SEMINAR 1 (DAY 2): WAYS OF WORKING
27th February 2015: London International Development Centre

SEMINAR REPORT

This report summarises the discussions from the 'Ways of Working' seminar and provides some guidance for participants who will be preparing and analysing partnership case studies in the subsequent four core seminars. The seminar drew on discussions from the previous day's 'Context-Setting 'event and brought together 16 members of the 'core group' to explore how we can work together to create a safe, critical and creative space for unpacking experiences of partnerships. The half-day seminar was guided by the following aims:

- To introduce participants and their partnership case studies
- To confirm the logistics of the core seminars (agreeing which institutions will host each seminar and when each of the case studies will be presented)
- To establish what participants will bring into the seminars
- To build on the previous day's discussion to establish a broad framework for discussing case studies
- To agree on some key questions/prompts/tools to guide analysis of the case studies
- To explore the types of outputs we hope to generate through the series

1. Case studies

The Table below sets out the seven partnership case studies that we will be exploring over the course of the seminar series. In addition to these, Kate and Jude (with input from the coordinating team) will be reflecting on the series itself as a partnership – see the blog post on developing the series for more on this.

Participating Institutions	**Project(s)**	**Background Info**	**Date of Presentation**	**Host Organisation**	**Theme of Presentation**
International Planned Parenthood Federation/ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	Integra: Strengthening the evidence base for integrating HIV and SRH services	Poster	28th Apr 2015	IPPF	Establishing Partnerships

ActionAid International/ UCL Institute of Education	Partnership around gender equality in schools	Presentation	20th Oct 2015	ActionAid	TBC
Practical Action/ UCL (Faculty of the Built Environment)	Participatory Informal Settlement Upgrading and Well-Being				
Voluntary Service Oversees / Institute of Development Studies	2 year systemic action research study into volunteering across four countries		Feb 2016	LSE/OU TBC	TBC
Marie Stopes International and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	Research Ethics Review Committee				
International HIV/AIDS Alliance/ London School of Economics	NA (Organically evolving research partnrship)	Outline	May 2016	IDS/HIV AIDS Alliance	TBC
Oxfam/ University of the West of Scotland	NA (The University of the West of Scotland-Oxfam Partnership: 'For a more equitable and sustainable Scotland')	Outline			

The Ways of Working seminar kicked off with an in-depth introduction to these seven partnerships. Key points and common trends that emerged through the ensuing discussion included:

- The issue of sustainability in partnerships (including staff-turnover, project-based versus ongoing relationships, institutional buy-in to partnerships, the difference between academic and practitioner affiliation to institutions, the role of different funding sources)
- The relevance/rigour debate (including academic – or alternative research standards, researcher autonomy etc.)
- Partnership brokers in different contexts (including mediation of multiple international partners, brokering skills and job descriptions, institutional support)
- Complexity, spontaneity and serendipity
- Personal relationships and individual autobiographies/institutional histories (including the role of the emotive)

2. Reflections from the Context-Setting Event

Many of the issues that emerged through the introduction to the case studies related back to the discussions of the context-setting event the previous day. Elaine, Flora and Jill were invited to reflect on those discussions in the context of our emerging framework for thinking through partnerships.

Elaine and Flora started by commenting on three key areas: 1.) Histories and autobiographies (pointing out the very different timescales of the two sector-specific presentations and suggesting the need to consider histories in greater depth as well as individual autobiographies which seemed to suggest lots of movement between places and institutions); 2.) Translations between the different sectors (including what is lost/found and that in seeking to find a common language there was sometimes a blandness of managed association, which meant that some of the significance, often signaled by moments of high emotion or the complex drawing of trees was obscured.) In this context, the importance of theorizing these processes in ways that might engage with the emotional and relational was raised and some potentially useful theorists - such as Paulo Freire and John Dewey who had engaged with practice in concrete sites, critical realism and feminist theory – were suggested as useful resources; and 3) the politics of evidence (and the importance of not loosing sight of the various channels of power that surround methodologies and the products of research partnerships – e.g. artefacts, books and relationships).

Jill then when on to offer an alternative practitioner perspective (see Box below)

Academic and INGO partnerships are happening because people are engaging. The 40 people in the room at the first context-setting seminar in the Re-thinking Research Partnership series demonstrate this. So why are we engaging?

One of my favourite children's books that I read to my daughter is a typical story of a tortoise and hare. It is called "Hurry up, and SLOW down." All day the tortoise takes his time, wakes up slowly and enjoys his cup of tea without pace; while the hare is constantly running around. This happens right up until bed time, when suddenly the hare wants slow things right down in order to postpone the turning off of the lights. Here are some thoughts about Re-thinking Research Partnerships from the perspective of the hare.

Academic and INGO partnerships are uniquely joined together by a common desire to do quality, reflective, learning-orientated research. From an NGO perspective engaging in research helps us learn from others, improve what we are doing, and stop doing things we should not be doing. Being active in research helps the NGO practitioner understand the organisation's pathway to impact, to shift organisational strategic priorities, and to take some programming chances, or innovate.

One of the key roles I play is to lead my organisation to become more research aware and research active. To do this I focus a lot on my role as a partnership broker. There are many aspects of brokering an academic and INGO partnership that are common to other partnerships. But what is unique about this kind of partnership?

First, we can look at the history of the two movements. Both academic and NGO institutions have taken a similarly trajectory, having been initiated in the early part of the 20th century and coming alive just after WW2. During the 21st century we have been challenged to shift focus of the dominantly US/European-centric movements to the global South.

At the same time the nature of the organisations themselves are very different. Academic institutions are truly professional organisations, relying heavily on the standardization of skills rather than processes to get things down. This allows professionals working in academic institutions large autonomy to achieve results. NGOs are more divisionalised organisations where a standardization of outputs is far more important than a standardization of skills. This means that NGO staff are more dependent on each other, and particularly on the senior managers leading at the top of their organisation.

Ultimately this means INGO structures, systems and organisational cultures are very different to academic institutions. These differences invariably lead to tensions in the partnership. In my role as a partnership broker of academic and INGO partnerships I have observed that it is often in the face of these tensions that we learn the most.

I am learning that the "publish or perish" mentality of an academic aids an organisation like mine that rarely stops doing anything. By continuously asking us how joined up research will contribute back to existing theory and literature; academics are keeping us more relevant and honest. At the same time, because of the dependency I lean on to make things happen in my organisation, I am learning that my relationship with an academic is individual, while their relationship with me is organisational. Because of this I need to welcome my academic partners into my office in order to allow them to get to know a wide variety of people in the organisation. I need to tell them that their reflective view and theory-based approach is appreciated and welcome particularly by top leaders who are grappling with issues of strategy and organisational impact. I often find myself encouraging academics not to always be the student but to allow for local participation and ownership in scholarly activities.

From my experience I know academic and INGO partnerships can change how NGOs generate and use evidence; and change how academics engage in the pathway to impact. But before we get to these important outcomes it has been important to focus on the history, politics and varying natures of these two different types of organisation.

3. Framework for analyzing case studies

The Table below shows the emerging framework for analyzing case studies (which integrates elements from the original funding application and survey as well as input from the 'Context-Setting' and 'Ways of Working' seminars.) Participants identified a number of questions we wanted to ask of partnerships. These were then sorted into thematic headings/prompts and these in turn were organized into a heuristic framework to help to explain the politics of evidence and participation in partnerships (i.e. how evidence/participation is influenced by context and power and how partnerships themselves can be transformative.) There are three parts to the framework, which we might draw on to think through our case studies: 1.) context and purpose; 2.) power in partnerships; 3.) power through partnerships. These are discussed below.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS
(Context and Purpose)

- Rationale for partnership (influencing ‘measures of success’)
- Funding source(s) (influencing research outcomes)
- Duration (short-term or sustained)
- Scale
- Nature and locations of partner organizations and levels of involvement
- Position of partners within their organizations (institutional or individual buy-in)
- Accountability (to whom?)
- Emphasis on reflection/learning and room for formative evaluation to improve partnership itself as well as outcome

INFLUENCES ON PARTICIPATION AND TYPES OF EVIDENCE VALUED IN PARTNERSHIPS
(Power *in* Research Partnerships)

Institutions	Practices	Artefacts	Narratives
• Histories • Agendas • Structures and processes (e.g. around funding and careers) • Values/ ideologies • Infrastructure • Time-scales	• Languages • Research capacity/ literacies/ skills • Methods and approaches (theory) • Standards of validity/quality • Collective values and ideologies	• Tools/templates for generating evidence • Texts for disseminating evidence • Technologies for supporting research design/ implementation/ communication	• Personal and institutional biographies of partnerships • Values/ ideologies • Emotive responses to partnerships • Individual and collaborative reflection on partnerships

EFFECTS AND AFFECTS OF PARTNERSHIPS
(Power *through* Research Partnerships)

Institutions	Practices	Artefacts	Narratives
• Changes to policy, structures and processes, values and ideologies, agendas and strategy	• Changes to skills, language, literacies, methods and approaches and standards/norms	• Changes to templates/texts/ technologies/ techniques	• Changes to sense of self as researcher, personal values and ideologies

1. Context and purpose

The nature of evidence and participation within a partnership has a lot to do with its purpose and the context in which it is established, developed and sustained. By exploring differences between partnerships (in terms of different rationales, funding-source, locations, durations, scales etc.) we might develop a 'typology' of partnerships, which could help us to understand why some things work well in certain contexts but not so well in others.

2. Power *in* partnerships

Power operates in many ways, through many channels and at many levels. The framework identifies four different but interrelated sources of power – each of which influence i) the types of evidence that is valued in and produced through partnerships and ii) the possibilities for participation of different actors to different degrees in these partnerships. First, ***institutions*** define what is valid and valued through their agendas, structures, processes & systems. Second, ***research practices*** (including languages, methods and skills) relate to specific institutions and define whose knowledges and literacies count and whose are excluded. Third, ***research artefacts*** (tools, technologies, texts, templates) enable certain representations or manifestations of evidence but restrict others. For example, a book contains a static message, which cannot be changed after publication, whereas a Blog can be ongoing and interactive. But the power accorded to these different texts is also defined by institutions and the standards set through research practices. And finally, ***narratives*** can operate at personal or collective levels and relates to how people make meaning or give accounts (either by themselves or with others) of their experiences. These accounts can have a powerful influence on the partnerships themselves – though of course some are recognized while others obscured – and this prioritising is defined by institutions (e.g. does an account reflect the institutions own agendas?), practices (e.g. does the account use the 'right' language) and artefacts (e.g. is the account in the right format?)

3. Power *through* partnerships

As well as being influenced by power channeled through institutions, practices, artefacts and narratives (and the implications for evidence/participation) partnerships can also challenge and potentially transform the nature of evidence and participation by affecting change in institutions, practices, artefacts and narratives. It would be very interesting to collect examples of how this has happened though the case studies and to address questions such as: 'where is it easiest/hardest to affect change?'; 'which actors have control over which domains?'; 'how sustainable is transformation in different domains?'

It is important also to stress that this is an *emerging* framework and so if it doesn't work or doesn't capture key aspects of our discussion we are free as a group to adapt, expand or discard it altogether.

4. Tools for presenting and analyzing case studies

Our analysis of the case studies will have two components: 1.) Preparation of background materials and presentation by the participants in each partnership; 2.) Collective analysis of each partnership case study - integrating experiences from the broader group. Jethro has compiled a list of tools and techniques to help guide our reflection both before and during the seminars. This has been integrated into the guidelines below.

PREPARATION

For case study presenters

Presenters should prepare two resources in advance of the seminar at which they will be presenting:

First, presenters should develop a background document to their partnership case study. This can be based on the document prepared for the Context-Setting workshop but should be expanded to consider (broadly) the three components of the framework – context/purpose (background info about the partnership); power *in* (what influenced evidence and participation in the partnership?); and power *through* (what aspects of evidence and participation – if any – did the partnership help to transform?) Each seminar will also be focusing primarily on one aspect of the research process. These are:

- Establishing and sustaining partnerships
- Designing research
- Collecting and analyzing data
- Representing and disseminating research

Presenters should try to think in some depth about the aspect they are allocated – though they are not bound to this if there are key issues related to some of the other aspects.

Second, presenters should also choose one or more of the following tools which offer a different way of thinking through case studies. The process of generating and telling a story can itself reveal new understandings, particularly if the method of narrative goes beyond fact and analysis to include elements that are creative, visual, symbolic, emotional, embodied and personal or interpersonal (autobiographical). The following are suggestions which can be selected, adapted or substituted as the case study presenters wish. The main principles are to expand and deepen the storytelling process to allow experience to be shown, felt and more wholly apprehended by the tellers and the participants, in order to then spark and deepen our analytical sense-making using the frameworks.

Visualisation
Images can be a powerful tool for inquiry and communication. We suggest you try creating images that are not too 'literal' or 'analytical' in the first instance (e.g. avoid flow and system diagrams to begin with – these can come later), and

work with metaphor, symbol and colour. Remember the tree diagrams we created in the first workshop. Methods could include:

- *Symbolic image or object*: draw a picture or select an object or set of objects (actual things to bring to the workshop) that represents the research partnership either generally or at a particularly interesting or challenging moment. Hold back from analysing this or being too literal in interpreting it, just work with the image and symbol and the feeling it evokes. If you are familiar with Morgan's 'Images of organisation' (try google) this might give you some ideas. What image best represents your partnership?

- *River of life*: This can either be done as an individual/institutional exercise (producing two visualisations from each of the partners which can then be compared) or as a joint exercise. The idea is to create a visual image of the journey of your partnership. This could be in the form of a river or a road /pathway. Use large paper – a flipchart page or even two stuck together. Use images rather than words (sparse words as labels are ok). The images can be symbolic rather than literal. Identify and trace the origins, tributaries, influences, branches, bends, rapids, waterfalls, obstacles, stagnant (or reflective) pools, bridges, dams. Identify any important forces or actors that influenced the partnership along the way, drawing these on the shore with images of people, contextual trends, events, turning points. Consider where the river is going – does it branch out like a delta with unknown direction, or go into a sea, and if so what kind of a sea? Use images, colours and a minimum of words. Don't take more than 30 minutes to an hour.

Creative Writing and Storytelling
Preferably having done some image work, individually or together, do some creative writing and storytelling. Here again it can help to remain in a free-flowing and imaginative mode, not worrying so much about exact accounts and analysis of them, but telling the story as you would to a friend or family member, making it interesting, embellishing the dramatic events, or even transposing it into a piece of fiction (fairy tale, fable). The idea is to find and express the narrative behind the story that evokes understanding at a personal and emotional level. Practice telling or writing the stories, individually or together, give and receive feedback if possible, and refine them – whether written or spoken – into something that can be presented in the workshop. Don't worry if it seems too sparse or fictitious, you will have the chance to provide more factual and analytical details.

We realize that these techniques may well be new and even uncomfortable for some participants and so the choice of which or how many to try is up to each individual. To support participants in getting the most out of them we will be using some to guide our collective analysis in the first 'core seminar'.

For non-presenting participants

First, please ensure that you have read all the background information sent to you about the case studies to be discussed at each seminar. In reading through the material, try to think about (and ideally make notes on) the similarities and differences between the partnership being presented and your own.

Second, think about your own partnership in relation to the specific focus of each seminar. The four aspects of research partnerships to be addressed at each of the four core seminars are:

- Establishing and sustaining partnerships
- Designing research
- Collecting and analyzing data
- Representing and disseminating research

ANALYSING CASE STUDIES

We will try to keep our collective analysis of the case studies as open as possible – drawing on participatory tools when we can – but it is also important that the discussions are productive and generate some comparable observations of research partnerships. Discussions will therefore be loosely organized around two prompts: i) the specific aspect of the research partnership that each seminar will be addressing (establishing/sustaining partnerships; designing research; collecting/analyzing data; representing/disseminating research); and the emerging framework (currently focused on context/purpose; power *in*; and power *through*).

In the first of the core seminars we will devote the first session to establishing some ground rules to help us establish a safe and supportive space for genuinely critical and reflexive discussion.

4. Outputs from the seminar series

To document our discussions we are committed to producing a number of outputs over the course of the seminar series.

Following each seminar we will produce:

- Summaries of the seminar (for both the 'core group' and wider network)
- A reflexive blog post following each seminar (to be written by a different member of the core group – see post by Flora on '[partnerships or relationships]' following the Context-Setting seminar)

We will also compile and update the following resources on our website:

- Emerging list of resources and links
- Emerging questions
- Emerging framework and conceptual tools

We will produce at least two publications towards the end of the series:

- A 'practitioner-focused' publication (e.g. edited book)
- A more academic-focused publication (e.g. 'special issue' of a journal)

Finally, we will work with a number of broker organisations (e.g. INTRAC, NCCPE, BOND, DSA, ELRHA, LIDC) to translate our discussions into the following:

- Training resources
- Resources for funders and policy makers (e.g. briefing papers)