Analysing institutional partnerships in development: A contract between equals or a loaded process?

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ABSTRACT

Partnerships are complex, diverse and subtle relationships the nature of which changes with time, but they are vital for the functioning of the development chain. This paper reviews the meaning of partnership between development institutions as well as some of the main approaches taken to analysis the relationships. The latter typically revolve analyses based on power, discourse, interdependence and functionality. The paper makes the case for taking a multi-analytical approach to understanding partnership but points out three problems: identifying acceptable/unacceptable trade-offs between characteristics of partnership, the analysis of multi-component partnerships (where one partner has a number of other partners) and the analysis of long-term partnership. The latter is especially the case for long-term partnerships between donors and field agencies which share an underlying commitment based on religious beliefs. These problems with current methods of analysing partnership are highlighted by focussing upon the Catholic Church-based development chain linking donors in the North (Europe) and their field partners in the South (Abuja Ecclesiastical Province, Nigeria). It explores a narrated history of a relationship with a single donor spanning 35 years from the perspective of one partner (the field agency).

Key words: Partnership, analytical frameworks, Nigeria, Europe, Catholic Church

INTRODUCTION

The development chain linking donors and intended beneficiaries is summarized as Figure 1. The boxes to the left are the donors, those in the middle are the ‘intermediaries’ or field agencies and those at the right the intended beneficiaries. The term ‘partnership’ is often used to describe the desired relationship between the organisations in the middle of the figure with those to towards the left, while participation is often employed to discuss the desired relationship between those in the middle and on the right (Davies, 2002). Each of the boxes of Figure 1 can comprise a diverse range of organisations, each with their own structures, procedures and mandate, and may include ‘non-governmental organisations’ (NGOs) as well as government organisations (GOs) and commercial organisations. Indeed, since the 1980s NGOs have become increasingly important players in the chain, especially in terms of development programmes implemented in less developed countries (Fowler, 1988, 2000; Bratton, 1989; Agbola, 1994; Tandon, 2000). In part this is because they are perceived as being able to ‘get things done’ faster, better and cheaper than government agencies (Smillie, 1995; Lewis, 1998). NGO staff enjoy the reputation of being highly motivated, and in a world where ‘value for money’ has become increasingly important as a mantra the rise of the NGO sector is understandable. Indeed, the interaction of groups such as NGOs with government has provided a fruitful arena for

discussion (Young, 2000; Lister, 2004). Accountability pervades all components and flows of Figure 1, but donors at the left hand side of the figure are in a particularly strong position to impose rigorous management systems on those receiving resources – the “*audit culture*” of Townsend and Townsend (2004; 272).

<Figure 1 near here>

All sorts of relationship between the groups of Figure 1 can occur, and these will change with time (Davies, 2002). While the development relationships are often perceived in terms of state organisations and NGOs they are not limited to this. There are commercial-government (Atkinson, 1999) as well as commercial-NGO multi-sectoral relationships (Chowdhury, 2004), as well as single-sector partnerships such as those between NGOs, GOs or commercial companies. But should all of these be seen as ‘partnership’? Indeed, as Fowler (1999) points out, “*not all development relationships are partnerships. Nor should they be*”. The problem is that the term partnership has such an appeal that it is indiscriminately used to cover almost all relationships. At one extreme the relationship could be nothing more than that of contractor and sub-contractor (Hailey, 2000; Mohan, 2002). At the other extreme it could be more of a “*contract between equals*” (Cox and Healey, 1998) founded on a more intimate and long lasting interaction with mutual respect (Lister, 2000). Some define partnership more tightly by stating that it is “*an arrangement existing between two or more organisations [or individuals or institutions] in working towards a commonly defined goal*” (Darlow and Newby 1997, cited in Davies 2002; 191). The implication is that the partners agree on their defined goal (Brinkerhoff

(2002a, 2002b) and upon a rational division of labour which contours the advantages held by each partner (Anderson, 2000). It also stresses a need for mutual respect and independence (Larkin, 1994), so that one partner is not simply taken over by the other, and a vision that goes beyond a simple transfer of resources. Relationships founded on a one way transfer of money and nothing else are less likely to be seen by field agencies as partnership except to placate and mollify their northern 'partner' (Lewis, 1998).

But if partnership is seen as the desired form of relationship in Figure 1 then

- What advantages does the relationship bestow?
- How best can relationships be analysed to check whether the form is a partnership or just rhetoric?

It is these two questions that form the basis for this paper.

The paper will begin by briefly reviewing the arguments often made for partnership in a development context. It will then critically explore some of the analytical approaches that have been taken for partnership. A central tenant of the paper is that the existing approaches to analysing partnership can provide a limited perspective, particularly for relationships that occur over longer periods of time (decades). The latter point will be highlighted by focussing upon the Catholic Church-based development chain linking donors in the North and their field partners in the South. As the Catholic Church claims to be universal it's northern (in the context of this paper these are donors) and southern

based development agencies share the same moral beliefs in a global community of equals. It is as well a community seeking lasting transformation with members open to learning from each other rather than just a temporary and ephemeral partnership created to deliver a single development project. As such the Catholic-Church chain is an example of a long-term partnership based on shared beliefs and morality which stress tolerance, respect for neighbour and a need to listen. But what do some of the approaches to analysing partnership say about the relationships within the Catholic Church development chain? Do they suggest a *contract between equals* (Cox and Healey, 1998) or a *loaded process* (Mohan 2002)?

WHY PARTNERSHIP?

There are a number of rationales for the desirability of partnership, but at its simplest it could be a matter of maximising the probability of success in a development intervention. The argument is one of efficiency based on an assumption that it enables a more efficient use of scarce resources by utilising compatibility within the partnership network (Johnston and Lawrence, 1988). A donor can avoid the need to create and staff a regional office by working in partnership with field agencies which are also assumed to be better connected to intended beneficiaries (Mohan, 2002). Partnerships may also be better placed to ‘lever’ funding from government and multilateral donors such as the EU (Geddes, 2000). There may also be assumptions of mutual learning and sharing of ideas

(Postma, 1994; Lewis, 1998). Allied to these tangible benefits for forming partnerships is often recognition of global inter-dependences and a need for solidarity (Postma, 1994; Fowler, 1999).

In many ways the popularity of partnership in development borrows much from the rise of public-private partnerships throughout the developed world of the 1980s (Hastings, 1996; Power, 2000; Schofield, 2002). Efficiency and expertise from the private sector were combined with public interest and accountability, and fresh perspectives were brought to government services (Kolzow, 1994; Larkin, 1994; Woodward, 1994). The so-called ‘Third Sector’ partnerships were not just about delivering better services in the short term but a desire for the partners themselves to learn and be influenced by each other. It has been argued that companies can gain much from such partnerships with the public or even NGO sectors such as a better image and influence on policy (Rundall, 2000) and even helping to “*challenge the private sector to adopt more ‘social’ objectives, less driven by short term gain*” (Hastings, 1996; 262). However, the typical assumption was that the public sector partner had more to learn from the private partner (Hastings, 1996). More sceptical views see such multi-sectoral partnership as possibly nothing more than a “*search for a fix*” (Geddes, 2000; 797). Atkinson (1999; 59) even goes as to state that:

“...there is no single authentic mode of assigning meaning to terms such as partnership and empowerment, that their meaning is constructed (i.e.

produced and reproduced) in a context of power and domination which privileges official discourse(s) over others”.

Nevertheless, it is sometimes assumed that analytical methods of partnership in such multi-sectoral contexts are more advanced than with development chain partnerships and could have much to offer (Lister, 2000).

A third strand to the partnership literature needs to be mentioned. There are studies which explore relationships within the private sector where there may be competitive advantages bestowed by partnership (Liedtka, 1996; Greenwood and Empson, 2003). In itself this is a large literature including suggestions as to how successful ‘partnership’ can be created and maintained (Bantham et al., 2003). Interestingly these include buyer-seller relationships as a form of partnership.

Has partnership succeeded in its goal of helping us achieve ‘better’ development? The answer is often assumed to be an unequivocal ‘yes’ but surprisingly there is a dearth of literature which critically evaluates the performance of partnership (Davies, 2002). Case studies abound, including for example Wallace’s (2003) study of NGOs in the UK, but only a few studies seek to analyse the driving forces at play in the formation of a partnership, seeing how the partnership functions and the benefits (if any) it delivers. In short, there is a lack of analytical frameworks which allow partnerships to be dissected (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998). Indeed much of the work in organisational theory to date

has focussed more on the identification of variation rather than explaining it (Greenwood and Empson, 2003).

ANALYSING PARTNERSHIP

A commonly expressed approach to exploring partnership is the analysis of power between partners (Saidel, 1991; Postma, 1994; Atkinson, 1999; Lister, 2000). An analysis of power is logical given that those with the resources (the donors) have the resources being sought by field agencies acting on behalf of beneficiaries (Anderson, 2000). Donors can stipulate terms and conditions that their southern partners have to match, and donors can do this in the name of accountability and ‘value for money’ (Fowler, 1998; Mosse, 2001; Mohan 2002). While partners are free to resist some of the stipulations being placed upon them, if they don’t want the money another may be only too pleased to comply as competition for funds can be intense (Smillie, 1995; Aldaba et al., 2000; Hailey, 2000), and some field agencies may be able to compete more effectively than others (Moore and Stewart, 1998). Much the same can be said of NGO donor relationships with government agencies in the north (Lewis, 1998; Wallace, 2003; Townsend and Townsend, 2004). As a result some understandably see partnership as a “*loaded process*” (Mohan 2002; 141), with the term helping to ameliorate uncomfortable inequalities in power between donors and field agencies (Anderson, 2000; Fowler, 1999, 2000).

Lister (2000) provides an example of an analysis of power in partnership for a group of organisations in Central America, and set out a chain akin to the model in Figure 1: a funder (BD) – a northern-based NGO – a group of southern partners. She then applied Dahl's (1957) four key constituents of a power relation to analyse the partnership:

- Base of power (the resources using to bring about influence)
- Means or power (actions that can be taken to bring about influence)
- Scope of power (specific actions taken to bring about influence)
- Amount of power (the extent of the influence)

Using this model, Lister (2000) comes to the conclusion that individual actors and relationships are critical in any partnership as it is through these that the four constituents of power are expressed. As a result she calls into question “*much of the theory currently being developed for NGOs in terms of capacity building, institutional strengthening, scaling-up and diffusion of innovation, which all rely on organizational processes as the basis for change.*” (Lister, 2000; 237).

The analysis of partnership using just power can be criticised in that it assumes that almost all the power resides with the donor. But field agencies are not powerless, and Forbes (1999) has described examples where such agencies have made use of their closeness to the local scene (and knowledge of local-ness) to influence donor behaviour. After all, donors will typically know far less than their local partners about the very

groups they are trying to help (Lancaster, 1999). It is also worth stating the obvious - that donors need to work with good and reliable field agencies otherwise the *raison d'être* of the donor is questionable. Also, not all development partnerships have a donor as one of the components. Chowdhury (2004) provides an example of a successful partnership in Bangladesh between an NGO (the Grameen Bank) and a telephone company.

Interestingly, while discussions of power particularly in north-south based partnerships have been prominent, this has not been the case in studies of partnership in public-private relationships of the developed world (Hastings 1999). One approach that has been used to understand how power differentials could play out within multi-sectoral partnerships assumed to be dialectical in nature (Atkinson, 1999), is to use critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992). Hastings (1999; 93) argues that partnerships can be thought of as a *“form of governance capable of ‘hot housing’ social change.....at least amongst those who participate in them”*. As a result of allowing for a dialectical relationship rather than a ‘one way’ process the partnership can be analysed by exploring the evolution of changes in assumptions, values and practice that has taken place since the partnership was founded (Hastings, 1996, 1998, 1999). A development chain example of a discourse analysis, although not expressed formally as such, is provided by Postma (1994) for the discourse between donors and NGOs in Mali and Niger. However, one needs to be very careful when using discourse to analyse power given the pro-partnership rhetoric, whether sincere or not, that one is likely to encounter from all partners in the relationship for different reasons. (Hastings,1999).

Another theory of interest is the adaptation of ‘inter-dependence theory’ (or perhaps more accurately ‘school of thought’) for individuals in close relationships such as marriage (Rusbult and Van Lange, 2003). Here the partnership is not just a useful and temporary conjunction to fulfil an agreed objective, but one based on a longer-term interaction with a level of investment (Rusbult and Buunk, 1993). Inter-dependence delves deeper into understanding the basis for dependence – the way partners affect one another. While there are echoes here of the Dahl constituents of power relations, the debate goes deeper. Indeed, one advantage of this school of thought is its potential to generate a multi-dimensional “*taxonomic characterization of situations*” (Rusbult and Van Lange, 2003; 370) as a first step in analysis. Bantham et al. (2003) borrow from interdependence theory to explore the partnerships between sellers and buyers. They posit what they refer to as mindset and skillset enablers in all relationships:

- Mindset enabler. Awareness of tensions in relationships and a willingness to address them. The tensions may be endogenous and exogenous to the relationship.
- Skillset enabler. Communication behaviours that facilitate the management of tensions. Borrowing again from the inter-personal literature Bantham et al. (2003) suggest that skills such as ‘non-defensive listening’, ‘active listening’, ‘self-disclosure’ and ‘editing’ can be included here. It is perhaps no coincidence that some suggest “*listening is at the cornerstone of effective partnership*” (Ndiaye and Hammock, 1991; cited in Postma, 1994; 454) but the type of listening is important.

The two enablers are related, a willingness to manage tensions has to follow from an awareness of such tensions coupled with a desire to do something about them. Indeed it is possible to combine the inter-dependence and investment theories of relationships with an analysis of power within development chains. Clearly, for the mindset and skillset enablers to function there has to be a genuine commitment from donors and their partners in the field.

Perhaps the most practically grounded analytical framework for partnership is that of Brinkerhoff (2002b) designed primarily as a tool to help with evaluation in a development context. After all, the point of the partnership is to generate tangible benefits (Davies, 2002). The effectiveness of partnerships in delivering benefits has received little attention, and care must be taken not to take the evidence presented by the partnership itself as the only evidence of success (Geddes, 2000). Brinkerhoff provides a detailed checklist of characteristics to help with evaluation of partnership performance. These cover the presence of pre-requisites and success factors, the practice or partnership and the outcomes of the partnership relationship. While the framework is complex it is useful in setting out the characteristics (indicators) to be looked for in assessing partnership. However, while all the indicators can be assessed for any partnership they may say little about the driving forces at play.

LIMITS TO ANALYSING PARTNERSHIP: THE CASE FOR A MULTI-ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Given that the Lister (2000), Hastings (1999), Bantham et al. (2003) and Brinkerhoff (2002b) analytical approaches all address partnership, albeit in quite different contexts and from varied angles, it is not surprising that they can be combined into a single multi-analytical framework (Figure 2). The four columns of Figure 2 represent the four analytical approaches, but there is clearly some overlap. The Bantham et al (2003) approach which dissects partnerships in terms of interdependency theory by looking for mindset and skillset enablers can help in exploring the issues of pre-requisites and practice identified by Brinkerhoff. They are also the basis of good discourse. The Lister (2000) and Hastings (1999) analyses of power relations, discourse and change in partnerships can also be mapped onto Figure 2 to help explain why some of the indicators identified by Brinkerhoff are as they are. The mindset/skillset enablers of interdependency theory can be used to explore partnership pre-requisites and practice and help with an understanding of power mapped via Dahl's relations or critical discourse

<Figure 2 near here>

What trade-offs between the columns of Figure 2 can occur or indeed would be acceptable/desirable? Does a good partnership have to have all the elements of Figure 2 pointing in the 'right' direction or can some aspects be sacrificed for others? For example, can discourse be less than perfect if the partnership delivers in what it is trying

to achieve? After all, it could be argued that the goal is not necessary ‘better’ partnership per se but ‘better’ development. The partnership is the means to the end not an end in itself.

A further point is that in much of the literature partnership is explored between but a few organisations. In practice a single field agency may have a partnership agreement with a number of donors who may, or may not, have some coordination between them in terms of what they fund and their procedures. Similarly a single donor will have relationships with a number of field agencies for programmes and/or projects. Hence relationships have many components and there is an element of ‘partnership management’ in place by all parties. Just because the outcome of an analysis with Figure 2 applied to one relationship points to ‘poor’ partnership it cannot be assumed that a similar analysis on another relationship involving one of the partners would yield the same result. Thus in order to analyse partnership it is necessary to both identify and explain organisation variation (Greenwood and Empson, 2003).

A related concern to such multi-component diversity is the time-scale over which the partnership is played out. Most of the literature and case studies tend to deal with examples of relationship over relatively short periods – a few years. Over these time scales many of the institutional factors will be more or less constant. But while the separate analytical approaches of Figure 2 provide a useful basis for dissecting partnership at such ‘snapshots in time’ how do they play out for longer-term relationships? While many of the components of a chain as set out in Figure 1 can change

rapidly such that a field partner may have many different donors over 5 years, there are examples of longer-term relationships such as those found amongst the religious groups. As institutions change (e.g. in terms of priorities, agendas and personal relationships) then it is to be expected that an analysis based, for example, on the base-means-scope-amount of power would generate different results throughout the history of the relationship. Similarly what if there are short periods where the donor does dictate process but on a larger time scale there is good discourse and taking a more functional analysis along the lines suggested by Brinkerhoff suggests that much was achieved because of the relationship despite any ups and downs? An analysis of discourse (Hastings, 1999) and inter-dependency (Bantham et al., 2003) could show much change over longer time scales, and a snapshot at one time could generate quite a different result to one taken just a few years later.

These problems can be highlighted by exploring relationships within the Catholic Church development chain. The long-standing relationship seen within this chain would be expected to facilitate the application of inter-dependency theory as well as providing the necessary mindset and skillset enablers for true partnership. At least in theory, this might serve to heighten awareness of disparate power relationships along the chain. But do the analyses of Figure 2 provide a consistent picture for the Catholic Church chain? If not, in what ways is the picture incomplete?

A STORY OF PARTNERSHIP IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH DEVELOPMENT CHAIN

The specific Catholic Church development chain employed here is summarised as Figure 3. It is the relationship between one of the diocese of Abuja Ecclesiastical Province, Nigeria, and one of the major Catholic Church-based donors of Europe. The relationship is in existence at the time of writing and therefore the diocese and the donor that form the heart of the story will remain anonymous in order to avoid any misunderstanding or prejudice. They will be referred to as the ‘diocesan development agency (DDA)’ and the ‘donor’, although these rather stark titles should not in any way detract from the more charismatic characteristics of both groups; indeed neither see themselves as just a ‘donor’ or a ‘development agency’.

<Figure 3 near here>

Nigeria has one of the largest populations of any African country (currently assumed to be 120 million people). It is generally assumed that about 30% of the population is Christian, and roughly half is Catholic. There are 9 Ecclesiastical Provinces in the country, each led by an Arch Bishop and in one instance by a Cardinal, divided in a total of 49 dioceses, each headed by a Bishop. The Catholic Church development chain in Nigeria has a unique trajectory having much internal variation as there is no obligation for conformity between dioceses. But because of the universal nature of the Church and

the discourse that takes place within it there is a commitment to general policies that address underlying problems at particular times. To ensure the efficient delegation of authority each diocese in Nigeria has a Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) headed by a JDPC coordinator. All seek funds from the same Catholic-based donors (and secular ones) for programmes and projects. Performance in each diocese depends on longevity, capacity and connections with the potential sources of assistance found mainly in the political and commercial centres in the country.

Missionaries have tended to play a significant role within the JDPC system between the 1960s and 1990s. Gradually the missionaries have pulled out as Nigerian religious have taken their place. By the turn of the 20th century there were few expatriates (non-Nigerians) in development positions in Nigeria. Indeed, in the view of the Arch-Bishop of Abuja Province one of the major problems faced by Catholic development agencies in the south is the need to replace an essentially volunteer workforce with indigenous people of equal caliber but paid on a salary basis.

Abuja Ecclesiastical Province is located in the centre of the country, and comprises six diocese: Abuja, Jos, Lokoja, Makurdi, Idah and Otukpo. There are a number of reasons for selecting Abuja Province for the focus of the research reported here:

1. Abuja Province encompasses the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria and at least in theory is the best placed of all provinces to have a strong interaction with Federal government.

2. Many aid agencies have their headquarters in Abuja, and again this facilitates an interaction with Abuja Province.
3. Abuja Province has an interesting mix of diocese. They vary in terms of age, size (in terms of Catholic population) and composition, characteristics which could well have a bearing on their partnership with donors. Lafia Diocese, for example, is relatively young and has yet to have the time to establish a 'track record' in development, while Makurdi is much older and well-established. Some dioceses have their headquarters at the state capital (Lokoja, Makurdi) while others for example Idah and Otukpo are far from them. Such conditions could well have an impact in relation to interaction with State government.
4. One of the older diocese of Abuja province is home to DDA. While the mandate of DDA has remained constant, its form, function and official title have changed during the period covered by the story, but DDA is a useful umbrella term. Also, while the terms 'diocese' and DDA could perhaps be seen as interchangeable (the Bishop heads both) the distinction between the two will be kept in order to reflect the fact that the DDA is to all intents and purposes a self-managing organisation existing within the diocesan structure. The coordinator of the DDA is in effect the JDPC coordinator of the diocese.

The narrative presented here covers a period of 35 years (1970 to 2005) and is only one and even part of the many that could be told. It is a story from only one side of the partnership (DDA) and told by three people (the DDA team) who have remained at the heart of the DDA for most of its existence. One of those helping to tell the story is the

only one to stay in the same post throughout most of the years and hence in the best position to provide a time-line. That person (a European) is the DDA coordinator of the chosen diocese. The other two members of the DDA team interviewed are the senior accountant and deputy coordinator (both Nigerian). Other actors involved in the relationship, especially those employed by the donor, have come and gone, and some have died. Therefore the behaviour and decision-making of the ‘donor’ (or more accurately the individuals within the donor whom the DDA team interacted with) presented here is very much as perceived by the DDA team. But while the story is only being told by one partner it is the one which has the most complete recollection of the events and, as will be seen, is also the one which has had the deepest sense of impact.

The DDA began in 1970, just after the Nigerian Civil War ended, but the donor at the heart of the story was not contacted by the DDA until 1972. The initial desire of the DDA was to steer clear of donors as much as possible, including Catholic-based ones. In the words of the coordinator it felt that “*the more you could do for yourself the more control you had over the situation*”. Some technical assistance for agricultural projects was sought through the local Ministry of Agriculture, but it was only when this route proved inadequate that the DDA approached the donor for support with salaries and technical inputs. Although the assistance wasn’t huge the donor did request for an evaluation of the DDA as early as 1976 (some 4 years after their modest assistance began). Although the DDA had no control over this decision it was not antagonistic to the idea and saw it as a positive contribution. The evaluation was positive and recommended that more personnel and structures were needed to maintain the momentum. The donor responded to the

evaluation by offering to provide more support with salaries and basic facilities and the DDA readily accepted. In retrospect this was the onset of dependency.

A further evaluation of the DDA instigated by the donor took place 6 years later in 1982. The DDA was less supportive of this second evaluation because it coincided with the close of a major World Bank project within which the DDA had inevitably become a significant player during the late 1970s and early 1980s and was in the process of divorcing itself from this project. It was also a time of great political and economic upheaval in Nigeria as the economy was in rapid decline and Structural Adjustment was due to be implemented in the mid 1980s. Therefore the DDA felt it was an inappropriate time for an evaluation as any recommendations could be outdated by the time the report was published. But from the DDA perspective there was no negotiation. Understandably, the outcome was rather confusing as events did overtake most of the findings. However, it did result in a series of 3 year rolling plans with continued core funding (mostly in the form of salaries, administration and technical inputs) from the donor. Donor staff visited DDA regularly over these years putting no pressure for any particular activity.

However, there were some less positive forces at play. The donor began raising a series of concerns relating mainly to the indigenization of the DDA which since its inception in 1970 had been led by an expatriate missionary. As is usual with such situations the congregation concerned did have a plan for a replacement with a local member of the same order when someone suitable became available. The expatriate who set up the DDA would then move on to another country and plans were already in train for this move. In

the late 1970s a possible local counterpart was identified and in training following a 2 year apprenticeship with the DDA. However, this appeared to be much too slow and ponderous for the donor despite the fact that as a Catholic-based organization its personnel were familiar with the way in which missionary orders work. At the donors insistence a lay person was also sent for training with a view to taking on the role of coordinator. As well as creating an obvious basis for confusion so great was the pressure for immediate change despite repeated warnings from the DDA that adequate time and thought were not taken to select a lay candidate or to providing the necessary salary and conditions of employment.

In the circumstances it is not unsurprising that donor pressure for indigenization was in the end counter-productive. While the missionary order tried to pursue its standard practice and recalled the expatriate coordinator with a view to starting up projects elsewhere the individual had to be returned to Nigeria on numerous occasions to continue the work for the DDA as it was simply not possible to find a lay replacement willing to work at the salary levels and employment conditions provided by the diocese. The position of the local member of the religious order also became confused and for a time it looked as though the order would have to pull out of the DDA altogether and reassign the individual concerned. The DDA team recalls this as a turbulent time that didn't become fully stabilized until the mid 1980s when the religious order requested that the original coordinator take a longer-term commitment with the local member as a *de facto* deputy. By the later 1980s the indigenization pressure from the donor had more or less ceased as

it became clear to all that the result of the previous interference had been counterproductive. Planning for complete indigenization had to start again.

Interference from the donor in the affairs of the DDA took another form in the early 1990s. By this time there had also been changes in donor personnel, and the donor now seemed to be of the opinion that the DDA needed help with appropriate agricultural technologies. The donor felt that the DDA would benefit from sharing experiences with other Catholic development agencies it funded in East Africa. The DDA felt (rightly or wrongly) that it had little choice in any of these arrangements and was obliged for many years to carry out trials investigating the effectiveness of these technologies. Given that the technologies were adapted for very different socio-economic and environmental conditions in East Africa it did not come as a surprise to DDA when they proved to be futile and ineffective in the West African scenario.

The third donor evaluation took place in 1997 and was again at its instigation. The results were again positive, but in the view of the DDA team the two evaluators contracted to conduct the evaluation had great difficulty in communicating the largely positive results to the donor. Neither was the DDA invited to discuss the findings with the donor. In 1998 the donor cut its core funding to DDA without any discussion and this could have led to the total collapse of the DDA except for its internal resilience and inner resources which drove it to widen its income source base. Ironically although that period was hard the view of the DDA team is that the overall outcome of this experience was positive. It had learned many hard lessons; the first being it needed to get back to its original philosophy

to avoid dependency on any one donor. The donor base was widened to include other Catholic-based and secular organizations. The donor has since reengaged with the DDA and the relationship at the moment is far more positive.

ANALYSING THE NARRATIVE OF RELATIONSHIP

So what does this brief story, admittedly related by one side of the partnership, say about the nature of the relationship? The following is an analysis using the four frameworks set out in Figure 2. The frameworks were explained to the DDA team and the analyses presented here are the results of a discussion between the team and the authors.

1. Power relations

It was obvious to all that the experience narrated above can be mapped onto the analysis of power suggested by Lister (2000). The donor had the upper hand in that it had control over finance - the base of power. It also had the means of power as well as the scope of power (evaluation). The DDA allowed itself to become dependent upon the donor for core funding and thereby allowed an exacerbation of the power gradient. Both donor and DDA together allowed a substantial differential in power to exist and with it came the exercise of the power. The DDA did not have to do this – it purposefully chose that course of action beginning with its first involvement with the donor in 1972. Worthy of

note is that the donor was only too pleased to have the DDA as a partner, a point illustrated by its increasingly financial commitment during the late 1970s and 1980s.

The power differential became increasingly tangible during the 1980s and 1990s, albeit with two different foci. In the 1980s it was founded on rapid indigenization driven by the donor while in the 1990s it was the provision of technical assistance to the agricultural programme which the donor thought might benefit from the experience of other East African partners. The climax to this exercise of power was when the donor unilaterally decided on the sudden removal of most of its funding for DDA. The DDA had no input into the process other than discussions with the evaluation team. Dialogue was conspicuously absent. Thus the picture which emerges from such an analysis of power appears to be stark and hardly one of partnership in any true sense of the term.

2. Discourse

If the relationship is explored through the presence of discourse then the picture is different. The view of the DDA team is that much encouragement was provided by the donor over the 35 years through visits and staff exchange sent by the donor for orientation to development. During this time there was exchange of ideas but at other key times discourse was patchy and inconsistent. The donor's abrupt disengagement from core funding was not explained and from the DDA team's perspective was difficult to understand given that the outcome of the evaluation was so positive.

But there were other times – indeed perhaps the majority of the 35 years - which the DDA team thought were characterized by extensive discussion and dialogue. Exchange visits were quite frequent and for certain aspects of the DDA’s work the donor was willing to listen and offer advice. In a sense discourse was compartmentalized; some issues, perhaps the majority, were open to discourse while others were not. Part of this was obviously due to the nature of the issue – some were clearly ‘non-negotiable’ in the eyes of the donor – but there were other reasons. During more than three decades the donor had three different desk officers for Nigeria and numerous other changes throughout the organization as a whole, while despite the turbulence the DDA had the same coordinator. Thus it is understandable that agendas and attitudes would change, and so would the basis for discourse.

Therefore in the view of the DDA team should an analysis of power remain in isolation then a misleading and unjust portrayal of the overall relationship would emerge. The exercise of power which emerged at distinct times corresponded with a collapse in discourse. For other periods, indeed for perhaps most of the time, there was discourse on a wide variety of issues and both partners valued the views of the other.

3. Inter-dependence

At one level there was no joint awareness of tensions between DDA and donor during the period when pressure was applied for indigenization. The DDA team felt that it tried hard to convey the problems as it perceived them. The donor seemed to believe that the DDA coordinator was in a position to appoint his/her own successor which as a member of a missionary order they were not. It led to much embarrassment and in retrospect most of the problems experienced at that time could be attributed to lack of adequate discourse brought about by the donor's unwillingness to listen. The complexities of engaging with different missionary groups were not fully grasped; despite the fact that the donor was Catholic-based and was aware of the structures and decision-making processes which exist in missionary orders. Of course the overarching problem of communication within Nigeria and beyond should not be underestimated. The nearest functional telephone was an eight hour drive away from the diocese. Change of desk officers and other staff at the donor severely limited institutional memory and in the view of the DDA team the obvious pressure of work in the offices of the donor all took their toll. Change in donor policies rarely became common knowledge. Therefore neither the 'mindset' or 'skillset' components of Bantham et al. (2003) for good discourse existed consistently over the 35 years.

Again at first sight this maps neatly onto the analysis based on power. However, in the overall picture of inter-dependence the situation is more complex. Much depended upon personal relationships between primarily the DDA co-coordinator and the donor desk

officers and this almost inevitably varied over the 35 years. At times the donor clearly valued its relationship with the DDA, as evidenced by the increased funding during the 1970s and 1980s, and both parties showed good evidence of both mindset and skillset attributes conducive to partnership. Both organizations maintained their identity, although as we have seen there was an increasing dependency of the DDA on the donor for funds. But the donor also needed the DDA as a ‘flag ship’ for its activities in Nigeria and often quoted the DDA as one of its success stories not just in Nigeria but in Africa. It sent many people to visit the DDA to get ideas as to how it organized and managed local initiatives. However, communication problems did not help and neither did the change in desk officers. Thus inter-dependence varied considerably over the 35 years.

As for institutionalization of mindset and skillset this simply did not occur. There was no institutional memory at the donor, and each desk officer came in with his/her agenda and personal attributes. Ironically much of this was apparent because the DDA did have the same coordinator throughout. If the coordinator had also been changed then institutional memory would have failed on both sides and neither would have been any the wiser.

4. Functional/Performance

During the 35 years of the relationship both organizations maintained their own distinctive identity – there was no attempt by the donor to take over the DDA or generally to tell it what to do on a day-by-day basis. Though interest waxed and waned at

times interference did not go beyond their efforts to promote indigenization (during the 1980s) and inappropriate technologies during the 1990s. When the donor decided to disengage from the DDA then mutuality was severely strained. Therefore in Brinkerhoffs (2002a) categorization the relationship was one of partnership. Also, the relationship between DDA and donor was highly successful as the donor provided funding (total or part) for the following:

- A total of 10,000 farmer councils established across the diocese
- 25 rain harvesting projects
- 12 bridges and culverts
- Was one of the major donors for a hospital of 100 beds
- Helped provide a water supply for a midwifery school
- Trained numerous hospital personnel (lab technicians, anesthetists etc.)
- Funded training and a primary health care programme which reached some 20 villages for 15 years
- Helped with office buildings, archives and stores
- Helped establish a 20 Ha seed multiplication farm in the diocese. This is also used for training and research.
- The on-farm research programme has proven so successful that the improved crop varieties promoted by the implementer now cover vast tracts in the region.

In that sense both partners met their objectives in a sustainable manner. The farmer council organization is self- generating and is currently in a second and third generation

of farmer group programmes. The donor hasn't funded these latter programmes but its investment lives on as interventions have been founded on the original network and framework which it generously sponsored when such ideas were novel. The evaluation of 1997 highlighted this. For most of the 35 years over which this interventions occurred there was in the view of the DDA team a healthy discourse with the donor, and changes were made where appropriate and where both parties agreed they would be desirable. With the exception of the insistence to promote East African technologies during the 1990s there was no attempt by the donor to impose decisions on the DDA in any of these activities.

Thus in contrast to the previous analyses, particularly that based on power, the analysis based on the Brinkerhoff model shows the relationship between the implementer and donor as a highly successful and 'true' partnership.

Discussion

So what picture do these four analyses paint in understanding the relationship between the DDA and the donor? Do they point towards a *contract between equals* (Cox and Healey, 1998) or a *loaded process* (Mohan 2002)? The answer is far more complex than would appear at first sight from the narrative presented by the DDA team – the partner most deeply affected over the 35 years. At times an analysis of the relationship between

the donor and DDA based upon a power differential as suggested by Lister (2000) would appear to generate one answer – *a loaded process* – as the donor did have and exercised its power and partnership was all but absent. Yet at other times this did not happen. Base, means and scope of power may have remained much the same but the exercising of it did not. To be sure there were some critical periods when the DDA was undoubtedly frustrated and even angry with its partner, and damage did occur, but taken over the 35 years even they were unwilling to say that power in the relationship was always a one-way street. To them it really did appear at times to be a *contract between equals*. A functional analysis along the lines suggested by Brinkerhoff generates a descriptive picture as to the nature and practice of the partnership. However, this interpretation is undoubtedly one of partnership success as much was achieved. Who can say whether it could have been done any better given the turbulence in Nigeria over those years? Similarly, and probably unsurprisingly, the analysis of discourse (Hastings, 1999) and inter-dependency (Bantham et al., 2003) showed much change over the 35 years. A snapshot at one time could generate quite a different result to one taken just a few years later. Priorities, agendas and personal relationships changed a great deal.

In a long-term relationship such as that represented by the DDA and donor it is to be expected that ‘ups and downs’ will occur. One also has to remember that this relationship was played out in one of the most economically and politically turbulent countries in Africa and took place over a period that included structural adjustment with that ensuing upheaval and international isolation. In itself this is hardly conducive to the sustainability of any relationship between a Nigeria-based partner and one overseas. It is perhaps not at

all surprising that analysis of the partnership yields different pictures of being a *loaded process* and a *contract between equals* – after all 35 years is a long time.

So are the four analytical frameworks of Figure 2 appropriate for such timescales? The answer has to be ‘yes’ in the sense that the points raised did resonate as being of importance to the DDA team. However, care does need to be taken. Snapshots can yield many pictures of the relationship but over the 35 years the vision is one of true partnership which had its times of discord and which ultimately resulted in a unilateral divorce. It lasted longer than many marriages, and when it broke down completely it took less than two years for the ex-partners to rediscover their appreciation for the each other and renew their relationship. While the DDA is adamant that it will no longer allow itself to become so dependent on a single donor ever again it clearly values its past relationship with the donor despite the problems. Similarly the donor clearly re-learned the value of its past relationship with the DDA. As one member of DDA team said during the analysis:

“Perhaps the best sign of all in true partnership is when both partners realize that they miss the other.”

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1

Power relations

(Lister 2000)

2

Discourse

(Hastings 1999)

3

Inter-dependence

(Bantham et al. (2003)

4

Function/Performance

Brinkerhoff (2002b)

ANALYSIS OF POWER

Identify the following for the donors:

Base of power

(resources available to donor)

Means of power

(procedures employed when handing over resource)

Scope of power (specific actions e.g. evaluation)

Amount of power

(the extent to which the donor influences what is done in the field)

Contrast this perspective on power with that taking a more discursive approach.

How are these power issues influenced by relationships with national and international donors?

Evidence for a discursive influence between donor and field partners in terms of three key areas:

Programmes: Assumptions about what is important to address in development programmes and projects.

Practice: how best to address the goals set in development (including issues of resourcing, timescales, assessing impact etc.)

Accountability: how is accountability addressed and to whom? How are these set out?

Is there really a “*shared understanding*” of these? Is there a discourse or is the process ‘one way’ (e.g. donor led)?

Check to see whether the following Enablers are in place amongst both donors and field agencies:

Mindset: awareness of tensions along with a willingness to address them.

Identify what these tensions are perceived to be and why they exist?

Identify examples of such awareness, or lack of it, from the perspective of donors and field agencies.

Skillset: Is there evidence of non-defensive listening, active learning, self-disclosure and editing?

If so, how are these ‘**institutionalised**’? Awareness of them as important enablers. Identify examples of presence or absence.

Importance of personal relationships?

Look for the following criteria amongst donors and partners:

Presence of **pre-requisite** and **success** factors
Linkage between **mutuality** and **organizational identity**

Partner performance

Outcomes of the partnership relationship

Does each partner meet their objectives?

How do they seek to maintain the ‘**identity**’ of the partnership?

How is it presented?

Evidence for a rational division of labour?

Captions for figures

Figure 1. Simplified version of the aid chain

Bold arrow = flow of financial resources; Dashed arrows = flow of ‘technical’ information, advice and expertise.

Figure 2. The four analytical approaches reported in the literature for partnership.

Figure 3. Part of the Catholic Church development chain linking European Catholic-based donors to partners in Abuja Ecclesiastical Province, Nigeria.

Lines indicate an interaction in terms of a flow of resource or information.