

Doing development differently: partnership brokering in a programme addressing urban poverty in Bangladesh



Tom Harrison October 2015

Based on a report commissioned by Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction Project (UPPR), UNDP Bangladesh

Introduction

In June and July of 2015, I was commissioned to review the way that the Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPPR) programme in Bangladesh has supported communities to develop relationships with other projects or organizations.

UPPR was a UK Aid funded partnership between the Local Government Engineering Department, UNDP and UN-Habitat. Its primary goal was to lift households in poor urban settlements out of poverty. This large and ambitious project had recognized that poverty is multidimensional in nature, and required the delivery of an integrated response with complementary interventions. Since 2008, it has supported over 2,500 poor urban communities in 23 towns and cities across Bangladesh.



Cluster leaders come together in a town-level Federation

One of the most significant achievements of the programme is the mobilization of community members into groups - called Community Development Committees or CDCs – which enable them to both identify needs and priorities, and also to express these needs in a coherent and powerful way. By the end of 2013, there were 2,588 CDCs, representing over 800,000 slum dwellers. The CDCs are themselves further organized into 250 ‘Clusters’ of CDCs, and 12 town-level ‘Federations’. The CDC has been acknowledged as a ‘stand-out feature in

nurturing strong community organizations leading to entitlements.’¹

The UPPR project had two main pillars: improving informal settlement infrastructure and addressing slum dwellers socio-economic needs.² However, part way through the programme, the UPPR management recognized that the variety of needs that communities expressed in their Community Action Plans was far greater than those covered in these pillar. In order to meet these priorities, UPPR supported communities to develop relationships with other projects or service providers. Collectively, these relationships are referred to as Partnerships and Linkages (P&L): UPPR defined collaborations with no

¹ UPPR Annual Progress Report (2012) & Targeting Urban Poverty Reduction Policy and institutions for inclusive urban governance, UPPR 2014

² UPPR used two funds to address these issues, the Settlement Improvement Fund (SIF) for physical settlement improvement and the Socio-Economic Fund (SEF)

exchange of funds as ‘Linkages’ and where UPPR pays for the services provided, it termed them ‘Partnerships’.³

Coming towards the end of the programme, and already planning for what might come next, UPPR management were keen to understand what the impact of these collaborations were, the extent to which they now had a life of their own beyond the project, and what could be learnt about using this approach in future urban programming.

The main question that I addressed in the review was therefore as follows:

‘When developing and implementing Partnerships and Linkages in UPPR, what processes, structures and roles are most likely to maximize the impact and sustainability of these partnerships and linkages beyond UPPR’s direct involvement?’

Research for the report was undertaken in six of the 23 towns and cities where UPPR has been supporting poor urban communities since 2008. The main research tool was unstructured interviews with a range of project stakeholders, supplemented by a structured participatory exercise with community members in one town and a survey which randomly sampled UPPR partners for quantitative data to compare with the data held by the UPPR team. Ten short case studies were produced based on the research from the following towns: Chittagong; Dhaka North; Tangail; Narayanganj; Sirajgonj; and Tongi.

Report findings

My first finding was that the use of P&L by UPPR allows **adaptive** programming. This flexible and needs-driven approach is in step with recent development thinking, as captured in the ‘doing development differently’ agenda. This is a movement being led by research organizations, funders and practitioners following a meeting in late 2014.⁴ A comparison between this agenda and the P&L programme suggests strong similarities in several areas: for instance, the focus on solving local problems identified by local people; the use of conveners to mobilize communities and other stakeholders so that ‘top down’ solutions are not imposed; and being flexible and experimental in trying a number of ideas and then building on the successful ones.



Community members want better health and education services but they also want jobs

The UPPR approach to P&L also clearly involves **cross-sector partnerships**. This kind of multi-stakeholder partnerships can be defined as being a collaboration between organizations from different sectors, combining resources and sharing risks to achieve a

³ In this report capital letters are used when the words ‘Partnerships’ and ‘Linkages’ (or ‘P&L’) are used with the definitions used by UPPR, and non-capitalized usage is adopted when the words are used in other ways

⁴ www.doingdevelopmentdifferently.com

common goal.⁵ Many P&L fit this definition very well, having features that have been recognized in other contexts where cross-sector partnership have been used.

When seeking to understand the organizational and individual roles that contribute to a successful collaboration, the concept of a **‘partnership broker’** is a useful one. One of the most exciting findings for me was that this term perfectly describes the catalytic and facilitative role played by UPPR in the formation of P&L. This is not a common or easy role for management or a donor programmer to play, but is entirely appropriate for UPPR which is not a long-term actor in addressing urban poverty.

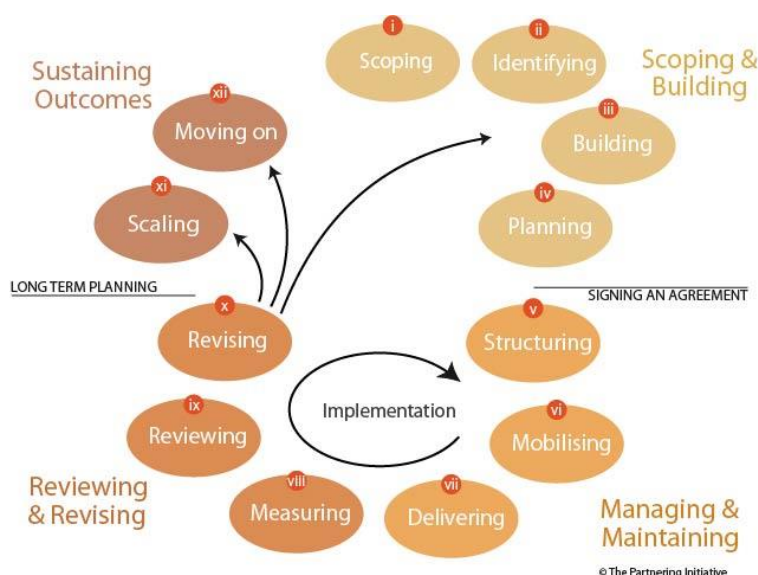
The partnership broker role has been defined as follows:⁶

‘A broker in the dictionary definition is a go-between in making relationships. Similarly, a partnership broker operates as an active go-between or intermediary between different organizations and sectors (public, private and civil society) that aim to collaborate as partners in a sustainable development initiative.’

‘UPPR is the catalyst and can play the match-maker role – UPPR Town Manager, Narayanganj

‘City Corporation people....are all very happy because UPPR has given long-term support to help get community people out of poverty...and link them to the City Corporation’ - Senior Manager, EEP, Narayanganj

This role can be separated from the role of actually being a partner, although the person or team playing the brokering role can be separate from the partners (an ‘external’ broker) but may sometimes be embedded in one of the institutional partners in practice (‘internal’ broker).



The fact that the UPPR team is playing a partnership brokering role as an internal broker is illustrated by analysis of the partnering cycle (see figure on left).⁷

The partnering cycle is divided into four elements when partnership brokers have been observed to play important roles. Table 1.0 below provides examples of how UPPR is playing the role

⁵ The Partnering Initiative

⁶ The Brokering Guidebook, Ros Tennyson, 2005 <http://thepartneringinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/TheBrokeringGuidebook.pdf>

⁷ <http://thepartneringinitiative.org/about-us/philosophy-and-approach/the-partnering-cycle-and-partnering-principles/>

of a broker as set out in the partnering cycle. As explained later, the UPPR brokering role is as yet incomplete and hence, this analysis focusses on the first two areas: scoping and building; and managing and maintaining.

Table 1.0: Comparison of the UPPR team brokering roles in the partnering cycle

Stage in partnering cycle:	Evidence of UPPR playing the role:
Scoping needs and options	<p>The needs of the community are expressed through Community Action Plans that have been set up by UPPR, using the CDC structure created by them. These needs – such as for health services or employment opportunities - are the starting point for P&L formation.</p> <p><i>For example: the Linkage with Marie Stopes in Chittagong came about because both Marie Stopes and UPPR are field organizations working across Bangladesh. Marie Stopes helped UPPR by providing health services to community members, which UPPR was unable to do alone</i></p>
Identifying potential partners	<p>There are many P&L in which the UPPR team has actively searched for a partner to deliver the required service.</p> <p><i>For example: The first contact that Mohila Parishad had in Tongi was with UPPR staff, and through this contact they were introduced to 20-25 CDCs. They already had contact with some people within the community that are also part of CDCs, but this was weak. The contact with UPPR made the contact stronger. UPPR also raised their credibility with local government so that they could involve Town Councilors in their work.</i></p>
Building relationships	<p>UPPR typically brings prospective service providers together with CDC and Cluster Leaders to discuss the needs of the community, and how a partnership or linkage may meet that need. Building a strong relationship between the CDC and Cluster Leaders and the partner is a key success factor for an effective and sustainable collaboration, and there is a lot of evidence that UPPR has done this well.</p> <p><i>For example: The Social Welfare department in Narayanganj is making use of UPPR's network to provide information about people who may qualify for their allowances. The local Councilor is both part of UPPR's structure and also on the allowances committee. It is significant that UPPR Town staff are not on this committee, which would not be appropriate as they are not a permanent or accountable institution.</i></p>
Mapping and planning	<p>UPPR supports co-creation of plans for activities and gets agreement on who is paying for what. In some collaborations, UPPR also provides technical assistance in the drafting of agreements and may be a signatory to the MoU.</p>

	<p><i>For example: UPPR Narayanganj brings its ready-made network of CDCs to the BRAC Economic Empowerment for Poor and Vulnerable Women in Bangladesh (EEP) project, and the two programmes have aligned objectives, which made it sensible to collaborate. This was a head start for EEP which saved time and money, and has allowed more people to be trained using the same funds. The UPPR team influenced the programme content - to include spouse training rather than just focus on women.</i></p>
Governance and structures	<p>UPPR ensures that governance arrangements are in place and working well, promoting the voice of the community as represented by CDC, Cluster and Federation Leaders.</p> <p><i>For example: the Federation is now particularly strong in Tangail and is involved in a range of governance functions. They have close working relationships with a number of NGOs and give regular input at meetings, which are very consultative in nature. They participate in meetings with the Society for Social Security – a national NGO - about how to improve their education service. The Federation leaders attend meetings with the District Commissioner and the Department for Women and Child Affairs on behalf of the CDC and Cluster leaders.</i></p>
Deepening engagement	<p>UPPR supports the partners to work directly with each other while keeping an overview and stepping in if needed.</p> <p><i>For example: Marie Stopes in Tongi has quarterly management meetings with CDC and Cluster Leaders which it sets up through direct contact with them, but it still also meets regularly with the UPPR Town team to exchange information as a transitional arrangement.</i></p>
Delivered projects	<p>UPPR gets reports from partners and monitors the delivery of services</p> <p><i>For example: In the project to provide clean and safe utility water in partnership with Shobar Jonno Pani (SJP) in Dhaka North, funds were under the control of the CDC Leaders but SJP worked closely with them so that they knew which materials to procure for the water network. The UPPR role was reported to be organizing committees, coordinating a monthly review meeting but not getting involved day to day, and helping to resolve any problems.</i></p>

The brokering role, when played well, is often invisible to partners. In some early writing about partnership brokers called *The Guiding Hand*,⁸ Ros Tennyson and Luke Wilde suggested that partnership brokering is a new style of leadership based on guiding, rather than directing, and noted that this means that effective partnership brokers may not be visible to all of the partners even when they were playing a critical role in the partnership. They linked this to the idea of the “servant leader” and alluded to the writing of Robert Greenleaf developed in his work, *Servant Leadership*⁹.

There is evidence that UPPR Town teams have adopted this style of leadership. For example in a workshop with community members in Sarajganj, the group almost overlooked the fact that the UPPR team communicates with NGOs providing health services in P&L, whereas the reality is that UPPR had been the prime mover in setting them up. For community members, this aspect of UPPR’s role may be much less visible than other parts of the programme, which is well appreciated when we see the high power and influence scoring given to the UPPR Town team in the same exercise.



A network mapping exercise revealed the brokering role played by UPPR staff

Another feature of the UPPR’s brokering is that it appears **very instinctive**. There was no training provided to team members, yet they found by trial and error a very effective ways of playing this role. This is not to say that it could not be improved by introducing some structure and skills-based training.

The broker role played by UPPR is **strong but incomplete**. UPPR has been very active in helping to set up P&L and get to the stage where they are functioning well with minimal input from UPPR staff. However, the role of a partnership broker should also be to monitor partnerships, measure their impact and then help partners to decide on next steps such as scaling up a partnership. UPPR has not so far taken this role in P&L.

The brokering of the P&L has resulted in **significant benefits for the communities** where UPPR works. A survey carried out for the research suggests that over the life of UPPR, Partnerships or Linkages were formed between UPPR and 450 partner organizations, benefitting 750,000 people and delivering services of the value of BDT 3,200 m (USD \$41 m) to these beneficiaries.

⁸ *The Guiding Hand Brokering partnerships for sustainable development*, UN Staff College and IBLF, 2000
http://www.unssc.org/home/sites/unssc.org/files/publications/the_guiding_hand_-_brokering_partnerships_for_sustainable_development.pdf

⁹Greenleaf RK (1977) *Servant Leadership* Paulist Press International USA

These results, which arise from a simple survey of UPPR Town Managers and estimates of value delivered from a random sample of around 5% of partner organizations, are not verified by any in depth sampling or other sources. They are much higher than the results captured on the programme's database which was shown by the research to be under-counting impact in a number of ways.

The brokering makes excellent use of the CDC and Cluster system and delivers **great value to partners**. It enables them to avoid the cost and difficulty of identifying and reaching the extreme poor.¹⁰ This benefits partners in a number of different ways: from identification of the extreme poor in the community - which benefits NGOs and agencies providing targeted services to this group – to engaging companies such as Bijoy Switches in Tangail which wants to train and employ local people.

For other partners, the ability to reach and sensitize community members is the main benefit of P&L. For example, the Fire Service in Dhaka North has been able to train people on fire hazards. Education of community members in the value of services is another benefit area, as exemplified by the gender awareness which has been raised by the BRAC EEP project in Narayanganj. Enhanced services provision is a major area when partners benefit from P&L. Marie Stopes in Chittagong has been able to extend its services to the extreme poor as a result of its Linkage with UPPR community representatives.

Finally, mobilization of community members using the UPPR structures can be very helpful, For example the Urban Primary Health Project in Narayanganj is able to utilize community volunteers as a significant field force when it is campaigning or responding to a disease outbreak.

There are **promising signs of sustainability** in these partnerships. Collaborations tend to be sustainable when:

- all partners are getting benefits from the collaboration;
- there is an alignment of incentives between roles and resources;
- the relationship between partners is strong and healthy.

In my review of P&L, I used a qualitative framework to examine these issues. Figure 1.0 has an assessment of the P&L where case studies were prepared for the report, with respect to their chances of sustainability. Each P&L is also placed on a spectrum between having mostly transactional features, and showing strong signs of being very collaborative.



The local CDC helps to find and train all Bijoy Switches' employees

¹⁰ This is the term used by UPPR to denote those with the lowest income and highest level of disadvantage in the communities where they worked.

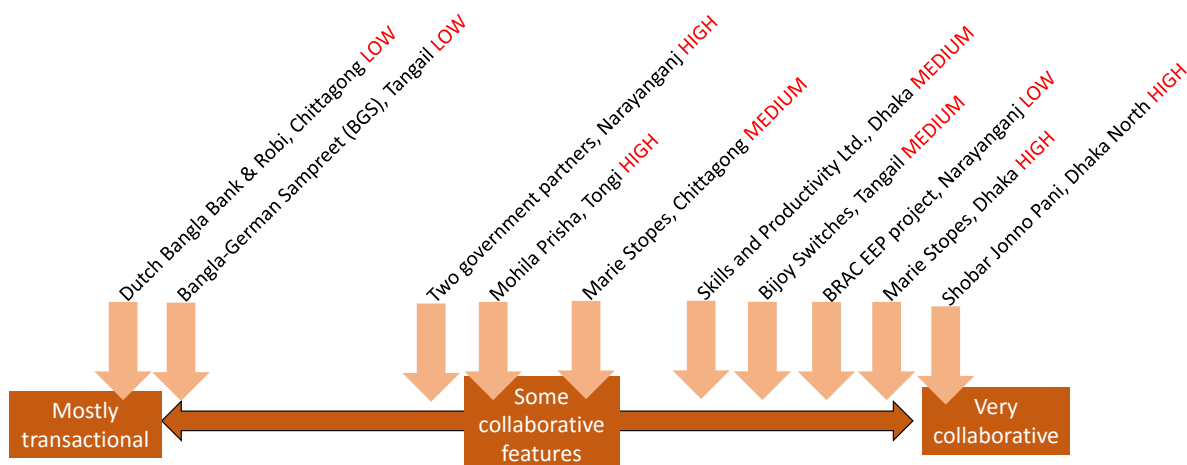


Figure 1.0 Assessment of collaborative features of P&L

Note: the red label refers to high, medium or low chance of sustainability

The chances of sustainability tend to correlate with the position on the spectrum, with more collaborative P&L also having a higher chance of sustainability.

The linkage between Marie Stopes and the community in Tongi has a good chance of sustainability, for example, because there are significant benefits to the community in terms of getting higher quality and cheaper services from Marie Stopes than from alternative sources. Because user fees cover the operational costs of the service, there is good alignment between incentives and resources. There is also a close working relationship between partners.



SJP customers are happy to pay for safe water in Dhaka North

Similarly, Shobar Jonno Pani (SJP) is able to continue its collaboration with the community in Dhaka North because community members are happy to pay for the water it provides, which is safer and more convenient than other options.

In both examples, the partners are able to better achieve their organizational mission through the collaboration, which incentivizes them to sustain it. These examples can be contrasted with that of Bangla-German Sampreet (BGS) in Tangail. In this case, the partner had a more distant relationship with UPPR and the community, and then delivered its training services at an unsustainably low price, even with UPPR's contribution. BGS, therefore, has no incentive to extend this relationship beyond the end of the UPPR funding.

With some P&L, the correlation between sustainability and collaborative features is less pronounced. This can be when there is a particularly high or low incentive for the partner to continue the collaboration.

Recommendations arising from the review

I made the following recommendations for future programming in respect of the partnership brokering role that the UPPR team played:

Design for sustainability: new urban poverty programmes should build on UPPR's experience with P&L by adopting the partnership broker role to foster collaborative and sustainable partnerships. Grants should be used with care and in-line with a brokering role. There should be good alignment between partners who benefit from activities and the way that these activities are financed.

Develop brokering skills: staff managing urban poverty programmes should be trained in partnership broker skills, as this will increase their effectiveness as brokers of sustainable collaborations. Courses are available and there are precedents in Bangladesh for staff to be trained in these skills.

Help partners to develop the capacity to partner: staff in partner organizations should also be trained in order to be able to be effective partners in P&L in future programmes.

Conclusions

In the somewhat defensive and almost fearful environment that we encounter with regard to international development expenditure by Northern governments – in Europe and Australia at least – I found the UPPR programme as a whole to be effective and inspiring. This is a conclusion I reached after being lucky enough to talk to women in the communities where the programme has been active, and listen to their stories of becoming empowered through getting skills and employment, and a of gaining a voice to engage with and challenge their municipal governments.

I cannot say whether as a whole UPPR illustrates 'value for money', but what I am sure of is that their partnership brokering activities were highly effective in supporting these communities, and for very little resource outlay. As such, I believe that this is an example of 'doing development differently' that needs to be shared and replicated widely. This is why I am to publish this paper, and I hope that it reaches and inspires others to find out more about partnership brokering and how this can lead to the same needs-driven and adaptive programming, with sustainable impact, that I have seen in UPPR's use of partnerships and linkages.

Tom Harrison is a sustainable development professional with 25-years' experience from more than 15 countries across Africa and South Asia. An accredited broker of cross-sector partnerships, Tom is interested in the contribution that partnerships between the private sector, government and NGOs can make to addressing poverty and disadvantage.

In recent years Tom has been Technical Director of the Business Innovation Facility (BIF), for which he was author of a number of publications and blogs in its pilot phase. He has contributed to research on inclusive business and social enterprise undertaken for the Business Call to Action (BCtA) and the World Bank, and has worked frequently with The Partnering Initiative (TPI). He has also managed programmes for, among others, GIZ, UNICEF and World Vision.