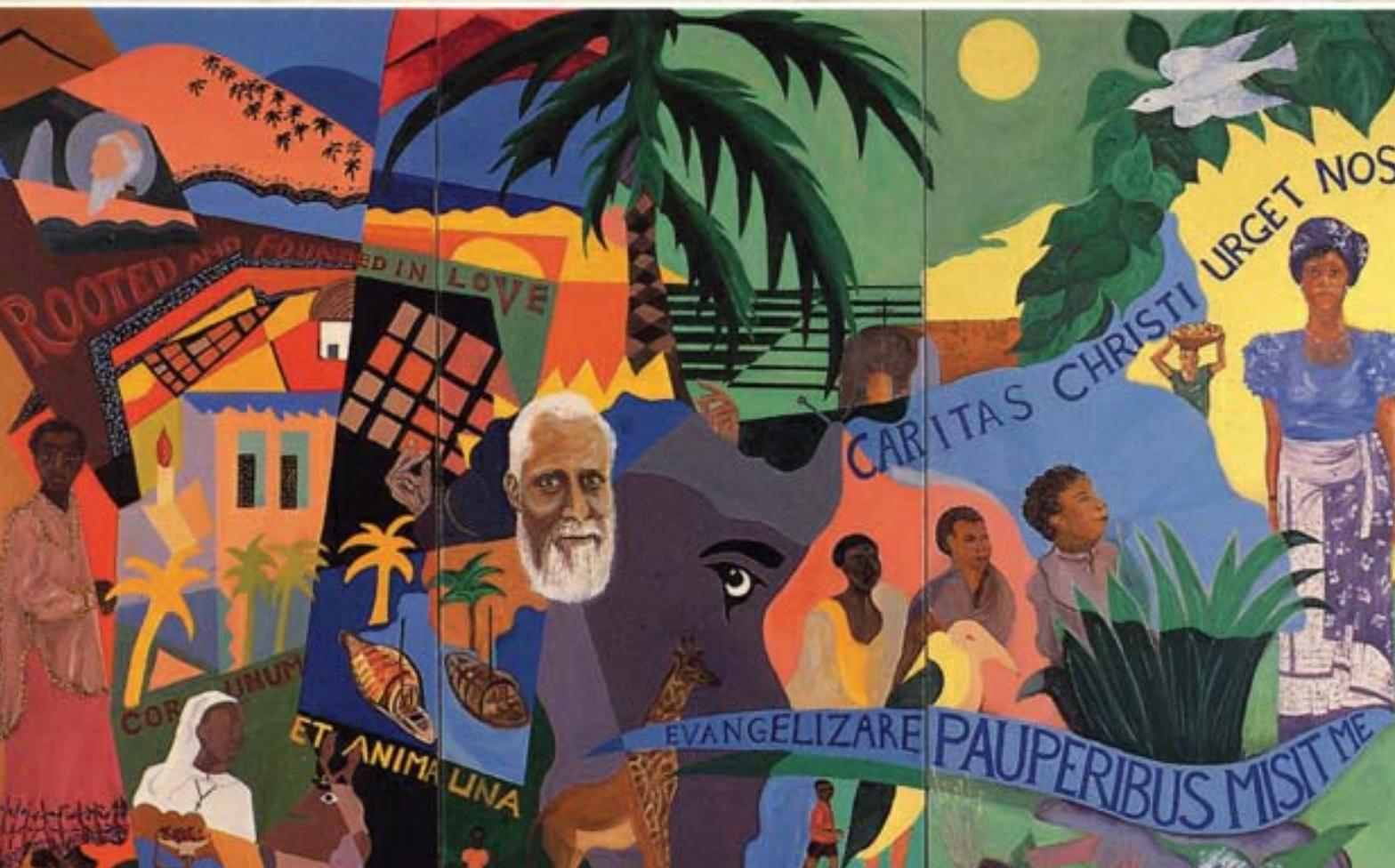


A REFLECTIVE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPMENT

A PATHWAY TO MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIP



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Thanks especially to those who read the document and critiqued it in light of their experience. We are grateful to the Non-Governmental Public Action Programme of the Economic and Social Research Council for funding this Reflective Process, and hope that their members and those in the public sector and government will enjoy their contribution to this important process.

A special thanks to the people with whom the different contributors have worked, telling stories inspired by real life situations.



Introduction

Non-governmental public action has become increasingly important since the mid-1970s in promoting social justice, reducing poverty and exclusion. There are many different kinds of non-governmental public action ranging from spontaneous protests and vigils to loosely organised social movements that depend on committed and passionate volunteers through to formally organised non-governmental organisations that draw on professional and salaried staff. All in different ways have a role to play in bringing about social transformation and all will need at some point to work with other non-governmental public actors, to engage with governments at different levels, and to seek support from members or donors.

This handbook provides an invaluable guide to reflecting on the relationships that non-governmental public actors have with each other and with governments and donors. In particular this handbook emphasises the need for critical reflection on how we go about relating to other actors, be these beneficiaries, donors, governments or other non-governmental public players. Self-aware, critical reflection is vital for understanding the complexity of these relationships and for practically manoeuvring these in a way that best advances social justice and poverty reduction. This becomes all the more important when such relationships are formalised through partnership agreements or contracts.

Based on their long-standing experience and research in the field in Nigeria, Professor Steve Morse and Nora McNamara have put together this practical guide to facilitate this process of critical self-reflexion. As Director of the ESRC Non-Governmental Public Action programme it is a pleasure to see the findings of academic research translated into practical outputs that can facilitate processes of change. Such work is indeed pioneering.

**Jude Howell,
London School of Economics**

Prologue

Development has reached a new phase.

The over-riding focus in development has been on the nature of the relationships between field agencies and intended beneficiaries.

Field agencies are individuals and/or organisations with deep feelings for communities and groups who they feel have the possibility of having their voices heard when they come together under their umbrella.

Beneficiaries are the people whose voices are meant to be heard.

For example, a village group trying to improve their provision and quality of water may approach a field agency with a track record of helping for advice on where they can go for help.



BUT

The field agency may not have the material resources to help. They may instead act as an intermediary (middle-person) to approach those who do have resources such as government and international aid organisations.

Why doesn't the village group go straight to government or international donors?

Why have a middle-person?

There are many answers to such questions:

- field agencies have knowledge about the sources of funds (who the donors are, where they are, what they fund, what budget they have)
- field agencies have knowledge of the language used to negotiate with donors
- field agencies have the negotiating skills
- field agencies should have the necessary managerial skills to bring the project to fruition
- field agencies have access to different technical skills which help make sure the project succeeds.

Trust is critical as field agencies represent the beneficiaries to others.

Field agencies have power, and it is vital that when acting in the name of beneficiaries that they listen to their voice and represent them. This needs to be done genuinely and consciously. But the temptation is to do otherwise – to instead foist beliefs on beneficiaries. There is a host of approaches to facilitate these central relationships, nowadays referred to as **stakeholder participation**.

What about the other key relationship – between the field agency and donors? How should they best interact? If the relationship soured, it could impact negatively on beneficiaries.

The relationship between field agencies and donors is often called a partnership.

But is partnership the best term to use?



Partnership is about:

- **a shared vision**
- **shared values**
- **sharing of risk**
- **equality and interdependency**
- **working together to reach an agreed goal**
- **communication at all levels**
- **mutual participation in decision-making**
- **mutual respect for each others' identities**
- **cooperation and collaboration on mutually agreed outcomes**
- **working towards the empowerment of all partners as equals.**

Through this interactive partnership a partner, who may originally come from a perceived or real position of power, works towards the empowerment of all partners as equals.



BUT

This list is a big ask. We know that the donors are the ones with the resources and field agencies can be made to feel like 'beggars'. While the field agencies have the knowledge of the grassroots and access to local expertise, it is the donors who make or break a project by simply saying yes or no. Funds are finite and demand is always high so harsh decisions are made as to what visions can be supported. So what about those who always receive no for an answer? Can they see the relationship between themselves and a donor as a partnership?

As field agencies are the pivotal link between those who haven't and those who have, it is important to ensure that the people involved (namely the agency staff) have the necessary expertise. This is ideally provided through experience and training in workshop settings where participants can learn from each other under the skilled guidance of a facilitator.



BUT

Workshops are expensive, and field agencies may not necessarily have the resources to send their staff on such training.

Workshops take staff away from their regular duties, especially when long-distance travel is involved.

Workshops can create tension if some are chosen over others.



The Reflective Process

This is aimed to be used:

- **as a self-guide for an analysis of relationships, primarily between field agencies and donors, but also having some reference to links between field agencies and the communities and groups they represent**
- **by those involved in development work without the resources to attend facilitated workshops on a regular basis**
- **as a means of keeping momentum alive after a workshop, where colleagues or friends form a coalition for self-guided reflection and analysis**
- **by donors. Efficiency has to be encouraged, but if there is a danger that 'value for money' takes precedence over the individual and disadvantaged groups, then reason for concern is well founded.**

Even though the manual is intended as a self-guide, it may at times be enhanced by an individual with some training and a deep interest in, and commitment to, development. It is particularly designed with self-starters and community leaders in mind.

In putting together this Reflective Process we believe it is necessary that:

- **people are willing to undergo self-guided reflection with honesty**
- **as self-guided exercises call for considerable discipline, it is recommended that a group of colleagues with the same values, and perhaps the same frustrations, will come together to share the process**
- **the need to relate well transcends boundaries of religion, gender, nationality and ethnicity and is not at all limited to development situations**
- **the need for a self-guide that helps you to understand yourself and your reactions in particular circumstances in working relationships is often overlooked**
- **a self-guide which helps us understand how we relate to others and how others relate to us is essential and pertinent for the success of development**
- **to help improve the whole development story, an analysis of relationships is necessary**
- **restoring the balance in relationships can reverse the impairment of development.**



This guide is best read in sequence, as it encompasses a reflection–action–reflection process. The steps can be presented as an infinity symbol which signifies that the process begins afresh once you have passed through 6 steps, yet the process is never completed. If this process becomes integral to our way of being, there is a possibility of more harmony and less friction in our daily working relationships. There are 6 steps, the first and last of which are ‘reflection’ and the other 4 are ‘action’ steps.

SIX STEPS TO SELF-ANALYSIS

Step 1 Reflect on Relationships: Identify one example of good and poor experiences with work relationships

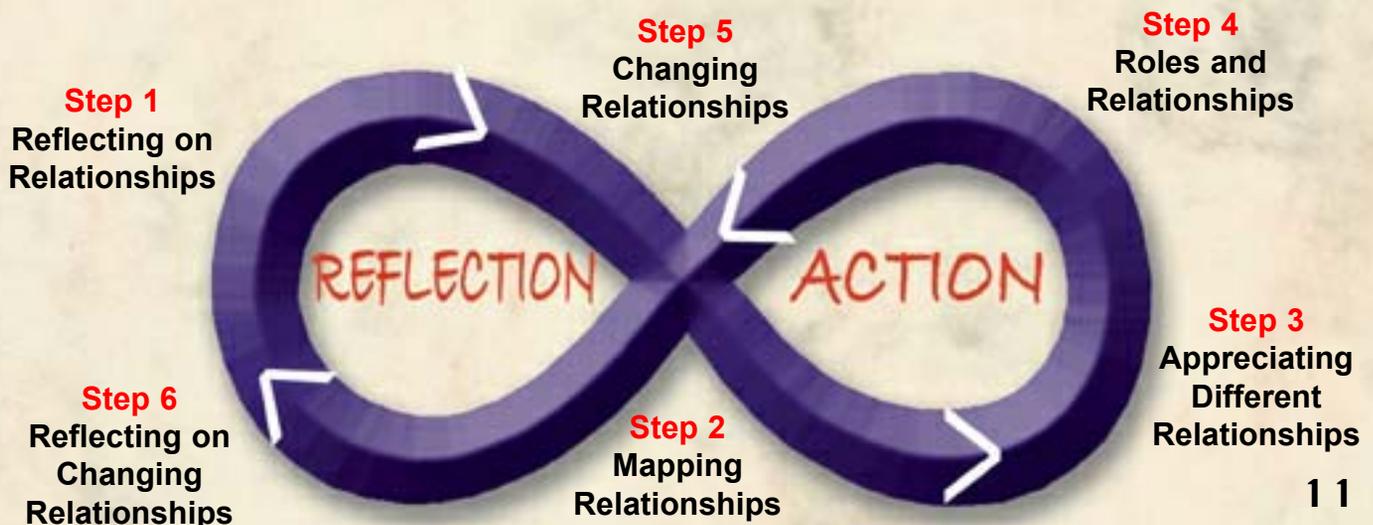
Step 2 Mapping Exercise: Encourage each other to map out the different individuals and groups of which they are part

Step 3 Evaluate Relationships: Name which relationships are usually identified as helpful or unhelpful

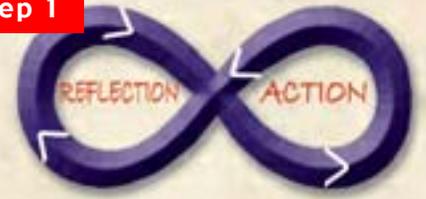
Step 4 Define Relationships: Describe what makes the relationships helpful or unhelpful

Step 5 Change Relationships: Having acknowledged problems with relationships, explore what can be done to improve them

Step 6 Reflect on Changing Relationships: Evaluate whether or not your action has made a difference



Step 1



To help illustrate the analysis here are some examples that showcase possible situations. They refer to no particular person or place.

Step 1: Reflect on Relationships

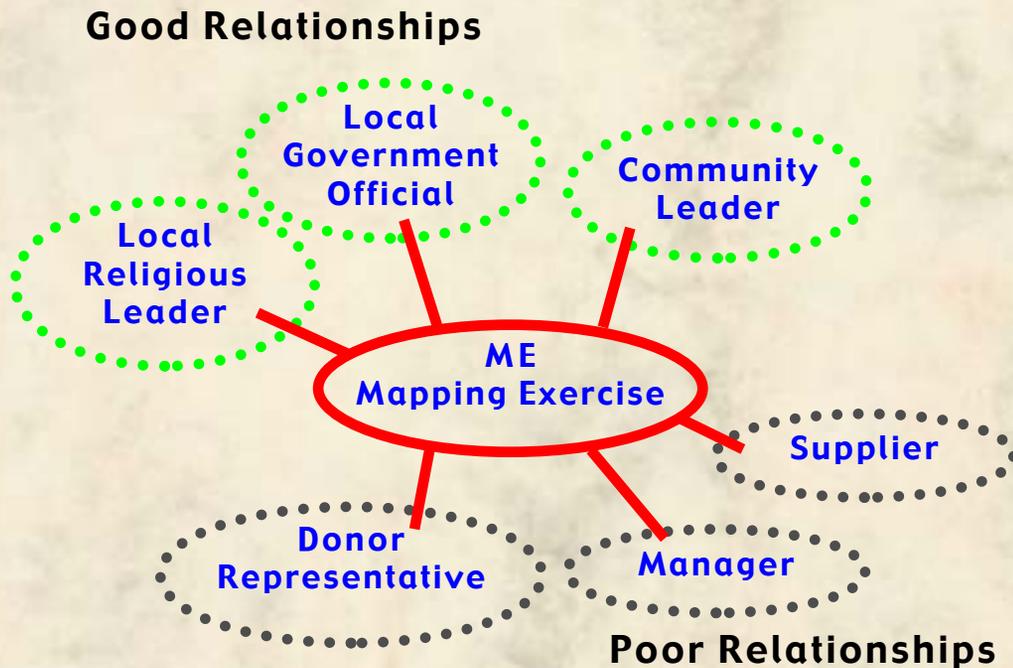
- From your own experience identify an occasion when you experienced a **good** working relationship.
- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Where and when did the event take place?
- What was the outcome?
- What was special about what happened?
- What are some of the ways you contributed?
- What was your most important contribution?
- What within you helped this relationship?

Repeat the above recalling a **poor** experience at work.

Step 2: Mapping Exercise (ME)

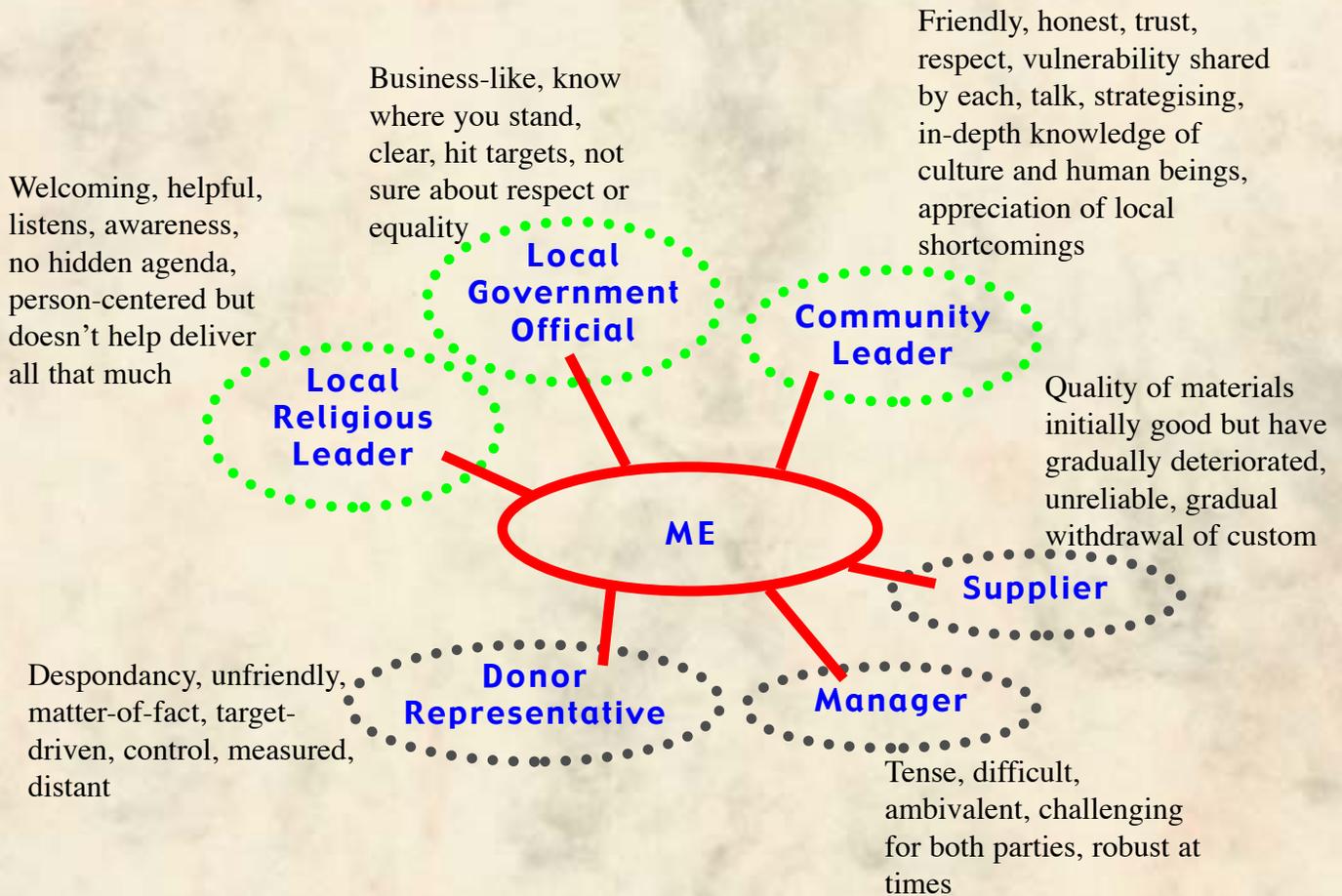
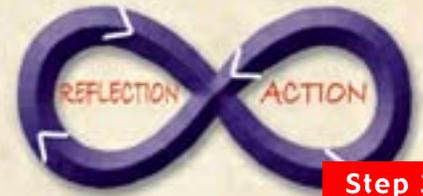
Look at all your working relationships .
You might draw them as follows, broadly
classifying each as good/fruitful or poor/unfruitful.

Each person in the group does the above alone and then
shares answers with the group.



Step 3: Evaluate Relationships

Using the relationships identified in Step 2 list at least 5 words/phrases to describe each relationship.





Step 4: Define Relationships

Step 4

Now look at these questions

Why are these relationships the way they are?
Should they be a partnership? Is partnership always essential?



Ideally partners, or at least in a good relationship. Has knowledge of local area but lacks resources to meet community needs

Potentially a Partnership. Real meeting of minds. Difficulties are addressed realistically with satisfactory outcome for grassroots people

Local
Government
Official

Community
Leader

Local
Religious
Leader

ME

Definitely not a Partnership, but doesn't need to be one. Have gradually replaced with another supplier - without animosity

Supplier

Good relationships encouraged as support and for goodwill. Nurtures ecuminism for common good

Donor
Representative

Manager

Not a Partnership but has potential, particularly if relationships have been good in the past

If I am an employee and my manager is my boss. I need to have a working relationship to achieve certain goals. If my manager is beaurocratic and 'top down', dictating and not consulting, partnership is difficult.

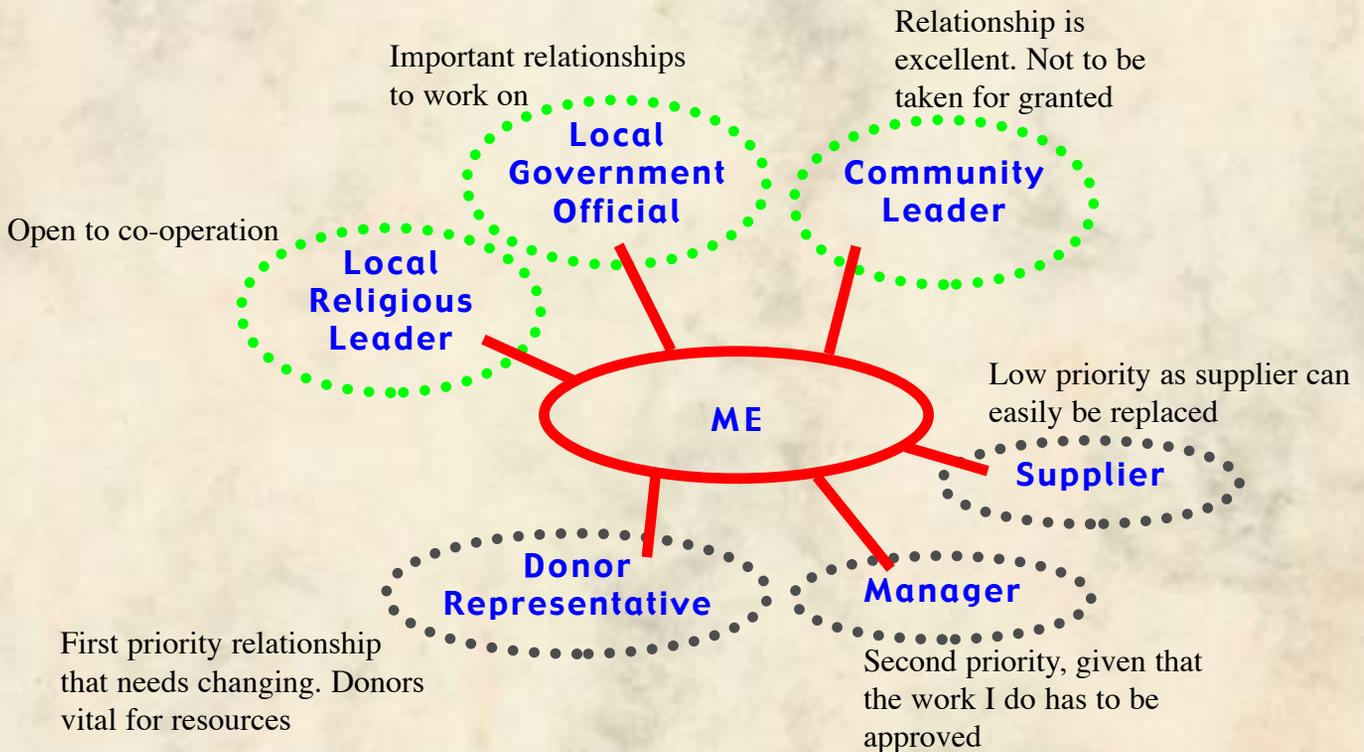
Step 5: Change Relationships

Step 5



Can you learn anything from your good relationships which might enhance your less satisfactory ones?
How might you create a safe environment for others and yourself to secure good working relationships?

Prioritise which of the unhelpful relationships need to be addressed, for example:



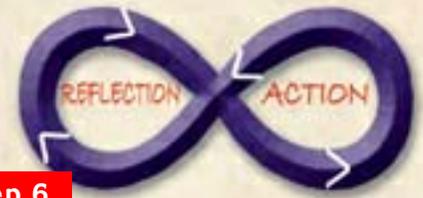
- **What tasks could help you achieve the goal of enhancing your relationships?**
- **By what signs will you know whether or not you have succeeded?**
(You might want to refer back to what you found in Step 3)

Possible routes to success:

	Task	Signs of success
1	Approach donor to clear the air	donor begins to include my points in communications
2	Refer more to points being made by donor	donor shows signs of dialogue
3	Use more frequent and better communication	correspondence shows an effort to keep the dialogue and plans in mind
4	Insist on programme being visited. Highlight critical issues such as sustainability, exit strategies, using face-to-face dialogue	donors visit
5	Enhance reporting – better presentation, photos and stories from beneficiaries	donor shows signs of action-based interest
6	Call for external evaluation	evaluation takes place
7	Get donor to communicate priorities	agreement is reached

Step 6: Reflect on Changing Relationships

- What has succeeded so far in bringing about desired change?
- Score 0 to 10 (poor to excellent) for improvement.
- What compromises were made?



Possible signs of success:

- 1 I visited donor and began to mention my points in communications and we agreed on a particular programme

- 2 The donor began to show clear signs of dialogue, mainly through letters and telephone calls

- 3 There was more frequent communication and, because a programme had been decided jointly, there were fewer arguments

- 4 Donor personnel visited and understood the activities undertaken

- 5 Reporting systems were put in place, with photographs and quotes from beneficiaries. Donors responded

- 6 Evaluation happened and was successful

- 7 Agreement was reached between the donor and myself about priorities

Score given out of 10 to my efforts to reach out to the donor: **8**

Points lost for: Inadequate discussion on exit strategy

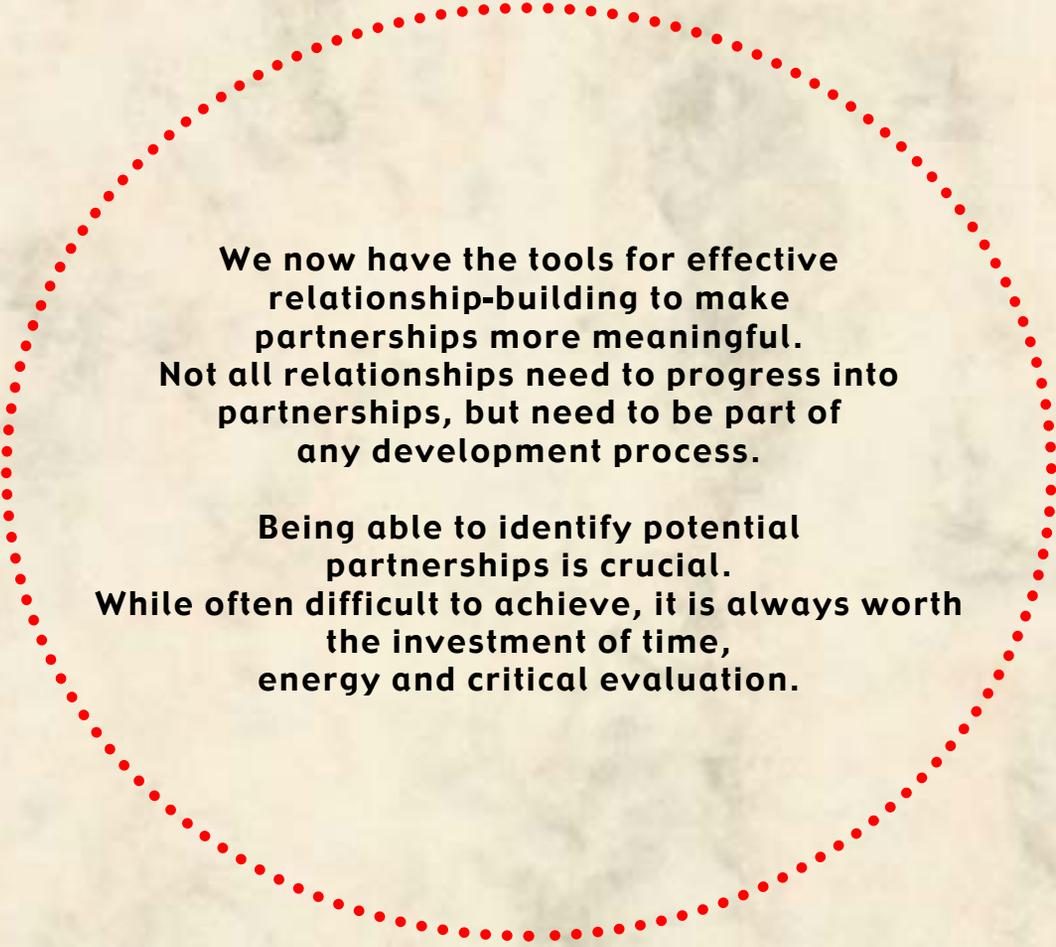
Outcome

A compromise was reached that one new major programme would be undertaken rather than a number of small ones. Donor and field agency felt that one programme would be more manageable as it connected with and complemented previous programmes with this donor. In the course of the dialogue we in the field agency learned the donor's policy of only funding projects for a specific period. Once we understood, we worked to develop new, but complementary, continuation activities. Donor listened to my views and agreed to engage. Our compromise was to let go of some smaller projects which could be funded elsewhere in order to concentrate on the larger one.

Has the improvement in the relationships brought about the desired benefits for the intended beneficiaries?

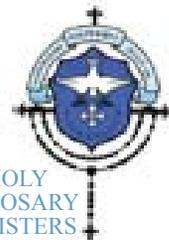
The above question is obviously critical. We now break out of the self-analysis loop and into new territory not covered by this Reflective Process. Clearly you are not the only one answering this question. Indeed the beneficiaries have the main say as to whether they have witnessed an improvement.





**We now have the tools for effective
relationship-building to make
partnerships more meaningful.
Not all relationships need to progress into
partnerships, but need to be part of
any development process.**

**Being able to identify potential
partnerships is crucial.
While often difficult to achieve, it is always worth
the investment of time,
energy and critical evaluation.**



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