

# UNITE TO IGNITE

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ACCELERATING THE  
TRANSFORMATIONAL  
POWER OF  
PARTNERSHIPS FOR  
THE SDGS AND BEYOND

## CASE STUDIES

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SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
**GOALS**

## COMPANION CASE STUDIES

This document accompanies, and should be read in conjunction with, the report and call to action, “Unite to Ignite: Accelerating the transformational power of partnerships for the SDGs and beyond”<sup>1</sup>. It features four short case studies, providing deeper insight and examples of the actions and investments required to unleash a new wave of multi-stakeholder collaboration for the SDGs and beyond.

### IN PRACTICE: INDIVIDUAL PARTNERING CAPABILITIES



I am excited to see U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)’s call for stakeholder engagement in their new “The Future of the Workforce” vision<sup>2</sup>. The Federal Government’s ability to engage with the private sector however requires knowledgeable professionals to make this happen and currently the capabilities of government are not adequate. I challenge my OPM colleagues to help us build the stakeholder engagement community by creating a job series [the institutionalisation of a specific job role] for this profession.

The Federal Government has been doing partnerships for over 20 years as a business model, but there is still not a job series that recognises this important profession. Currently government employees working in this area are either program analysts, management analysts, foreign service officers, or business analysts. These job series only marginally cover engagement and mostly don’t envision building partnerships.

Partnership builders require the following skill sets: communication, strategic planning, ideation, networking, marketing, collaboration, innovation, negotiation, acquisition and program management. In addition, partnership builders must develop a specific kind of empathy, where they are able to identify how a partnership benefits a potential partner (AKA what’s in it for me, knowledge). All of these skills require a curated curriculum of training, practice and mentorship.

Partnerships are built on trust, not by institutions, but by people. Simply stated, people power partnerships. The government needs to invest in and retain its best collaborators because they build a trusted network of partners. Without a job series, the government struggles with hiring the right people, promoting them, and retaining senior leaders. Without a retention plan, the government loses the best of its partnership people, which then makes it more difficult to build trust and partner with the private sector. Given that most agencies now have partnership offices, it makes good sense to provide them with qualified staff, who have an opportunity to advance in this field.

With 20 years into building partnerships, it is time for the government to invest in its teams and develop the Partnership Officer job series.

**Jim Thompson is a veteran US civil servant, and a pioneer of public sector collaboration, particularly with the private sector, in multiple roles at USAID, the White House, the State Department and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.**

<sup>1</sup> Available from: <http://partnershipaccelerator.org/campaign>

<sup>2</sup> [Policy, Data, Oversight: The Future of the Workforce - OPM.gov](#)

## IN PRACTICE: ORGANISATIONS TO BE FIT FOR PARTNERING



**'We are partners' is one of World Vision's core values.** Across our advocacy and campaigning, disaster response, and development programming – with a special emphasis in fragile contexts – we seek to work with a diverse range of organisations across the public and private sectors, civil society organisations, faith communities, and institutions.

Our global strategy, Our Promise, underlines this core value of partnership, calling us to 'collaborate and advocate for broader impact'. Partner of Choice, a World Vision programme built on TPI's Fit for Partnering framework, is delivering the deep organisational change required to bring the 'collaborate' aspect of this strategic imperative to life. The programme involves country offices undertaking an analysis of the current fitness for partnering through a survey and interviews with staff and, crucially, our partners. That analysis and a process of reflection leads to a programme of change to improve the quality and impact of our partnering.

17 country offices to date have joined the programme to date spanning contexts as diverse as South Sudan and Vietnam, Malawi and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In recent conversations with senior leaders across these country offices, three themes emerge:

**First, is that the survey process is critical.** The chance to hear partner voices in a neutral context is critical in understanding how others see us. **Second is the importance of the "summit",** the reflective get-together of functional leaders and managers across the organisation that generates the necessary buy-in as well as giving key insight and making action plans both more realistic and sufficiently ambitious. **And third, that the Fit for Partnering framework enables a more holistic and strategic approach to working with partners.** It's not that we want more partners, nor that we want more compliance or even just streamlined processes, but the right partnerships with the right organisations that are most likely to deliver impact over time. It also allows each country office to grow toward its partnering ambitions, learning along the way.

In one post-war economy, the leadership team has successfully oriented relationships across civil society and is now carrying out programming for refugees and around child protection in partnership with the government and with organisations representing minority groups.

In Malawi, World Vision chose to join Partner of Choice to help as they oriented to working with and through partners across their programmes. Following the Partner of Choice survey and summit, they started to invest systematically across national and local partnering approaches. This was spearheaded by appointing a Partnerships and Capacity Building lead within Operations, supporting a Partnering Strategic Intent and new Guidelines, along with a new Partner Review Committee.

To ensure appropriate return on investments into partnerships, World Vision Malawi instituted new review processes. "With support from Quality Assurance unit, each Relationship Manager at all levels shall ensure that basic and advanced analysis of partnering data is done to establish partnership changes over time, trends and impact on child well-being. Each Relationship Manager at all levels shall ensure that each partnership is using monitoring data to improve process, generate innovations and identify areas for advocacy." And to ensure that the area managers are confident in this work, they've been progressively enrolled into WV's Partnering2030 course.

We recognise that successful partnering depends on context, on finding potential partners with adequate partnering intent and skills, on our own staffs' competences, and on the organisational capabilities. Partner of Choice is helping us to play our role across this spectrum, paying attention to our own capabilities, and being able to support partnering within our operating contexts far more strategically, systematically and effectively.

## IN PRACTICE: PARTNERSHIP SPECIALIST SUPPORT

Partnership Process Facilitators (or 'brokers') are specialists who accompany and support a group of partners to build equitable, effective and robust partnerships that can achieve breakthrough results and deliver for all. They help partners to:



- Stay true to the strategic purpose and goals of the partnership.
- **Design, manage and lead the partnering process** and collaborative journey, including fit-for-purpose governance.
- **Navigate complexity, uncertainty, diversity, power dynamics** and hold difficult conversations in ways that are fair, open and create confidence.
- **Model, coach and uphold principled partner relationships**, communications and behaviours including attending to power dynamics, nurturing collaborative leadership and horizontal accountability, and acknowledging and challenging unhelpful, unethical and uncollaborative assumptions, behaviours and systems that perpetuate "business as usual".

While every partnership is unique to its context, the experience of the Partnership Brokers Association (PBA) has been that the partnering process is surprisingly universal. Furthermore, we have seen that where one or more individuals take on the intermediating role, the results are:

- Better decisions and win-win solutions – increased quality
- Greater equity and stronger relationships – increased social capital
- **Greater partnership efficiency** and resources leveraged – increased value for money.
- **More strategic and systemic shifts**, joined up approaches and breakthrough results – increased impact.

Having someone with such a mandate stops partnerships from 'playing safe' or getting stuck in forms of delivery that reinforce the status quo rather than catalysing urgently needed transformative change. Indeed, without braving uncomfortable conversations we cannot make progress on systemic issues like decolonisation / localisation, decarbonisation and economic inequity.

*"Partnership brokering gave me the courage and mandate to support people to be more radical"*

**Community Partnership Facilitator, Africa**

Partnership facilitators may be one of the partner representatives (so act as 'internal' facilitators) or they may be an independent third party (acting as an 'external' facilitator). Both bring specific added value. An internal facilitator is more likely to have long-term engagement and deep understanding of the partners and partnership. An external facilitator may be more trusted as independent, brings fresh perspective and dedicated focus and may be helpful in addressing specific challenges, such as negotiating partnership agreements, facilitating difficult conversations, resolving conflicts, and evaluating collaborations. At best internal and external work in tandem. Whichever the case, all partnership facilitators need to model fairness and to seek to ensure fairness within the partnership.

**In practice:** The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) engages accredited external partnership facilitators across a range of its international cooperation programs, to help reduce risk, and to establish greater trust, openness and understanding with its partners, understanding that building the ability of its partners to speak up and be heard leads to greater equity and efficacy.

A number of its large-scale development programs have embedded a 'partnership approach guided by a partnership broker', to co-create Ways of Working to supplement contracting arrangements, and annual reflective practice health checks on the partnership. This recognises partnership process management (partnership brokering) as an approach which supports good delivery of aid. External partnership specialists are brought in to advise and facilitate these processes on behalf of all partners, not just DFAT.

## IN PRACTICE: PLATFORMS AND POLICY



**Role of Government:** The Jamaican government sees its role as establishing systems, policies and legislation that are facilitatory, and leading the process of national development. They describe an open and facilitated approach to policy making that aims to engage actors in development processes from local to national levels. Such systems enable effective planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation, to

avoid duplication and inefficiencies under a well-defined and coordinated process with clear development objectives.

**Supportive policy framework:** The government has a history of demonstrating responsibility to national development through policy. The Vision 2030 Jamaica National Development Plan, was developed in 2009, and is a comprehensive planning framework that integrates the economic, social, environmental and governance aspects of national development. This overarching plan offers a long-term framework that also informs the creation of sector plans. Monitoring and oversight to the process is accomplished through multi-stakeholder thematic working groups (TWGs).

*"It is important to mention that in Jamaica, the SDGs are implemented through the Vision 2030 National Development Plan... you can see it as a successful exercise in multi-stakeholder partnership [for] implementation." - Government*

**Consultation to create sectoral plans:** every three years the Medium-Term Socio-Economic Policy Frameworks (MTFs) are revised through extensive consultative processes that enable stakeholders input in sectoral and national priorities, which facilitate buy-in and ownership for implementation.

*"It helps to create ownership and buy in from different stakeholders... there is more incentive or impetus to participate in implementation." - Government*

**A framework for decentralised action at subnational levels:** The Vision 2030 Jamaica National Development Plan is implemented through the MTFs, and informs the development of local sustainable development plans, which are at a parish level or sub national level. At the subnational level, stakeholder participation is enabled by the Local Governance Act of 2016, which creates a framework for the establishment and maintenance of local level groups or organisations that support engagement in development issues and may be thematic in focus or extends to broader community issues.

**Feedback loops in this consultative framework:** Local level organisations and community groups feed information up into parish development committees or the Inter-Agency Network, a multi-stakeholder group of government organisations and service providers at the parish level led by the Municipal Corporation and the Social Development Commission, which is an agency of government.





Image: António Guterres, UN Secretary General, speaking at the opening of the SDG Action Weekend September 2023 (Photo credit: TPI)