

POSITION PAPER

PARTNERSHIP

April 2015

What is partnership all about? How to start a new partnership? How to work together for many years and develop your partnership? How to end a partnership in a good way? If you are asking yourself these questions, this paper is for you. It presents DUF's considerations on working in partnership – as well as lessons learnt, ideas and tools for strengthening your partnerships.

WHY WORK IN PARTNERSHIPS ?

DUF projects must be implemented in partnership between DUF's member organizations and one or more partner organizations. Put simply, to work in partnership to work together.

The idea is that when young people engage with other young people, they learn a lot from each other and they get a better understanding of each other's lives, organizations and contexts. That understanding is valuable in itself – and it is a good basis for doing projects that make a difference.

DUF wants to promote partnerships that:

- Create **long-term work relations** rather than short-term project activities.
- Are based on **joint ownership** and **equality** among partners
- Are based on **clarification of expectations, roles and responsibilities**
- Are based on a shared understanding of the aims of the partnership and the projects

»» Equality – a Fundamental Principle

Equality is a fundamental principle of good partnerships. It entails:

- That you as organizations respect each other's views.
- That both parties contribute something to the project and the partnership.
- That both parties make an effort to learn from the partnership and evolve accordingly.
- Both parties have an influence on and responsibility for the common projects.

HOW TO ESTABLISH A GOOD PARTNERSHIP FROM SCRATCH?

Establishing a good partnership

Some organizations meet up by chance and find out that they have something in common. Other organizations go in search for potential partner organizations that work with a specific issue or are active in a specific country.

When you establish a new partnership, it is important to consider, who will be the right partner for you and how you can make the partnership strong and viable.

A good match is based on careful considerations and honest conversations about what you as organizations are passionate about and what kind of change, you want to create for children and young people.

If the partnership is to be meaningful, your organizations should have something that you want to work together on. Often the cooperation runs more smoothly if you have similar organizational values and ways of working – but it can

»» A Partnership that Fits

For you to get the best possible partnership and results, it is important that you talk openly and are conscious about the needs and wishes each of you have.

- What do you want to get out of the project, and what can you learn from it?
- What can you contribute with?
- How do you meet each other's expectations and needs?

»» How do you find out what your partner wants out of the partnership?

DUF recommends you to clarify your expectations to each other, decide on your respective roles and define clearly who is responsible for what – at an early stage in the partnership. A partnership agreement can help you to clarify expectations to each other.

»» Know Your Partner

When you want to find the right partner it is a good idea to find out if you match when it comes to organizational values and ways of working:

- What are the values that each organization is based upon?
- How is each organization led? Do you have active local volunteers? What do they do and do they have an influence on the activities and the organization?
- How is each organization funded? Do you have other partnerships and donors?
- What activities does each organization do? How are they organized?

»» The first meeting

The first meeting between potential partners is always exciting. There are lots of hopes, expectations and ideas for a cooperation – and you want to get a good start together.

It is a good idea to prepare for the first meeting together with the potential partner: What is important for you to talk about at the meeting and what are you curious to hear more about from the potential partner?

One way of doing it could be to agree on an agenda beforehand:

- What is the purpose and agenda of the meeting?
- Who are you? Introduction to each organizations purpose, structure and activities. What are you curious to hear more about?
- Intro to the DUF framework?
- What are your ideas for working together?
- Are you a good match? Any agreements forward?

... And remember, the most important thing in the first meeting is to keep an open mind, be curious and listen to each other.

also be that you want to learn something from an organization that works in a different way than you do.

And in almost all partnerships the personal chemistry matters – do you like working together?

HOW TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONSHIPS IN AN EXISTING PARTNERSHIP?

It is a good idea to meet up regularly to build a good relationship and to take time for reflection and learning from the experiences in the partnership.

You can apply for a Partnership Development project during or between projects and meet up in Denmark or in the

partner country. Often partnerships talk about challenges they are facing, new visions for the work together or revisit their partnership agreements.

It is also a good idea to participate in the **international DUF events**, such as project management seminars or conferences. That way you get a chance to meet, work on ideas together and share experiences with other partnerships.

HOW TO END A PARTNERSHIP IN A GOOD WAY?

All partnerships come to an end at some point. Sometimes it is a joint decision to end a partnership – and sometimes the partners don't agree how and when the cooperation should end.

»» Experience from practice

The Social Liberal Youth and the Youth Agenda Trust have started cooperation on dialogue activities in Zimbabwe. To get a good understanding of each organization's way of working with dialogue, they conducted dialogue activities together during their preparatory study. After the activities, they gave each other feedback and talked about how they understood the concept of dialogue and their way of working. This open dialogue very early in the partnership paved the way for a trusting relationship in which both partners are communicating in an open and honest way with each other.

»» What is important in a partnership?

During monitoring and learning visits, DUF asks partnerships what they find important in a partnership. These themes are often mentioned:

- Context knowledge. It is important that the organizations in the partnership gain an understanding of the context in which each organization work.
- Open, honest communication is key to build trust and ensure a good cooperation. Don't hide problems, but deal with them in a constructive way. Respect each other and listen to each other.

»» How do you know if you are developing your partnership?

The WWF partnership toolbox has a lot of questions and tools to help you to work together. It also has tools for how to see if you are making progress in your partnership and suggestions for how to develop your partnership over time.

»» DUF recommends that you make a partnership agreement, where your shared expectations are written down alongside other important themes, such as your shared vision and division of responsibility. It is a requirement that the partners enter into a partnership agreement for all Partnership Projects.

When you have established a good trusting relationship, it can be a good idea to ask yourselves how you want the partnership to develop in the long term.

- **What happens when you complete the task you set out to do together?** Talk with partners and stakeholders about how the cooperation is going. After each project, it is a good idea to check in with each other and see if your ideas for working together still match.
- **How will you know when we have come to the end of the partnership?** How can you end the partnership in a good way? If you are thinking about ending the partnership for whatever reason, it is a good idea to talk about how you can phase out the cooperation in a good way well before you intend to end the partnership.
- **How can you ensure that the changes you have achieved live on?** Think about sustainability in all your projects. How will your work and the changes you have achieved live on?

PARTNERSHIP CAN BE DIFFICULT

When you work closely with another organization you may run into challenges and frustration along the way. Maybe you disagree on the purpose of your project and the working methods – or you may find that personalities clash.

DUF supported partnerships often say that it is important to talk regularly and to meet up face to face when possible. The more you get to know each other, build understanding and mutual trust, the better you are at solving disagreements before they become irreconcilable conflicts.

It is a good idea to talk about how you intend to deal with disagreements and conflicts. That way both organizations can explain how they prefer to deal with critique and disagreements. It is a good idea to include your considerations in your partnership agreement, so that you can refer back to it if a disagreement arises.

DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

When a project is approved for DUF funding, the money will be allocated to the Danish organization. The Danish organization is financially and legally responsible to DUF. However, the Danish organization and the partner share the responsibility for implementing and managing the project.

FURTHER INSPIRATION...

Tools recommended by DUF

DUF has created a tool for partnership agreements that can help you to get through essential themes.

There are also range of other tools to support you in establishing and developing a partnership. The **WWF Partnership toolbox** provides simple and efficient tools - and is available at the DUF website.

Meet up with DUFs consultants

DUF can provide inspiration on how to find partners, establish partnerships and give advice on how to develop your partnership.

» Experience from practice

Ungdomsringen, The Danish Organization of Youth Clubs (UNGR) and Straight Talk Foundation (STF) have worked together since 2009. DUF met with representatives from the two organizations for a conversation on working in a partnership, during a partnership development meeting in Denmark in the fall of 2014.

DUF: If you were to describe working in a partnership to new project groups in DUF, how would you explain it?

- **Saul (STF, staff):** To me it means to enter into a marriage, because it is more of everyday talking together, everyday working together.
- **Hassan (STF, staff):** I have three words to explain what it is like working in a partnership. 1: Think together, 2: Talk with each other and 3. Work with each other.
- **Annet (STF, volunteer):** To me it is about motivating other people, encouraging each other, being there for each other. These are some of the things that keep the partnership moving.
- **Allan (UNGR, staff):** I agree. If I should give an advice to new groups it is the word equality. That means, that it is not here in Denmark that we should produce the ideas, it is not us who should come with the ideas and tell our partner what to do. But as Hassan said, we think together, we work together, equally.
- **Benedicte (UNGR, volunteer):** Effective communication, equality, openness and open mindedness, transparency and honesty. You need to know when you go into a partnership that you come from different cultures and you need to be honest about how you work.
- **Allan (UNGR):** And just because we know each other well, just because we are “married”, it doesn't mean everything is running smoothly. There can be some points where we disagree, but we can still talk in a fair way. And if the partnership is running well there is also space to discuss and give constructive criticism to each other.

DUF: The match of organizations in a partnership is essential for a good working relationship. What is a good match? What is important to look for?

- **Benedicte (UNGR):** We could see that in Straight Talk Foundation, there were youth clubs that were similar to ours and part of our goal is cultural exchange. We could instantly see that we had something in common and we could work well together.
- **Hassan (STF):** For me a good match is not only in the names, in the thematic areas. It is also in the human beings, it matters which people you are going to be working with.
- **Allan (UNGR):** The organizations should have more or less the same capacity. Straight Talk Foundation and UNGR are both professional organizations and match each other.
- **Benedicte (UNGR):** And I think it is okay that if you go on a partner identification visit and find out that you don't match, you don't have to carry through with the partner you planned, it is better to find the right one.

DUF: What are the things you learn from each, the differences between you and the things you gain from working together with each other?

- **Hassan (STF):** I think that the youngsters from The Danish Organization of Youth Clubs are learning that in Africa people can be very bright, very intelligent and open minded. We have to deal with the historical background and the relationship between Europe and Africa. So when the youngsters interact and speak with each other, so much of that background gets broken down. So we see that the youth begin to appreciate each other as human beings and the similarities we have - and that fosters cooperation much more closely.
- **Allan (UNGR):** One thing we learnt is the way they do peer-to-peer sex education, how openly they talk about it in the Straight Talk youth clubs. We have a similar peer-to-peer sex education concept at the national level of The Danish Organization of Youth Clubs, called 'the Sexualists'. Inspired from the education methods we saw in the Straight Talk clubs, we formed a local sex talk club. We couldn't copy the concept directly, but we modified it to fit within our own context and linked up with the Sexualists at national level.

And when we started this partnership project, Kirsten from The Danish Organization of Youth Clubs was telling about the structure of The Danish Organization of Youth Clubs and Hassan took the idea about a regional structure home to Uganda. Not copying, but adapting the idea.



DUF: What has been challenging in the partnership? What have you gained from the challenges and how do you overcome them?

- **Hassan (STF):** There must be a level of consistency in the people who are part of the project. Some of the youth we have to work with are completely new, so there must be a level of consistency to maintain continuity throughout the pilot and partnership projects.
- **Allan (UNGR):** Projects and partnerships are carried by human beings and not by papers. I agree with Hassan that all these changes of people are challenging. Otherwise you start from scratch all the time and there is no continuity.

DUF: What makes the friendly relationship possible?

- **Benedicte (UNGR):** It is that you go there, and you talk together, you don't only sit around a table but you do other things as well. You really talk in depth and learn about each other's families. If you understand the persons behind the decisions, you tend to understand the decisions.
- **Allan (UNGR):** And I want to add that the friendship we have, it is also coming from the partnership agreement. So my advice to new groups is to make a partnership agreement and use it. When we started this partnership we talked about how will we talk together for example through constructive criticism. If you write down your agreements, you can refer back to them later.

DUF: Do you have any good advice for new DUF supported partnerships?

- **Allan (UNGR):** Bring the challenges on the table, don't try to hide them. Then we can talk to each other. Be honest to each other.
- **Benedicte (UNGR):** Effective communication, equality, openness, transparency and honesty. And friendship. I think friendship is crucial in a partnership.
- **Hassan (STF):** When we have partnerships it means we are together. Equality is what drives partnerships. If you think that you are superior, just because you have the money and the money is going to another organization – that partnership is going to fail.
- **Saul (STF):** For any new partnership, they need to think about their vision and mission. The two partners have each their vision, and sticking to your core values is important when you develop projects. Don't change to suit the partnership or to suit the other because you think that will make the other partner happy.

➤➤ This paper presents DUFs considerations on partnership - as well as ideas and tools for working with your partnership.

Our most important advice is to tailor your approach to your own organizational setup, the work of your organizations and the context you are working in. That is why the paper doesn't give prescriptions or specific answers to how you should work with your partnership. Instead we encourage you to think through themes, that we have found to be important to DUF supported partnerships.

We have included the tools used in DUFs learning activities – and we refer you on to other toolkits that we find inspiring. In doing so, we hope to stimulate your own thinking and ideas on how the methods and tools we present may be useful in your own work to create positive change.

There are many other ideas, approaches and tools that are used by young people in civil society organizations that are not included in this paper. Please share your own experiences, ideas and stories with us in order to make the toolbox more practically relevant for others. There are no deadlines and new pages and tools can be added at any time.