

The potentials and limitations of partnerships for sustainable cities

SUMMARY: This paper discusses the experience with partnerships between municipal authorities and NGOs, community organizations and the private sector, drawing on case studies from Leicester, Pune, Buenos Aires, Nakuru, Benin City and Surabaya. It identifies the factors that help partnerships to succeed. The case studies include some successes, as partnerships allowed more to be done because each partner contributed resources and as synergies between sectors were exploited. Some partnerships also provided low-income groups with more influence on government or private enterprise programmes. The case studies highlight how successful partnerships need "good government" as the institutional and political framework within which privatization and municipal-NGO-community organization partnerships can work best. Successful partnerships usually imply that the stronger partners pass some decision-making powers to the others. Successful partnerships also need access to resources.

1. López Follegatti, Jose Luis (1999), "Ilo: a city in transformation", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 11, No 2, pages 181-202.

2. UCDO (2000), UCDO (Urban Community Development Office) Update No 2, Urban Community Development Office, Bangkok, 32 pages; also Boonyabancha, Somsook (1999), "The urban community environmental activities project, Thailand", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 11, No 1, April, pages 101-115.

3. Stein, Alfredo (2001), *Participation and Sustainability in Social Projects: The Experience of the Local Development Programme (PRODEL) in Nicaragua*, IIED Working Paper on Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas, London. A summary of this paper is published in *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 13, No 1, April 2001.

4. See the paper on Leicester by Ian Roberts listed on the back page; for Manizales, see Velasquez, Luz Stella (1998), "Agenda 21; a form of joint environmental management in Manizales, Colombia", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 10, No 2, pages 9-36.

5. See the paper on Pune by Jane Hobson listed on the back page.

6. Gaye, Malick and Fodé Diallo (1997), "Community participation in the management of the urban environment in Rufisque (Senegal)", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 9, No 1, pages 9-29.

I. INTRODUCTION

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PUBLIC agencies and community organizations, NGOs and private enterprises are seen as a means by which urban governments can get more done. They are considered especially relevant for urban governments that lack the capacity and funds to meet their responsibilities for infrastructure and service provision. There are examples of how much such partnerships can deliver – for instance, the remarkable scale and range of improvements achieved in the small Peruvian city of Ilo through community-municipal partnerships.⁽¹⁾ There are also examples of institutions that support a great variety of community-municipal initiatives – for instance, the Thai government's Urban Community Development Office⁽²⁾ and the Local Development Programme (PRODEL) in Nicaragua.⁽³⁾ Other partnerships, developed by local governments with the private sector and with community groups, have addressed environmental problems – for instance, within Local Agenda 21s in Leicester (UK) and Manizales (Colombia).⁽⁴⁾

Many local government-community or local government-NGO partnerships have focused on particular projects or sectors such as the support provided by the municipal authority in Pune (India) for public toilets developed by community organizations and NGOs,⁽⁵⁾ the provision for water and sanitation in Rufisque (Senegal)⁽⁶⁾ or the community-NGO partnerships in Chennai for waste collection.⁽⁷⁾ There are also the many housing projects developed by the South African Homeless People's Federation in collaboration with the NGO People's Dialogue and various local authorities.⁽⁸⁾ Each of these illustrate different ways in which the resources available to local government can be combined with those of other partners. Even poorly funded municipal authorities can contribute much to such partnerships as they contribute some resources (for instance public land), remove bureaucratic obstacles and change (or waive) inappropriate regulations.

II. PARTNERSHIPS

MANY OF THE papers in the October 2000 issue of *Environment and Urbanization* describe the experience with partnerships in different cities, namely, Leicester, Nakuru, Surabaya, Pune, Buenos Aires and Mangalore. The role of partnerships in Leicester in developing a Local Agenda 21 is of particular interest since this is widely regarded as one of the most innovative urban environmental programmes in Europe. Within the framework of a Local Agenda 21, measures were taken to improve public transport and to reduce congestion, traffic accidents, car use and air pollution; also measures to improve housing quality for low-income households, reduce fossil fuel use, increase

This is a brief of the October 2000 issue of the journal **Environment and Urbanization**, which was on **Sustainable Cities Revisited**. It draws on the 15 papers in this issue (which are listed on the back page, along with details of how to obtain a copy of this issue or obtain copies of individual papers from the web or by e-mail). This summary, produced with support from the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID), is to allow the journal's main findings to reach a wider audience.

renewable energy use and make the city council's own operations a model of reducing resource use and waste. Leicester set up a multi-sector board to bring together decision makers, business interests, academics, NGOs and community groups, and a local non-profit organization to manage the Environment City initiative. This, in turn, set up specialist working groups with representatives from government, business, the university and interest groups on such topics as the built environment, energy, the natural environment, transport and waste. Each working group had to develop, with wide consultation, a strategy for the city and develop practical demonstration projects. A fund to provide seed capital was set up to support the projects developed by the working groups.⁽⁹⁾

The municipal authorities in Nakuru (Kenya) also sought to develop partnerships between municipal authorities and local and external groups to jointly address environmental problems. Nakuru residents face serious inadequacies in the provision for water, sanitation and solid waste management. A Localizing Agenda 21 programme was developed, supported by various national and international agencies and NGOs but its capacity to address the most serious environmental problems was limited by the weakness of the local authority and the disinterest from central government.⁽¹⁰⁾

Other papers in the October 2000 issue of *Environment and Urbanization* describe different kinds of partnerships:

- In Surabaya (Indonesia), various partnerships between community organizations, NGOs and the government seek to reduce poverty and address environmental problems including the Social Safety Net Programme, the Urban Forum, programmes to address air and water pollution, and the long-established *kampung* improvement programme.
- In Pune (India), the municipal corporation recognized the ineffectiveness of their public toilets and so encouraged NGOs to work with low-income communities in developing more appropriate designs and more effective maintenance. It proved difficult for a local NGO, Shelter Associates, to meet official implementation schedules and cope with bureaucratic delays while still delivering for and remaining accountable to low-income residents. Thirteen communal toilet blocks have been designed and built by this NGO, responding to community preferences. These include special provision for children (who often find latrines frightening and so avoid using them), a design that women find more comfortable and a caretaker's room that can also be used for meetings, playgroups or other community activities.
- In Mangalore (India), the partnership was between the highly organized fishing community and the elected city corporation representatives, who sought to halt a barge mounted power generation project. This project was being promoted by higher levels of government and it would have threatened local livelihoods. This is an example of the politics of sustainable cities at work, as local groups worked to prevent external forces from exploiting local resources and imposing serious economic and environmental costs. The paper also describes the sophisticated system of indigenous organizations formed by the fishing communities and the many developmental interventions they have made.⁽¹¹⁾

III. PRIVATIZATION

THE PRIVATIZATION OF infrastructure and service provision is often referred to as a "partnership" even when it is not so much a partnership as a contractual arrangement between government and a private company. Two papers reflect on recent privatizations. The first describes different models for more effective and representative municipal-private sector community organization partnerships to improve or extend provision for water and sanitation. Drawing on the authors' experience working to support community-based upgrading programmes and to develop relationships between low-income communities and the private company responsible for water and sanitation in much of Buenos Aires, it highlights the kind of arrangements that can allow for greater community involvement and for more flexibility in what the private company offers low-income settlements.⁽¹²⁾

The paper on waste management in Benin City (Nigeria) draws on interviews with 591 households to reveal the inadequacies in the privatized collection system.⁽¹³⁾ This performs no better than the public service it replaced. Indeed, the proportion of households with a regular refuse collection service is now lower than it was in 1975. Some issues raised in this paper are similar to those raised in the paper on Buenos Aires. Both papers stress the fact that low-income groups and their community organizations need more say in influencing solutions, and that private sector (or public sector) suppliers must be more flexible in finding arrangements that match the needs of different neigh-

7. Anand, P B (1999), "Waste management in Madras revisited", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 11, No 2, pages 161-176.

8. Baumann, Ted, Joel Bolnick and Diana Mitlin (2001), *The Age of Cities and Organizations of the Urban Poor: The Work of the South African Homeless People's Federation and the People's Dialogue on Land and Shelter*, IIED Working Paper on Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas, London; also Bolnick, Joel (1996), "uTshani Buyakuluma ('The grass speaks')", People's Dialogue and the South African Homeless People's Federation, 1993-1996", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 8, No 2, pages 153-170.

9. See the paper on Leicester by Ian Roberts listed on the back page which discusses not only the lessons learnt from these partnerships (and how to make sure they work effectively) but also their limitations.

10. See the paper by Samson W Mwangi listed on the back page.

11. See the paper by Gururaja Budhya and Solomon Benjamin listed on the back page.

12. See the paper by Ana Hardoy and Ricardo Schusterman listed on the back page.

13. See the paper by Vincent Ogu listed on the back page.

bourhoods, including different capacities to pay. These two papers also emphasize how public authorities must have the capacity to set appropriate conditions for private sector involvement, to monitor performance and to take appropriate action if agreed conditions are not met.

IV. WHAT HELPS SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

WITHIN THESE PAPERS, which are drawn from very different contexts, certain themes are stressed:

The recognition of unequal power between the “partners” and the importance of ensuring that the priorities of the weaker partners (generally low-income groups and their organizations, often local NGOs) don’t get pushed aside by those of the stronger partners. Successful partnerships are usually built around mutual gain. They imply that the stronger partners pass some decision-making powers to the others. A partnership is more than an arrangement through which one organization (for instance, a private company or a municipal authority) contracts another (for instance, an NGO or community organization) to undertake some task, even if such an arrangement may be called a “partnership”.

The need for any urban partnership that builds consensus around some pressing issue or that develops a Local Agenda 21, to get action – for instance, by having access to resources or the power to generate an appropriate response from existing agencies. Any enthusiasm for partnership quickly wanes if no action is taken to address the problems that the partnership has identified. The enthusiasm among various international agencies for promoting “stakeholder dialogues” or city consultations within urban centres with under-resourced and weak local governments must be backed up with support for addressing the priorities identified within such consultations.

*The key role of “good governance” in providing the context within which partnerships can be effective. It is difficult for NGOs or community organizations to be effective without government support or in the face of a bureaucracy that imposes unnecessary delays and constraints. It is also difficult to ensure that privatization serves the needs of lower-income groups without effective, accountable local authorities. The “privatization” agenda of some international donors seems to be based more on these donors’ immediate need for organizations that can implement the projects they fund than on a careful assessment of the best means of improving provision. Frustrated by having to work with weak municipal authorities, the donors hope that private enterprises will prove more effective. But this means too little attention given to developing the capacity of governments to set appropriate terms for privatization, to act as regulators and to ensure consumer representation within this regulation. **“Good governance” is needed to provide the institutional and political framework within which privatization and municipal-NGO-community organization partnerships can work best.***

The need for local government agencies to develop the capability and habit of being responsive to local needs. The review of Leicester’s experience notes how it is often easier for local governments to be “participatory” in encouraging discussion than in actually delivering. In Pune, the municipal support for communal toilets developed by local NGOs and community organizations revealed the constraints that its bureaucratic structures brought to implementation.

The need for particular measures to ensure that under-represented and unorganized groups are involved. Several papers note the difficulties of ensuring that the needs and priorities of women, youth, minority groups and the lowest-income households are included. As Leicester’s experience shows, special measures need to be taken to address this, but doing so is obviously particularly difficult in societies where many such groups face discrimination in most aspects of their lives.

The difficulty of moving beyond present needs. It is obviously easier to develop partnerships around pressing local needs such as inadequate refuse collection or poor quality public transport than around environmental problems whose impacts are outside the city (for instance, water pollution affecting water users downstream) or transferred to the future (for instance, high levels of greenhouse gas emissions).

The need for clarity and precision with regard to the role of any partnership, what it is seeking to achieve and how it will do so. Much time can be lost if partnership-based groups are not clear about their function.

Local non-profit institutions, including NGOs and higher education institutions, have had important roles in many partnerships, both in stimulating and supporting action and in ensuring continuity. In Leicester, a local NGO, Environ, was set up to support the multi-sector board that brought together representatives of the city government, the county government, business and community

groups. In Buenos Aires, an Argentine NGO, IIED-America Latina, has a key role in developing and supporting new models for community-driven improvements to water and sanitation, and ensuring that these models are implemented more widely in low-income, unserved areas. In Surabaya, the local university has an important role in many environmental initiatives. In Nakuru, NGOs helped stimulate and support the Local Agenda 21. In Pune, local NGOs were responsible for community consultations and for ensuring implementation of the new communal toilets.

Although Leicester's experience will be of particular interest to many municipal authorities and NGOs that are developing Local Agenda 21s, some caution is needed when seeking to draw lessons. There is an important difference between Leicester's experience and those in most urban centres in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Leicester developed partnerships to go beyond the normal functions of local government; most other urban centres see partnerships as ways of fulfilling conventional and essential functions because of the incapacity of local government to do so (and often because of the lack of support from higher levels of government). This can lead to such a gap between needs and what local partnerships can actually achieve that the enthusiasm for partnerships disappears.

The key issue for most local governments is thus not so much to develop partnerships but to provide the framework within which a great multiplicity of partnerships can develop and be effective, within which those with low incomes and other disadvantaged groups have influence. Good governance, which includes building good relations with community organizations as well as a commitment to participation and accountability, has to underpin this. Good governance also has to include measures that reduce the bureaucratic constraints on effective action and remove anti-poor orientations with regard to how low-income groups earn a living (for instance, harassment of street vendors) and develop their own homes.

V. MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE PRESENT...

THE OCTOBER 2000 issue of *Environment and Urbanization* was the fourth issue on the theme of Sustainable Cities,⁽¹⁴⁾ reflecting both the interest of readers and the interest of those who submit papers. Amidst all the discussions of what the term sustainable development actually means and what it implies for "sustainable cities", it is worth recalling the two key points in the Brundtland Commission's definition of the goal of sustainable development: "...meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."⁽¹⁵⁾

Two papers consider measures to meet the needs of the present or, conversely, the failure to meet these needs. The first is on changes in urban water use in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and is a sad reflection on the failure to develop the institutional framework to provide a most fundamental need – safe, sufficient, reliable, accessible and affordable water supplies.⁽¹⁶⁾ This paper reports on the dramatic deterioration in provision for water between 1967 and 1997 in many of the 16 urban sites in nine urban centres (including Nairobi and Dar es Salaam) where research was undertaken. Most of those sites that already had piped water in 1967 had less reliable supplies by 1997, and mean per capita water use had dropped to half the 1967 levels. For households without piped supplies, the time spent collecting water had tripled over those 30 years.

The second paper on meeting the needs of the present highlights the extreme vulnerability of many low-income urban households to disasters.⁽¹⁷⁾ These not only kill and injure large numbers but also destroy people's homes and other assets and undermine their livelihoods. The paper describes how an urban livelihoods approach can help to reduce people's vulnerability to disasters and integrate poverty reduction with risk reduction. Seeing disasters as one-off, exceptional events that need special organizations to respond to them misses the extent to which vulnerability can be reduced within the programmes and actions of municipal authorities. The livelihoods framework, with its emphasis on building and diversifying household asset bases, provides a tool to link the micro-level activities and concerns of households with macro-level municipal activities and programmes.

VI. ...WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE ABILITY OF FUTURE GENERATIONS TO MEET THEIR NEEDS

SEVERAL PAPERS CONSIDER how to make cities perform better with regard to resource use and waste management. Two concentrate on the loss of fertile land to urban expansion. The paper on Buenos Aires describes the loss of agricultural land in one of the world's most productive agricul-

14. The other issues on Sustainable Cities were Vol 4 No 2 (1992), Vol 10 No 2 (1998) and Vol 11 No 2 (1999). Together, the four issues contain over 50 papers; for more details see <http://www.iied.org/eandu/>. These back issues may also be ordered from E&U, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H ODD, UK, e-mail: humans@iied.org for £12 each; for postage and packing add 15 per cent for the UK, 25 per cent for Europe, 40 per cent for elsewhere.

15. World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press.

16. See the paper by John Thompson, Ina T. Porras, Elisabeth Wood, James K. Tumwine, Mark R. Mujwahuzi, Munguti Katui-Katua and Nick Johnstone listed on the back page

17. See the paper by David Sanderson listed on the back page.

18. See the paper by Jorge Morello, Gustavo D. Buzai, Claudia A. Baxendale, Andrea F. Rodríguez, Silvia Diana Matteucci, R. E. Godagnone and R. R. Casas listed on the back page.

19. See the paper by Shahab Fazal listed on the back page.

20. See the paper by Helen Ross, Anuchat Pongsomlee, Sureeporn Punpuing and Krittaya Archavanitkul listed on the back page.

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22. This volume can be ordered through the Centre for Science and Environment's web page: www.cseindia.org.

tural areas.⁽¹⁸⁾ The continued expansion of the built-up area is not so much the result of population growth (which has slowed considerably) but more the result of the movement of middle and upper-income groups to *barrios cerrados* (closed neighbourhoods) on the city periphery, and of the speculative parcelling of land in advance of its development. The paper on Saharanpur City (India) provides an interesting contrast. This is a much smaller and less well known city but has similar problems as urban expansion extends over high quality agricultural land.⁽¹⁹⁾

In neither city can urban expansion be stopped. If the supply of land for new housing is constrained, this simply drives up prices and further restricts options for low-income groups. Restrictions on new development can also encourage expansion just beyond the area where development has been controlled, extending sprawl still further and increasing dependence on private automobile use. The issue is, rather, how to reconcile the land needs for urban expansion with protection of key natural resources.

The paper on Bangkok⁽²⁰⁾ highlights how poorly coordinated decision-making structures and the political culture have allowed the development of land uses and a built environment in which the public interest has been neglected, and the functioning of the natural flood plain ecosystem has been ignored. The authors show how an integrative analysis of city systems can help us see beyond current environmental and social problems to underlying causes, and suggests different opportunities for possible interventions. Focusing on a single aspect of a city or its people, without understanding its context, risks interventions which treat symptoms rather than causes.

No discussion of urban sustainability would be complete without some consideration of waste management. One paper looks in some detail at the potential for recycling in Mexicali (Mexico), based on a careful recording of the weight and composition of household waste.⁽²¹⁾ This found that 80 per cent of household refuse was potentially recyclable. The paper also discusses the potential benefits of a recycling programme not only in reducing waste volumes but also in lengthening the life of the existing city dump, a significant concern given the difficulties that most city authorities have in getting new dump sites at a reasonable distance from the areas from which waste is collected.

This brief ends with a cartoon by Rustam Vania, which highlights the key global issue in regard to sustainable cities - the finite nature of global 'environmental space' in terms of natural resources and the capacity of global systems to absorb wastes (especially greenhouse gases). It is drawn from *Green Politics: Global Environmental Negotiations I* published by the Centre for Science and Environment in India and edited by Anil Agarwal, Sunita Narain and Anju Sharma, which critically reviews the international negotiations on global environmental issues and the institutions that are seeking to address them.⁽²²⁾



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