Overview

This Ethics Lunch & Learn is the first of a new four-part series on the core values of the Task Force.

In this session, we discussed the evolving nature of partnerships and our responsibility to respond to shifting needs and expectations. Colleagues from several Task Force programs shared their experiences, perspectives, and questions while exploring various themes including equity, sustainability, capacity exchange, shared commitments, and decolonization.

Thank you to the TFGH President and CEO, Patrick O’Carroll, for introducing the series and opening this session on Evolving Partnerships. You can view the recording, starting after his remarks, here.

Key Features of Strong Partnerships

Girja Sankar, Head of NTDs at CBM International and Chair of the Neglected Tropical Diseases NGO Network (NNN), opened the webinar with a reflection on the five key features of strong partnerships: communication, transparency, governance, representation, and inclusion.

She shared several questions she often explores within partnerships working to eliminate neglected tropical diseases (NTDs):

- Are we enablers of change or active participants? Are those mutually exclusive or inclusive?
- When do we need to lean out?
- How do we engage in the act of decolonization without monetizing it?

She left participants with the following to reflect upon: “Transparency and inclusion in global health partnerships require that some of us consider excluding ourselves.”
Exemplifying logistical applications, Lori Warrens shared how MSA has worked to formalize, execute, and maintain diverse collaborations through partner agreements. Shared best in her words she said, “We were working with organizations that had terrific, longstanding collaborations and partnerships, but we felt there were not enough checks and balances in place to support the recipients as much as possible.

“What we’ve found is that a very informal network of hundreds of people did have an interest in becoming more formalized. We now have donors who are well-educated and evangelists for the concept of what a quality donation looks like. They are out there searching to find products that fit the need that’s out there. For large organizations that are used to bureaucracy, a formal agreement has made their work easier. Recipients also benefit from more guidelines to ensure that they are receiving what they want to receive.”

Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination

Emphasizing human relationships, John Ward shared guiding principles for partnership development that he has learned from his experiences at both the CDC and the Task Force:
- Being mission-oriented gets you to a convening place where others have a shared interest.
- Recognize and value what each partner brings to the table.
- Be a problem-solver. Convey a sense of optimism while being realistic about the problems at hand.
- Demonstrate being credible and trustworthy. Deliver candor in a way that people respect. Deliver what is promised.
- Be a convening force. If you can bring people together, then you’re helping all of us do better.
- Be a good communicator. People want connection, and different partners want different levels of connection.
- Be passionate about the mission and the work. Passion is infectious.

He also shared an excerpt from All I Really Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten, a book by Robert Fulghum. The selection emphasized equity and responsibility.
Pat Lammie reflected on the changes he has observed in the field of NTD research within partnerships: “We are moving away from the student-teacher relationship to the peer relationship. Through the co-creation process, there’s an opportunity to ensure country perspectives are respected.”

Katie Gass offered a recent example from partners working to control and eliminate schistosomiasis. NTD-SC wanted to bring together all groups already working to address schistosomiasis. “Traditionally, we would turn to countries where we already had strong relationships, and that didn’t seem right anymore,” she said. “So we made it an open opportunity.”

When making funding decisions, they ensured they had representation from the region. Because decisions would impact all country programs, she said, “We needed to present the data and then leave the room so that the ministries of health and African experts of schistosomiasis could decide what the data told them.”

Key Takeaways

- People responsible for delivering programs should also be the ones responsible for making decisions.

- Listening, mutual respect, and allowing for equal voices require practice and humility.

- Formalizing a partnership through agreements with clear expectations can benefit donors and recipients alike.

- Focus on relational connection with partners first; from that space of trust, their expertise will naturally flow to guide the process.
Questions for Further Discussion

How do we determine when the time is ripe to develop a partnership?

What are we doing to build systems and processes in such a way that even when we, in the global north, are not there, the elimination agenda is achieved?

How do we include the communities that are the ultimate beneficiaries of the services offered by the partnerships?

What constitutes a ‘good’ partnership and an equitable partnership?

What common challenges or successes have you experienced in nurturing such partnerships?

In what ways have partners encouraged programs to adapt how they engage with collaborators?

How have partnerships evolved through the COVID-19 pandemic and through recent calls for decolonization and localization?

How do the terms, expectations, and responsibilities inherent in partnerships evolve?

How are partnerships formalized, executed, and maintained?

Is there a case for a ‘partnership agreement’ that is based not only on expectations but shared commitments and values? What should such an agreement look like?

Coming Soon

Guidance for Evolving Partnerships
FACE is now developing guidance to support programs when considering, building, and maintaining ethical and equitable partnerships.

Lunch & Learn Webinars in 2024
The next webinar in our four-part series on Task Force core values will explore consequential compassion, with webinars on global health equity & social justice, and stewardship, later in the year.