**Title:** The universal common good: Faith-based partnerships and sustainable development

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Abstract

Partnership is increasingly espoused as the best relationship between members of the sustainable development aid chain, and implies a respect for the position of all and a desire to avoid a situation where one group dominates another. It also implies a form of relationship which is not just ‘better’ for the sake of it but which is more able to help achieve sustainable development. But given the inevitable inequalities in power between donors that have the resources and field partners that don’t it can be hard to put this ideal into practice. This paper explores the function of partnership within a group of closely related institutions that comprise the Catholic Church development chain. The research focussed on three Catholic Church based donors (one from the USA and two from Europe) and their partners in Abuja Ecclesiastical Province, Nigeria. Relationship between and within various strata of the Church in Nigeria were also examined. Relationships were ‘patchy’ at all levels. One of the donors had a significant operational presence in Nigeria and this was regarded by some respondents as a parallel structure which seriously undermined local bodies. However, while problems existed there was a sense of inter-dependence arising from a shared sense of values and Catholic Social Teaching which allowed partners to work through their stresses and conflicts. It is the innate sustainability of the aid chain itself founded upon a set of shared values which provided the space and time for problems to be addressed.

Key words: Sustainable development, partnership, Catholic Church, Nigeria
Introduction

The aid chain linking donors and intended beneficiaries can be summarized as Figure 1. Boxes to the left of the diagram represent donors, organisations having resources and based largely in the rich North of the globe. Boxes in the middle are the ‘intermediaries’ or field agencies who implement aid programmes. Boxes to the right of the diagram represent the intended beneficiaries, and may be a relatively small number of households to a whole country or region. Aid flows from the left of Figure 1 to the right in the form of discrete packages of projects and programmes, and information flows in all directions. For example, the ‘intermediaries’ are representing the poor to the donors and thus weave imagery of the condition and needs of the poor they purport to serve (Bebbington, 2005). Donors may have no presence on the ground with which to challenge this vision and therefore have to make judgements about the needs they are presented with when making decisions over resource allocation. Donors, in turn, make representations to others such as tax payers. Thus representations of the poor may flow from right to left or even from the middle outwards. In addition, different parts of the aid chain may be embedded in quite diverse political, economic and cultural contexts, and each of the boxes of Figure 1 can comprise a diverse range of organisations, each with their own mandate, structures and processes, and may include ‘non-governmental organisations’ (NGOs) as well as government organisations (GOs) and even companies (Ashman, 2001a; Ite, 2007a, 2007b) and the relationships between them can change with time.
Partnership is increasingly espoused as the ideal form of relationship between all of the entities represented in Figure 1 in order to arrive at change which will make a difference and be sustainable and one definition is:

“Partnership is a dynamic relationship amongst diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labour based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner”

Brinkerhoff (2002a; page 21)

Some emphasise process in partnership and call for a “contract between equals” (Cox and Healey, 1998) founded on an intimate and sustained interaction with mutual respect for each others’ independence (Larkin, 1994; Lister, 2000), while others put the emphasis on sustained impact and the need for agreement over problems to be address and how best to handle them (Anderson, 2000; Davies 2002). Indeed the term ‘partnership’ has such an appeal that it is indiscriminately used to cover almost all relationships in Figure 1 (Hailey, 2000; Mohan, 2002; Green and Curtis, 2005). For example, a relationship may be a temporary one with the donor contracting a field agency to fulfil a set of terms and conditions which it specifies with very little (if any) input from the field agency. Is that a partnership, or if it isn’t then is it necessarily an inferior form of relationship in terms of facilitating sustainable development?
It is typically assumed that partnership makes the best use of what are inevitably scarce resources by utilising compatibility between agencies (Johnston and Lawrence, 1988; Mohan, 2002). Thus a donor with its range of field partners can achieve more with the same resource and field agencies can make their donors aware of what is required. There may be significant assumptions of mutual learning arising from a discursive flow of information and views. By way of contrast, contractual (client – contractor) relationships are seen as more limiting in terms of discourse and opportunity for mutual learning and influence (Postma, 1994; Lewis, 1998). All the contractor (field agency) is meant to do is deliver what is required by the client (the donor). But what are the guarantees that the latter does have a good understanding as to what is required and how best to achieve it? While the division of labour may be clear in such contractor-client relationships there is no mutually derived understanding of the problems and activities, and is thereby assumed that fulfilling the contract runs the risk of providing little sustainable gain for intended beneficiaries.

While assumptions behind the advantages of partnership are often espoused there is a surprising lack of published analyses which critically evaluates them (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998; Davies, 2002). Research on partnership tends to be case study based, illustrating examples of good practice and highlighting problems, without necessarily exploring broader issues (Bebbington, 2004). Attempts have been made to derive a more theoretical basis for analysing partnership, and in a recent review of the literature exploring the role of partnership in sustainable development Van Huijstee et al. (2007) suggest that there are two major perspectives in the partnership literature: institutional
and actor. The first of these explores partnership as a set of arrangements between institutions (the boxes of Figure 1) while the second is more focused on ‘goal achievement’. Under the ‘institutional’ perspective a commonly used approach is to focus on power (Saidel, 1991; Postma, 1994; Atkinson, 1999; Lister, 2000). Power is not an unfamiliar topic for analysis within the broad development family (Fowler, 1998; Anderson, 2000; Mosse, 2001; Mohan 2002; Davies, 2002; Bebbington, 2005). Competition for limited resources is always intense (Smillie, 1995; Aldaba et al., 2000; Hailey, 2000), and it is inevitable that some agencies will be better able to lever resources than others (Moore and Stewart, 1998). Much the same can be said of donor relationships with government agencies in the North (Lewis, 1998; Wallace, 2003; Townsend and Townsend, 2004). Lister (2000) provides an analysis of power in partnership by applying Dahl’s (1957) pioneering framework which uses as an starting point an analysis of the nature and extent of resources using to bring about an influence as well as the specific means employed to exercise an influence. Another approach has been to analyse power through discourse (Atkinson, 1999). Examples of the latter can be found in analysis of multi-sectoral (e.g. private-public-voluntary) partnerships. Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) is founded on the theory that there is a dialectical relationship between the use of language and social change such that changes in one will be influenced by changes in the other (Hastings, 1998, 1999). Hence power can be analysed by exploring the evolution of changes in assumptions, values and practice amongst partners. An aid chain example is provided by Postma (1994) for a donor and its field agencies in Mali and Niger. However, one needs to be very careful when analysing discourse to explore
power given the pro-partnership rhetoric, whether sincere or not, that one is likely to encounter from all partners for different reasons (Hastings, 1999).

A second approach to analysing ‘institutional’ partnership is founded on ‘interdependence theory’ (Rusbult and Van Lange, 2003). Here it is assumed that partnership has to be based on a long-term interaction with a level of investment from all involved. This goes beyond an analysis of power differentials by exploring the ways in which partners influence each other (Rusbult and Buunk, 1993). After all, donors need good field agencies as much as field agencies need donors. Clearly they are inter-dependent, but how is this reflected? Bantham et al. (2003) posit what they refer to as mindset and skillset enablers and tracking these is the basis for their analysis of partnership. Mindset refers to an awareness of tensions and conflicts in relationships and a willingness to address them, while skillset refers to the communication behaviours that facilitate the management of tensions. Skills such as ‘non-defensive listening’, ‘active listening’, ‘self-disclosure’ and ‘editing’ can be included here. Indeed some suggest “listening is at the cornerstone of effective partnership” (Ndiaye and Hammock, 1991; cited in Postma, 1994; page 454). After all, partnership does not necessarily imply a lack of conflict (Poncelet, 2001), but a willingness to manage tensions has to follow from an awareness of such tensions coupled with a desire to do something about them.

Within the ‘actor’ perspective of Van Huijstee et al. (2007) Brinkerhoff (2002a, 2002b) provides a more ‘goal achievement’ analysis of partnership. This follows from a reasonable assumption that partnership is of little use unless it does enhance the
achievement of sustainable development. Thus the emphasis is upon looking for features which should be ‘better’ compared to more contractual (client – contractor) relationships. The advantage of this approach is that it is more grounded in practical achievement of partnership and one can easily set measurable indicators to gauge attainment. The approach has elements in common with the Arnstein (1969) ‘ladder of participation’ (Figure 2) when set out as a matrix with ‘identity’ and ‘mutuality’ as the scales. In this matrix ‘contracting’ is equated with what Arnstein refers to as ‘informing’; one person/organisation tells the other what to do. However the indicators may say little about the driving forces at play in relationships. Indeed much of the work in organisational theory to date has been focussed far more on the identification of variation rather than explaining it (Greenwood and Empson, 2003). Thus it can be descriptive (what is happening in the relationship?) rather than analytical (why is it happening?).

All of these approaches to analysing partnership have elements in common and it is perhaps no surprise that there are overlaps between them and they can be combined. Figure 3 employs the more ‘actor’ approach characterised by Brinkerhoff as a skeleton and superimposed upon this is a theoretical overlay of power and inter-dependence for analysis of institutional relationships.
Faith-based partnerships

An especially interesting and important dimension of Figure 1 is the role played by religious-based groups; Christian, Islamic and others (Clarke 2007). These are unusual in the sense that members of a faith-based aid chain can be assumed to share a set of moral beliefs and standards which should bind them together in a longer-term relationship which potentially should be close to an ideal basis for partnership. The Catholic Church aid chain is an example, with organisations based in the North charged with accessing and distributing resources to their partner organisations (also mostly Catholic) in the South. The Catholic Church is universal in nature and its theology has derived a global doctrine of Catholic Social Teaching (CST; Curran, 2002) which is based upon principles of:

- Sanctity of human life and dignity of the person
- Family, community, and participation
- Rights and responsibilities
- Preferential Option for the poor and vulnerable
- Dignity of work and the rights of workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God’s creation

Even from a perusal of these headings it is clear that underlying concepts of sustainable development are deeply embedded throughout CST.
As well as the presence of a common doctrine faith-based organisations such as the Catholic Church also tend to have a common organisational structure. The Catholic Church in particular is very hierarchical in nature, and its donor agencies in the north are embedded within this structure in the same way as the southern field agencies. As a result each part of the chain knows the operational context within which the other parts exist; there is simply no excuse for unfamiliarity. Even so, while the structures may be the same they are obviously embedded in differing national historical, cultural and economic contexts. Given this influence it is not unreasonable to assume that different Catholic Church-based donors may well have different modus operandi as to how they interact with their southern partners.

The broad objective of the research reported in this paper was to explore how the various approaches to analysing partnership (power, inter-dependence, function) could be applied to the Catholic Church aid chain, and what this says about the ability of that chain to help achieve sustainable development.
METHODS

Site selection

The Catholic Church development chain employed in the research comprises the dioceses of Abuja Ecclesiastical Province (AEP), Nigeria. Nigeria has one of the largest populations in Africa, currently assumed to be 140 million people, and it is assumed that about 30% of the population is Christian, and roughly half this Catholic. The Catholic Church in Nigeria is highly hierarchical (Figure 4). There are nine Ecclesiastical Provinces, each led by an Arch Bishop and in one instance by a Cardinal, divided into 52 dioceses, each headed by a Bishop. AEP is located in the centre of the country in Abuja; the Federal capital of Nigeria. AEP comprises six diocese; Abuja, Lafia, Lokoja, Makurdi, Idah and Otukpo (Figure 5). Each diocese has two main development personnel:

1. Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), headed by a JDPC Coordinator
2. Health Coordinator.

The JDPC Coordinator is responsible for the broad development remit of the diocese, such as peace building, infrastructure (bridges, roads, water supply), agriculture and other priorities. The Heath Coordinator is in charge of the hospitals and clinics, as well as outreach programmes. Each diocese also has a HIV/AIDS coordinator reporting to the
Health Coordinator, reflecting the increasing problem of AIDS in Nigeria, and some have a Primary Health Care Coordinator.

Each Province has a development office and is mandated to help its constituent diocese with cross-cutting programmes, sourcing funds from donors etc. In addition to the Province there is a Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), with offices in Abuja and Lagos (the commercial capital of the country), which acts as the administrative centre for the Catholic Church in Nigeria. CSN works directly with the diocese and province and has various functions, including representation of the Church both inside and outside of Nigeria. The country also has what are referred to as ‘inter-provincial’ programmes. This is a looser and more time-bound arrangement between a group of Provinces focused on a specific issue of common interest. AEP is a member of one such programme tasked with enhancing hospital facilities. All of these church-based institutions (diocese, provinces, CSN, inter-province) seek funds from the same Catholic-based donors (and secular ones) for programmes and projects.

The research focused on three of the major Catholic Church-based donors of the north. In order to maintain anonymity they will be referred to as agencies A, B and C. Agencies A and B are based in Europe while C is based in North America. All three ‘sister’ agencies share the Catholic Social Teaching ethos, and obtain part of their funding from Church collections in their country of origin. They also obtain funds from their respective government aid agencies. Naturally they are all well aware of the others, including personnel, structures, preferred mode of operation and priorities, but they are quite
different in the ways in which they function in Nigeria. The ‘youngest’ in the sense that it has only recently (1999) set up an operation in Nigeria is agency C. C has a headquarters in Abuja with both Nigerian and expatriate staff (35 in total), and funds a range of programmes with an especial focus on HIV/AIDS (with money from USAID) and conflict resolution (peace building). Agency A also has a permanent presence in Nigeria but it is relatively small – just one officer (a Nigerian) working out of Jos – but is set to grow in the near future. Like C they have tended to work directly with diocese but are now changing to a mode similar to B by working more through the Church structures and playing the role of a facilitator. Unlike Donors A and C, Donor B has no direct presence in Nigeria and instead tends to work by supporting and encouraging existing structures. For example, Donor B supports the inter-provincial health care programme of which AEP is a part. Donor B also pays the salaries of some AEP and CSN staff.

AEP was selected for a number of reasons:

1. AEP has relationships with all three donors.

2. AEP diocese vary in history, size (physical), composition, Catholic population (as a proportion of the total), location and other characteristics which could well have a bearing on their partnership with donors.

3. AEP encompasses Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria, and as many international aid agencies (like C) have their headquarters in Abuja this should provide an
advantage to AEP. The same could be said of potential links with Federal Government Ministries and agencies, many of which are also headquartered in Abuja.

Survey

The Bishop, Justice Development and Peace and Health Coordinator of each of the six dioceses were interviewed (Table 1). In some cases it was possible to also interview the HIV/AIDS and Primary Heath Care Coordinators. The key actors/leaders in charge at AEP, CSN and also the Inter-Provincial levels were also interviewed. For the Catholic-based donors the personnel charged with coordinating the allocation of grants to Nigeria were interviewed. In some cases more senior people within the donor organization were interviewed in order to achieve a better feel of historical trends in the relationship.

Interviews were semi-structured in nature and recorded for transcription. Interviews typically took 2 hours or so, and once transcribed the information was coded and classified under a number of themes which had emerged. However, while the interviews were semi-structured four questions were included that required a numerical ranking on the part of the respondents. Respondents were asked to provide a ‘score’ for each of the three donors from 0 (worst) to 10 (best). The questions and interpretation of the score are as follows:
1. How are your relations with the donors? Bad Excellent
2. Do you see the relationship with the Catholic-based donors as a partnership? Definitely Not
3. Do you think that the donors see you as an equal? Definitely Not
4. How important are inter-personal relationships when dealing with Catholic-based donors? Not at all Very much so
5. How do you think the Catholic-based donors consider the importance of participation? Not important Very important

While quantitative scoring of opinion is, of course, a crude device it was intended as a means of triangulating with answers already provided to some questions as well as to provide the basis for further discussion. As it transpired the process worked well and the scores did match the general thrust of comments made earlier in the interviews.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analysed to look for commonalities in response and differences in perspective. Analysis of the scores was via the Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test of medians (Kruskal and Wallis, 1952). The Kruskal-Wallis test assumes
that $k$ samples are random and independent and that the data (in this case the scores given to each donor) can be ranked.

$$H = \frac{12}{N \times (N + 1)} \times \left( \sum_{i} \frac{R_i^2}{n_i} \right) - 3(N + 1)$$

Where

$k =$ number of samples (each labeled with $i$) being compared in the test

$n_i =$ number of observations in sample $I$ (sample sizes do not have to be equal)

$n =$ sum of all sample sizes ($= n_1 + n_2 + \ldots \ldots + n_k$)

$R_i =$ rank sum of sample $i$. The rank of each observation is computed according to its relative magnitude in the totality of data for the $k$ samples. An adjustment is made for tied ranks (ties are each given the average of their ranks).

The H statistic approximates a Chi-square distribution with degrees of freedom given by $k - 1$, and median separation is via the calculation of $z$-values (comparison of sample median to overall median).
Results

While there is some variation in the meaning of partnership the sentiments expressed are broadly similar amongst almost all the interviewees (field partner and donors). The following is a typical statement:

“Well I think I should say partnership is, I should say it’s a collaborative effort by the end users trying to work together and trying to understand one another and trying to see how you could work together for a particular goal.”

A11 (Makurdi Diocese)

The word ‘collaborate’ emerged many times, but there were also numerous mentions of ‘trust’, ‘respect’, ‘sensitivity’, ‘mutual’, ‘understanding etc. all of which painted a picture that those involved wanted to be seen as equals. But was this happening in practice?

The median scores given by the respondents in Nigeria to the five questions and for the three donors to feature in the survey are provided in Figure 6. Agency B comes out the ‘best’ (higher median score) while C tends to come out the worst (lower median score), with A closer to ‘C’ than ‘B’. The result for one of the questions (relations with donors) is statistically significant at 0.1 while another (partnership) is significant at 0.05. The results for the other two questions (equality and inter-personal relationship) are not significant at 0.1. Thus there is a ‘patchiness’ in terms of how the three donors are
perceived in Nigeria; they are not seen as the same and the donor having the most substantial physical presence in Nigeria was scored the lowest.

Figure 7 presents the same score data for the donors but rearranged in terms of male and female respondents in Nigeria. Men (mostly priests) and women (mostly religious sisters) did not differ statistically in terms of the scores provided to the four questions, but it is noteworthy that the median scores given by male respondents was higher than that given by females.

The main difference in perception was related more to the position of the individual in the Church hierarchy. Figure 8 presents the median scores given by the respondents grouped into two categories:

- diocesan personnel (JDPC, Health and HIV/AIDS coordinators and secretaries)
- others (personnel in Provincial, Inter-Provincial and National structures)

Interestingly, personnel at the diocesan level were more positive (gave higher scores) in terms of their answers to the four questions than were those at provincial, inter-provincial and national levels. This ‘scale effect’ was particularly apparent with regard to the questions to do with partnership and equality (P < 0.05), but was also true for the question regarding the view of donors towards stakeholder participation (P < 0.01). It would appear that personnel at administrative scales levels above the diocese are more likely to be critical of the ways in which the donors engage with the Church in Nigeria,
The final test applied to the score data involved grouping the AEP diocesan-based personnel into their diocese. For this comparison the scores given to three of the questions (questions 1 to 3) have been aggregated within each diocese. The median scores are shown in Figure 9. The value of H (18.54) is significant at P < 0.01. It would appear that there are statistically significant differences between the scores provided by the six dioceses. The sample size is too small to break the data down into individual questions, but taken as a whole it would appear that the most positive views are held by personnel in Abuja and Lokoja diocese, while the most negative views across all three questions are held in Idah diocese.

**Discussion**

While only the score data from the interviews have been presented in this paper it is clear that there is patchiness with regard to how the three donors are perceived by the respondents in Nigeria. But what has lead to this and what does it say about impact upon partnership and the facilitation of sustainable development in Nigeria?

Donor B is for most respondents the partner *par excellence*, and relationships with this donor are regarded by AEP personnel as based on trust and support of in-country structures. Donor B has no permanent presence in Nigeria but works solely through existing institutions. For example, B helps fund the inter-provincial health care
Programme and supports Nigerian staff based at the CSN and in the Province. By way of contrast donor C which has structures and personnel based in Abuja is seen more negatively. First there is the notion that C works through its own structures directly with the diocese, and to the respondents at ‘higher’ levels in the Church hierarchy this appears to bypass well-established and accepted structures of the Church.

“We are now telling [C] that we don’t want any agency to come in and set up parallel structures. And [C] say that this is how they function and we say we don’t want you to function this way. If you are a Catholic Church agency recognise that there is a Church in Nigeria and that the Church in Nigeria has structures. If the structures are not capable then empower those structures, but don’t set up a parallel structure”

A17 (representative from the CSN)

Secondly there is a perception that C acts as a middle man between the Nigerian Church and key bilateral donors such as USAID.

“So once we saw that happening and then [C] now making itself a contractor for us so we are not able to go to USAID now to ask for funding for something they [C] say no we are the ones to go in your name. So [CRS] now goes in the name of the Catholic Church in Nigeria........ We are not supposed to be a sub-contractor of [C]”
A17 (representative from the CSN)

Donor C is a relative newcomer to Nigeria having been expelled from the country at the time of the Civil War (1968 to 1970). It was invited back by the Nigerian Bishops in 1999. Some AEP diocese (e.g. Makurdi) are very positive about the work of C while others (particularly at the provincial and national levels) see its *modus operandi* as not representing true partnership as it parallels Church structures in Nigeria rather than complimenting and enhancing them. Indeed C was seen by some respondents as working against sustainability by inhibiting the development of structures in Nigeria. These findings were somewhat unexpected as it would naturally be assumed that having a physical presence in a country, such as that held by donor C and to a growing extent A, would be beneficial. It provides an opportunity for direct interaction with the donor on a regular basis. Church staff can easily visit the offices of C in Abuja and A in Jos, and the donor staff spend much time in the field visiting their partners. Staff from donor B do travel to Nigeria on a regular (e.g. yearly) basis and take the opportunity to visit their partners in the field but such visits are inevitably hectic and contact at each diocese may only be for a day or two (at most). It would appear that respect for local structures in Nigeria is the critical factor in assessment of partnership rather than what is achieved in the field. Success can be diluted by a perception that the local hierarchy is being circumvented, and it is clear that while all organizations belong to the same Church there is a strong sense that sustainability has to be founded on the local.
With regard to differences in scoring between males and female respondents this reflects tensions at the level of the diocese. Women tended to occupy the positions of Health and HIV/AIDS Coordinator (but not always – Idah, Otukpo, Makurdi and Lokoja have priests as Health Coordinators) while a lay man occupied the post of JDPC Coordinator in Abuja. This meant that every where there was a female Health Coordinator there nearly always was a male JDPC Coordinator (usually, but not always, a priest). Similarly where there was a female HIV/AIDS Coordinator (Idah and Makurdi) the Health Coordinator was male.

“The other tension is surrounding the position of, let’s say, professional people in the positions of JDPC Coordinator and Health Coordinator. They’ve tried so hard and insisted and suggested to the Bishops to appoint people who are capable, but they [the Bishops] still think that it’s better to have their Priests. Because first it’s about money, secondly the Priests themselves insist that when money comes through the diocese it has to be the Priests in control.“

A8 (Inter-Provincial Programme)

Bishops preferred to have priests in these roles of power and as these were the interface between the diocese and the donors then this was seen as a reflection of a perceived lower status within their diocese and a sense that donors are at the very least ignoring the issue.
For the differences in respondent perception between the diocese, the findings point to some deep issues of equity within the Church. The high score provided by respondents based in Abuja Diocese is not surprising given that this diocese is feted by the donors as a convenient show case for their work. Makurdi personnel also tend to have positive views as this diocese has also been an attractive location for donors to fund projects. A high proportion of the population in Makurdi diocese is Catholic, and this diocese has a long history of development work, especially in health care and education but also rural development. Success breeds success, and the Catholic-based donors regard Makurdi as a diocese that achieves results. As a result relationships appear to be good.

“I want to say with all sense of modesty that the integrated health programme in the diocese of Makurdi is the most organised and best structured health system you have in the country…… it was well put in place by the expatriates who started it all and it’s well structured. But the government of Benue State very often, they have their people come and have a look at what we’re doing and seeing how they can improve on their own system. “

A10 (Makurdi Diocese)

Although Lafia has been recently created, part of it came from Makurdi diocese. Thus it has some of the benefits of association with a successful diocese, but even so there were problems with levering funding from donors.
“Our diocese is supposed to be a young diocese, but I’m afraid to say young in the sense that it is four years now, and then I’m unable to meet up with people who have the right connections for anything to come to Lafia diocese. So it has been really very, very difficult……. No, nothing, nothing, nothing. Apart from this car, a single car as you can see, donated by [donor A], nothing again.”

A1 (Lafia Diocese)

The high scores given by Lokoja and Otukpo are for completely different reasons to that of Abuja and Makurdi. Ironically, both of these diocese receive little funding from the three donors and their experience of them is limited, but what contact the personnel have had with the donors (mostly donor B) has been positive. What was interesting here was the mention of so-called ‘black listing’ that these diocese in particular felt that they suffered from. While respondents were often unaware of the details, stories were relayed of money going missing in the past or used for a purpose which hadn’t been agreed with the donor. As a result the diocese could not access more funding from that donor.

By way of complete contrast the more negative views of Idah towards the donors are founded on long experience with all three donors (in the case of donors A and B this experience spans some 35 years). Opinion is deeply divided in Idah, with some ranking the donors highly while others are more inclined to score them (especially donor C) low. Issues of C tending to ‘dominate’ local structures were prominent in Idah and this is largely responsible for the low scores from Idah. The complaints largely revolve around a
perceived inflexibility of donor C in terms of conditions it sets within its HIV/AIDS programme.

These differences between diocese in ability to lever funding is perhaps understandable as money does tend to follow money, but the inequality also raises a challenge for the Church. While the Province can play a role there is also a strong sense of diocesan independence. Successful diocese wish to continue to reap the advantages they have developed from their track record.

“where we have the common projects that we cut across the six dioceses, it will be much more better through the provincial structure. But when we have a programme that is peculiar to us, it would be a waste of time for it to pass through the province, it’s better directly to us who are implementing it. But if it’s a common project that we cut across the six dioceses in the province, that the provincial structure becomes much more better. So I think we look at them from these two angles, the project or programme that are peculiar to a particular diocese should be channelled directly to the diocese and the diocese account directly what they have received. But the one that is of common interest, through the province.”

A5 (Makurdi Diocese)
Thus there is a sense of both competition as well as cooperation and the challenge for the Province and indeed the CSN is to somehow address the inequalities while at the same time making sure that successful diocese are not perceived to be penalized.

What do these insights say about partnership and the Church’s facilitation of sustainable development in Nigeria? An analysis of the system in terms of power, seen in the way in which control is exercised via policy, resources (Lister, 2000) or discourse (Hastings, 1996, 1998, 1999), certainly provides some novel insights. Criticisms of donor C were founded largely on a perception that it had undermined local structures and, in effect, had taken power away from the local. On the Nigerian side it was felt that discourse with donor C was limited, and it imposed terms and conditions on diocese, albeit at the behest of USAID. Donor A operates at more of a distance and does not have a physical presence in Nigeria and as a result was seen as supporting sustainability. But respondents, even the most critical, readily acknowledged the excellent work that donor C was doing in terms of HIV/AIDS, and an output orientated analysis (the ‘actor’ perspective of Van Huijstee et al., 2007) following the approach set out by Brinkerhoff (2002a, 2002b) would yield a much more positive picture of partnership between donor C and the diocese as indeed was witnessed by respondents at the diocesan level. Donor C does have a strong physical presence in Nigeria and that, along with its international track record of success, was largely responsible for levering the funds from USAID. Donor C has to compete with a range of other public and private agencies for government funding, and if successful it has to follow a set of conditions set out by USAID as to how the money is to be used. By way of contrast, donor A receives a block grant from its government aid agency and has
much control, over how that money is used. It is debateable whether AEP or CSN would be able to lever such funding from USAID by themselves without the involvement of Donor C. So there is clearly a trade-off. A need to support local structures has to be integrated with the comparative advantages that international donors have in leveraging funds. Given that all of the agencies in the analysis presented in this paper are Catholic Church-based this should not be an insurmountable issue. The will is certainly there. The following is an exchange between one of the authors and the head of donor C in Nigeria:

“What you need to understand is that [C] was here in 60s and 70s we supported bringing in food for the rebel populations during the Biafra war. So we were invited to leave the country...if you put it that way.....so during those days we were primarily focused in the southern part of the country. We didn’t return until 1999 after it became a democratic state....so we are relatively new. If you go to Ghana you will see a 40 year old programme. In Sierra Leone you will see a 40/41 year old programme, with a very long-standing understanding between the Bishops and Arch Bishops about what [C] is and how it functions and how we are going to relate to each other. Now we are back in Nigeria and we are new or young here and we are trying to define ourselves in this huge country and the Catholic Secretariat and the diocese are trying to define us as well. So we are learning. We are constantly learning.

Author: So it’s not a policy decision then to go directly to diocese?
No..no…it was a growing pain. The realisation…..and I am guessing because I wasn’t here during the planning stages…that when the US government expressed interest in care and support and was willing to provide money they probably had already pre-selected certain states that they wanted us to work in….it was a US government decision…and we subsequently got together with the Bishops who are in those states and said we wanted you as partners in this. Often times the best laid plans ....it's just trying to appease all the different stakeholders.”

This would suggest that mindset and skillset enablers for partnership are in place, and given that the Catholic Church aid chain is a long-lasting one there is much time for mutual learning to take place and changes to be introduced. Partnerships tend to be analysed over relatively short periods such as a few years (Lister, 2000), but the Catholic Church aid chain has the longevity with which to deal with such patchiness.

Perhaps ironically it has to be said that some of the more intractable problems do not revolve directly around the North-South partnership axis but instead are centred more around South-South relationships, albeit with the Northern donors also having a responsibility. Two such issues emerged from this research. Firstly with regard to the inequality between diocese of AEP in accessing resources there is a sense of intractability as donors target funds at those they deem best able to make use of them, and indeed donor A in particular also gives resources to non-Catholic agencies in the South if
it feels that they will achieve results. But is this really in tune with a Catholic Social Teaching that calls for inequalities to be addressed? While the Province and CSN are playing a role here the donors also have a responsibility to deliver good value, and this tension between accountability and partnership has been highlighted by others (see for example Ashman, 2001b). There has to be a compromise, but achieving it presents a challenge. Similarly there is the issue of gender inequality articulated by female respondents in particular. It is perceived by some that Bishops do seem to favour having priests in positions of power, whether they are qualified or experienced to hold those positions or not, and that will have an effect on the diocese-donor relationship.

Case studies of partnership are always open to the criticism that the findings provide site and time-specific insights which resist generalisation (Bebbington, 204). Thus there is a tension between having enough depth to identify the nuances within relationships that can be so important while at the same time teasing out findings that have wider relevance. One finding that from this work that does provide a salient lesson is that one cannot expect to facilitate partnership in aid chains through a mere presence in a country. While it may have a logic given that a presence should help with a regular contact between donor and recipients it can in fact have the opposite effect if ‘local’ institutions feel that it reflects a lack of trust. In the example discussed here the problem with the presence of donor C was no so much at the level of the diocese but at higher-level coordination; the CSN and Provincial offices. These are important structures within a hierarchical institution like the Catholic Church, and there is an expectation that they should be respected. Thus a perception of parallel structures circumventing the local provided a
focal point for tension to develop and hardly provided a foundation for sustainable development. Also, of course, it should be noted that Nigeria is not unique in this regard and each country has a similar hierarchy. Can similar problems be expected elsewhere? It is interesting to note that donor C respondents stressed the uniqueness of their problems in Nigeria. As a senior member of donor C puts it:

*It [the relationship with Nigeria] really is our most troublesome one and, like I said, we worked in a hundred countries around the world and this is probably the most troublesome one......... Nigeria does have a history of accountability problems that we all know about.*

The donor perceived its problems in Nigeria as special and not of wider concern, but this view that Nigeria is the “most troublesome” in terms of relationships is contradicted by a senior member of the CSN:

*But interestingly enough, I just finished last week a meeting of Secretaries General of all of Africa, which I also had in Abuja. Interestingly enough this is the opinion of every Secretary in Africa. They are frustrated about the way donor C operates...... We want to be helped to stand on our feet, because exactly the same network, if tomorrow they are, some government comes and chases them out, then all the projects they're working on collapse, the programmes collapse. Whereas if you learn to work through us, no matter how weak we are, now we may not do it as perfectly as you would do it, but if*
you learn to work through us, if any day you have to go out then the programmes continue...... But if you are doing it yourself, then the day you leave, so that's not a good model of development.

Respondent A19 (CSN)

In the view of A19 the relationship with donor C is hardly the basis for sustainable development and while Nigeria might be the most vocal critic of the in-country presence policy of donor C the feeling was much wider in Africa even if not expressed. Yet the ‘in country’ presence of donor C was far more appreciated by the diocese. At that scale the people involved welcomed the ability to be able to approach donor C directly.

So what of field partners that are not so embedded within such national coordinating structures? Many NGOs, both faith based and secular, are small (perhaps run by just one person) and operate at small spatial scales without any national hierarchy for coordination and thus an in-country presence of a major donor is not a source of friction and on the contrary will presumably be highly welcome given the ready accessibility. But the Catholic donors are in Nigeria to show solidarity with the Catholics of that country, even if they also work with other faiths and secular groups to address poverty wherever it is found. The head of donor C in Nigeria is regarded by that organisation as an ambassador of the Bishops in the USA and is explicitly referred to in those terms rather than being just a manager. There is an innate longevity born of shared vision, but while the global nature of the Catholic Church provides many advantages there are still national identities
which have to be negotiated, both from the perspective of the donor and field agency, and there is potential for conflict. This is not an insurmountable problem and the issues of a universal Church having to work within nation-states has existed as long as the Church has. What is required is an awareness of these issues and a willingness to address them; the mindset and skillset enablers of Bantham et al. (2003). These are the barriers to successful partnership, but the Catholic Church-based chain has longevity and a deep desire to address problems in relationships between its components. There is a sense of inter-dependency and a ‘snapshot’ analysis based solely on power would be misleading as there is clearly a desire from all concerned to work through problems. Given its strong sense of partnership this should provide a solid basis for enhancing sustainable development. Following this research there have been intensive discussions between the CSN and provincial officers and personnel of donor C, and many of the issues have been resolved or are being addressed. If nothing else there has been better understanding as to why donor C works the way it does when compared to donor B, and mistakes have been rectified. An underlying CST and common awareness of structures and processes help enormously, but difficulties can still occur. Perhaps of greatest concern are causes of the ‘patchiness’ that are more deep-rooted, sensitive and yet still acknowledged; such as inequality between diocese and indeed the gender issue. There is clearly much about ‘partnership’ that the Church still needs to address.
Conclusion

Partnership has become the mantra for relationships between groups that seek to work together for a common cause, and with good reason. Partnership implies a respect for the position of all and a desire to avoid a situation where one group dominates another. It also implies a form of relationship which is not just about a ‘better’ relationship for the sake of it but also which is better able to help achieve sustainable development. But given the inevitable inequalities between donors that have the resources and field partners that don’t it can indeed be hard to put this ideal into practice. Even in the Catholic Church which has a global structure and a shared CST which should facilitate partnership there are clearly difficulties emerging from the needs for accountability and the provision of assurances to those providing resource while at the same time preserving identity and independence of local groups. This research has shown that given enough time and will these dual demands can be negotiated within an aid chain to the satisfaction of all. The Catholic Church certainly does have longevity even if the will can be weak at times, and its aid chain is sustainable because those involved fundamentally believe it has to be so. Mutual respect is the foundation for this sustainability, whether within the Catholic Church or in other faith-based and secular aid chains.
Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the Arch-Bishop of Abuja Ecclesiastical Province, the Rt. Rev. John Onaiyekan, the Coordinator (JDPC and Health) and other Church personnel they met and interviewed in Nigeria. Their frankness and openness were much appreciated. The authors would also like to thank the anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions for the improvement of this paper.

References


Table 1. AEP respondents included in the survey.

Table provides the position of the respondent within their respective diocese and their code (for anonymity).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diocese</th>
<th>Bishop</th>
<th>JDPC Coordinator</th>
<th>Health Coordinator</th>
<th>HIV/AIDS Coordinator</th>
<th>Health Secretary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuja</td>
<td>A14</td>
<td>A5</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafia</td>
<td>A23</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>A6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makurdi</td>
<td>A9</td>
<td>A11</td>
<td>A10</td>
<td>A20</td>
<td>A4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otukpo</td>
<td>A17</td>
<td>A18</td>
<td>A15/A16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idah</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A7</td>
<td>A21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lokoja</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A12(^4)</td>
<td>A13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

1 Idah Bishop unwell at time of survey
2 Lokoja Bishop deceased at time of survey
3 Idah JDPC Coordinator could not be interviewed as this post had recently been vacated by one of the authors and her replacement had not yet been selected.
4 Lokoja JDPC Coordinator unwell as time of survey so his assistant was interviewed instead.
All respondents are Nigerian

Four of the JDPC Coordinators interviewed are priests, and the Deputy Coordinator (Lokoja) is a male lay person.

Two of the Health Coordinators are female (religious sisters; A3 and A6) while four are male (priests; A10, A15/A16, A7 and A13).

A15 and A16 refer to the outgoing and incoming Health Coordinators for Otukpo Diocese

Both HIV/AIDS coordinators are female (religious sisters)

The only Health Secretary interviewed is male (lay person)
Figure 1. Simplified version of the aid chain connecting ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ peoples

Flow of resources

Flow of information (advice, expertise, ‘representation’)
Figure 2. Models of relationships between citizens and those with power and between organisations.

(a) Between organisations (after Brinkerhoff, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mutuality (mutual dependence)</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracting</td>
<td>one organisation contracts another</td>
<td>organisations work together to meet their goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>one organisation becomes to all intents and purposes an extension of the other</td>
<td>one organisation becomes absorbed or co-opted into the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Between citizens and those with power (based on Arnstein, 1969)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mutuality (mutual dependence)</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informing</td>
<td>citizens informed about decisions which have been taken by external agents.</td>
<td>citizens involved in compromise decisions between a range of partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informing/consultation/placation</td>
<td>degrees of tokenism with citizens dependent on power holders for action</td>
<td>Manipulation/therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manipulation/therapy</strong></td>
<td>non-participation with power-holders dictating to or ‘educating’ citizens almost as extensions of themselves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Faith-based partnership and sustainable development

Figure 3. Partnerships – an analytical framework combining the approaches of Brinkerhoff (2002), Bantham et al. (2003), Lister (2000) and Hastings (1999).

- Equality in decision making
- Resource exchange
- Reciprocal accountability
- Transparency
- Partner representation and participation in partnership activities
- determining organization partner identities
- organization identity within the partnership
- Value-added
- Partners meet own objectives
- Partnership identity

- Mindset and skillset enablers (Bantham et al., 2003)
- Interdependence – investment – commitment

- Presence of pre-requisites and success factors
  - perceptions of partners tolerance for sharing power
  - partners willingness to adapt to meet partnership needs
  - existence of partnership champions
  - trust
  - confidence
  - senior management support
  - ability to meet performance expectations
  - partner compatibility

- Partner performance
  - Partners and partner roles enacted as prescribed or adapted for strategic reasons
  - Partner assessment and satisfaction with their partner’s performance

- Partners in network
  - Donor(s) – field agency(ies)
Faith-based partnership and sustainable development

Figure 4. Catholic Church hierarchy and the variation on the theme in Nigeria.

Structures in bold are those devoted, at least in part, to development issues in Nigeria.
Faith-based partnership and sustainable development

Figure 5. Abuja Ecclesiastical Province, Nigeria.
Faith-based partnership and sustainable development

Figure 6. Perspective of Church development personnel in Nigeria on three of the Catholic-based donors.

How are your relations with the donors?

Do you think that the donors see you as an equal?

How do you think the Catholic-based donors consider the importance of participation?

Do you see the relationship with the Catholic-based donors as a partnership?

How important are interpersonal relationships when dealing with Catholic-based donors?
Faith-based partnership and sustainable development

Figure 7. Perspective of male and female Church development personnel in Nigeria on three of the Catholic-based donors.

How are your relations with the donors?

Do you see the relationship with the Catholic-based donors as a partnership?

Do you think that the donors see you as an equal?

How important are interpersonal relationships when dealing with Catholic-based donors?

How do you think the Catholic-based donors consider the importance of participation?
Faith-based partnership and sustainable development

Figure 8. Perspective of diocesan and other Church development personnel in Nigeria on three of the Catholic-based donors.

How are your relations with the donors?

Do you see the relationship with the Catholic-based donors as a partnership?

How important are inter-personal relationships when dealing with Catholic-based donors?

How are your relations with the donors?

Do you see the relationship with the Catholic-based donors as a partnership?

How important are inter-personal relationships when dealing with Catholic-based donors?

How do you think the Catholic-based donors consider the importance of participation?

Do you think that the donors see you as an equal?
Faith-based partnership and sustainable development

Figure 9. Perspectives of diocesan personnel towards three of the Catholic-based donors (A, B, C).

Medians are based on combined scores for questions 1, 2 and 3.