



# POINTS OF VIEW

Capturing Opinions from Practitioners Working Remotely

## INTRODUCTION

### Why this paper?

This paper provides an opportunity for a number of individuals operating in a range of contexts to give voice to specific issues drawn from their own experiences of remote partnering. It has been undertaken to complement and add value to the more formal research completed in an earlier phase of this project and it is a conscious attempt to personalise the issues and to circumnavigate the tendency to generalise and / or to moderate (aka 'sanitise') views that are likely to make for uncomfortable reading.

The founding partners involved in setting up the Remote Partnering Project<sup>1</sup> all believe in the importance of partnering<sup>2</sup> to ensure better delivery of humanitarian aid and truly sustainable development (including the achievement of the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals). We also believe that for partnering to optimise its potential, it is vitally important to be open and honest about what gets in the way.

### Why is 'remote' partnering worthy of exploration?

Partnering is always challenging since it involves multiple actors from a range of organisations that pool resources and co-create appropriate solutions to significant societal or environmental challenges. Even when working face-to-face it can be hard to really get to know each other, understanding each other's values, priorities, contexts and cultures. And many report that working long-distance for all or most of the time adds very significantly to the challenges of partnering effectively.<sup>3</sup> As will be seen from what follows, the challenges are not necessarily different but they can be more intractable.

### What does it take to say it like it is?

Added to this, speaking openly about partnering challenges seems to be quite a challenge itself! So much has been, and is being, invested in partnering as the 'delivery mechanism of choice' (whose choice is a question worth asking, but perhaps not here) that critique of the paradigm by those involved<sup>4</sup> can be felt as just too exposing. It is relatively rare, for example, to find partnership case studies that speak openly about what hasn't worked and where the paradigm is deficient. It is hard to be a lone voice when there is much at stake.

### The reason for anonymity

For this reason, we decided to offer those we interviewed for this paper anonymity so that they would not jeopardise important projects or expose organisations or partnerships in an unhelpful way.

### Acknowledgements and appreciation

Having said that, we would like to acknowledge the frankness with which those we interviewed shared their experiences and opinions. Sorry they can't be named to get the credit they so deserve.

### A word on the role of 'editor'

Editors have considerable power in choosing what to include and what to leave out. I acknowledge this, and carry full responsibility for the choices I have made.

Ros Tennyson

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<sup>1</sup> Action Against Hunger, British Red Cross, PAX, Partnership Brokers Association, Partnerships Resource Centre (Erasmus University)

<sup>2</sup> In which we include all forms of multi-stakeholder collaboration for development – whether or not they are described as 'partnerships'

<sup>3</sup> This is covered quite fully in the research undertaken during the first phase of the Remote Partnering Project that can be accessed on [www.remotepartnering.org/outputs](http://www.remotepartnering.org/outputs)

<sup>4</sup> There is a growing critique but rarely from within existing partnerships.

## POINTS OF VIEW



### The global / local interface turned on its head

Scenario & role: Partnerships Advisor for a major international NGO carrying an HQ / global role from a country office in southern Africa

*I chose to work from one of our country offices rather than HQ, and I am very happy to be working in Africa since our partnerships are really in the field and it is important to understand the realities of that from their perspective and to provide a bridge between their experience and expectations and those of HQ.*

*Our funding base has changed so that now the great majority of our funding is 'institutional' which has a huge impact on our partnering approaches since it is very restricted, unlike both our traditional funding sources, which were unrestricted, and our organisation's culture. We used to be able to do whatever we felt was needed, but now our partnership model is far more like sub-contracting and this is a very challenging time for staff at all levels of the organisation.*

*My role mostly involves acting as an intermediary between all the different players. I am brokering ideas and concepts more than actually building partnership for programmes and delivery. I am also largely working remotely so constantly have to deal with technology challenges – connectivity here is very unreliable so hugely frustrating me and for all those I work with. It can also mean missing a lot of non-verbal information and cultural nuances.*

*And, of course, language is also a big consideration. English can be seen as a less direct language where people go around issues and it is hard to get the real message. What do you say and what do you not say? Have you / others really understand what is and is not being said. People who are fluent in English have a big advantage and those who aren't can easily feel marginalised. There is also the issue of those who easily 'take the floor' and those who need more time to formulate what they want to say.*

*On-line meetings have to be efficient and they require all concerned to be really well prepared. If others are obviously not well prepared, I simply postpone the meeting. This is all part of building experience for us all of how to work well remotely. I have also created different kind of groups and do many 1-2-1 meetings on line. I increasingly make deliberate efforts to create safe spaces for people – this seems to work but risks me holding too much control when I am trying to build greater equity.*

*I think remote partnering is very hard to do on-line. It so quickly becomes more about sharing information rather than relationship building. Ensuring genuine participation on line is tough. Added to which are the (perceived / actual) power dynamics – I am sure that some in the field see me as an HQ representative – a kind of HQ spy! But they also see me as a key influencer so they try hard to get my attention and to get me to convey messages they want HQ to hear.*

*So much of this is a matter of psychology.*

*But it is also a matter of history and context – in some countries, where there is a strong culture of collaboration, partnering comes naturally, in other countries that are becoming seriously aid dependent, there is a growing culture of 'playing the (donor's) game' by partnering in name but not in reality.*

*My position can be quite challenging. I often hear people push back by saying “this won't work in our context” which can be hard to counter even when I suspect this is an excuse for not examining a suggestion and / or being unwilling to change – but perhaps slightly easier since I am on the ground and able to point to examples in comparable contexts from direct experience.*



## **Grappling with social not just geographic remoteness**

Scenario: Director of an environmental programme operating in a country in Central/Eastern Europe – essentially acting as an intermediary between local agencies and an external donor

*In my experience, **all** partnerships have a remote aspect to them. The local food system we are operating here as a partnership venture works remotely to shorten the **social** distance not necessarily the **geographic** distance between the seller and the buyer. The ability to overcome social distance is in exact relationship to how personalised the system is. When people are confident that the relationship guarantees that you are being dealt with entirely honestly (“they will sell to me good produce – that is the same as what they give to their own families”), ‘rules’ regulations, policing and paperwork become unnecessary*

*What is happening here is a genuinely inter-dependent relationship that is fundamentally inclusive even though it may be quite geographically dispersed. In fact, most of the buyers and sellers relate to each other remotely on a day to day basis.*

*Technology services the system and enhances the existing social processes – individual producers use the software to set their prices and promote their products and consumers select the farmer from whom they want to buy. All relationships are voluntary and it has become quite clear that the quality of relationships and level of trust that come from knowing each other (even if largely on-line) is the single most important thing. This mutual trust is not a given. It must be earned, which is why those involved invest in personalising relationships*

*In doing this work, I have become acutely aware of the difference between ‘rules’ and ‘principles’. A system built through rules (largely because of grant-makers requirements) makes everyone compliant, whereas working principles that emerge from the group over time help to create the notion of the ‘collective individual’ where everyone contributes to the common good but also ‘steps up’ to take on their specific areas of responsibility. This is not a planned, programmed or pre-ordained process. It’s not possible to predict who will take on a role when needed, what is important is that someone always does once principled-relationships are in place.*

*It is essential for closing social distance that those involved choose themselves to opt in. People want the personal, informal approach where they retain their individuality rather than being told what to do. Farmers connect to each other and directly to their customers in the market and vice-versa. There is an interaction, a reciprocity. This is how the partnership as a social system remains remote, while overcoming both social and geographic distance.*

*There is huge potential and opportunity for growing local food systems in scale and impact by dealing with social distance as a basis for effective remote partnering. If this is to happen in an organised way, several things need to happen including:*

- Donors becoming more interested in what happens, what changes and what emerges rather than seeking simplistic reports and predictable results according to the rules they have set
- Giving credit where it is due (to those who make change happen rather than those who give the money or who managed the project)
- Acknowledging the huge importance of non-financial contributions and valuing the energy, effort and risk-taking of those at the heart of the project
- Really re-framing how money is given and in what ways – addressing the massive gap between the rhetoric ('partnership') and the reality ('control')
- Investing in a new model of a self-funding system generating enough surplus for the partnership's own development

*It is important that in addressing the issue of remoteness we don't get stuck in believing that this is only a question of physical distance. It is the social distance that matters.*



## Managing a major contradiction

Scenario: Senior role in an international NGO operating through federated structure with the remit to undertake due diligence on behalf of a bi-lateral donor in relation to in-country partners / service providers.

*I am currently working on a big organisational project to develop a risk framework for environments where we have to work remotely. In our organisation, insecurity and access are **major** drivers of decisions behind whether to remote partner or not. So we make the choice to partner remotely (not a choice, really, since there is no other option) when we cannot get access to a specific local context – it is a necessary modality prompted by the constraints of the external environment. Partnering, especially long-distance, would not necessarily be our first choice.*

*Add to that the requirements from our donors and the strongly regulatory environment in which we operate and we often feel caught between a rock and a hard place. What regulation drives us towards is, largely, procurement of services rather than building a collaborative approach. The relationship is essentially contractual in culture, often requiring a mass of operating procedures that are really inappropriate (as well as being almost impossible to deliver) in the very difficult contexts where we work since we are almost always working by 'proxy'.*

*It puts serious pressure on us at a number of levels since legislation holds the individual to account as well as their organization. Just one example of how easy it is to be caught out – when we are in the field and we stay in a room where the owner pays tax to a listed or corrupt regime, do we ourselves become, de facto, guilty of diverting aid?*

*How can we as an INGOs know: when we have done enough in terms of due diligence? How far we will be held responsible? What level of due diligence is acceptable since this all costs money that is urgently needed for our work?*

*Our donors have obligations to ensure 'zero tolerance to aid diversion' and that is understandable and laudable, but it has implications for us: how do we satisfy donors that we are exercising due diligence and*

*appropriate levels of control whilst also trying to genuinely shift the power to local actors and support them in evolving appropriate decisions and interventions – which donors also claim is key priority?*

*It is interesting that this – for us such a big dilemma and such a fundamental challenge to building partnerships – has been so little explored in what has been written to date about partnering as a development mechanism. Especially where those partnerships are largely established and maintained remotely.*



## **Corruption: the un-discussed and un-discussable**

Scenario: Director of an environmental programme in a country in Central Asia

*The thing about corruption is that it is **always** the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about. The role of corruption is never articulated and yet in our development work I believe we are faced with it in so many different ways. Project protocols (for example, for monitoring and evaluation) rarely cover or take account of this issue. By being ‘political’ and ‘diplomatic’ and avoiding all controversial topics we fail to identify the many risks that arise from this issue. I am sure this is not unique to the country I am working in.*

*What would it take to have an honest design that recognizes corruption as a significant issue and major influencing factor so that it becomes a reality that is taken into account in how a project is designed and how it is implemented? Failure to do this both jeopardises the work by impeding our capacity to deliver the hoped-for results and by, in effect, positioning us as colluding with corruption by default.*

*This requires serious critique of our current practices and significant adjustment at all levels.*

*Undertaking project reviews earlier (well before mid-term) could involve exploring corruption and its impact on the partnership and / or programme of work.*

*Our main donor didn't address this issue at all. Corruption was simply accommodated as an inevitable phenomenon. As it happened, the project they were funding had at its heart a focus on formalizing an economic activity where social and environmental aspects were causing great turbulence in society and were actually attracting illegal activities and corrupt practices. One could argue that the funding itself was (albeit unwittingly) contributing to, rather than mitigating or addressing, corruption.*

*This country is of considerable political significance and provides an immensely important bridge between East and West – that is a significant (if understated) influencing factor.*

*I often speculated on what the hidden agenda was of the donor (a bi-lateral working on behalf of a European government). I believe it was all tied up with money flows and with the government-to-government relationship in a politically sensitive scenario. It is clear that bi-lateral donors have to be accountable in ways that are acceptable to both their own and to the host government where they provide funding – so it seems that assumptions and risks may well not be explored fully enough in the inception phase because it would risk the project not proceeding and jeopardise the all-important political relationship.*

*It is not clear how much of this donors acknowledge and how much they choose to ignore. They are, typically, far away... perhaps they need to get more dust on their boots.*

*In my role as Project Director, I was constantly operating as an intermediary between several different constituencies and interest groups – of which virtually all the relationships were managed long distance. This intermediary role meant having to consider:*

- *How my actions to deliver the required results (for donors) – my primary accountability – would be reconciled with my own personal / professional values*
- *What to do when it became clear that there were some seriously flawed assumptions and that the log-frame / project framework approaches were wholly inadequate because they were not able to reflect the realities on the ground*
- *How to ‘broker’ relationships between two government ministries (economy and environment) which were of equal significance to the project but not comfortable working with each other*
- *How to manage local government expectations and behaviours as they began to ‘smell the money’*
- *How to handle the pressure from NGOs wanting access to funds on almost any terms*
- *Working in line with but apart from political cycles where the project (and funding) were used for political advantage*
- *How best to serve vulnerable communities and their high expectations of me and the project to change their situation*

*An additional issue was working across language boundaries and our great dependence on interpreters / translators. This is also easily underestimated. Translators are not regarded in this country as in any sense ‘high status’ so they are easily belittled and put under subtle pressures not to be the bearers of bad news or difficult issues. This means no one is ever quite sure exactly what has and has not been communicated. This is quite serious and potentially quite dangerous (lives and well-being of vulnerable people can be at stake so this word is chosen intentionally) because decisions are made based on yet more unsubstantiated assumptions.*

*This leads to a default focus on reading body language and feeling the emotional temperature (both of which can be easily misinterpreted). It also leads to an emphasis on building social relationships – usually through sharing a drink and toasting decisions and ‘the blue sky’ in a spirit of camaraderie, which tends to lead to drunken behaviours even ending up in fights. And of course, alcoholism is a major issue in this part of the world – actually just as disturbing and problematic as corruption.*

*And so the cycle(s) continue(s).*



## **The pressure to ‘trust’ even in an untrustworthy environment**

Scenario: Manager of the local chapter of a major international relief agency in a country in East Africa

*I do understand the move towards ‘partnering’ as a delivery mechanism for humanitarian relief and sustainable development but it has a lot of implications and pressures. In my role – acting between international agencies, national NGOs and local CBOs – I often feel that we are pushed into partnerships too soon and with too little preparation or confidence in those we are being asked to partner with.*

*Why is this the case?*

*Usually in life when you form a significant relationship you spend time together, you look each other in the eye and you find ways of testing or checking how sincere people are in what they are saying or proposing. You build a level of openness and trust and you also use your instinct and observations to help you form a judgement. Anxiety surrounds all new relationships – my first approach, even face-to-face, is always tentative and I invest time to build understanding and insight. Things change as the relationship finds its balance. Talking and spending time together builds more confidence – people will open up but it always takes time – days and sometimes months or even years.*

*In the circumstances in which I work on partnerships, we start with not knowing each other and we have few opportunities to meet. Some partners I have literally never met. I am expected to invest resources in organisations and people with whom I have no established connection or sense of mutual respect or obligation. My overriding feeling as a manager of these partnerships is one of fear.*

*What does the fear come from? I find these issues hammering inside my head:*

- *“I don't know you. I don't know what you are. I don't know if your intentions are good. I don't know who or what influences you.”*
- *“How do I know that what you are telling me is true?”*
- *“How do I build enough trust to ensure you are not just partnering for self-interest?”*

*Working long-distance, both from the donor and from the implementation partners, makes all this MUCH harder. When I talk with partners, on the phone or skype, I can't see them – yet, in my culture and experience, 80% of communication is through eye contact and getting a sense from visual clues about what impact the conversation is having. Without this it takes MUCH longer to gain confidence and build genuine trust. All my partnering decisions require me to make a judgement call – this is a lot of pressure on me as the person who 'signs off' on the country-based partnerships and who will be accountable if / when things go wrong.*



## **Understanding the real constraints**

Scenario: Programme Manager responsible for peace-building in current / post-conflict situations in the Middle East on behalf of an international agency based in Western Europe

*It seems to be common that partners in the field complain that INGOs do not understand their constraints well enough. And, of course, this can often be true. But my experience is that those we work with in the field find it equally hard to understand that INGOs also have many constraints and that this may lead to considerable tension and sometimes even breakdown in the relationship. I often hear the frustration in the voices of those we work with when they say: “Why don't you just fund what we need?” or “We are victims of this conflict and you are taking sides by how you choose to spend the money”. I have to spend considerable amounts of time explaining that the funding we have is not unrestricted and we cannot simply choose how to allocate it.*

*Despite my best endeavours, our partners do not understand our constraints – or perhaps they simply refuse to accept them. This is just part of a picture that may suggest that there is still a gap between our organisational rhetoric (of equity and mutuality) and the reality (dependence). Like many other ‘Northern’ entities we may be guilty of ambivalence in who has the power in the relationships.*



*There is the additional impact of our remoteness – issues are less easy to grasp, explore and discuss in a transparent way. Such issues include:*

- **Information** – the lack of direct exposure to the (government / political) system in which we have to operate
- **Anxiety** – about our dependence on government funding and the risk of losing our (perceived or actual) neutrality in how we make decisions in the field
- **Uncertainty** – about the continuity of funding and the need for short-termism in funding decisions
- **Embargos** – on certain countries (eg Russia) where we are not allowed to work despite the clear need of what we could bring
- **Exposure** – risking the safety of those we work with in the field by having to work through formal arrangements
- **Restrictions** – having to work through mainstream systems (including banks) when informal systems (including cash) may be far safer and a more secure way to reach those who need it most

*Our work depends on key relationships that have to be ‘hidden’ as many of those we work with are at serious risk if their relationship to us is exposed. It means we have to work very hard and in subtle ways to understand, know and trust each other unconditionally. Our work depends on the power of the ‘heartfelt handshake’ – where this is in place we can continue to work long-distance, over time (sometimes decades) with real confidence.*



## **Navigating Political and Cultural Differences**

Scenario: Manager responsible for environmental and livelihood development partnerships spanning eight countries for a multi-lateral agency based in a country in South Asia

*We work across eight countries in Central, South-East and South Asia and the cultures and political scenarios are very different which makes our work challenging enough to which we also add the additional challenge of the great geographic distances between those with whom we work. We are all constantly travelling and trying our best to bridge these gaps. We use English as the nearest we can get to a common language – which is not necessarily popular with the different country governments – and this has implications for how well we communicate and / or genuinely understand each other.*

*We have had to get very smart at differentiating between cultures and adapting our behaviour in each different context – in China, for example, we focus on protocols, hosting dinners and bringing gifts which would be entirely inappropriate in other countries. Of course, none of this is written in black and white.*

*The huge differences in scale and size of our eight countries is also a factor – for the smaller countries, what we do has a very big impact and is of great importance whereas in the bigger countries it is a far lower priority and it can be hard to get people’s attention. Added to which, some of the countries (India and Pakistan, for example) refuse to meet in each other’s countries, so we are limited in where we can meet with all our partners.*

*Strangely we never thought of our work as ‘remote partnering’ it is just the way we do our work – but it absolutely is! In recent times, we have become far more concerned with the **process** of partnering and in*

*finding ways to build capacity of all our partners to collaborate more effectively (despite the diversity and the distance between them).*



## The sense of isolation for those in the middle

Scenario: Project evaluator based in Southern Europe working on behalf of an international agency to assess and support partnership approaches to the refugee crisis

*My main experience from working on this project was a sense of serious isolation. I was working on behalf of a large network of organisations and didn't 'belong' to any of them, located in an office in a nearby country to where the programme was operational but completely distant from those we were all trying to help. Whilst I was always clear **what** I was working on, it was always quite unclear to me exactly **for whom** I was working.*

*To whom was I actually accountable?*

- *Contractually to donors and the partner agencies – evaluating the impact of services and generating learning and sense making so they could improve their programming?*
- *Delivering services in alignment with the values and priorities of the wider network?*
- *The refugees themselves?*

*In such remote partnering arrangements, what does accountability mean and does it mean the same to everyone?*

*This lack of clarity had its impact on how I was able to relate to, and work with, partners. How feasible and realistic were the tasks and responsibilities I was given? How much influence could / should / did I have? Feeling very remote was, in fact, directly comparable to feeling that I had very little influence.*

*I understood that my role was to focus more on the partnership and its potential for changing things and for learning whilst the partners had a much stronger focus on programmatic issues and delivery. Sometimes partners asked for specific services or support which I and my colleagues tried to respond to quickly, but all too often when we offered a response to their request they didn't follow through and we never really knew why this was – whether the issue itself had reduced in importance, or there were unexpected changes either in terms of personnel or the operational context.*

*I often reflected on how much power I actually had and how often it seemed as if I was being expected to 'smooth' (by containing rather than challenging) which was at odds with my belief that I had an obligation, in the spirit of enquiry, to explore the reasons for poor practices and unhelpful partnering behaviours.*

*In the end, many things came down to a judgement call – but that was hard without someone else to check things out or explore options with. This can be quite exhausting, as well as increasing the sense of isolation, because you never arrive at a conclusive 'truth' and you are always asking whether you have done as much as you possibly can or whether you have actually, by default and however unintentionally, been covering up / colluding with poor partnering. This may often be true for those in the intermediary role in all partnerships but it is undoubtedly made more challenging working remotely.*

*It is quite hard to live with a sense of just doing 'well enough' – I found myself carrying a great sense of responsibility for what the partnership did (or didn't) achieve – whilst also living with a sense of almost complete dis-empowerment.*

## FINAL THOUGHTS

### The value of these points of view

These points of view are expressed in brief and all merit deeper examination. However, we hope that they will add further dimension to this important exploration of remote partnering if only to 'up the game' and help drive more effective, and even transformative, partnerships by encouraging others to express their concerns.

### What do the contributors share?

Whilst each contributor raises a specific-to-them issue, there are some underlying threads to what they are keen to communicate. Most share a real sense of personal responsibility for their respective partnerships and partner relationships alongside a feeling of being relatively lonely – whether in terms of being physically isolated, feeling somewhat unsupported and / or simply being a 'lone voice'.

It is also worth noting that each of them was eager to voice their experiences – none of the usual delayed response to an 'out of the blue' email request.<sup>5</sup>

### What isn't included but seems important...

Taking some editorial licence here, there are a number of issues that were touched on in the interviews that did not come over as strongly as they probably should because the focus of questions was on something else. These include:

- The impact of internal constraints / hierarchies / contradictory messages / slowness to change
- The immense power of donors which risks partnerships staying in the 'compliant' realm and not being able to be truly transformational
- The role of the intermediary<sup>6</sup>: are they 'servant' or 'leader'?

### What next?

How can we proceed to build confidence and capacity for those who operate in remote partnering arrangements – often quite unsupported? One answer to that is in our work to build a new kind of platform for those in the field to grow their professional competencies in this relatively new and seriously under-supported paradigm.

Perhaps another equally important issue<sup>7</sup> is, how can operating remotely **assist** in raising the kinds of uncomfortable issues, disconnects and contradictions that have been raised here rather than denying or exacerbating them?

In an earlier piece of research – a facilitated conversation between 12 partnership brokers from across the globe and a wide range of partnering scenarios – the following things were mentioned as some of the possible advantages of partnering remotely:

- *Working remotely **could be a real leveller**<sup>8</sup> everyone experiences the same pain / challenges as human beings... it can change some of the power dynamics*

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<sup>5</sup> Five of the eight responded within an hour and the remaining three within 24 hours!

<sup>6</sup> Whether they are operating as a 'partnership broker' or not

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps a more important question, if partnering as a sustainable development paradigm is to optimise its potential

- *Could work well with a clear devolution / allocation of roles and expecting a level of self-sufficiency and autonomy that is then reported back to the group – evolving a **more horizontal way of working***
- *The example of NGOs and INGOs working on the Syria crisis – INGOs had to hand over / let go as they had no direct access – **changing the (traditional / unhealthy) power / control dynamics***
- *May **open up new / unexplored / unexpected opportunities** by doing things differently*
- ***Relocates the focus / locus of the work** – more possible to build locally grown / locally owned partnerships*
- *Need to build trust earlier and more consciously to be able to ‘let go’ and let things evolve locally – this could mean that **partners move more quickly to cross boundaries and change behaviours***
- *May be **easier to be constructively disruptive** and bring about change at a local level rather than imposing a centrally controlled agenda*
- *May give the **space for people to work in very different ways** (for example giving introverts an opportunity to contribute from a more ‘reflective’ space)*
- *Could be developed to **build on and celebrate cultural diversity** – by co-creating a range of ways of working that suit different cultural preferences (for example building partnering approaches from stories rather than log frames)*

It is interesting to note that several of these spontaneous suggestions echo the issues raised in this paper by a quite different group of partnership practitioners.

In our Design Lab held in January 2017, as a key part of the Remote Partnering Project, the group of 16 practitioners and specialists evolved the following description / vision of what effective remote partnering might be like:

*In an effective remote partnering system, partners get beyond the disadvantages and explore new ways of working together long-distance that give space for understanding each others constraints and building opportunities for innovation and breakthrough.*

*They operate in a principled way though giving and receiving feedback, exploring how to work well together and being prepared to challenge and to change. Diversity and distance become productive, as the separation gives time for individual reflection, imagination and re-framing that leads to new insights and collective action.*

*Within the partnership, each individual can work at their own pace, according to their own capabilities, while focusing on the needs of their communities and supporting the needs of others.*

*Sharing this common thread of connectedness and consciousness, each partner feels genuinely empowered to weave an original story, embedded within the local culture, history and environment, that enables themselves and their community to evolve context-appropriate ways of doing new things.*

There are, probably, three final questions we need to ask ourselves:

1. Will we be able to build on the lessons from the contributors to this paper by addressing the real challenges and issues faced by practitioners who partner remotely head on?

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<sup>8</sup> Bold text is the editor’s to assist the reader in making connections to the earlier material

2. Can our commitment to making remote partnering more effective provide the much-needed opportunity to re-consider (even re-invent) what partnering itself could actually achieve?
3. How will this focus on remote partnering help practitioners to build more efficient, challenging and highly flexible partnering mechanisms to create the best possible responses to the multiple challenges we face?

*“Can we rely on it that a ‘turning around’ will be accomplished by enough people quickly enough to save the modern world? This question is often asked, but whatever answer is given to it will mislead. The answer ‘yes’ will lead to complacency; the answer ‘no’ to despair. It is desirable to leave these perplexities behind us and get down to work.”<sup>9</sup>*



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<sup>9</sup> EF Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, Jonathan Cape 1973