



CSOs and Partnerships for Service Delivery: An International Perspective

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The Synergos Mission

- Synergos and its partners mobilize resources and bridge social and economic divides to reduce poverty and increase equity around the world.

Synergos in Southern Africa

- Synergos works at a region-wide level and on a national level in Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe:
 - To strengthen the capacity of grantmaking organizations and emerging community foundations
 - To advance cross-border collaboration among grantmakers in response to HIV/AIDS

Synergos in Southern Africa

- To encourage the efforts of individual philanthropists in support of civil society anti-poverty action
- To build cooperation and collaboration among civil society, business, government and international agencies
- To foster the ‘bridging leadership’ capacities required to forge effective development partnerships

International Trends

- Reduction of foreign aid flows over the past decade
- Decline of the state and state provision, especially in Africa
- Significant growth in development funding channelled via civil society organizations (CSOs)

International Trends

- Most CSO funding is for service delivery not policy and advocacy work
- Growth of ‘public-private partnerships’ (PPPs)
- Increased contracting out of public services

International Trends

- WSSD plan of action based on multi-sectoral ‘partnerships for sustainable development’
- Growing prominence of ‘civil society’ and its links to democracy and ‘good governance’
- Reform of government legislation to create ‘an enabling environment’ for CSOs

International Trends

- Broad consensus exists on the critical role of CSOs in service delivery partnerships
- But more recently major donors, like the World Bank and DFID, have reaffirmed the leading role of a national 'developmental state'

International Trends

‘State-dominated development has failed, but so will stateless development. Development without an effective state is impossible’

– World Bank Development Report, 1997

Myths about CSO Service Delivery?

- ‘CSOs reach the poorest of the poor’
- ‘CSOs are reducing, not just alleviating, poverty’
- ‘The quality of CSO provision is better than that of the state’
- ‘CSOs can provide broad service delivery coverage’

Myths about CSO Service Delivery?

- ‘CSOs are more efficient and cost effective than the state’
- ‘Most CSOs have a clear analysis of poverty and connect to wider anti-poverty agendas’
- ‘There is no trade-off between CSO service delivery to the poorest and financial sustainability’

Myths about CSO Service Delivery?

- ‘CSOs are good at self-regulation and coordination’
- ‘CSOs are good at ‘scaling up’ delivery’
- ‘CSOs can provide an effective alternative framework and infrastructure for broad service delivery’

What do CSOs have to Offer?

- Specialist and ‘niche’ experience and expertise in particular sectors or communities
- Creativity and innovation
- Testing of new models and methodologies
- Strong community links and ‘bridging,’ relationship-building role
- Convening power

What do CSOs have to Offer?

- Community consultation and facilitation of dialogue
- Fostering community accountability and effective civic participation in decision-making and resource allocation
- Information gathering capacity
- Accessing 'community knowledge'

What do CSOs have to Offer?

- A 'catalytic' role in improving service delivery
- Generation of new policy options and facilitating 'policy dialogue'
- Advocacy and lobbying on behalf of a pro-poor agenda'
- Training and capacity-building services

What do CSOs have to Offer?

- Capacity-building and support to local government
- Documenting 'best practice' in service delivery (as well as lessons from failure)
- Project management and evaluation services
- Monitoring government and private sector performance

Criticisms of CSO Service Delivery

- Limited coverage
- Variable quality of services
- Amateurish approach
- High staff turnover
- Overdependence on charismatic or pioneer leaders

Criticisms of CSO Service Delivery

- Lack of effective management systems
- Poor cost effectiveness
- Lack of coordination
- Weak sustainability due to dependence on foreign funding

Why Multi-Sectoral Partnerships?

- To achieve collaboratively what cannot be achieved alone
- To promote community leadership and participation
- To 'scale up' service delivery and widen impact

Why Multi-Sectoral Partnerships?

- To combine the comparative advantages of different sectors – and achieve synergies
- To influence and improve government and business development practice
- To understand other sectors better
- To become more effective in advocacy, negotiation and mediation skills

Why Multi-Sectoral Partnerships?

- An opportunity for organizational learning and capacity-building through collaborative action
- A means to build relationships and trust
- A means to access financial resources and build 'sustainable development' models

Cautionary Notes

- Partnerships are not the only alternative
 - CSOs should do internal assessments of the various options and feasibility of partnerships
- Power relationships in partnerships will always be an issue
 - CSOs need to develop strategies to manage unequal power dynamics

Cautionary Notes

- Partnerships are not static
 - CSOs must constantly monitor, review, evaluate and adjust partnerships
 - CSOs must not lose sight of the original goals and motivation for partnerships

Cautionary Notes

- Partnership does not mean agreeing on everything
 - CSOs need to find common ground with partners through dialogue and joint action
 - CSOs need to guard their integrity, independence and critical role to be successful partners

Cautionary Notes

- Partnerships will fail if they are not built on complementary ‘core competencies’
 - CSOs need to engage where they have proven ‘added value’
 - CSOs must avoid ‘partnership promiscuity’
 - CSO should not enter partnerships as ‘window dressing’

Risks of Partnerships

- Potential compromise of lobby and campaigning activities
- Loss of identity, autonomy, objectivity and perspective
- Being tarred with same brush when partners fall into disrepute
- Mismatched time frames for implementation

Risks of Partnerships

- Partnerships can become bureaucratic and ‘high maintenance’
- Long-term partnerships can lose sight of original needs and objectives – and become an end in themselves
- Partnerships can limit CSO flexibility and responsiveness

Lessons and Challenges

- Assess the relevance and viability of partnerships
- Be true to your core mission and competencies
- Ensure community participation and community accountability

Lessons and Challenges

- Build internal capacities for ‘bridging dialogue’ and partnering
- Document and share lessons from partnerships
- Develop skills and methodologies for evaluating partnerships and defining success

Lessons and Challenges

- Seek a 'balance of power' and a mutual, written exchange of obligations
- Invest in effective CSO networking, coordination and common interest representation
- Work with other CSOs to secure an enabling legislative, tax and institution environment for partnerships

Lessons and Challenges

- Build political support for partnerships – and the political will to sustain them
- Analyse risks and develop a risk management strategy
- Plan ahead for agreed ‘exit strategies’

Lessons and Challenges

- Respect the legitimacy and leadership role of democratic governments
- Respect national and local development priorities and frameworks
- Maintain critical independence and advocacy role

Lessons and Challenges

- One of the biggest ‘added values’ of CSOs is their values
- Move from a ‘needs-based’ to a ‘rights-based’ approach to development
- Turn ‘service delivery partnerships’ into partnerships for transformation and social justice