development

This introductory course to partnerships presented jointly by Dr. Darian Stibbe, Partnering Initiative and Mr. Sean Southey, Equator Initiative, UNDP, was a compressed form of a normally 5-day training course. The course explained different types of partnerships, the core partnering principles, main phases of partnering phases as well as details of each phase. Also described were the role of a partnership broker, roles needed in partnerships and essential brokering skills.

Partnerships stem from the realization that different stakeholders have common interests and goals and the appreciation that working together can help realize them. A partnership is an association among different stakeholders where the risks and benefits are shared. In the field of sustainable development, partnerships are critical as it is clear that sustainable development goals can only be achieved through working together and complement resources, skills and competencies while increasing impact and credibility, as well as sharing risks and benefits.

Every partnership project is unique since they are always context specific. However, the principles and processes of partnering are global and transferable. The core principles of partnering are equity which leads to mutual respect, transparency which leads to trust, and mutual benefit which ensures sustainability. The partnering cycle consists of four phases: Scoping and Building is when potential partners are identified; Managing and Maintaining; Reviewing and Revising; and Moving on, Sustaining or Renegotiating. This last step can lead to either the dissolution of the partnership after the accomplishment of its mission or back to the beginning of the cycle.

Successful partnerships begin with a thorough exploratory phase where partners are identified and engaged. To engage potential partners it is important to understand their interests and priorities. To build a constructive relationship partners should be transparent about their motivation, needs and limitations. After the initial exploratory phase partners should agree on round rules and map out the general roles of each partner. Once these are clear, partners can start to work on specific projects. Skills required for building successful partnerships include interest-based negotiation which can be achieved by actively listening to the position of different stakeholders and finding underlying interests which give room to explore a wider range of solutions.