

European Development Days in Brussels, June 2016

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), set in 2015, call for a new global partnership. This also suggests looking back at partnerships that have been around for two decades and evaluate their status. The picture is diverse. For some involved in multi-stakeholder projects, it is clear that many partnerships today are lacking effectiveness. The panel discussed how to unleash the potential of multi-stakeholder collaboration for SDG implementation.



Strengthening multistakeholder partnerships to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

The strength of partnerships is that they create linkages between different organizations. But this can become a challenge when different organizational structures (governments, NGOs, and businesses) and working mechanisms coincide. Different views of partners, not only on how to archive the shared goal, but also on the shared goal itself, based on values, can challenge the partnering process.

Petra Künkel, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Collective Leadership Institute, emphasized that partnerships require viewing leadership in a different way. Rather than focusing exclusively on the capacity of

individuals, partnerships function well if leadership is seen as the capacity of a collective, composed of strong individuals from diverse organizations and equipped with collaborative capacity. Collaboration becomes successful when it is built on essential human competencies. People can create the future together and in a constructive way when they see that a future is at stake, when they have developed a minimum degree of trust, and when they are excited about something new. When asked by the audience what she saw as success factors for cross-sector partnerships, Petra highlighted six essential elements:

- 1. Joint strategy development and an orientation towards the future.*
- 2. A proper engagement process so that people can own the future together and the building of networks of networks; this creates resilience in partnering processes.*
- 3. A commitment to finding the best possible solution; this means looking anew at existing challenges and integrating innovative approaches.*
- 4. An awareness that societal transformation processes are not only about systems, but first and foremost about people; acknowledging each other's humanness and going the extra mile to understand why people think or act the way they do is important*
- 5. Creating a culture of dialogue; only this creates trust, and the respect for differences results in unleashing collective intelligence*
- 6. A commitment to looking at the larger context of a particular partnership initiative and assessing if and how a change initiative contributes to a larger story or transformation system.*



Petra Künkel at EDDs

A key step to a successful partnership is often right at the beginning. It is the step-by step engagement that builds a functional collaboration ecosystem (link to one of my blogposts). Equally important is understanding power differences and strengthening weaker partners; the more equal partners become in

the way they influence the course of change, the more successful partnerships become. Strong partners must support weaker ones.



Mike Wisheart and Petra Künkel at EDDs

If we take a broader view, it seems that the key premise of successful partnerships is the involvement of all partners in the development of a joint strategy. This means going beyond simple monitoring and evaluation and making sure that good governance instruments, especially in multi-stakeholder partnerships, are in place. These instruments have to be embedded in three core premises: a culture of dialogue; accountability; and a climate of trust.

The Collective Leadership Institute is the co-founder of a new initiative, *the Promoting Effective Partnering* initiative that drives quality in partnerships to increase their effectiveness and impact. This is part of a visible change, the professionalization of partnership practitioners that leverages capacity building, research, and knowledge exchange.

The EDD has been Europe's leading forum on development since 2006. For its 10th anniversary, EDD focused on the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Sustainable Development Goals. More than 150 countries were represented at the EDD 2016 with more than 42,000 participants. Further information about the event can be found at: www.eudevdays.eu/



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