Tech Brief Principal Preparers:
Julia Ross, CORE Group
Betsy McCallon, White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood

Building Successful Alliances for Global Health

- *Alliances need to evolve at a pace that builds trust and cohesion.*
- *Successful alliances balance effective decision-making with broad participation.*
- *Alliances are most effective when they have a fully funded Secretariat.*

Have you ever needed to quickly mobilize in-country networks for program scale-up? Have you ever wished for a reliable way to disseminate tools and strategies to community stakeholders? Have you ever looked for ways to strengthen nongovernmental organization (NGO) country collaboration for greater impact?

Alliances such as the CORE Group and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood (WRA) help donors and partners meet these challenges and reach more women and children in need. They do this by offering one-stop access to established networks whose reach and reputation in developing countries make them highly effective partners.

The *CORE Group*, established in 1997, is a membership association of 40 international NGOs whose mission is to promote and improve the health and well-being of children and women in developing countries through collaborative NGO action and learning. Collectively, CORE Group members work in more than 140 countries.

The *WRA* is an international coalition of individuals and organizations formed to promote increased public awareness and develop and implement plans of action to make pregnancy and childbirth safe for all women and newborns—in both developing and developed countries. Today more than 1,000 WRA members, located in more than 71 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America, mobilize to ensure that women and newborns throughout the world enjoy safe pregnancy, childbirth, and optimal postpartum health.

Lessons Learned
Lessons learned from building these alliances include the following:

Alliances need to evolve at a pace that builds trust and cohesion.
Much of the success of alliances comes from the process of alliance building: the involvement of stakeholders, sharing of information, and collaborative planning; these must be established from the alliance's inception and cannot be rushed or forced.

WRA model: When establishing a WRA in a new country, a large stakeholders' workshop is held, bringing together likely partners in the health sector as well as less obvious ones, such as the police and religious leaders. Participants include government representatives, donor agencies, international NGOs, local NGOs, professional associations, and individuals. The global concepts of the WRA are introduced, but the stakeholders develop their own vision and priorities for their Alliance, as well as examine the assets and contributions of each member.

From this workshop, a "core committee" is formed to determine the next steps and develop the organizational structure and decision-making mechanisms for the Alliance. It may appear that health programming activities are slow to start, but this process is essential. Even though what emerges is often similar to other WRAs, it is imperative that the decisions and strategies are established locally, cultivating commitment, unity, and trust for the future sustainability of the Alliance.

Successful alliances balance effective decision-making with broad participation.
To be effective, alliances must foster participation, transparency and open communication, while at the same time granting decision-making authority to a small cadre of leaders.

CORE Group model: The CORE Group ensures broad participation among its NGO members through member-led, topic-specific Working Groups that meet monthly via conference call, exchange technical information through listservs, develop annual workplans (with designated activity owners) at spring and fall membership meetings, and implement activities throughout the year with support from the CORE Group Secretariat.

CORE Group members elect fellow members to serve on its 12-person Board of Directors, which sets key strategic goals and makes key decisions for the organization. Board members have gained the trust of CORE Group members, are committed to the CORE Group's role as a "neutral broker" among NGOs, and, together with Working Group Chairs, are able to "wear two hats"—representing their own NGO as well as the CORE Group—in liaison with donors, partners, and policymakers.

Alliances are most effective when they have a fully funded Secretariat.
Talented and committed secretariat staff members are essential in order to facilitate sharing among members, ensure member needs are met, and move an alliance's technical agenda forward. Without full-time staff dedicated to supporting and growing an alliance, critical momentum may be lost and member interest may wane. Donor support for alliances is critical, particularly in their early stages. As alliances grow and strengthen, they can also leverage resources locally, be built into members' projects, and utilize in-kind contributions and membership fees to ensure sustainability.

CORE Group model: The CORE Group currently manages four country-level polio secretariats, which serve to coordinate Private Voluntary Organization (PVO)-bundled proposals for complementary polio-eradication activities. Funding supports a full-time, in-country secretariat director who represents NGO partners at various forums, provides technical assistance and training, convenes regular meetings, develops common monitoring and evaluation systems, and facilitates communication among PVOs, donors and governments. Funding also supports travel for secretariat staff and communications activities such as creating newsletters or Web sites.

WRA model: Varied experiences from WRA National Secretariats, located in 12 countries, have illustrated the critical need for a fully funded Secretariat, including a full-time Coordinator, with administrative and logistical support from the host organization. There is no blueprint for the Secretariats; they are owned and driven by their membership. The Secretariat ensures that the Alliance adheres to its action plan, collects and disseminates technical and programmatic information, and serves as a communication hub. Likewise, the Global Secretariat coordinates the efforts of its global members, enhances opportunities for south-to-south exchange and capacity building, and shares strategic plans and results.

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Where to get more information: www.maqweb.org

CORE Group: www.coregroup.org
White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood: www.whiteribbonalliance.org

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