ANNEX XI

Guidance for Building Successful Partnerships

A useful strategy for implementing National ECD Policies and meeting Policy Goals is to develop public-private partnerships for designing and implementing priority programmes. Often, a special fund is established for this purpose. Fortunately, the conditions and elements for designing, developing and nurturing successful partnerships now are well understood.

The cultural context of partnership at both local and national levels is all-important. Careful attention should be given to studying successful approaches for creating public-private partnerships in each context to help ensure their long-term sustainability. In multi-ethnic nations, partnership approaches will differ from sub-region to sub-region. They should be considered in each context before launching new partnership initiatives. Furthermore, the cultural context for developing partnerships at the national level may be quite different from cultural contexts in provincial or community settings; therefore, in many nations, it may be essential to carry out quite different partnership strategies in various parts of the country. For a nation that decides to promote the development of public-private partnerships for ECD, a set of strategies, plans and funding approaches will be required. At a minimum, these should encompass the following areas:

- Identifying and convening potential partners with an emphasis on inclusiveness
- Specifying methods for giving equitable support for financial resources, goods and services
- Providing recommendations on how to design and implement partnerships, and
- Developing a system for monitoring and evaluating partnerships to ensure accountability, transparency and the measurement of results.

Within this context, some steps for developing sustainable public—private partnerships have been gleaned from reviewing hundreds of successful educational partnerships developed across a wide array of sectors.48

Full participation in all partnership processes

Representatives of each public and private institution involved in a partnership should participate in all planning, implementation and evaluation processes. Although institutions must retain their independence, they should seek to build balanced and reciprocal relationships. The leadership styles of partner institutions will be of critical importance to ensuring high levels of long-term participation. Leaders who value teamwork, clear communications, shared programme management, transparency and accountability usually establish strong, long-lasting and successful partnerships.

Shared vision, expectations, roles and objectives create a climate of trust

First, new partners must build a shared vision and shared expectations. Then, clear roles and responsibilities should be outlined. These roles and responsibilities usually will differ, but they should be given equal value in the eyes of all partners. Potential objectives for the partnership should be identified by each partner, and then brought together to create a list of objectives that will be pursued in common. These roles, responsibilities and objectives must be reviewed and reinforced frequently in order to ensure the partnership stays on track. A relationship of trust must be developed and maintained or the partnership will falter, and ultimately fail.

Clearly identified benefits for all partners

To the extent possible, benefits for all partners should be clearly identified, described, reviewed and achieved. The benefits for each partner usually will differ due to varying expectations. By attaining expected short and longer-term benefits for their institutions’ programmes, partners usually will want to maintain the partnership.

Sources of financial and other support specified

To the extent possible, financial and other resource support from public and private donors should be established at the outset and clearly communicated to all partners. As noted above, a separate fund may be established for partnerships, with guidelines for accessing resources, transparent management, accountability, and results measurement. Additional sources of support usually are identified over time, but initial support for generating partnerships is essential.
Periodic inter-personal relations and consistent rules of engagement

Exchange visits and meetings between partner institutions should be carried out periodically especially to maintain the momentum of partnership activities and to engage the active participation of public and private decision makers. Well-understood and consistent rules of engagement and communication are required. Virtual communications, although useful for day-to-day communications, are not sufficient to maintain partnerships. Good personal relationships lead to inter-institutional commitment and achieving shared objectives.

Partnership programme

Each partner should establish a partnership programme focused on achieving agreed upon objectives. This programme should promote a willingness to take risks and innovate in order to ensure the partnership will be creative and sustainable. Programme contents may evolve over time and they will need to be adjusted flexibly and transparently by the partners.

Flexible Partnership Action Plan

The partnership programme should have an Action Plan with a specified duration. It should have clear steps or phases, list specific activities in sequence and all responsible parties, and provide deadlines for activity completion. The Action Plan will need to be revised periodically to meet evolving needs and take advantage of interim results.

Accountability: internal and external partnership assessment

All partners should establish mutually agreeable results and indicators of success. Using consistent results measurement, each partner institution should assess its own and their partners’ participation, achievements and challenges. Assessments should be shared and used to plan future activities, improve effectiveness and efficiency, and revise partnership relationships, as needed. Periodically, external evaluations will be useful to identify additional results, trends across institutions, and prepare reports to donors.

Openness to adding new partners

Although a major effort should be made at the outset to identify all potential partners from public and private sectors, usually additional institutions appear as the partnership gains success. Exclusivity can lead to harming or ending even excellent partnerships; therefore, developing systems for flexibly integrating new partners over time is essential.

Conclusion

By using prevailing cultural systems for building balanced reciprocal relations between institutions of the public and private sectors, successful ECD partnerships can be created, developed and maintained. They must be transparent, equitable, beneficial and accountable. They can help the public sector to expand services, improve quality, achieve greater equity, and build more efficient and effective services. They cannot, however, replace the essential role of the public sector to guarantee good health, education and safety for all of the nation’s children.

ENDNOTE