



# Building Multi-Sectoral Partnerships To Address Complex Problems

*Lessons from the Partnership for Child Nutrition  
and the Bhavishya Alliance, India*

By Surita Sandosham and David Winder  
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## Introduction

These lessons are derived from our direct engagement in the global Partnership for Child Nutrition (PCN) and the Indian partnership Bhavishya Alliance (BA). The global initiative and the local partnership it gave birth to represent a unique multi-sectoral approach to fostering innovation in addressing child undernutrition in India. Results are still unfolding and the partnership is still at the stage of both developing new relationships and testing a range of interventions. This document is not a “how to” paper on creating partnerships. There are other accessible references for that.<sup>1</sup> Instead, it serves as a guide, focusing on lessons that illustrate some of the constraints and enabling forces impacting this type of partnership. It also proposes a

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Synergos’ Inclusive Partnership Approach and Tennyson, Ros. *The Partnering Toolbook*. The International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), 2003.

number of key building blocks critical to constructing and sustaining this type of collaborative partnership.

Multi-sectoral partnerships involve corporations, government departments and civil society organizations operating in a collaborative arrangement to address a complex problem they could not solve individually. This partnership was ambitious in scope and aimed to effect systemic change. By describing the context we hope it will be clear why we selected to focus on these ten lessons.

## CONTEXT

### A. The Problem

The problem of child undernutrition in India is a complex and difficult one. India as a country has continued to make great economic strides, with growth hovering at 9% each year. However, progress in reducing malnutrition has been slow, as evidenced by the recent National Family Health Survey 3 which shows that 46% of Indian children are underweight.<sup>2</sup> Addressing the problem in a systemic way requires understanding the complex causes of child undernutrition. The principal ones are: 1) Lack of access to clean water and poor sanitation leading to high frequency of avoidable diseases such as diarrhea, 2) Lack of access to pre-natal and postnatal care, 3) Socio-cultural causes related to the low status of women in many communities. This results in lack of opportunity for women to gain access to education, knowledge and economic opportunity, 4) Inadequate access to food resulting from seasonal shortages and inadequate child feeding practices, 5) Poverty and lack of access to resources such as land, irrigation and forests, particularly amongst tribal and low cast communities.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the implementation of a wide range of government and non-government programs aimed at ridding the country of child undernutrition the problem remains stuck. There are a number of reasons for this including insufficient sustained commitment by the government<sup>4</sup>, fragmented government responses, limited scale and impact of NGO initiatives and the failure to mobilize the skills and experience of the business sector to increase the scope, efficiency and effectiveness of government programs.

There is increasing recognition of the fact that the high rate of child undernutrition has devastating consequences on both a human and economic level. A major World Bank report had concluded that “India’s development will be seriously impeded if the problem (of high malnutrition is not dealt with expeditiously.<sup>5</sup> It was becoming evident that though most of the

<sup>2</sup> 2005-2006 National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) National Fact Sheet India.  
<<http://www.nfhsindia.org/pdf/IN.pdf>>

<sup>3</sup> Winder, David “Draft preliminary analysis of the Indian nutrition problem”. Synergos Institute, March 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Shekhar, Meera. “Don’t lose your appetite, but isn’t it odd for a rising economic giant to ignore its malnutrition problem.” Hindustan Times: February 22, 2008, Mumbai. (Meera is a Senior Nutrition Specialist at the World Bank in Washington DC.)

<sup>5</sup> Measham, Anthony R. and Chatterjee Meera: “*Wasting away. The Crisis of Malnutrition in India*”. The World Bank, 1999

technical solutions to malnutrition are known, new strategies are required to address its complex interlocking causes.

The organizations that came together to create this partnership believed that the time had come to attempt an innovative multi-sectoral approach. This required involving the stakeholders most affected and the harnessing of the best thinking, knowledge, resources and competencies of government, NGOs and corporations to generate creative solutions and interventions that would rapidly reduce the rates of undernutrition.<sup>6</sup> At the core of creating this partnership is the sentiment articulated best by Albert Einstein “*No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.*”<sup>7</sup>

## B. The Partners

The founders of the Partnership for Child Nutrition (PCN) are Unilever, a global producer of food, home and personal care products; UNICEF India, the UN organization focused on the right of every child to survive, grow, and develop according to their full potential and The Synergos Institute, an international non-profit organization that brings people together to address the underlying causes of poverty and inequity in innovative ways that lead to long-term change. Generon Consulting, an international consulting company provided the leadership for the design and execution of the Change Lab described below. In 2005, the partners signed a letter of agreement that outlined their intention to contribute to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals of halving between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by focusing on the prevalence of underweight children under five years of age. PCN is part of a broader collaboration between UNICEF and Unilever to address the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>8</sup>

The work of PCN began in India and the state of Maharashtra was selected as the first state because it was considered to offer a number of favorable conditions. Principle among them is the willingness of government, corporations and non-governmental organizations to collaborate to problem-solve the issue of child undernutrition.<sup>9</sup> Supported by PCN, the Bhavishya Alliance (*bhavishya* means “future” in Sanskrit) was formed as an Indian trust to launch a transformative process called The Maharashtra Change Lab. The Lab, designed by Generon Consulting, convened thirty professionals from government, civil society and the corporate sector with the objectives of co-creating initiatives, strengthening relations between the sectors and building individual capacities over 12 weeks, as a way of addressing child undernutrition.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Heaver, Richard. *Strengthening Country Commitment to Human Development Lesson from Nutrition*. Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Plotkin, Bill. *Nature and the Human Soul Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2008. p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF and Unilever signed an MOU in December 2004.

<sup>9</sup> The background work and documents included Toschka, Holger and Marti van Lieere. “The Nutrition Situation in India: Analysis in light of the Partnership for Child Nutrition” (internal Unilever document); Winder, David. “Preliminary Analysis of the Nutrition Problem.” March 2005. (draft internal Synergos document); and a stakeholder map prepared by Surita Sandosham.

<sup>10</sup> Bhavishya Alliance Maharashtra Change Lab Overview. Version 5. April 2006.

BA operates in Maharashtra pursuant to the terms of an MOU signed by the Maharashtra Secretary of Women and Child Development, UNICEF Maharashtra and the trustees of the Bhavishya Alliance (Hindustan Unilever, ICICI Bank, Tata Group and HDFC). In addition to the trustees, the governing council of BA includes eminent individuals from government, non-governmental organizations and other corporations.

### C. Shared Assumptions

Before identifying some lessons learned, it is important to outline some assumptions shared by many of the partners in PCN and BA.

- In addressing complex issues such as child undernutrition, it is important to draw on the wisdom, resources and experience of all three sectors operating in the context where the partnership is being developed.
- Child undernutrition lends itself well to a partnership because all segments of society have an interest in children growing up healthy, educated and employable.
- Since child undernutrition is an inter-generational problem, the interventions should also be inter-generational.
- Participation in such partnerships requires that each entity be open to new learning, be willing to consider innovative and different ways of thinking and be amenable to working collaboratively across sectors.
- While partners agree on the need to reduce child undernutrition, they may not always agree on the best way to address it. A partnership provides an appropriate framework for participants to resolve differences with good will and to create a common purpose.
- Given the expertise and primary responsibility of the public sector to address undernutrition, the role of the government is essential and its support for recommended changes is vital if any intervention is sustainable at scale.
- Given the innovative drive, experience and efficiencies of the private sector, its active participation is essential because it makes possible new ways to think about systemic problems and new ways to resolve them.
- Given their unique roles as community advocates and service providers, NGO's and CBO's are essential to ensure that community sensitivities, needs, concerns and aspirations are reflected in any changes considered and that appropriate mechanisms of public accountability are part of any systems changes.
- Given the importance of families, care givers and many other organizations and institutions who can, and do, positively impact child under-nutrition, the partnerships deems it important to collaborate with them to achieve the goal of a reduced incidence of this serious societal concern.

## Lessons Learned

### Invitation and Assembly Phases<sup>11</sup>

*Lesson 1: The process of forming a multi-sector partnerships is complex and often requires more time than expected.*

Partnerships working across sectors are heterogeneous in nature, multi-layered and inherently complicated. In addition to engaging corporate, government, community-based and non-governmental sectors there are multiple stakeholders within these sectors whose involvement is important for the ownership and sustainability of eventual interventions. There are internal dynamics within the respective organizations to contend with and the added complication, particularly with corporate partners, of how to relate the partnership goals to their core business. Investing the time and effort to map each organization and its culture and structure, which will differ from country to state to district to village, will improve the selection of the right partners and avoid partnership fatigue.

A lot of power dynamics get played out in the formation of partnerships which adds to the complexity of partnerships. When an entity enters a partnership there is an inevitable reduction in its individual power, visibility, authority and autonomy – a situation not easy for many to adapt to. A clear articulation of the stake of each partner in the partnership is vital. For example, since UNICEF operates in the same space as BA, it collaborates with Government, while partnering with NGOs and corporations – it was not always clear how the partnership would help it achieve its goals and objectives. At times, there was the perception that the BA was competing with partners and their interests. This sometimes affected the willingness of partners to use their personal visibility, power and influence in support of the overall partnership. The situation was further complicated where partners with national and state office differed in their understanding of the role and structure of the partnership.

There is a role for international partners in catalyzing partnerships in places where there are few examples of working collaboratively across sectors. This was the case with Bhavishya where the origination of an idea and the initial design rested with interested parties operating internationally. The next layer required ensuring local ownership and eventually adaptation of the concept by local stakeholders representing different sectors closer to the problem. This movement from layer to layer requires careful selection of the right organizations and individuals who are decision makers and able to achieve “buy in” by their own organizations. Sustainability of a partnership requires that at the initiation stage, international partners hold and act on the intention of recognizing the limits of their role and to actively create the right circumstances to ensure acceptance by local owners.

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<sup>11</sup> We have attempted to cluster the lessons learned under the phases of the “Synergos Inclusive Partnership Lifecycle” which is under development. We recognize however that some of the lessons apply to more than one phase. The last two lessons fall into the category of “cross-cutting themes or elements” which apply to all stages of the “Lifecycle”.

Another time-consuming complication is that frequently individuals who are leaders in the partnership do not stay in the same organization or hold their position for long. It is important from the start to ensure the ownership is spread among a number of individuals who occupy leadership positions in their respective organizations or are in line to become leaders. From an advocacy standpoint of sustaining the partnership this is an important factor whether the organization is operating internationally or locally.

In India, the issue of ownership was addressed through an early decision of the global and local initiating partners to create a new entity. PCN provided resources for the start up phase of BA, including funds, seconded staff and advice and guidance in establishing the trust and selecting a local board to ensure transition to local ownership. The credibility of the “U Process” – which was to be tested in India for the first time as a mechanism for addressing the complex problem of undernutrition – was enhanced by the advocacy of the initiating international partners. The global partnership, PCN, helped to ensure that the problem of child undernutrition in India was viewed as part of a major global problem. It’s global reach held out the possibility of developing strategies that could be replicated and or adapted in other states of India and in other countries and that relevant experience from other countries could be shared with the local partnership.

Two of the three initiating PCN partners – Unilever and UNICEF India – have a strong and long-standing presence in the country and the state of Maharashtra. Unilever is represented by its subsidiary Hindustan Unilever and UNICEF India provides through its state offices support to the Government of India in the field of child development including programs to reduce child undernutrition. In spite of this in-country presence, serious challenges were encountered when moving from a concept conceived in New York, Delhi and The Hague to one embraced by stakeholders closer to the problem in Maharashtra.

PCN was further challenged by unrealistic expectations to obtain rapid results from the application of the “U Process” and one consequence of this rushed agenda was that the process of final selection of participants in the Change Lab was inadequate. In addition, insufficient efforts were made to unpack respective theories of change, establish the interconnections among sectors, test the assumptions and anticipate and minimize potential blockages and obstructions. If the learning from the global and local levels had been integrated from the initiation stage, the necessary shared vision and values could have been created sooner. It took at least one year from the end of the Maharashtra Change Lab to articulate a shared vision with the local partnership.

*Lesson 2: Local ownership and a credible and neutral host organization are critical to partnership success.*

It takes concentrated effort and time to build relationships, create trust and achieve the acceptance, buy-in and commitment of local partners. An upfront investment of time and resources to soften the tension between the international partners and local partners is absolutely necessary. Initiating partners must be invited by local stakeholders/partners to create a sustainable multi-sectoral partnership. Engaging local ownership at the outset diminishes the time required to influence people of the need for such a partnership. PCN was not made up of enough local partner organizations that could provide that necessary invitation or legitimacy for

local ownership. Developing local ownership started with the Change Lab but as local leadership was not a central component of the process, intense efforts had to be made after the completion of the Lab to build a broad and inclusive cohort of local leaders to build a robust partnership.

The time available to select Lab team participants and hire facilitators was condensed to a few weeks because of pressure from the major funder and government to launch the Change Lab. The result was that local facilitators were hired without sufficient time to incorporate their knowledge and design skills into what came to be perceived by many as a foreign process conducted by foreign consultants. The intention of creating a partnership among local and international facilitators did not occur seamlessly, if at all.

PCN was advised to create a new neutral entity, the Bhavishya Alliance, to convene the stakeholders from the different sectors and house the partnership rather than selecting an existing organization as a neutral convener. Creating this new organization and selecting the participating organizations and individuals for the Change Lab did not occur in a sequential manner. The process of building a new organization and conducting a Change Lab at the same time led to tension among the participants and facilitators of the Change Lab. Another option (which was explored and dismissed) would have been to have partnered with a local organization or association which was perceived as neutral and had the influence and capacity to convene local stakeholders. Building on that local agency's existing relationships, the partnership could then have worked to ensure agreement on vision and mission and on how best to utilize the assets and resources of the global partners. In the long run, this could have increased the likelihood of ensuring the sustainability of the partnership. This course however would have taken more time as the perceptions of competition between existing organizations would have had to have been addressed. Also there is no guarantee that an appropriate host organization acceptable to all would have been found.

*Lesson 3: It is important early in the partnership to have thorough knowledge of the underlying causes of the problem to be addressed and solutions already tried.*

This may seem obvious, yet preparatory work is critical. This includes developing a deep understanding of local cultural dynamics and management styles. Drawing extensively on local wisdom and understanding of the system as well as the underlying causes of the problem is essential. This should start in the feasibility phase. Doing so ensures full understanding of the context and makes participants aware of the diversity of positions that will be assumed by the various sectors once the partners are brought together.

As stated in Lesson 1 there are multiple layers to be understood. These range from the systems in which decision makers in all sectors operate, to the needs and assets of communities and beneficiaries. State, district, block and village governance structures are not monolithic and it is important to identify the strongest institutional and individual partners committed to bringing about change. This preliminary work can help in adapting processes to suit the particular local environment and later designing with local stakeholders the appropriate interventions.

In this case, in the invitation and assembly phases insufficient attention was paid to involving and understanding stakeholders already working on the issue of child undernutrition. The issue and

its causes are well documented and many potential solutions are known and have already been tested. There would have been real advantage in acknowledging what existed, what worked and why the systems continued to fail, before “breakthrough” initiatives were designed. In the Change Lab there were unresolved tensions around who knew more about the issue, who could claim “expertise” and which were the best proposed interventions. There were power dynamics that played themselves out in ways that were not constructive. Anticipation of these dynamics based on the necessary homework would have possibly reduced some of the tension among Change Lab participants.

## Dialogue and Action Phase

*Lesson 4: It is important to identify and nurture leaders who can act both as change agents and bridge builders*

Identifying leaders from the various sectors who have the commitment and passion to co-create a multi-sectoral partnership is an essential building block. These leaders have to be seen as change agents within their sectors and communities. They are usually individuals who are fed up with the status quo and are seeking new ways of working and new institutional arrangements. They are very aware of their strengths and weaknesses (both personally and institutionally) and recognize that the change they seek is long term. Many leaders believe the work they are doing may not impact children during their lifetime but their imperative is to set the wheels in motion to shift the systems that are causing the problem.

They possess a high tolerance for differences as cross-sector partners work towards a common vision for collective action. They need to possess tools that help them think systemically, set up and facilitate processes that bring diverse stakeholders into constructive engagement and collective decision-making. In addition, they need to be comfortable in participating in emerging processes like the “U Process”. They are also able to mobilize the necessary resources to sustain the partnership and carry out the eventual interventions.

The Maharashtra Change Lab was successful in identifying a number of core leaders representing the different sectors. Many of them are members of the governing body of BA. They effectively use their knowledge, skills and influence to move the BA agenda along and implement interventions that test new relationships. Over time, through formal and informal ways, they have developed trust and are able to have difficult conversations to resolve issues. These conversations have led to agreement on such complex issues as whether to support corporate branded products or generic ones in a situation in which partners have different policies which make reaching agreement on the partnership goals difficult. The ability to speak with candor and understand the situation from each partner’s perspective is very important to maintain.

Another successful example has been the agreement on action to improve the supply chain of medicines and food supplements to public health centers in one district. Leadership has come from Hindustan Unilever, who are experts on supply chain management, working with leaders at all levels from the Director General of the State Mission, Commissioner for the Integrated and Child Development Services, Divisional Commissioner and Department of Health officials to Anganwadi workers (women responsible for community child care centers), who have provided



key inputs on the reality they face. The admission by leaders in one sector that a process is not working and requires the collective efforts of other sectors to address the procurement problems and ensure supply of the necessary medicines to the community illustrates the capacity of these leaders to transcend institutional boundaries and prejudices. These leaders can be described as “Bridging Leaders” and are critical to a successful partnership.

*Lesson 5: Key players in the partnership should possess a range of other skills needed to create strong management and governance systems.*

Creating multi-sectoral partnerships to solve complex problems is an evolving and dynamic process, which requires patience and flexibility. There are specific competencies required which should be made explicit, particularly when seeking representatives from the various sectors that form the partnership. They include competencies in developing networks and building alliances, engaging in cross-functional activities, collaborating across boundaries and finding common ground and the ability to influence and negotiate with people from different sectors, social classes and cultures.

The BA partners who exhibited the following competencies really helped to move the partnership positively:

- **Wisdom**—the ability to perceive reality as it exists without the filters of one’s biases, hidden agendas etc. This permits the identification of interventions appropriate to the situation, not ones which each partner would like to champion.
- **Humility**—the absence of conceit, not holding personal achievements possessively, the ability to subsume one’s ego – narrow interests and ambitions-, and the capacity to accept the possibility that others may have more knowledge, expertise and understanding than oneself.
- **Compassion**—the ability to feel the suffering of others with no judgment and no barriers. This permits a deep acceptance of others however disagreeable they may be.

The stage at which interventions are being tested, requires the strong commitment of individuals with project management skills including the ability to prepare work plans, budgets, goals, project milestones, deliverables and time lines.

In a recent study by AccountAbility called “Governing Collaboration-Making Partnerships Accountable for Delivering Development” a number of partnerships were reviewed to assess how their governance structures impacted the partnerships. Some of the competencies they outlined for the initiation phase include skills to build relationships, trust, stakeholder engagement, inclusiveness and representation. These competencies then have to be integrated with those that develop strategy to adapt to changing risk and opportunities. The study states that “governance systems need to be accountable for:

- Driving the partnership to achieve strategic goals based on agreed measures.
- Enabling the partnership to resolve disputes and resolve concerns within the system.

- Limiting and removing disabling competition within the system.
- Limiting and removing internal and external system free riders.
- Solving resourcing challenges.
- Ensuring continuous learning, improvement and system innovation.
- Embedding systems for downward accountability and voice.<sup>12</sup>

The core leadership of the Governing Council of BA comprises the representatives from the partner organizations, many of whom embody these competencies. One example serves to illustrate the importance of having people within the partnership who have strong meeting facilitation skills and can command the respect of all partners. A one-day workshop called to address the under-utilization of corporate partners and attended by the heads of the government agencies, NGOs and CEO's of the participating corporations was facilitated by a member of the Governing Council of BA. As a result of his excellent facilitation the partners were able to clearly map areas for intervention and develop work plans for these interventions.<sup>13</sup>

*Lesson 6: New interventions should be tested before scaling up*

Each new intervention designed by the Bhavishya partnership incorporates some new actors from the three sectors. We have learned that it is important that new interventions are tested on a small scale. Pilot projects allow room for experimentation with new relationships. This approach should lead to better problem diagnosis and the design of interventions that can be implemented at scale.

For example, applying a bridging leadership training program which was designed specifically for corporate and non-profit executives to village level leaders will require careful adaptation. Incorporating local knowledge and wisdom makes it easier to redesign a program that has previously been untested at the village level and will enable designers to decide if scaling up is feasible. It may well be that the process changes completely to suit the new environment, in which case all knots should be untangled through testing before scale-up begins.

In BA other examples of new forms of partnerships, which incorporate behavioral change and strengthen the capacity of existing government systems to address child undernutrition, include one in which corporations and government work jointly to improve the medicine supply chain in local public health centers. Another involves building the capacity of women's self-help groups to understand nutrition and prepare nutritious meals for government child care centers.

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<sup>12</sup> Forstater Maya, Steve Rochlin and Simon Zadek. "Governing Collaboration: Making Partnerships Accountable for Delivering Development" AccountAbility: April 2008. pp. 24-33.

<sup>13</sup> Alliance. "A Journey...Thought to Action!: The role of multi-stakeholders in Bhavishya Alliance on corporate engagement" Meeting notes. April 10, 2007.

## Sustaining Phase

### *Lesson 7: Opportunities for reflection should be constantly provided during the Partnership Lifecycle*

Nurturing and sustaining a partnership that is attempting to create new arrangements to impact the problem of child undernutrition requires developing a practice of reflection throughout the process. The constant examination of what is happening by posing questions such as: “How did I feel about it?”, “Why did it happen that way?”, and “What would I do differently?” allows for deeper examination of assumptions, patterns of behavior and interactions. This should be developed as common practice during meetings, gatherings, learning journeys and other group activities.

The lesson from India is that it is important to learn from local reflective practices and adapt all practices to the specific context. Acknowledging the existence of indigenous reflective practices as well as incorporating them into the design allows for experimentation and the generation of new forms of practice. One way to do this is to be explicit about what is in the “toolbox” and provide a variety of options that people can adapt to their needs without feeling that one tool is more superior to another. Sensitivity to cultural and traditional practices is an important competency for facilitators to have.

In India, the menu of practices used during the Maharashtra Change Lab included but was not limited to regular “check in”, “after action reviews”, learning journeys, reflective walks, yoga, nature retreats, storytelling and journaling.<sup>14</sup> The richness of the experience in India was undoubtedly enhanced by incorporating the knowledge and practices of local facilitators.

### *Lesson 8: To ensure sustainability resources should be diversified.*

In a cross-sectoral partnership, partner commitments to contribute resources should be documented in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by all partners. In addition, the MOU will set out the roles of each partner. There should be an overarching MOU defining the partnership in general and then several more related to the implementation of interventions which would involve new partners. The initial MOU acts as a lubricant for new relationships. In India where bureaucracy is respected and individuals are frequently transferred from one post to another, an MOU serves to legitimize the partnership and ensure that agreements are understood and respected by incoming staff.

It is important to recognize that the health of the partnership is dependent on diversifying partner contributions. In addition to financial contributions it is critical to encourage and recognize other contributions to the partnership in the form of seconded personnel, office space, time, knowledge and networks.

If there is one sole funder, there is a risk that its motives for creating the partnership could be questioned. The fact that in the start up phase, BA was funded principally by one corporation meant that the policies and practices of that corporation had a disproportionate weight in determining the structure and governance of the partnership. Over time, the inclusion of other funders helped dispel the notion held by some NGOs that the partnership was really a “front”

<sup>14</sup> Bhavishya Alliance. *Bhavishya Alliance Toolkit*. July 2006.

for one corporation to sell its products. The transition from seconded staff to professional staff accountable to the Governing Council was also helpful in this regard.

### Cross-Cutting Themes or Elements

*Lesson 9: An appropriate mix of qualitative and quantitative instruments needs to be designed to evaluate the impact of the partnership.*

In this case, too much effort was focused on struggling to establish quantitative goals for reducing child undernutrition to be used as the measure of success, rather than balancing them with the long-term goal of creating robust processes to establish sustainable partnerships. In BA, we created short, medium and long-term quantitative goals with the final results linked to the UN Millennium Development Goals. We learned in the process that it is important to be realistic about our ability to measure impact and to establish a causal link between specific interventions and outcomes.

It is also important to recognize that multi-sectoral partnerships are collective engagements designed to solve complex and sometimes intractable problems. In this case, the partnership sought to make shifts in the design and management of delivery systems created to benefit children. Forging these new institutional arrangements and bringing about a clear recognition that government departments serving the target population are interdependent, involves changing mindsets and behaviors. There have to be qualitative measurements showing the shifts in behavior of actors in the system, in addition to the quantitative goals regarding impact on child nutrition. These qualitative measurements are really about illuminating systems and the robustness of the processes that are required to shift systems.

For example, how best to measure the impact of a series of brainstorming meetings with corporate partners to determine their added value towards addressing child undernutrition? Building trust among the partners is one building block in a partnership and nurturing the partnership requires constant attention with many dialogues. There is a tendency to dismiss these meetings as just that, and not part of a necessary process for stakeholders to establish the trust required to achieve collective support for the interventions. It is important to be clear on the objectives of each meeting and how one meeting connects to the next and to ensure that the outcomes of these meetings are documented in order to provide qualitative information on progress.<sup>15</sup>

We need to find ways of measuring results in terms of the creation of facilitative processes for constructive engagement and problem solving, the utilization of expertise and technical assistance, the mobilization of resources and the creation of a platform for partnership formation at the grassroots level. Key milestones should be identified and celebrated along the way.

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<sup>15</sup> Bhavishya Alliance. "Community Dialogue for Building Multi-Sectoral Partnership To Solve Complex Problems (Reducing Child Malnutrition)" Executive Summary. September 12, 2007.

Convening itself should be highlighted as a milestone including the subsequent follow up work and engagement by corporations new to such partnerships.<sup>16</sup>

Documenting and measuring the shifting paradigm captures the change in attitudes which leads to new relationship and arrangements. For example, the work to address the supply chain management of medicines in the local PHCs (Public Health Clinics) started with a couple of meetings with corporate and government partners at the highest levels and then moved to more meetings in the district with their respective counterparts. This was a necessary foundation, which eventually led to the corporate partners being able to send in their management trainees to the district to work with the government and community to understand the problem and jointly design a solution.

*Lesson 10: Communication and documentation policies need to be developed for each phase of the partnership*

Communication and documentation policies have to be developed for the partnership. These policies should be based on a risk analysis that takes into account the anticipated risks each institution will take in participating in the multi-sectoral partnership. Policies will differ depending on the intended audience. Greater emphasis should be given to communication with internal stakeholders as it is critical to demonstrate progress in the partnership as a means of strengthening ownership. This in turn will serve to reduce negative external perceptions of the partnership.

In India, fear that journalists could voice their skepticism of the motives for corporate involvement in editorials prompted the BA to keep a low profile and carefully control external communications. This cautious strategy provided room for establishing shared goals and expectations within the partnership, for creating clarity on who communicates on whose behalf and provided the space to experiment without feeling that the world was watching and that any misstep could potentially be the subject of negative reporting.

Process documentation which seeks to track the development of the partnership is a necessary communication tool and also an input for learning documentation for stakeholders and others. This documentation complements the monitoring and evaluation function discussed in Lesson 9. For example, after each major convening a report was prepared summarizing the objectives and outcomes. Also, after the Maharashtra Change Lab two learning documents were produced: a short film on the “lab process” and a “learning history”. A regular newsletter, posted on the BA website, was also created to keep stakeholders informed on developments, lessons learned and milestones reached, based upon the agreed goals.

## Conclusion

The global Partnership for Child Nutrition and its Indian counterpart the Bhavishya Alliance have made headway in the last two years. They have worked through the challenges and initial

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<sup>16</sup> Bhavishya Alliance. “A Journey...Thought to Action!: The role of multi-stakeholders in Bhavishya Alliance on corporate engagement” Meeting notes. April 10, 2007.

missteps and spent time establishing the legitimacy of BA to identify and test out new interventions to address child undernutrition. The priority moving forward is to test the selected initiatives in partnership with communities and to determine which should be scaled up.

The roles of the global partners have shifted to being active supporters providing links to networks and resources. The credibility and legitimacy of BA has been established at a high level in government and what is critical moving forward is to closely involve the leaders in the communities where the initiatives are being implemented. This is by no means an easy task and present many of the challenges illustrated above.

The continuing development of the partnership requires a continued investment of patience and capital. Global partners should maintain the course set and at strategic intervals provide a mirror to allow PCN and BA to take stock and ramp up their collective efforts and make necessary adjustments. We look forward to reporting further learning as the partnership develops and scales up new initiatives.

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