

Demystifying donor-business collaboration

Collaborations between donors and business are increasingly common, but it's rare that we hear candid views from those involved on what worked, what didn't, and what tips they can offer others. This month's series on the Hub looks to demystify donor-business collaboration, in partnership with the Business Innovation Facility. We launch a new report that draws lessons from their company engagement, a new checklist, and share a dozen blogs, from entrepreneurs and donor programmes, about collaboration.

NEW Inside Inclusive Business report

If you've ever had a fruitless conversation 'talking past' each other, you'll enjoy Tom Harrison's [blog introducing the new report: 'How can companies and market systems development programmes engage effectively?'](#)

Enjoy the report too, with 10 great examples, clarity on what a 'market systems programme' seeks from collaboration, with top tips for both donors and companies. [Download the report here.](#)



Let's start candidly: it's tough. Hear the challenges and proposed solutions from two donor perspectives:

- Cristina Bortes acknowledges it didn't always go to plan. Hear how [the Business Innovation Facility has adapted](#) when companies sign contracts without reading them, or corporate lawyers reject standard donor terms
- The Girls' Education Challenge pursues Strategic Partnerships to improve education for marginalised girls. Asyia Kazmi is candid about the need for a [clear business case](#), the difficulty of shifting beyond CSR, and the risk of fitting business into a donor mould.

and two business perspectives:

- The Founder and Director of a leading agricultural business based in Sub-Saharan Africa tells the [hard truths about private sector- 'DINGO' relationships](#).
- In a decade working for Cadbury, Kraft & SABMiller Anna Swaites has seen the [risk that programmes are designed to match donor money](#) instead of vice versa. She explains why a partnership built around shared objectives will succeed- a programme designed around objectives to win funding will not.

It's important to clarify your own strategy and understand your partner's approach to engagement. So, if you're feeling confused about the donor strategies for company collaboration:

- Kerry Conway explains [what is it that donors look for](#), why DFID wants to work with firms on their core business and how it aims to influence the many by working with one or a few
- Harry Aldwinckle outlines five key issues in answer to [how do donors make decisions about which business initiatives to work with?](#)
- our Guest Editor's choice, by Tom Harrison, unpacks an Overseas Development Institute report on [why and how donors support social enterprise](#).

So, what does collaboration look like in practice and what works?

- 'Relationship health' is a key success factor for donor business partnerships. Prairie Summer explains how this has influenced [USAID's approach to business partnerships](#), and why they have shifted from one-off partnerships to long-term strategic alliances with business.
- Soji Apampa introduces a 2 x 2 matrix of donor and business ['will and skill'](#), as a good way to think about opportunity, risk, and where to focus.
- Saifullah Shovon of the Bangladeshi conglomerate Advanced Chemical Industries explains how [business reach and impact have expanded via donor partnerships](#), with proposal writing a barrier. Tips include NGO partners and webinars to help overcome this blockage.
- Practical Action, Bangladesh, partnered with ACI to provide expert bid writing capacity. Sabrina Shahab discusses [how NGOs can facilitate successful business-donor relationships](#).
- Oxfam's Erinch Sahan looks at [how business structure affects suitability to partner](#) with donors and achieve development impact, suggesting two ways that donors and NGOs can engage: through creating partnerships with business or acting as a catalyst for models with higher potential for positive impact.
- Finalising a partnership is not a simple process. Our [new checklist 'The 'go/no-go' decision for an inclusive business partnership'](#) is a tool to help companies assess the value, risks and implications of a partnership, in order that they can confidently go ahead, know that more information or negotiation is required, or decide not to proceed.

So, what can we learn from this? Our Editor Caroline Ashley draws it altogether in her overview blog ['Candid reflections on how companies and donors collaborate'](#).



DFID's Girls' Education Challenge pursues Strategic Partnerships to improve education for marginalised girls



ACI Bangladesh have successfully partnered with several donors on inclusive business projects

We've had fantastic feedback to our webinar series on marketing nutrition to the base of the pyramid? The only complaint - the two webinars were too short!

It's not too late. You can watch the recording, download the presentation, and read all the resources from our partners - the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and Hystra - on the [event page](#).

The panellists have answered all the questions we were unable to discuss on the webinar, [in the FAQ here](#).

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This month's series is sponsored by the Business Innovation Facility, a DFID-funded market systems development programme working in Malawi, Nigeria and Myanmar.

The views presented here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of BIF, DFID, or IBAN, and do not constitute professional advice. We welcome feedback on our publications – please contact us at enquiries@inclusivebusinesshub.org

The Practitioner Hub is hosted by the Inclusive Business Action Network (IBAN).

