

## **NGO Performance Through NGO Partnerships In Uganda**

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## Abstract

This study assessed the relationship between NGO performance and NGO Partnerships, taking a case study approach of ActionAid International- Uganda. The study focused on the dynamics of Management of partnerships, levels at which partnerships occur and the drivers for NGO partnerships in relation to the performance of NGOs. The study was both qualitative and quantitative in nature and applied both primary and secondary data collection methods. Three data collection methods of documentary reviews, questionnaire and semi structured interviews were used to gather the data that informed this study. The major respondents for this study were staff of ActionAid Uganda and its partner organisations drawn from its operational areas. The study was carried out in over 10 districts targeting areas where ActionAid Uganda operates and these include Masindi, Nebbi, Amuru, Kalangala, Katakwi, Mubende, Kumi, Pallisa, Namutumba and Kampala.

The study was explanatory and endeavoured to understand how NGO partnerships are interrelated with NGO performance- cognisant of the other internal and external factors for the performance of NGOs such as their strategic intent, availability of funds and donor support and the capability of the leadership and management teams. This study pointed out that the management of partnership is fundamental in the performance of NGOs through participatory and effective planning and coordination mechanisms. The need for contact persons in NGOs to address partnership issues and a clear understanding of the partnership principles is emphasised by this study. Furthermore, the study revealed that NGOs operate at different level from national, district and community levels; and that irrespective of the level, majority NGOs still implement activities at grass root/community levels. This could be attributed to the need for NGOs to be in close contact with the people they claim to represent. The levels at which NGOs operate has no direct bearing on the performance of NGOs and what is important for the performance of NGOs is clarity of purpose at the different levels. Regarding the drivers for NGO partnerships, the study revealed that different factors motivate NGOs to form partnerships and the major ones are search for financial aid/resources and the shared need to address community needs. This therefore requires that the formation of NGO partnerships should be a systematic and well planned process that takes into account the strategic directions of the organisations rather than an adhoc venture.

## Introduction

In the Ugandan perspective, partnerships are becoming a recognisable approach to work in the public, private and NGO sector. The National Development Plan (2010) recognises the importance of public private partnerships for effective service delivery and addressing the development needs. Networks and alliances have continued to take centre stage in achieving development needs.

Measuring organizational performance is a difficult and messy business (Edwards and Hulme, 2002) as it follows that there is no single way to assessing organizational performance that will address all situations. Riddell,(2003) maintains that the overriding problem in judging NGO performance is the lack of firm rules for judging the effectiveness either of NGO projects and programmes in particular of poverty alleviation projects in general.

The scholars who have assessed NGO Performance say that it is intricate and well influenced by several factors and contexts related to the time indicators of the past, the present and the future. There is also a view of performance that the organisation itself wants as an entity much as it is dependent on stakeholders. Tamkin, (2005) suggested a set of core measures of performance that have a general implication and include productivity, profitability, staff performance and quality. According to Fowler, NGOs are not islands and their performance is related to relationships and collaborations with other development players.

NGOs form different partnerships such as Alliances, Networks, Consortia and Coalitions among others (Fowler, 2004). This study majorly focused on NGO-NGO partnerships paying greater attention to networks and alliances. Globally, partnerships between NGOs based in the 'North' and the 'South' have become a key part of international development processes. Fowler, (2002) analyses the trade offs in NGO relations mentioning networks, alliances, consortia and coalitions. There are different motivations between the North and South NGOs in developing partnerships. For example, sometimes northern NGOs have to work in partnership to attract donor funding or as an accountability requirement in their home countries (Walsh, 2002). Whilst NGOs are drawn to the concept of partnership as an expression of solidarity that goes beyond

financial aid, the failure of NGOs to deliver on promises to their various constituencies and have clear accountability mechanisms leaves desirable efforts among NGOs even today (Edward and Hulme, 2002). Crewe and Harrison (2002: 72) defined partnerships as a diverse range of activities from giving grants, technical assistance or equipments, sharing information, managing projects and joining forces to lobby decision makers.

Crewe further mentions that Christian Aid describes its recipients of funds as partners while NGOs who undertake development projects themselves such as CARE, ACORD and ActionAid often refer to their beneficiaries and community based organizations as partners- a scenario that has been noted by this study.

ActionAid International adopted the partnership approach in 2001 as a basic approach of service delivery and improving the livelihoods of the target community. Guided by the principles of empowerment, campaigns and solidarity and taking sides with the poor and organisations of the poor, (ActionAid Right to End Poverty, 2006-2011), AAI works in solidarity with the poor to sustain a movement for change in which rights holders lead in addressing the structural causes of poverty. The new policy Agenda calls for countries to adjust to new economic terrains and the need to support long term human development illustrates NGOs as agents of democratisation and pays little attention to economic and political aspects of efficiency and effectiveness (Edward and Hulme, 2002). Fowler (2002) too reveals that INGOs have no readily defined bottom line indicators for measuring performance due to the rooted influence of aid systems among others and calls for systematic and participatory involvement of stake holders in assessing NGO performance.

On a regional perspective, there is growing requirement for partnerships to be based on mutual trust, respect and shared vision (DFID, (2006), Guler, (2008), Warner, (2002). One of the underlying problems has also been the difficulty of establishing and maintaining regular contact between NGOs with the increasing numbers (Hammamet, 2002). This calls for the need for NGOs to collaborate and bond under networks and alliances.

For example, to promote peace, security and stability, the Caribbean, Pacific and African countries signed the Maputo declaration of 2004 that also re-affirmed their commitment to achieve the Millennium Development goals. The Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development programme is an African Initiative to increase agricultural productivity and eliminate hunger in Africa. The New partnership for African development (NEPAD) was formed as an African Union strategic framework to raise the socio-economic development challenges of poverty, development and marginalization.

Despite the regional partnerships, networks and collective efforts, mild accomplishments are evident in participating countries (EU bullet in 2005). Bray (2000) studying community partnerships in education emphasized the need for partnerships to be genuine and involve key ingredients such as willingness to respect the view points of other partners, identification and collaboration to achieve a common task. There is no mention of distinct linkages to organizational performance and how this will result into provision of timely services to the people, stake holder satisfaction as well as the cost-input ratios arising in a partnership.

Holmen (2002) recognised that networks are particularly suitable for NGOs to improve performance as a cost effective means to share information. Prakash (2008) describes CSO alliances as a step-wise progression where partners develop shared understanding and build towards a more lasting relationship as is the case of Food Rights and Uganda Land Alliance in Uganda. The analysis made on the NGO sustainability index (2008), indicate that sustainability will require a critical mass of NGOs that can efficiently provide services that consistently meet the needs, priorities and expectations of their constituents thus, organisational performance. The underlying assumptions include ability of NGOs to provide services in a variety of fields, provision of goods and services that reflect the needs and demands for the pro-poor (ActionAid Country Strategic Paper III). Similar experiences exist with other national and international organisations like the World Vision, Uganda Red cross Society and CARE Uganda. Reviewing its partnerships with local civil society organisations (2004), CARE International Uganda explored reasons for the formation of partnerships and how partnerships should be managed and explains differences in working with and through partners. However, little was mentioned on

how these relate to an organisations ability to provide timely and quality services that this study sought to pursue.

## **Purpose of the study**

The purpose for this study was to find out how NGOs' partnerships contribute NGO Performance

## **Literature Review**

### ***Management of partnerships and Organisational performance***

Partnership relations entail both individuals spearheading the partnerships and the organisations in general, thus the need to manage people relationships in NGO- partnerships. This study dwelt on two functions of planning and coordination between ActionAid Uganda and its partners and how this recounts to organisational performance. This therefore quires that partnerships should not be looked at as a one-off event or arrangement witnessed with the signing of Memorandum of understanding and giving grants but rather as a as a mechanism of work that involves frequent interaction and participation.

*Planning in partnerships and NGO Performance* :Planning is a very important aspect in management and NGO partnerships in general and it is believed that "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail". Without a plan, managers are set up to encounter errors, waste, and delays. A plan, on the other hand, helps a manager organize resources and activities efficiently and effectively, gives an organization's sense of direction, helps to anticipate problems and cope with change, and provides guidelines for decision making to achieve the organizations goals that relates to performance.

Among the NGOs, planning is envisaged to be a participatory process that involves all the different stake holders ensuring accountability at all levels (AAIU ALPS, 2001). However, this process is not always as participatory but rather manipulative (ACODE, Policy Brief N0 7). From the findings of the study 'Towards increased involvement of NGOs in the NAADS programme', it was noted that NGOs were closer and had rapport with the people and were also using participatory approaches to involve communities. It was also mentioned that NGOs have

created competition for communities' time and duplication of services and programs that may not necessarily address community needs. Due to the procession nature of partnerships, cooperation development in most organizations is usually occasional and sporadic rather than systematic and purposeful and this influences the performance of organisations (Fowler, 2000, Ross, 2009). This impacts more on the work of Non Governmental Organisations based on the nature of their work.

Citing MacLeod (2004: 2), Walsh (2004) cautions against focusing management on the quality of partner relationships at the expense of the planning the quality of development work which these partnerships are ultimately aimed at carrying out. Notably, this is line with the major Accountability, Planning and Learning Systems (ALPS) that aims at creating opportunities for continuous learning and strengthening both upward and down ward accountability systems.

Ashman, (2001) noted the importance of understanding the complexities involved with partners bringing complex systems together and how this hinders mutually beneficial` partnership arrangements and NGO performance. Crewe and Harrison, (2002), contend to this and noted that some local organizations with which donors work with are treated as passive recipients who are unable to manage their own affairs. This hinders the ability of local organisations to mobilise other resources to increase income inflows, make independent decisions and implement relevant programs for addressing the identified needs in these partnerships.

*Coordination in partnerships and Organisational Performance:* Coordination involves bringing together the different elements and parts of an organisation and its strategic fit in the internal and external environment. This tally with the open systems approach that look at organisations as interrelated units and a sum of its parts (Katz and Khan, 1978). It requires functional feedback system and communication cycle that allows for sharing of information and managing complexities that come with bringing systems together and may hinder mutually beneficial relationships (Ashman, 2001). While there are diverse views that exist on partnerships, Fowler (2002), Esra (2008), Susan, (2009) concur with the need for mutually enabling inter-dependent interactions that are built on trust and shared vision for sustainable NGO partnerships. Absence of mutual interactions will result into lack of focus on the purpose of partnerships and failure to meet the expectations of the different stakeholders in an efficient and effective way.

AAIU'S midterm review report in 2007 highlighted six areas of strategic change management to improve organisational performance. Objective 4 of AAIU's change management plan has been: "Improving organizational effectiveness through strengthening the management role in ensuring organizational health with specific attention to re-definition of staff roles and enforcement of performance management systems. The 2010 CSP III evaluation report mentions that this has been partially achieved with relatively high levels of efficiency and less effectiveness.

### ***Reasons for the formation of partnerships and Organisational Performance***

Partnership development is a clear-cut but hectic process that requires careful thinking and developing mainstreamed criteria for assessment. Organizations generally join together in pursuit of self-interest, which may be shared with or differ from other stakeholders. The partnership must, however, develop a shared purpose, with a common understanding of the problem and the role of each organization in addressing the problem (Wood and Gray 1991). Motivations must be explicit for joining a partnership, allowing for discussion of differences and development of ways to accommodate any differences. Citing Fourie & Burger, (2000), Basheka (2011) mentions that partnerships are still a contentious subject to development due to lack of hard evidence about its benefits. Referring to public-private partnerships, he notes that partnerships are an institutionalised form of cooperation working on indigenous objectives and a joint target. This presupposes that partnerships are formed based on the shared goals and objectives but does not suggest the likely benefits in these partnerships.

Interests in partnerships involve mutual benefits that range from additional resources, sharing responsibilities and tasks, increased credibility, and better understanding and responsiveness to community needs, among others (Kreuter and Lezin 1998). Resource dependency theory confirms the search for additional resources as a motivation for partnerships, where the decline in federal and state resources, for example, led organizations to look to other organizations (Bardach 1998).

The rhetoric around partnerships as a way to increase individual organizational resources and to achieve economies of scale and enable NGOs to achieve the set goals and objectives makes partnerships a popular solution. While these are mentioned, less information exists on how



partnerships result into achieving the set goals and agreed agenda among the stakeholders. While studies have been done to analyse Public-private partnerships (PPPs), there are still gaps on understanding the formation of partnerships among NGOs. Whatever type of partnership relationship therefore, the need to address a common need, tapping into existing expertise and resources is vital and is analysed by this study.

It therefore points out that there are several factors that lead to the formation of NGO partnerships ranging from economic, social and political spheres. These include among others the desire for financial aid, donor requirements, need for expansion and reaching out to more geographical areas, sharing skills and information and building resilience through collectivism. This also brings in the picture the trade offs in NGO partnerships as presented by Fowler (2002). While reference is given to all the above factors, no clear attention has been paid to the drive to attain resources (financial, human) or other inputs required for organisational survival. Given the current views on the dominance of financial aid and building on the resources dependency theory, an analysis of the economics of partnerships and sharing skills in NGO partnerships here thus follows.

*Government policy and NGO partnerships:* Partnerships have formed a core part of multilateral and bi-lateral development arrangements focusing on development by the developed countries. For instance, the European Consensus for Development approved in 2005 puts achievement of the MDGs at the centre of European Commission and European Union member state's development policy. This involves development strategies that are owned and led by developing countries themselves, thus the need for ownership and capacity development for sustainability (European consensus on Development, 2006). With privatisation and liberalisation of the economies, public private partnerships have cropped in with the influx of civil society organisations though their role is still passive and quasi (Africa APRM report, 2008).

In Uganda, the National Development plan was launched in April 2010 (NDP 2010) replacing the Poverty Eradication and Action Plan (PEAP) and recommends the role of partnerships between the public sector, private sector, CSOs and NGOs in achieving development including the Millennium Development Goals. The NGO Act and the Local Government Act mandates

districts to monitor the operation of NGOs at local government or district levels. Fowler (2002) contends that due to internal concerns and external pressures, NGOs should demonstrate their effectiveness as agents of development by developing their own democratic structures (Edward and Hulme, 2002). This has implications on the nature and magnitude of work that civil society organisations engage in; which impacts on their effectiveness and the ability to respond to stakeholders' needs and demands. According to the National Development Plan (NDP), it is stated that "... government enjoys productive partnerships with the civil society organisations and supports the role they play in the process of economic growth and development which includes; (i) Advocacy, particularly for interest groups who might otherwise be neglected; ii) Voluntarily financed service delivery in sectors not covered by government programmes; (iii) Publicly financed service delivery, subcontracted by government; (iv) Support to conflict resolution; and (v) Independent research on the key issues" .

The current NGO legal, regulatory and policy framework also appears to fuel hostility rather than cooperation and partnership. For all intents and purposes the NGO Act, CAP 113 (as amended in 2006) falls far short of a progressive law in a country aspiring to deepen democracy and claiming to respect constitutional law and its obligations under various international instruments and covenants. The Uganda NGO law deviates from other 'generally acceptable principles and practices for laws affecting civil society NGOs inclusive.

Notably, there is lack of a common understanding among NGOs on government programmes and policies and the need to play an oversight role in the implementation of government programmes. This therefore requires that NGOs to meaningfully and ably respond to the needs of the target audience should understand the existing government policies and ensure linkages between government and disadvantaged communities. This study therefore attempted to explore the likely relationship of government policies on NGO efficiency and effectiveness

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a cross sectional and explanatory study design .The study was explanatory to find out how the likely relationship between NGO partnerships and NGO performance (Saunders, et al, 2007). According to Sekaran (2003) explanatory studies seeks to establish connections between events and

variables. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected through triangulation to enrich the study (Amin 2005). According to Schick (2004) “the two research paradigms are complementary in nature” and provide the in-depth explanations about attitudes, perceptions and motivations while quantitative methods provide the hard data needed to meet the required study objectives and testing hypothesis among others. The survey was used to be able to collect large amount of data from the sizeable population (Saunders, et al, 2007). This study attempted to analyse management of partnerships, levels of NGO partnerships and the driving factors for the formation of partnerships among NGOs.

This study targeted staff of AAIU and partner organisations as respondents for this study. ActionAid Uganda has a total of seventy six (76) staff both at national and field offices across the country. These included middle level, operational and strategic staff. The total number of ActionAid partners is 96 (AAIU draft partnership guidelines), a total of seventy four (74) partners have a running Memorandum of understanding and twenty two (22) partners are viewed as strategic partners (including networks and alliances). The accessible population was one hundred and seventy two (172) from which ninety eight (98) respondents were selected. For Action Aid Uganda partners for example, attempts to generate perceptions and information in a controlled and influential environment was ensured. The accessible population was one hundred and seventy two (172) people including seventy six (76) staff of ActionAid Uganda and ninety six (96) partner organisations. For the total sample size of 172 respondents, Morgan and Krejcie (1970) suggest a sample size of 118 respondents. In the table below, 98 respondents were covered by this study representing 83% of the targeted respondents. Simple random sampling technique was used providing all the subjects an equal chance to participate in the study. For purposes of acquiring detailed and quality information for this study, a cross section of data collection methods were used. These included the questionnaire method, the interview method and documentary review. Reliability of 0.75 was obtained by computing the Cronbach's Coefficient.

## Findings

**Table 1:** Distributions on Planning in Management of NGO partnerships

Items on Management of NGO Partnerships		Agree	Disagree	Total
The management of NGO partnerships affects the performance of NGOs	Count	75	8	83
	%	91	9	100
Partners are consulted on issues that affect the partnership with Action Aid Uganda.	Count	74	9	83
	%	93	6	100
Involvement of partners in planning processes by ActionAid has increased other stakeholders satisfaction to AAIU programs	Count	73	10	83
	%	90	10	100
Action Aid Uganda has a clear performance management system for staff to offer and provide adequate technical support to partners.	Count	52	31	83
	%	66	34	100
The disbursement of funds to partners allows for timely implementation of program activities and timely response to community needs	Count	53	30	83
	%	67	34	100
Action Aid partners can easily make decision within the partnership without fear and hesitation	Count	49	24	83
	%	61	39	100
AAIU holds joint planning and meetings with partners and facilitate timely response to identified community needs	Count	73	10	83
	%	87	13	100
My organisation is able to live beyond the partnership with AAIU.	Count	53	8	61
	%	87	13	100

Source: Primary Data

Overall, 91% of the respondents agreed that the management of partnerships affects effectiveness and efficiency of NGOs. On average, most of the respondents agreed (74%) that they are consulted on issues that affect the partnership with in ActionAid Uganda. This illustrates the open systems thinking approach for NGO partnerships as well as the open information policy propelled by the organisation. The importance for shared learning and respect for diversity of views among the different stakeholders whose interests must be taken care of in a partnership prevails here.

**Table 2:** Distributions on levels of NGO partnerships

Partners level of operation with Action Aid Uganda	Frequency	Percent
National Level	18	34.6
District Level	18	34.6
Community Level	14	26.9
Any other (please mention)	2	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Partner implementing activities at</b>		

<b>community level</b>		
Yes	42	82.4
No	10	17.6
Total	52	100.0

*Source: Primary data*

From the table above, 34.6% of the partners interviewed operate at national level, 34.6% operate at district level and 26.9% operate at sub county/community level and only 3.8% operated at other levels such as parish levels. Most of those at community level were community based groups and associations started by vulnerable and marginalised groups to meet their basic needs. It is vital to note that the categories of the partners above are in line with AAIU's partnership guidelines and view of partnerships at local level (AAIU CSP III 2006-2011). Notably, while majority of the partners are district based partners, their operations cut across the levels and so is the case with national partners; with the shared goals of empowering and building the capacity of communities. There are also stakeholder interactions among organisations operating at the different levels and implementing activities; which is in line with the views of the open systems thinking theorists

### **Levels of NGO partnerships in performance and Thematic Areas**

This study also attempted to analyse the different focus areas in which ActionAid and its partners were working in relation to the organisations Country Strategic plan III. The different programmatic areas include sponsorship in communities, right to food, womens rights and right to a life with dignity in the face of HIV/AIDS, the right to quality education, the right to human security in conflict and emergencies and the right to juts and democratic governance. The information on the distributions of the thematic areas was only generated from respondents from the partner organisations and are presented in the table below.

**Table 3: Distributions on thematic areas in ActionAid partnerships in Uganda**

<b>Partners level of operation with Action Aid Uganda</b>	Frequency	Percent
<b>Thematic areas Partners are working in</b>		
Education	14	26.9
HIV/AIDS and women's rights	15	28.8
Just and Democratic Governance	12	23.1
Food Rights	6	11.5
Sponsorship	3	5.8
All <sup>i</sup>	2	3.8
<i>Total</i>	52	<i>100.0</i>

*Source: Primary Data*

In terms of distribution of partnerships in line with ActionAid's thematic areas, results show that most of the partners (28.8%) perceive their work contributing to women rights and HIV/AIDS thematic areas, followed by 26.9% of the partners focus on the right to education, 23.1% of the partners implement Just and democratic governance, 11.5% contribute towards the Right to food and 5.8% of the partners interviewed were implementing sponsorship work. Among those interviewed, only 3.8% of the partners perceived their work as cross cutting in all thematic areas. These findings tally with the analysis and review of the AAIU's partners profile over the last years which shows that majority of partners focused on HIV/AIDS and women's rights related work.

**Table 3: Distributions on partner's contributions to achieving AAIUs goals**

Items on contribution to AAIU goals and objectives	Frequency	Percent
How has your work at the level mentioned above contributed to AAIUs ability to meet its goals of fighting poverty in the community		
Enabled poor and excluded people and communities in Uganda to exercise their power to secure rights	18	34.6
Ensure that the power of women and girls in Uganda are leveraged to demand, secure and exercise their rights	15	28.8
Mobilization of civil society and empowerment to fight for rights and justice	13	25.0
Ensure that Government of Uganda and public institutions are supported and held accountable to promote, protect and defend citizen's rights	5	9.6
All	1	1.9
Total	52	100.0

*Source: Primary Data*

The study findings on the partner's perceptions on their contribution towards achieving AAIUs goals and objectives (NGO performance) revealed that majority of the partners (34.6%) have contributed towards enabling poor and excluded people and communities in Uganda to exercise their power to secure rights- as stipulated in AAIUs CSPIII. This is followed by 28.8% of the respondents who have contributed by ensuring that the power of women and girls in Uganda is leveraged to demand, secure and exercise their rights. This is synonymous and proportional to the number of partners working in the women's rights and HIV/AIDS thematic areas

**Table 5: Means and standard deviations on Drivers of NGO partnerships**

Items on Drivers of NGO partnerships	N	Mean	Standard Deviation.
As partners, we share the same goals and objectives and this has increased our income inflows.	72	2.14	.775
As partners, we understand the purpose for our partnership and has led to timely response to community needs and stake holder satisfaction.	74	2.00	.794
In our partnerships, we share the same development cause and either party can make decisions without fear.	74	2.00	.740

Source: Primary Data

On average, all respondents agreed that there are shared goals and objectives in AAIU partnerships that contribute to income inflows, stakeholder satisfaction and timely response to community needs that are all elements of NGO performance (effectiveness and efficiency). With the standard deviations of 0.774, 0.794 and 0.740 indicated above, the study suggests that there is no significant relationship between drivers for NGO Partnerships and performance of NGOs what so ever

### Recommendations

Communication, participatory planning and effective coordination need to be emphasised if NGO partnerships are to yield results and promote ownership and sustainability of actions in NGO partnerships

NGOs in Uganda should enforce its partnerships at all levels and especially at community and district levels to effectively achieve its goals and objectives as well as reaching out to the targeted vulnerable, poor and excluded communities

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