

## DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE (DPP) IN NIGER

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USAID West Africa Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene (USAID WA-WASH) Program organized in Niger on November 26-28, 2012a workshop on developing partnerships. Twenty three representatives with a broad range of experience and expertise in the water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector from the private, public and civil society in Niger participated in the workshop. The workshop aimed: (1) to raise awareness on the knowledge and resources available in partnerships in the WASH sector; (2) to develop practical skills for working in partnership with others; and (3) to share skills and knowledge to address the challenges of existing partnerships. The workshop was facilitated through group discussions, plenary presentations, debates and role plays based on real life situations.

The approach highlights the essential characteristics of working in partnerships in the WASH sector. Discussions from the participants on the existing partnerships validated the relevance of this analytical framework in understanding the partnership challenges. The primary purpose of partnerships is to experiment new products, services and approaches and therefore, it is critical to carefully analyze events and processes that slow down progress (disablers) and events that speed up progress (enablers). The enablers and disablers of partnerships are divided into three categories: (1) the organizational cohesion, which guarantees every party the support of his organization; this cohesion is determined partly by the authority available to the participant, the attitude of the organization to risks and the timing of the partnership; (2) the relationship between partners where each partner must allow a fair assessment of their characteristics (risks, skills, and competencies) and functioning in terms of information sharing; this dimension of the partnership context also includes the functions of decision making and governance that ensure effective collaboration among partners; and (3) the appropriateness of the partnership scope that deals with the balance between the objective of the partners and the content of the partnership; this dimension evaluates the partners' contribution to the means to achieve the partnership objectives, the adequacy of resources and the knowledge of the partnership intervention framework

The identification of the various factors both enablers and disablers in the early stages of the partnership, and the need to establish strategies to anticipate obstacles are critical to the success of the partnership. The results from group discussions demonstrated the relevance of performing such an analysis as a preliminary to any partnership. The discussions also highlighted the complexity of WASH partnerships as water and sanitation are an indivisible component necessitating a partnership between players of both sectors. This partnership could be sometimes difficult especially between local authorities and NGOs in civil society-public partnerships. The representatives from the Ministry of Water Resources stressed the need for information sharing with NGOs.

A session on status and power in partnerships was presented through role plays. This session examined how partnerships challenge social norms as they emphasize horizontal decision-making. Partnerships disrupt the natural tendency for people to move into leadership roles that are expressed through vertical structures, which are predictable and easier to manage. Participants were divided into four groups to stage role plays to demonstrate different types of power relationships and status between actors in multi-sector partnerships. The participants discussed the influence of the status in the role plays presented and the ways in which power and status can be displayed in partnerships.

A case study of a partnership between a South African NGO and private (for profit) organizations was presented to demonstrate the different interests and motivations of various partners in a partnership. Participants discussed the various interests that were at stake. This led to the introduction of the concept of scale of motivations which aims to list and prioritize different reasons likely to motivate the commitment of a partner in a partnership. The participants observed that the different actors may have common motivations at different scales. The session demonstrated the concepts of interest and motivations to engage in a partnership, stressing the importance of context in their definition.

Other concepts such as governance in partnerships, accountability, negotiation and conflict resolution were presented through debates, role plays and group discussions. Partnership governance includes effective management structures to assign roles and responsibilities to partners, manage and control resources, information and coordination of activities and tools for conflict resolution, leadership, and learning culture. Accountability was broken down into three categories including compliance (obligation to account), responsiveness to changes and transparency in terms of information and reporting progress both internally and externally. Various negotiation styles were presented. The ideal negotiation style creates a win-win situation among all parties involved in a partnership. In order to achieve such a win-win situation in a negotiation, partners should focus more on the underlying interests of each other rather than their positions in order to widen the choice of options leading to a mutual agreement. In the second part of the session, the participants practiced their negotiation skills and understanding of the concept of negotiation by interest through "the exercise of the tree". This exercise entailed role play of a scene that involved two neighbors that disagreed over a tree. The participants were particularly aware of the impact of language, especially the use of the personal pronoun "I". The use of this pronoun appears binding because it involves a much higher level of commitment to that implied by the use of "we", which includes without distinction all parties.

The evaluation of the partnerships is important as it fosters dialogue between the partners to enable them to adjust internal imbalances (which reduce efficiency) and adapt to external changes. Evaluation considers all aspects of accountability (internal and external), the level of involvement of partners and the underlying motivations. It is important to progressively integrate indicators in the monitoring and evaluation plans. In addition, a development of communication strategy is equally important to ensure that all the parties are informed of the activities of the partnership. The partnership is not intended to last forever, but a mechanism to achieve goals, therefore it is important to develop an exit strategy to avoid creating a void after the end of the partnership. Clear communication of the exit strategy to local actors is important as well as gradual withdrawal to ensure sustainability of the achievement of the partnership goals. Finally, the participants developed action plans for implementation in their respective organizations to improve the working practices in the partnerships.

*The full report is available (in French) upon request via our website. For more details about our program activities and other reports please visit <http://wawash.fiu.edu/>.*

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