Partnerships and Power – Understanding the dynamics within

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The rhetoric

- Partnerships seen as a way to increase development effectiveness:
  - **2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness**: donor policies and practices aligned to national development strategies, role of nat’l governments at the forefront.
  - **2008 Accra Agenda for Action**: engagement of wider stakeholders, including CSOs and private sector.
  - **2011 Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation**: voice at the negotiating table to even wider group. Established framework embracing traditional donors, South-South cooperators, the BRICs, CSOs and private funders.
The status

- Progress in including various stakeholders into decision making and implementation processes

- Southern voices stronger than they were 20 years ago

- Contributions of non-traditional actors increasingly recognized as valuable
What do we mean by partnership?

Current definitions and debates fail to acknowledge that implicit in any partnership are **power dynamics**, and **different understandings** of, and approaches to ‘reality’.
Power differentials

- How often are partners really equal?

- To what extent are partnerships and the dynamics within them dependent on what each partner has and can bring to the table?

- ‘Partnerships’ with donors – money and conditions often set by them – very often these are contractual relationships?
Power differentials (continued)

- Power differentials even more evident when you have 3 layers: Donors → INGOs → local NGOs → local communities

- Need to recognize that relationships are very often unequal

- Local NGOs/CSOs are rarely the ones who hold the power
Power differentials (continued)

- There is a need to enter into real, equal partnerships where each party has a voice
- Devolve more and more power and responsibility to communities and their governments themselves
Changing dynamics

- What do we mean today by the term ‘international NGO’?

- Southern founded and based NGOs are increasing in number, and likely to outnumber traditional western-based NGOs

- Important to recognize hierarchy and power dynamics, but dichotomy between ‘international’ and ‘local’ NGO becoming increasingly artificial
“First, can we agree that it is a big back yard?”
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