



INTERNSHIP REPORT

NGO-BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP: A SOLUTION FOR PRIMARY HEALTHCARE IN AFRICA?

Qualitative case study into the
facilitators and barriers
influencing the potential of an
NGO-business partnership
perceived by stakeholders

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Rianne Koeling

STUDENT NUMBER
2539894

COMMISSIONING PARTY
Amref Flying Doctors

ECTS + COURSE CODE SPECIALIZATION
30ECTS + AM_471121

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VU SUPERVISOR
Ona Ilozumba

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Author: Rianne Koeling

Commissioning organization: Amref Flying Doctors

On-site supervisor: Danny Dubbeldeman

VU supervisor: Ona Ilozumba

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Athena Institute

Faculty of Science

VU University Amsterdam

De Boelelaan 1085

1081 HV Amsterdam

The Netherlands



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Executive summary

Introduction

Underserved countries continue to face development challenges such as healthcare. Despite the major progress made with regard to global health during the Millennium Development Goals, 400 million people still lack access to essential and good quality healthcare services. This was one of the reasons why the United Nations (UN) released the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. In this, the UN stress the importance of partnerships such as NGO-business partnerships (NBPs) to achieve these goals. Previous research emphasized NBPs, having a strategic collaboration, to accelerate the successes in sustainable development projects. Although there is a lack of insights into the transformative potential of NBPs and its underlying factors. Success factors are abundantly provided but have a relatively narrow focus on contextual influences of other actors. Notwithstanding that literature has shown the many interactions NGOs and business have in a multi-stakeholder context. The current trends in international development combined with the poor insight into factors influencing an NBP, makes it valuable to explore the facilitators and barriers influencing the potential of these partnerships from a broader perspective.

Research objective

This study was commissioned by the non-governmental organization Amref Flying Doctors in order to explore the potential for their partnership with Royal Philips that aims to improve primary healthcare in Africa. The Amref-Philips partnership will be used as a single case study in this research. Therefore, the objective of this study is to contribute to the success of NBPs by identifying factors promoting or hindering the potential of a partnership between an NGO and a business. In order to achieve the objective of this study, the following research question was formulated: *What are the factors promoting or hindering the potential of an NGO-business partnership to improve primary healthcare in Africa?*

Methodology

A qualitative research comprising of one group discussion and 22 interviews amongst stakeholders (from state, market, and civil society). Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling. Group discussion and interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by means of an adapted conceptual model developed by Austin & Seitanidi (2010). For triangulation, an observation of two-day strategy session was conducted.

Results

On an organizational level, the presence of trust was perceived as a critical facilitator which is for a major part dependent on personal relations. Specifically, it was claimed that trust will be enhanced during collaboration between the partners to obtain a better understanding of each other's mission and incentives. Furthermore, collaboration will be enhanced by evaluation, successes and alignment. With regard to factors lying outside partnership's power, it was found that collaborating with public sector makes the partnership susceptible to unpredictable circumstances and corruption. As the Amref-Philips partnership is a first of its kind, unfamiliarity has consequences for investments, and eventually scalability of projects. Lastly, stakeholders witnessed a paradigm shift going on that will facilitate NGOs and business to jointly operate in the healthcare sector in Africa. To conclude, there is potential for NGO-business partnerships to improve primary healthcare in Africa.

Discussion and conclusion

NBPs were found to be a meaningful vehicle to achieve targets set in the SDGs. It was found in literature as well that collaborations between the NGO and private sector by virtue of its strengths and abilities has the potential to fulfil the gaps in the public sector. As seen in existing literature, trust was observed as a prominent factor, not solely in collaborations in the healthcare sector. As mentioned before, trust is not only required between the NGO and the business within the partnership but on a higher level in the ecosystem as well. Probably this could be intertwined with public sector collaboration which was claimed as great decisiveness in the potential of an NBP. To be more specific, interpretation of the findings leaves room for thoughts that the public sector is uncomfortable with such partnerships. As aforementioned, to successfully act in the primary healthcare field in Africa, NBPs need the license to operate. Clearly, private and public sectors are intertwined in such a complex problem as primary healthcare in Africa despite they act in their own bubble. Societal organizations and businesses could anticipate on these moving trends by behaving in an opportunistic way but with caution. The findings in this study contribute to partnerships literature by demonstrating the importance of considering the stakeholder context as well as the NGO-business relations. Therefore, partnership practitioners should recognize that issue-specific nature of the interdependencies between their organization and other stakeholders are present in NBPs. On organizational level, this means that effective governance and strong leadership are needed to facilitate cooperation, coordination, and communication. Additional practical recommendations towards the NGO Amref Flying Doctors were given in this study.