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***Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in Education:  
the Escuela Nueva Program in Colombia***



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# MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION: THE *ESCUELA NUEVA* PROGRAM IN COLOMBIA

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## 1. Overview

According to the First Regional Conference on Secondary Education in Africa (2003), ‘There is scant information about PPPs [Public-Private Partnerships], so there are few websites that a corporation or school or ministry of education can access. The absence of widely known models, summaries of key experiences and shared lessons learned makes the start-up and monitoring of these partnerships more challenging’. For many stakeholders the development of Private Public Partnerships (PPPs), also known as Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSP), is the chosen strategy for development work. However, partnerships have different meanings to different constituents. There remains a general lack of consensus about what exactly a partnership is, what the role of the private sector should or could be, and what some of the common obstacles and best practices in PPPs are, particularly regarding education.

Colombia is home to a long and fruitful history of partnerships which serve as excellent models for the rest of the world. Initially, the role of the private sector in supporting education was merely philanthropic in nature. The private sector limited itself to financing new education initiatives. This is no longer the case. There has been a real shift in the way that the private sector views its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda. Rather than seeing CSR ventures as a dumping ground for spare capital, obsolete technology and retired executives, the private sector is now viewing them as an opportunity to offer its managerial expertise, innovate with new products, and bring profit to the field of development. For example, since the mid-1980s, the National Federation of Colombian Coffee Growers has been applying its administrative enterprise knowledge to the Escuela Nueva program of community-based schools. The private sector is at the forefront of Market-Based Poverty Initiatives too, where not only does the community benefit from sustainable social impact, but the corporations do as well. There is no better example of this in Colombia than Starbucks’ and Empresas de Nariño’s partnership. Luis Fernando Gavilanes of Empresas de Nariño, Starbucks’ coffee exporter, explains that Starbucks pays Empresas de Nariño an overprice which must be invested in coffee-growing regions. Through training and new equipment, this investment enables coffee farmers to improve the quality of their coffee, which they then sell to Empresas de Nariño who is able to export a higher quality of coffee for Starbucks. The investment is limited to specific regions because, as Mr. Gavilanes said, ‘[We wanted] the benefit to reach those people who were being loyal to us so that in the same manner we could reward that loyalty’.

This study focuses on educational partnerships in Colombia. The qualitative in-depth research consisted primarily of in-country interviews and site visits to partnership projects. In the course of research, 6 government officials, 5 private company representatives, 4 donor agency representatives, 34 farmers, school administrators and professors, and 14 students from 5

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different departments in Colombia were interviewed. The findings presented here reflect their opinions and experiences.

## 2. Process

There is no model to fit all partnership needs; as Ros Tennyson (2003) notes in *The Partnership Toolbook*, 'Each partnership will follow its own unique development pathway'. Similarly, no two alliances studied in our research followed the same process. Yet, some common steps emerged that all of the partnerships experienced as part of their proceedings. Though they were not as ordered, clearly identified, and organized as the twelve steps (scoping, identifying, building, planning, managing, resourcing, implementing, measuring, reviewing, revising, institutionalizing, and sustaining or terminating) documented in Tennyson's model, we identified 6 common steps:

1. *Needs Assessment*: understand the challenge or public service needing attention.
2. *Partner Selection*: identify and select possible partners.
3. *Planning*: outline the proposed intervention with clearly stated objectives and roles, draft agreement for partners to sign.
4. *Implementation*: work towards the agreed upon goals following the pre-established deadlines and identifiable deliverables.
5. *Monitoring and Evaluation*: monitor progress throughout the life of the program, evaluate at the end to measure results.
6. *Revision*: determine, at the end of the program cycle, whether to continue with the intervention for another cycle or to terminate the program.

## 3. Models

Diverse models were presented under the title of *Public-Private Partnerships*. While Ms. Elena Castellón Buendía, from Cementos Argos, states that 'We [Cementos Argos] call it an alliance even when we pay for the service'; Mr. Luis Fernando Gavilanes, from Empresas de Nariño, does not fully agree. He explains that '[If] a project costs X amount of money and they [the public sector] give their technical team, their infrastructure... and add that up to be their matching funds (...) Then that for us is not interesting. For us it is interesting when the investment is *peso* to *peso*. That is, the public sector puts one *peso*, we put one *peso*'. In other words, while for some in Colombia a partnership can be a contractual relationship for services, for others a precondition to term a partnership as an alliance is that it must have all partners contribute funds.

Another form of alliance is the role that the private sector has played in providing private education in Colombia. Approximately 16.9% of primary schools and 22.4% of secondary schools are private (World Bank, 2004). The private sector also has an active role through programs such as Concession Schools, where low-income students are able to attend private schools under a specified contract between the private schools and the public educational system (Barrera Osorio, 2005); and the Program for Expansion of Secondary Education Coverage (PACES for its acronym in Spanish) under which private institutions receive vouchers to partially cover the costs of poor students attending their institution (Patrinos, 2006). Other organizations refer to partnerships when a corporation or entity donates equipment or infrastructure to a school.

There is no clear definition of what a Public-Private or Multi-Stakeholder Partnership means. Each organization, corporation and government creates its own definition according to its needs. Whether these variances in definition present a problem or concern is yet to be determined. Thus

far it seems that the lack of a concrete and universal definition is not hampering Colombia's ability to provide multi-sectored responses to intricate needs in education.

#### 4. Advantages

As defined by respondents from all sectors, the goal of partnerships is to provide a creative solution to a complex public service concern that requires a multi-sectoral approach. The common agreement is that only when comprehensive and cross-sector initiatives are undertaken will the social impact generated be innovative and sustainable. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships enable sectors to acknowledge each other's strengths and limitations, recognizing that together they can create stronger initiatives. As succinctly described by Lucía Ruiz Martínez of Fundación Promigas, the social branch of the largest natural gas transport company in Colombia, 'With partnerships we look to increase the financial capacity, distribute the costs, complement capacities (competencies) and to achieve a collaborative learning; to learn from each other'.

The following were the most salient advantages of working in partnerships cited by the respondents.

- **Cost Sharing:** Under the multi-sectored approach partners share the costs of implementing an intervention, known as cost sharing. This was identified as one of the most attractive characteristic of partnerships for all sectors. This does not only include capital costs, but technical and material costs as well. Cost sharing is important for two main reasons: first, it forces the actors to take an active role in the partnership as they have resources invested in the initiative; second, it partially frees up funds from the public sector to be invested in other social areas demanding attention; third, partnerships open the doors to additional funding opportunities, such as U.S. Agency for International Development's and the Inter-American Development Bank's matching funds programs that require partnership formats.

**Good Practice Example 1:** Ms. Elena Castellón Buendía, from Cementos Argos, has the common practice of identifying the factors that can lead the PPP to failure or success. In explicitly identifying them, the partners are able to monitor the possible dangers and enhance the drivers of success.

- **Risk Sharing:** Having the opportunity to implement a project where numerous societal actors are not only actively involved, but actually have a stake in the success of the project, is a great advantage for any initiative to become successful.
- **Complementing:** The limitation that one partner faces may be the strength that another partner brings. Mr. Pablo Jaramillo Villegas of the National Federation of Colombian Coffee Growers provides an example: 'The public sector is very slow in managing resources. I would say initially it is in this that the private sector has more to offer; in the administrative management'.

'Today we are grateful to the IOM (International Organization for Migration). We learned a lot from them: how to monitor, how to evaluate a project. They are experts on that, and we weren't... They have taught us about that.'

Luis Fernando Gavilanes, Empresas de Nariño.

- **Knowledge Sharing:** Each actor has specific sector-related knowledge to share with other partners (i.e., public sector knowledge of public issues, private sector knowledge of market forces, and civil society knowledge of the community). This knowledge can be transferred to other actors, resulting in significant learning, as well as enhance the project itself.
- **Enhanced Innovation:** Different points of view result in more constructive and creative solutions.

**Good Practice Example 2:** When elections for Mayor near, Ms. Ana María González Londoño, from Fundación Luker, invites all candidates, regardless of their political orientation, to a meeting where the organization's partnerships with the government are presented. Fundación Luker believes that by definition any PPP in education is long-term; hence, various government changes will occur while the alliance is in place. At this meeting Ms. González Londoño inquires of each candidate whether, if elected, he/she would support the initiatives presented because, as she explains, if one of the candidates does not support the program and is elected to office, then Fundación Luker would cease its activities in the region. Since its foundation 10 years ago, Fundación Luker has always received the candidates' approval. This tactic ensures that once elected to office Fundación Luker can depend on the new Mayor's support. Once the Mayor commences his term, he/she is invited to sit on or send a representative to the partnerships' decision making committee. At this time the organization assumes a little more leadership than usual, helping the programs move along until the new appointed government representative learns in detail about the partnerships and their functioning. According to Ms. González Londoño this is another partnership advantage, since even when the individuals in key leadership positions change, there is always a partner involved that will continue with the alliance until all partners are settled once again.

- **Legitimacy:** Each actor brings a different legitimacy to the program. Ms. Ana María González Londoño from Fundación Luker, sponsored by Casa Luker, one of the most important producers of food and home cleaning products in Colombia, explains that 'As the private sector, we [Fundación Luker] do not agree in that we should replace the State in a function that by National Constitution is their responsibility. We should support the State. Secondly, because even if it were not the State's obligation, the State is the natural leader for these processes of public service provision. And we think that the sustainability of the interventions in the education sector go hand in hand with the strength of the alliance we make with the public sector'. Other respondents identified the private sector's legitimacy as related to processes, as the community generally considers a company more transparent than the government. The civil society's legitimacy stems from its relationship with and knowledge of the community.

- **Improved Relations with Community:** Generally, all partners came in contact with the community, not only showing their sectors' interest in the public good, but also building a direct relationship with the community, including a corporation's relationship with its own employees and customers. Mr. Gavilanes proudly states, 'The benefit... The company's name is known in all of Nariño. Before Empresas de Nariño would receive the coffee, but there were many intermediaries. People did not know Empresas de Nariño because they were more concerned about the intermediary. Today Empresas de Nariño relates directly with the people and they already know us'.
- **Sustainability:** There was a definite consensus about the inherent sustainability that partnerships present. 'In countries like those in Latin America where the public sector regularly changes, the existence of a private entity guarantees the continuity over time of the intervention's strategy in projects... Of course we [Fundación Luker] remain open to suggestions for accomplishing the project's objectives, which each new public administration brings with it', elucidates Ms. González Londoño. Additionally, all sectors agreed that sustainability should be thought out and planned.

**Good Practice example 3:** 'The I.V.A. is what you [in the U.S.] know as V.A.T., the value added tax. In the Colombian tax system there are certain organizations that are exempt from this tax. [If] a product is not in the Colombian basket,\* then those products have the 16% I.V.A. When paying for the product, companies charge this V.A.T. and in two months time they present an I.V.A. declaration and send it to the government. In the project, the IOM is exempt from this tax. So corporations would charge the I.V.A. to the IOM, but then the government would return it to the IOM, which helped in generating new funds for new and more beneficiaries.'

Luis Fernando Gavilanes, Empresas de Nariño.

## 5. Challenges

- **Working Rhythms:** The private and public sectors identified the different working rhythms between partners as an issue always present. The public sector is apprehensive about the private sector's fast track and feels misunderstood in terms of its processes. Private sector representatives complained about the government's slowness in action and bureaucracy. 'So,' Mr. Jaramillo Villegas offers, 'one must have a lot but a lot of persistence and a lot of patience. It's not because the others are bad and one is good. Not in the least. It's not because one is efficient and the others are inefficient. Not in the least. But there are differences and one must respect those differences'.

'The expectations about visibility, copy rights and intellectual property, commercial use and other related issues should be previously defined in the agreement between parties'.

Lucia Ruiz Martinez, Fundación Promigas.

- **Fund Management:** The management of program funds was identified as a vital issue to settle right from the start. All respondents, including official representatives, agreed that the government's red tape considerably slowed down the disbursement of funds.

Additionally, the issue of corruption is always to be considered. Transparency is even more important than ever given the involvement of multiple partners. Considering that one of the private sector's solid characteristics is efficient processes and clear procedures, all respondents strongly suggested having the private sector manage the alliance's funds.

'Power is communal. The decisions are concerted.'

Pablo Jaramillo Villegas, National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia

- **Partner Disparity:** Several interviewees agreed that partner equality was essential for the alliance's success. A very serious pitfall is for a partner to underestimate another partner. Multi-stakeholder Partnerships are based in the belief that one party alone cannot achieve as much as when working with other sectors; hence Ms. Ileana Mejía from Fundación Mamonal recommends having monthly meetings with all partners at which written reports are presented, progress is communicated and current concerns are dealt with.
- **Politics:** The turbulent political scenario that many developing countries face makes the partnership extremely vulnerable. Allying the partnership with a specific political party or movement, rather than with the elected government, may bring about negative consequences.

## 6. Conclusion

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships provide a highly effective mechanism for the creation and implementation of education programs. The numerous cases from Colombia presented in this analysis not only prove this, but also serve as models for other countries. What all respondents, regardless of the sector they belonged to, continuously emphasized was that no matter the intervention, partnerships had been the best arrangement that they had so far devised to obtain sustainable social impact. As Mr. Jaramillo Villegas observed, 'It's [a PPP is] a hybrid. It's a hybrid where one takes the best from both sides; where despite the difficulties of the different cultures, of the different rhythms, of the different interests... when agreements are reached and things are done, the results are better than if each did things separately. That's what we call a synergy; where one plus one is much more than two'.

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