

## **Effectiveness key in triple PPPs to scale up water and food supplies in developing areas**

**In tripartite partnerships of governmental agencies, NGOs and business partners make extraordinary efforts to deliver new, long-lasting, food security and water services for low-income communities. A recent symposium deepened the available knowledge on large-scale, model based public-private partnership (PPP) initiatives. Participants agreed that PPPs do bring in effectiveness, efficiency and equity and can provide the agility that is required in dynamically changing circumstances.**

Partners in PPPs can accomplish more in development projects than working on their own. Their presumed complementary skills help to implement lasting services for clean drinking water, decent sanitation and food security for poor communities. In practise, though, it proves challenging for partners to learn to speak each other's language and to keep their focus on the common goal. These were amongst the main findings at a symposium organised by RVO (Netherlands Enterprise Agency) on February 16 in The Hague, the Netherlands. Participants at the symposium discussed the achievements by the many ongoing PPP-projects of the Sustainable Water Fund (FDW), the Ghana WASH Window (GWW) and the Facility for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Food Security (FDOV) programmes.

### **Getting the private sector involved**

In her opening speech Karin Roelofs, head of the Water Team at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, underpinned the importance of involving the private sector in development programmes and the global efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). "The overall goal is to achieve system change in developing countries and PPPs can play an important role in that strategy. Such partnerships recognize that the private sector can contribute to economic development and employment, but can also act as a knowledge partner", Roelofs said. Another important reason to involve the private sector is the financing of SGD-goals. "The 5 to 7 trillion US dollars that are needed to achieve the SDGs, cannot be raised from the public sector alone. We must include the private sector."

PPPs are a way for government agencies, business and NGO's to cooperate on specific issues such as lasting WASH services and increased food production. "It is unavoidable that there will be hard lessons to be learned. About managing short term profit objectives and long term local needs and demands is key", Roelofs added.

### **Different objectives**

At the symposium several PPP projects were presented and speakers were asked to reflect on their 10 years of working in FDOV, FDW and GWW programmes. It showed that PPPs can have different objectives. It can either be commercial, or societal. Aart van den Beukel, managing director at Safisana shared that his company is now starting its fifth facility in Ghana to turn faecal sludge from pit latrines into saleable biogas and compost. Through PPP participations his company has been able to utilize subsidies to cover the investments costs (CAPEX) so the income from the sales could be used to cover the operational costs (OPEX). This allowed Safisana to gradually expand and reach enough scale to break even.

Jeroen Jurriens of Wetlands International presented the EcoShape PPP-project executed along the coast of Java, Indonesia. This PPP aims to restore the coastline, bring back mangrove forest for flood protection and, at the same time, provide new livelihood opportunities to fish farmers. The PPP involved many stakeholders. According to Jurriens it had been the common 'dream' that kept the actors together and made them proud of their collective achievement. "The project is closed now and we managed to cover all costs. Now the Indonesian government is replicating our approach in several other coastal areas".

Stuart Morris of East West Seed Knowledge Transfer told about the need by small hold vegetable farmers for better materials, such as seeds, better skills to grow crops but also entrepreneurial skills to set up a sustainable business. His foundation is involved in a PPP project in Nigeria to increase farmer's profitability and make them more responsive to changing market demands. "Training on good agricultural practises is important to increase their yields", Morris said, "but we also need a systemic change. By scaling up their production we can bring more value to the whole food supply chain. Youth and women are our game changers. More value enhances the food security, improves nutrition and brings economic growth", he added.

### **Best of both worlds**

John Cameron, emeritus associate professor at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of Erasmus University Rotterdam, told about his findings on five of the 42 public-private partnerships that are part of the FDW programme. One of the aims of the programme is the scaling up of paid WASH-services for vulnerable communities. A challenging mission as it also indirectly aims to improve health conditions and reduce poverty at the same time. Improved WASH-service brings better health and economic development thus allowing poor communities to start paying for these services.

According to Cameron the five PPPs in Latin America (1) and in Africa (4) he studied, did show added value. "Because of its complexity, it was very difficult to access the achievements of the PPPs. However, we concluded there had been added value. But it was impossible to establish the exact rate of return." For that the researchers would have had for instance to put a price on the women's time involved in water services. According to Cameron the circumstances made it impossible to establish real market prices for an economic assessment.

### **Learning processes**

Cameron emphasized the need see PPP-partnerships as a process, rather than a project with a narrowly defined goal. "It seems to be the dream of a PPP to achieve effectiveness, efficiency and equity all simultaneously. Through some magical symbioses. In practise it takes time for the partners to settle and adjust to each other. PPPs are complicated and require continuing learning. There should be more focus on the creation of relationships, instead of engineered outcomes", he advised. He learned from the PPPs he studied that partners are often labelled as regulators, profit seekers and fund seekers. "We should pursue on the motivations of the partners, rather than on these labels."

### **Risk assessment**

Cameron also address the importance of risk assessment. "It is the elephant in the room. Nobody wants to talk about risks. Only about certainties", he had learned from the PPPs he studied. "One cannot go to a government agency and confront them with their internal affairs.

If you say that, you are out of the country. I can appreciate this delicacy”, he said. However, as a result most of the risk analyses tend to be about engineered risks. “That addresses only questions like whether a technology is appropriate for this situation. But we got this whole area of relational risks, which we find very difficult to talk about. We identified 44 different types of risks of which half are relational”, Cameron remarked.

For more information, please see the conference report (including the highlights and lessons learned) [here](#).