ECOTOURISM, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (EECD)

PARTNERSHIP ESTABLISHMENT GUIDELINE

Contact:

Mesganaw Getinet
Managing Director
Phone: +251 911 24 69 84
Email: misganaw@2mgconsultancy.com
www.2mgconsultancy.com

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
July, 2026

Approval Page

- Approval Statement
- Name and Signature of Board Chairperson
- Name and Signature of Executive Director
- Date of Approval

Acknowledgment

- Recognition of individuals and institutions that contributed to the development of the guideline

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Examples:

- CSO – Civil Society Organization
- NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
- CBO – Community-Based Organization
- MoU – Memorandum of Understanding
- ToR – Terms of Reference
- KPI – Key Performance Indicator
- CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

ABOUT THE GUIDELINE

This Partnership Establishment Guideline was developed by MG Consultancy under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative to enhance the institutional capacity, sustainability, and collaborative efficiency of grassroots Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Ethiopia.

Genesis and Purpose

The guideline addresses critical institutional gaps identified during a partnership training conducted by MG Consultancy supported program. While grassroots CSOs recognize the strategic value of multi stakeholder collaboration, they frequently lack structured mechanisms to operationalize them. This document serves as a practical, post-training institutional resource to transition CSOs from conceptual understanding to systematic implementation and used in creating a new partnership network.

Development and Quality Assurance

To ensure technical rigor and contextual relevance within the Ethiopian civil society landscape, the initial framework underwent a comprehensive professional review and enrichment by **Dr. Amogn Asfaw**. The resulting tool synthesizes international best practices with local operational realities.

Scope and Target Audience

While primarily designed for partner organizations collaborating with **WHH, CoSAP,** and **DEC**, the guideline is universally applicable to any grassroots CSO seeking structured engagement with:

- Government institutions
- Donor organizations
- Peer civil society organizations and development partners
- Private sector and academic institutions
- Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

Core Framework

The document provides end-to-end operational guidance across the entire partnership lifecycle, supplemented by adaptable institutional templates:
By equipping grassroots CSOs with these standardized procedures, MG Consultancy aims to advance the localization agenda, foster collaborative leadership, and drive sustainable, locally-owned development outcomes across Ethiopia.

Sincerely,

Mesganaw Getinet
Managing Director
Phone: +251 911 24 69 84
Email: misganaw@2mgconsultancy.com
www.2mgconsultancy.com

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Partnerships in the Development Context

The increasingly complex nature of development challenges including poverty, climate change, humanitarian crises, inequality, governance deficits, unemployment, public health emergencies, and social exclusion—has demonstrated that no single organization possesses sufficient resources, expertise, legitimacy, or geographic reach to address these issues independently. Governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), development partners, academic institutions, the private sector, faith-based organizations, and local communities each possess unique comparative advantages that become significantly more effective when combined through well-structured partnerships. Partnerships have therefore become a fundamental strategy for achieving sustainable development outcomes. They facilitate the pooling of financial, technical, human, and institutional resources; foster innovation through knowledge sharing; strengthen accountability and transparency; and enhance collective action toward common development objectives. International development frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), recognize partnerships as indispensable mechanisms for mobilizing knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources necessary to achieve inclusive and sustainable development.

For grassroots Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), partnerships represent not merely a funding mechanism but a strategic approach for institutional strengthening, organizational learning, policy engagement, improved service delivery, and increased community impact. Effective partnerships enable organizations to maximize limited resources while creating synergies that generate greater and more sustainable development results than organizations working independently. This guideline has therefore been developed to provide a structured framework through which grassroots CSOs can establish, manage, monitor, and sustain effective partnerships that are based on shared values, mutual respect, transparency, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

Importance of Partnerships in Development Work

Partnerships have become one of the defining characteristics of contemporary development practice because development challenges are multidimensional and require integrated responses. Effective partnerships generate value by bringing together organizations with complementary mandates, expertise, experiences, and resources. Well-managed partnerships contribute to development by:

- mobilizing financial, technical, and human resources beyond the capacity of individual organizations;
- improving efficiency through coordinated planning and reducing duplication of interventions;
- expanding geographical outreach and increasing access to underserved and marginalized communities;
- facilitating innovation through the exchange of knowledge, technologies, and best practices;
- strengthening advocacy and influencing public policy through collective voice and coordinated action;
- enhancing institutional learning and organizational capacity through peer support and mentoring;
- improving accountability to communities, donors, and government through shared governance mechanisms;
- increasing resilience by distributing operational, financial, legal, and reputational risks among partners; and
- promoting sustainability by fostering local ownership and long-term institutional relationships.

Strong partnerships therefore create value that exceeds the sum of individual organizational contributions. Rather than competing for limited resources, organizations collaborate to leverage comparative advantages and achieve greater collective impact.

Role of Partnerships in Strengthening Grassroots CSOs

Grassroots CSOs play an essential role in representing community interests, promoting citizen participation, delivering essential services, protecting human rights, and supporting local development. However, many grassroots organizations operate under significant constraints, including limited financial resources, inadequate technical capacity, weak institutional systems, restricted access to funding opportunities, and limited influence in policy processes. For grassroots organizations, partnerships should therefore be viewed as institutional investments that build organizational resilience and sustainability rather than merely transactional arrangements for project implementation. Strategic partnerships help address these constraints by strengthening both organizational capacity and development effectiveness. Specifically, partnerships enable grassroots CSOs to:

- access technical assistance, mentoring, and specialized expertise;
- improve institutional governance and management systems;
- strengthen project design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting capacities;
- share knowledge, innovations, and good practices with peer organizations;
- enhance organizational credibility and legitimacy among donors, government institutions, and communities;
- improve advocacy capacity through collective representation and coordinated engagement;
- establish stronger relationships with government institutions, research organizations, and development partners;
- increase visibility and public recognition of community-led initiatives; and
- strengthen organizational sustainability through diversified partnerships and long-term collaboration.

National and International Perspectives on Partnership

National Perspective

In Ethiopia, civil society organizations are increasingly recognized as important actors in national development, humanitarian response, democratic governance, peacebuilding, environmental protection, social inclusion, and community empowerment. National legal and policy frameworks encourage constructive engagement between CSOs, government institutions, communities, and development partners in advancing national development priorities. The Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Proclamation emphasizes the importance of cooperation, networking, coalition building, transparency, accountability, and institutional strengthening among CSOs. Likewise, national development strategies encourage multi-stakeholder collaboration to improve service delivery, strengthen local governance, enhance citizen participation, and promote sustainable development. Within Ethiopia's Civil Society Organization Capacity Development Program for Local and Grassroots CSOs (CDP-Lg), partnerships are considered essential for strengthening organizational capacity, promoting collaborative governance, increasing social accountability, facilitating learning, improving coordination, and enhancing sustainability of development interventions.

International Perspective

Globally, partnerships are recognized as a cornerstone of sustainable development. International frameworks consistently emphasize collaboration among governments, civil society, private sector organizations, communities, and international development agencies.

Examples include:

- **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17**, which promotes multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development.
- **The Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness**, which emphasize equitable partnerships, mutual learning, transparency, accountability, and local ownership.
- **The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC)**, which promotes inclusive partnerships based on shared responsibility, transparency, country ownership, and mutual accountability.
- **OECD Development Effectiveness Principles**, which encourage coordination, harmonization, learning, and evidence-based collaboration.
- **UNDP Partnership Guidance**, which highlights shared value creation, risk sharing, innovation, and collective impact.

Across these international frameworks, effective partnerships are characterized by voluntary collaboration, shared objectives, complementary strengths, mutual benefit, respect for organizational autonomy, equitable participation, and joint accountability for results.

1.2 Purpose of the Guideline

The purpose of this Partnership Establishment Guideline is to provide a comprehensive institutional framework that enables grassroots Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to systematically identify, establish, manage, strengthen, monitor, and sustain effective partnerships with diverse stakeholders in support of their organizational missions and development objectives.

Specifically, the guideline seeks to:

- establish standardized procedures for partnership identification, assessment, establishment, implementation, monitoring, and review;

- promote partnerships founded on mutual respect, transparency, equity, accountability, and shared ownership;
- strengthen institutional capacity for strategic partnership management;
- provide practical tools for partner selection, due diligence, partnership agreements, governance, risk management, and performance monitoring;
- improve coordination among CSOs and other development actors to maximize development impact and reduce duplication;
- support compliance with applicable national laws, donor requirements, and international partnership principles; and
- promote sustainable, long-term partnerships that contribute to resilient institutions and improved community outcomes.

Ultimately, this guideline aims to ensure that partnerships are strategic, value-driven, accountable, and aligned with both organizational priorities and community needs rather than being formed solely in response to short-term funding opportunities.

1.3 Scope of the Guideline

Geographic Scope: this guideline applies primarily to grassroots CSOs operating within Ethiopia. It is intended for organizations implementing development, humanitarian, governance, environmental, peacebuilding, human rights, social protection, health, education, livelihood, and related interventions at community, woreda, zonal, regional, and national levels. The guideline also applies to partnerships established with regional, national, continental, and international organizations where Ethiopian grassroots CSOs participate as implementing partners, consortium members, coalition participants, technical collaborators, or strategic partners.

Institutional Scope: this guideline governs all forms of institutional partnerships entered into by grassroots CSOs, including strategic, programmatic, financial, technical, advocacy, research, networking, coalition, consortium, and resource mobilization partnerships. This Guideline applies throughout the entire partnership lifecycle, providing a comprehensive framework for establishing, managing, and concluding partnerships. It covers all key stages, including partnership identification and opportunity assessment; stakeholder mapping and partner selection; organizational due diligence and risk assessment; partnership negotiation and approval; the development of partnership agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs);

implementation and coordination; governance and decision-making; communication and information sharing; financial management and accountability; monitoring, evaluation, learning, and adaptation; conflict prevention and dispute resolution; and, where appropriate, partnership renewal, transition, or termination. By addressing each of these stages, the Guideline promotes transparent, accountable, and mutually beneficial partnerships that are aligned with organizational objectives and deliver sustainable development outcomes. The guideline complements existing organizational policies relating to governance, finance, procurement, safeguarding, human resources, risk management, and monitoring and evaluation, and should be implemented in conjunction with those policies.

Stakeholders Covered: This guideline applies to partnerships established with, or involving, a broad range of development actors, including, but not limited to:

- grassroots, local, national, and international Civil Society Organizations;
- Community-Based Organizations (CBOs);
- Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs);
- government ministries, regional bureaus, zonal offices, woreda administrations, and local authorities;
- bilateral and multilateral development partners;
- United Nations agencies;
- donor organizations and philanthropic foundations;
- academic and research institutions;
- private sector organizations and social enterprises;
- professional associations and networks;
- media organizations;
- community structures, traditional institutions, and local leadership bodies;
- women's organizations, youth organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities, and other representative groups of marginalized populations; and
- other stakeholders whose mandates, expertise, and resources contribute to achieving shared development objectives.

Regardless of the type of stakeholder, all partnerships established under this guideline shall adhere to the guiding principles of mutual respect, transparency, equity, inclusiveness, accountability, shared responsibility, local ownership, sustainability, conflict sensitivity, gender equality, safeguarding, and respect for human rights.

1.4 Objectives of the Guideline

1.4.1 General Objective

The overall objective of this Partnership Establishment Guideline is to provide a comprehensive institutional framework that enables grassroots CSOs to establish, manage, strengthen, and sustain strategic, equitable, and mutually beneficial partnerships that enhance organizational capacity, improve development effectiveness, promote accountability, and maximize positive and sustainable impacts on the communities they serve.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

Specifically, this guideline seeks to:

- ✓ Provide standardized procedures for identifying, assessing, establishing, implementing, monitoring, reviewing, renewing, and terminating partnerships.
- ✓ Promote strategic partnerships that align with the mission, vision, values, strategic priorities, and development objectives of grassroots CSOs.
- ✓ Strengthen institutional capacity of grassroots CSOs in partnership planning, negotiation, governance, communication, coordination, resource mobilization, and collaborative leadership.
- ✓ Promote transparent and accountable partnership management through clearly defined roles, responsibilities, governance structures, reporting systems, and decision-making mechanisms.
- ✓ Facilitate equitable collaboration among CSOs, government institutions, private sector organizations, development partners, academic institutions, and community structures.
- ✓ Enhance resource mobilization and efficient resource utilization through coordinated planning, joint programming, and collaborative fundraising initiatives.
- ✓ Promote knowledge sharing, organizational learning, innovation, and peer support among partner organizations.
- ✓ Strengthen collective advocacy and policy engagement to amplify community voices and influence policies affecting local development.
- ✓ Reduce duplication of efforts while promoting synergy, complementarity, and coordinated service delivery among development actors.

- ✓ Improve organizational resilience and sustainability by fostering long-term institutional relationships based on mutual trust and shared responsibility.
- ✓ Promote compliance with national legal frameworks, donor requirements, organizational policies, and internationally recognized partnership principles.
- ✓ Enhance partnership performance through continuous monitoring, evaluation, learning, adaptive management, and regular partnership reviews.

1.5 Guiding Principles

Successful partnerships are founded not only on formal agreements but also on shared values that shape organizational behavior, decision-making, communication, and accountability. These principles serve as the ethical and operational foundation upon which all partnerships established under this guideline shall be developed, implemented, monitored, and sustained.

1.5.1 Mutual Respect

Every partner shall recognize and respect the identity, mandate, expertise, autonomy, values, experience, and comparative advantages of other partners. Partnerships should acknowledge that each organization contributes unique strengths that are essential to achieving shared objectives. Mutual respect requires partners to:

- recognize each partner as an equal stakeholder regardless of organizational size or financial contribution;
- value diverse perspectives and experiences;
- respect institutional independence and internal governance;
- appreciate cultural, social, and organizational diversity; and
- maintain professional relationships based on dignity and courtesy.

Respect creates the foundation upon which trust and long-term collaboration can flourish.

1.5.2 Transparency

Partnerships shall operate through open, honest, and timely communication. Partners are expected to share relevant information necessary for informed decision-making and collaborative implementation. Transparency includes:

- sharing objectives, expectations, and constraints openly;
- timely disclosure of financial and operational information;
- transparent decision-making processes;
- open communication regarding risks, challenges, and lessons learned;

- clear documentation of agreements and commitments; and
- regular reporting on partnership performance.

Transparency minimizes misunderstandings, strengthens confidence, and promotes accountability among partners.

1.5.3 Accountability

All partners are jointly and individually accountable for fulfilling their agreed responsibilities and delivering expected results. Accountability extends not only to partner organizations but also to beneficiaries, communities, donors, government institutions, and other stakeholders. Partners should:

- fulfill agreed commitments within established timelines;
- use resources responsibly and efficiently;
- comply with legal, contractual, and ethical obligations;
- maintain accurate records and documentation;
- participate in regular monitoring and reporting; and
- accept responsibility for successes, challenges, and corrective actions.

Mutual accountability strengthens credibility and reinforces confidence among all stakeholders.

1.5.4 Equity

Effective partnerships recognize that fairness does not necessarily mean equality. Partners contribute different resources, expertise, networks, and capacities, all of which should be valued appropriately. Equity requires:

- fair participation in decision-making;
- recognition of both financial and non-financial contributions;
- balanced sharing of benefits and responsibilities;
- equitable access to information and opportunities;
- deliberate efforts to address power imbalances; and
- protection of smaller organizations from domination by more powerful institutions.

1.5.5 Inclusiveness

Partnerships should actively embrace diversity and ensure that all relevant stakeholders have opportunities to participate meaningfully in partnership processes. Inclusiveness requires partners to:

- involve organizations representing diverse constituencies;

- recognize marginalized and vulnerable populations;
- encourage participation across different organizational sizes and capacities;
- respect cultural, linguistic, and social diversity; and
- remove barriers that prevent meaningful engagement.

Inclusive partnerships produce more legitimate, representative, and sustainable development outcomes.

1.5.6 Participation

Partnerships should be built through active engagement rather than passive consultation. Every partner should have opportunities to contribute ideas, influence decisions, participate in implementation, and evaluate progress. Participation includes:

- joint planning and priority setting;
- collaborative decision-making;
- shared implementation responsibilities;
- collective monitoring and evaluation;
- regular dialogue and consultation; and
- continuous feedback and learning.

Meaningful participation strengthens ownership, commitment, and long-term sustainability.

1.5.7 Trust

Trust is the cornerstone of every successful partnership. It develops through consistent actions, honesty, reliability, integrity, and fulfillment of commitments over time. Partners should build trust by:

- honoring commitments;
- communicating honestly and respectfully;
- addressing problems promptly;
- respecting confidentiality where appropriate;
- demonstrating competence and professionalism; and
- acting consistently with agreed values and principles.

Trust reduces transaction costs, facilitates collaboration, and enables organizations to manage challenges constructively.

1.5.8 Sustainability

Partnerships should create lasting value that continues beyond individual projects or funding cycles. Sustainability involves strengthening institutions, building local capacities, and promoting long-term collaboration. Partners should therefore:

- invest in institutional capacity development;
- promote knowledge transfer and organizational learning;
- diversify resource mobilization strategies;
- strengthen local ownership of initiatives;
- develop long-term partnership strategies; and
- establish mechanisms for continuity beyond donor-funded interventions.

Sustainable partnerships contribute to resilient institutions capable of delivering lasting development outcomes.

1.5.9 Shared Ownership

Successful partnerships require collective ownership of both processes and results. Partners should jointly define priorities, develop plans, implement activities, monitor progress, and celebrate achievements. Shared ownership implies that partners:

- co-create partnership objectives;
- jointly develop work plans and budgets;
- participate in governance and oversight;
- share responsibilities and risks;
- collectively solve problems; and
- jointly evaluate partnership performance.

When ownership is shared, commitment, accountability, and collaboration are significantly strengthened.

1.5.10 Local Leadership

Grassroots organizations and local communities possess invaluable knowledge of local realities, needs, priorities, culture, and development opportunities. Partnerships should therefore strengthen—not replace—local leadership. This principle requires partners to:

- recognize local organizations as primary development actors;
- support locally led decision-making;
- strengthen indigenous knowledge systems;
- build long-term institutional capacity;

- promote community ownership; and
- avoid externally imposed solutions that undermine local agency.

Local leadership enhances relevance, legitimacy, sustainability, and community trust.

1.5.11 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

Partnerships shall promote equal opportunities, equitable participation, and non-discrimination across all partnership processes. Gender equality and social inclusion improve both the quality and effectiveness of development interventions. Partners should:

- ensure balanced representation of women and men in leadership and decision-making;
- address barriers faced by women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, and marginalized groups;
- integrate gender analysis into partnership planning;
- promote inclusive policies and practices;
- collect and utilize disaggregated data where appropriate; and
- foster organizational cultures that respect diversity and inclusion.

1.5.12 Conflict Sensitivity

Partnerships operating in diverse social, political, and cultural environments should be designed and implemented in ways that avoid exacerbating existing tensions and contribute positively to peace and social cohesion. Conflict-sensitive partnerships should:

- understand local conflict dynamics;
- conduct context and stakeholder analyses;
- identify potential risks associated with partnership activities;
- ensure equitable resource allocation;
- promote inclusive dialogue;
- establish mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution; and
- regularly monitor unintended consequences of interventions.

Applying conflict-sensitive approaches enables partnerships to "do no harm" while strengthening resilience and peaceful collaboration.

1.5.13 Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)

All partnerships established under this guideline shall uphold internationally recognized human rights principles and national constitutional provisions. Partnership processes should contribute to the realization of human rights while ensuring that development interventions are people-centered, participatory, equitable, and accountable.

A human rights-based approach requires partners to:

- respect, protect, and promote the dignity and rights of all individuals;
- ensure meaningful participation of rights holders in decision-making;
- strengthen the capacity of duty bearers to fulfill their obligations;
- prevent discrimination in all partnership activities;
- promote access to information, justice, and accountability mechanisms;
- prioritize vulnerable and marginalized populations; and
- integrate human rights principles throughout the partnership lifecycle.

Embedding human rights into partnerships enhances social justice, strengthens accountability, and ensures that development interventions contribute to inclusive and equitable outcomes for all.

Implementation Note

The guiding principles presented above are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. They shall guide all stages of the partnership lifecycle—from partner identification and due diligence to governance, implementation, monitoring, conflict resolution, renewal, and exit. All partnership agreements, Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), consortium agreements, and collaborative arrangements developed under this guideline should explicitly reflect these principles to ensure consistency, integrity, and long-term effectiveness.

1.6 Legal and Policy Framework

Partnerships established under this guideline shall comply with applicable national laws, organizational policies, donor requirements, and internationally recognized development principles. Adherence to these frameworks promotes legality, transparency, accountability, and effective collaboration throughout the partnership lifecycle.

1.6.1 National Civil Society Legislation

All partnerships shall comply with Ethiopia's legal framework governing Civil Society Organizations, particularly the Civil Society Organizations Proclamation No. 1113/2019 and related directives issued by the Authority for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO). Partner organizations are expected to:

- maintain valid legal registration;
- comply with governance and financial management requirements;
- fulfill statutory reporting obligations;
- operate within their approved mandates; and
- observe applicable national laws and regulations.

Legal due diligence should be conducted before formalizing any partnership.

1.6.2 Partnership Policies

Partnerships shall be established and managed in accordance with this guideline and other relevant organizational policies, including governance, finance, procurement, human resources, safeguarding, risk management, monitoring and evaluation, and conflict of interest policies. Each partnership should be governed by a written agreement that clearly defines:

- objectives and expected results;
- roles and responsibilities;
- governance and decision-making arrangements;
- resource management;
- reporting requirements;
- dispute resolution mechanisms; and
- conditions for amendment, renewal, or termination.

1.6.3 Organizational Strategic Plan

Partnerships should support the organization's mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities. Before entering into a partnership, organizations should assess whether the proposed collaboration:

- aligns with strategic objectives;
- complements existing programs;
- strengthens institutional capacity;
- enhances development impact; and
- contributes to long-term sustainability.

1.6.4 Donor Requirements

Where partnerships involve external funding or technical assistance, organizations shall comply with applicable donor requirements while ensuring consistency with national laws and organizational policies. Key areas of compliance may include:

- financial accountability and auditing;
- procurement and asset management;
- monitoring and reporting;
- safeguarding;
- gender equality and social inclusion;
- environmental and social safeguards;
- anti-fraud and anti-corruption measures; and
- branding and communication requirements.

1.6.5 International Development Principles

This guideline is informed by internationally recognized partnership frameworks that promote effective and accountable development cooperation, including:

- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 on Partnerships for the Goals;
- The Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness;
- The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC);
- OECD Development Effectiveness Principles; and
- United Nations partnership principles.

These frameworks emphasize local ownership, mutual accountability, transparency, equity, inclusiveness, sustainability, and results-oriented collaboration.

Implementation Note

Organizations should ensure that every partnership complies with Ethiopian law, aligns with organizational strategies, satisfies applicable donor requirements, and reflects internationally recognized principles of effective partnership. Where differences arise between partner procedures, they should be addressed through dialogue and documented agreements while maintaining compliance with national legislation and the highest standards of accountability and ethical practice.

CHAPTER TWO: PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

2.1 Rationale for Partnerships

Development challenges are increasingly complex, interconnected, and resource-intensive. Issues such as poverty, climate change, unemployment, food insecurity, humanitarian crises, governance, social exclusion, gender inequality, and environmental degradation cannot be effectively addressed by individual organizations acting in isolation. These challenges require coordinated efforts that combine the comparative strengths, expertise, resources, and networks of multiple stakeholders. For grassroots CSOs, partnerships provide a strategic mechanism for expanding institutional capacity, improving service delivery, increasing influence, and achieving sustainable development outcomes. By working collaboratively, organizations can leverage complementary strengths, share risks and responsibilities, avoid duplication of effort, and generate greater impact than they could achieve independently.

Partnerships also foster innovation, strengthen organizational learning, enhance accountability, and promote coordinated responses to community needs. They facilitate meaningful engagement among CSOs, government institutions, development partners, the private sector, academia, and local communities, thereby contributing to more inclusive, effective, and sustainable development interventions. The following sections outline the principal reasons why partnerships are essential for grassroots CSOs.

2.1.1 Resource Mobilization

Limited financial, technical, and human resources remain one of the greatest challenges facing many grassroots CSOs. Strategic partnerships enable organizations to mobilize and leverage resources that would otherwise be inaccessible to individual organizations. Collaborative resource mobilization enhances organizational sustainability while increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of development interventions. Partnerships support resource mobilization by:

- facilitating joint fundraising and consortium-based funding opportunities;
- pooling financial, technical, and material resources;
- sharing infrastructure, equipment, and specialized expertise;
- reducing operational costs through shared implementation; and
- diversifying funding sources to reduce dependence on a single donor.

2.1.2 Knowledge Sharing

Every organization possesses unique experiences, expertise, and lessons learned from its work. Partnerships provide structured opportunities for organizations to exchange knowledge, strengthen institutional learning, and promote innovation. Organizations that actively learn from one another are better equipped to adapt to changing development contexts and improve programme quality. Knowledge-sharing partnerships contribute to:

- dissemination of good practices and successful approaches;
- exchange of technical expertise and professional experience;
- peer learning and mentoring among organizations;
- collaborative research and evidence generation;
- improved problem-solving through collective learning; and
- development of innovative solutions to emerging challenges.

2.1.3 Improved Service Delivery

Communities often face complex and interrelated needs that require coordinated responses from multiple actors. Through coordinated implementation, partnerships contribute to improved development outcomes and greater community satisfaction. Partnerships enable organizations to combine complementary expertise and resources to deliver more comprehensive, efficient, and inclusive services. Collaborative service delivery helps organizations to:

- reach larger and more diverse populations;
- improve the quality and effectiveness of interventions;
- reduce duplication of services;
- coordinate responses across sectors and institutions;
- strengthen referral systems and complementary programming; and
- ensure that services are more responsive to community priorities.

2.1.4 Advocacy and Policy Influence

Many policy and governance challenges cannot be effectively addressed by individual organizations acting alone. Collective advocacy enables organizations to speak with a stronger and more credible voice when engaging decision-makers and influencing public policy. By working together, organizations can influence policies, legislation, and institutional practices that contribute to sustainable social change. Partnerships strengthen advocacy by:

- developing common policy positions;
- coordinating advocacy campaigns and public awareness initiatives;
- increasing visibility and public credibility;
- engaging government and development partners more effectively;
- amplifying the voices of marginalized communities; and
- promoting evidence-based policy dialogue.

2.1.5 Capacity Development

Institutional capacity is essential for effective and sustainable organizational performance. Partnerships create opportunities for mutual learning and organizational strengthening through the sharing of knowledge, skills, systems, and experience. Rather than creating dependency, effective partnerships strengthen the long-term institutional capacity and resilience of all participating organizations. Capacity development through partnerships may include:

- technical assistance and mentoring;
- leadership and governance development;
- staff training and professional development;
- strengthening financial and administrative systems;
- improving monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) practices;
- enhancing digital and technological capacities; and
- supporting organizational policy and systems development.

2.1.6 Scaling Development Impact

One of the most significant advantages of partnerships is their ability to achieve results that exceed the capacity of individual organizations. By combining resources, expertise, networks, and community relationships, partners can increase both the scale and sustainability of their interventions. Through collective action, partnerships produce greater development impact while maximizing the efficient use of available resources. Partnerships enable organizations to:

- expand successful initiatives to new geographic areas;
- reach larger numbers of beneficiaries;

- integrate complementary services for greater impact;
- respond more effectively to emergencies and emerging challenges;
- generate stronger evidence for policy and programme improvement; and
- create sustainable institutional and community-level change.

2.2 Types of Partnerships

Grassroots CSOs may establish different types of partnerships depending on their strategic objectives, organizational capacity, and development priorities. While some partnerships are long-term and strategic, others are established to address specific projects or technical needs.

- ✓ **Strategic Partnerships:** Long-term collaborations established to advance shared missions, strengthen institutional capacity, and achieve common strategic objectives through sustained cooperation.
- ✓ **Programmatic Partnerships:** Partnerships formed to jointly design, implement, monitor, and evaluate development or humanitarian programmes and projects.
- ✓ **Technical Partnerships:** Collaborative arrangements for sharing technical expertise, skills, technology, training, mentoring, research, and specialized knowledge to strengthen organizational performance.
- ✓ **Financial Partnerships:** Partnerships established to mobilize, manage, or co-finance resources for implementing development initiatives while ensuring financial accountability and sustainability.
- ✓ **Advocacy Partnerships:** Collaborative efforts among organizations to influence public policies, promote social change, protect rights, and amplify the voices of communities through coordinated advocacy and campaigns.
- ✓ **Research Partnerships:** Partnerships involving joint research, evidence generation, knowledge production, innovation, and dissemination of findings to inform policy and practice.
- ✓ **Community Partnerships:** Collaborative relationships with local communities, community-based organizations, traditional leaders, and other grassroots structures to ensure community ownership, participation, and sustainability.

- ✓ **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Partnerships between CSOs, government institutions, and private sector organizations that leverage complementary resources and expertise to achieve shared development objectives.
- ✓ **Consortium Arrangements:** Formal collaborations in which two or more organizations jointly implement projects, mobilize resources, or respond to funding opportunities under agreed governance and management structures.
- ✓ **Coalition and Network Membership:** Voluntary alliances of organizations established to promote coordination, knowledge sharing, collective advocacy, policy engagement, and mutual learning around common interests.

Good Practice Note: *Organizations may participate in more than one type of partnership simultaneously, provided each partnership aligns with their mission, strategic priorities, and institutional capacity.*

2.3 Potential Partnership Stakeholders

Effective partnerships require engagement with a broad range of stakeholders whose expertise, resources, mandates, and influence complement the work of grassroots CSOs. Depending on the nature of the partnership, stakeholders may include the following:

- ✓ **Government Institutions:** Federal, regional, zonal, woreda, and local government institutions responsible for policy formulation, regulation, public service delivery, and development coordination.
- ✓ **International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs):** International organizations that provide financial support, technical assistance, capacity development, humanitarian response, and knowledge-sharing opportunities.
- ✓ **National Non-Governmental Organizations:** National CSOs with complementary mandates that collaborate on programme implementation, advocacy, research, resource mobilization, and institutional strengthening.
- ✓ **Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):** Locally established organizations that represent community interests, facilitate grassroots participation, and strengthen community ownership of development initiatives.

- ✓ **Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs):** Religious institutions and faith-inspired organizations that contribute to community mobilization, social services, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and values-based development.
- ✓ **Academic and Research Institutions:** Universities, colleges, and research centers that provide technical expertise, research, innovation, training, and evidence for policy and programme improvement.
- ✓ **Private Sector Organizations**: Businesses and social enterprises that contribute financial resources, technology, innovation, employment opportunities, and corporate social responsibility initiatives.
- ✓ **Media Organizations:** Print, broadcast, and digital media organizations that support public awareness, advocacy, information dissemination, and stakeholder engagement.
- ✓ **Development Partners and Donors:** Bilateral and multilateral agencies, United Nations organizations, philanthropic foundations, and funding institutions that provide financial, technical, and policy support.
- ✓ **Community Structures:** Traditional leaders, elders, youth groups, women's associations, persons with disabilities' organizations, local committees, and other representative community structures that facilitate inclusive participation and local ownership.

Good Practice Note: *Stakeholder selection should be guided by strategic alignment, complementary expertise, shared values, institutional credibility, and the potential to contribute to mutually beneficial and sustainable partnership outcomes.*

CHAPTER THREE: PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

3.1 Partnership Identification

Successful partnerships begin with a systematic process of identifying organizational needs, potential partners, and opportunities for collaboration. Partnership identification should be evidence-based, strategic, and aligned with the organization's mission, strategic objectives, and community priorities. Before initiating any partnership, the organization should determine whether collaboration offers greater value than acting independently.

- ✓ **Stakeholder Mapping:** Stakeholder mapping is the process of identifying individuals, organizations, and institutions that have an interest in, influence over, or contribution to the intended partnership. The mapping exercise should assess stakeholders' mandates, expertise, resources, influence, and potential roles to identify suitable partners and strengthen coordination.
- ✓ **Needs Assessment:** A needs assessment identifies organizational and community needs that cannot be effectively addressed through internal resources alone. It helps determine whether a partnership is necessary and defines the specific areas where collaboration can add value.
- ✓ **Opportunity Analysis:** Opportunity analysis involves identifying external and internal opportunities for collaboration, including funding opportunities, policy initiatives, technical assistance, research, innovation, advocacy, and joint programming. Organizations should assess the strategic relevance and potential benefits of each opportunity before pursuing a partnership.
- ✓ **Partner Scouting:** Partner scouting is the process of identifying organizations with complementary mandates, expertise, resources, and values. Potential partners may be identified through existing networks, stakeholder consultations, conferences, referrals, donor recommendations, government platforms, and partnership databases.
- ✓ **Partnership Prioritization:** Not every potential partnership should be pursued. Organizations should prioritize partnerships based on strategic relevance, expected impact, resource requirements, mutual benefits, organizational capacity, and associated risks. Priority should be given to partnerships that offer long-term value and contribute directly to organizational objectives.

Good Practice Note: *Organizations should maintain a Partnership Opportunity Register to document potential partners, collaboration opportunities, and prioritization decisions for future engagement.*

3.2 Partner Selection Criteria

Selecting the right partner is critical to building effective and sustainable partnerships. Partner selection should be objective, transparent, and based on predefined criteria to ensure compatibility and reduce partnership risks.

- ✓ **Mission Alignment:** The prospective partner's mission, vision, and strategic objectives should be compatible with those of the organization and support the intended partnership goals.
- ✓ **Shared Values:** Partners should demonstrate commitment to common values such as integrity, transparency, accountability, equity, participation, human rights, and community empowerment
- ✓ **Technical Capacity:** The partner should possess the technical expertise, qualified personnel, systems, and experience necessary to fulfill its expected roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ **Governance Structure:** The organization should have an effective governance system, including clearly defined leadership, decision-making mechanisms, internal controls, and accountability structures.
- ✓ **Reputation and Credibility:** Preference should be given to organizations with a positive reputation, demonstrated integrity, strong professional relationships, and a proven record of successful programme implementation.
- ✓ **Financial Stability:** Potential partners should demonstrate sound financial management systems, responsible use of resources, and the capacity to manage partnership funds effectively.
- ✓ **Geographic Presence:** Where relevant, the partner should have an operational presence, local knowledge, and established relationships within the target geographic area or community.

- ✓ **Community Acceptance:** The organization should be trusted and recognized by the communities it serves, with evidence of meaningful community engagement and positive stakeholder relationships.
- ✓ **Compliance Status:** Partners should comply with applicable laws, regulatory requirements, donor conditions, and organizational policies, including safeguarding and ethical standards.
- ✓ **Risk Profile:** Organizations should assess the potential legal, financial, operational, reputational, and safeguarding risks associated with each prospective partner before entering into a partnership.

Good Practice Note: *A standardized Partner Selection Scorecard should be used to evaluate and compare prospective partners objectively.*

3.3 Partner Due Diligence

Due diligence is a systematic assessment conducted before formalizing a partnership to verify the suitability, credibility, and capacity of a prospective partner. The process helps minimize risks and supports informed decision-making.

- ✓ **Organizational Assessment:** Review the organization's legal status, governance, strategic direction, staffing, operational capacity, and previous partnership experience.
- ✓ **Legal Assessment:** Verify the organization's legal registration, operational authorization, regulatory compliance, litigation history (if any), and authority to enter into partnership agreements.
- ✓ **Financial Assessment:** Assess financial management systems, audited financial statements, internal controls, funding sources, financial sustainability, and compliance with donor requirements.
- ✓ **Programmatic Assessment:** Evaluate the partner's technical competence, programme experience, implementation capacity, monitoring and evaluation systems, and track record in delivering results.
- ✓ **Safeguarding Assessment:** Determine whether the organization has adequate safeguarding policies and procedures to protect children, vulnerable adults, staff, and communities from abuse, exploitation, harassment, and other forms of harm.

- ✓ **Risk Assessment:** Identify and evaluate potential partnership risks, including strategic, operational, financial, legal, environmental, security, reputational, and safeguarding risks, together with appropriate mitigation measures.
- ✓ **Reference Checks:** Obtain references from previous partners, donors, government institutions, or other credible stakeholders to verify the organization's performance, integrity, reliability, and partnership experience.

Good Practice Note: *The Due Diligence Assessment Report should be completed* ***before*** *any Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or Partnership Agreement is signed. It should be reviewed by senior management and, where required by organizational policy, submitted to the Board of Directors as part of the partnership approval package. This report should be reviewed and updated periodically for long-term partnerships or whenever there are significant organizational or contextual changes.*

3.4 Partnership Approval Process

All proposed partnerships should undergo a formal internal approval process to ensure compliance with organizational policies, strategic priorities, and governance requirements before any agreement is signed.

- ✓ **Internal Review:** The responsible programme or partnership unit should review the proposed partnership to assess strategic alignment, expected benefits, resource implications, potential risks, and due diligence findings.
- ✓ **Management Approval:** Following the internal review, senior management should evaluate the proposal and determine whether the partnership meets organizational objectives, risk tolerance, legal requirements, and resource availability before granting approval.
- ✓ **Board Approval Requirements:** Partnerships involving significant financial commitments, strategic implications, legal obligations, long-term institutional commitments, or reputational risks should be submitted to the Board of Directors or its designated committee for approval in accordance with the organization's governance framework.

- ✓ **Documentation Requirements:** No partnership shall be formalized without appropriate documentation. At a minimum, the partnership file should include:
- Partnership concept or proposal;
- Stakeholder mapping and needs assessment (where applicable);
- Partner Selection Scorecard;
- Due Diligence Assessment Report;
- Risk Assessment Report;
- Internal and management approval records;
- Board resolution (where required);
- Signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or Partnership Agreement; and
- Any other supporting legal or technical documents.

Good Practice Note: *Organizations should establish a centralized Partnership Register to record all approved partnerships, including key dates, responsible officers, duration, review schedules, and partnership status. This facilitates effective monitoring, institutional memory, and accountability.*

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTNERSHIP FORMATION

4.1 Partnership Negotiation

Once a prospective partner has been identified, assessed, and approved, the partnership should be formally established through a transparent negotiation process and documented in an appropriate written agreement. The partnership formation process should ensure that all parties have a common understanding of the purpose, expectations, roles, responsibilities, and governance arrangements before implementation begins. Partnership negotiation is the process through which prospective partners discuss, agree upon, and document the terms and conditions of their collaboration. Negotiations should be conducted in good faith, guided by mutual respect, transparency, equity, and shared ownership. The objective is to establish a partnership that is mutually beneficial, clearly defined, and aligned with the interests of all parties. The negotiation process should address, at a minimum, the following areas:

- ✓ **Areas of Cooperation:** Partners should clearly define the thematic areas, programmes, projects, or services in which they intend to collaborate. The agreed areas of cooperation should align with the strategic objectives of all parties and avoid duplication of effort.
- ✓ **Roles and Responsibilities:** Each partner's roles, responsibilities, and expected contributions should be clearly defined to promote accountability and minimize misunderstandings. Responsibilities should reflect each partner's comparative advantage and institutional capacity.
- ✓ **Resource Commitments:** Partners should agree on the financial, human, technical, material, and in-kind resources each organization will contribute. Resource commitments should be realistic, documented, and linked to agreed activities and deliverables.
- ✓ **Governance Arrangements:** The partnership should establish appropriate governance structures, including decision-making processes, coordination mechanisms, leadership roles, reporting lines, and meeting schedules to ensure effective oversight and implementation.
- ✓ **Communication Mechanisms:** Partners should agree on communication channels, information-sharing procedures, reporting schedules, spokesperson arrangements, confidentiality requirements, and mechanisms for stakeholder engagement.
- ✓ **Risk Sharing:** Potential legal, financial, operational, reputational, safeguarding, and security risks should be identified during negotiations. Partners should agree on

appropriate risk mitigation measures and clearly define how responsibilities for managing risks will be shared.

Good Practice Note: *All negotiated terms should be documented in meeting minutes before preparing the formal partnership agreement.*

4.2 Development of Partnership Agreements

Following successful negotiations, the partnership should be formalized through a written agreement that clearly defines the rights, obligations, and expectations of all parties. The type of agreement should reflect the purpose, complexity, duration, and legal nature of the partnership.

- ✓ **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU):** An MoU is commonly used to establish a general framework for collaboration where partners agree to work together toward shared objectives without necessarily creating legally enforceable financial obligations. It is suitable for strategic, technical, and institutional partnerships.
- ✓ **Consortium Agreement:** A Consortium Agreement is used when two or more organizations jointly implement a project or programme, particularly under donor-funded initiatives. It defines governance arrangements, financial management, reporting obligations, decision-making procedures, and the responsibilities of each consortium member.
- ✓ **Collaboration Agreement:** A Collaboration Agreement formalizes partnerships for joint activities such as research, advocacy, capacity development, knowledge sharing, or programme implementation. It specifies the scope of collaboration, responsibilities, and expected outputs.
- ✓ **Service Agreement:** A Service Agreement is appropriate where one organization provides specific professional or technical services to another. It defines the scope of work, service standards, deliverables, timelines, payment arrangements, and performance expectations.
- ✓ **Grant Agreement:** A Grant Agreement governs partnerships involving the transfer of financial resources from one organization to another for implementing agreed activities. It outlines funding conditions, eligible expenditures, reporting requirements, compliance obligations, audit provisions, and accountability measures.

Good Practice Note: *All partnership agreements should be reviewed by the organization's authorized management and, where necessary, legal counsel before signature.*

4.3 Essential Elements of Partnership Agreements

Regardless of the type of agreement, every partnership document should clearly define the terms governing the collaboration. At a minimum, partnership agreements should include the following elements.

- ✓ **Purpose:** A clear statement explaining why the partnership is being established and the intended value of the collaboration.
- ✓ **Objectives:** Specific and measurable objectives that the partners intend to achieve through the partnership.
- ✓ **Scope:** A description of the activities, geographic coverage, target groups, and areas of cooperation covered by the agreement.
- ✓ **Duration:** The commencement date, duration, review periods, renewal arrangements, and expiration date of the partnership.
- ✓ **Roles and Responsibilities:** Clearly defined duties, obligations, deliverables, and decision-making responsibilities of each partner.
- ✓ **Financial Arrangements:** The financial contributions of each partner, budgeting, fund management procedures, eligible expenditures, audit requirements, and financial reporting responsibilities.
- ✓ **Reporting Requirements:** The type, frequency, format, and timelines for technical, financial, and progress reporting, including responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation.
- ✓ **Branding and Visibility:** Agreed procedures governing the use of organizational names, logos, publications, public communications, media engagement, and donor visibility requirements.
- ✓ **Data Protection:** Provisions for collecting, storing, sharing, and protecting personal, organizational, and confidential information in accordance with applicable legal and ethical standards.

- ✓ **Intellectual Property:** Ownership, use, publication, licensing, and sharing arrangements for research findings, publications, training materials, software, databases, and other intellectual property developed through the partnership.
- ✓ **Dispute Resolution:** Mechanisms for resolving disagreements through consultation, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, or other mutually agreed procedures before resorting to legal action.
- ✓ **Termination Provisions:** Conditions under which the partnership may be amended, suspended, or terminated, including notice periods, settlement of outstanding obligations, asset disposition, confidentiality requirements, and post-termination responsibilities.

Good Practice Note: *Every partnership agreement should conclude with signature blocks for authorized representatives of all parties, indicating their names, positions, signatures, organizational seals (where applicable), and the date of execution.*

CHAPTER FIVE: PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 Partnership Governance Structure

Effective partnerships require appropriate governance arrangements to ensure strategic direction, coordinated implementation, accountability, transparency, and timely decision-making. The governance structure should be proportionate to the size, complexity, and duration of the partnership and clearly define reporting lines, responsibilities, and communication channels. Depending on the nature of the partnership, the following governance structures may be established.

5.1.1 Steering Committee

The Steering Committee provides strategic oversight and policy guidance for the partnership. It oversees the overall direction of the partnership, approves major decisions, reviews performance, resolves strategic issues, and ensures that the partnership remains aligned with the objectives of participating organizations. The Steering Committee should comprise senior representatives from each partner organization and meet periodically as agreed in the partnership agreement. Typical responsibilities include:

- providing strategic leadership and oversight;
- approving annual work plans and major revisions;
- reviewing partnership performance and progress;
- addressing strategic risks and challenges;
- approving significant policy or operational changes; and
- supporting resource mobilization and sustainability efforts.

5.1.2 Partnership Coordination Team

The Partnership Coordination Team is responsible for the day-to-day management and coordination of partnership activities. The Coordination Team should consist of designated focal persons from each partner organization. It serves as the operational link between partner organizations and ensures effective implementation of agreed plans. Its responsibilities include:

- coordinating implementation activities;
- facilitating communication among partners;
- monitoring implementation progress;
- organizing partnership meetings;
- preparing technical and financial reports;

- following up on agreed actions; and
- supporting joint planning and problem-solving.

5.1.3 Technical Working Groups

Technical Working Groups (TWGs) may be established where specialized expertise is required. They provide technical guidance and support in specific thematic or operational areas. TWGs should make technical recommendations to the Partnership Coordination Team or Steering Committee as appropriate. Examples include:

- Programme Implementation TWG
- Finance and Compliance TWG
- Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) TWG
- Safeguarding TWG
- Communications and Advocacy TWG

5.1.4 Joint Review Platforms

Joint Review Platforms provide opportunities for partners to collectively assess progress, share lessons learned, identify challenges, and agree on corrective actions. These platforms may include:

- quarterly review meetings;
- annual partnership review workshops;
- joint monitoring visits;
- stakeholder consultation forums; and
- partnership learning events.

Regular joint reviews strengthen accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.

Good Practice Note: *Governance structures should remain simple and proportionate. Small partnerships may combine several functions within a single coordination mechanism, while larger partnerships may require multiple governance bodies.*

5.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are essential for effective partnership management. Every partner should understand its obligations, reporting relationships, and contribution to achieving partnership objectives.

5.2.1 Board of Directors

The Board provides overall governance and oversight of strategic partnerships.

Its responsibilities include:

- approving major partnership agreements where required;
- ensuring partnerships align with organizational mission and strategy;
- overseeing institutional risk management;
- monitoring partnership performance; and
- promoting accountability and ethical governance.

5.2.2 Executive Director

The Executive Director provides executive leadership and ensures effective implementation of approved partnerships.

Responsibilities include:

- approving operational partnership arrangements within delegated authority;
- representing the organization during high-level negotiations;
- allocating institutional resources;
- ensuring compliance with legal and contractual obligations;
- resolving major operational issues; and
- reporting to the Board on partnership performance.

5.2.3 Program Managers

Program Managers coordinate programme implementation and ensure delivery of agreed outputs.

Their responsibilities include:

- developing joint work plans;
- coordinating implementation activities;
- supervising programme staff;
- monitoring progress against agreed targets;
- preparing technical reports; and
- maintaining regular communication with partner organizations.

5.2.4 Finance Team

The Finance Team ensures sound financial management of partnership resources.

Responsibilities include:

- budget preparation and monitoring;

- financial reporting;
- fund disbursement and reconciliation;
- maintaining financial records;
- ensuring donor compliance;
- supporting audits; and
- advising management on financial risks.

5.2.5 Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Team

The MEAL Team supports evidence-based partnership management by monitoring performance and facilitating organizational learning.

Responsibilities include:

- developing monitoring frameworks;
- collecting and analyzing performance data;
- coordinating joint monitoring activities;
- conducting evaluations;
- documenting lessons learned; and
- supporting adaptive management.

5.2.6 Partner Organizations

Each partner organization is responsible for fulfilling its agreed obligations in accordance with the partnership agreement.

Partners are expected to:

- implement assigned activities;
- contribute agreed resources;
- participate in governance structures;
- submit timely reports;
- comply with applicable laws and organizational policies;
- share information openly; and
- uphold the guiding principles outlined in this guideline.

Good Practice Note: *Roles and responsibilities should be clearly documented in the partnership agreement and reviewed periodically to reflect changes in partnership arrangements.*

5.3 Decision-Making Procedures

Effective decision-making promotes transparency, accountability, and mutual ownership. Decision-making procedures should be clearly defined in the partnership agreement and consistently applied throughout the partnership lifecycle.

5.3.1 Consensus Building

Partners should seek to make decisions through dialogue, consultation, and mutual agreement whenever possible. Consensus-building promotes trust, ownership, and long-term collaboration while strengthening relationships among partners. Consensus discussions should be based on evidence, transparency, respect for diverse opinions, shared objectives, and mutual benefit.

5.3.2 Voting Procedures

Where consensus cannot be reached, decisions may be made through voting as specified in the partnership agreement. The agreement should define voting rights, quorum requirements, decision thresholds (simple or qualified majority), proxy arrangements where applicable, and procedures for recording decisions.

Voting should be used only after reasonable efforts have been made to achieve consensus.

5.3.3 Escalation Mechanisms

Issues that cannot be resolved at operational level should be escalated through agreed governance structures. Typical escalation levels include:

1. Partnership Coordination Team;
2. Steering Committee;
3. Executive Leadership of partner organizations; and
4. Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms where necessary.

Escalation procedures should specify timelines, responsibilities, and documentation requirements.

Good Practice Note: *Significant decisions affecting finances, governance, organizational reputation, or legal obligations should always be documented through formal meeting minutes and approved by the appropriate authority.*

5.4 Communication and Information Sharing

Open and timely communication is fundamental to successful partnerships. Effective communication promotes trust, coordination, transparency, and informed decision-making while reducing misunderstandings and duplication of effort. Partners should establish communication procedures at the outset of the partnership.

5.4.1 Internal Communication

Internal communication facilitates coordination among partner organizations and project teams. It should include:

- regular coordination meetings;
- progress updates;
- technical consultations;
- meeting minutes and action tracking;
- internal newsletters or bulletins where appropriate; and
- digital communication platforms for routine collaboration.

Communication should be timely, accurate, and accessible to all relevant partners.

5.4.2 External Communication

External communication ensures consistent engagement with communities, government institutions, donors, media, and other stakeholders. Partners should agree on:

- authorized spokespersons;
- public communication procedures;
- media engagement;
- branding and visibility requirements;
- publication approval processes; and
- stakeholder engagement strategies.

External communication should present a consistent and coordinated partnership message.

5.4.3 Reporting Protocols

Reporting promotes accountability and enables partners to monitor progress and make informed decisions. The partnership should establish clear protocols covering:

- reporting formats;
- reporting frequency;
- reporting responsibilities;
- approval procedures;
- technical and financial reporting requirements; and
- feedback mechanisms.

Reports should be evidence-based, timely, and shared with all relevant partners.

5.4.4 Information Management

Partnerships should establish systems for managing information throughout the partnership lifecycle. Information management should address:

- data collection and storage;
- document management;
- confidentiality and data protection;
- information sharing procedures;
- record retention;
- digital security; and
- access rights for partner organizations.

Partners should ensure that information is accurate, secure, and used responsibly in accordance with applicable legal requirements and partnership agreements.

Good Practice Note: *At the start of the partnership, partners should develop a Partnership Communication and Information Management Plan outlining communication channels, reporting schedules, document-sharing protocols, confidentiality requirements, and responsibilities for managing partnership information. This plan should be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains effective and responsive to the partnership's needs.*

CHAPTER SIX: RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Resource mobilization and sound financial management are fundamental to effective and sustainable partnerships. Partners should work collaboratively to mobilize resources, manage finances responsibly, and ensure that all partnership resources are used efficiently, transparently, and in accordance with applicable laws, donor requirements, and organizational policies. Financial management arrangements should promote mutual accountability, minimize financial risks, and support the achievement of agreed partnership objectives.

6.1 Joint Resource Mobilization

Joint resource mobilization enables partner organizations to combine their expertise, networks, and institutional strengths to secure financial, technical, and material resources that may not be accessible individually. Collaborative fundraising also strengthens competitiveness for large grants and promotes coordinated development interventions.

Partners should:

- identify funding opportunities of mutual interest;
- jointly develop resource mobilization strategies;
- coordinate fundraising efforts and donor engagement;
- define roles and responsibilities during proposal development;
- agree on resource allocation principles; and
- ensure that fundraising initiatives align with the partnership's objectives and organizational mandates.

Joint resource mobilization should promote fairness, transparency, and mutual benefit while avoiding competition among partners for the same funding opportunities.

Good Practice Note: *Partners should maintain a shared pipeline of funding opportunities and periodically review resource mobilization priorities.*

6.2 Proposal Development Partnerships

Many partnerships are established to jointly prepare and submit funding proposals. Collaborative proposal development enables partners to leverage complementary expertise, demonstrate broader institutional capacity, and respond more effectively to donor requirements. During proposal development, partners should agree on:

- the lead organization and proposal coordination responsibilities;
- programme design and technical contributions;
- budget preparation and resource allocation;
- partner roles and implementation arrangements;
- proposal review and approval procedures;
- timelines for submission; and
- ownership of proposal documents and supporting information.

Good Practice Note: *Proposal development should be guided by written consortium or collaboration arrangements whenever multiple organizations are involved.*

6.3 Resource Sharing Mechanisms

Partnerships often involve the sharing of financial, human, technical, and material resources. Resource-sharing arrangements should be clearly documented to ensure equitable access, accountability, and efficient utilization.

Resources that may be shared include:

- financial contributions;
- office facilities and equipment;
- vehicles and logistics support;
- technical expertise and consultants;
- training materials and knowledge products;
- digital platforms and information systems; and
- personnel and volunteers.

Resource-sharing arrangements should clearly specify:

- ownership;
- responsibilities for management and maintenance;
- conditions of use;
- cost-sharing arrangements where applicable; and
- procedures for asset disposition upon completion of the partnership.

6.4 Budget Management

A realistic and jointly agreed budget is essential for effective partnership implementation. Budgets should reflect agreed activities, partner responsibilities, and expected outputs while complying with donor requirements and organizational financial policies. Partners should:

- prepare budgets collaboratively;
- allocate resources based on agreed responsibilities;
- establish procedures for budget revisions;
- monitor budget utilization regularly;
- maintain adequate supporting documentation; and
- ensure expenditures are eligible, reasonable, and properly authorized.

Budget monitoring should be conducted periodically to identify variances, address implementation challenges, and support informed financial decision-making.

6.5 Financial Accountability

All partners are accountable for the proper management and use of partnership resources. Financial accountability requires transparency, accurate record keeping, effective internal controls, and compliance with applicable legal, donor, and organizational requirements. Partners should:

- maintain complete and accurate financial records;
- use partnership funds solely for approved purposes;
- establish adequate internal financial controls;
- prevent fraud, corruption, and misuse of resources;
- disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest; and
- cooperate fully during financial reviews and audits.

Where funds are transferred between partners, responsibilities for financial management, reporting, and oversight should be clearly defined in the partnership agreement.

6.6 Financial Reporting

Financial reporting promotes transparency and enables partners, donors, and governing bodies to monitor the use of partnership resources. Reports should be accurate, timely, complete, and supported by appropriate financial documentation.

Financial reports should normally include:

- budget versus actual expenditure;

- expenditure by budget line;
- fund balances;
- explanation of significant budget variances;
- supporting schedules where required; and
- certification by authorized financial personnel.

The frequency and format of financial reporting should be specified in the partnership agreement and comply with applicable donor requirements.

Good Practice Note: *Financial reports should be reviewed jointly by programme and finance teams to ensure consistency between technical progress and financial performance.*

6.7 Audit Requirements

Periodic audits provide independent assurance that partnership resources have been managed in accordance with applicable agreements, financial regulations, and donor requirements. Audits strengthen accountability, improve financial management, and promote stakeholder confidence.

Depending on the nature of the partnership, audits may include:

- internal audits;
- external independent audits;
- donor compliance audits;
- financial verification exercises; and
- special audits where irregularities are suspected.

Partners should:

- facilitate access to financial records and supporting documentation;
- cooperate fully with auditors;
- respond promptly to audit findings;
- implement agreed corrective actions; and
- monitor the implementation of audit recommendations.

Where partnership funds are managed by multiple organizations, the partnership agreement should clearly define audit responsibilities, cost-sharing arrangements, and procedures for addressing audit findings.

Good Practice Note: *Audit findings should be discussed during partnership review meetings, and corrective action plans should be developed, implemented, and monitored to strengthen financial management and reduce future risks.*

CHAPTER SEVEN: RISK MANAGEMENT IN PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships create valuable opportunities for achieving shared development objectives; however, they also expose organizations to various strategic, financial, operational, legal, and reputational risks. Effective risk management enables partners to anticipate potential challenges, minimize adverse impacts, and enhance the sustainability and resilience of partnership initiatives. Partners should adopt a proactive approach to identifying, assessing, mitigating, monitoring, and reviewing risks throughout the partnership lifecycle. Risk management should be integrated into partnership planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation rather than treated as a one-time exercise.

7.1 Partnership Risk Management Framework

A Partnership Risk Management Framework provides a systematic approach for managing risks that may affect the achievement of partnership objectives. The framework should be integrated into the organization's overall risk management system and implemented throughout the partnership lifecycle. The framework should include the following key components:

- Risk identification;
- Risk assessment and prioritization;
- Risk mitigation planning;
- Assignment of risk ownership;
- Risk monitoring and reporting; and
- Periodic review and continuous improvement.

The framework should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each partner in managing partnership risks and ensure that risk management is incorporated into governance, planning, and decision-making processes.

Good Practice Note: *Every major partnership should develop and maintain a Partnership Risk Register that is reviewed regularly throughout the partnership period.*

7.2 Types of Partnership Risks

Partnerships may face different categories of risks depending on their nature, complexity, operating environment, and stakeholders involved. Understanding these risks enables partners to design appropriate mitigation measures.

- ✓ **Strategic Risks:** Strategic risks arise when the partnership fails to achieve its intended objectives or no longer aligns with the mission, vision, or strategic priorities of the partner organizations. Examples include conflicting organizational priorities, poor strategic alignment, ineffective governance, changes in organizational leadership, and failure to achieve agreed outcomes. Strategic risks should be managed through regular strategic reviews, effective governance, and continuous stakeholder engagement.
- ✓ **Financial Risks:** Financial risks relate to the misuse, loss, or inadequate management of partnership resources. Examples include budget overruns, fraud and corruption, weak financial controls, ineligible expenditures, delayed fund disbursement, and donor non-compliance. Partners should establish strong financial management systems, internal controls, regular financial monitoring, and independent audits to minimize financial risks.
- ✓ **Operational Risks:** Operational risks result from failures in systems, processes, human resources, or day-to-day implementation. Examples include delays in implementation;, inadequate staffing, poor coordination, procurement challenges, technology failures, and ineffective communication. These risks should be addressed through effective planning, clear operating procedures, adequate staffing, and regular coordination.
- ✓ **Legal Risks:** Legal risks arise from non-compliance with applicable laws, regulations, contractual obligations, or organizational policies. Examples include breach of partnership agreements, regulatory non-compliance, tax-related issues, intellectual property disputes, contractual disagreements, and data protection violations. Partners should ensure legal compliance through due diligence, legal review of agreements, and continuous monitoring of regulatory requirements.
- ✓ **Reputational Risks:** Reputational risks may occur when the actions or performance of one partner negatively affect the credibility or public image of the partnership or other participating organizations. Potential sources include unethical conduct, poor programme performance, financial irregularities, negative media coverage, safeguarding failures, and stakeholder dissatisfaction. Partners should uphold high ethical standards, maintain transparent communication, and respond promptly to reputational concerns.
- ✓ **Safeguarding Risks:** Safeguarding risks involve the potential for harm, abuse, exploitation, harassment, or neglect affecting children, vulnerable adults, staff, volunteers, or community members during partnership activities. Examples include sexual exploitation and abuse,

sexual harassment, child abuse, discrimination, workplace harassment, and abuse of authority. All partners should implement safeguarding policies, codes of conduct, complaints mechanisms, and regular safeguarding training to protect individuals and communities.

- ✓ **Political Risks:** Political risks arise from changes in the political, legal, or security environment that may affect partnership implementation. Examples include policy changes, government restructuring, civil unrest, conflict, election-related instability;, restrictions on civil society operations, and changes in donor priorities. Partners should regularly monitor the external environment and develop contingency plans for responding to political and security risks.

7.3 Risk Assessment Process

Risk assessment is the systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and prioritizing partnership risks based on their likelihood of occurrence and potential impact on partnership objectives. The risk assessment process should include the following steps:

- ✓ **Step 1: Risk Identification:** Identify potential risks through stakeholder consultations, document reviews, due diligence assessments, environmental scanning, and lessons learned from previous partnerships.
- ✓ **Step 2: Risk Analysis:** Assess the likelihood of each identified risk occurring and the potential consequences for the partnership.
- ✓ **Step 3: Risk Rating:** Classify risks according to their overall significance using a risk matrix (e.g., Low, Medium, High, or Critical).
- ✓ **Step 4: Risk Prioritization:** Prioritize risks requiring immediate attention based on their potential impact and probability of occurrence.
- ✓ **Step 5: Risk Ownership:** Assign responsibility to specific individuals or partner organizations for monitoring and managing each identified risk.
- ✓ **Step 6: Documentation:** Record all identified risks, ratings, mitigation measures, responsible persons, and review dates in the Partnership Risk Register.

Good Practice Note: *Risk assessments should be conducted before signing partnership agreements and updated whenever significant organizational or contextual changes occur.*

7.4 Risk Mitigation Measures

Risk mitigation involves developing and implementing actions to prevent identified risks or reduce their likelihood and impact. Risk mitigation measures should be proportionate to the level of risk and reviewed periodically throughout the partnership. Common mitigation measures include:

- conducting comprehensive due diligence before partnership approval;
- establishing clear partnership agreements;
- defining roles and responsibilities;
- strengthening internal financial controls;
- implementing safeguarding policies and training;
- developing business continuity and contingency plans;
- maintaining adequate insurance where appropriate;
- conducting regular monitoring and supervision;
- strengthening communication among partners;
- providing staff capacity development;
- conducting periodic compliance reviews; and
- implementing corrective actions based on audit findings.

7.5 Risk Monitoring

Risk monitoring is a continuous process of tracking identified risks, assessing the effectiveness of mitigation measures, and identifying emerging risks throughout the partnership lifecycle. Risk monitoring should be integrated into routine programme monitoring, financial management, and partnership review processes. Partners should:

- review the Partnership Risk Register regularly;
- monitor key risk indicators;
- discuss risks during coordination and governance meetings;
- document new and emerging risks;
- report significant risks promptly to management;
- update mitigation measures as circumstances change; and
- evaluate lessons learned to improve future partnerships.

Good Practice Note: *High-risk partnerships should include risk management as a standing agenda item during Steering Committee and Partnership Coordination Team meetings to ensure timely decision-making and continuous oversight.*

Key Principles of Partnership Risk Management

All partners should apply the following principles when managing partnership risks:

- **Proactivity:** Anticipate and address risks before they become significant issues.
- **Shared Responsibility:** Risk management is the responsibility of all partners, with clearly assigned risk owners.
- **Transparency:** Communicate risks openly and promptly among partners.
- **Proportionality:** Apply mitigation measures that are appropriate to the level of risk.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regularly review risk management practices and incorporate lessons learned.
- **Compliance:** Ensure that risk management aligns with legal requirements, donor conditions, organizational policies, and ethical standards.

These principles strengthen organizational resilience, protect partnership resources and reputation, and contribute to the achievement of shared development objectives.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION

8.1 Sources of Partnership Conflict

Conflicts may arise at any stage of a partnership due to differences in expectations, roles and responsibilities, decision-making processes, communication, financial management, resource allocation, organizational culture, leadership styles, program implementation, ethical conduct, or compliance with partnership agreements and donor requirements. External factors such as policy changes, political instability, community dynamics, or emergencies may also affect partnership relationships. Identifying these potential sources at an early stage enables partners to take timely corrective measures and maintain productive collaboration.

8.2 Conflict Prevention Measures

Conflict prevention should be integrated into partnership management through clear partnership agreements, well-defined roles and responsibilities, transparent decision-making, regular communication, joint planning, timely information sharing, and effective coordination. Partners should promote mutual respect, accountability, and trust while periodically reviewing partnership performance, identifying emerging risks, and strengthening staff capacity in communication, negotiation, and conflict management to minimize the likelihood of disputes.

8.3 Grievance Handling Procedures

All partners shall have access to a fair, transparent, and confidential grievance mechanism for raising concerns related to partnership implementation, governance, financial management, ethics, or staff conduct. Grievances should be submitted through agreed channels, acknowledged promptly, investigated impartially, and resolved within an agreed timeframe. Decisions and corrective actions shall be documented, communicated to the concerned parties, and monitored to ensure effective implementation while protecting complainants from retaliation.

8.4 Mediation Mechanisms

Where disputes cannot be resolved through direct dialogue, partners should pursue mediation before initiating formal legal proceedings. Mediation shall be facilitated by a mutually agreed and impartial third party who supports constructive dialogue and assists partners in reaching a voluntary and mutually acceptable solution. Any agreements reached through mediation should be documented, endorsed by all parties, and implemented in good faith.

8.5 Arbitration Procedures

If mediation fails to resolve a dispute, partners may refer the matter to arbitration in accordance with the provisions of the partnership agreement and applicable national laws. The arbitration process shall be impartial, confidential, and conducted by an agreed arbitrator or arbitration panel. The arbitral decision shall be considered final and binding unless otherwise provided by law or the partnership agreement.

8.6 Partnership Dissolution Procedures

Partnerships may be dissolved upon successful completion of agreed objectives, mutual consent, expiry of the partnership agreement, or in cases of material breach, fraud, persistent non-compliance, or other circumstances specified in the agreement. Dissolution shall be carried out through an orderly process that includes written notification, consultation among partners, settlement of financial obligations, management of jointly acquired assets, completion or transfer of ongoing activities, final reporting, and documentation of lessons learned. Throughout the dissolution process, partners shall safeguard the interests of beneficiaries, donors, and other stakeholders while ensuring transparency, accountability, and compliance with legal and contractual obligations.

CHAPTER NINE: MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND LEARNING

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) is a systematic approach for measuring partnership performance, promoting organizational learning, strengthening accountability, and supporting evidence-based decision-making. An effective MEAL system enables partners to monitor progress, evaluate results, improve programme quality, demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, and continuously adapt partnership strategies based on evidence and lessons learned. For grassroots CSOs, MEAL enhances transparency, strengthens institutional capacity, promotes mutual accountability among partners, and ensures that partnership interventions respond effectively to the needs and priorities of communities. All partners should establish and implement a joint MEAL framework that clearly defines performance indicators, monitoring and evaluation methodologies, reporting requirements, accountability mechanisms, and learning processes.

9.1 Partnership Performance Framework

A Partnership Performance Framework provides a structured approach for planning, monitoring, evaluating, and improving partnership performance throughout the partnership lifecycle. It defines expected results, performance indicators, data sources, responsibilities, reporting schedules, and review mechanisms to measure both partnership effectiveness and development outcomes. The Partnership Performance Framework should be jointly developed by all partners and reviewed periodically to reflect changes in the partnership or operating environment. The framework should:

- align with the partnership's objectives and expected results;
- define measurable performance indicators;
- establish baseline and target values where appropriate;
- identify data sources and verification methods;
- assign monitoring and reporting responsibilities;
- establish reporting timelines; and
- support evidence-based decision-making and adaptive management.

Good Practice Note: *The Partnership Performance Framework should complement existing organizational MEAL systems and donor reporting requirements to minimize duplication and promote consistency.*

9.2 Partnership Indicators

Partnership indicators are measurable criteria used to assess partnership performance, implementation quality, and organizational effectiveness. Indicators should be **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) and should measure both partnership processes and development results.

9.2.1 Effectiveness Indicators

Effectiveness indicators measure the extent to which the partnership achieves its intended objectives and delivers expected outcomes. Examples include:

- percentage of planned activities completed;
- achievement of partnership outputs and outcomes;
- beneficiary satisfaction with partnership interventions;
- quality of programme implementation;
- level of partner collaboration; and
- achievement of agreed performance targets.

9.2.2 Efficiency Indicators

Efficiency indicators assess how economically and effectively resources are utilized to achieve planned results. Examples include:

- budget utilization rate;
- timeliness of activity implementation;
- cost-effectiveness of interventions;
- timely submission of reports;
- efficient utilization of shared resources; and
- reduction of duplication among partners.

9.2.3 Sustainability Indicators

Sustainability indicators assess the likelihood that partnership benefits and institutional capacities will continue beyond the life of the partnership. Examples include:

- strengthened institutional capacity;
- continuation of collaborative initiatives;
- community ownership of interventions;
- diversification of funding sources;

- integration of partnership approaches into organizational systems; and
- long-term policy or institutional changes influenced by the partnership.

9.2.4 Accountability Indicators

Accountability indicators assess the partnership's compliance with agreed standards, transparency, responsiveness, and stakeholder engagement. Examples include:

- timely technical and financial reporting;
- implementation of audit recommendations;
- functionality of feedback and complaint mechanisms;
- stakeholder participation in decision-making;
- safeguarding compliance; and
- transparency in information sharing.

Good Practice Note: *Partners should develop a* ***Partnership Performance Scorecard*** *that is reviewed periodically to monitor progress against agreed indicators.*

9.3 Joint Monitoring Mechanisms

Joint monitoring enables partners to collectively track implementation progress, verify results, identify challenges, and take corrective actions where necessary. It promotes transparency, mutual accountability, and shared ownership of partnership performance. Partners should agree on monitoring methodologies, schedules, responsibilities, reporting formats, and follow-up actions at the beginning of the partnership. Joint monitoring mechanisms may include:

- joint field monitoring visits;
- quarterly implementation reviews;
- progress tracking against work plans;
- financial monitoring;
- beneficiary feedback collection;
- data quality assessments;
- donor or government monitoring missions; and
- joint verification of outputs and outcomes.

Good Practice Note: *Joint monitoring should actively involve partner organizations, community representatives, and other relevant stakeholders to promote participatory monitoring and accountability.*

9.4 Partnership Review Meetings

Partnership review meetings provide structured opportunities to assess progress, evaluate performance, discuss challenges, review risks, and make informed decisions to improve partnership effectiveness. Review meetings may be conducted:

- monthly for operational coordination;
- quarterly for implementation review;
- semi-annually for strategic assessment; and
- annually for comprehensive partnership performance evaluation.

Typical agenda items include:

- progress against agreed objectives;
- monitoring findings;
- financial performance;
- risk management updates;
- accountability issues;
- lessons learned;
- emerging opportunities; and
- agreed corrective actions.

All review meetings should be documented through formal minutes and action plans.

9.5 Learning and Knowledge Management

Learning is a continuous process of generating, documenting, sharing, and applying knowledge to improve partnership performance and organizational effectiveness. Knowledge management ensures that valuable experiences, innovations, and lessons learned are captured and made accessible for future use.

Partners should establish mechanisms for:

- documenting lessons learned;
- conducting after-action reviews;
- organizing learning workshops and reflection sessions;
- facilitating peer learning and exchange visits;
- sharing research findings and technical guidance;
- maintaining knowledge repositories; and

- integrating lessons learned into programme design and organizational policies.

Effective learning strengthens institutional memory, supports innovation, and promotes adaptive management.

Good Practice Note: *Partners should organize at least one annual learning event to reflect on partnership achievements, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.*

9.6 Documentation of Best Practices

Best practices are proven approaches, innovations, or experiences that demonstrate measurable success and have potential for replication or scaling.

Partners should systematically document best practices by describing:

- the development challenge addressed;
- the intervention implemented;
- key success factors;
- measurable results achieved;
- lessons learned;
- challenges encountered;
- recommendations for replication; and
- supporting evidence.

Best practices may be documented through:

- case studies;
- success stories;
- technical briefs;
- policy briefs;
- photographs and videos;
- newsletters; and
- learning publications.

Documented best practices should be disseminated among partners and relevant stakeholders to encourage knowledge sharing and continuous improvement.

9.7 Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability is the obligation of partners to explain and justify their decisions, actions, and use of resources to beneficiaries, partner organizations, donors, government institutions, and other stakeholders. Strong accountability systems enhance transparency, trust, and partnership effectiveness.

Partnership accountability mechanisms should include:

- clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- regular technical and financial reporting;
- joint performance reviews;
- internal and external audits;
- stakeholder feedback and complaint mechanisms;
- safeguarding reporting procedures;
- compliance monitoring;
- transparent decision-making processes;
- conflict of interest disclosure; and
- corrective action planning and follow-up.

Partners should ensure that accountability mechanisms are accessible, confidential where appropriate, responsive, and inclusive of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Good Practice Note: Every partnership should establish a **Feedback, Complaint, and Response Mechanism (FCRM)** that enables beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, and partner organizations to safely raise concerns, provide feedback, or report misconduct, with clear procedures for investigation, response, and resolution.

Key Principles of MEAL

All partners should implement the partnership MEAL system in accordance with the following principles:

- **Results-Oriented:** Focus on achieving measurable partnership and development outcomes.
- **Participation:** Engage partners, beneficiaries, and stakeholders in monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning processes.
- **Transparency:** Share information, findings, and decisions openly and honestly.
- **Mutual Accountability:** Hold all partners responsible for fulfilling agreed commitments and using resources responsibly.
- **Evidence-Based Decision-Making:** Use reliable data and evaluation findings to guide planning, implementation, and decision-making.

- **Learning and Adaptation:** Continuously apply lessons learned to improve partnership performance and organizational effectiveness.
- **Inclusiveness:** Ensure that the voices of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups are reflected throughout the MEAL process.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regularly review performance, address weaknesses, and strengthen partnership practices through innovation and learning.

By institutionalizing an effective MEAL system, grassroots CSOs can enhance partnership performance, strengthen stakeholder confidence, improve accountability, and maximize sustainable development outcomes for the communities they serve.

CHAPTER TEN: SUSTAINABILITY AND EXIT STRATEGY

Sustainability is a fundamental consideration throughout the partnership lifecycle. Effective partnerships should not only achieve immediate objectives but also strengthen institutional capacity, empower local actors, and create lasting development outcomes. Sustainability planning should begin during partnership formation and continue throughout implementation to ensure that benefits, knowledge, systems, and relationships endure beyond the partnership period.

Similarly, every partnership should include a well-planned exit or transition strategy that enables an orderly conclusion of partnership activities while minimizing disruption to beneficiaries, staff, and partner organizations.

10.1 Sustainability Planning

Sustainability planning is the process of identifying strategies and actions that ensure partnership outcomes continue after external support or formal partnership arrangements have ended. Sustainability should be integrated into programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Sustainability planning should be participatory and involve all partners, beneficiaries, and relevant stakeholders. Partners should develop a Sustainability Plan that addresses:

- long-term institutional capacity;
- financial sustainability;
- community ownership;
- continuation of key services and interventions;
- policy and systems strengthening;
- local resource mobilization; and
- ongoing stakeholder engagement.

10.2 Capacity Strengthening

Strong institutional capacity is essential for sustaining partnership achievements. Partnerships should contribute to strengthening the technical, managerial, financial, and governance capacities of participating organizations, particularly grassroots CSOs. Capacity strengthening may include:

- leadership and governance development;
- technical training and mentoring;
- financial and grants management;

- Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL);
- safeguarding and compliance systems;
- digital transformation and information management;
- proposal development and resource mobilization;
- policy and systems development; and
- organizational learning and knowledge sharing.

10.3 Institutionalization of Partnerships

Institutionalization ensures that successful partnership approaches become part of the regular policies, systems, and practices of participating organizations rather than remaining temporary project initiatives.nPartners should promote institutionalization by:

- integrating partnership approaches into organizational strategic plans;
- establishing internal partnership policies and procedures;
- strengthening governance and coordination mechanisms;
- documenting and standardizing successful practices;
- building long-term institutional relationships;
- maintaining partnership databases and knowledge repositories; and
- allocating organizational resources to sustain collaborative initiatives.

10.4 Exit and Transition Planning

An exit or transition strategy provides a structured process for concluding or transferring partnership responsibilities while safeguarding programme achievements and minimizing disruption. The Exit and Transition Plan should include:

- criteria for partnership closure;
- transition of responsibilities;
- handover of assets and documentation;
- completion of outstanding obligations;
- communication with stakeholders;
- final reporting and financial reconciliation;
- documentation of lessons learned; and
- post-exit monitoring where appropriate.

Good Practice Note: *Exit planning should be conducted collaboratively and communicated well in advance to all stakeholders. Exit strategies should prioritize continuity of essential services, preservation of institutional relationships, and protection of beneficiary interests.*

10.5 Post-Partnership Engagement

The conclusion of a formal partnership should not necessarily end institutional relationships. Continued collaboration can strengthen professional networks and create future opportunities. Partners are encouraged to maintain engagement through:

- knowledge sharing and technical exchange;
- participation in joint learning events;
- collaborative research and advocacy;
- professional networking;
- future consortium opportunities;
- joint resource mobilization; and
- periodic communication and information sharing.

Good Practice Note: *Maintaining positive post-partnership relationships strengthens trust, institutional memory, and future collaboration. Partners should conduct a formal Partnership Close-Out Review to evaluate achievements, document lessons learned, and identify opportunities for future collaboration.*

CHAPTER ELEVEN: ETHICAL STANDARDS AND SAFEGUARDING

Ethical conduct and safeguarding are fundamental to effective, accountable, and responsible partnerships. All partner organizations have a duty to uphold the dignity, rights, safety, and well-being of staff, volunteers, beneficiaries, and communities. Ethical standards should guide all partnership activities and decision-making processes, while safeguarding measures should prevent harm, abuse, exploitation, discrimination, and misconduct.

Partners shall establish and enforce policies, procedures, and accountability mechanisms that promote integrity, respect, inclusion, and protection throughout the partnership lifecycle.

11.1 Code of Conduct

Every partner organization should adopt and implement a written Code of Conduct that establishes expected standards of professional and ethical behavior for board members, staff, volunteers, consultants, and contractors. The Code of Conduct should promote:

- integrity and honesty;
- professionalism;
- respect and dignity;
- impartiality and fairness;
- accountability;
- confidentiality;
- responsible use of organizational resources;
- prevention of conflicts of interest; and
- compliance with applicable laws and organizational policies.

11.2 Child Protection

Where partnership activities involve children or adolescents, partners shall implement child protection measures to safeguard children from abuse, exploitation, neglect, violence, and harmful practices. Partners should:

- adopt child protection policies;
- conduct safe recruitment and background checks where appropriate;
- provide child safeguarding training;
- establish confidential reporting mechanisms;
- ensure safe programme environments; and
- comply with national child protection laws and international standards.

11.3 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Partnerships should promote equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and meaningful participation of all individuals regardless of gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics. Partners should:

- integrate GESI into programme planning and implementation;
- promote women's leadership and participation;
- ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities;
- address barriers affecting marginalized groups;
- collect sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data where appropriate; and
- monitor inclusion outcomes throughout the partnership.

11.4 Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH)

All partners shall maintain zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PSEAH). Partners should:

- adopt PSEAH policies and procedures;
- provide mandatory staff training;
- establish confidential reporting channels;
- protect whistleblowers and survivors from retaliation;
- investigate allegations promptly and fairly;
- take appropriate disciplinary action where misconduct is confirmed; and
- cooperate with relevant authorities where required.

11.5 Anti-Corruption Measures

Partners shall conduct all partnership activities with integrity, transparency, and accountability while preventing fraud, corruption, bribery, embezzlement, and misuse of resources. Partners should implement:

- anti-fraud and anti-corruption policies;
- conflict of interest declarations;
- financial controls;
- procurement transparency;
- whistleblower protection mechanisms;
- regular internal and external audits; and
- prompt investigation of suspected misconduct.

11.6 Data Protection and Privacy

Partners are responsible for protecting personal, organizational, and sensitive information collected or shared during partnership activities. Data protection measures should include:

- lawful and ethical data collection;
- informed consent where required;
- secure data storage;
- controlled access to information;
- confidentiality agreements;
- secure electronic data management;
- responsible data sharing; and
- secure disposal of records when no longer required.

11.7 Environmental and Social Safeguards

Partnerships should ensure that programmes and activities avoid or minimize adverse environmental and social impacts while promoting sustainable development. Partners should:

- assess environmental and social risks during programme planning;
- promote sustainable resource use;
- prevent environmental degradation;
- respect land and natural resource rights;
- protect cultural heritage;
- engage affected communities in decision-making;
- prevent discrimination and social exclusion; and
- implement mitigation measures for identified environmental and social risks.

Good Practice Note: *Environmental and social safeguard considerations should be integrated into partnership planning, risk management, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure that development interventions are environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive, and do not unintentionally cause harm to communities or ecosystems.*

Key Principles of Ethical Standards and Safeguarding

All partners should uphold the following principles throughout the partnership lifecycle:

- **Integrity:** Conduct all partnership activities honestly, ethically, and professionally.
- **Do No Harm:** Prevent and mitigate any actual or potential harm arising from partnership activities.

- **Respect for Human Rights:** Uphold the dignity, rights, and freedoms of all individuals.
- **Zero Tolerance for Misconduct:** Prohibit all forms of exploitation, abuse, harassment, fraud, corruption, and discrimination.
- **Inclusiveness:** Ensure equitable participation and non-discrimination in all partnership processes.
- **Confidentiality:** Protect sensitive information and respect privacy rights.
- **Accountability:** Establish effective mechanisms for reporting, investigating, and addressing misconduct.
- **Environmental Responsibility:** Promote environmentally sustainable and socially responsible development practices.

Adherence to these principles strengthens institutional credibility, safeguards vulnerable populations, and fosters ethical, transparent, and sustainable partnerships among grassroots CSOs and their stakeholders.

CHAPTER TWELVE: REVIEW AND AMENDMENT OF THE GUIDELINE

This Partnership Establishment Guideline is a living document that should be periodically reviewed to ensure its continued relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with changes in the legal, policy, institutional, and development environment. Regular review enables the organization to incorporate lessons learned, emerging best practices, stakeholder feedback, and evolving national and international standards on partnership management. The review and amendment process should be participatory, transparent, and evidence-based, ensuring that the guideline remains practical and responsive to the needs of grassroots Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

12.1 Review Period

This guideline shall be reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains current, relevant, and consistent with the organization's strategic direction and the evolving partnership landscape. As a general principle:

- a comprehensive review shall be conducted every **three (3) to five (5) years**;
- interim reviews may be undertaken whenever significant changes occur in legislation, government policies, donor requirements, organizational strategies, or partnership practices;
- reviews may also be initiated following major organizational restructuring, external evaluations, audits, or significant partnership experiences that warrant revision.

The review process should assess:

- effectiveness of the guideline in supporting partnership management;
- consistency with national laws and regulatory frameworks;
- alignment with organizational policies and strategic plans;
- compliance with donor requirements and international standards;
- implementation challenges and lessons learned; and
- emerging partnership opportunities and risks.

12.2 Revision Procedures

Revisions to this guideline should follow a structured and consultative process to ensure technical quality, institutional ownership, and stakeholder acceptance. The revision process should include the following steps:

Step 1: Identification of Revision Needs

Revision needs may arise from:

- changes in national legislation or regulatory requirements;
- amendments to donor policies and compliance requirements;
- organizational strategic changes;
- audit findings and evaluation recommendations;
- monitoring and learning outcomes;
- stakeholder feedback; and
- emerging good practices in partnership management.

Step 2: Establishment of a Review Team

The Executive Director shall designate a technical review team or committee responsible for coordinating the revision process. Where appropriate, the team may include representatives from:

- senior management;
- programme units;
- finance;
- legal or compliance functions;
- Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL);
- safeguarding;
- partner organizations; and
- subject matter experts.

Step 3: Consultation and Validation

Draft revisions should be circulated for consultation with relevant internal and external stakeholders to obtain comments and recommendations.

Consultation may include:

- management review meetings;
- staff consultations;
- Board discussions;
- partner consultation workshops;
- donor feedback where applicable; and
- legal or technical review.

Step 4: Finalization

Following consultation, the review team shall incorporate agreed revisions and prepare the final version for approval.

Good Practice Note: *Significant amendments affecting governance, financial management, safeguarding, or legal compliance should undergo legal review before approval.*

12.3 Approval of Amendments

All amendments to this guideline shall be formally approved in accordance with the organization's governance structure and delegated authority.

Approval procedures should include:

- technical endorsement by the responsible department or review committee;
- review by the Executive Management Team;
- legal or compliance review where necessary;
- approval by the Executive Director for minor administrative revisions; and
- approval by the Board of Directors for substantive policy amendments or major revisions.

Once approved:

- the revised guideline shall be formally issued;
- previous versions shall be withdrawn from official use;
- staff and partner organizations shall be informed of the revisions;
- orientation or training shall be conducted where necessary; and
- implementation of the revised guideline shall be monitored.

No amendments shall become effective until they have been formally approved and communicated through the appropriate organizational channels.

12.4 Version Control

A Version Control System shall be maintained to ensure that only the current approved version of the guideline is used throughout the organization and by partner organizations.

The version control system should record:

- version number;
- title of the document;
- date of approval;
- effective date;
- summary of revisions;

- approving authority; and
- next scheduled review date.

Each revised edition of the guideline should clearly indicate:

- document title;
- version number;
- publication date;
- revision history;
- document owner;
- approval authority; and
- document classification, where applicable.

Key Principles for Review and Amendment

The review and amendment of this guideline shall be guided by the following principles:

- **Relevance:** Ensure that the guideline remains responsive to the evolving needs of grassroots CSOs and the partnership environment.
- **Participation:** Engage internal and external stakeholders in the review and revision process.
- **Transparency:** Conduct reviews and amendments through open, documented, and accountable procedures.
- **Evidence-Based Decision-Making:** Base revisions on implementation experience, monitoring findings, evaluations, audits, and stakeholder feedback.
- **Compliance:** Ensure alignment with applicable laws, regulations, organizational policies, donor requirements, and internationally recognized partnership standards.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Promote regular learning, innovation, and adaptation to strengthen partnership effectiveness and organizational performance.

By establishing a systematic review and amendment process, the organization demonstrates its commitment to good governance, institutional learning, and continuous improvement, ensuring that this guideline remains an effective and practical tool for establishing, managing, and sustaining partnerships among grassroots Civil Society Organizations and their stakeholders.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Partnership Identification Checklist

Annex 2: Stakeholder Mapping Template

Annex 3: Partner Assessment and Due Diligence Checklist

Annex 4: Partnership Risk Assessment Matrix

Annex 5: Partnership Approval Form

Annex 6: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Template

Annex 7: Consortium Agreement Template

Annex 8: Partnership Work Plan Template

Annex 9: Joint Monitoring Checklist

Annex 10: Partnership Selection Scorecard

A Partner Selection Scorecard is a practical tool that enables organizations to evaluate prospective partners objectively using standardized criteria. It improves transparency, minimizes bias, and ensures that partnership decisions are evidence-based. Below is a sample that can be included as an annex or adapted to your organization's context.

Partner Name: ________________________________

Date of Assessment: ___________________________

Assessed by: _________________________________

Type of Partnership: __________________________

Partner Selection Scorecard

No	Selection Criterion	Assessment Questions	Weight (%)	Score (1–5)*	Weighted Score
1	Mission Alignment	Does the organization's mission and strategic direction align with ours?	15		
2	Shared Values	Does the organization demonstrate commitment to integrity, accountability, inclusion, and human rights?	10		
3	Technical Capacity	Does the organization possess the required technical expertise and	15		

		implementation experience?			
4	Governance Structure	Does the organization have effective governance, leadership, and internal controls?	10		
5	Reputation & Credibility	Does the organization have a positive reputation among stakeholders and communities?	10		
6	Financial Stability	Does the organization have sound financial systems and demonstrated financial management capacity?	10		
7	Geographic Presence	Does the organization have operational presence and local knowledge in the target area?	5		
8	Community Acceptance	Is the organization trusted and accepted by the target communities?	10		
9	Compliance Status	Is the organization legally registered and compliant with applicable laws and donor requirements?	10		
10	Risk Profile	Are the legal, financial, operational, safeguarding, and reputational risks acceptable?	5		
		Total	**100**		

Scoring Scale

Score	Description
5	Excellent – Fully meets or exceeds requirements
4	Good – Meets requirements with minor gaps
3	Satisfactory – Meets minimum requirements
2	Weak – Significant gaps requiring mitigation
1	Poor – Does not meet requirements

Overall Rating

Total Weighted Score	Rating	Recommendation
85–100	Excellent	Recommended for partnership
70–84	Good	Recommended with minor conditions
55–69	Fair	Partnership may proceed after addressing identified gaps
Below 55	Poor	Not recommended for partnership

Key Strengths Identified

1. ______________________________
2. ______________________________
3. ______________________________

Key Risks/Gaps Identified

1. ______________________________
2. ______________________________
3. ______________________________

Risk Mitigation Measures

1. ______________________________
2. ______________________________
3. ______________________________

Assessment Recommendation

☐ Recommended for Partnership

☐ Recommended with Conditions

☐ Deferred Pending Additional Information

☐ Not Recommended

Prepared by: __________________________

Signature: ______________________________

Date: __________________________________

Reviewed by: ________________________

Signature: ___________________________

Date: _______________________________

Guidance for Use

- The scorecard should be completed after stakeholder mapping and the preliminary assessment of a potential partner.
- Scores should be supported by evidence obtained through due diligence (e.g., registration certificates, strategic plans, audited financial statements, governance documents, references, and safeguarding policies).
- The weighted score should be considered alongside qualitative findings; a high numerical score should not override significant legal, financial, ethical, or safeguarding concerns.
- The completed scorecard should be attached to the Partner Due Diligence Report and retained in the partnership file as part of the organization's approval process.

Annex 11: Partnership Review Meeting Template

Annex 12: Conflict Resolution Form

Annex 13: Partnership Termination Form

Annex 14: Partnership Exit Strategy Template

Annex 15: Code of Conduct for Partners

Annex 16: Partnership Database Template

Annex 17: Partnership Annual Report Template

Annex 18: Partnership Satisfaction Survey Questionnaire

Annex 19: Partner Capacity Assessment Tool

Annex 20: Glossary of Partnership Terms