



**PARTNERING & PARTNERSHIPS:  
LESSONS LEARNED IN THE DI**

The Devonshire Initiative believes the NGO and mining sectors are better able to improve development outcomes in the communities in which they operate when they collaborate with each other as opposed to when they operate separately. The DI and its members have dedicated time to exploring best practices and case studies on cross-sector partnerships to better understand their challenges and benefits and to improve member capacity to collaborate with each other and organizations outside of the DI. The [Partnership Brokers Association](#) has shared their expertise and the DI has utilized resources from the [Partnering Initiative](#) to inform our best practices.

The Partnering Initiative, in their [report on NGO-business partnerships](#) from 2008, defines cross-sector partnerships as those relationships which establish non-statutory collaboration between organizations from different sectors which typically are entered into to achieve certain goals. It is important to acknowledge that partnership can be defined in many ways, and there are many different kinds of partnerships.

## CONTEXT

Leading up to the formation of the DI, partnerships were ongoing between civil society and private sector actors in the U.S. and Europe (UK primarily), though this same kind of engagement was deeply contested in Canada. Many in the development sector viewed the private sector as irrelevant or even malevolent when it came to possible contributions to poverty reduction and improvements in developing nations. Many in the private sector at the time saw little reason to engage with the development sector as they were either largely uninterested in possible contributions they could make or viewed civil society as anti-private sector altogether.

Looking beyond Canada, it was evident to DI founder, Marketa Evans, that the partnerships were engaging the competencies of all actors involved beyond their usual business operations. By collaborating, companies and organizations were challenging each other to apply their existing skills such as problem solving, systems thinking, and communication to tackle issues they had not previously considered to be within the scope of their operations (More information regarding the pre-DI context can be found in [The Story of the DI](#)).

The DI was one of the first spaces in Canada to address the issues and possibilities surrounding the relationship between mining and development, recognizing that nothing inherent in development prevents mining companies from also being development actors. It contributed to a shift in dialogue which opened the door to

mining companies becoming more invested and involved in the development sector. The goal of the DI was never the incubation of partnerships; it was about relationship and trust building to foster an environment more conducive to collaboration and partnership.

Some DI members were engaged in cross-sector partnerships before the DI was founded. One member organization reported that the DI provided a safe space to discuss the challenges and controversies, as well as the opportunities and potential benefits associated with cross-sector partnerships they, as an organization, were already involved in. Other members have entered into partnerships because of their involvement with the DI. Some of these started from personal relationships with other DI members which led to a partnership, while other members took the foundations of partnership learned in the DI space and applied those to interactions with non-DI members. Additionally, various members have reported that the DI has helped them gain the knowledge to advocate for cross-sector partnerships within their own organization.

Many DI members agree that in the last decade, cross-sector partnerships and dialogue about them are becoming more common than ever before. This represents a significant change in attitudes and discourse within the mining and development sectors. One member noted that no one sector has the solutions to alleviating poverty, and it is only through collaboration between the private sector, civil society, and government that we can find those solutions. We are beyond the days of asking whether partnerships of this kind are valuable. Another member said that now we need to be asking ourselves: “What innovations come from cross-sector collaborations? How did these collaborations change both the players and the game? And finally, how can we build on those innovations to tap into mutual benefits and best practices?”

DI members have acknowledged that there are a range of practices across both sectors in both development and the way particular companies think about their impact on the environment and the communities in which they work. As mining companies and NGOs strive to be leaders in their respective fields, the DI members hope that changes to individual practices of cross-sector partnership lead to better development outcomes at a local level. Those local level changes can lead to broad changes in practice for mining companies and NGOs across the board to change development outcomes on a global level.



# CHALLENGES

Challenges associated with cross-sector partnerships in the early days of the DI surrounded whether it would be possible and beneficial to partner across sectors at all. Today the DI has committed to collaboration as a strategy for improving development outcomes and is focused on best practices in partnerships.

Some major challenges to cross-sector partnerships in the early days of the DI were:

- A lack of understanding of what exactly other sectors do and what their business operations entail.
- Concerns that collaboration between the NGO and mining sectors can put the reputations of both sides at risk.
- Misalignment in how NGOs and mining companies regard the financial commitment necessary for partnership and the perception of a power imbalance when the industry partner is contributing greater financial resources to the partnership.
- High perceived cost of partnering compared to the potential that the partnerships would not improve outcomes or deliver development results in a transparent and accountable way.
- Internal and external constituencies needing to be convinced of the benefits and value of cross-sector partnerships if they were to be sustained long term by those organizations.

After close to a decade of sharing and learning, DI members now have a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with cross-sectoral partnerships. In subsequent years, the DI has identified methods of overcoming these early challenges and strategies for strengthening partnerships.

# LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned about partnering span the [partnership cycle](#) from due diligence and partnership establishment, through the life of the partnership, and into the evaluation and conclusion of the partnership. Lessons learned have been taken from the DI's previous workshops, affiliate organization resources, and documents in the public domain related to cross-sector partnerships.

## DUE DILIGENCE

Strong partnerships start with a strong foundation established through the due diligence process. This process guides the potential partners through getting to know each other and coming to a better understanding of whether they have capabilities and interests which would be conducive to entering into a partnership.

### Lessons on Due Diligence:

- Know why you and the potential partner are interested before starting formal the Due Diligence Process. What benefits is each party hoping to gain? What are each partner's motivations for being involved in the partnership? **What can be done together which would generate greater value than could be generated if both partners were working alone?**
- Get to know each other's organizations and how they approach areas like problem resolution and communication. Knowing your partner can protect you from surprises in the future as you can both identify potential risks and prevent them from becoming problems during the partnership.
- Build personal relationships between the partners. Host discussions and conversations at both organizations' offices and begin getting to know the partner better. Engage in learning and sharing activities such as CEO Swaps or site visits to learn about each other's organizations and operations.
- Ensure there are common values and shared objectives, and that you understand where motivations and goals may differ between the partners. Establish objectives and next steps for the partnership and try to get a sense of the the partner's commitment to seeing those objectives realized.
- Rather than planning the partnership around what project to run, consider instead what constraints or challenges each partner is facing. The partners can then base their partnership on exploring opportunities for collaboratively working through those challenges and constraints
- Help mitigate skepticism about the possible partnership by engaging a diverse set of people from both partners in the due diligence process. Diverse competencies will only improve the quality of the relationship and having individuals involved from many parts of the organization can help improve the buy-in from the partners overall.

### **Due Diligence Case Study:**

The Breakwater Field Visit: In 2008, the Devonshire Initiative organized a field visit to a minesite in Honduras belonging to Breakwater Resources. NGO and industry participants visited the minesite as well as the surrounding community and facilities set up by Breakwater as part of their involvement in the area. NGO participants were allowed to ask any questions about the context in which Breakwater was working and the operations they were conducting. In turn, the Breakwater staff from both the local and head offices shared their experiences and challenges they faced in operating the mine.

This exposure visit demonstrated the kind of trust which could be built between actors and stakeholders when they share and communicate openly with each other. Expanding on the knowledge NGOs had about mining also enhanced their ability to engage with mining companies and understand their operations. It allowed for the NGOs to familiarize themselves with mining and to engage in a candid dialogue with industry employees at different levels of the company. Additionally, all members learned more about how NGOs and mining companies can think and work differently than each other and how this can impact their ability to reach understanding for meaningful collaboration.

## STRENGTHENING THE PARTNERSHIP

After going through the Due Diligence Process, there are further steps to be taken while establishing the partnership to strengthen it and best ensure success.

### Lessons learned on Strengthening the Partnership:

- Establishing and maintaining a partnership takes significant time and effort from both partners. It is crucial while the partnership is being established to make sure that both partners are willing to put in that effort.
- Formalize the agreement through establishing Non-Disclosure Agreements, or potentially an MOU, establishing timelines, making commitments to certain activities, and provisioning adequate resources for those activities.
- Establish good governance and accountability protocols for the partnership so there are systems in place for resolving potential problems down the road.
- Both parties need to commit adequate human resources to meeting the goals of the partnership. There should be at least one staff member dedicated to maintaining the health of the partnership, whether that role is part or full time is situationally dependent.
- High staff turnover in positions dedicated to maintaining a partnership was found to slow the partnership process and the ability to meet the partnership goals. Prioritizing the process of the partnership as an organization rather than having it be the priority of an individual can reduce the risk of this issue.
- Having a third party with similar experience working with industry and NGOs involved in the partnership to either provide technical assistance, specialized knowledge, or insight from related experiences can help move the partnership processes along.
- Build on existing resources related to your project and its desired impact in order to avoid repeating work which has already been done. Explore whether similar projects have been done by other companies or organizations, and determine what was learned which could be taken to your project. Research what tools, frameworks, etc. already exist which can be utilised in your partnership.
- Reaffirm goals and objectives throughout the life of the partnership. Maintain an open dialogue about where the partnership is going to ensure both partners are on the same page and can continue moving forward together to meet the agreed upon goals.

## COMMUNICATION

Strong communication is key in maintaining a strong relationship throughout the life of a partnership. This means not only clearly and openly communicating with the other partner but also with your own stakeholders as well as the media and public about the partnership.

### **Lessons learned on internal communication:**

- Clearly communicate with the partner about your drivers, interests, and wants for the partnership, and ensure you know their drivers, interests, and wants. If possible, discuss these together and record them to refer back to through the life of the partnership.
- Understand that partners don't always communicate about the project or partnership in the same ways. If one partner is process focused and the other is outcomes focused, they may encounter difficulties in reaching common goals and understanding which are essential to a strong partnership. These differences in focus and perspective can be overcome when they are directly acknowledged and communicated about openly.
- Communicate about the partnership with everyone in your organization as soon as there is substantive information that can be provided. This can improve internal support for the partnership and mitigate skepticism. Assist the partner in managing their internal skeptics, and understand that while skepticism is healthy, it must be met with clear explanation of the value of the partnership, how the partnership aligns with the organization's interests, and the process undertaken in deciding to work with the partner.

- Communication can increase your understanding of the risks that both partners are facing in entering the partnership.
- If field offices are involved in meeting the goals of the partnership, ensure that there is strong communication between head offices and field offices for both organizations. Understand how the needs and interests of each field office differ from those of the head office.

### **Lessons learned on external communication:**

- Plan ahead collaboratively for how the partnership and its activities will be explained to stakeholders and critics. Have a coherent message for all parties to provide, be transparent about the relationship, and communicate results and benefits of constructive engagement.
- Find ways to demonstrate to each other's constituents the benefits of activities undertaken in the partnership. Show returns and justify risks involved.
- Communicate within your organization about the nature of the partnership and project on an ongoing basis through the life of the partnership. This improves everyone's understanding of the reality of the partnership's goals and direction.
- Communicate the purpose of the partnership to stakeholders and the public. Having the purpose established by both partners during the Due Diligence Process allows for clarity if the partnership is misconstrued later by people outside of it, such as peers or the media.

- It is better to constantly communicate with the public and media about the partnership than to wait until you have tangible results and metrics to present. A lack of communication will cause a vacuum where critics can come up with their own ideas about the nature of the partnership.
- Engaging government, communities, and field partners in the projects ensure more sustainable outcomes. This also helps to ensure project goals are driven by community needs.

### **Communication Case Study:**

Partnerships discussed in the Media: One of the major takeaways from the media attention paid to the 3 CIDA funded partnerships in early 2012 was the importance of having a communication plan established when entering into a partnership. The media attention took the organizations involved by surprise and they very quickly had to respond to counter the mis-information on the projects which was proliferating in the media. Many of the partners in those situations agreed that having a strategy for communicating about the partnership to the media and public would have allowed them to respond more rapidly and with a common voice to the criticisms they faced. More information available in the [Story of the DI](#).

## EVALUATING PARTNERSHIP:

- Partnership evaluation is an ongoing process through the life of the partnership, not something conducted only after the partnership is over. Thinking about evaluation during the establishment phase helps to embed it into the life of the partnership. Additionally, allocating resources to evaluation during the partnership's establishment helps integrate evaluation into the partnership and keep it on everyone's radar.
- Conduct evaluations on an ongoing basis and use those evaluations to continue improving the partnership and its activities. Embed partnership evaluation into the M&E of the project.
- It is important to focus not only on tangible and measureable benefits and outcomes when evaluating a partnership as many important outcomes for partners and beneficiaries are difficult to measure and less obvious.
- If "evaluating" a partnership is met with internal resistance, consider reframing the exercise as a "review" which might be interpreted as less critical of individual people's work and efforts.
- A challenge to completing thorough evaluation of partnerships is the typically short partnership cycle. Considering the complexity of the stages of the partnership lifecycle, timeframes of 2-3 years can hinder their success from the outset and restrict the resources and time to fully evaluate the partnership's effectiveness.
- Evaluation of even bilateral partnerships can be complex and time consuming as they are often made up of a web of interconnected actors around the two main partners. Discussing the boundaries of the partnership and what is included under the evaluation early in the partnership process can keep the evaluation from getting unruly.
- Evaluation of partnerships is not as formal or well understood as monitoring and evaluation for projects or programs. This and the added complexity of having multiple intersecting actors means that evaluating the partnership can take longer than other kinds of evaluations.
- A thorough evaluation of a partnership truly puts the trust built in the partnership to the test. Openness with each other as well as the openness of other actors involved with the partnership greatly improves the honest evaluation of the partnership.
- It is necessary to have some human, financial, and other resources to carry out the partnership evaluation process. Inadequate resources limit the extent that the partnership can be understood and then learned from.
- It is conversely important not to allocate too much focus and resources to evaluation of the partnership where that detracts from the activities of the partnership.

# OUTSTANDING CHALLENGES

The lessons learned which have been outlined above have all led to addressing some of the challenges with partnership which were identified in the early days of the DI. Since then, those challenges have not necessarily been surmounted, but they have become more nuanced as the DI members expand their experiences and develop a greater understanding of the practice of partnering. Here are some of the challenges that the DI members are facing today in establishing and maintaining strong cross-sectoral partnerships:

- These issues result in misalignments in approaches and attitudes to the partnership:
  - » Differing goals, values, and definitions of success for the partnership
  - » Different operational cultures as it impacts their approach to the partnership
  - » Different decision-making processes between partners
- These issues strain partner willingness and ability to commit to the partnership process:
  - » The large time commitment of partnering
  - » Transaction cost, or the cost of participating in a partnership
  - » Differing capacities of organizations and their field offices to commit to the partnership
- Other issues include:
  - » Trust building between partners
  - » Embedding the partnership at all levels of the organization

Building on the lessons already learned about partnership development, the DI will continue to address the ongoing challenges of cross-sector partnerships.

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# CONCLUSIONS

The Devonshire Initiative and its members are in a very different space than they were when they first began exploring the opportunities for collaboration between the mining and NGO sectors. Some DI members have concluded partnerships and many others are involved in new partnerships both with DI members and those outside of the DI. In the coming years, the DI space will be useful for evaluating and discussing those partnerships to scale up the lessons we are continuing to learn through experience in cross-sector collaboration.

Maintaining an ongoing conversation around partnership will help industry and NGO members alike to make sense of their changing roles within development. The decrease in commodity prices and the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals are two current factors influencing collaborations between industry and NGOs. In response to these factors, how both sectors will contribute to development and cross-sector partnerships will continue to shift.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## DI REPORTS

- ***Breakwater Resources Pilot (April, 2008):*** These minutes outline the activities and discussions from the DI trip to Breakwater Resources' minesite in Honduras. The trip was a learning and sharing opportunity for the DI's NGO members to learn about mining. It is a strong example of the benefits which can come from open and honest communication across sectors.
- ***Partnership Backgrounder (April, 2008):*** This document by Bud Sambasivam and Marketa Evans outlines the situation of Canadian cross-sectoral partnerships as it stood in 2008. It presents the challenges faced in the Exploration, Construction, and Implementation and Maintenance phases of partnering as well as the DI's learnings about partnerships thus far.
- ***Canadian Government CSR Strategy, Formalizing the DI, and Partnerships the DI has Catalyzed (December, 2009):*** Part 2 of this workshop report contains lessons learned from early partnerships in the DI space.
- ***Collaboration beyond the Business-Civil Society Relationship (September 2010):*** This workshop enumerates discussion of the importance of collaboration and challenges faced in having effective collaboration and dialogue between sectors. It breaks down conversation between what's working, not working, and missing from the conversation and is a good introduction to the earlier dialogues around partnership and collaboration in the DI.
- ***Looking Back, Looking Forward (December, 2012):*** This workshop report distills lessons learned about partnership in the DI as of 2012 providing a basis for understanding more current conversations around partnership in latter workshop reports.
- ***Communicating Partnerships: Speaking Publically to the Value of Cross-Sector Collaboration (April, 2013):*** This workshop focused on media perceptions of mining company collaborations with NGOs and government. The conclusions include lesson learned in managing media perceptions through strong communication strategies.
- ***Due Diligence in Industry-NGO Partnerships (May, 2013):*** A detailed breakdown of due diligence and recommended avenues to explore through that process can be found in this workshop report.
- ***The Art and Science of Partnering (October, 2014):*** The presentation slides from this workshop facilitated by the Partnership Broker's Association give a renewed look at challenges around partnership.
- ***A Focus on Evaluation (June, 2015):*** This report provides a breakdown on best practices and ongoing discussions related to evaluating partnerships.

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- *The Partnership Brokers Association* [website](#).
- *The Partnering Initiative's – Zambia Partnering Toolkit*: This toolkit, though written from the Zambian context, is a strong resource regarding cross-sectoral partnerships in general.
- *Case Study on Plan/IAMGOLD project* – (contact Linda Liutkus, Plan Canada, lliutkus@plancanada.ca)
- *Global Affairs Canada led project evaluations on the 5 pilot projects* – [Executive summary available](#)
- *Preventing Conflict in Exploration*: This toolkit is the product of a partnership between PDAC, World Vision and CDA.
- *WV and Barrick Partnership*:
  - » [Statement from Barrick Gold](#) on the partnership.
  - » [Statement from World Vision](#) on the partnership.
- *Plan and IAMGOLD Partnership*
  - » [IAMGOLD's announcement](#) about their partnership with Plan Canada

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