BUILDING EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS

A collaborative practice and reflection paper
by Plan International UK and Social Development Direct

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Foreword

International aid needs to be reformed. The power that lies largely in the hands of organisations based in the Global North needs to be shared more equitably with local actors, who often cannot access the same funding and influencing opportunities, and as a result are blocked from leading on development in their own communities.

As a signatory to the Pledge for Change, Plan International recognises the need to build a stronger aid ecosystem based on the principles of solidarity, humility, self-determination, and equality. This means creating genuine partnerships with local and national organisations and governments, and shifting

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more power, decision-making and money to those in places affected by crisis and poverty. Only through such partnerships will we remove any dependency on aid and continue to build the strength of the communities we strive to support. This entails fundamental change and a shift in approach on the part of international NGOs.

Pledge for Change commits Plan International to make clear and visible progress on these objectives by 2030. One of the three key pledges is that Equitable Partnerships will be our default approach by 2030, and we will prioritise and value the leadership of national and local actors and invest in making partners stronger and more sustainable.

To achieve this, Plan International will build on its existing Building Better Partnerships approach and has already begun to implement practical changes to our operating models to enable more locally led responses. This report represents an important step in reflecting on our own partnerships and how we can do more, recognising that shifts at the individual, cultural and organisational level will be necessary if we are to achieve transformative change.

Executive Summary

In 2021, Plan International and Social Development Direct began a collaborative Building Equitable Partnerships Initiative to enhance our learning, knowledge, and practical innovation on partnerships, based on a shared mission-driven aspiration to build a fairer future for international development sector. There is a growing consensus among development practitioners around the world that historic power imbalances in global civil society and the aid system will not be shifted unless we forge more equitable partnerships at all levels in the system.

Drawing on a document review and key informant interviews with colleagues from PIUK, the wider Plan International family, SDDirect and external organisations, we developed the prototype partnerships continuum below. The continuum draws on the pioneering work of The Partnering Initiative and assumes that building equitable partnerships requires intentionality and an achievable level of ambition that is appropriate to the goals, context, resources, and assets of the partners. The continuum represents (as ideal types) a spectrum of different kinds of partnerships with different levels of ambition. Our assumption is that there can be high quality partnerships that are informed by equitable partnerships values at all levels of ambition, however the extent and depth of collaboration tends to increase along the continuum.

Figure 1: the Partnerships Continuum (see Figure 4 and Annex 1 for more details)
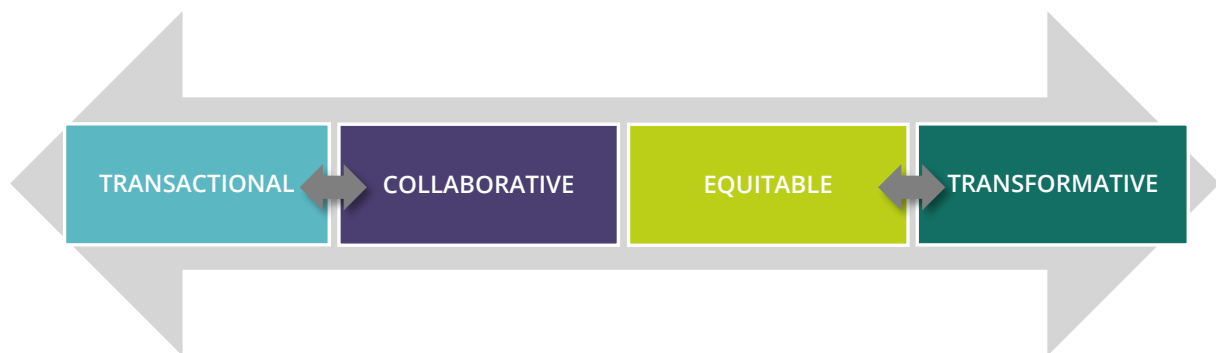
The continuum is intended to be used to analyse current partnerships; to set an appropriate level of ambition level for partnerships; to help move partnerships along the different levels of ambition as proposed by partners; and to inform the development of related partnership tools and methodologies, especially in the following areas:

- *Making the case* for partnerships

- Analysing *partnership readiness*

- Conducting regular *partnership health checks*

- Working with *partnership markers and indicators*

Our stakeholder consultations revealed a wide consensus that more equitable partnerships are a necessary ingredient of efforts to shift historic power imbalances in development and that they are vital to delivery of higher quality, more effective and sustainable results. This summary practice and reflection paper reviews key findings from our research and stakeholder dialogue, including key drivers of our commitment to more equitable partnerships and related opportunities, challenges, and costs.

Throughout the *Building Equitable Partnerships Initiative*, we have heard how strong commitments to feminist leadership, localisation, and anti-racist and anti-colonial approaches are drivers for more equitable partnerships. Partnerships are valued within our organisations for their potential to extend scale and reach, increasing quality, impact, and influence of our work.

There are multiple challenges to building more equitable partnerships, including:

- Challenges of time, scale, and resourcing

- Underinvestment in building the leadership capacity and skills needed for partnering

- Risk-averse organisational cultures and compliance-based organisational bureaucracy

- Lack of evidence and data collection on partnership performance and results

- Weak power analysis, accountability, and feedback mechanisms

- Lack of clarity around the costs of more equitable partnerships

- Entrenched mindsets and behaviours that inhibit equitable partnerships

- Failure to adapt partnership language, terms, and concept to context, and/or applying a *one size fits all* to partnerships.

Based on our research, dialogue and findings, the paper highlights five key priorities for change in our practice and culture to pave the way for more equitable partnerships. It identifies five main cost centres and proposes a working hypothesis on how to analyse financing and resourcing requirements at different levels of ambition for partnerships. Finally, it outlines our prototype equitable *partnerships continuum* (with summarised details of different levels of ambition in Annex 1).

1. Introduction

a. Background

Plan International and Social Development Direct (SDDirect) share a mission-driven aspiration to build more equitable partnerships with a range of actors, including local partners in the diverse countries and regions where we work. In late 2021, capitalising on our existing partnership, PIUK and SDDirect, in collaboration with Plan International Inc. (the Plan family's global hub and country offices), embarked on a phased collaborative initiative to enhance our learning, knowledge and practical innovation on partnerships. Our collaboration builds on and complements current thinking and guidance developed by Plan International and SDDirect (and other good practice resources), addressing gaps and contributing to further improvement of our partnerships guidance, tools, and frameworks.

The aim of the *Building Equitable Partnerships Initiative* is to support the development of more equitable partnerships with the whole range of partners with whom SDDirect and PIUK work. Our collaboration in this work is inspired by the core values and beliefs of the two organisations about mutual respect, fairness, feminist leadership, and a more equitable balance of power in the international development community. It responds to Sustainable Development Goal 17, which calls for the strengthening of 'means of implementation to revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development,' and it strives to advance the *Pledge for Change* (to which Plan is a signatory) that aims to make equitable partnerships 'our default approach' by 2030.

The *Building Equitable Partnerships Initiative* is an effort to put our existing *partnership principles* into practice. Following is a summary of those guiding principles:

Plan Partnership Principles	SDDirect Partnership Principles
• Mutual respect and listening	• Equity and inclusion
• Knowing yourself and your partner	• Accountability and transparency
• Clearly defined objectives for your relationship and non-negotiables	• Shared vision, values, and purpose
• Sharing responsibility and risk	• Effective communications and joint learning
• Learning from each other and striving for mutual growth	• Capacity development and sustainability
• Good judgement	

b. Methodology

In the first phase of the *Building Equitable Partnerships Initiative*, we conducted a literature review, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a range of participants from PIUK, SDDirect, Plan International country offices and national organisations, and external thought leaders. To gain a range of perspectives, we included informants working in diverse job functions, including programmes, finance, business development, technical teams, and senior management.

Our interviews and stakeholder consultations indicated that there is a high demand for additional guidance, tools and resources supporting movement towards more equitable partnerships. Recognising the diversity of partnership and contexts in which we work, all interviewees saw value in developing a conceptual framework and practical tools (such as the prototype *partnerships continuum*, based on levels of ambition for partnerships, outlined in Section 7 below). When adapted to context, these tools could help to a common language and a shared organisational approach to partnerships – and to promote a more considered and deliberate approach to equitable partnerships.
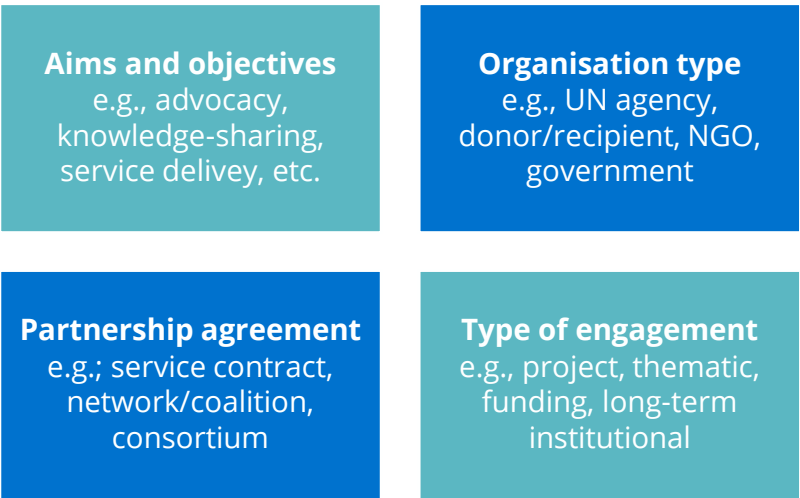
In the second phase of the project, we developed partnerships tools that we are currently piloting to further refine the tools and feed into a set of partnerships case studies. This paper shares learning from a literature review, key informant interviews and stakeholder dialogue conducted during the first phase of the *Building Equitable Partnership Initiative*.

c. Context

Despite the growing consensus on the importance of partnerships for international development, there is a gap in practical guidance on assessing, building, and sustaining equitable partnerships. Recent discussions around localisation and decolonisation of aid have heightened the focus on equitable partnerships and shifting power from Western-based organisations (*Centre for Humanitarian Leadership*, 2021; *Peace Direct*, 2021).

We found that organisations typically categorise their partnerships in four main ways:

Aims and objectives e.g., advocacy, knowledge-sharing, service delivey, etc.	**Organisation type** e.g., UN agency, donor/recipient, NGO, government
Partnership agreement e.g.; service contract, network/coalition, consortium	**Type of engagement** e.g., project, thematic, funding, long-term institutional

While these approaches to a typology of partnerships are useful for identifying different characteristics of partnerships, we found that they do not adequately address the need to identify and measure different levels of ambition for partnerships and often fail to consider the dynamics of power and collaboration. As a means of addressing this gap, the *Building Equitable Partnerships Initiative* instead proposes an *equitable partnerships continuum* approach, described in this report.

We identified partnership models that have adopted a similar approach to the *partnerships continuum* proposed by the *Building Equitable Partnerships Initiative*. *The Partnering Initiative* (TPI) and *UNDESA* described a *Partnership Spectrum* with three basic types of partnership: 1) leverage/exchange, 2) combine/integrate, and 3) transform (Stibbe et al., 2018). The *Partnership Brokers Association* (2022) and *Research Fairness Initiative* (2018) developed models for partnerships analysis that helps identify the characteristics of partnerships ranging from *transactional* to *collaborative*.

2. Why focus on equitable partnerships?

'We believe that our vision can be achieved even more effectively by working with others. Working with global partners, local partners, youth groups and consortium and alliances means we combine our expertise to advance children's rights and equality for girls.' – Plan International

Commitments to feminist leadership, anti-racist and anti-colonial approaches are drivers for more equitable partnerships. Throughout our key informant interviews and discussions, we observed a high level of commitment to these ideals. Moving towards more equitable partnerships is seen a necessary step to make progress on these commitments.

A commitment to localisation is a key driver of the proposed move in the Plan family from a compliance-based, direct service delivery approach to a more equitable partnerships-based model. More equitable partnerships are seen as a precondition for *locally-led development* that strengthens the leadership role and capacity of local partners (in contrast to more conventional development where is limited investment in local leadership and capacity strengthening, much of which is focused on meeting the needs and reporting requirements of dominant partners – often funders, international actors and/or larger development organisations.

Equitable partnerships are valued for their potential to extend scale and reach, increasing quality, impact, and influence of our work. The stakeholders we have engaged in our research value the assets that partners bring, such as their increased geographic reach, local networks and legitimacy within communities, their grounded local knowledge and specialist expertise. High quality partnerships with youth networks, women's rights organisations, and other local civil society organisations (CSOs) are widely acknowledged as essential to the effectiveness and legitimacy of Plan's and SDDirect's work.

Co-ownership and co-creation are more likely to deliver quality plans, delivery, and outcomes, by ensuring that the interventions are informed by context, local knowledge, and community demand. To nurture and sustain co-ownership and co-creation, complementary efforts are required to build more equitable systems, practices, policies, and shared risk management.

Mindset shifts are already underway. In Plan International the drive towards more equitable partnerships is being encouraged by its landmark 2018 *Building Better Partnerships* guidance note and related guidance and training materials, as well as its *Power, Privilege and Bias* training, feminist leadership principles, and the *Pledge for Change*. In SDDirect, the energy for more equitable partnerships derives feminist leadership principles as well as continuing discussions on what racial justice, post-colonialism and feminist leadership mean for our work.

> *'We believe that a locally led approach to development is more effective, ethical and sustainable. High quality partnerships founded on shared values enable us to create long-lasting impact.' – SDDirect*

3. Challenges for equitable partnership-building

Through our stakeholder dialogue and consultations, we identified several challenges that restrict levels of ambition to build more equitable partnerships:

- **Timeframe and scale:** More equitable partnerships typically take time to develop and require significant investments of staff time and effort. As it is difficult to retrofit equitable dynamics and arrangements, such investments ideally need to be built in from the beginning. Short turnaround times in response to funding opportunities often leave little space for partnership formation. Shorter-term and smaller scale ventures can limit the scope for higher levels of ambition. However, sometimes shorter term, smaller scale partnerships can allow for piloting collaboration and help to build trust and understanding for higher level of collaboration and equity.

- **Money and resourcing:** The costs of more equitable partnerships are often underestimated or invisible due to a lack of focus on the practical elements of partnership work and different levels of ambition. *Cost/benefit* and *value for money* analysis for partnerships is typically weak which makes it difficult to plan for and allocate the time and resources required. Lack of rigour in financial and resource planning for partnerships contributes to a weak, incomplete, or unconvincing *added-value case* (or *business case*) for partnerships.

- **People and skills:** Commonly, development organisations have limited human and leadership resources and skills for equitable partnership-building. Key skills needed to build and maintain partnerships (such as brokering, facilitation, mediation, organisation development, participatory methods, stakeholder feedback and engagement, inclusive dialogue and listening skills) are sometimes insufficiently prioritised in our learning and development platforms. Often there is a scarcity of dedicated partnership support, with partnership brokering and management treated as an 'add-on' to existing roles without recognition of the time, effort and flexibility required to nurture high quality collaboration. Typically, much depends on a few key individuals, and turnover in personnel is a challenge.

- **Risk and evidence:** Where organisational culture is risk-averse and focused on compliance, conventional development partnerships tend to impose unequal burdens of compliance and bureaucracy on smaller and/or local organisations. Often there is little joint risk analysis and an unequal risk

burden borne by less powerful or fund-receiving partners. This can undermine trust and motivation on the side of local partners and contributes to unbalanced power dynamics. Stakeholders consulted highlighted a general lack of solid evidence, data and learning on the value and performance of partnerships. This makes it more difficult to make the case for partnership, to justify further investment in the partnership, and to apply evidence and learning to improve partnership delivery and outcomes.

- **Power:** Power analysis, stakeholder voice, feedback and accountability mechanisms are often weak at every stage of development partnerships. Donors, Plan National Offices, and other global level actors have a built-in power advantage through control of funds and non-negotiable conditions like safeguarding requirements, GDPR and anti-terrorism rules.

- **Behaviours and mindsets:** There are multiple disincentives for more equitable partnering and localisation, including: potential loss of power (when power is perceived as a *zero-sum game*); having to share resources more equitably; and potential threats to job security as historically dominant partners are required to share and/or reduce their control over resources, funds, and decision-making. Conversely, feminist leadership principles suggest that we all gain power from sharing power and working collaboratively. Clearly, historically more dominant development actors have a particular challenge to restructure traditional roles, decision-making, compliance systems and funding models that perpetuate power imbalances.

- **Contextualisation:** Most informants to our research stressed the need for the language and terminology of partnerships to be *translated* and *adapted* for different local contexts. A *one size fits all approach* does not reflect the diversity of partnership types or situations.

4. What needs to change?

Our stakeholder consultation and research identified the following key changes needed to make progress on more equitable partnerships:

- **Equitable partnerships require changes in mindsets and behaviours**. There needs to be a greater focus on building trust with partners, mutual benefit and respect, and leadership development. At the same time, we need to move away from seeing partners one-dimensionally as operational arms, implementers, or instruments of delivery. To facilitate these shifts, more focused efforts are needed to strengthen partnership dialogue, as well as to enable co-creation of the *added value case for partnership*, better power analysis and management of power relations, critical culture shifts, and tangible institutional systems change.

- **Sustained, cross-organisational efforts are needed to promote localisation and equitable partnerships.** New partnerships tools (like the *partnerships continuum* outlined below), as well as existing tools and resources produced by the Plan International family and other organisations, can be mobilised to create a common frame of reference and an agreed level of ambition. Partnerships driven by an ethos of *locally led, globally connected* must develop language and concepts that are accessible and adaptable for diverse contexts. To avoid competing with other tools or overburdening staff, new tools and methods should build on existing guidance (including *Building Better Partnerships to Advance Children's Rights and Equality for Girls*, Plan International, 2018) and partnership-building resources from organisations like The Partnering Initiative, Synergos, and others. Emerging tools should integrate resources on feminist leadership, gender transformative and youth-focused approaches, power analysis, anti-racist approaches, and other relevant tools.

- **More investment is needed in specialist partnership skills.** Investment in partnerships capacity and skills strengthening is needed to provide more devoted staff partnership expertise and better facilitation support. There is a need for more dedicated partnership management and support roles as well as intentional partnership skills development, (within teams and across organisational functions) to embed the necessary expertise and capacity across partner organisations. Dedicated staff time is required to develop and utilise these skills. Partnerships learning needs to be documented and shared more effectively to facilitate cross-team learning.

- **Equitable partnerships require greater clarity around expectations, a solid case for partnership and a high degree of partnership readiness.** Better mapping of different types of partnership is needed to support partnerships work, as well as more in-depth analysis of partnering portfolios, partner assets and partnership capacities. It is important to be deliberate from the start about the right level of ambition for each partnership in line with its purpose, timeframe, scale, assets, organisation, and context. Ideally, the feasibility and partnership assembly stage should include a joint assessment of the conditions, expectations and enabling or disabling factors for the partnership. Our research highlighted the usefulness of developing a foundational *added-value case for partnership* (including a *partnership readiness assessment*) that would outline the rationale, context, scope, and possibilities of the partnership, as well as partnership performance indicators, ways of partnership working, and the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of each partner. Such analysis and case statements would lay a stronger foundation for more equitable partnerships – for example, by setting out clear commitments, markers and agreed levels of ambition that could be monitored over time to assess progress and enable partnership learning and adaptation.

- **Improved tools are needed to match the ambition on partnerships.** Our research findings suggest a need for further development of useful tools, including: accountability, inclusive dialogue and feedback mechanisms that amplify the voice of local partners, youth and communities; better communications and information-sharing mechanisms; tools to assemble the *added-value case for partnership*, including a *partnership readiness assessment*; a flexible template for regular *partnership health checks*; and tools to support shared risk analysis and more equitable risk management and mitigation.

5. Costs associated with more equitable partnerships

Lack of clarity around costs and financial drivers is a commonly cited barrier to promoting and achieving equitable partnerships. Through our research we identified five main cost centres.

Time and effort: Additional time and effort is required to establish and maintain equitable partnerships, to ensure participation and shared leadership from partners, and to build or maintain relationships. This may include additional partnership-related time and level of effort for staff, leadership, partners, donors, and other stakeholders.

Convening and dialogue: Dedicated convening and dialogue activities and resources are needed to promote strong and equitable partnerships. This can include investments in partnership feasibility dialogue, joint planning and appraisals, monitoring, partnership 'health checks' and learning processes. Additional time and resources should be allocated to build shared leadership and ensure equitable and inclusive participation among the partners in these processes.

Capacity strengthening: Investments may be needed in a range of areas to strengthen internal capacity and that of partners. This may include targeted partnership skills development, leadership development, organisation development (OD) support and accompaniment. Financial and organisational systems improvement may also be required to adapt to new ways of working in partnership.

Travel: Equitable partnerships may require additional travel budget to support joint processes, convening and meaningful participation of partners and stakeholders, such as: partnership dialogue, planning and review; governance, decision-making and stakeholder feedback; skills and capacity strengthening; peer learning events; joint risk assessments; donor engagement; field-based monitoring; etc.
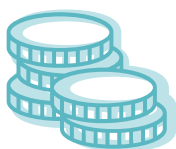
Organisational preparation, transition costs and core budget: Concerted progress on localisation and equitable partnership-building will often entail additional costs for systems development, staffing and human resource transitions, phasing out of certain 'traditional' or 'donor' roles; and other organisational shifts. Core budget and non-restricted funding may be needed to subsidise the time, resources and organisational change processes required for stronger partnerships and more resilient partner organisations.
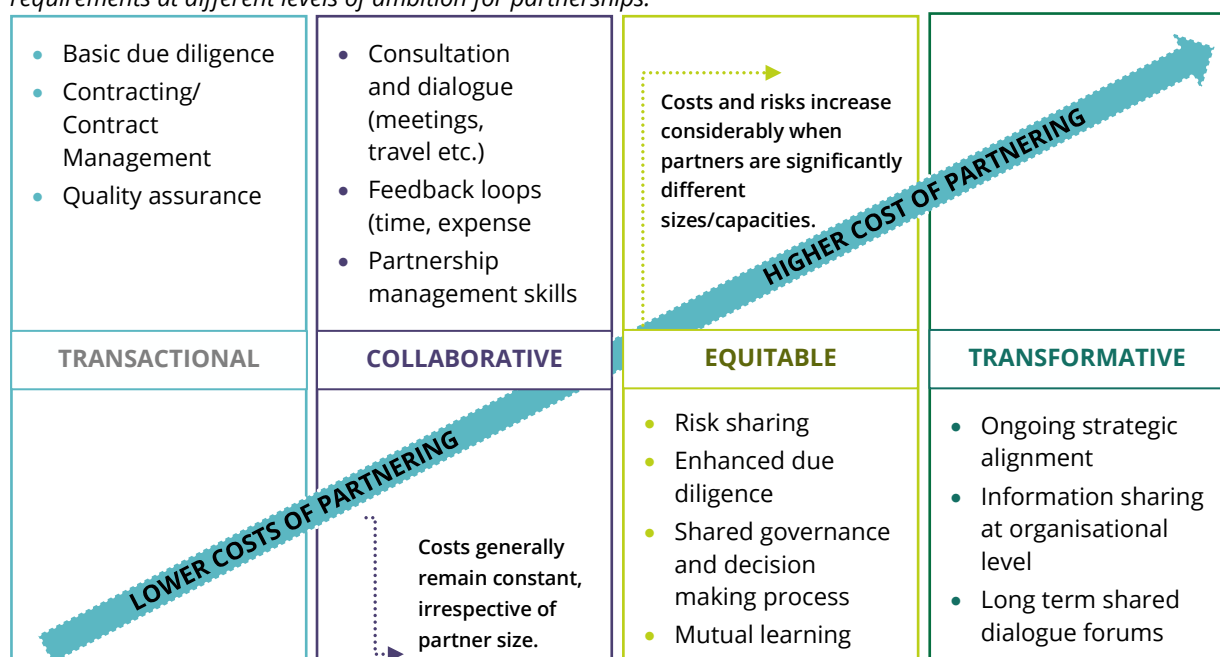
6. Financing and resourcing for equitable partnerships

Throughout our consultations, it was clear that control of resource allocation and flows are perceived as a significant driver of power in all partnerships. We found:

- **Resourcing commitments need to be clearly understood by partners** to develop enabling conditions for more equitable partnerships and to deliver more effective, impactful programming and influencing work. Presenting these costs from the outset to funders supports the case for targeted resourcing of vital work that underpins operational delivery of partnerships – work that may have been under-resourced or regarded as an overhead.

- **Different partnering models have quite different resourcing requirements and dynamics.** Failure to resource a partnership adequately, in line with the proposed purpose or level of ambition, is likely to put unsustainable stress on a partnership and contribute either to disappointing results or to a continued mismatch between aspiration and reality.

- **Equitable partnerships are more likely to succeed when donors and funders are not solely focused on 'delivery' of goods and services but are also invested in the equitable aspirations and commensurate ways of working for the partnership.** Donors must be willing to support the allocation of resources at levels that would enable equitable partnerships to operate, grow, learn, and adapt in ways that can deliver both development impact and real shifts in partnership practice.

Figure 2 below outlines our working hypothesis and draft framework for analysing financing and resourcing requirements at different levels of ambition for partnerships.

• Basic due diligence • Contracting/ Contract Management • Quality assurance	• Consultation and dialogue (meetings, travel etc.) • Feedback loops (time, expense • Partnership management skills	Costs and risks increase considerably when partners are significantly different sizes/capacities.	
TRANSACTIONAL	**COLLABORATIVE**	**EQUITABLE**	**TRANSFORMATIVE**
	Costs generally remain constant, irrespective of partner size.	• Risk sharing • Enhanced due diligence • Shared governance and decision making process • Mutual learning	• Ongoing strategic alignment • Information sharing at organisational level • Long term shared dialogue forums

HIGHER COST OF PARTNERING

LOWER COSTS OF PARTNERING

7. The Partnerships Continuum

In the early stages of Phase 1 of our research, we developed a prototype *partnerships continuum* tool (Figure 3) to represent a spectrum of partnerships with different levels of ambition. Our assumption is that there can be high quality, principles-based partnerships at all levels of ambition, however the extent and depth of collaboration increases along the continuum. The *partnerships continuum* is intended as a tool to understand the qualities, characteristics, expectations, aspirations, and standards of partnerships at different levels. It is also designed to provide a means for better planning, assessment, monitoring, and management of diverse partnerships.

Figure 3: Draft Partnerships Continuum, Feb 2022

TRANSACTIONAL   COLLABORATIVE   EQUITABLE   STRATEGIC
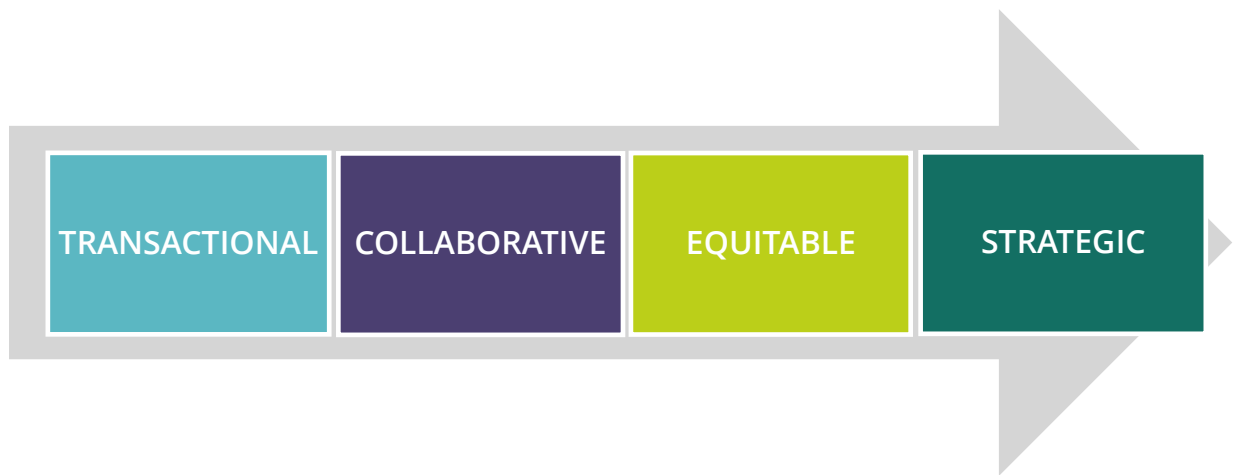
Based on our further research, stakeholder dialogue and feedback over course of March-June 2022, we refined the *partnerships continuum* tool (Figure 4) to reflect key learnings.

Figure 4: Updated prototype of the partnerships continuum, June 2022 (see Annex 1 for details)

TRANSACTIONAL	COLLABORATIVE	EQUITABLE	TRANSFORMATIVE
Such as contractual (aid system) agreements for provision of services – or transactional donor/recipient relationships – to fund or deliver specified activities, outputs, or results.	Within the constraints of the traditional aid system (or donor-defined limits), partners combine resources to deliver better results through collaboration – delivering value that is more than the sum of their parts.	Based on active participation and co-creation, like-minded partners pursue a shared vision with an integrated approach and more equitable sharing of power, resources, ownership, and learning.	A co-equal partnership of action and learning, inclusive of community voice and agency and based on a shared vision of systemic change, that draws on and nurtures the diverse resources, capacities, talents and of the partners.

The key changes we made to the *partnerships continuum* are:

- We have changed the name of the highest level of ambition from *strategic* to *transformative* as 'strategic partnership' has a quite specific (and varied) meaning to different development actors.

- We have revised the graphic representation of the *partnerships continuum* to show multi-directional movement across the spectrum, recognising that a partnership may move back and forth across the spectrum during its life cycle or in response to varying conditions, constraints and/or resourcing issues.

- The revised *partnerships continuum* is informed by our assumption that investments in joint learning, innovation and mutual capacity strengthening tend to increase with higher levels of ambition and that capacity strengthening becomes less one-directional (i.e., less top-down) as the level of ambition grows. In the case of a *transformational partnership*, mutual capacity strengthening may be a very explicit objective and rationale for collaboration.

- We have included arrows between *transactional* and *collaborative* partnerships, and between *equitable* and *transactional* partnerships to show the spectrum of partnerships as two sets of linked levels of ambition. Generally, stakeholders suggested that movement between both sides of these sets was more organic or easier to envisage and achieve, whereas the jump from the *collaborative* to the *equitable* level of ambition may be more challenging to achieve.

Annex 1 outlines a schedule of features, characteristics, standards indicators of different types of parternship in relation to the following key areas of partnership design and practice:

- Motivations and expectations

- Initiation and ownership

- Nature of collaboration

- Form and extent of engagement

- Accountability, decision-making and resourcing

- Agreed terms of engagement

- Risk management

Please note that the summary of characteristics of partnerships at different levels of ambition (in Annex 1) is abridged and draws on the wider literature on partnerships. A longer version of the matrix is contained in internal PIUK/SDDirect reports.

Some indicators or descriptors of partnerships at different levels are drawn from the work of *The Partnering Initiative*, particularly its tool *The Relationship Spectrum* (see: https://thepartneringinitiative.org/the-relationship-spectrum-2/) and its guidance for building high impact multi-stakeholder partnerships for the *Sustainable Development Goals* (co-published with UN DESA, 2018 and 2020) – see list of references and resources below. Where we have specifically quoted content from The Partnering Initiative (TPI) in Annex 1, this content from the above sources is noted as *(TPI)*.

8. Looking forward

In the current phase of the *Building Equitable Partnerships Initiative*, Plan and SDDirect are focused on development and testing of the *partnerships continuum.* We are producing and collating SDDirect and Plan partnership case studies that draw on the *partnerships continuum* (and related tools) and document learning in a succinct format.

Key tools developed include:

- A template for production of *building equitable partnerships* case studies.

- A tool with guidance for development of a clear *added value case for partnership* at planning stage, including the added value contributions (financial and non-financial) of all partners.

- A tool with guidance for undertaking a *partnership readiness assessment* as part of partnership case development, scoping, mutual appraisals, and risk assessment.

- A tool with guidance for an adaptable *partnership health check* process to strengthen partnership mutual self-assessment tools (with scoring).

In 2023/2024, we plan to pilot and refine these tools, along with prototype *partnerships continuum*. In due course, we intend to share further learning with a wider community of practice.

By sharing our initial findings, lessons from practice, and emerging tools, we hope to make a modest contribution to the wider field and to stimulate further exchange internally and externally on how to build and measure equitable partnerships in development and humanitarian work. Conscious that momentum is growing for *shifting the power* in the global development system (supported by practical innovation to *put principles into practice*), we welcome feedback and engagement on this early-stage practice and reflection paper, including opportunities for learning and dialogue.

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Synergos Institute (2019) *Business as Bridging Leaders: A guide to cross-sectoral partnerships*, https://www.syngs.info/files/businesses-as-bridging-leaders-guide.pdf.

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TPI and UN DESA (2020) The SDG Partnering Guidebook A practical guide to building high impact multi-stakeholder partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals.

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WaterAid (2019) *Partnership framework*, https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/partnership-framework

Below is a condensed version a provisional *partnerships continuum* schedule of descriptors and characteristics at different levels of ambition.

AREA	TRANSACTIONAL	COLLABORATIVE	EQUITABLE	TRANSFORMATIVE
Motivation and expectations	Shaped by practical business interests, needs and delivery priorities. Mainly driven by efficiencies and value for money. Typically, a timebound and/or shorter-term arrangement with specific and well-defined deliverables.	Often driven by donor and funding opportunities, specific calls for proposals and business development processes. Partnership is seen as the most effective response to an opportunity for a substantive, well-defined role in a traditional aid delivery partnership.	Driven by clear partnership principles and strategy as well as shared commitment to development impact and learning. Commitment to negotiate shared vision & values, joint purpose and equitable sharing of power, resources, and ownership among partners.	As well as clear partnership principles and strategy, driven by shared aspiration for transformative, sustainable, and catalytic impact on social justice issues. Based on shared vision and values, joint purpose and equitable sharing of power, resources, ownership, and knowledge.
Initiation and ownership	'One party [usually the donor or lead agency] decides the	Consortium or coalition chosen and convened by lead agency, based on	Partners commit to creating time and platforms for equitable	Partners invests time and resources into partnership-building

	programme based on their knowledge/experience' (TPI). Downstream delivery partners or service providers are identified and contracted to provide niche services and/or implement specific activities.	significant consultations, negotiations, and pre-positioning. Typically built around specific opportunities, events, activities, or thematic area in which the lead agency has a strong comparative advantage, track record and leadership capacity.	partnership-building, regular and inclusive dialogue, partnership health checks and problem-solving. Partnership conveners facilitate co-creation of partnership vision, approach, joint purpose, objectives, and activities.	from outset, facilitating co-creation and co-ownership of approach, joint purpose, objectives, and activities. Inclusive of the voices and equitable participation of those closest to, and most affected by, the challenges at stake.
Nature of collaboration	Leveraging other partners' resources or niche services to achieve the client or lead agency's ends. One party purchases a service from – or donates to the work of – another or partners exchange resources to	Partnering leadership group plays a key role in leveraging resources, expertise, and niche services of partners to deliver high quality development delivery and impact. Defines clear activities and outputs decided at the beginning.	There are high levels of participation and transparency in programme design, learning, adaptation, governance, and budget allocations. Draws effectively on the complementary skills, experience, and	Brings together complementary skills, experience, and resources (including social capital). Clear agreed outcomes, embracing flexibility, agility, joint learning, and adaptive programming. Power dynamics surfaced and

	allow one or both to deliver more (TPI).		resources to deliver collective excellence.	acknowledged with practical action to ensure equitable sharing of power.
Form/extent of engagement	Limited engagement from parties beyond agreed activities (TPI). Narrow and focused, revolving around discrete projects and agreements that may be tightly specified - major focus is on a financial transaction (Fowler). Involves negotiation to maximise lead agency value and gains.	Expectations, objectives, terms of engagement and roles of all partners laid out in clear partnership agreements. Lead agency promotes good communications, open dialogue, and targeted access to the donor (within constraints of often limited budgets and time as well as tight delivery schedules).	Based on open and inclusive dialogue, honesty, and timely sharing of information (including, as much as possible, financial transparency). Requires inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue to understand the system and engage the players required to design and implement successful interventions (TPI).	Typically, a longer term, deeper partnership of equals, recognising that complex social challenges require multi-stakeholder collaboration to advance systemic change. Driven by clear partnership principles, common purpose, joint ownership and equitable sharing of power and resources as well as an aspiration for transformative, sustainable, and catalytic impact.

| Accountability, decision-making and resourcing | Donor or lead agency sets the parameters and budget, retaining overall decision-making authority.

Rules- and compliance-based.

Problem-solving is largely about meeting needs of client as well as terms, duration, and renewal of contract. | Expectations, objectives, terms of engagement and roles of all partners laid out in clear partnership agreements.

Information is shared, consultations take place with partners, but the final decision-making, access to full information, control of budgets and access to the client/funder rest with lead. | All partners have equitable voice and influence in in decision-making and (where relevant) in client/funder communications.

Mutual accountability, with understandings and accountability mechanisms outlined in terms of engagement. | Shared decision-making and management (including maximum budget transparency and co-responsibility).

Mutual accountability, with understandings and accountability mechanisms outlined in terms of engagement. |
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| Agreed terms of collaboration | Terms of exchange, engagement, lines of accountability and deliverables outlined in clear contracts and agreements. | Terms of collaboration, engagement, lines of accountability and communication, and deliverables outlined in clear contracts and partnership agreements. | Expectations, joint objectives, terms of collaboration and engagement, lines of accountability and communications, ways of working, and roles of all partners laid out in | Agreed framework to create a co-equal partnership, based on high levels of trust, shared values, common purpose, and joint ownership with clear terms of engagement and ways of working. |

			clear partnership agreements.	
Risk management	Risk largely transferred to service provider or junior partner.	Typically, risk is largely borne and managed by a lead agency.	Shared risk analysis and management.	Joint risk analysis and management.