

FUNDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN NORTHERN AND
SOUTHERN NGOS: CAN AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS EXIST?

By

MICHELLE BREANNE SWANK

A THESIS

Presented to the School of International Studies
and the Honors College of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Bachelor Arts

August 2004

APPROVED: _____
Galen R. Martin

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Michelle Swank

for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

In the School of International Studies

to be taken

August 2004

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Approved: _____
Galen R. Martin

With the rise of southern NGOs, northern NGOs are increasingly working through southern NGOs rather than directly implementing programs in the south. Partnership has arisen as an idealized notion of how they should work together, challenging previously existing donor-recipient models in which southern organizations and individuals act as passive recipients in the development process. Many definitions of partnership exist. This thesis focuses on Alan Fowler's definition of authentic partnership, and asks whether this is a realistic possibility. Rather than a simple negative, the answer is complex and multifaceted.

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Introduction

While it is common to hear charges of U.S. and European imperialism and neo-colonialism in regards to military policies and the activities of transnational corporations, most people in the so-called “developed world” would naturally think of international aid as nothing but a benevolent force. Yet aid too has been referred to as neo-colonialism, and the treatment of recipients by donors “has long been under scrutiny” (Crewe and Harrison 69). Donors have tended to treat recipients much like people were treated under colonial rule, “as passive recipients who are unable to manage their own affairs” (Crewe and Harrison 69). The idea of “partnership” questions this relationship. Those receiving aid are no longer considered to be just recipients, but partners in a process. “Partnership” is a term now used to describe the relationships between many different types of organizations in the aid world. This thesis will focus on the partnerships between NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) located in the global north, and those located in the global south.¹

So what exactly are NGOs? The way in which the term is used varies. NGOs are always non-governmental and not for profit. The United Nations originally invented the term NGO to refer to those organizations that have a recognized consultative status to the United Nations and are primarily engaged in research and advocacy (Bolling and Smith, 153). The term PVO (private voluntary organization) was used by the UN to describe

¹ For this paper, the north is used to define those countries that are net donors of development aid (mainly Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, the U.S., Canada, and Japan) and the south, those countries that are net recipients of development aid (Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe).

those organizations oriented more towards action and service (Bolling and Smith, 153). Today, NGO is the more prevalent term and it can refer to any non-profit organization, although in the north it is particularly used to describe those organizations working internationally. Some well-known examples of NGOs are the Red Cross and Save the Children. Some NGOs in the north focus more on relief, whereas others focus more on development.² Some focus more on research, some on advocacy, and some are action oriented. Some focus on specific issues, such as biodiversity or micro-credit (small loans), but most have a broad focus, working on many issues. This thesis will focus on those northern NGOs that work in development and are connected to the implementation of programs, rather than doing research or advocacy. However, many of these NGO work in other areas, (relief) and in other ways, (advocacy or research), as well.

In the south, the term “NGO” generally refers to any non-governmental, non-profit organization. Many southern NGOs are community-based membership organizations that essentially help their own communities. These could be organizations such as agricultural cooperatives, village councils, and women’s credit groups (Lindenberg and Bryant 5).³ Other southern NGOs exist to help other NGOs. These NGOs are professionally staffed and many support the aforementioned grassroots organizations through the international (and national) aid that they receive (Lindenberg and Bryant 4-5). Some work in certain regions of a country, while others are national in scope. The majority of NNGOs (northern NGOs) discussed in this thesis work mainly with the latter type of SNGO (southern NGO).

² Development is a very complex and loaded term, which will be explored in detail in Chapter One.

³ By some definitions, these would not really be NGOs, as some define NGOs as only those organizations that are professionally staffed and serve other populations (Wils, 1).

Until the 1960s, the vast majority of international aid was given bilaterally (from the government of a northern country to a southern country), or multilaterally (from multilateral institutions such as the UN to a southern country) (Lindenberg and Bryant 3). Beginning in the 1960s, a global non-profit sector began to emerge (Bryant 3). The organizations of this sector were referred to by many names, the most common being non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Many viewed aid from NGOs as a promising alternative to previous forms of aid due to their smaller size (enabling more people-to-people interaction), and their stronger likelihood of giving aid according to need rather than for political gain. The growth of NGOs in the north took off in the 1970s and accelerated during the 1980s and 1990s (Bryant 3). There has also been a later, but much larger, mushrooming of local NGOs in the global south (Lindenberg and Bryant 4).

As SNGOs increased in numbers and in capacity, some bilateral and multilateral aid organizations began to fund SNGOs, rather than working through southern governments or directly implementing projects themselves. Also, many NNGOs began working through SNGOs (rather than directly implementing programs themselves). The logic behind this was that SNGOs have local presence and knowledge, and are therefore better equipped to directly implement programs (Kazibwe 2000). Instead of implementing programs, many NNGOs now raise funds for SNGOs, monitor the work of SNGOs, and do research for SNGOs. The term *partnership* arose in the 1970s to describe an ideal relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs, (Fowler, 1998 140). Exactly what this meant was not clear, but for many it implied a change in power relations: NNGOs and SNGOs would now be *partners* rather than donors and recipients.

One prominent writer on the subject, Alan Fowler, describes the types of relationships that he (and many others) would like to see as “authentic partnerships.” He defines authentic partnership as “a joint commitment to long-term interaction, shared responsibility for achievement, reciprocal obligation, equality, mutuality and balance of power” (Fowler 2000).

Unfortunately, the literature indicates that relationships that resemble this definition of partnership are rarely practiced. However, it is a bit unfair to compare all partnerships to this definition, as all organizations may not be striving to reach it. Many argue that the concept of partnership has been “downgraded as a result of being too fashionable and overused” (Brehm 7). The term is now politically correct, and it almost seems old-fashioned to use terms such as “donor” and “recipient” (Crewe and Harrison 70).

For those organizations that do desire to strive for “authentic” partnerships, there are many problems associated with this. Problems with cross-cultural communication can lead to misunderstandings and a lack of trust. NNGOs tend to have greater access to knowledge and connections (with northern governments for example), leading to unequal power relations and the dependence of SNGOs on NNGOs. Northern attitudes can sometimes impede equitable relations, as many NNGO staff members hold negative attitudes about SNGOs, and sometimes about southerners themselves. Funding processes only exacerbate this problem. When people are put in control of money they tend to abuse that power.

Indeed, funding is recognized to be the biggest barrier to equitable relationships built on mutuality. NNGOs expect SNGOs to be accountable to them, (in terms of the use

of funds and in terms of the quality of projects) but NNGOs often do not act as if they are accountable to SNGOs. When NNGOs receive funds from bilateral or multilateral organizations, they end up as intermediaries in an “aid chain,” in which those lower down in the chain are accountable to those higher up, but not vice versa. Hence, SNGOs are accountable to NNGOs, and NNGOs are accountable to bilateral and multilateral aid organizations. Possessing funds also tends to give NNGOs the “final say” in important matters, even though in theory the agenda should be “southern driven” to a large extent. Many SNGOs also find themselves changing their agenda in order to attract northern donors in the first place.

Some NNGOs try to overcome these problems by taking specific actions. For example, some give fairly steady funding to SNGO partners each year, so that the partners do not feel that the amount of funding that they receive one year is dependent on whether they pleased the NNGOs the year before. Others unfortunately do not necessarily change their actions, but simply continue to use the partnership rhetoric, knowing that the way this language is used is not really appropriate to the situation.

Can authentic partnership ever exist? Many claim that it cannot. Eliot for example claims,

... this is a dialogue of the unequal, and however many claims are made for transparency or mutuality, the reality is—and is seen to be—that the donor can do to the recipient what the recipient cannot do to the donor. There is an asymmetry of power that no amount of well-intentioned dialogue can remove (65).

Others possess a more hopeful view, believing that authentic partnership can exist if the right conditions are in place (Brehm 36).

This thesis will attempt to answer the aforementioned question: To what degree can authentic partnership exist? Chapter one will describe the history of development,

discussing the beginnings of the concept of development, and detailing the changing trends in the way development has been practiced over the years, as partnership must be understood in the greater context of international aid. Participation, a particular way of practicing development, will be discussed, and partnership will be discussed as a concept existing within the greater framework of participation. This section will also discuss what partnership is and why it is important in terms of both effective development practice and international equality.

Chapter two will discuss the reality of partnership, detailing how the idea of partnership has played out in practice. It will argue that while partnerships vary tremendously, most partnerships have been far from authentic. It will also discuss trends in partnership, both positive and negative. Lastly, this chapter will identify and discuss the many barriers to authentic partnership.

Chapter three will detail the specific actions that NNGOs have taken to overcome these barriers. It will argue that funding processes are the strongest and most consistent barriers, as well as the most difficult to overcome. The chapter will discuss certain changes taking place within the aid system, and it will argue that in order to answer the question of "Can authentic partnerships exist?" it will be necessary to see how these changes play out in the future. In particular, it will argue that the answer to this question depends on the extent to which SNGOs can use the legitimacy that NNGOs receive from working with them to their own advantage. This chapter gives suggestions on how SNGOs might go about doing this. Also, the chapter presents a case study of an NGO that has created a commendable model of partnership. Lastly, the chapter gives NNGOs suggestions for creating more equitable partnerships.

While most of the information in this thesis comes from previously written literature, it also uses information from two interviews with northern NGOs who work in partnership with southern NGOs. These are IDEX (International Development Exchange) and Pueblito Canada.

IDEX is a U.S. organization working for economic justice in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. They work only through partner organizations, and they have never been operational (email to author 4/28/04). They have thirteen partner organizations, and the ways in which they work for economic justice vary from region to region. In Africa the focus is women's and girl's empowerment and youth education and training. In Asia it is sustainable agriculture, micro-credit lending, and labor rights. In Latin America, partners focus on indigenous women's rights, organic agriculture, fair trade cooperatives, and developing local markets (About IDEX 2004). The organization has a small staff and a fairly small budget, which comes from individuals, foundations, and corporations (IDEX 2003).

Pueblito Canada is a Canadian organization working in early childhood development. The organization works with partners (one partner in each country) in Mexico, Brazil, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic (Pueblito 2004). They have been around since 1974, when a group of Canadians founded a Children's Village in Costa Rica (Pueblito 2004). Like IDEX, Pueblito has a fairly small staff. Unlike IDEX, they do receive funds from an ODA donor, as well as from the public (Personal Communication 2004).

Chapter 1: Partnership and the History of Development

Most of us take it for granted that the world is divided into “developed” and “developing” countries. This stems from the belief that one part of the world is behind and needs to catch up with the other part of the world. Developed countries have low birth rates, large economies, tend to be very urbanized, and are “modern,” while developing countries have higher birth rates, smaller economies, are more rural, and are more “traditional” rather than “modern.” There are many theories about how to develop the third world, all of which assume that the third world needs to be developed. In addition to an ideology, development is a set of institutions and practices. The World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and Save the Children (an NGO) are all development institutions. In practice, development projects are as varied as the construction of a dam to aiding governments in democratization.

According to Cowen and Shenton, the social theory of progress can be traced back to both Christian ideas and, conversely, enlightenment thinkers (31). The idea’s Christian origins stem from “the doctrine of divine revelation in which Providence through history maps out a design in advance of human efforts” (31). “Enlightenment thinkers constructed secular variants of this idea, giving autonomy to human purpose and proposing the prospect of unlimited improvement through unaided human effort” (31).

Ideas of progress and development were also very prominent in European colonialism. “During the nineteenth century, those who saw themselves as developed, believed that they could act to determine the process of development for others deemed less-developed” (Cowen and Shenton 28). This supposed lack of development was both

economic and cultural in nature, as the two were believed to be connected. List, writing in 1856, said, “the economical education of a country of inferior intelligence and culture...is effected more certainly by free trade, with more advanced, richer, and more industrious nations” (List 77-78).

It was not until after World War II, however, that the word “underdevelopment” came into common usage (Escobar 31).

The notions of underdevelopment and Third World were the discursive products of the post-World War II climate. These concepts did not exist before 1945. They emerged as working principles within the process by which the West—and in different ways, the East—redefined itself and the rest of the world. By the early 1950s, the notion of three worlds—the free industrialized nations, the Communist industrialized nations, and the poor, nonindustrialized nations, constituting the First, Second and Third World respectively—was firmly in place (Escobar, 31).

The United States was particularly concerned with the development of the third world at this time, due to the Cold War. Both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. strove to influence the third world politically, culturally, and economically (Escobar 34). The U.S. and other Western countries offered a capitalist version of economic growth, whereas the Soviet Union had a socialist proposal for development (Brohman 10-11). With the quick success of the Marshall Plan,⁴ the U.S. perceived that development in the third world though economic aid was very possible (Brohman 10). In 1961, John F. Kennedy created USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development). For the first time, assistance in social and economic development was separated from military aid (USAID 2003).

In the 1950s and 1960s, development focused mainly on economic growth. Industrialization and the improvement of the infrastructure of third world countries were primary focuses. This focus on growth was in large part influenced by modernization

⁴ The Marshall Plan called for U.S. economic aid to Western Europe after World War II.

theory, a prominent development theory at the time. It argues that in order for third world societies to develop, it is necessary that they modernize, both economically and socially. Rostow's growth model (1960) details a sequence of stages from "traditional society" to "mass consumption" that third world societies must pass through in order to become developed (Rostow 1960). Like all of modernization theory, Rostow's model is teleological: linear, and with a clear end-point in sight. Modernizationists see the European experience as a blueprint for development. The theory also sees "traditional culture" as a barrier to development, arguing that development can only occur in the third world when the third world westernizes (Brohman 16).

By the early 1970s, many people working in international development became disillusioned with the aforementioned model of development (Brohman 203). Economic growth had failed to trickle down to the poor and people's basic needs were not being met. Development aid began to focus on those needs, concentrating on the provisions of food, sanitation, health care, and other such necessities (Brohman 205). Rural development was now a major issue, and emphasis was shifted to projects that directly targeted the poor (Brohman 204).

During the 1980s, macroeconomics moved to center stage once again. However, this time there was a move away from the state as a large player in development, and aid began to be given conditionally, rather than freely. The policies put in place were neo-liberal in nature. They called for a shrinking of the state and the opening of markets. This rise of neo-liberalism coincided with the spread of World Bank/IMF structural adjustment programs (Brohman 133). In order to receive loans from these organizations, countries had to agree to take certain economic measures. Among these were the

privatization of certain state-owned enterprises, the reduction of government spending on social infrastructure (such as education and health care), and the removal of price subsidies for basic goods (Brohman 133). These measures were taken in large part as a response to the international debt crisis; in which many southern countries declared that they were unable to keep up with the payments they owed the north (International Payment and Exchange 2004). The World Bank and others believed that third world governments needed to spend less in order to be able to keep up with debt payments. However, the move towards neo-liberalism was not something that was being pushed only on the south, but the north was moving away from the state as well. In fact, it was Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom who really started the privatization wave of the 1980s (Margaret Thatcher 2004).

This move away from the state coincided with a rise in NGOs. As the state began to be looked down upon as a provider of services, many saw NGOs as a promising alternative and NGOs rose up to try to fill the vacuum left by the state. Also coinciding with the rise in NGOs was a rise in a development practice referred to as participation, which focuses on the people-to people development that NGOs are thought to be better equipped to engage in.

In the 1970s, the work of people such as Paolo Freire began to raise awareness of the importance of community know-how and experience (Blanchet 638). For example, people began to recognize that people who have always lived in poverty might actually know something more about poverty than development workers who travel around the third world staying in four-star hotels. Participatory approaches were a response to the perceived failure of more traditional approaches. It was perceived that many projects and

programs were not effective because they failed to take into account both the local culture and the local context (Blanchet 637).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s a family of approaches and methods known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) came into being (Chambers, 1998 xv). Initially, PRA was mainly used in conducting research. Participatory research has been particularly strong in Latin America, as it has long been associated with the adult education movement (Chambers, 1997 106). The idea was that expatriates would “hand over the stick” to local people to represent their own realities (Chambers, 1997 117). Hence, as opposed to a development worker firing off a list of questions in an interview, the worker might get together with a small group of people from the community and ask them to draw a diagram. Kane, Bruce, and De Brun, give an example from research in The Gambia of how PRA can be useful.

We discovered that teenage girls who were pregnant, married, or about to be married constituted an ‘invisible’ segment of the community. While admiring a social map drawn in the sand, a little boy asked ‘Where’s the girl in that house? Why didn’t you put her in?’ and the men nearby replied: ‘She’s fifteen, she’s about to be married’. Checking, we discovered that 25 per cent of the girls in the village were missing from the map. This pattern of exclusion was repeated in every village studied, and social maps adjusted accordingly (Kane, Lawrence, and De Brun 35).

In this situation, a classic questionnaire may not have elicited this very important information about the status of certain teenage girls in The Gambia.

While PRA was initially used for research it is now also used to put plans into action (Chambers, 1997 104). The main impetus behind participation is the idea that it causes people to be both the principle actors and supervisors of their own development (Libro de Consulta 2004). It is now recognized that communities must define their own needs as well as appropriate solutions to their problems. Often times being “principal

actors” means that they are expected to contribute in concrete ways to the projects taking place in their communities. This contribution may be in the form of money, time, or materials. The idea behind this is that the project becomes “theirs” and this ownership causes real interest and hard work, and hence, successful projects.

According to Alan Fowler, like participation, the notion of partnership dates back to about the 1970s, “when it expressed the ideological aspiration of international solidarity in the development cause” (Fowler, 1998 140). However, it was during the 1980s and 1990s when a large majority of NGOs shifted from being operational (doing direct development work in the south) to working in partnerships with SNGOs. This shift “was seen to have come about as a result of pressure from donors and from the south” (Brehm 21).

So what do people mean by “partnership?” There is no widely accepted definition (Kilalo and Johnson 456-7). “Definitions of partnership occupy a spectrum from functional, resource-based definitions at one end, to idealistic, trust-based notions at the other end. The reality, as presented in the typologies of many writers, is a confused mixture of the two” (Brehm 18).

Functional definitions of partnership focus on sharing resources in order to meet a common goal. For the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, (1998) for example, “Partnerships are strategic alliances that involve a sharing of resources and responsibility to achieve a common objective.” On the other hand, some of the more idealized definitions focus on the importance of the partnership itself, rather than only the ends it is achieving. Alan Fowler, a prominent author on the subject of NNGO-SNGO partnerships, uses the term “authentic partnerships” to define what he thinks a partnership should be.

For Fowler, the word partnership implies “a joint commitment to long-term interaction, shared responsibility for achievement, reciprocal obligation, equality, mutuality and balance of power” (Fowler, *Beyond Partnership* 3).

Redd Barna (Save the Children Norway) has a definition of partnership which touches on these ideas. They state, “Redd Barna shall engage in co-operation on the basis of a shared commitment to the best interest and the rights of the child. Co-operation shall be based on equity, mutual respect and understanding between the parties” (Redd Barna). Notably, out of the seven NNGOs that defined partnership in Brehm’s study (22-3), Redd Barna is the only one that discusses the concept of equity in its definition.

As previously mentioned, many definitions of partnership will fall somewhere in between Fowler’s and that of the Caledon Institute. Norwegian Church Aid, for example, states, “by partners Norwegian Church Aid means churches and church, religious and voluntary organisations with which Norwegian Church Aid has a long-term collaboration...Co-operation is characterised by mutual trust, respect, openness and responsibility” (Norwegian Church Aid 2000). Hence, many, but not all, of Fowler’s components of partnership are mentioned.

What fits into the category of partnership for one organization may vary considerably from what another organization would call a partnership. The International Community Foundation (ICF) has four different categories for organizations that they work with (personal communication 2004). These are donor, partner, grantee, and contractor. Obviously, a donor is an organization that funds ICF. For ICF, a partner is an organization in which ICF works with towards a common goal (personal communication 2004). These relationships generally do not involve funding. A grantee relationship does

involve funding. A grantee must apply for a grant, and they must go through a formal review process after the project is over (personal communication 2004). Lastly, a contract relationship requires a formal contracting process. Their scope of work is very specific and they deliver progress reports often. They are more accountable than grantees (personal communication 2004). Many NNGOs would refer to all of the above relationships as “partnerships,” despite the large differences between each relationship.

While there is no one definition of “partnership” in English, translating this concept into other languages is even more difficult. According to Malhotra “the literal translation of the word ‘partner’ in Thai best describes the relationship between a prostitute and her client.” In Latin America, many different Spanish words are used to connote “partner” or “partnership,” such as “asocio,” (partner) “asociación,” (partnership) “socio,” (partner) and “contraparte” (counterpart) (Pueblito, Personal Communication 2004). Partners of the NNGO Katalysis suggested using the word “companerismo” because “partnership” was “claimed and practiced in so many different ways by other development agencies” (Jones 20). “Companerismo” implies “a deeper, more friendship-based relationship” (Jones 20).

In order to avoid ambiguity, this thesis will focus on partnership in terms of “authentic” partnership, asking whether it can be achieved. However, it is very important to recognize that many NNGOs may very well be achieving their own definition of partnership. Not every NNGO or SNGO desires to work in “authentic” partnership, and that is perfectly fine.

Why though, might authentic partnership be important? Scholars and development workers have identified myriad reasons both for working with SNGOs and

for working towards an idealized notion of partnership. Some reasons for northern NGOs to work with and through southern NGOs (rather than being operational) are that SNGO labor costs are lower, local organizations know the local context and culture better, and local organizations generally provide greater continuity (Hoksbergen).⁵ Likewise, SNGOs gain much more than funds in working with NNGOs, as the NNGOs provide worldly experience, technical knowledge, and networking opportunities.

The reasons to strive for authentic partnerships are a bit more complex. For one, these partnerships are long term, allowing for a long-term impact (Hoksbergen 2002). Sustainability has been and continues to be a crucial issue in development aid, and partnerships that are meant to last a long time will have a better chance of achieving sustainability in their programs. Trust is also a crucial aspect of authentic partnerships, and Fowler argues that relationships based on trust are economically efficient.

When there is sufficient similarity and trust between transacting parties, tasks can be achieved more smoothly, problems can be dealt with more quickly because the frameworks of interpretation are the same, understanding can be reached with less effort, coordinated action achieved more readily, and so on. Crudely put, reducing relational friction saves energy, improving efficiency and NGDO effectiveness (Fowler, 1998 146).

Another very important reason for obtaining authentic partnerships goes back to the idea of participation. Ideally, southern NGOs should represent their surrounding communities, soliciting their participation and basing what they do on their needs.⁶ If NNGOs engage in relationships with SNGOs where the latter have a strong voice in the relationship, ideally, local voices will be heard. "Local participation leads to greater local ownership"

⁵ The author discussed these among other reasons for obtaining "authentic" partnerships. However, I see them as reasons for working with southern NGOs period, regardless of the type of partnership involved.

⁶ Whether most southern NGOs truly represent their populations is debatable. This is an extremely important question, but this thesis does not seek to answer it. Certainly southern NGOs vary tremendously in this way. Some are much more grassroots oriented than others.

(Hoksbergen 2002). Furthermore, strengthening the capacity of SNGOs strengthens local civil society.⁷

Hoksbergen (2002) also argues that authentic partnerships are essential for global development. He notes that there are certain issues that affect everyone in the world, such as terrorism and environmental issues. According to Hoksbergen (2002), "If we are to work on these issues in sustainable ways, then we must all be included in the conversations . . . ownership of any solutions must be widespread." He argues that we can ensure positive change by fostering authentic partnerships "in which we can listen to and learn from each other, bring our different perspectives to bear on the issues, and organize together to solve our common problems and to achieve our common dreams."

On the more cynical side, Fowler and others point out that there may be less idealistic reasons to work in partnerships. Fowler says, "partnership is seen by some as a terminological Trojan horse, because its intent is to simply mask the way in which the powerful North actually manipulates Southern societies to its own advantage" (Fowler, 2000 4-8). Similarly, Malhotra argues that the use of partnership terminology by NNGOs is somewhat connected to their need to establish legitimacy. He points out that while bilateral organizations have legitimacy because they are part of an elected government, NNGOs do not have this same legitimacy. As bilateral and multilateral organizations are increasingly directly funding capable SNGOs, people may question the need for the existence of many NNGOs. The argument that they can create authentic partnerships with SNGOs is an answer to that question.

⁷ "Civil Society is composed of formal and non-formal voluntary associations that are organized around common interests" (Mercy Corps 1). According to Mercy Corps, "the function of a healthy and vibrant Civil Society is to empower citizens to participate in the economic, political and social activities that affect their lives in order to achieve just, productive, and secure communities" (Mercy Corps 1).

Lastly, authentic partnership is important because it may be the best bet for many SNGOs at the moment. Many relationships could theoretically exist that would benefit SNGOs, and yet would not really be partnerships. For example, if NNGOs simply wrote checks for SNGOs without having any demands of them, involvement in what they were doing, or dialogue, this would solve many of the problems associated with "partnership." However, this is very unlikely. Those who see NNGO-SNGO relationships as hopelessly unequal with little mutuality might suggest that SNGOs put more effort into self-financing. Indeed, self-financing has been on the partnership agenda for many years (Fowler, 1998 152). However, "experience to date on economically rooting southern and eastern NGDOs {nongovernmental development organizations} in their own economies has not been encouraging" (Fowler, 1998 152). Some observers estimate that if aid stopped, 95% of SNGOs would disappear. Hence, "while efforts at creating greater self-reliance must be increased in the short term, the struggle remains to create authentic partnerships which transcend the funding elements in relationships between Northern NGDOs and others" (Fowler, 1998 152).

Of course, partnership and participation are not magic bullets. Both are currently fashionable and politically correct, but using the language and taking action are not the same. According to Brohman,

Although alternative development programs have often been promoted by rhetoric about decentralization and participation, in practice, they have generally been tightly controlled by the state and/or outside development agencies. For the state, there is often a basic contradiction between paying lip service to participation for reasons of political expediency, and a real fear that grassroots organizations will generate popular empowerment beyond state control (270).

Furthermore, despite all of the talk about "bottom-up" development, development is still essentially imposed from the outside. "The imposition of outside concepts of

participation—not only by state agencies, but also by many NGOs—has often undermined [local] forms of political organization and democratic practice” (Fowler 1991; Fox 1990).

Some critics of the whole process of development have taken a discursive approach to it. Not everyone takes it for granted that the third world needs to be developed. Jonathan Crush argues that “the *discourse* of development, the forms in which it makes its arguments and establishes its authority, the manner in which it constructs the world, are usually seen as self-evident and unworthy of attention” (3). This discourse is the conceptual framework we use to view development. It is how we define and label parts of the world (third world, first world) and how we define and label the people in those parts of the world (illiterate, uneducated). These labels all carry many connotations.

The development discourse presents us with one way of thinking about the world, but there are many. Taking the example of formal education, it seems commonsensical to argue that education is very important for the well-being of people all over the world, and that those that lack it are deprived. However, this is a more complex issue than it is made out to be. We speak about “education” as if it means only one thing, but there are many types of education. When we do not evaluate whose knowledge, values, and history are being taught we assume that only those of some groups matter. While it is important that people are able to navigate the world outside of their community, many criticize modern education because only certain types of knowledge are taught. In Latin America education has tended to exclude indigenous cultures, and many indigenous people are now asking for bilingual and bicultural education (Behrman, Gaviria, and Szekely 2003; Fischer and Brown 1996).

As Arturo Escobar points out (5), it is difficult to talk about development outside of this discourse. In order to discuss power relations, it is sometimes necessary to divide the world into sections, and yet, in using terms such as north and south or first world and third world, all types of connotations are at play.

In "Becoming a Development Category," Nanda Shrestha, who grew up in Nepal in the 1950s and 60s, describes how a discourse of development functioned there. Before being introduced to *bikas*, (the Nepali word for development) Nanda had never thought much of being poor, and he certainly had not thought of himself as "underdeveloped" (Shrestha 268). Yet he soon learned that only by being educated in a modern way could he be *bikasi* (developed) rather than *abikasi* (underdeveloped) (Shrestha 268). *Bikas* was connected with roads and hospitals, but also with the English language and white people, who were now at the top of the social hierarchy (Shrestha 271).

Bikas also caused a significant change in views on poverty. Poverty and the poor had now become stigmatized (Shrestha 275). "Since wants were rising, poverty had grown a new face. It had a much deeper materialistic undertone than ever before. Poverty was never so frightening and degrading in the past" (Shrestha 274).

While "partnership" and "participation" are in some ways innovative concepts, it is important to remember that they are still a part of the development discourse, which in some ways may inhibit them from truly taking on their full meaning.

Chapter 2: The Reality of Partnership

Partnership in Practice

The term partnership is now widely used to describe relationships between northern and southern NGOs. "It is no longer common for either NGOs or government donors to speak in terms of 'beneficiaries' or 'counterparts' when referring to the institutions, groups, and individuals who are the recipients of aid" (Crewe and Harrison 70). But has a change in action accompanied this change in language use? Indeed, more and more NNGOs are working through southern partners, rather than directly implementing their own programs in the south. The literature suggests, however, that NGOs have performed quite poorly in reaching the ideals implied in the term "partnership."

In the literature, the general opinion given is that most NNGO-SNGO partnerships do not resemble authentic partnership. Fowler (1998 141) states, "There are so few NGDO relationships around today which have the qualities of true partnership that one might expect the term to have been quietly dropped." In "Something Nothing' Words: Lessons in Partnership from Southern Experience," Kamal Malhotra argues that SNGOs often feel resentment at the mere use of the term "partner," as it is not a true reflection of the relationship. For this reason, many Latin American NGOs use a term more similar to "counterpart" rather than "partner" to describe their relationships with NNGOs (Malhotra). Malhotra also argues that this feeling may be why not many

southern practitioners have written about the topic, seeing the term simply as irrelevant to reality.

According to Nwamuo, “experience shows that donors . . . have exhibited attitudes that projected them as ‘senior partner’. As such, they determine priorities, budgets and activities and generally interfere with the autonomy of local institutions” (Nwamuo 2000). The interviews discussed in “Conversations with Southern Partners” reflect this idea. All six SNGOs interviewed felt that NNGOs continue to set the development agenda without adequate input from their SNGO partners. In “Whose Ideas Count: How can Mexican NGOs challenge global development fashions,” Janet Townsend (2001) asks, if SNGOs are real partners in setting the development agenda, why do we see the same values and practices in Mexico as we do in India? She points out that while many development practices and ideas originate in the south, they tend to be co-opted by the north and pushed onto SNGOs as “the answer.”

Townsend also discusses the “report culture” that has developed. Critical of the extensive evaluation and monitoring procedures undertaken by NNGOs, Townsend comments that from the perspective of SNGOs it seems as though “the important thing is to measure and count ‘activities completed,’ ‘performance indicators met,’ and ‘outputs’ rather than ask ‘what difference does it make?’” (Townsend 2001). She attributes this partly to the “drive for professionalisation” but also describes it as an issue of trust. Unfortunately, the Mexican NGOs that she spoke with feel that all of this reporting does not necessarily do much to weed out corruption, while it does make it more difficult for honest NGOs to work effectively. These NGOs feel that the only way to find out what is really happening in the field is for more and longer visits to take place. Furthermore,

regardless of the effectiveness of this “report culture” it does not say much for trust existing between northern and southern NGOs, which is often listed as an important principle of “authentic” or “true” partnerships (Mohiddin 1998; Fowler, 1998 144).

This is also an issue of a lack of mutuality. “In practice, accountability is often one way from the southern NGO to the northern NGO. Where this is the case, the northern NGO will tend to have a greater institutional knowledge of its southern partner, leading to a lack of transparency” (Brehm 14). Some NGOs from Mali and Niger interviewed in Postma (452) also touch on a lack of mutuality when they say that “we give information to our northern NGO partners, but we do not know how it is used.” Clearly, the reverse is not true. Brehm also points out that theoretically, SNGOs should be accountable to their local constituencies more than to the north, as it is that local connection that is the main reason for working through SNGOs in the first place (46).

There are not a large number of case studies detailing partnership in practice, particularly from Latin America. One case study by Sarah Lister is a good example of two partnership relationships that do not resemble authentic partnership. The NNGO in the study is part of an international development arm of a U.S. evangelical Christian membership organization (Lister 7). Initially, the NNGO’s purpose in the Central American country was to work with church-based SNGOs and help them to strengthen their capacity. While working with these local partners, progress was slower than expected. The NNGO felt that the SNGO had limited capability and a lack of vision. The NNGO was facing demands from their head office to be able to demonstrate their impact more clearly, and they ended up directly implementing a health project. Due to the strict requirement on how such projects should operate, which their bilateral donor imposed,

the project did not even involve any local partners. Ceasing to work with these local partners (at least for the moment) may or may not have been the most logical choice, but this choice likely did not generate feelings of north-south solidarity. The values of “a joint commitment to long-term interaction” and “shared responsibility for achievement” (Fowler 2000) were not evident here.

Lister also discusses a current ongoing partnership between this NNGO and a SNGO in the same country. Notably, this relationship is referred to as a partnership by the NNGO, but not by their SNGO counterpart (Lister 8). According to Lister, the NNGO exerts a considerable amount of influence over the SNGO. This influence is both structural (over strategic organizational issues) and operational (on project design implementation) (Lister 10).

The relationship between the NNGO and the SNGO is highly influenced by the relationship between the NNGO and their bilateral donor, from whom they receive 65% of their funding (Lister 7). One tension between the SNGO and the NNGO is that the SNGO feels that the NNGO is not fulfilling its original mandate of church oriented work. The NNGO has become less church oriented and more “development” oriented mainly to fulfill the request of its bilateral donor, (Lister 11) and it seems to expect its SNGO partner to do the same.

While inequality seems to be the general rule, there are at least a few examples of partnerships where SNGOs express feeling equality in the relationship. One extreme (and very unique) example is the Dominican NGO Centro de Investigacion Para la Accion Femenina. One staff member claims to see donors “not as philanthropists but as parties in an exchange” stating, “we regard the two sides involved as entirely equal: they provide

the money, we provide hope, fresh outlooks and information, ethical rewards” (Theunis 1992). Of course, just because they regard the two parties as entirely equal does not necessarily mean that their NNGO partners also do as well, or that they even feel that their NNGOS partners do. Also, they are a research NGO, and it seems that most of the literature, (as well as this thesis), focuses more on action oriented NGOs, whose partnerships may have more cause for conflict and inequality.

One example of a NNGO that seems to be successful in forming effective and somewhat equitable partnerships is the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. The CRWRC has been working in partnerships for 30 years (Hoksbergen 2002). In interviews with southern partner staff, 2/3 of respondents said that they do feel like equal partners in many aspects of the relationship. Some statements made were, “CRWRC does not act superior even though they have the money,” “the key in partnership is how the stronger one behaves in terms of finances,” and contrasting CRWRC with other partners, “other partners come and tell us what to do, or they want a hard proposal rather than dialogue” (Hoksbergen 2002). According to Vicky Mancuso Brehm (24), church related organizations in general have tended to be more responsive to their southern partners’ agendas. However, Brehm states that there is now a tendency within these organizations to move towards a more “assertive” approach, as they have found themselves moving too far away from their original mandates.

Regarding NNGOs at large there seems to be disagreement as to in what direction partnerships are headed towards. Inarguably, there has been a rise of “tied aid.”

In the 1980s and 1990s too, an important aspect of much aid is the fact that it comes with explicit conditions. There are symptomatic of donor’s assumptions that they have a better understanding of a country’s needs than its own government. Conditions relate to the

nature of the political system, to the human rights record of a country, and to economic policy (Crewe and Harrison 69).

While Crewe and Harrison are primarily discussing the changes taking place in bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, Malhotra argues that they are also true of NNGOs to some extent.

Fowler believes that with the rise of contracting and tied aid (associated with the aforementioned structural adjustment programs), partnerships have moved from relationships based on solidarity to businesslike relationships (Fowler, 1998 140). This has occurred alongside similar changes in the aid world at large, such as the neo-liberal focus on the unregulated economy as the path to well being. Supposedly, “the age of solidarity has come to an end, and the age of pragmatism and efficiency has begun” (Schlanger 1992). Exhibiting a similar mindset, Mercy Corps says in their civil society newsletter, “naïve sentimentality often keeps alive ineffective and inefficient NGOs,” (8) indicating a preference for pragmatism over idealism.

One case study on the relationship between the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement of Sri Lanka and NOVIB (an NGO from the Netherlands) very much supports Fowler’s thoughts. At the beginning of his chapter entitled “In Unequal Dialogue with Donors: The Experience of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement,” Dr. Jehan Perera, a staff member of Sarvodaya, says, “Sarvodaya has been repeatedly subjected to donor evaluations: in this chapter we evaluate our relationship with our donors” (Perera 156).

Sarvodaya Shramadana means “the awakening of all society” (Perera 156). Some examples of the programs of Sarvodaya are their Early Childhood Development Program and their Economic Enterprises Development Program (Perera 157). Sarvodaya is very decentralized; over 2000 villages in Sri Lanka have registered Sarvodaya societies and

democratically elected office-bearers (Perera 158). This decentralization, as well as a bottom up, participatory approach has always been very important to the organization.

In the late 1960s, NOVIB became Sarvodaya's main development partner. During the first few years of the partnership, Van Vlijmen, NOVIB's Secretary-General, invited A.T. Ariyaratne, the founder of Sarvodaya, to the Netherlands several times to assist in NOVIB's campaigns for funds and to take part in development education there. Dr. Sjef Theunis, the successor of Van Vlijmen, spent quite a bit of time each year touring Sarvodaya villages throughout Sri Lanka. When he decided that Sarvodaya had reached a certain level of maturity, the two organizations jointly worked out an extensive six-year program of development cooperation (Perera 160). In 1977, they set up a Commission of Dialogue to jointly develop, monitor, and evaluate Sarvodaya programs. According to Perera,

It was a cooperative relationship, and not one of a donor and recipient. Both NOVIB and Sarvodaya shared and developed their philosophy together. They empowered each other in the understanding of people's participatory development activities. There were tense periods, such as the time of communal riots in 1983, but the organisations could always iron out differences and misunderstandings. Mutual respect, freedom to make decisions and easy access to each other were the salient features of this relationship with NOVIB (Perera 160).

In 1985 CIDA suggested having a donor consortium and Sarvodaya agreed. In 1986, 26 partner organizations of Sarvodaya got together with Sarvodaya for the first consortium meeting (Perera 161). This consortium was marked by transparency and openness. Both Sarvodaya and donors had ample time and space to express their views.

From the perspective of Sarvodaya, the relationship basically went downhill from there. The consortium began imposing complex financial and administrative control systems on the Sarvodaya administration (Perera 162). Sarvodaya staff became swamped with paperwork. More importantly, NOVIB, along with other donors,

basically attempted to take over the Movement. "Evaluators, consultants and donors literally took over the policy and decision-making functions trying to convert the Sarvodaya Movement into a mere delivery mechanism" (Perera 163). While Sarvodaya was based on bottom-up processes and decentralization, NOVIB was working in the opposite direction. At this time, Sarvodaya was in no position to resist the pressures of the consortium because they were undergoing a politically motivated attack from the president of Sri Lanka (Perera 162).

Not surprisingly, the program declined, and the donors placed all of the blame on Sarvodaya (Perera 164). In 1993 the project director of NOVIB responded to Sarvodaya's appeals for a change in the relationship by saying, "we are not interested in philosophy. For NOVIB, development is a business. There is nothing idealistic about it. Sarvodaya should conform to a businesslike relationship with NOVIB" (Perera 162). Regarding these statements Perera says, "this language was completely new to us. We were making a serious effort to build up efficiency in all departments of our work while not losing sight of our ideals and objectives" (162-63). He goes on to say, "Sarvodaya's attempts to open a dialogue with NOVIB were scorned. Decisions were taken in The Hague and simply conveyed to Sarvodaya. We were treated as a subcontractor, not a partner" (Perera 163). Perera warns in particular about the dangers of a consortium, saying that consortium donors can scare off non-consortium donors and become monopoly suppliers of aid (Perera 167). Needless to say, the original spirit of partnership with NOVIB had changed significantly over the years.

Many Peruvian NGOs similarly report a decline in the quality of their relationships with NNGOs (INTRAC 50). They attribute this first of all to the fact that

from their viewpoint, NNGOs have since the 1990s begun to behave like official aid agencies, imposing strict measures of accountability.⁸ Secondly, Peruvian NGOs have begun to see NNGOs as competitors for funds. Access to funds for NNGOs has become more difficult, and more funds have become available in Peru for the NGO sector. Many NNGOs have registered their Peruvian offices as local Peruvian NGOs in order to apply for available funds. Obviously this competition does not do much for solidarity between NNGOs and SNGOs.

The ten NNGOs interviewed by Brehm (one of them being NOVIB) seem to hold a more optimistic view than Fowler. Among the NNGOs it was generally felt that partnership is becoming more equal (Brehm 35). People also felt that partnership is now moving back towards a notion of solidarity. The six SNGOs interviewed in 1996 also expressed in "Conversations with Southern Partners" (2003) the viewpoint that there is a positive trend toward allowing southern partners to establish their own agenda. According to Laura Macdonald (124) Latin American NGOs are beginning to demand greater equality. They are also requesting that there be less NNGO involvement in their programs, desiring instead "more strategic forms of support such as training and information sharing" (Macdonald 124). In Brehm's study (43), Latin American partners were seen to be the most expressive and critical, discussing power imbalances more openly than people from other regions.

The NNGOs in Brehm's study (23) do indeed feel that there has been a move away from a "project approach" to a "partner approach," which is apparently what many Latin American NGOs have been requesting. Essentially this means that partnerships have begun to focus less on projects (and the funding processes surrounding those

⁸ This issue is discussed in "Barriers to Authentic Partnership."

projects) and more on the organizational strengthening of SNGOs (often referred to as capacity building). When capacity building is taking place, then the NNGO is funding and supporting the SNGO itself, rather than its project and programs. Some NNGOs try to focus about half of their activities on capacity building and half on project/program support.⁹ Of course, organizational strengthening sometimes goes both ways. One IDEX staff member for example, points out that their partner SNGO, DESMI, has a greater institutional memory due to greater staff stability. She says,

We often portray it as if IDEX helps bring greater stability and financial support to our partners, and in many cases that is true. But it goes both ways. DESMI, as far as I know, has always been more solid and stable financially and in terms of staffing than IDEX. If anything, we have maintained continuity and integrity because of the input and support of people like Jorge [director of DESMI] (email to author 4/28/04).

Some see a problem with the capacity-building rhetoric in that it does not acknowledge that SNGOs too have knowledge and expertise to share.

Regardless of whether the aforementioned trends have caused more NNGOs to move closer to or farther away from authentic partnerships, it is clear that in practice, both in the past and today, partnership has been much less than authentic.

Barriers to Authentic Partnership

As evidenced in *Partnership in Practice*, there are many barriers to and problems associated with authentic partnership. Some of these problems have to do with the

⁹ Some differentiate between projects and programs, a project being a shorter-term, more concrete activity, such as building a dam, where a program would be more long-term and complex, such as a family planning education campaign.

attitudes of people, some with the structures inherent in the aid system, and some may be a combination of both.

Clearly, in any cross-cultural alliance, misunderstandings and clashing viewpoints will often arise. In Making Your Partnership Work, Daniel Rickett addresses some common differences between American culture and many cultures of the global south. He notes, "Most people in the world value relationships above other values. This is in bold contrast to American pragmatism that puts achievement first" (Rickett 46). Also crucial is that Americans, as well as Western Europeans, tend to be forthcoming and simplistic in their communications, while people from many other cultures in both the north and south (Japan, for example) tend to be much more indirect in their dealings with people. Unfortunately, "most Americans are not skilled at understanding people who express themselves indirectly" (Rickett 46). Furthermore, feelings can get hurt when people of a European background are excessively blunt.

Clashes also occur over how development in general is viewed. Dr. Jehan Perera of Sri Lanka describes the donors that the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement worked with as "emphasising a top-down approach, centralisation, professional expertise, materialist values, and the short-term," while he sees Sarvodaya as emphasizing "a participatory bottom-up approach, decentralisation, voluntarism, holistic development and the long-term" (Perera 166).

One particular cultural issue that may cause problems is the relative politeness of certain cultures in the global south. Perera also discusses this issue, saying, "the Sri Lankan culture of being polite and courteous continues to inform Sarvodaya actions" (Perera 166). NGOs may take the "politeness" of certain SNGOs as a sign that they are

currently content with the status quo, when in reality they are not completely revealing their true feelings for fear of being rude or offending.

In addition to politeness, some SNGOs may not express their true feelings due to a lack of self-confidence. This is especially the case with smaller SNGOs. "They may feel that they do not have the authority or the knowledge to challenge what they are hearing and being asked to do" (Townsend 2001).

While SNGOs sometimes have trouble voicing their opinions, NNGOs sometimes have trouble hearing them. The SNGOs interviewed in "Conversations with Southern Partners" (2003) request that NNGO staff "don't come in as 'the expert,'" arguing, "We are all experts," and suggest instead that they ask what they "can bring to the situation to make a difference." Similarly, at the caucus of indigenous pueblos, the opening statement of the creation of capacities requested, "when you speak of development experts, it is necessary to consider the indigenous experts who are directly connected to natural resources" (Caucas 2004). Many people from the global south have become quite fed up with northern "experts" who do not seem to value local knowledge.

Some NNGO attitudes may be unconscious. However, many from the north exhibit conscious condescending attitudes towards SNGOs. Crewe and Harrison, both working in development, have often heard derogatory claims about SNGOs from donors. Some of the worst examples are, "they couldn't organize a picnic let alone a development project," and "they could not manage without us" (76).

A 2000 study by Firoze Manji about British NGOs "suggests that despite years of exposure to and interactions with the Third World, there remains a considerable deficit of respect and trust for their counterparts in the South" (Manji 75). The study asked British

NGOs whether they were in favor of ODA going directly to SNGOs, (as opposed to through NNGOs). Eighty percent of the NNGOs interviewed were against this, and the reasons given were surprising. According to Manji, "what is striking about this list of reasons against direct funding of Southern NGOs is that, were logic to prevail, most Northern NGOs would not qualify to receive funds from ODA either" (Manji 76). For example, it was argued that direct funding would shift the accountability of SNGOs "away from their own constituencies towards donor agencies" (Manji 75). This is ironic as NNGOs are often accountable only to an ODA donor and a self-appointed board, rather than to their constituencies. Furthermore, SNGOs are currently most accountable to NNGOs, not to their constituencies. It should be noted that these attitudes likely at least in part arise from a fear by NNGOs of what their future role would be were direct funding the most common practice.¹⁰ In today's world, NNGOs must constantly re-evaluate what purpose they serve, and this insecurity may lead them to become more critical of their SNGO "partners."

NNGO turnover may also contribute to these attitudes. According to Fowler (1998 142), "northern desk officers are often junior, transient, and substantially less experienced than southern NGDO staff in the practice of development work." "Unable to rely on commanding respect because of their experience, northern NGDO staff tend to use their position as gate-keepers, wielding power through the purse, which distorts negotiation" (Fowler, 1998 142). NNGO turnover is also an issue because it affects the relationship between partners. A staff member of IDEX (International Development Exchange) commented on this issue:

¹⁰ Currently, NNGOs who receive funding from bilateral or multilateral organizations are seen as "intermediaries" between these organizations and SNGOs. However, their roles and the necessity of their existence are continually being questioned.

I would say most of our partners have more staff stability than IDEX does, if only due to the nature of community organizations (they tend to be run in the long-term by the people who founded them, because they are committed to this as their life work) vs. Northern NGOs (they hire whatever person they find with the best qualifications, but that person may move on at any point to another city, another NGO, another career, etc. without any inherent loyalty to the organization). Why does this matter? Well, the person in charge of a program tends to shape that program according to her/his values/principles/perceptions etc. We have had at least 5 Latin America Program Directors over the past 10 years. Five people run a program 5 different ways, and this creates a lack of trust and stability in the relationship with the partners (email to author 4/28/04).

The misconceptions of NNGOs about the success of their partnerships may also be a barrier in and of itself. When NNGOs feel that they are already taking part in authentic partnerships, how can they be expected to try to change them for the better? Manji's aforementioned survey indicates that NNGOs see their relationships with SNGOs as significantly more equal than those between ODA organizations and SNGOs. The evidence shows that many SNGOs do not see it this way. According to Crewe and Harrison,

It is rarely recognized by donors that their relationship with recipients cannot be a meeting of equals. For example, Intermediate Technology staff tend to assume that difficulties with partners should be blamed on particular organizations or differences in objectives, rather than understood as a political relationship (76).

In their eagerness to join partnerships, NGOs may perceive that they are more compatible with another NGO than they really are. When NGOs do not examine each other's values and larger vision, but only examine each other's immediate goals, problems will likely occur. For example, Crewe and Harrison discuss what happened when Intermediate Technology partnered with KENGO (a Kenyan energy NGO) in order to distribute a certain type of stove in Sri Lanka. While both organizations had the same

immediate goal of stove distribution, KENGO was mainly concerned with deforestation, seeing the stoves as a possible option to decrease it, while Intermediate Technology was mainly concerned with helping the rural poor (86). When KENGO realized that stove distribution was not effective in significantly decreasing deforestation, they began to focus more on other activities. In the end, Intermediate Technology basically took charge of stove distribution and the partnership disintegrated (Crewe and Harrison 86).

Differences in capacity between organizations can be equally crucial. In fact, Brehm found in her 2001 study that “The organisational capacity of the Southern partner is perhaps the greatest single determining factor in the nature of the relationship that develops” (27). Smaller organizations receiving funding from larger NNGOs often feel a greater amount of dependence than larger SNGOs do (Brehm 33). Furthermore, differences in capacity may create misunderstandings. Differences in the number of staff or volunteers, amount of funds, and other aspects of organizations create differences in the ability to “get things done” (Rickett 39). This can create tensions and misunderstandings if too much is expected of one partner.

How organizations relate to each other is also important. Oftentimes, NNGOs have one person who deals with a certain partnership with an SNGO, and that person visits the SNGO and has contact with more than one staff member. On the other hand, the staff of SNGOs are often not invited to come visit the NNGO, creating unequal exposure (Malhotra 1997).

SNGOs also tend to find themselves in competition with other SNGOs for donors. This is a barrier to authentic partnership, as many SNGOs find themselves spending their time and money on making themselves presentable to NNGOs, all the while changing

their agenda to please these NNGOs. Postma (454) discusses how, “because the Malian NGOs need to invest heavily in the competition for northern partners and present their organization in a way that northern NGO will find acceptable, they often end up compromising themselves and become mere executing agencies on behalf of the non-national partner.” Some wealthier countries in the south sometimes find themselves in an even weaker bargaining position as they are viewed as not quite as needy as some other countries, and so less deserving of aid (Townsend 2001). In Mexico for example, many NNGOs and ODA donors have either withdrawn or are gradually withdrawing, seeing Mexico as less in need than other countries, causing competition between Mexican NGOs for funding (Townsend 2001).

Townsend also uses the example of Mexican NGOs to discuss the separation of SNGOs from the “knowledge economy” (Townsend 2001). The knowledge economy can include everything from scientific procedures (part of development projects) to accounting skills (organizational knowledge), to information regarding where and how to get funding. According to Townsend,

Ideas and information about these areas of knowledge are traded, discussed and disseminated in a whole variety of ways and in many different forums – face-to-face meetings between colleagues and friends; in email discussions; at parties and social gatherings; and from journals and books. They are also deliberately kept secret by competing NGOs, or may simply be inaccessible if, for example, an NGO doesn’t have a fluent Spanish or even English speaker, or someone who knows how to fill in a log frame, or doesn’t have access to books or journals, or staff who can go to the right social and professional events.

The knowledge economy tends to be dominated by NNGOs and a few larger, more powerful, SNGOs. The rest of the NGOs, located primarily in the south, have less of a chance to both contribute to and learn from the knowledge economy. This imbalance is not conducive to authentic partnerships. A staff member from a West African NGO puts

it bluntly: “northern NGOs have a monopoly on information and communication with donors and international agencies—we want to be dependent on our own means, but how can we not be dependent on [northern NGOs]” (Postma 453)?

While some SNGOs find themselves outside of information loops that they would like to be in, others find themselves in relationships that they never truly desired to be in. One West African NGO complains that “partnership as an instrument of development was imposed on us by northern NGOs” (Postma 452). It should not be assumed that all NGOs, northern or southern, desire to work in partnerships that strive to be “authentic.” Some SNGOs for example, may desire to work in “partnership” with NNGOs in order to secure funding, but they do not necessarily desire the closeness that the word often implies. Many SNGOs also may not put full effort into attaining relationships that resemble authentic partnership due to their resentment to the use of the term itself. As previously noted, many SNGOs feel resentful about the use of the term because they feel that it really does not describe the relationships that actually exist between NNGOs and SNGOs (Malhotra 1997). They hear NNGOs talking about “partnership” and “solidarity” but what they actually see may often be NNGOs lording over them. Authentic partnerships cannot exist if both parties do not desire and work for them.

Imposing a certain type of partnership is also an issue. Often times the NNGO comes to the table with a pre-set standard agreement that the SNGO must sign onto (Brehm 14). If there is no mutuality or equality in the negotiation process of what the partnership should be, these aspects of “authentic” partnership will likely not exist in the partnership itself either.

While sometimes it is the partnerships themselves that are imposed, other times it is the ending of a partnership that is imposed by the NNGO. There has always been an assumption that the goal of a development worker is to “work herself out of a job” (Hoksbergen 2002). In the early days of development, back when most NNGOs were primarily operational, the idea was to bring the community of focus to a certain level of self-reliance. At this point, the NNGO would move to a new community, or return home (Hoksbergen 2002). With the move toward partnering with SNGOs, the idea was now to help the SNGO build its capacity to a point where it no longer needs to partner with the NNGO. A paradox exists here. “True partnership is achieved at the moment of mutual independence and equality, yet this is generally the moment the partnership ends” (Goold, personal communication 2000).

The eventual goal of “phase out” is rarely questioned in the development community. Hoksbergen (2002) discusses why some staff members of CRWRC (the Christian NNGO discussed in “Partnership in Practice”) are reconsidering “phase out.” “Phase out” can be a barrier to authentic partnership because it sometimes means the ending of a relationship that is functioning and evolving well. Why start over from scratch after spending all of that time creating effective partnerships? A second issue particular to CRWRC is that of the 31 SNGO partners that commented on “phase out,” all 31 were against it. Andrew Gwairangmin of the Nigerian NGO CRUDAN, says “if you’re in partnership with another organization, then you don’t just quit. African culture values friendship, like a brother. You never stop being a brother. Phase out is a project-oriented idea” (Hoksbergen 2002). Daniel Rickett describes the two different ways that the south and the north look at the issue.

For Western, goal-oriented partners, it (the partnership) is usually over when the objective is accomplished. For many non-Western partners it is never really over because it is a relationship, not a task. Even when the relationship has served its purpose, non-Western partners invariably strive to keep the relationship alive. This penchant for fraternal relationships is one of the wonderful gifts non-Western cultures have in abundance and Anglo-Americans sorely lack. Learning to live and work in community is one of the great benefits of intercultural partnership (Rickett 47-48).

Hence, the planned phasing out of partnerships can also be a barrier to authentic partnership because of the different cultural perspectives on it.

Unequal transparency and accountability are also huge barriers. As previously mentioned, one-way structures of accountability lead to one-way transparency, and both are examples of the lack of mutuality in partnerships. According to Fowler, "the north is organizationally less transparent than the south, which disempowers the latter" (Fowler, 1998 Partnership 143). Furthermore, NNGOs are increasingly dependent on their governments for funding (Malhotra), and ODA donors are increasingly imposing stricter regulations on NNGOs (INTRAC, 1998 50). Hence, due to their relationships with ODA donors, NNGOs may find themselves imposing stricter accountability mechanisms on SNGOs than they (NNGOs) would like. Although relationships between ODA donors and NNGOs are also referred to as "partnerships," the evidence suggests that these donors tend to tightly control NNGOs, even more so than the latter control SNGOs (Lister 11; Malhotra 1997).

In addition to accountability mechanisms, this control of NNGOs by ODA donors significantly affects the funding processes of NNGOs and their SNGO partners. Brehm finds that partnerships sometimes end solely due to cuts in government funding (31). On the other hand, NNGOs sometimes rush to develop relationships with more SNGOs when

funding becomes available (Brehm 52). This can be tricky as engaging in too many partnerships makes quality partnerships less likely (Brehm, 29).

Another issue is the need to show results to ODA donors. A staff member of Pueblito commented that while she feels that partners may feel equality in some aspects of the relationship, “always having to justify fund use to CIDA does create an imbalance” (personal communication 2004). NNGOs may desire to support the new initiatives of SNGOs, even if they are perceived as “risky.” Furthermore, they may understand that development takes time. But regardless, many NNGOs cannot take the risk with their “constituency and funders (sic) back home by getting burned in a partnership that carries too many risks and may take too long to generate results” (Postma 452). In addition to limiting the partnerships they may enter into, this issue likely either causes many NNGOs to refrain from supporting some of the initiatives of their local SNGO partners, or causes them to change the initiatives to their own liking through the power that they hold.

NNGOs naturally do hold a tremendous amount of power in the relationship due to their control over money. This is not to say that money is the only important or even the most important resource exchanged between the parties in SNGO-NNGO partnerships: one of the premises behind partnership is that both parties have something of value to give to the relationship. However, NGOs tend to plan around money, and the fact that NNGOs hypothetically can retract their funds at anytime is a significant barrier to authentic partnership. “When northern donors suddenly change funding priorities, there can be a serious impact on work in the south. Southern NGOs may be left without funding or face having to quickly re-define their programs” (Conversations with Southern Partners 2003).

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement faced such a problem with NOVIB, their main donor at that time. In 1993, when the Movement was being singled out by an attack from the current president of Sri Lanka, NOVIB cut 42% from their planned grant for 1994/95, plunging Sarvodaya into a financial crisis (Perera 156). According to Perera, this crisis caused Sarvodaya to rethink its relationship with donors.

Fowler also argues that there is

perpetual insecurity within Southern NGDOs that their funds will be cut off, leading to a child-parent stance in interactions, accompanied by outbursts of assertiveness and remorse which cloud communication and generate feelings which act as barriers to open dialogue" (1998 143).

On the northern side, it is difficult for the staff of NNGOs to avoid throwing their weight around while "holding the purse strings" (Fowler 142). They are as, Dr. Perera (167) says, "ordinary humans after all, and money tends to equal power in the world."

According to Brehm, "it is in the area of shared governance that there is the least mutuality within the partnership process between Northern and Southern NGOs" (46). She says, "the NGOs in the study maintain a respect for the autonomy of the Southern Partner and most would not expect to influence their decision-making processes, particularly at Board level, in a formal way." "However, there is at the same time a recognition of the indirect influence the Northern NGO has as a donor setting funding priorities" (Brehm 46). "The power of the donor is . . . indirect, implicit, and often disguised" (Brehm 46).

The barriers to authentic partnership are not few nor are they simplistic. Partnership relationships are complex, multifaceted, and often involve more than two parties. While differences in culture and ways of working make partnerships difficult

enough, power imbalances often make the word “partnership” a very inaccurate description of relationships.

Chapter 3: Creating Authentic Partnerships

Overcoming Barriers: How NNGOs Endeavor to Create Better Partnerships

Unfortunately, there are few examples in the literature discussing how NNGOs actually go about trying to meet their partnership goals. Brehm's study of ten European NGOs is an exception. As previously mentioned, shared governance is an area of partnerships where mutuality tends to be sorely lacking, due to the indirect influence of the northern NGO (Brehm 46). There have been some attempts to compensate for this. Some NNGOs in Brehm's study have a small advisory group of partners that feeds into board-level decision-making (Brehm 47). However, most NNGOs in the study are not in favor of formal partner representation on their boards, "because this relates to the identity of the organisations," as many NNGOs have strong national roots based on membership and they say that they do not want to turn into multi-national organizations (Brehm 47). Similarly a staff member of Pueblito said that in her opinion, partners do not sit on each other's boards because the boards govern the organizations, whereas programs are the shared process (personal communication 2004).

Some NNGOs do have SNGO partner representation on their board. IDEX, for example, has one representative from each region that serves on its board. Jorge Santiago, coordinator of IDEX partner DESMI, sees this as very positive. In IDEX's quarterly newsletter, Santiago comments, "IDEX had the foresight to begin this process of bringing representatives of its partners on the board because it sees that new ideas emerge when there exists a plurality of opinions and viewpoints." He recounts his experience on the

board, saying, "Through respect and dialogue we united our efforts to link our local reality to a global vision" (Partner Commentaries and Announcements 2003). As a result of SNGO partner requests during IDEX's 2003 review process, the three regions that IDEX works in now nominate their own representatives to the IDEX board (Hobson 42).

IDEX also has participatory mechanisms for selecting new partners. Also as a result of the 2003 review process, IDEX has developed a procedure "whereby all regional partners nominate organizations in their region and then work with IDEX to screen and select new partners according to a clear and agreed set of criteria" (Hobson 42). These mechanisms work to balance out the inevitable inequality in the area of shared governance, by taking power away from IDEX and giving it to SNGO partners.

In order to try to avoid 'imposing an agenda' on SNGO partners, NOVIB (Oxfam Netherlands) has a principle of not mixing dialogue with funding, so as not to influence the partner's agenda (Brehm 24). Exactly how the two are separated is unclear. IDEX does seem to keep the two separate to a certain extent, as IDEX gives all partners \$45,000 over a period of three years, and the amount does not vary considerably from year to year. The only issue where dialogue takes place in relation to funding is on how much funding should go to each program. Each partner proposes how to allocate the funds that will go to their organization, and this is discussed and agreed upon with IDEX (The IDEX Partnership Model 1999). IDEX also has recently agreed to work with each partner for a minimum of six years rather than only three, so that the partner has a chance to "build their capacity in a meaningful way during the partnership" (Hobson 43). However, in the past, one partnership was ended before the three- year period was over (at the time three years was the minimum) due to "serious organizational, governance,

and financial accountability problems that were beyond remedy by IDEX” (IDEX, IDEX 2003 Annual Report).

In order to minimize the power imbalances caused by funding, many organizations keep the amount of funding small, placing greater emphasis on organizing, planning, training, and building organizational integrity (Hoksbergen 2002). CRWRC also has a matching grant program in some countries, in which locally raised funds are matched with funds from CRWRC (Hoksbergen 2002).

Formal partnership agreements that cover all of the dimensions of a partnership (not only funding) are also useful in drawing attention away from the funding dimension of the relationship to focus on other important aspects of it. Some NNGOs, such as Pueblito (personal communication 2004) have a general partnership template that SNGOs may make changes to before the agreement is signed. Other NNGOs, such as NOVIB, draw up a partner agreement with each SNGO partner individually (Brehm, 45). This addresses the barrier of northern imposed partnerships.

As previously mentioned, accountability also tends to center around funding, and even when evaluating non-financial aspects of the work, accountability tends to be one-way. Some NNGOs have begun to give questionnaires to SNGOs, and others have a complaints procedure for SNGOs (Brehm 46). IDEX has an annual and three year review process in which partner's evaluate their own and each other's fulfillment of commitments (email to author 4/29/04). Their 2003 IDEX Democratic Principles of Partnership Questionnaire inquires about SNGO perceptions on equality, accountability, contentment or criticisms in certain areas, and rating the importance of certain aspects of the relationship. (Summary Analysis 2003).

Knowledge of and exposure to partner NGOs can also be quite imbalanced. Some NNGOs such as IDEX (About IDEX 2004) and NOVIB (Brehm 42) often invite staff from SNGO partners to come and visit them. IDEX (email to author, 4/29/04), Pueblito (personal communication 2004) and probably many others also hold regular regional meetings for southern partners to get together. This enables the organizations to share knowledge and ideas, and also enables South-South cooperation to take place.

Acknowledging SNGO separation from the knowledge economy, IDEX provides southern partners contacts in the U.S. such as fair trade organizations and donors.

While visits to the north enable SNGOs to become closer with NNGO partners, some NNGOs are experimenting with field offices (country or regional) in order to be closer to SNGO partners (Brehm 39). This closeness is crucial for creating trust. Results have tended to be positive. For example, "so far, there is anecdotal evidence that the establishment of the Kenya Office of DanChurchAid has strengthened relationships, and Partners are more open to expressing their real needs and problems than before" (Brehm 39). On the other hand, NNGOs setting up field offices may run the risk of controlling their SNGO partners. "There is a balance to be struck between proximity and interference" (Brehm 39). Furthermore, it seems that these field offices would increase the problem of unequal exposure. Some NNGOs have also begun to reduce the number of their partnerships with SNGOs in order to develop closer partnerships, "recognising that there is a limit to the number of close partnerships that staff can develop" (Brehm 29).

In trying to ensure compatibility between partners, NNGOs are taking different approaches. Some are less concerned with what type of SNGO they are working with than they are concerned with the capacity and structures of the SNGO. As stated in

“Barriers to and Problems Associated with Partnership,” capacity differences are seen by some to be a very large barrier to equal partnerships based on mutuality (Brehm 27).

Other NNGOs focus more on the ideology of an organization when choosing a partner. IDEX, for example, works with partners that work in areas of greatest economic need in eight focus countries. These organizations must have: a mission and purpose compatible with that of IDEX, a focus on economic justice, participatory and democratic processes for community decision making, and they must include women in the management structure (IDEX Partnership Model 1999). IDEX developed these criteria with current SNGO partners (IDEX Partnership Model 1999).

The organization of MS Danish Volunteers tries to ensure compatible partnerships by carrying out a very detailed organizational assessment with its partners. MS asks many questions in order to get to know the organization. This may give MS a better chance of forming successful partnerships. On the negative side, “as MS gets to know the organisation, its constituency and the extent of democracy in decision-making, partners can feel the questions are intrusive” (Brehm 40). Furthermore, the process is time-consuming. According to Brehm, “there is therefore some initial scepticism to the approach amongst Partners. However, many Partners appreciate the process of partnership as it develops” (Brehm 40). However, this also exacerbates the problem of “unequal exposure.” The process of ‘getting to know one another’ is very unequal (Brehm 40). Redd Barna-Asia ¹¹ reports ambivalent feelings on this:

¹¹ Redd Barna is a northern NGO with its head office located in Norway and Redd Barna-Asia is a southern branch of Redd Barna. Judging by the context it seems that the speaker of the quote is most likely local, and speaking from the perspective of an SNGO. When the speaker says “international NGO” this means the same thing as NNGO.

In most cases the international NGOs (NNGOs) ask us questions which out of respect for their privacy and human integrity, we would never ask of them. Indeed, it is crucially important for us to identify true international friends and yet this process is more difficult for us than it is for the international NGOs (NNGOs) (Redd Barna-Asia 1997).

While striving to overcome certain barriers requires putting specific mechanisms in place, other barriers simply require the rethinking of assumptions. Regarding the length of partnerships, many CRWRC staff recently are beginning to question the idea of “phase out,” believing that while some partnerships should not continue, it should not be assumed from the beginning that every partnership will eventually end (Hoksbergen 2002). It will be interesting to see how these ideological changes play out in the long run.

Can Authentic Partnership Exist In Relationships Involving Funding?

The question of whether truly authentic partnerships can exist in relationships involving funding is difficult to answer. There are always exceptions to generalizations, and anything is potentially possible. There certainly are many barriers involved. Cultural differences create tensions and misunderstandings. Ultimately, probably the only way to deal with this is through much patience, listening and open-mindedness on both sides. Imbalances in access to knowledge can be compensated for to some extent, but the north does have a distinct advantage in having a greater number of connections. Differences in capacity and values are best dealt with by ensuring compatibility from the start, yet problems will arise. Northern attitudes can certainly be a barrier, and many NNGO staff are probably more paternalistic in their actions than they realize. However, although the non-funding problems discussed above can be significant barriers, it seems that there will be situations when each would not be a significant barrier. Capacity differences are not

always a problem, Northern attitudes vary greatly, and some situations of cross-cultural communication are better than others.

However, regardless of the severity of the aforementioned barriers, they pale in comparison to the barriers surrounding funding. According to Dalton and Kuechler

An abiding problem in building authentic partnerships between northern NGOs and those elsewhere is the transfer of finance between them. Where this does not occur, for example within parts of the large scale, often member-based, international environmental and women's movements and in interaction between small lobby and advocacy organizations, authentic partnerships seems easier to realize.

In short, the only barriers that seem to exist constantly and inevitably are those surrounding funding.

There are examples of NNGOs (most often those that do not receive much ODA funding) that have clearly made a great effort to achieve authentic partnership. IDEX is one such organization. They have tried to bring the focus away from funding toward mutual strengths, through such measures as steady (and limited) funding, providing many skills and resources other than funding, having SNGO representation on their board, and including partners in many processes, such as the election of new partners (Partnership Model 1999).

In 2003, IDEX partners evaluated the partnership extensively. In the important areas of accountability, communication, and transparency, IDEX did quite well. The area in which they did a bit less well was equality. Fifty five percent of partners felt that equality had been substantially or fully implemented. According to one IDEX staff member,

there is a perceived gap in the implementation of the tenets of equality, and while there was no elaboration on how things could be improved, there was an expressed dissatisfaction. Overtly it seems like an equal and democratic partnership is in place, but covertly there are power dynamics propelled by the concept of funding, which leads to IDEX

having the upper-hand in decision making in every area”(Summary Analysis 2003).

In more specific terms, another IDEX staff member said,

I personally think that there is no way to achieve “equality” between funders and grantees (no matter how grassroots and solidarity-oriented the funder is) simply because one party inevitably controls the flow of money and can cut it off if they are displeased. As much as we try to encourage our partners to be open and honest with us, at the end of the day they are not going to show us the tough stuff (a program that is failing, internal problems between their staff) because they think that maybe if we don’t like it we may ultimately not continue the partnership. We try to dispel this perception but it remains (email to author 4/29/04).

This seems to come back to what many in the literature have argued; that the relationship cannot be equal, because the NNGO can do to the SNGO what the SNGO cannot do to the NNGO.

Are relationships in areas other than international development in which money is exchanged in one direction always unequal? Not necessarily. It is not true that the party giving the money always has more power. A teacher generally has a certain amount of power over a student, for example, despite the fact that the student is usually paying the teacher. A middle-aged woman choosing to take piano lessons from another middle-aged woman has a certain amount of power in the relationship. The teacher knows that if she does not do a satisfactory job, the student can take her money elsewhere. On the other hand, it is generally the teacher that organizes a plan of study, as the teacher “knows best.” Both have substantial power in the relationship.

In the NNGO-SNGO partnership relationship, an important question to consider is which organization needs the other more? SNGOs need NNGOs for funding, connections, and knowledge, while NNGOs need SNGOs for knowledge and legitimacy. If there is any way that authentic partnership can exist, it is likely related to the latter.

Originally, the majority of NNGOs were operational, setting up in southern countries and directly providing services to communities. However, pressure from donors and SNGOs has caused many NNGOs to cease to be operational and to work only through southern partners (Brehm 21). Hence, these NNGOs need SNGO partners in order to be able to do their work. Even for those NNGOs that are still operational, this is increasingly looked down upon, and partnership is seen as a necessity. For example, in their Civil Society Newsletter Keny-Guyer of Mercy Corps says, "every relief and development organization worth its weight in salt works with and through local organizations and associations" (1). Operational NNGOs are not perceived to have legitimacy, as this comes from being connected to the people one is trying to help. According to Fowler,

The ultimate legitimacy of development NGOs, south and Northern, can only be derived from what they achieve in their relationship with the intended beneficiaries of their existence and efforts- the poor. Southern NGOs can obtain this legitimacy directly in the Third World; most Northern NGOs that are not operational can only obtain this via their partnerships (1992 21).

As changes occur in the aid world, the role of NNGOs is continually being questioned. As SNGOs grow and become more professional, the direct funding of SNGOs by ODA donors is increasing. In Bangladesh for example, half of the money that goes to SNGOs from SIDA (Sweden's bilateral development agency) goes directly to them, rather than through Swedish NGOs (Lewis 1998). What is unclear is what added value northern NGOs provide in this scheme. After all, going through NNGOs adds more overhead costs and uses valuable time. One answer to the "value added" question is that NNGOs are in the best position to engage in effective and authentic partnerships with SNGOs. They are more similar in size and capacity to SNGOs than, say, bilateral organizations or the UN (multilateral), and they can play important roles in advocacy and

public education without having as strong a specific political agenda as the bilateral and, sometimes, multilateral organizations have.

Some (Malhotra 1997) make the argument that NNGOs really must strive for authentic partnerships if they desire to continue to be relevant to the larger scheme of things. Malhotra even predicted that many NNGOs would cease to exist by 2000 due to their focus on short-term survival, rather than using authentic partnership as a long-term strategy.¹² While authentic partnership might be better for the long-term relevance and (possibly) survival of NNGOs, Malhotra points out that “there does not appear to be anything in the NNGO make-up, funding structure (from either public or official donors) or reward and incentive systems that would ensure that changes enabling more genuine partnerships to emerge with SNGOs will actually occur,” unless SNGOs pressure NNGOs enormously on this issue.

To elaborate on this point, NNGOs must be accountable to ODA donors in many ways, but the quality of their partnerships is not something they are accountable for. If ODA donors were more concerned about the quality of NNGO-SNGO partnerships, they could, for example, establish a system in which the SNGO reports back to the ODA donor on their evaluation of the work of the NNGO, both in general and in relation to the partnership dynamics themselves.

Similarly, NNGOs are somewhat accountable to the public. On their websites, they detail what they do, what their values and priorities are, and their financial information. However, many (maybe most) NNGOs do not even organize formal evaluation of the quality of their partnerships. For those that do, it certainly would not be the first thing that possible contributors would look for. Imagine if there was an

¹² To my knowledge no collapse of NNGOs has begun to happen.

organization like the American Institute of Philanthropy solely dedicated to rating NGO effectiveness in working with partners. Individuals interested in contributing could go to the website and see how SNGOs rated each NGO partner. The organization could also list which NGOs have broken off their partnerships with SNGOs, moving some of the blame from the SNGO to the NGO, as it currently tends to fall on the former.

Essentially what is being described is a dream world, in which donors and the public hold NGOs accountable in their partnerships, and NGOs compete with each other based on their partnerships; those who have the most authentic partnerships receive the most funding from donors and private contributors.

This dream world will most likely never exist, but if it did, it does seem that authentic partnerships could possibly also exist. Holding NGOs to higher standards in some areas might balance out existing inequalities. If the success of NGOs were to depend on the authenticity of their partnerships, it would seem much more probable that authentic partnerships could exist.

While it seems that there are no mechanisms in play that would take power away from NGOs, it is possible that the rise in direct funding could affect the power imbalance. Those SNGOs that find themselves financially stable due to the funds they are receiving from ODA donors may be able to hold NGOs to a higher standard, as more should be expected from them in terms of partnership. Furthermore, a rise in the direct funding of SNGOs means a decrease in the ODA funding of NGOs. This means that many NGOs may have to increase their private fundraising efforts. While this will be difficult and it may threaten the survival of some NGOs, it is crucial as NGOs who

receive little or no ODA funding have the most autonomy, and as evidenced at least anecdotally, they generally seem to have the most equitable partnerships.¹³

In this questioning environment, other changes are taking place. More NNGOs are focusing on advocacy in addition to direct project work (operationally or through SNGOs). While it is important that SNGOs engage in advocacy in order to directly represent themselves, “a certain comparative advantage for global advocacy work can be argued to exist among northern NGOs due to their proximity to donors, organizational sophistication, and availability of resources to direct toward advocacy efforts” (Lindenberg and Bryant 177). Advocacy is another answer to the question of what NNGOs can do in the new aid system. Southerners point out that NNGOs have an important role to play both in lobbying and consultation and in educating their constituencies (the northern public) about development issues.

Since the 1970s, the number of formal mechanisms for NGO/government consultation has grown steadily (Lindenberg and Bryant 196). In addition to governments, NGOs are often consulting multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the UN. The late 1990s in particular saw important consultations with these organizations (Lindenberg and Bryant 196). This change is important, as anecdotal evidence indicates that equal and effective partnerships tend to most often exist when advocacy, rather than project implementation, is involved (Brehm 33). In relationships in which NNGOs are both funding projects and working in advocacy, the advocacy aspect of the relationship will at least bring some equality to the relationship.

Although major changes are occurring, Malhotra’s “partnership or bust” scenario may be a bit extreme. After all, there are many more SNGOs than NNGOs, which gives

¹³ Katalysis, to be discussed later on in this section, is a notable exception.

the latter an advantage.¹⁴ Furthermore, if working with SNGOs was no longer an option for some reason, NNGOs could possibly look for other connections in the south, such as southern governments. However, it is not unreasonable to think that SNGOs might be able to use both the current climate of questioning the value of NNGOs and the rise of direct funding to their advantage. On their own, there may not be a tremendous amount that SNGOs can do. Fowler discusses suggestions that successful SNGOs give about achieving better partnerships. Some of these are “be transparent in your internal dealings, don’t hide failure when it occurs,” and “be sure of yourself, who you are, and what you stand for, because ‘good donors do not like you to be donor driven’” (1998 151). These suggestions are easier said than done. While nobody would advocate hiding failure, experience shows that often times donors want to see positive results. Being “sure of yourself” is important, but it seems that donors often want to fund SNGOs who will adjust to their values and needs, rather than keeping their own.

If SNGOs were to cooperate rather than compete, however, it might be possible that they could join together to stand up to NNGOs. According to Chiriboga, SNGO networks have proven to be somewhat effective in the world of advocacy, (Chiriboga 1999). Taking this idea a step further, I do not see why small groups of SNGOs working in the area of program implementation could not get together to form SNGO webs. A group of say, five Central American SNGOs working on similar issues could become a block unit, which would only accept partnerships as a group. In this situation, the NNGO would not have the power to kick an SNGO out of the partnership if it were unhappy with the way the SNGO was operating. Furthermore, the SNGOs could set down ground rules;

¹⁴ As of 1990 there were about 2,500 NNGOs (UNDP 84-91). One estimate of SNGOs puts the current number in the 20,000-50,000 range (UNDP 86).

for example, that each member of the partnership must be given the same amount of funds. This would address the problem of SNGOs trying to “impress” NNGOs, both in order to receive more funds and in order to ensure that they do not get “kicked out” of the partnership (as mentioned by an IDEX staff member). If one member of the group felt bullied by the NNGO, the whole group could threaten to leave the partnership. This would be especially useful if the amount of money that the SNGOs in the alliance received was a fairly small percentage of their entire budget. This way, were the NNGO to leave the group, the SNGOs would stand to lose only a small amount of their budget for the near future, but a small NNGO might lose half of its partners.

If SNGOs did not desire to ban together in quite this way, they could also simply agree on “codes of conduct” in their relations with NNGOs (Yates 15). If all Central American SNGOs for example, were to agree on a code of conduct for working with NNGOs, NNGOs would be hard pressed not to abide by that code. However, this is a difficult issue, as partnerships do vary tremendously, and many NNGOs and SNGOs may have different ways of working and partnering.

Along the same lines, Yates suggests that SNGOs collaborate to develop locally appropriate uniform standards and procedures on matters relating to accountability and monitoring. There is no question that NNGOs and ODA donors will continue to demand accountability from the south. However, if some northerners truly believe that the south knows how to best develop the south, then it follows that they would also believe that the south knows how to best judge which programs are “effective” or not.

There is at least one case study that implies that authentic partnership may currently exist. This case study is discussed in this section in order to give concrete

examples of measures that may make authentic partnership a real possibility. In Choosing Partnership: The Evolution of the Katalysis Model, Ronald F. Jones (1993) discusses the NNGO Katalysis and its partnerships with SNGOs. Katalysis truly seems to have a partnership “web.” Over the years, the organization has undergone many changes in order to improve its partnerships. Some of these changes have been initiated by Katalysis, and some have come from the suggestions of SNGOs. Katalysis focuses on micro-enterprise development, women’s community banking, and environmentally sustainable development (Jones 9). It was established in 1984, and its first partnership was created in 1985, when Katalysis cofounder Bob Graham and Belizean Carlos Santos co-founded BEST in Belize (Jones 6). In 1985, Graham became the first chairperson of BEST and Santos took a seat on the Katalysis board.

In 1989, Katalysis partnered with two new SNGOs; CAPS of the Caribbean, and ODEF of Honduras (Jones 14). At this time the board policy was formalized, “the executive director of each southern organization would become a member of the Katalysis board, and each southern partner would select a Katalysis board member to sit on its own board as well” (Jones 12). In 1990 the executive directors of partner organizations also began gathering the day after Katalysis board meetings to discuss the partnership issues that affected their organizations (Jones 12).

In 1991 Katalysis decided that each year the Katalysis board meeting would rotate, sometimes it would be in California, sometimes it would be in Latin America. Also, all meetings would be held in both English and Spanish (Jones 13). That same year, Katalysis and its partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which set out the policies that govern partner interaction and partner decision-making (Jones 13). The

document also “officially transformed the Partnership from a constellation of separate agreements between Katalysis and each Partner into a truly multilateral coalition” (Jones 13). This is very important as it places Katalysis as just one partner in a web of partners, rather than as a head partner connected to other partners, which were only loosely connected to each other.

It is clear that the partnership really was a web both in speech and in practice. In 1990 and 1991, one partner organization, CAPS, was having major financial and management problems. The organization ended up disbanding, but Katalysis, BEST, and ODEF gave much time and financial support to CAPS in its time of need (Jones 15). The partnership also was long-term oriented from the beginning. “The Partnership participants agreed . . . that like a marriage, *this partnership is for life*” (Jones 19). This did not mean that “divorce” was impossible, but simply that ending the relationships was not a part of the plan.

In 1990 Katalysis initiated a new fundraising policy. Before 1990, Katalysis would finance a twice-annual fundraising appeal to its supporters, and then Katalysis would decide how that revenue would be spent. “Now all Partners share the printing and mailing costs equally and then vote on how the resulting funds will be allocated. Southern participation in overhead costs like this is extremely rare if not unprecedented in international development” (Jones 25). Partners also call on donors together. For example, when ODEF, BEST, and Katalysis were in Washington D.C. in 1992, they met with donors such as USAID and the World Bank to discuss funding (Jones 26). In this way, Katalysis acted simply as another partner in the web of partners, rather than as an intermediary higher up on the aid chain.

The Partners agreed to consult each other when hiring staff that would be interacting with the partners (Jones 26). Accountability also flows in many directions. The southern partners have evaluated Katalysis, and southern partners have evaluated each other (Jones 27). Training is also multi-directional. Katalysis and SNGO partners have conducted regional workshops together. For example, two staff members from Katalysis and BEST held a participatory management workshop for ODEF board, staff, and management (Jones 27). This acknowledged southern knowledge and experience.

In 1992 two more SNGOs were added to the partnership, CDRO and MUDE of Guatemala (Jones 22). After working with the other partners for a year, they became full partners in 1993. When CDRO and MUDE were transitioning to becoming a part of the partnership, BEST and ODEF provided them with substantial assistance (Jones 24). Many other south-south exchanges have taken place as well.

One of the most crucial changes that has taken place in Katalysis is the formation of a "Partnership Board of Directors" (Jones 29). Each executive director serves on the board, and each has one vote. As of 1993, the plan was that the new board would "govern the activities and operations of the Partnership" (Jones 29). In 1993, one suggestion made by this new board was that each SNGO be allowed to select any representative from the partnership (from another organization) to sit on its board, not just one from Katalysis, as this would "decentralize participation in shared governance from Katalysis to the Partnership at large" (Jones 30). Edwards, writing in 1996, also claims that the responsibility for overall decision-making in the partnership rotates to a different partner on a regular basis.

In sum, this partnership is characterized by: shared governance, joint fundraising and joint management of those funds, multi-directional accountability, multi-directional training and learning, and south-south cooperation.

Is this partnership “authentic?” It should be noted that the book Choosing Partnership: The Evolution of the Katalysis Model, while acknowledging tough issues, seems to try to come at the Katalysis partnership from a very positive perspective. Also, as often is the case, the majority of the opinions cited in the book come from the north.

As of 1993, Jones says, “Achieving full equality was still an issue to the southern partners,” implying that from their perspective, full equality had not yet been achieved (Jones 28). However, certain changes did take place during 1993. The “Partnership Board of Directors” was created, replacing the Katalysis board as the “Partnership’s ultimate authority” (Jones 28). Also, as mentioned before, it was recommended that each southern partner’s board be allowed to select a representative from Katalysis or another SNGO, rather than only Katalysis (Jones 30).

There are now 13 SNGOs in the partnership (Bootstrap Banking). Unfortunately, there have not been any more Katalysis publications similar to the one written in 1993.¹⁵ It would be interesting to know how the partnership has evolved since then. What is unclear is how the innovative practices of the Katalysis partnership have affected power in relation to funding. It appears as though the Partnership Board of Director’s have power over policies affecting the partnership in the broad sense, but it is unclear as to what extent (if at all) this board has a say over the programs of different partners. The joint fundraising processes of the Katalysis Partnership are innovative, as everyone who takes part in the fundraising (which is all partners) may vote on how the money will be

¹⁵ I did request an interview from Katalysis, but I received no reply.

spent. What is also unclear, however, is how Katalysis chooses to disburse the funds that it receives from USAID and other donors for its partners. If Katalysis was unhappy with the work of a certain partner, could it significantly decrease funding to that partner (without the approval of the other southern partners)?

This partnership is certainly very powerful, because unlike with many one-on-one relationships (with one NNGO and one SNGO), Katalysis cannot easily leave the partnership, because it would lose all of its partners in one moment. Also, it can probably be assumed that all partners (through the board of directors) would have to vote on forcing one partner to leave the partnership, although this is not explicitly stated. This is a crucial aspect of the relationship, as it is integral to the amount of power that Katalysis possesses. On the Southern side, if Katalysis were to leave the partnership, the SNGOs could retain the partnership and simply continue to ask USAID and others for funding directly, as the SNGOs are already well known as a group to many donors.

Another important idea to take away from this case study is that focusing in only one region may be beneficial. All current members of the partnership besides Katalysis (located in California) are located in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Bootstrap Banking). This makes for easier south-south collaboration, and similar cultures makes for easier communication. An important question here is whether SNGOs can use the legitimacy that NNGOs gain from them to their advantage. What it really all comes down to is whether, either by the actions of SNGOs or NNGOs, or by continuing changes within the aid system, NNGOs will grow to need individual SNGOs as much as SNGOs need them. If this happens, then there probably is a real chance for authentic

partnership. If not, then authentic partnership probably is not a realistic reality for the vast majority of NGOs.

Creating Better Partnerships

The previous section questioned whether authentic partnerships can exist. Even if we were to assume that partnerships that closely resemble the definition of authentic partnership cannot exist, it is still useful to strive for better relationships between NNGOs and SNGOs. Furthermore, many NNGOs may not be striving to have authentic partnerships, but they may want to improve certain aspects of their partnerships, such as trust or communication. This section will discuss ways in which partnerships might be improved.

Some NNGOs have experimented with downwards measures of accountability (SNGOs evaluating NNGOs). Fowler takes this a step further and argues that every evaluation or impact study should include an evaluation of the relationships themselves. He points out that working under the idea that "all transactions contributing to the project must be subject to independent scrutiny will reduce the present tendency to place the burden of performance on NGDOs [non-governmental development organizations] in the South and East, neglecting pre-conditions set up by the North in the beginning" (Fowler, 1998 150). While NNGOs affect the outcomes of programs through their process in the dialogue, it is the SNGOs who tend to be held responsible for the outcomes of the programs, as they are the implementers. However, this is unfair as one can certainly implement a poorly thought out idea well, and still receive poor results.

Fowler also advocates for real, not token consultation. Even the most well meaning, solidarity minded NNGOs find that in the end, they have more power over decisions than SNGOs. However, publishing areas of disagreement along with the policy itself shows respect for all involved, and it also indicates where tensions are likely to arise in the implementation of programs (Fowler, 1998 150).

Fowler also suggests that each party involved set out mutual rights and expectations prior to engaging in a partnership. In this simple exercise, each party writes down what it feels are its own rights, as well as the rights that it believes its partner possesses. This way the parties can identify where they agree and where negotiation is necessary. For example, an NNGO might expect to have access to all information about the SNGO, including the areas it is not financing, whereas the SNGO might disagree. If the NGOs cannot compromise on areas of disagreement, they could either look for other possible partners, or simply take the relationship for what it is, possibly dropping the "partnership" rhetoric (Fowler, 1998 150).

Similarly, it is important that NGOs work with other NGOs that are compatible with their values and ways of working. Yet, the questions that NNGOs ask are sometimes seen as intrusive and inappropriate (Brehm 40). Fowler suggests that NGOs jointly use a partnership checklist to look critically at whether conditions for the desired type of partnership exist (Fowler, 1998 147). Some of the features of compatibility on Fowler's checklist are similar values and beliefs, time scales, approaches to gender, theories of the causes of development problems, and capacities (Fowler, 1998 147).

Of course, NNGOs must also realize that expectations may change. Everything cannot be planned out on paper. "No written agreements, signed commitments, or

guidelines for cooperation, however well-designed, will stop change from occurring. The best you can do is to manage change" (Rickett 107). Rickett also points out that it is important to continually revisit why NGOs are working together. He states:

Partners who collaborate primarily out of benevolence run the risk of overvaluing their contribution and undervaluing the partner's contribution. When that happens the overrated partner can easily fall into the trap of paternalism. To prevent this, partners should identify the reasons they are equally committed to the partnership, put it in writing, and revisit those reasons as the partnership evolves (Rickett 39).

Although this may sound a bit fluffy, it could be very useful, because the reasons that NNGOs need SNGOs are often a bit abstract (such as legitimacy). NNGOs may need to remind themselves why they need their SNGO partner as much as their partner needs them.

Also related to legitimacy is the fact that SNGOs are increasingly suggesting that NNGOs do development work in their own countries, as this makes the organizations appear more legitimate and connected to a local constituency. In "Conversations with Southern Partners," one SNGO staff member points out that poverty and environmental problems exist in the north as well as the south. He argues that there needs to be more of a linkage between working on development issues in the north and in the south. He says, "when people realize the problem is the same, they won't blame their problems on the south (i.e. that jobs are flowing south because of cheaper labour costs)." He notes that northerners either tend to view the problem as one of the south only, or they tend to view the south as competing with the north. Cooperation needs to take place.

Northerners also have much work to do in development education. According to Malhotra (1997),

The key focus of such NNGO domestic programs should

be on interpreting the work of their SNGO partners and broader South development issues to their domestic publics with a view to raising awareness leading to action and subsequent changes in the latter's attitudes, lifestyle choices, in addition to northern government policies and programs.

In addition to advocating on behalf of the south, the north should really use the advantage that it has with regard to information access to distribute information to SNGOs in order to allow them to advocate for themselves. NNGOs can also help to increase the exposure of SNGOs. In "Conversations with Southern Partners," (2003) participants said, "if the northern NGOs know of government or UN representatives who are visiting an area, they should encourage them to visit NGO projects. Increased exposure can lead to greater resources."

It is also up to NNGOs to try to create lasting relationships by attempting to maintain staff stability within their organizations, which is an issue in both the north and south but seems to be a larger issue in the north. The most obvious answer to this issue would be that NNGO staff simply make an effort to stay with an organization for longer periods of time. It is tempting to leave every time a better offer appears, but this is not in the interest of partnership, nor is it in the interest of creating effective NNGOs in general, as staff turnover creates very poor institutional memories.

Lastly, as mentioned in the previous section, south-south cooperation is crucial to partnership. South-south cooperation can help strengthen SNGOs through the sharing of information and resources (Yates 14). SNGOs can join already existing networks, as well as approach other SNGOs in order to form new networks. Keeping in contact with other partners of an NNGO is particularly important.

Conclusion

While it is easy to condemn people who use the language of partnership but do not act on it, the question of the possibility or impossibility of authentic partnerships has proven to be much more elusive.

Clearly, in practice, most partnerships are far from authentic. Concepts such as "accountability" and "efficiency" are seen by many NNGOs to be more important than the quality of relationships. Some organizations are making great strides toward equitable relationships, but these organizations are the exception, not the rule. The status of these relationships is not static. Many organizations are moving away from solidarity toward more business-oriented relations, in part due to structural changes in the aid system, and in part due to changing attitudes. This change is evident in the early nineties experience of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. On the other hand, some feel that partnership is now moving back toward a notion of solidarity (Brehm 35). Furthermore, many NNGOs have fairly recently started to work in partnership with SNGOs, and their partnership models are continually evolving. They will need time to develop.

The barriers involved are not minor problems that simply require a little tweaking of the relationship. Malhotra (1997) sums it up:

Relationships between an NNGO and SNGO, even without a funding dimension, are fraught with problems, dilemmas and inequities (e.g. access to information). Even in such situations, building genuine partnerships which require bridging various gaps, often take years. They have to be based on, among others, a foundation of growing mutual trust and respect, recognition of the equality of different types of contributions to the relationship . . . When funding is introduced as a major variable in this equation, achieving genuine partnership becomes much more complex and, indeed, is unattainable in most current relationships.

In order to overcome these barriers, some NNGOs have employed different strategies in, among other things, shared governance, funding habits, mutual accountability, and proximity. Katalysis is probably the NNGO that has taken the most extreme steps to overcome these barriers. Still, it is unclear whether the Katalysis partnership is truly authentic. Also unclear is exactly what the future holds for partnerships.

The direct funding of SNGOs is increasing, and the role of NNGOs is continually being questioned. Some claim that NNGOs must engage in more authentic partnerships in order to ensure long-term sustainability, but this is not certain. The aforementioned changes may give SNGOs more options. It is possible that some SNGOs might be able to be more particular about which NNGOs they work with, especially if formed in a web, rather than one-on-one relationships. For NNGOs that truly desire authentic partnerships, Katalysis serves as a good example of an NNGO that has created a web of NGOs in which, at least in theory, each NGO has equal power.

As previously mentioned, it is important to remember that not all NNGOs are striving for authentic partnerships, and for those that are, this is an ideal that may or may not be completely reachable. Just as no marriage is perfect, no partnership is perfect either. For simplicity's sake, this thesis used Fowler's definition of authentic partnership as something to measure other relationships against. However, in the real world, partnerships are as varied as marriages, and there are many different ways to create more equitable partnerships. The question of whether relationships that precisely meet the definition of authentic partnership can exist is not so important. What is more important is how and why stronger and more equitable partnerships might exist.

For all of its flaws, the concept of “authentic partnership” (at least for some) is trying to get at the core of an imperialist legacy of development. It is trying to counteract the neo-colonialism inherent in the development apparatus. For all that aid accomplishes (and at least at the local level, there are many positive examples of what aid has accomplished), it is important to remember that cultural imperialism and aid are interlinked. Traditionally, aid has really meant that the north was developing the south, rather than helping the south to develop itself in the way that it saw fit. Partnership and participation, while somewhat idealized notions, question this practice.

One could say that there are two ways to look at this issue. On the one hand, authentic partnership can be a useful idea, because imperfect and unattainable as it is, it exists to counteract the idea that northern NGOs must develop the south, rather than southern NGOs developing the south with the help of the north. Authentic partnership gives NNGOs something to strive for and reminds them of the importance of power relations in the overall development agenda. While relations between organizations those that truly have partnership as a central tenet of what they do and their partner SNGOs are not entirely equal, they are indeed better than relations between NNGOs and SNGOs that have never truly tried to work in anything other than a pure donor-recipient relationship.

On the other hand, to say that authentic partnership is impossible is not a statement only about relations between NNGOs and SNGOs but about the whole apparatus in general, as the same problems exist in all situations where aid is being given by the north to the south. One could see the whole aid system as a continuation of colonialism, only more subtle in its ways of working. Under this viewpoint, while

relationships vary, they are all essentially part of the same machine which transforms the south to its own liking.

I would not recommend that aid be stopped. After all, the disparity between the wealth of the north and south is staggering. Unless we come up with better ways of working between north and south that still address southern poverty, we must strive for practical ways forward within the aid system, using concepts such as participation and partnership to the best of our ability. However, it would also behoove us to keep the point made in the previous paragraph in mind at all times, acknowledging the tremendous power that the north has over the south, and critically analyzing exactly how that power is used. Without doing this, it can be very easy to use terms such as partnership to describe relationships that are anything but.

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