

# Brokering local collaboration



An inquiry into a programme to systematically build partnership brokering as a key staff competence in World Vision's local programmes for sustainable child well-being



# Introduction

*“Partnering at district level happened before and it can open doors, but partnering at local level goes a step further: it gets right into the heart of the community’s resources, impacts children directly and is able to get results faster and better.”<sup>1</sup>*

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is now widely seen as vital to creating a more equitable and sustainable world. But such collaboration (commonly called ‘partnership’ or ‘partnering’) can be time-consuming and complex to build, manage and scale up effectively. The role of the ‘partnership broker’<sup>2</sup> describes those who support development partnerships through their skilled management of the partnering process. This Inquiry explores the importance of partnership brokering at local levels in building faster, better and longer lasting results in development activities focused on child well-being.

For this exploration, we have focused on the feedback from a number of World Vision staff around the world who have recently been trained in partnership brokering. They are now using these skills to build deeper collaboration in the communities in which they work. Their observations, reflections and stories form the body of this report. From the evidence that emerged, we have assessed the progress so far, and suggested a number of recommendations for World Vision going forwards. However, we believe the lessons will be of interest beyond an internal World Vision audience, so we end by making some tentative conclusions about the role of partnership brokering in the NGO sector at the community level and the potential value of partnership brokering as a professional competence at a local level.

## This Inquiry – the starting point

Our working hypothesis was that, whether internal or external to the collaborating organisations involved, those trained and operating as partnership brokers contribute a unique, vital and nuanced skill-set in achieving the best possible development outcomes for communities as well as the best value for partners.

Partnership brokers can – and do – operate at all levels from strategic / policy making to grass roots delivery. Our focus here is on the value and impact of partnership brokering on some of the most vulnerable children and communities on the planet – where reducing poverty and disadvantage are paramount. Our Inquiry was designed to explore if the development and deployment of partnership brokering competencies makes a difference to the role of those staff working on the front line in improving the well-being of children, and if so, in what ways.

1. Development Facilitator, World Vision, Malawi.

2. The term ‘partnership broker’ emerged from the observation that successful multi-stakeholder partnerships invariably had one or more people operating in an inter-mediating capacity – a role rarely recorded and often unrecognised. *The Guiding Hand: Brokering Partnerships for Sustainable Development* (2000) was the first publication to explore this critical role in detail and was one of the prompts for the Partnership Brokers Training Programme established in 2003 by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) & the International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF).

## Our collaboration in conducting this Inquiry

This Inquiry was itself set up in a highly collaborative way – from initial exploration, through to design and compilation of the final report. Rather than an entirely external evaluation we saw considerable value in a more dialogic and engaged review of experience at this stage. Our respective priorities and starting points are summarised below – these should help to inform the assumptions underpinning our approach, that both allowed us to challenge each other and to grow in our thinking about a topic that matters to both entities but in different ways.

**World Vision** (WV) is a global Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. This includes over 1600 local development programmes. WV has focused on the need for these local programmes to become more effective in multi-stakeholder collaboration as a critical route towards its mission of achieving the sustained well-being of 150 million children, especially those that are most vulnerable.

*“When you look at the community as a partnership broker, you are likely to be amazed at the wealth of resources and contributions they can make. The community can truly be an equal partner in the development journey whilst also helping World Vision as an NGO to be more cost effective and our work more sustainable.”*

*Development Facilitator, Malawi*

This Inquiry is of direct interest to WV’s decision-makers and strategic planners as well as its field staff, managers and partners at local level. This Inquiry is shared more widely because WV believes that it may be of interest and relevance to the wider sector. As NGOs struggle to achieve significant and sustainable change in increasingly challenging circumstances, genuine collaboration is, probably, the only realistic way forward. It is this key thought that has prompted us to work on this Inquiry with PBA.

The **Partnership Brokers Association** (PBA) is an international non-profit organisation dedicated to understanding, articulating and building capacity for partnership brokering as a critical component in effective collaboration for a more inclusive and sustainable world. The findings from this Inquiry will be a significant contribution to the Association’s ‘Learning’ agenda and will inform plans to make its own partnership brokers training available at a local level.

*“We (by which I mean our growing group of alumni worldwide) are passionate about collaboration that is innovative, rigorous, ambitious and transformational. We believe that competent partnership brokering can make all the difference between success and failure. We are also insatiably curious about what works and in what circumstances. As an Association we are committed to critical analysis of our assumptions and to continuous improvement.”*

*Ros Tennyson, Development Director, PBA*

PBA is driven by a need to learn about whether, when and in what ways competent partnership brokering makes a critical contribution to development partnerships (or similar multi-stakeholder arrangements). This Inquiry presents a unique opportunity to take PBA’s own questions to a new level,

and for this they express gratitude to World Vision for the opportunity to learn more about their training programme and explore its value.

## Collecting the data

We collected data in a number of ways: an initial review of World Vision literature – specifically the Local Partnering Training (LPT) materials<sup>3</sup>, an online survey completed by 194 (approximately 15%) of LPT programme graduates, of whom 144 are front line (ADP<sup>4</sup>) staff (all data gathered was viewed anonymously, unless respondents chose to give their name), together with detailed interviews with 16 staff from 5 countries (Cambodia, Lebanon, Malawi, Philippines and Uganda) and 1 senior manager. 4 representatives from World Vision partner organisations were also interviewed (from Cambodia, Malawi, Philippines and Uganda). The average time since the respondents had been trained was 10 months. Despite the limitations in the remit of the Inquiry<sup>5</sup>, we believe that these early findings are significant and worth sharing. The respondents gave a wealth of insight into their experiences – far too much for us to give in detail here – though we have done our best to synthesize and capture their views.

It is important to note that, after regional piloting, this training started to be rolled out across World Vision as recently as December 2012. As such, World Vision rightly sees this as an inquiry into work in progress rather than offering definitive conclusions.

## Who responded?

The 194 LPT course graduates who completed the online survey for this Inquiry come from a range of countries. It is likely that those who responded have positive associations with LPT and so these responses may well be at the more successful end of the spectrum. Who responded is also influenced by a number of inhibiting factors including: lack of local internet connectivity; time issues and short-term response times allowed and, perhaps, lack of advertising of the survey. The number of responses per country varied greatly – though it should be noted that in some country offices the majority of trainees responded. There may be some bias in reporting by confident early-adopters of the partnering approach, but this should not affect the applicability of the results.

*“I already knew partnering techniques, but the way the LPT is organised and structured totally forces us to learn more and reflect about the missing components in our daily collaboration.”*

*LPT trainer, Lebanon*

*“The brokering training helped so much – we were overwhelmed! Now we understand that there are many partners from within the community who have the skills and motivation to help with supporting child well-being. We can now reach out and join hands with them and create child well-being together. I really think about the development facilitators who have not had this training and wonder how they are faring”.*

*Development Facilitator, Uganda*

*“Each and every cluster staff should undergo the full LPT so we are working on an equal footing so that they understand. Team leaders, Sponsorship officers, cluster staff and finance officers given there are budget implications”*

*Development Facilitator, Malawi*

## What did we find out?

In spite of the methodological and time limitations of this Inquiry, we discovered a surprising amount. Our discoveries range from quantitative to qualitative. The overall ‘stats and facts’ of the range of collaborations and partners are included in Box 2. These are important in grounding the more qualitative discoveries as they show the range of collaborations that WV staff currently work in, and the range of diverse partners in those relationships.

3. This includes: *Local Partnering Essentials, Good Practice for Putting World Vision’s development programmes into Action, Handbook for development programmes*, and an internal sustainability discussion paper.

4. An ADP, or ‘Area Development Programme’ is World Vision’s local programming area; the population varies by population density and issues being addressed, but is typically about 50000 people.

5. For example, that those interviewed had completed their training relatively recently so their impact was limited and the fact that the interviews and survey were conducted in English, which for many was a second or even third language.

## Partnership brokering training for World Vision's local staff

### Adopting a partnering approach

Through the 1990s, World Vision built and deepened its understanding of 'transformational development' – sustainable, just change for children and families in the context of their communities and environments. Building on that experience, in 2005 came the next step in understanding how WV programmes could achieve greater impact, focused on child well-being, with further reach to the most vulnerable and with more sustainable outcomes.

To do this, the 'Development Programme Approach'<sup>6</sup> (DPA) was designed to tackle the causes of poverty, whilst empowering communities to play more effective roles in their development journey, all focused on the sustained well-being of children, especially the most vulnerable.

This approach requires and enables staff to engage with key community stakeholders at all stages. Staff need to be able to partner well with community stakeholders and to facilitate partnerships between them. Having high quality, principled relationships is critical: they need to be mutually beneficial, equitable, open and empowering of stakeholders.

At the same time, a number of key managers across the organisation had completed PBA's partnership brokers training. Inspired and informed by their experiences, WV decided to adopt and adapt the PBA course structure and materials to suit its local focus, participant group and context.

### WV's Local Partnering Training

WV's internal capacity building programme for partnering is called Local Partnering Training (LPT), a one week course supported by reading and coaching. It supplements the core (DPA) programme training. LPT draws strongly on the original 4-day PBA<sup>7</sup> course, with role plays written in the context of a multi-stakeholder development process in a peri-urban slum. It is designed to equip staff to be able to turn the principles of partnership into day-to-day practice and to build different forms of collaborative arrangements. The training focuses on experiential, adult and blended learning to help build practical skills and experience of partnering and partnership brokering. It is a key part of equipping local staff for the challenges of brokering development collaboration.

*"Together (DPA and LPT) are relevant because they build ownership, capacity and contribution of resources. I don't see how you can have DPA without LPT."*

*Development facilitator, Malawi*

### Box 1: Overview of World Vision's Local Partnering Training

Topic	Notes
Collaboration forms and the collaboration space	Help local staff identify the range of stakeholders and relationships in a given locality
Understanding partners	Looking at civil society context, motivations, drivers, benefits, costs and risks to partnering
Partnership management cycle	A framework to navigate partnership processes
Core skills for managing partnership	Interest-based negotiation, resource scoping, prioritisations, partnering agreements
Role of partnership brokers	The changing and developing role of the PB in a local programme
Learning and reflection	Applying learning to real life situations
Role plays	Putting partnering tools and approaches to life in an extended, open-ended simulation: practising the role of the partnership broker and the role of partner
Double accountability	Recognising the roles of partner representatives to each other and their organisations

6. <http://wvi.org/development>.

7. Partnership Brokers Training, foundation course ('Level 1') – see <http://partnershipbrokers.org/w/training/> for more details. Other groups also contributed, in particular the Viva Network, [www.viva.org](http://www.viva.org).

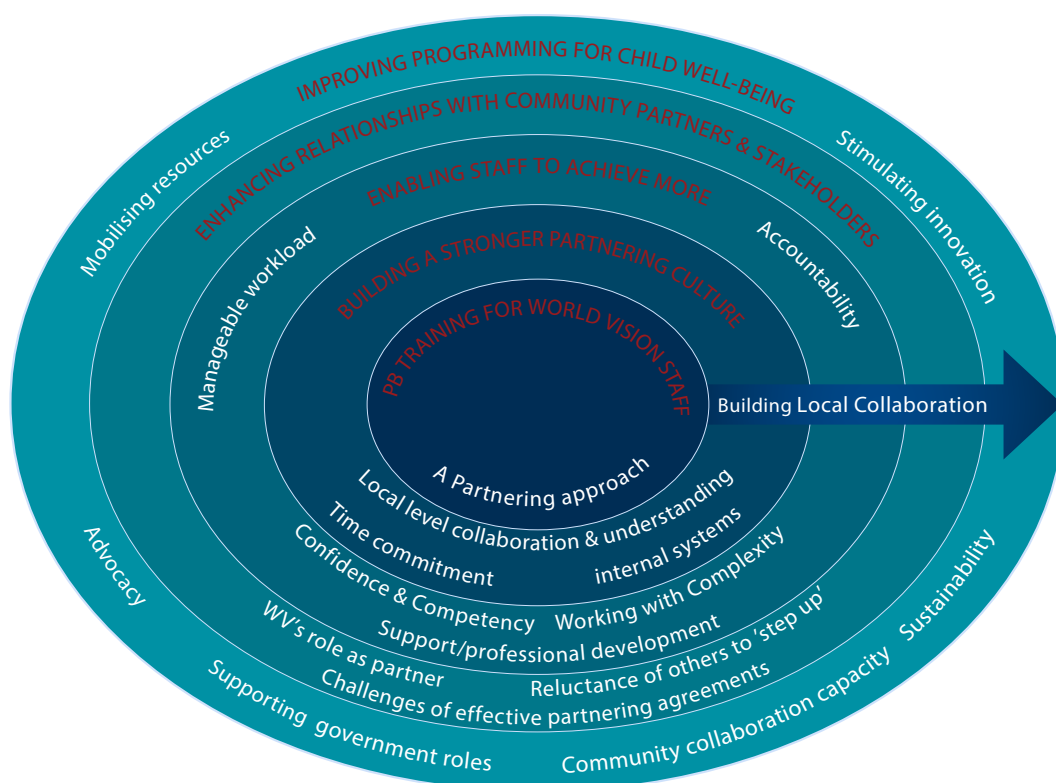
## Training roll-out

At the time of finalising this Inquiry (September 2013), 1,250 staff from 26 countries had completed the course; supported by 85 accredited or conditionally qualified internal trainers. Over the coming year 300 – 400 more staff from existing and new LPT countries will be trained.

The findings are arranged according to a chain of cause and effect, starting with the training and leading to changes to programme outcomes. This is summarised in the table below.

We cannot claim to have been able to assess the actual impacts on communities and on child well-being of the partnership brokering approach since it is too early for this to be clear and was also beyond the scope of this piece of work. However, as will become clear, there are a considerable number of effects that are reported by those who have undertaken the training and are working differently as a result. These are explained below, starting with the staff and their work culture and moving out to look at partners and programming changes.

## Ripple model of the effects World Vision's Local Partnering Training

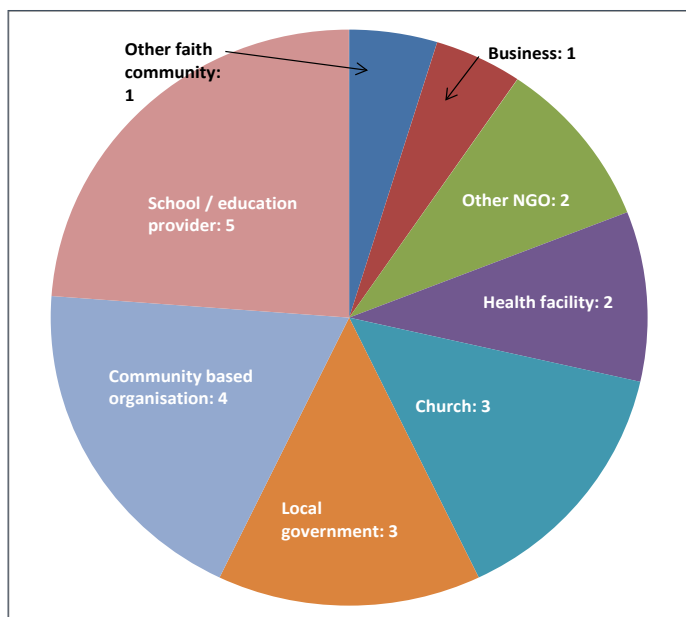


## Findings: an overview of the organisational relationships being managed by respondents

According to the survey findings, WV field staff now actively engage at the local level with a wide range of entities and constituencies. 106 respondents reported working with 3,936 groups (average of 37). Below, median values show that a typical programme involves 21 relationships.

### Box 2: Range of organisational relationships

Many of the different kinds of partnership described by respondents at local levels were informal and relatively spontaneous in nature, and so it is possible some have been omitted because they did not fit more formal definitions.



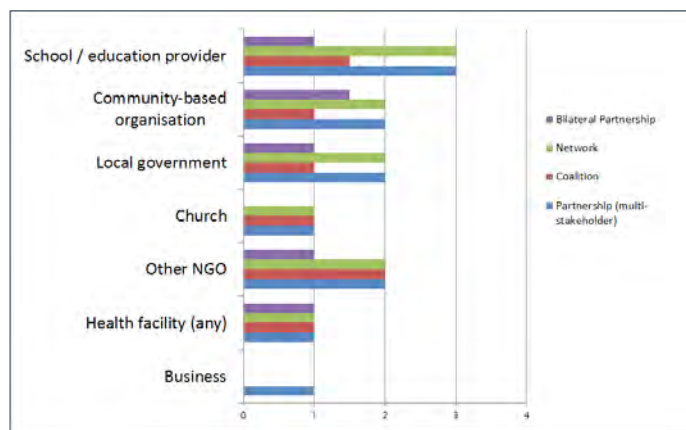
However, it is also possible that some initially loose relationships have subsequently had a formal description added.

The partnership brokering skill-set and approach enables stakeholder engagement in a variety of collaborative processes – from mobilising networks and coalitions for child well-being to multi-stakeholder accountability platforms as well as more formalised partnerships for specific project delivery.

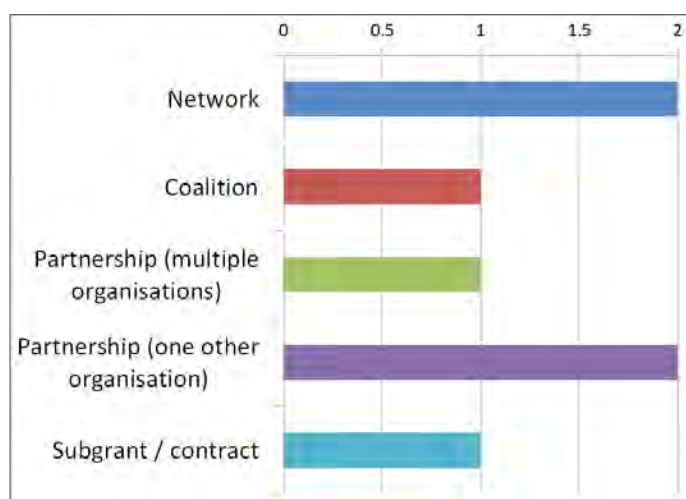
This is shown in the numbers of collaborations that staff reported that they are now taking on partnership brokering responsibilities for several different types of collaboration

### Range of organisation relationships linked to World Vision programmes<sup>8</sup>

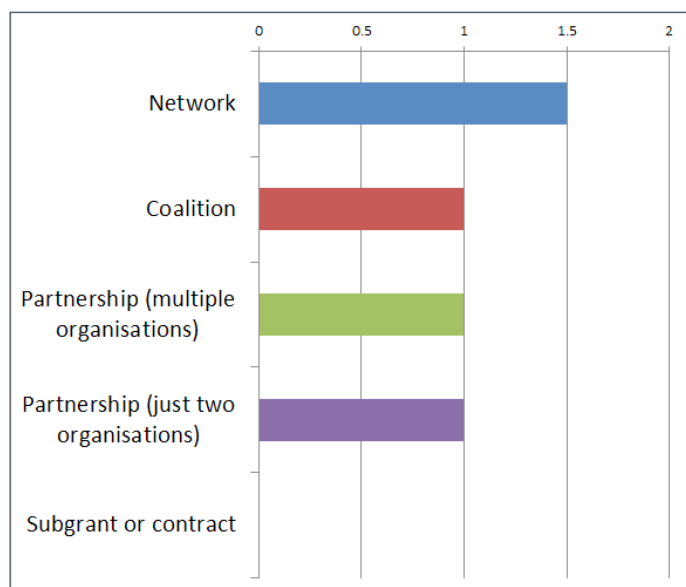
8. To note: 'Other faith community' does not show in this graph because medians are being used. 56 responses averaged 4 relationships with other faith groups, spread evenly between multi-stakeholder collaborations (1.3 per response) or contract (0.8 per response). The wide range of response may be because of programmes that work in different faith majority contexts (most respondents were in Christian majority locations). This would bear further enquiry. In comparison, 87 respondents reported an average of 6.4 church relationships. It is interesting that business – private sector organisations – most commonly engage in partnerships: this is where they may find a 'value proposition'. But overall, the numbers of businesses participating is still relatively small. It appears that the non-profit organisations – both state and voluntary



The types of collaboration that the respondent is working in as Internal Broker (medians, total = 7)



The types of collaboration that the respondent is working in as External Broker (medians, total = 4.5)



– have a much stronger likelihood of working together.

# Building a stronger partnering culture

## Deepening collaboration at a local level

The demand for the LPT training from WV offices around the world has been “extraordinary”<sup>9</sup>. This reflects how partnering is embedded in WV’s development programme approach. LPT provides core skills, attitudes and knowledge for this partnering approach to be implemented.

Staff explained that the added value of the partnership brokering training was the shift in their own approaches to collaboration. Rather than just being given new tools and processes, they had a new way of communicating with others that is being applied broadly to their work.

*“My mind set of how to work with the community changed after the training. Before, I understood the community to be poor and vulnerable with little to offer, now I see that the community has something to offer and they need to play their part.”*

Grant Manager, Malawi

*“Before we focused on beneficiaries but now we see them as partners. We can’t do everything so it is critical we build their capacity in service delivery.”*

Development Facilitator, Uganda

The training opens people’s eyes to value what other groups can offer:

*“This is not about bringing WV resources to the collaboration either to finance or to do the task, rather we are resource sharing. We may just facilitate and not necessarily provide further resources. When meeting other groups, there is now a deliberate focus on resource sharing – with equity and opportunity to share what they can and what they have.”*

ADP Manager, Philippines

It builds expectations of shared leadership:

*“Now we are not just leading, but helping others with important roles in the field to complement each other.”*

Education Specialist, Lebanon

In turn, staff report how this effects community responses:

*“The response to our new approach has been overwhelming. When we did our action planning collaboratively, people were saying ‘I can provide this’, ‘I can provide that’ ... even when it came down to stationary! That wasn’t happening before.”*

Grant Manager, Malawi

## Tackling limited understanding of partnership as a paradigm

Respondents did not think that principle-based partnering was always understood by relevant colleagues and managers across the organisation. In such cases, respondents had some difficulties with pressure, for example, for faster results.

*“Colleagues who don’t understand sometimes put pressure. ‘Why is it taking so long?’ ‘You need to be firm’, ‘Why should we share credit/branding when we are contributing the money?’ I have had to work with my colleagues to help them to understand that the partner contributions have value even if they are not financial, that we need our partners if the work is to get done, that we are stronger with partners than with consultants who we might otherwise pay to play their role.”*

*Those people who don’t directly deal with lots of stakeholders or broker partnerships think it is easy. The role-plays during the LPT course helped us realise it is not such an easy task, that you need to be very careful, aware, and knowledgeable and that it takes time and negotiation. It was good for our whole office to go through the training together and understand that.”*

National Advocacy Officer, Lebanon

*“The knowledge I got from LPT motivated me to work with partners. However, some of my colleagues still have a limited understanding of working with*

*partners, which limits our potential for teamwork on partnering.”*

National staff member, Uganda

## The time it takes

It takes effort, patience and persistence to broker and build partnerships, and the capacity to partner, effectively at community level, time for this needs to be factored into WV staff work plans and strategy at the earliest design phase of local programmes.

*“We are hungry for results, but we need patience, this is a process. We need to build a conducive environment for them to do well. Sometimes it takes a while just to get them to regularly attend meetings. You need to do a lot of engagement, a lot of capacity building. Empowerment takes time.”*

ADP Manager and LPT Trainer, Malawi

One person suggested that, given sometimes stark context challenges and depending on the competence of the WV person in the brokering role, it can take as much as 3-5 years to build up strong partnership-ready organisations.

## Strengthening internal systems

Partnership processes need to be effective for all partners, as well as meeting all partners’ different legitimate needs. Inappropriate or cumbersome policies and procedures of individual partner organisations can hinder or undermine the partnering process for all. Organisational processes and systems better designed to support WV’s field staff to promote collaboration skills more effectively are needed. WV staff explained the need for:

- Enabling finance and procurement systems that do not inhibit resource sharing;
- Mechanisms for reporting / recording / valuing non-financial contributions to truly acknowledge the full value of community-level partnerships;
- Swift and simple approval times and procedures;
- Guidelines and tools for monitoring partnerships and collaborations;
- Clearer guidelines on sub-granting within partnerships;
- Clear guidelines on who signs off on agreements;
- Clearer transition / exit procedures for leaving an ADP as well as a partnership;
- Tools and procedures that support rather than undermine partnerships.

An example is in construction:

*“World Vision procurement policies require staff to get a full quotation and then pay a contractor to purchase materials and deliver. This prevents WV from being able to contribute, for example, bags of sand to a construction plan in which other partners provide the other construction materials. The WV finance and procurement system does not enable parts of a building to be provided or the pooling of resources for construction.”*

ADP Manager, Malawi

9. Camilla Symes, Senior Director for Development and Programme Effectiveness.

## Enabling staff to achieve more

### Increasing staff confidence and competency to partner

The LPT course is widely felt by WV field staff to be necessary for their learning because it:

- Builds skills and understanding in 'how' to collaborate;
- Helps staff to 're-align their mind set'<sup>10</sup> (growing an attitude of 'we can and should do this');
- Enables the transition to a more collaborative approach to their work.

67% of respondents said that before the training they felt 'not very fully' or 'not at all' equipped for partnering and collaboration work, but after the training that figure reduced to less than 3%; 'very fully' and 'quite fully' moved from 4% to 65% (the remainder 'usefully').

They reported being better equipped in terms of:

- Clarified terminology and a common partnering language;
- Enhanced skills and confidence;
- Greater technical understanding of collaboration and how to implement it in the field;
- Feeling more empowered to facilitate partnerships effectively;
- Better able to mobilise resource sharing arrangements at the local level.

Partnership cycle management was helpful for staff in understanding the partnering process and the 'outputs' required at each stage of the process. It has also encouraged reflective practice, allowing staff to be more self-aware and to understand how others may be affected by what they do. One person described it as:

*"A behaviour change programming module for dealing with diverse people."  
Community Development Facilitator, Uganda*

The LPT is seen as giving staff a language and an approach to help break deadlocked situations.

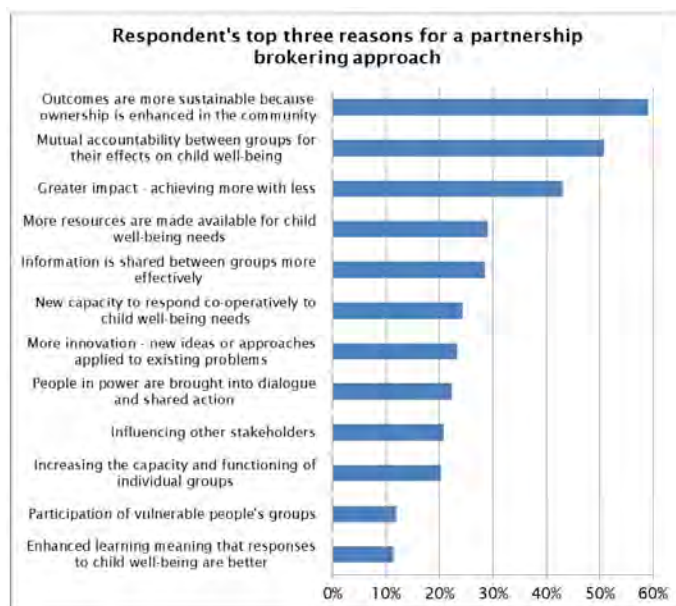
*"A Programme Manager called to express the difficulty in getting the District Government official to understand the need for shared contribution to the implementation of an activity. I responded to the call, went with the Manager and – using the concept of mutual trust & benefits & shared value learnt on the course – I was able to get the official to reason with us and later agree to contribute to the implementation for the activity"*

*Zonal staff, Ghana*

### Valuing a partnering approach

Respondents were asked to list their top three benefits of the partnership brokering approach – these are summarised in Box 3.

Box 3: The importance of a partnership brokering approach as reported by front line staff



The top 3 ranked suggest that partnering approaches change three very different facets of programming: sustainability, looking at the long term; mutual accountability, changing the power of day-to-day working relationships; and impact, the current outcomes (i.e. immediate difference to child well-being).

It might be that the bottom scoring topics - advocacy, capacity-building, and vulnerable people group engagement score low because they were either already included in programming, or seen as subsets of more prominent ideas (e.g. 'learning' as one part of 'innovation'); it may also be that they will become more prominent as partnering practices mature over time.

### Making sense of complexity

The number of actors influencing child well-being in an ADP can be quite overwhelming for local staff. Survey respondents identified an average of 37 relationships, and a median of 21; they were engaged in at least 7 different collaborations, an urban example is provided below from the Philippines, but many rural programmes have similar complexity. By providing a range of options for collaborative relationships based on sound partnering principles, staff are reporting more meaningful and practical relationships. This partly contributes to the feeling of not having to do everything, but it also allows other partners to be drawn in appropriately. This is shown, for example, by the way that staff were able to report on the different kinds of collaborative relationship, and approaches to partners (e.g. to network or to build partnership; to focus on capacity-building or brokering).

10. ADP Manager, Philippines.



*“WV operates an ADP in one of the biggest informal settlements in Metropolitan Manila, a highly urbanised dynamic, fast & highly political context, of approximately 10-12000 families.*

*The community is complex and diverse. Amongst registered families there are 20+ church denominations, 10% Muslims, & 80% Catholic. There are many diverse social groupings, organisations, NGOs and government agencies operating in the area. The number and variety of stakeholders is both a challenge and an opportunity. Discernment in partner selection is a necessity and much partnering happens at multiple levels: the barangay (village/ward), the city, and the National Capital region (17 cities).*

*At barangay level: WV joined an existing inter-agency coalition of 7-10 organisations: NGOs, Peoples organisations, local government agencies. The WV Role is to help strengthen the coalition.*

*At City (metropolitan borough) level: WV joined existing networks & an area based standards network (150 members).*

*National Capital region (Metropolitan Manila): WV joined an area based standards network under the Department of Social Welfare and Development (this is composed of INGOs, other social welfare agencies in the city and local NGOs) and collaborated with the Office of Civil Defence (NCR) for interventions on disaster risk reduction.”*

*ADP Manager Philippines*

## Ensuring a more manageable workload for staff

A great deal is expected of local programme staff and many reported feeling overwhelmed by the complexity and the workload. Having the knowledge and ability to manage complexity and share the workload with partners has helped staff feel more positive and contributed to staff satisfaction and a sense of professional well-being.

*“This approach is more fulfilling. It makes more sense, at the community level with all groups working for the same thing. When they come together and share, they can complement each other, building capacity to deliver even when we are not there. We are not supposed to lead every meeting or deliver every capacity building.”*

*Development Facilitator, Malawi*

A number of staff mentioned that their own well-being improved with the shift to a brokering approach. They were no longer having to do everything themselves and were using their time more effectively which lead them to feel they were being more effective and therefore happier in their work.

*“In the training we were asked to draw a picture of a development facilitator. Someone drew a monster, overloaded and overwhelmed. The training was like the medicine for the overloaded monster. I have not since been overloaded like I used to be because I know who to involve. When you understand partnering concepts well, you realise that the work is going back to the local people. But those who have not understood it well are still trying to do it all themselves. I am enjoying my work as it gets lighter and lighter.”*

*Development Facilitator, Uganda*

## Accountability conflicts

Attention needs to be given to the effective management of a role that combines that of ‘neutral’ partnership broker whilst also being the WV representative within the partnership. The challenges in this regard include:

- Balancing organisational requirements with practical partnering: *“Building relationships, trust and capacity takes time. In many situations local staff are overwhelmed with targets, indicators, deadlines and this is why the most*

*important basics in partnership fall as being less important.”*<sup>11</sup>

- Juggling WV’s strategic objectives with being a neutral process manager: *“At times there may be delays in achieving strategic interests in order to allow time for the process to be more equitable. Ensuring objectives are met but also building capacity.”*<sup>12</sup>
- The community sometimes confuses WV’s brokering of a partnership with an intention to lead and control it: *“Often the community is not very empowered and is unused to being active in participatory processes and feel comfortable leaving it to WV.”*<sup>13</sup>
- Staff working as partnership brokers also need to represent WV finding a challenge in: *“maintaining neutrality while facilitating a partnership.”*<sup>14</sup>

*In Uganda, a community development facilitator felt that the NGO forum he had helped to galvanise was being pushed by WV. Others were waiting for WV to speak, giving the status of ‘the final word’. He had been neglecting his brokering role (coordinating & facilitating) and realised he was dominating. He decided he needed to withdraw from facilitating the process, the forum began to stall. He suggested the group select a chairperson to champion the process instead. He sat with the new appointee and shared his knowledge of what it takes to facilitate a partnership process. He outlined the principles and offered advice on how to respect them. Meetings now go on with or without the WV representative and he feels freed up to focus on other things.*

The next example highlights the tension for an international NGO, with very legitimate concerns, building partnering approaches in a context of low capacity civil society finding ways to maintain its appropriate legal, due diligence requirements and at the same time not dominating smaller, less developed organisations:

*“Partnering requires building good relationships and more trust but strict, inflexible policies and processes get in the way of trust.”*

*Development Facilitator, Cambodia*

## Need for continuing support / professional development

Whilst the training is perceived as providing a paradigm shift for WV staff, it is only after the training, when staff need to operationalise the new approach, that new practices get embedded, much of the learning happens and staff are put to the test in terms of using their new skills. Staff suggest that they need more:

- On-going training, coaching and supervision which means that their line managers need to have the knowledge, capacity and experience to provide support to their staff in their new roles (whether directly or indirectly);
- Opportunities to deepen their understanding and practice as a team – not just as individuals;
- Confidence boosting in this approach and to be able to feel that they can express anxieties about the challenges they face.

11. National quality assurance staff, Romania.

12. Development Facilitator, Uganda.

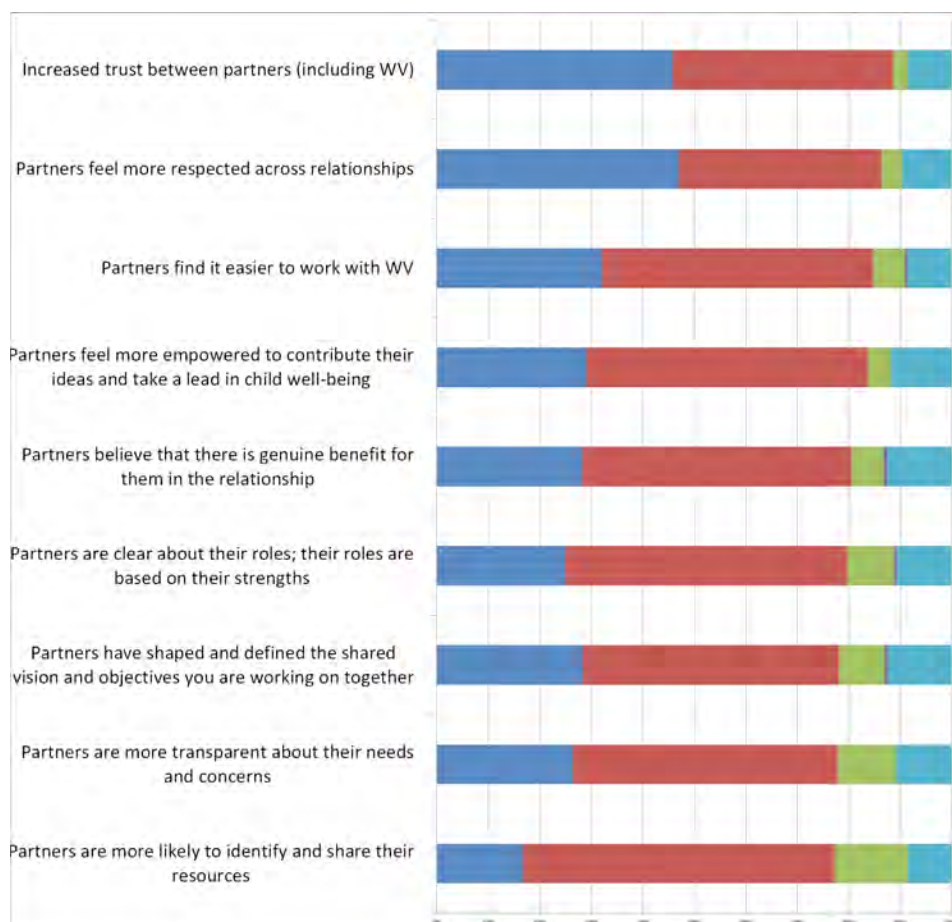
13. Education Specialist, Lebanon.

14. Field staff, Tanzania.

## Enhancing relationships with community partners and stakeholders

In the survey, staff report a strong correlation between the partnership brokering approach and stronger, better quality working relationships (approximately 10% said it was too early to tell). Specifically, the approach was perceived to help with the (often challenging) needs of building trust, accountability, and respect (this reflects what they said was most important).

### Box 4: How partnering enhances relationships with community partners



45.7% of survey respondents perceived that a brokering approach 'always' increased trust between partners, with only 11.2% saying 'rarely', 'never' or 'too early to tell' - the lowest of all the response options. Staff interviewed commented that a focus on transparency and openness about the temporary nature of WV's presence in an area was more realistic and built trust and credibility with communities. 47.1% perceive partners 'always' feel more respected now, and 39.7% 'sometimes', (9.8% said don't know or too early to tell). This would need more objective verification from partners more broadly, but this reflects the interviews with partners. They felt that their contributions were being valued more, although they were not directly asked whether they felt more respected.

It is interesting that the lowest score was for 'more likely to identify and share their resources'. This reflects the reality that trust takes time to build, although it is notable that many examples of newly shared resources were provided.

### Understanding and trusting WV's role as partner

*"They see us as funders. When we start talking about a joint project, the expectation is that we will play the 'absent' role of the donor. When actually we want to talk about joint planning, joint implementation."*

*National Advocacy and Policy advisor, Lebanon*

*"In Albania, the term 'partnership' is relatively new and misunderstood – especially since civil society hardly exists."*

*Survey respondent, Albania*

WV had sometimes been perceived as a donor at the local level, which brings with it an assumption of a rigid work practice of submitting proposals that get financed, little involvement in the details, and hands-off in implementation. None of these are, however, how WV is choosing to work. Many respondents observed that by building partnerships, WV was able to:

*"...change people's perception of the organisation and help them understand that regardless of whether there is or is not a financial arrangement at a later stage of the collaboration, WV would like to work together with them."*

*Advocacy and Policy advisor, Lebanon*

The partnership brokering approach appears to help position WV better as an organisation to work with. Adhering to the partnering principles of equity, mutual benefit and transparency makes clear the organisation's values, and positions WV as a desirable organisation to work with.

*"It enhances WV image as a trusted partner in development work."  
Programme manager, Cambodia*

An example of mutual benefit:

*"We need to get better at sharing credit – it doesn't give us less but more - more visibility, more trust and a more credible image. It opens up engagement and widens our networks."  
Advocacy and Policy advisor, Lebanon*

An example of transparency in practice:

*"We are being more open and upfront about our plans to leave the area and we invite early discussion of concerns since if their concerns are not addressed they may lose trust or back out of their commitments which can potentially cause problems later on."  
ADP Manager Philippines*

To turn this aspiration into reality, some interviewees explained that starting a new partnership with a small-scale project had helped to build trust and confidence in working together and had led to more involved collaboration. This widespread reporting of growing trust, and the value this brings, partly explains why 'accountability' was seen as so important by the survey respondents. Equity grew as partners reported feeling that their roles were respected, facilitation responsibilities and resources were shared (see 'Mobilising resources'). The example below shows growing ownership which is another indicator of growing equity.

Community groups in particular were reported to be responding with greater engagement and taking greater ownership. One community-based organisation (CBO) partner explained that he saw the role of WV as: "empowering community CBOs to be able to do what we want and sustain ourselves when WV leaves"<sup>15</sup>. Much of the work at community level involves many CBOs. These have limited organisational capacity, constraining the rate of progress and requiring organisational capacity building approaches to enable them to function as partners in shared projects.

### Reluctance of other players to 'step up'

The partnership broker's role is particularly challenging and they have to work hard to:

- Maintain active participation of partners;
- Build capacity of community stakeholders;
- Encourage governments to partner effectively;

*"It is a challenge to ensure active participation. Often there are only a small number of active partners. Scaling can be difficult because not all partners are active."*

*District Education officer, Cambodia*

Inconsistent participation could be due to a number of factors, and was noted by a number of interviewees – as shows the above quote. This could be due to a hangover from a general NGO approach that emphasised consultation rather than collaboration. Or, as some have reported, it might be that there is a need for a deeper understanding of

what the partnership broker is seeking to achieve where the partnership broker's identity is tied to that of an international NGO as well as a neutral facilitator of a multi-stakeholder process.

As WV steps back at some point during its planned programme lifespan, others need to step forward and the role of the WV staff member operating as a partnership broker is to bring about this stepping up. This can be challenging for staff both to galvanise action from others and to let go themselves.

### Challenges of effective partnering agreements

Developing formal arrangements can be challenging, both from a partner and World Vision perspective. These challenges include a lack of consistency in partnering arrangements and a lack of trust in the process or each other. Most progress seems to have been made where contractual relationships have been renegotiated after being infused with the partnering principles.

*"To me this [community partnership brokering] is very satisfying. Previously we lost a lot of opportunities. Partnerships were mainly higher level with MOUs between organisations where mostly it was the lawyers working together."*

*Development Facilitator, Malawi*

There are also challenges emerging as partners move toward playing a fuller role in shared projects:

*"The biggest challenge I face is to move from mobilising and catalysing phase to something more structured."*

*Local programme staff member, Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza*

*"For our grant project in nutrition for child & maternal health, we created new guidelines to explain and formalise how we will work together and the roles and responsibilities of partners from across the district, not just those already with us, but those who were yet to join. The response has been overwhelming. Partners have given their full support to the agreement and say they feel that this is the right way to go."*

*Grant Manager, Malawi*

Staying focussed on the value each partner brings, careful interest-based negotiation allowed 3 groups to create a partnership agreement in Lebanon for a broad-ranging lifeskills and education project. It was enabled by a collaboration between the WV National Office education team and the local programmes.

The Education lead used her new partnership brokering skills to move from small and transactional contracted activities between two of the partners. These activities were 'safe' but inherently limited. By a careful negotiation, their new agreement:

- Provides clarity and accountability – showing that each organisation was valued for their expertise and would be leading a particular stream of activities;
- Clears up assumptions and address fears about competition between the partners; branding issues and the potential risks. This made the smaller organisations in the partnership feel a more genuine sense of equity;
- Demonstrates through a well worked-through decision-making process that this would be a genuinely collaborative way of working;
- Shows how serious each partner is about the collaboration and that they are fully committed.

In the first place, the partnership reached 16 schools across Beirut and has now been rolled-out more widely. Rather than the initial approach of just focusing on education and lifeskills support for youth, the partnership programme is also sensitising teachers to support lifeskills and economic development for older youth and school leavers.

15. CBO Partner Uganda.

# Improving programming for child well-being

## Mobilising resources

Mobilising resources for shared projects has often been seen as a challenge but many staff report being “amazed at the wealth of resources” available in the community as well as the communities’ readiness to contribute in a way that they had never seen before and even the willingness of community members to leverage resources from elsewhere.

*“The ADP planned to support the Primary Health Care (PHC) to deworm 2000 children in the primary focus area. After meeting with the PHC coordinator she expressed the desire of her outfit to conduct the activity in the entire district. We therefore held meetings with other stakeholders including Ghana Health Service (GHS) which supported the activity and through that all the children in the Asante Akim North District were dewormed.”*

*Local programme staff, Ghana*

42% of those surveyed said partnership brokering is most important because it enables doing ‘more with less’.

Examples provided by respondents included a whole range of contributions: vaccinations, family planning resources, specific technical inputs, materials for building, stationary and of course time, project management and money. The resources came from an equally diverse range of contributors, ranging from government and other NGOs through to CBOs and churches. These contributions all enabled doing ‘more with less’ either through making project costs less, or by increasing the size of a project.

## Strengthening Advocacy

Making the case for brokering good partnerships, one WV national level advocacy officer said: *“There is lots of competition between NGOs, it is not how it should be but it is how it is. We need to find a way to work together and get that common agreement, with each benefiting, or we will not succeed in our efforts.”*

Most of those consulted see the partnership brokering approach as strengthening advocacy efforts by:

- Adding credibility as WV is not working alone but aligning itself with others/building capacity;
- Influencing different players at various levels to adopt and integrate child well-being issues into their own programmes and services;
- Enabling a common approach towards government and policy-makers.

*“Working in a collaborative way is more effective. If our advocacy efforts are only about co-ordination or occasional campaigns, our influence is not as high as when we work in a partnering way through a coalition.”*

*Advocacy and Policy advisor, Lebanon*

Longer-term advocacy partnerships prevent staff needing to re-engage on every new issue. Advocacy partnerships continue deepening relationships and build on growing trust, and save time and effort.

## Supporting government roles

A key element of sustainability is the role of local government.

*“Often local government is side-lined and only ‘reported to’ rather than being engaged. Government needs to be involved if things are to be sustained, we are better able to bring government than we used to be.”*

*Grant Manager, Malawi*

Local government officers were reported to be happy to work collaboratively as their catchment area is often very large and they typically don’t have the funds to provide services effectively – another example of mutual benefit. Several commented that the local government officers in their regions welcomed the change in approach. This was particularly true where more formalised opportunities for stakeholder inter-action have been put in place, such as a multi-stakeholder platform for child well-being with stakeholder networks, in education, or health. A government worker from one such platform said:

*“Everyone is now able to contribute to government processes and are more satisfied because there is room for exchange on government issues!”*

*Local government child protection officer Malawi*

*The local government in Senegal who used to ask for straightforward service delivery from WV has now taken a great step in working with others. WV’s recent participation in building classrooms and health posts has decreased from 90% to 10%. This has happened as a direct result of the local government officers seeing more clearly that they do have something to contribute – in this case, technical expertise, buildings and local workforce. Local programme staff, Senegal.*

Including local government officers more fully in local level activities, despite the challenges involved, and seeking strategic support from key higher-level government people at (for example) district/sub-county level, was seen to be an additional outcome of skilled brokering and a critical success factor in building sustainability. Whilst the need for deeper engagement to ensure longer-term sustainability was understood, there are concerns about government not delivering as a partner and thus negatively affecting delivery.

Other challenges from local government that inhibit effective partnering and that WV partnership brokers need to understand and address include:

- Government resource provision being sporadic and / or arriving late;
- Planning cycles being ‘out of sync’;
- Having to work across different government departments;
- Government bureaucracy and procedures being cumbersome;
- Managing shifting political positions;
- Government staff turnover;
- Lack of understanding and experience of partnering;
- Unwillingness to give up any control in order for the collaboration to be participatory.

Many of these mirror NGOs’ own constraints on partnering (e.g. staff turnover and coordination between departments), and explain some of the practical difficulties.

### A local Care Network – giving children a voice

In Malawi, local programmes have started to create or join networks working in different issues of child well-being, such as health or food and nutrition.

The networks meet up every month to discuss community issues and find solutions. CBOs are becoming stronger in the process and the networks are becoming more vibrant, particularly in the Education and Care networks. World Vision is present, to facilitate and support as needed depending on the history of that collaboration, and gather feedback on WV's own programming to be able to adjust or improve it. It takes time to energise such a network, especially to move beyond information sharing.

In the 'Care' network, a Children's Parliament was initiated. An unusual network meeting happened in March 2013, when those present were surprised to hear the children's representative from the Children's Parliament bring up the issue of child abuse as a hidden problem. The network took action, and 2 people were taken to court on child abuse charges and one was imprisoned. The children also spoke of a teacher who was absconding from duties because of an alcohol problem. This issue was also followed up on and a resolution found whereby the teacher accepted the accusation and started addressing his alcohol issue.

The local government child protection officer, whose remit covers 68 villages in a 10km radius, describes this network as "the hope for the area. Before the children were not allowed to speak but now they can speak for themselves about the issues that affect their lives".

This multi-stakeholder and multi-issue platform, creating accountability to children, is seen locally as both a new and exciting development for children's well-being.

The team leader (WV ADP Manager) reported that it had taken three years to develop the trust between the organisations - a great deal of attention, patience, and sticking to principles. This included not providing short-term incentives but pursuing genuine mutual benefit and developing the collaborative skills of the partners.

### Building capacity for collaboration in the community

The approach to building relationships seems not only to build community participation but also plays its part in mending fences:

*"Partners in the area where I work have bad experiences of collaborating with each other, the brokering process in itself has helped to re-build trust."*

*Field staff member, Albania & Kosovo*

WV staff expressed that a well-executed and well brokered partnering approach is building enhanced collaboration capacity and forging stronger local relationships as different stakeholders are encouraged to recognise each other's value and work in mutually beneficial ways, often without precedent. Staff that have completed the LPT course are increasingly involved in sharing their understanding of partnering with stakeholder groups through mentoring or actual training so that collaboration can increasingly underpin all local action.

Some staff are building individual capacity for partnership brokering within the community so others can take on some of the brokering work of WV programme managers. Versions

of the LPT course are being developed in local languages. These are not as technical as the LPT course itself but they do cover the principles and basic concepts.

### Stimulating Innovation

Well-brokered partnerships were considered by almost a quarter of survey respondents to create the conditions for innovative solutions through 'New ideas or approaches applied to existing problems' and as a direct result of collective problem solving and resource sharing. Examples of innovation identified in our research include:

- Improving teaching effectiveness;
- Improving Community health services;
- Building the capacity of local government and CBO capacity;
- Child-centred community accountability;
- Building sustainability through community partnership brokering capacity;
- Programming that includes more than one WV department working together for the first time.

### Developing sustainability

This final finding builds on the outcomes reported above, and helps explain what respondents reported as the most important rationale for partnering (58.9%).

Sustainability is 'the ability to maintain and improve upon the outcomes and goals achieved with external support after that support has ended'<sup>16</sup>. All of the outcomes reported above have direct links to sustainability:

- Increase in accountability in the roles of Government departments;
- Development in community capacity for collaboration, learning and innovation;
- Shared advocacy transforming relationships and building accountability;
- Ownership of the responsibility for child well-being constantly growing as groups invest and find reward for those efforts.

The respondents explained that sustainability is enhanced by partnering approaches that recognise and leverage the roles and resources of stakeholders. Mutual reinforcement between aspects of sustainability was clear, especially ownership, accountability and partnering:

*"Easier, faster quality programming that builds ownership. Partners do their own programming and hold themselves as well as WV accountable."*

*Development Facilitator, Uganda*

*"We are not just collaborating for the sake of collaborating but instead there is a consciousness that we are creating a partnership in which people feel ownership, are already involved and have the capacity to continue what we have started. In this way, our effort over many years is not wasted when we leave."*

*ADP Manager, Philippines*

16. World Vision International, 2009, LEAP 2nd edition, accessed at <http://wvi.org/publication/leap-2nd-edition>, p86.

### **Partnering for effective microfinance in Cambodia**

As part of planning the final phase of a local programme, the Development Facilitator worked out that micro-finance loans were leading to greater indebtedness across families in a village, with resultant difficulties for their children. He takes up the story:

"I found out that bad lending and borrowing practices between the community and micro-finance institutes were having a very damaging effect on families in the community. People were taking out duplicate loans, lenders were unaware that they were duplicate, local authority representatives (village/commune/district leaders) were signing them off and the community were unable to pay back the multiple loans. 69.5% of people had micro-finance loans and in one instance a village of 89 families had loans for 146 people, even though each family is only supposed to take one loan. In 2009 the situation became critical when natural disasters caused agriculture to collapse. Many people were unable to pay back their loans and migrated to the Thai border to escape the situation and find work. Children were left unsupported and often suffered malnutrition. The micro-finance institutions had not only lost their profit from repayments but the drastic reduction in the amount of money in circulation reduced their ability to lend out again to local people in need.

#### **Applying a partnering approach**

The community itself came to an understanding of the difficulties ahead for community people if things continued in the same way. When the request first came from the community to work with Micro-Finance Institutes (MFIs), I did not know how to help the community solve this problem. After doing the role play in the LPT practical training I felt very relieved to have an approach that could help me in this context.

Although it is still early in the lifecycle of the collaboration, I can see the causes and effects of the different approach I am taking - the process of partnering. I have been able to draw specifically on my practical experience in the LPT role plays to:

- Facilitate meetings with the community, the district governor's office and microfinance institutes;
- Help bring about understanding and build relationships;
- Help groups find their common interest in preventing loan duplication;
- Prioritising actions to prevent bad loans such as awareness-raising on savings approach/financial literacy.

To help us all understand the wider and longer term implications of bad debt on the community, I used other tools (not from the LPT) such as:

- 'Plus – minus – interesting' to help understand the scope of the problem;
- CAS: Consequence and sequel – where the community, including local community authority representatives, are encouraged to think about the implications of duplicate loans over time - six months, one year, three years, five years.

#### **People's response to the change in approach**

Resistance to a partnering approach has been felt more from the microfinance groups than from the community. Collaboration does not easily fit into their business plan and they are initially resistant to deviating from their usual way of doing business. However, despite this resistance they too saw how over the long term bad debt would have negative consequences for them, so they have slowly come around.

I think that our work over the last 10 years in the area has helped to build up trust with the community, with a reputation for transparency and a willingness to help. I think this is why the community trusts WV to facilitate the collaboration.

I feel more confident and motivated. I feel clear that we are going in the right direction to reduce bad debt in the community. I enjoy and am happy to be learning a new approach and to be able to bring together the community, authority leaders and microfinance groups to meet the community needs around duplicate loans.

The community has requested that our work with MFIs extend to be commune wide, not just within the ADP so now my task is to train local people in the LPT approach to broker their own collaborations in microfinance and work at the community level.

## Recommendations for World Vision

Based on a review of the issues identified by respondents and the solutions they are developing, and drawing on PBA's experience, here are some recommendations to enhance local level partnering. Readers should note that several of the recommendations are already being pursued or developed.

<p><b>Explaining</b> Communicate the role and value of partnering</p>	<p><b>Record, publicise and celebrate achievements</b> – at local levels with partners as well as within WV and the NGO sector. Make examples accessible internally</p> <p>Use experience and evidence to <b>make a compelling case</b> for the partnering and partnership brokering approach – specifically with reference to increased local ownership, more innovation and potential for sustainability</p>
<p><b>Embedding</b> Align systems and structures to become 'partner friendly'</p>	<p>Continue to <b>align programme models, approaches &amp; programmes</b> with the multi-stakeholder partnering approach</p> <p>Ensure key staff at all levels (strategic, management, operational, front line and support) have a deeper understanding of the importance of partnership brokering and its potential to achieving WV's mission. <b>Leadership and line managers take LPT</b> in a shortened form to enable enlightened management, coaching, mentoring and support to others in their partnership brokering activities/learning and to ensure messaging is aligned and consistent</p> <p>Develop a <b>structured approach to peer-to-peer learning</b> – through communities of practice, workshops, online meetings and study visits etc to share challenges and successes</p> <p>Make <b>financial, procurement and decision-making systems more partnership-friendly</b> – including, for example, mechanisms that enable resource sharing</p> <p>Establish a <b>partnering focal point</b> at the national level who will push the partnering agenda holistically and will provide back-up and expertise when needed</p> <p>Clarify and <b>communicate the changing nature of the partnership brokering role</b> at different stages of the collaboration / partnering cycle – from shaping during the initiation phase to empowering during the maintenance phase to revising during the reviewing phase and, eventually, in managing the moving on / exit process</p>
<p><b>Recruitment</b> Choose and support staff for partnering</p>	<p><b>Review the competency requirements</b> with respect to the partnership brokering skills of those operating in field and programme management roles. Seek to appoint those that have: a collaborative attitude; an appreciation for teamwork; good communication skills (particularly verbal); good listening skills; sensitivity to the needs / priorities of others; the ability to be flexible and to manage complexity</p> <p>Encourage new staff to <b>bring partnering experiences</b> from elsewhere and to try new approaches, learning from things that don't work well rather than playing too safe to push boundaries</p> <p>Recognise that those who are successful in partnership brokering are likely to be moved into more senior positions quite fast – be prepared for a relatively quick turnover</p> <p><b>Support new staff</b> as they grapple with new collaboration frameworks and the issue of double accountability (to WV and to their partners)</p>
<p><b>Training</b> Create and promote learning methods for different staff needs</p>	<p>Enable others in WV in different positions to take the LPT course to <b>build greater understanding and common approaches</b>. Consider personnel from national offices who would benefit from the training</p> <p><b>Include key partners in the LPT</b> (to build capacity, a common language with partners and avoid creating a sense of privilege for WV staff)</p> <p>Embed key LPT modules within an increased number of core community development trainings and <b>support the capacity development of internal trainers</b></p> <p><b>Adapt the LPT course</b> to be available at different levels of sophistication and in local languages for different contexts including rural/urban</p> <p><b>Provide follow-on capacity building activities</b> in different ways. E.g.: advanced training and / or shorter courses on specific partnering issues / competencies as well as internal mentoring of newly qualified partnership brokers</p> <p><b>Develop tools for monitoring</b> and assessing partnership activity and health. Embed within line management systems to ensure organisational accountability and support whilst recognising time contingencies</p>
<p><b>Evaluating</b> Looking at partnering outcomes</p>	<p>Performance indicators suggested by WV partnership brokers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How far partners make a commitment by contributing their own resources (of different types)</li> <li>• Quality of partner participation</li> <li>• Degree of follow through on their shared / agreed commitments</li> <li>• Increased understanding of and respect for each other's drivers and values</li> <li>• Degree to which partners share risk and participate in evaluation and partnership reviews / revisions</li> </ul> <p><b>Compare the partnership / collaborative approach</b> with non-partnership alternatives</p>

A vigorous investment in new approaches to old problems often has a 'wow' factor. Strong support follows implementation of a new thing that seems appropriate, empowering and effective. But once the 'new-ness' has begun to wear off, leaders may move on to the next new strategies, or the approach remains in place, but become so formalised that it loses its dynamism and impact.

If collaborative approaches are to be effective long-term it must be because these approaches are continuously recognised as providing organisational value – they need to avoid slipping into a 'been there, done that' formula. World Vision, like all other organisations promoting a partnership / collaborative approach to development, needs to find ways of maintaining focus, providing on-going support and the determination necessary to being willing to continue to push the boundaries in order to maximize the benefits of collaboration to sustained child well-being.

Local Partnering Training: Introduction to a partnership resource scoping meeting as adapted by World Vision Cambodia





## Partnership Brokering – Lessons for the NGO Sector

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WV's recent experience, articulated in this report, provides useful insight into the value of building partnership-brokering capacity at grass roots level. As the NGO sector worldwide moves more strongly towards approaches to development and aid that are based on non-traditional alliances and collaboration, partnership brokering competencies appear to be of value in a number of ways<sup>17</sup>:

### **Making the most of resources**

The examples show how partnering allows different partners to make the best use of their resources, in the widest possible understanding of the idea – from networks, including those of expertise and professional bodies through to finance and materials from large and small actors in society.

### **Building accountability**

International NGOs constantly need to ensure accountability, both upward and downward, to build both effectiveness and legitimacy. The examples here show how partnership brokering, built on just three fundamental principles, allows this to emerge in very practical ways, from gaining trust through to the 'handing over' of technical capacities.

### **Working together successfully**

Partnering for development is still a relatively new concept at a community level – and is sometimes regarded locally as just another 'development fad'; successful collaboration is rare in practice. The partnership brokering approach can trigger a genuine paradigm shift that enables greater engagement in collaboration and contributes towards changing organisational culture and systems. Communities will only become truly empowered through partnering when those facilitating the process use brokering skills and competencies to listen, speak, act and shape in ways that encourage, support and model collaboration at its best.

### **Wide applicability**

Those who have honed their partnership brokering skills apply them in a multiplicity of ways. They gain key skills for development work in a broad spectrum of roles and functions, geographic levels (national/district/local, etc), contexts (urban/rural), staff experience levels and phases of the programming cycle.

### **Understanding and managing local complexity**

There is no question that all local contexts are layered in their complexity and for this reason solutions are likely to be multi-level and to embrace diverse interests and goals – this process cannot be undertaken by one individual (no matter how competent) or even one entity (no matter how big). Partnership brokering helps frontline staff to understand the dangers of doing too much and helps them better manage their workload and avoid overwhelm and workplace stress in turn creating more effective and faster results.

Astute partnership brokers do not rush in to 'do everything', they recognise that they too carry 'baggage' in the form of prejudices, preconceptions and assumptions – so they facilitate exploration and co-created solutions using their capacity for reflective practice and brokering skills to build understanding of – rather than just simplifying – complexity.

### **Enhancing practitioner competence**

Even highly experienced development workers described value in using a skilled, principled partnering approach. Not only as a 'refresher' and 'validator' of what they intuitively know, but also provides a new way of reflecting on how they are doing their brokering and partnering, an approach that encourages self-awareness and continuous learning and improvement.

### **Invigorating meaningful grass-roots participation**

Local communities are contributing to setting their own priorities. They are enabled to form issue groups, interact with each other and government in multi-stakeholder platforms. This builds ownership (and avoids dependency), engaging them in participatory decision-making and social accountability. The conscious mobilisation of these platforms help participants feel like empowered partners in their own development, understanding how they can act collaboratively. This stronger local ownership and leadership indicates that partnership brokering is part of helping people to co-create more responsive, organised and equitable governance and accountability systems.

### **Enabling better harmonisation of development/aid efforts**

Here one NGO was shown to be continuously adapting its role to what was needed in the local context – sometimes acting as broker, sometimes funder, and sometimes technical expert. Rather than working in an old paradigm of competition between organisations, collaboration allowed refocusing on delivering the best value for communities and society. Helping those involved understand how to shift from a competitive paradigm to a collaborative one is likely to be critical in the genuine harmonisation of everyone's efforts by marshalling and making best use of the attributes, experience and contributions each player brings.

### **Transformative effect on the development ecosystem**

It appears that those trained as partnership brokers tend to build the partnering capacity of the partners they work with, creating a capacity multiplier effect. For local communities this creates an ecosystem of development support that reaches from the local to the national and provides a more enabling and collaborative environment in which social change can take place. This alignment and consent to partner is needed if we are to meet the current and pressing needs of our fragmented and competitive world.

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17. These wider lessons that the PBA team have drawn from this Inquiry also take account of findings that other trained as partnership brokers have reported elsewhere – see: *What do Partnership Brokers Do?*

## Partnership Brokering at community level

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### Partnership brokering is an achievable skill

Despite the intensity of the course and complexity of the role, field staff clearly can succeed in completing and building on it. Designed originally for employees of large organisations, there were concerns that the original PBA course would be too conceptual for the needs of community-level partnership brokers. These concerns were allayed through WV's adaptations of the course for the grassroots. This, combined with dedicated organisational backing and management support, demonstrate pretty conclusively that community partnership brokers can also access the learning and experience the paradigm shift experienced by participants of the PBA's original course.

### Integrating and institutionalising partnership brokering is critical

Part of the successful uptake and implementation of partnership brokering as a community development approach in WV is due to its integration as part of a wider organisational change. LPT is not 'stand-alone' but rather provides training in skills and an approach integral to WV's new Development Programme Approach. This is perceived as essential to the sustainability of outcomes.

### Application of learning requires on-going organisational support

Most of the time, PBA only has the opportunity of the training course to access participants and inspire and equip them to make their own paradigm shift. This has led to very stringent trainer approval processes and rigorous standards of teaching. WV's example shows that creating in-house training capacity and enabling on-going mentoring and coaching is possible. Organisations can then provide individuals with multiple opportunities to develop their learning and sharpen their partnering practice.

### Partnership brokering enhances many kinds of inter-organisational relationship

The essence of partnering is shared responsibility in relationships where trust and respect is built over time. By motivating stakeholders to play their part building their capacity to collaborate and taking on a more invisible leadership role, those operating as partnership brokers at community level enable and empower individuals and communities to be agents of change in their own development story as well as building a more resilient and collaborative development ecosystem which can support them. This includes a wide range of non-traditional working relationships – whether in the form of networks, consortia, coalitions, intra-sectoral action or more formal partnerships.

### Partnership brokering is the practice of equitable, respectful relationships

Partnership brokering requires the ability to be aware of self and others and engage in reflective practice; to find value in difference and diversity; and consciously create more equitable, transparent and mutually beneficial relationships and share resources according to strengths and interests. The partnership brokering competences were first designed

for navigating relatively well-defined inter-organisational partnerships. The evidence presented here suggests that these same competencies and approaches have a more universal applicability in creating an equitable and sustainable world.

*"Partnering is not just a tool for sustainable development, it is a matter of survival, where stakeholders know how to communicate with each other, respect, love and most of all, value their different contributions."*

*Development Facilitator, Lebanon*

## Conclusion

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As stated earlier, this Inquiry seeks to capture a moment in time – drawing initial lessons from a programme that is still in its infancy. There is much potential for further work in due course as the programme matures on the one hand and becomes embedded in World Vision’s internal systems, on the other.

Areas for further exploration could include:

- The kinds of longer term professional development that are most helpful to those trained in partnership brokering skills; Deepening understanding through Longer-term studies of a well-brokered, collaborative approach on child well-being;
- Determining inherent challenges and limitations of this approach;
- Understanding how a partnering orientation influences a large NGO and its modus operandi;
- Finding out how the wider influences on the NGO / development sector are enabling or hindering how partnership brokering adds social value.

Last but not least, the PBA team would like to say...It is quite something for an organisation of World Vision’s global status and size to hold up a mirror to its work... and then to offer what is revealed openly to a wider external audience...in this they are modelling a willingness to be transparent about the challenges they have faced (and continue to face) in adopting partnership and partnership brokering approach to their local programmes.

This is a lesson in transparency for all of us around the world who hope against hope that skilful partnership brokering will indeed play a significant role in building innovative, responsive and rigorous multi-stakeholder collaboration for a more equitable and sustainable world.

## References and further reading

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Each World Vision office subscribes to common values and aims:

We are Christian • We are committed to the poor • We value people • We are stewards • We are partners • We are responsive

World Vision is committed to the sustained well-being of children, especially the most vulnerable, within families and communities. It is striving to achieve the well-being of 150 million of the world's most vulnerable children by 2016.

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**Partnership Brokers Association** is committed to creating a more equitable and sustainable world by building capacity for innovation, efficiency and excellence in cross-sector collaboration. The Association promotes and supports partnership brokering worldwide through learning (research), training and transforming (advocacy). Its aims are to:

- Ensure that partnership brokering is widely understood;
- Ensure that those operating as partnership brokers are skilled, principled and professional in how they carry out the role;
- Create and connect a dynamic network of partnership brokers operating in all sectors and locations;
- Deepen ways to improve the impact of social innovation through collaboration;
- Establish PBA as the pre-eminent organisation in this field.

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