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

MSc. Management, Policy Analysis & Entrepreneurship in Health and Life Sciences

Rianne Koeling
Colophon
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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
# Table of contents

Preface .......................................................................................................................... 2

Abbreviations ............................................................................................................. 5

Executive summary .................................................................................................... 6

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................... 8
   1.1 Objective .......................................................................................................... 9

2. Contextual background ......................................................................................... 10
   2.1 Trends of sustainable development towards the SDGs .................................. 10
   2.2 The importance of NGO-business partnerships ........................................... 11
   2.3 Challenges of NGO-business partnerships .................................................. 12
   2.4 Amref-Philips partnership ............................................................................. 12

3. Theoretical background ......................................................................................... 17
   3.1 Cross-sectoral partnerships ........................................................................... 17
   3.2 Transformative potential of partnerships ....................................................... 17
   3.3. Conceptual model ....................................................................................... 18
   3.4 Concepts and relations .................................................................................. 19
   3.5 Sub-questions ............................................................................................... 20

4. Methodology .......................................................................................................... 22
   4.1 Case study ....................................................................................................... 22
   4.2 Phase I: Group discussion and interviews .................................................... 22
   4.3 Phase II: Observation of session ................................................................... 25
   4.4 Ethical considerations .................................................................................... 25
   4.5 Research quality ............................................................................................. 26

5. Results .................................................................................................................... 27
   5.1 Organizational level factors .......................................................................... 27
   5.2 System level factors ....................................................................................... 31

6. Discussion .............................................................................................................. 36
   6.1 Key findings .................................................................................................... 36
   6.2 Comparison to existing literature .................................................................. 36
   6.3 Theoretical and practical implications .......................................................... 38
   6.4 Strengths and limitations ............................................................................... 39
   6.5 Reflection on conceptual model ..................................................................... 40
   6.6 Recommendations for future research ......................................................... 41
   6.7 Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 41
   6.8 Business value ............................................................................................... 41
Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................................................. 42
References .......................................................................................................................................................... 43
Appendix I: Original conceptual model ............................................................................................................. 48
Appendix II: Description of study population ................................................................................................... 49
Appendix III: Information about organizations ............................................................................................... 50
Appendix IV: Group discussion – topic guide .................................................................................................. 52
Appendix V: Interview guides .......................................................................................................................... 54
Appendix VI: Creswell’s steps for coding ......................................................................................................... 61
Appendix VII: Matrix analysis .......................................................................................................................... 62
Appendix VIII: Practical recommendations towards Amref Flying Doctors .................................................. 63
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 & Seitani (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
NBP 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, NBP 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 NBP. 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.