

NN41, December 2008

The New Politics of Partnership: Peril or Promise?

Foreword

By Kenneth King, Editor, NN

This has proven to be one of the most salient special issues we have covered. There are no less than 48 contributors, and there were many others who were just prevented by the rush of December deadlines from getting their contributions in before we had to close on December 9th. The title of this issue is the same as that of the Second NORRAG Cluster meeting in Geneva on December 12th 2008.

It has been such a key topic because it goes to the heart of what most of our Northern readers do ? work regularly in the South ? as agency personnel, consultants, NGOs or as researchers. And it has also appealed to many of our Southern readers who have years of experience of being a partner in a Northern project.

A great deal of what is under the partnership umbrella has been described critically, and rightly so. Doubtless there is much that is even more critical but it can't be written down because it would offend. But there is much reflection on what constitutes a genuine partnership, and there are fortunately some very powerful examples of partnership-in-practice, especially from Chile and Ghana. We are fortunate also to have some striking examples of people-as-partners. Surely many of us have worked intensively with colleagues and friends from the South for years without even using the partnership discourse.

Intriguingly, there is only one of the 48 articles actually written jointly between Northern and Southern partners, and another between the Western and Eastern partner. But as Noel McGinn (this issue) says: ?Spoken communication across cultures is difficult enough; collaborative writing requires constructing new, shared metaphors, and often threatens the relationship.?

In our initiating blurb, we had said that these research marriages had not been analysed very much. But this special issue will prove useful for providing a very wide range of relevant literature on partnership and partenariat, both theoretical and more practical and evaluative.

In many ways the partnership literature is the flip side of that lengthy literature on technical assistance, experts and counterparts. Both of them have been more analysed from the North than the South. But what becomes clear, including in this special issue, is that most partnerships have more than two partners; in the North they have the funding and the academic partners, and in the South two there is the representative of the funding agency and the academic partner. This special issue has some examples of Northern partners looking South from their different institutional perspectives, but we don't have all four perspectives on the same activity. Such triangulation ?or quadrangulation ? would be valuable.

We do carry just one or two examples of South-South networking, and particularly the example from Japan?s support to Asia-Africa partnership or ?dialogue?. We had hoped to carry a discussion of China-Africa university collaboration ? which is very widespread. This would be intriguing because China continues to perceive itself as a developing country; so its university partnerships are South-South in a way that is currently different from Japan.

We should mention to NORRAG readers that the theme of this special issue will also be a Thematic Section of the next **UKFIET Oxford Conference, 15-17 September 2009**, under the title: The New Politics of Aid Partnerships (see last article in this issue). NORRAG is being joined on this by the **Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty (RECOUP)** which is itself a research partnership. Indeed one of its core sub-themes is Partnerships. We are also being joined by the **UNESCO Centre for Comparative Education Research** at the University of Nottingham. The overall theme of the Oxford Conference is PPPs, no not public-private partnerships but Politics, Policies and Progress!

NORRAG NEWS has not carried an analysis of the EFA Global Monitoring Reports (GMRs), as a special issue. It is high time we did. In the meantime, NORRAG readers

should know that the UKFIET (of which NORRAG is an institutional member) is organising a major colloquium on the newest GMR 2009 on the 26th January in London. See flyer at the end of this issue on Overcoming Inequality: Why Governance Matters.

Kenneth King
St. Pierre de Bressieux, France

10th December 2008

Full contents of [NORRAG NEWS 41](#).

Download the full issue of [NORRAG NEWS 41 in pdf](#).