Partnership working in rural regeneration

Governance and empowerment?

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Executive summary

Partnerships have emerged over the past 15 years as a commonplace feature of rural regeneration strategies. Their development has been promoted by a range of policies operating at the European, national and regional scales. Yet little is known about how rural regeneration partnerships work in practice, or about their success in achieving their objectives and about the obstacles to effective partnership working.

This report presents the findings of a two-year research project examining the processes of partnership working in rural regeneration. The key characteristics of some 150 partnerships were identified, and a detailed questionnaire sent to 50 of these. In addition almost 70 interviews were conducted with those involved in six case study partnerships, and meetings of these were also attended. Data was gathered on the organisation, form and working culture of partnerships; their staffing and resources; their initiation and evolution; and on the attitudes and experiences of partnership coordinators and partnership members. Some key findings have emerged.

Partnership formation

The growth of partnership working in rural regeneration has not produced a new homogenised form of governance institution – 'the partnership' – but rather a diverse and complicated set of organisations with different focuses, different scales of operation, different durations and histories, and different patterns of sector representation and funding. Any analysis of the effectiveness of partnership working must acknowledge this complexity, and recognise that each of these differences will produce their own sets of obstacles and challenges, and necessitate different strategies of good practice. Broadly,

however, we can state that the purpose for which a partnership was established, and the institutional context within which it is set, will provide key parameters guiding the processes of partnership working.

We found that nearly two thirds of the partnerships we identified were formed since 1996, reflecting the relatively recent expansion of this mode of operation. Just under a half were of limited life, usually less than five years. Regional scale partnerships had the longest duration, while those at a local level were funded for the most limited periods. Public agencies and local authorities are most frequently responsible for funding and initiating partnerships, with private and voluntary sector funding being more sporadic.

Partnership organisation and structure

Within these broad parameters, the organisation and structure of a partnership will shape its operation. The constitution, the aims and objectives, the partners enrolled, the funding arrangements, the committee structure and the means of community engagement all contribute to the effectiveness of the partnership process. In most cases, the formation of a partnership is objective-led, with the identification of a need resulting in the formation of an organisation to address that need. Usually, however, the initial organisation was either community-based or a single initiative within a wider organisation. The adoption of a partnership form often followed as a second stage in the process, as the rules governing potential sources of funding were investigated. Few partnerships therefore emerged 'organically'. Most were a response to the requirements of funders.

The underlying rationale of partnership working is that it is necessary to pool the varied resources of a range of organisations in order to create a capacity to act with regard to specific objectives. We found, however, that the enrolment of partners often occurs in a very limited period of time, is driven by a small group of key individuals, and is designed to meet funding timetables. This establishment phase is important, as most partnerships were very stable in terms of membership once operational. As with funding, private and voluntary sector engagement was more difficult to negotiate than that from the public sector, and there were additional problems over 'representativeness'. Identifying who should represent diverse groups, such as 'the community', or 'the private sector', caused considerable difficulties and raised issues of accountability.

Working in partnership

Those involved in partnership working bring with them a range of experiences and expectations. For some it is part of their job, and for others it is a 'service' they perform voluntarily. For all of those participating, the experience of partnership working is far from straightforward and involves considerable negotiation. The engagement of partners in partnership working is uneven, and organisational problems arise if this unevenness is not addressed. A range of 'internal' factors hampers the effectiveness of partnership working. These include equivocal commitment, uncertain aims and objectives, overlapping agendas with other agencies, funding and resource problems and differential expectations. Even if these issues are negotiated there are 'external' constraints to be tackled such as bureaucratic procedures, inflexible funding criteria, and output-driven procedures.

In the search for models of best practice, far too little attention has been paid to the 'learning curve' along which all partnerships have to travel, and the trust and commitment which has to be earned, as well as given. Time is needed before the delivery phase to prepare, train and properly recruit partners. Successful partnerships also depend on the active and willing participation of a range of partners – effective partnership working should not be taken for granted, but has to be nurtured and developed collectively.

Implications for future strategy

Behind the almost uniform acceptance of partnerships as a 'good thing', there lies a whole host of issues which need to be addressed in order to promote effective rural regeneration strategies. These issues include resourcing and funding; the scales at which partnerships operate and the communities they address; processes of accountability and empowerment; and the very meaning of the term regeneration itself.

Introduction

Partnership working in rural regeneration

Partnerships have emerged over the course of the past 15 years as an increasingly commonplace fixture on the landscape of urban and rural regeneration in Britain. Originally conceived as part of inner city policy during the 1970s, partnership working was developed in the 1980s by the British government as a means of loosening local government's hold over urban economic development, and by the European Community as a mechanism for re-directing its structural funds from large-scale state-led projects to small-scale 'bottom-up' initiatives. The 'partnership principle' has now become established as the preferential mode of management across a diverse raft of policy arenas from health to training, from conservation to community development.

Equally, partnerships are no longer associated primarily with *urban* governance, but are now also an important tool in the governance of *rural* areas. Close examination of the organisations operating in any small town or rural district in England or Wales is likely to reveal LEADER groups, Local Agenda 21 groups, training partnerships, community enterprise or development projects, civic fora, and rural development programmes, as well as a plethora of groups focused on marketing, product valorisation, sustainable development, transport or tourism – all constituted as some form of *partnership*, bringing together a range of organisations, often from across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The impetus for this proliferation of partnerships has come from all levels of government, and has been promoted by policy documents at the European, national and regional scales. The Cork Declaration from the European Conference on Rural Development in 1996 stated that rural policy "must be as decentralised as possible and based on partnership and co-operation between all levels concerned" (p 3); while the consultation paper, *Rural England*, issued by the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions argued that "stronger and more inclusive rural communities that can respond to change in the countryside will be assisted by better government that encourages partnership between agencies" (DETR, 1999, para 2.6).

The growth of partnership working has been supported and encouraged not only by politicians and government officials but frequently also by practitioners in economic and community development. Publications for and by non-statutory community groups have emphasised the supposed benefits of partnerships for 'community capacity-building', helping to involve people from the local community in developing services "appropriate to their needs" (Wilson and Charlton, 1997) and developing "initiatives which come from the community, which are more likely to succeed in the long term than 'top-down' approaches" (Greenlees, 1998).

However, little continues to be known about how rural regeneration partnerships work in practice: about their organisation, form and working culture; about their resourcing and staffing; about their initiation and evolution; about issues of accountability and representation; or about their success in achieving their objectives and about the obstacles to effective partnership working.

In addressing these issues, this study focuses on the *process* of working in partnerships. While

information is presented from an extensive survey of the organisational characteristics of partnerships in the study area (in order to provide an indication of the factors shaping partnership working), it is not the intention to definitively *enumerate* partnerships working in rural areas, nor to *measure* the success of partnerships in contributing to job or wealth creation or other forms of economic development. The latter would in any case be highly difficult to achieve, given the tangled matrices of governance within which partnerships operate, the uncontrollable influence of external factors, and the lack of comparative data relating to a hypothetical non-partnership alternative.

In focusing on the process of partnership working in this way, we are employing a very particular understanding of *effectiveness*. As effectiveness cannot be measured in terms of partnership output – jobs created or training places filled (except against the partnership's own targets) – we need instead to think of effectiveness in terms of realising the *aims* of the partnership working, and reaping the *supposed benefits* of partnership working. Thus, *effective partnership working* might be where cross-sectoral representation is achieved; where communities are fully engaged in identifying problems and solutions; where there is a pooling of resources; where replication of activities is avoided; where consensual decision-making processes are instituted; and so on. *Obstacles to effective partnership* working are therefore obstructions which militate against the realisation of the above goals; and *good practice* in effective partnership working may be identifying and implementing strategies to overcome such obstacles.

This report presents the findings of a two-year research project based around a case study of rural regeneration partnerships operating in Mid Wales and Shropshire, the details of which are discussed below. The report is structured into three sections. The first section describes the nature and characteristics of rural regeneration partnerships in the region, identifying the factors involved in influencing the form of partnerships. The second section examines issues involved in the formation and practice of partnership, identifying challenges faced by partnerships and examples of good practice. The third section analyses experiences of working in partnerships, drawing on interviews with both partnership coordinators and partner representatives to

identify the elements that contribute to effective practice. In each case the issues highlighted relate both to the practice of participants in partnership working, and to wider policies framing partnership working. As such, the concluding chapter draws out the key findings of the report for both practitioners and policy makers.

Defining partnerships

For the purposes of this report, partnerships are defined as:

> An arrangement which deliberately draws together the resources of specified partners in order to create a capacity to act with regard to a defined objective or set of objectives.

This definition includes three important elements. First, partnerships are deliberate in that they are established for a specific purpose. Second, the distinctive feature of partnerships is that they draw together the resources of a number of different partners. These 'resources' may be financial, practical, material or symbolic, while the partners may be drawn from different sectors or from the same sector. Third, the rationale for partnership creation is that the blending of resources is necessary in order for a desired outcome to be achieved.

In positing this definition of partnerships, a series of further distinctions have been made. First, we have distinguished between the *principle of partnership working* and *partnerships as organisations*. The former is a governmental strategy which seeks to encourage integration, consultation and the sharing of responsibility in the process of governance, while the latter refers to a particular organisational form. Commitments to the partnership principle by public bodies need not necessarily result in the formation of partnerships as organisations.

Second, *partnerships as organisations* can be further divided into partnership programmes, partnership organisations, and partnership projects. A *partnership programme* is an initiative instigated and managed by a central body to provide funding for projects or organisations, where the formation of partnerships is a condition of funding. A *partnership organisation* is a formal or semi-formal body consisting of two or more

partners but with an identifiable financial and administrative structure and an identity distinct from that of its constituent partners, which has been created to combine the resources of its constituent partners to achieve a capacity to act with regard to specified objectives. A *partnership project* is a working arrangement between two or more partners established to manage or implement a specified project, where the project does not have a distinctive financial and/or administrative structure from that of its parental partner organisations. This report focuses on *partnership organisations*, but recognises that such groups frequently exist within a *partnership family* in which partnership organisations may be funded under partnership programmes, may themselves be partners in other partnership organisations, may manage their own partnership programmes, and may be involved in specific partnership projects with other agencies.

Third, distinctions may be drawn between different types of *partnership organisation*, using a variety of factors including constitution, focus, territorial scale, funding, organisational structure and sectoral representation. In particular, we distinguish in this report between *facilitative* partnerships, which are discussion and policy focused, and which seek to *enable* through over-arching strategic engagement; and *delivery* partnerships, which are targeted to specific practical outcomes. The focus on this categorisation is not to suggest that it has pre-eminence over other possible categorisations, but rather emphasises that this differential structuring of the aims of a partnership may produce different obstacles to effective partnership working and therefore may require different strategies for good practice.

The research project

This report is based on three principal sources of information, collected through empirical research in the three counties of Ceredigion, Powys and Shropshire. First, an extensive desktop and library exercise was undertaken to produce a database of rural regeneration partnerships operating in the study region, which allowed the analysis of the key characteristics of partnerships and of factors important in structuring their form. Over 150 partnerships were identified during this stage of the project. Second, a postal questionnaire survey was sent to 50 of these partnerships, selected as a

representative sample on the basis of the characteristics identified in stage one. Data from the 33 questionnaires returned has been employed to analyse the activities, resourcing, constitution and organisation of partnerships, and to identify factors structuring the environment of working in partnerships, as well as perceived advantages and disadvantages of partnership working. Third, interviews were conducted during the spring and summer of 1999 with coordinators and committee members of six partnerships, selected for intensive case study as illustrative of the range of partnerships identified in the region (see Box 1 and Appendix A). These interviews focused on attitudes towards partnership working and the experience of working in the partnerships concerned, and on discussion of problems encountered and strategies adopted to overcome obstacles. In total, over 60 interviews were held during this stage of the project.

In addition to the above, eight further interviews were conducted with representatives of a number of public, voluntary sector and local government bodies engaged in promoting and resourcing partnership working. Further information was also gathered through attendance of project team members at meetings of the case study partnerships, and at other relevant conferences and meetings held during the period of the project.

Box 1: The six case study partnerships

The Mid Wales Partnership

A facilitative partnership of public, private and voluntary sector bodies in the Mid Wales regions of Powys, Ceredigion and Meirionnydd.

Empowering Enterprise in Local Communities

A facilitative partnership under the Single Regeneration Budget, funding community regeneration projects in Shropshire and Herefordshire.

Jigso

A facilitative partnership organisation operating across rural Wales, involved in encouraging community participation through the provision of training and awarding of grants.

Menter Powys LEADER II Local Action Group

A delivery partnership organisation operating as the local action group of the European Union's LEADER II programme in Powys.

Oswestry Hills LEADER II Local Development Group

A delivery partnership organisation operating as the local action group of the European Union's LEADER II programme in the area surrounding Oswestry in north west Shropshire.

The Market Town Initiative

A partnership programme run by the Development Board for Rural Wales[1], to fund 10 community-based regeneration initiatives in small towns in Mid Wales. Research on this case study focused in particular on three partnership organisations funded under the initiative:

Curiad Caron

A community-based partnership organisation operating under the Market Town Initiative in Tregaron and district, Ceredigion.

Deudraeth 2000

A community-based partnership organisation operating under the Market Town Initiative in Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd.

United Hay

A community organisation, funded by the Market Town Initiative, and operating in Hay-on-Wye, Powys.

Notes: These partnerships are described in more detail in Appendix A; [1] integrated into the Welsh Development Agency in April 1999.

Characteristics of rural regeneration partnerships

Identifying the practice of partnership working

The evolution of partnership working in rural regeneration may be traced back to exploratory attempts to coordinate public sector involvement in urban development by the Callaghan government in the late 1970s (see the 1977 Inner City White Paper and the 1978 Inner Urban Areas Act). The longest-established of the partnerships identified in Mid Wales and Shropshire dates from this era, having been initially formed and funded under the then Urban Aid programme. However, partnerships were only incorporated into the mainstream of urban and rural development under the Conservative government of the 1980s and early 1990s, primarily as a strategy to disperse responsibility for regeneration from local government to include the private sector, and as a means of shifting the emphasis in urban policy from state intervention to stimulating an enterprise culture. Through partnership working, it was believed, business values could be introduced into the public sector, and a more competition-oriented form of regeneration policy could be nurtured through the bidding process.

The City Challenge initiative, launched in 1991, and its successor, the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), have in particular been identified as key mechanisms for entrenching the partnership principle in urban regeneration. However, the number of rural regeneration projects funded under these programmes has remained comparatively small, and this has encouraged an erroneous identification of partnerships solely with urban governance, and a consequential lack of research on partnerships in rural regeneration.

In reality, partnership working has become a highly significant feature of rural governance in Britain. The partnership principle has been implicit in the strategy of agencies such as the Development Board for Rural Wales (DBRW) since the 1970s, and the term 'partnership' itself has been commonly employed since the late 1980s (see annual reports of the DBRW, 1978-97). In a Welsh context, the explicit promotion of partnership organisations emerges in the urban regeneration work of the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) in the early 1990s and is extended to initiatives in rural areas under its remit, such as Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire (WDA, Annual reports and accounts, 1990-99). More broadly, the three 'rural' White Papers published by the British government in 1995/96 (DoE/MAFF, 1995; Scottish Office, 1995; Welsh Office, 1996) all positioned the principles of partnership, community engagement and shared responsibility at the core of government rural policy, and these principles were subsequently incorporated into the working practices of government agencies.

The reorganisation of local government during the 1990s also prompted the expansion of partnerships between or involving local councils; especially in areas where a complete transition to unitary authorities had taken place (as occurred in Wales with the transition from a two-tier to a unitary system in 1996), or where a district gained 'independence' from a shire county as a new unitary authority (for example, Wrekin in Shropshire, which, following a review of the Local Government Commission's recommendation, was granted unitary status in 1997 leaving a two-tier structure in the remainder of the county). Strategy documents produced by the new authorities in Mid Wales and Shropshire strongly emphasised the key role of partnership in their future operations for financial reasons and to

achieve economies of scale (Ceredigion County Council, 1996, 1997; Powys County Council, 1996, 1997; Shropshire County Council, 1997).

Additionally, the review of the European Community's Structural Funds in 1988 identified 'partnership' as one of four 'general principles' of its regional policy as a strategy for re-directing funds from state-driven infrastructural projects to locally driven endogenous development. This new emphasis gained significance for rural regeneration through the parallel identification of 'redeveloping rural areas' as a priority objective of the Structural Funds (Objective 5b) and the subsequent qualification by a number of rural regions in Britain for assistance under this criteria, positioning the European Union as a major source of funding for rural regeneration projects, and of partnership as a necessary pre-requisite for accessing such funding.

At the same time, the term 'partnership' has become widely employed as a rhetorical device, being loosely applied to a broad spectrum of consultative or funding arrangements of varying degrees of formality. For example, the National Assembly for Wales has launched a 'Local Government Partnership Council' which is in effect a forum for consultation between the Assembly and local councils. Similarly, local government departments may speak of 'working in partnership' to refer to routine consultative arrangements, while business may describe sponsorship of local organisations as 'partnership with the community'. Identifying partnerships as defined for this report therefore requires careful negotiation of a lexiographical maze, and close analysis of the characteristics of organisations describing themselves as partnerships.

Initiation, duration and focus of partnerships

Partnerships can exhibit a wide range of characteristics in terms of their age and duration, focus and activity, funding, scale of operation and sectoral representation. These variations reflect the structural contexts in which partnerships are formed and operate, but may also produce different obstacles to effective partnership working and require different strategies for good practice.

The influence of external factors is evident in the dates of initiation of partnerships in Mid Wales

and Shropshire. Nearly two-thirds of the partnerships identified in the region were formed during or after 1996, reflecting the relatively recent expansion of partnership working in rural regeneration, driven by changes in public policy (Figure 1). In particular, the implementation of the second round of Objective 5b funding in 1994, and local government reorganisation in Wales in 1996 provided an impetus for partnership formation in those years – the former requiring partnerships to be created in order to access funding, and the latter resulting in partnerships between the new unitary authorities for both strategic and service delivery purposes.

Just under half of the partnerships in the database have been constituted to operate for a limited duration – usually because funding has only been secured for a limited period, or because the partnership forms part of a limited-life programme. In most cases, the set duration is for a period of five years or less. This has consequences in terms of strategic planning by partnerships – as is discussed in the next chapter – but also raises issues for the chronological plotting of partnership formation based on analysis of currently existing partnerships. However, it is clear that the period from 1995 to 1999 witnessed a rapid cumulative increase in the number of partnerships operating in Mid Wales and Shropshire.

The proliferation of partnerships is evident at all scales of operation (Table 1). However, there is arguably a greater continuity and longevity of partnerships between organisations at a regional scale. Nine of the 12 partnerships in our database established before 1993 operate at a regional scale or above; and just over half of regional-scale partnerships and nearly two thirds of county-scale partnerships in the database have not been constituted for a limited life-span. In contrast, over 70% of sub-county partnerships have a limited life and – perhaps significantly – all have been established since 1993.

The fixed duration of many community-focused partnerships reflects their predominant focus on the *delivery of services and specific projects*, rather than as fora for consultation or strategic planning. Nearly nine out of 10 sub-county partnerships have a 'delivery' focus, compared with just over a third of regional scale partnerships. This polarisation has a number of consequences. 'Delivery' partnerships tend to be constructed

Figure 1: The growth of partnership working in Mid Wales and Shropshire

Date of initiation of partnerships 1992–99

Number of partnerships operating per year 1992–99
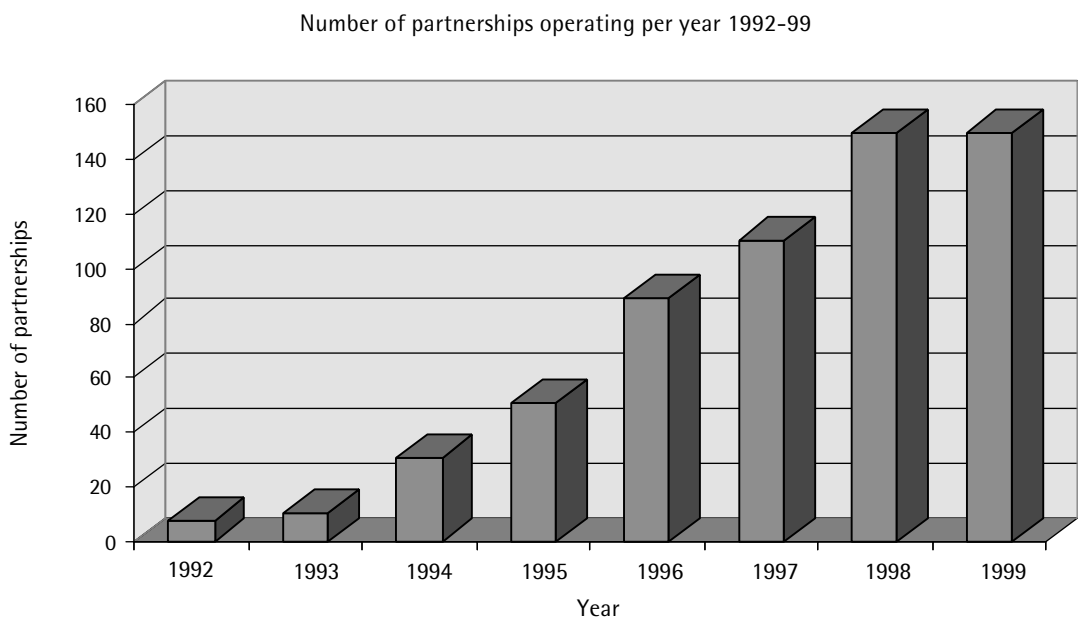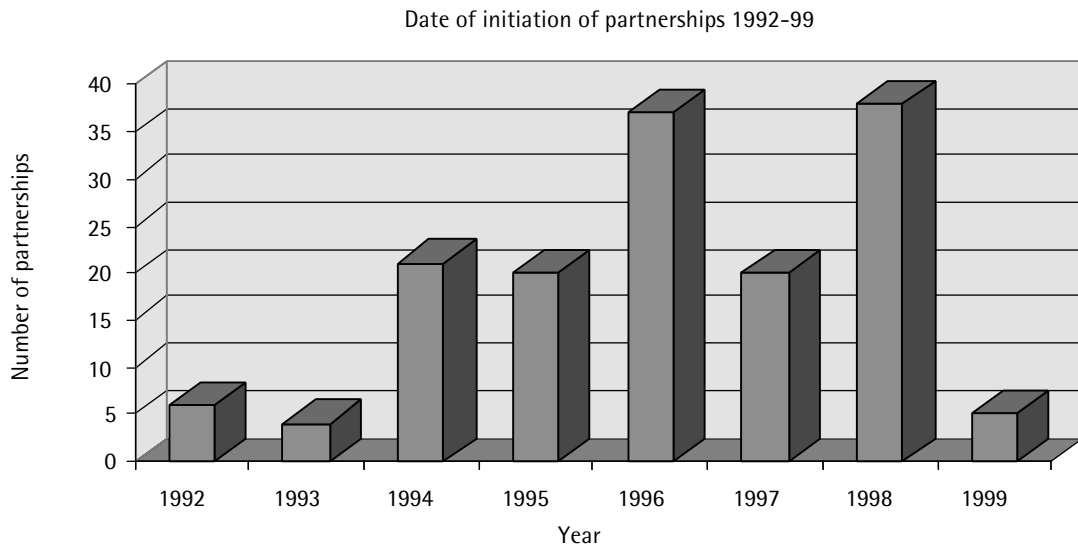
Table 1: The structure of partnerships in Mid Wales and Shropshire

Scale of territory	Number of initiatives	Focus of partnership		Funding of partnership					Initiation of partnership			Duration of partnership		Sector mix of partners				Average no of partners
		F	D	EU	Q	LA	P	TEC	Prior to 1993	1994 –96	1997– 2000	On– going	Limited life	Q	LA	V	P	
Regional and above	73	47	26	28	43	27	14	10	9	35	29	38	35	64	51	30	36	10.38
County	50	13	37	20	14	26	5	26	3	25	20	32	18	43	40	19	32	7.48
Sub-county														25	30	22	19	
Area	14	1	13	7	10	9	0	0	0	8	6	2	12					7.29
Place	17	3	14	4	10	8	1	1	0	10	8	7	10					4.35
Total n	154	64	90	59	77	70	20	37	12	78	63	79	75	132	121	71	87	7.38
%	100	42	58	38	50	45	13	24	8	51	41	51	49	86	76	46	56	

Key: F = facilitative; D = delivery; EU = European Union; Q = quango; LA = county or district council; P = private sector; TEC = Training and Enterprise Council; V = voluntary/community.

Source: JRF Community Action, Partnerships and Emergent Forms of Governance Database, 1999

around specific projects and are often funded under particular programmes or initiatives. As such they tend to have a pre-determined limited life, and those currently operational will invariably have been established within the past five years. In contrast, 'facilitiative' partnerships, focused on strategic discussion and planning, frequently have a broader, rolling agenda and therefore are more likely not to have a pre-determined life span.

Thus, not only are the detailed processes of working in partnership likely to be different because of the different purposes of the partnership working, but issues of timing, start-up, building rapport and trust, and securing continued benefits after the end of the partnership can be expected to be of greater concern to delivery partnerships than to facilitative partnerships. Furthermore, there is a clear question of power in the scaling of this typology, as the predominance of delivery partnerships at a sub-county scale suggests that the expansion of community-scale partnerships has been driven more by an interest of sharing the burden of project implementation, than by a desire to create new mechanisms for public participation and strategic engagement.

Funding partnerships and sectoral representation

One of the advantages of partnership working emphasised within policy discourse is the capacity of partnerships to integrate the public, private and voluntary sectors. Following this rhetoric, some commentators have insisted on tri-sectoral representation as a fundamental defining feature of partnerships (Westholm, 1999). Transferring this discourse into practice, the partnerships currently being established to monitor and implement Objective 1 funding in West Wales and the Valleys are being formed within guidelines stipulating a strict three-way division of representation between the public, private and voluntary sectors.

However, in practice, few of the rural regeneration partnerships currently operating in Mid Wales and Shropshire meet this ideal. Less than a third of partnerships have representation from all three sectors, and for a significant proportion the partnerships exist solely between agencies in the public sector. Overall, the voluntary sector is represented in only 46% of partnerships in the database, and the private

sector in 56% (Table 1). Significantly, both the voluntary and private sectors are more strongly represented in partnerships scaled at a sub-county level. This again raises questions of power, as voluntary and private sector actors are more commonly enrolled into partnerships focused on delivery, than into partnerships focused on strategic discussion and decision making.

In addition, the contribution of partners drawn from different sectors to partnerships is not equal. As is discussed in the next chapter, public agencies and local authorities are frequently responsible for initiating partnerships and play the major role in resourcing partnerships, especially in the provision of office space and personnel. The public sector also plays the leading role in financing partnerships. All of the partnerships in our database receive funding from the public sector in some form or other, but only one in eight received any funding from private sector sources. Very little private sector funding was directed to delivery partnerships, with the majority of partnerships receiving private sector contributions being constituted at a regional scale as facilitative partnerships.

The concentration of funding sources in part reflects the manner in which the growth of partnership working has been driven by public agencies through the mechanism of their funding regimes. As access to public funds has increasingly been funnelled through competitive programmes, in which partnership is a criteria of eligibility, so partnerships have been created to gain specific public funds, as opposed to being created to draw resources from a wider range of sources across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Consequently, quangos, including notably the Welsh Development Agency (the WDA took over the responsibilities of the DBRW in April 1999), are the most significant source of funding for partnerships in Mid Wales and Shropshire, followed closely by local authorities – who frequently provide 'matched funding' for partnerships part-financed under other programmes and initiatives.

The parallel importance of the European Union in promoting partnerships is evident in the funding of seven partnerships in the database under EU Community Initiatives – including LEADER, KONVER, TIERRAS and INTERREG. A further 52 partnerships also received funding from other EU Structural Funds, mostly under Objective 5b.

Summary

The growth of partnership working in rural regeneration has not produced a new, homogenised, form of rural governance institution – 'the partnership' – but rather a diverse and complicated menagerie of 'partnership organisations', with different foci, different scales of operation, different durations and histories, and different patterns of sector representation and funding. In this way, partnerships contribute to what has been described as the "tangled hierarchies which increasingly govern rural areas in a complex web of interdependence" (Goodwin, 1998).

Any analysis of effective partnership working must acknowledge this complexity, recognising that the different structures, contexts and experiences of different partnerships will produce their own sets of obstacles and challenges, and necessitate different strategies of good practice to maximise effectiveness. Furthermore, an understanding of the issues involved in effective partnership working requires an appreciation of the factors shaping partnership characteristics.

First, the *focus of partnership process* – that is, the purpose for which a partnership arrangement was adopted, produces particular characteristics in terms of sectoral representation, funding, scale and duration. Partnerships established to combine the capacities of several partners in order to undertake a specific project (delivery partnerships) will be engaged in a different form of partnership process and will face a different set of issues, than partnerships established as fora for discussion between partners in order to facilitate collective action (facilitative partnerships).

Second, the form and characteristics of partnerships can be strongly influenced by the *institutional context* within which they exist. The effective concentration of sources of funding for partnerships in the public sector means that a relatively small number of agencies are highly influential in shaping partnership characteristics. Also, there is a geography to this influence, as evidenced by the English-Welsh border which bisects our study area, with different funding streams operating on either side. In Mid Wales, the long established Development Board for Rural Wales and the Welsh Development Agency have been highly significant in funding and promoting partnerships through programmes and initiatives not available in Shropshire. This specificity can hinder cross-border partnerships.

Similarly, the importance of EU funding to partnerships in Mid Wales and Shropshire indicates the stimulus for partnerships created by eligibility for territorially-focused EU Structural Funds. While the vast majority of our study region was eligible for Objective 5b funds during the project period, there was some evidence that organisations in areas which had received targeted EU funding since 1989 were better equipped to compete for funds and to adapt to effective partnership working than those only awarded funding in 1994. (Powys and Ceredigion qualified for Objective 5b funding in the 1989-94 round of the Structural Funds as well as the 1994-99 round. South and West Shropshire qualified only in 1994. Furthermore, while LEADER groups were established in Powys and the Teifi Valley in southern Ceredigion in 1989, no LEADER group existed in Shropshire prior to 1994, and the Antur Teifi LEADER group only extended its territory to north Ceredigion in 1996.)

The attitude of local authorities and other local state agencies towards partnership working is also significant in this respect, potentially opening or closing sources of funding and thus influencing the form, scope and scale of partnerships. For example, local government in Shropshire has been more proactive in supporting partnerships than its Welsh counterparts, funding a comparatively greater proportion of partnerships, and helping to initiate partnerships at a county-scale earlier than in Powys or Ceredigion. Conversely, the Mid Wales Training and Enterprise Council has been a more significant funder of county-scale partnerships in Powys and Ceredigion than its Shropshire equivalent.

Organisation and structure of rural regeneration partnerships

Partnership organisation and effectiveness

The way in which a partnership is structured and operates may be crucial to its effectiveness. There is no automatic means by which the simple act of forming a partnership produces benefits of coordination, shared resources, greater legitimacy or enhanced capacity to act. The enrolment of the right partners, the identification of appropriate aims and objectives, the establishment of smooth and transparent working practices, adequate resourcing, and the building of trust between partners are all important stages in constructing an effective partnership. However, if these factors are not satisfactorily addressed, the organisational structure of partnership can itself become an obstacle which militates against realising the benefits of partnership working:

> "The actors [within a partnership] are essential. But you also need an appropriate framework that lets them 'act', rather than one that bogs them down in the framework. You can bring actors to a standstill by pouring sand over them."
> (Partnership coordinator)

Maximising the efficacy of partnership organisational structures raises issues for both policy makers and practitioners. Policy makers indirectly create the framework within which partnerships operate by setting criteria for funding, by determining the timetables for bidding and for the duration of programmes, and by regulating the types of resources available. Each of these decisions has the potential to constrain the organisational structures that partnerships may adopt. Within these limits, it is the practitioners – the employees of the partnership, and the managers and decision makers within partner organisations – who play the fundamental role in determining the constitution and working practices of partnerships, and hence the scope for effective partnership working. These issues can be explored in detail with reference to partnerships in Mid Wales and Shropshire.

This chapter draws largely on a questionnaire survey of 33 partnerships undertaken during 1998-99; see Appendix B for further details.

Issues in partnership formation

Partnerships are formed for a variety of reasons, including intentions of pooling resources, engaging communities and strengthening a 'regional voice'. However, in most cases, the formation of a partnership is objective-led, with the identification of a 'need' such as training, job creation, or the provision of community facilities, resulting in the formation of an organisation to address that need. Over three quarters of partnerships surveyed in Mid Wales and Shropshire, had been initiated in response to a perceived need, often originally as a community organisation or as an initiative within a wider body, rather than as a partnership. The adoption of a partnership form often followed as a second stage, as potential sources of funding were investigated. Nearly two fifths of partnerships surveyed identified 'accessing funds' as a significant factor in their formation.

The influence of funding requirements in driving partnership formation has led to some concern that they are generating what the director of one major funding body labelled 'accidental partnerships':

"I wonder to what extent we are causing a fairly fluid coalescence of groups, where they come together in order to make an application for funding to try and sort a particular issue out." (Funding agency director)

There continues to be a strong suspicion in some quarters, particularly in local government, about the value of partnership working. For other organisations participation in partnerships is rationalised in an entirely negative, defensive fashion, perceiving that they could not afford to be 'left out' or that they needed to be involved to protect their own interests:

"I went ... not to encourage it. [...] I was a bit concerned that they didn't start 'interfering' into mainstream agricultural policy. So I went along because I was a bit concerned about this." (Partner representative)

If organisations feel that they have been cajoled into partnerships, or approach partnership working with a defensive attitude, then the danger arises that their strategy in partnership meetings will be to limit the scope and evolution of the partnership, constructing obstacles that militate against the development of effective partnership working.

A sense of being cajoled into partnerships can arise if a funding body is perceived to be playing a leading role in directing partnership formation. In general terms a range of actors are involved in the initiation of partnerships, including community groups and individuals. However, in Mid Wales and Shropshire, local authorities and quangos (including the DBRW and the Rural Development Commission [RDC]) had been involved in setting up nearly two thirds of partnerships surveyed, with the local community, voluntary organisations and key individuals each only involved in the formation of just under a third of partnerships. Funding initiatives operated by government departments or the EU were similarly involved in over a quarter of partnership formations.

This influence is exercised in a number of ways. Public bodies such as the WDA, DBRW and local authorities are frequently involved in directly initiating facilitative and regional-scale partnerships, which often build on their own individual capacity. In more locally-focused partnerships, however, the involvement of public bodies may be secondary to that of individuals and community groups. The influence of county councils and development boards comes in helping local initiatives to shape their organisations into formats appropriate for securing funding. For example, in the DBRW's Market Town Initiative, officials at the agency worked closely with those applicants unsuccessful in the first round of grants to assist them in building partnerships which qualified for funding in the second round. Apart from refining aims and objectives, this sometimes meant extending participation in the bidding organisation.

The mix of actors involved in partnership formation becomes significant when their influence extends as far as determining the constitution of the partnership and setting its aims and objectives. In the majority of partnerships surveyed, the constitution and organisational structure of the partnership was decided not just by the partnership itself, but also by other actors. For around 15% of the partnerships, this included the community which the partnership was targeted at. However, funding bodies, notably local authorities and government departments, were involved in determining the constitution of just under half of the partnerships surveyed. The partnerships themselves were usually the most important contributor to this process, but for a significant minority, it was the local authority or other funding body which was most influential. Just under a fifth of partnerships had no influence over their constitution or organisational structure at all.

The setting of aims and objectives for a partnership can be even more complex. These not only reflect the initial motivation for the partnership, but frequently must also position the partnership within the scope of funding programme, while often also setting out a vision for a community, which may or may not have been consulted. As Table 2 shows, the published aims and objectives of partnerships commonly combine 'output' aims, 'strategic' aims and 'process' aims. Similarly, the targets identified by partnerships surveyed in Mid Wales and Shropshire include both outputs such as building a community centre, the promotion of sustainable tourism or the provision of training; and 'process' aims such as 'sharing techniques', encouraging greater community involvement, and 'working with other agencies'.

While the tendency may be to emphasise the 'output' and 'strategic' aims – as these outline the underlying purpose of the organisation and are the reason for which it has secured funding – it is the 'process' aims which set out *why* a partnership form has been adopted, and which identify *the benefits* which it is hoped will be achieved by working in partnership. It is therefore the 'process' aims which set the targets against which 'effective partnership working' should be evaluated. The process of setting aims, objectives and targets is an important one. The identification of inappropriate or unrealistic 'output' and 'strategic' aims may lead to the partnership being perceived as a failure if these cannot be delivered. Similarly, if the 'process' aims are not clearly stated, then partners may be ambiguous about their role and the development of efficient working practices in the partnership may prove difficult.

Over 80% of partnerships surveyed are formally evaluated by their sponsoring bodies; but less than a third evaluated themselves and only two involved the target community in evaluation. As such, evaluation often tends to focus on output, taken as the most important criteria of evaluation for nearly two thirds of the partnerships surveyed. Yet, 'process' aims were evaluated for over three quarters of partnerships. 'Effectiveness of partnership working' was explicitly evaluated in nearly three fifths of partnerships, and for one fifth it was the main criteria of evaluation. Success in encouraging 'new agents' was the main criteria for a further four partnerships.

For many partnerships, the process of partnership formation occurs within a very limited timescale. The bidding timetables for funding programmes and initiatives frequently allow only a few weeks for the preparation of applications between the initial publicity and the closing deadline. This can mean that the lead role in establishing the partnership and formulating the application is often taken by organisations such as local authorities with the personnel and resources to dedicate to the task, and that partners are enrolled from a pool of existing contacts. In particular, the bidding timescale commonly does not allow for substantial input from local communities:

> "One of the justifiable criticisms of Rural Challenge was that we had very, very little time to make a bid for it and a group of individuals were brought together by the local authority around a table as quickly as possible to get a bid in. And then the bid turned out to be successful. And then you have got to deliver what are actually very, very tight outputs. And of course because of the tight bidding timetable there hasn't been the chance to do effective community consultation."
> (Partner representative)

Effective partnership working can be enhanced by modifying the way in which funding competitions are run by public agencies to allow a greater lead-in time for the preparation of bids and for partnership initiation. Time needs to be allowed for partnerships to develop strong leadership and direction, to devise a suitable set of aims and objectives, to enrol appropriate partners and for the allocation and duties and responsibilities so that each partner's role is clearly identified and understood at the outset. Additionally, development agencies should consider providing limited 'start-up' funding to resource potential partnerships during the preparation of applications and to facilitate effective community engagement at this stage. Funding agencies also have a role to play in providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants and working with them to assist the preparation of revised bids. The good practice of the Development Board for Rural Wales's Market Town Initiative, which allocated funds in two separate rounds, may be followed in this respect (see Box 2).

Without greater assistance for partnership formation from public agencies, there is the danger that competitive partnership programmes will increasingly concentrate funds in a limited number of communities. Bidding successfully for partnership funding is a skill which some communities are better placed to exploit than others. For example, communities whose socioeconomic profile is biased towards the professional classes, with a relatively high number of graduates or public sector employees in the population, may be better positioned to tap into the professional knowledge and competencies of local residents in the preparation of bids. Similarly, communities which have been recipients of previous partnership funding, or which have been specifically targeted by community capacity building initiatives, are often more able to respond to funding opportunities and to develop partnerships and applications which meet qualification criteria:

Table 2: Analysis of the published aims and objectives of a selection of illustrative partnerships

	Mid Wales Partnership	Dyfi Eco-Valley Partnership	Oswestry Hills LEADER II	Shropshire Regeneration Partnership	Curiad Caron MTI
Vision aims					
Diversified economy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sustainable development	✓	✓	✓		
Enhanced environment	✓	✓	✓		✓
Integrated rural development	✓			✓	
Provide a model for others		✓			
Enhanced social resources			✓		✓
Better quality of life	✓		✓	✓	✓
Cultural distinctiveness			✓		✓
Increased employment opportunities	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greater community participation			✓	✓	
Output aims					
Support local business	✓	✓			✓
Attract inward investment	✓				
Job creation	✓				
Representing local interests to external bodies	✓				✓
Support bids for funding	✓				
Infrastructural development	✓	✓			✓
Increase tourism	✓		✓		✓
Increase local sourcing of goods		✓	✓		✓
Encourage 'export' of local products		✓	✓		
Support introduction of new technologies	✓	✓	✓		
Assessment of local need	✓			✓	
Process aims					
Partnership to implement projects		✓	✓		
Improving coordination between partners	✓				
Publicising strategy and aims	✓				
Public consultation/community involvement			✓	✓	✓
Combining resources of partners			✓		
Inviting local politicians to meetings	✓				
Transnational cooperation and exchanges		✓	✓		

Source: Curiad Caron (1997); Dyfi Eco-Valley Partnership (1997); Oswestry Hills LEADER II (1997); Mid Wales Partnership (1998); Shropshire Regeneration Partnership (1998)

Box 2: Good practice – the Market Town Initiative

The Market Town Initiative was launched in 1996 by the DBRW as a competitive community-based programme to improve the social, economic and environmental future of towns in rural Mid Wales. A total of £90,000 over three years in revenue funding was allocated to each of the 10 towns in two rounds of awards. In the first round, 25 applications were received and five awards made to groups in Abercraf, Cardigan, Dolgellau, Rhayader and Llanfair Caereinion. Towns that were unsuccessful in the first round were given assistance and advice on their applications and were subsequently invited to re-submit their revised applications for a second round of awards. In this second round, five further awards were made to groups in Blaenau Ffestiniog, Hay-on-Wye, Llanidloes, Penrhyndeudraeth and Tregaron.

The formation of partnerships was a pre-condition of funding as the competition rules allowed for only one application to be received from each town. This was intended to encourage wider participation in identification of needs and objectives, and to act as a mark of the commitment of the community as a whole to the project. The failure to develop effective partnerships and the too narrow targeting of projects were common reasons for the rejection of applications in the first round:

> "There was one town ... [where] basically it was town council-led and the majority of the content of their application was based around the importance of improving the graveyards [in the town]." (Development agency manager)

In the above case – as in others – officials from the development agency worked with the local group to help them form a wider partnership with other organisations in the community and to develop a broader programme of activities based on more extensive consultation:

> "We were able to work with them to broaden [the partnership] for a second application. And the second application was just a complete turnaround and they brought in more individuals and more groups in the community and more experience into the group that they had there and they submitted an application which was successful in the second round." (Development agency manager)

By staggering the distribution of awards and by working with groups which had been unsuccessful in the first round, the DBRW was able in its Market Town Initiative to widen the range of communities benefiting from the programme and to help build more effective local partnerships.

"LEADER areas are notorious for this ... you can almost plot them on a map in terms of applications that they make to a whole range of bodies because they are confident, and they have also developed 'style' and experience." (Director of a funding body)

The greater ability of groups which have experience of partnership working to successfully bid for more funding is helping to produce an uneven geography in which some areas become 'partnership rich' and others 'partnership poor'. Unchecked, this trend may lead to the promotion of partnership working combined with competitive tendering for regeneration monies serving to reinforce spatial inequalities in the scale of rural regeneration activities, potentially becoming counter-productive to the regeneration objectives of rural policy.

Greater awareness of the unequal capacities of rural communities is required from funding bodies in order to address this problem. Good practice may follow that of the National Lotteries Charities Board whose system is designed to guard against giving priority to subsequent bids from groups who been successful previously. Grant officers score an application against a set of criteria, but must also comment on each application. If it is noted that an application is scoring highly because of a group's past record, the assessment is adjusted to focus on the appropriateness of the current bid.

Enrolment of partners

The underlying rationale of partnership working is that it is necessary to pool the varied resources of a range of organisations in order to create a 'capacity to act' with regard to specific objectives, such as economic regeneration and community development. In this context, the question of who are enrolled as partners is crucial – not just in terms of the availability of appropriate resources, but also in terms of the legitimacy of the partnership with its target population. However, as discussed above, the enrolment of partners often occurs in a limited period of time, and is driven by a small group of key *animateurs*. Partners are frequently drawn from existing networks of contacts and established organisations. Although a rational assessment of which partners should be involved is commonly undertaken, the final boundaries of inclusion and exclusion can sometimes appear arbitrary:

> "On one level you were saying, 'We are a rural group, so we need the local authorities, we need the TECs, we need the farming unions – the agricultural people'. So we wrote these organisations in. And suddenly you start getting into the politics of who needs to be there. Are the National Parks members? No they are not. So, the local authorities are there, the WDA is there, the TEC is there, the Mid Wales Manufacturing Group is there, the Country Landowners Association were supposed to be there, but I have never seen them. The WCVA are members, as is the Mid Wales CBI. Why the National Parks are not there, well, I don't know." (Partner representative on a facilitative partnership)

The identification and enrolment of partners during the establishment phase is important as most partnerships tend to be relatively stable in terms of membership once operational. This is particularly the case with locally-focused delivery partnerships, where the number of partners tends to be fewer and where the appropriate partners can be more readily identified and enrolled at the outset. Facilitative partnerships with a strategic role, however, and those covering a large territory, tend both to have more partners and also are more likely to have gained partners since formation. New partners may be recruited in order to represent new sectors and therefore to boost the partnership's legitimacy, or in order to access new funding sources. Only rarely do partners actually leave a partnership, usually as a consequence of public sector reorganisation.

Engagement with partnership activity in many contexts occurs because lead partners know strategically that they must incorporate other institutions and those institutions in turn accept the obligation simply because they need to be present and should be involved. This is commonplace in the recruitment of local authority and other public sector agencies.

> "The partnership was sold to the districts and as long as they didn't have to put money in then they weren't that bothered and simply signed up." (Coordinator, facilitative partnership)

These core agencies then operate strategic selectivity in drawing in appropriate representation from other sectors for functional reasons and to build the capacity of the partnership to meet bidding or delivery requirements (see Box 3).

Making the selection of who should be involved from private and voluntary sectors frequently involves mobilising strategic contacts and building appropriate teams through a process of informed selection. Thus representatives may be hand-picked because of the positions they hold or their known commitment and quality:

> "What we did was to invite people to sit on our group from various organisations. But rather than inviting the organisations to send somebody, we instead almost 'cherry picked' from the organisations that we wanted in order to make sure that we could get people working together." (Committee member, delivery partnership)

Occasionally, however, engagement arrives far more through chance, though lead partners are clearly always looking for suitable participants. These processes, drawing on local knowledge and interests, can raise difficult questions concerning the representativeness of partners and the legitimacy of their voice.

'Representatives' of partners are frequently 'hand-picked' by the lead partners to participate in the partnerships as individuals. Although particular *organisations* are involved because they are "the

Box 3: Strategic selection of partners

"SRB bids have been put in by local authorities and suddenly they realise that they haven't got the community and voluntary elements involved. So they say 'Will you be our partners?'. So you are not a 'real' partner." (regional partnership coordinator)

"What actually happened was that there was two of us.... And we sat down and said 'Right, who ought to be [in the partnership]?'. So we put some lists together about all the organisations that ought to be represented.... And so we came up with a list and we threw this list around and we made some additions and subtractions. Then we had a long discussion about the voluntary sector and its representation, and the amount of public sector representation in terms of limiting it ... which was interesting. And we also discussed 'local' representation. And we were able to ensure that there was strong local representation in the end." (partner representative, LEADER group)

"It is a matter of hitting the right 'buttons' ... depending on this, one might make a decision as to who ought to be on the partnership." (partner representative, LEADER group)

"I think that the reason why we were there was because we were probably the only grassroots organisation that they could find." (community sector partner representative)

'standard' organisations to be invited" a more strategic approach may be taken to selecting particular individuals to represent those organisations to represent them. This approach is adopted in an attempt to maximise the effectiveness of partnership working by building a team committed to the partnership and its aims. However, it also highlights that the reasons for the involvement of individuals as well as for the involvement of organisations varies, and that not all individual participants may be involved through interest in what the partnership is doing. While some do effectively volunteer because they have an interest or self-interest in the partnership's activity, in many cases the task of representing a local authority or other public body on a partnership is simply delegated to a member of staff (see Box 4).

While the enrolment of public sector partners may be relatively straightforward, enrolling partners from the private sector can be more problematic.

"If you get somebody from the voluntary sector, then it may be possible to say – because there is a structure there – that that person can 'represent' the voluntary sector. And the same can be said for the public sector and the local authorities.... But to say you can get somebody to 'represent' the business sector is actually a

different issue, of course. Because they represent *their* business and there aren't necessarily the [wider] structures there." (Partner representative, LEADER group)

This is not just a question of representativeness, but also one of the resource-cost of partnership working. Conventional wisdom holds that partnerships enable private sector finance and expertise to be incorporated into economic development initiatives. However, only a minority of partnerships surveyed in Mid Wales and Shropshire include private sector partners, and even fewer receive private sector finance. This reflects in part the dominance of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the indigenous rural private sector. SMEs commonly have neither the surplus capital to invest in partnerships, nor the surplus personnel or office space for secondment. Membership of partnerships may equally be regarded as a costly distraction without obvious returns by individual business people.

"[It is] difficult to get the private sector involved in projects which have more of a social focus. They want to see some direct benefit back to themselves [and] with a lot of projects they cannot see any benefits from being involved so they don't bother." (Partner representative)

Box 4: Reasons for individuals' participation in partnerships

Delegation

"Periodically everything is thrown up in the air and it then comes down on different people. And this was one of the things that came down on me. Having said that, one of the reasons why it came down on me was because I had an interest in this area. But basically, it just sort of landed on my desk." (Voluntary sector partner representative)

"[The partnership] landed on my desk really." (Public agency representative)

"Originally the director of community services was nominated ... but he delegated it to me. He thought that I was the most appropriate person to attend." (Local authority representative)

Inheritance

"The guy who actually wrote the bid, wrote it when he was working [for another organisation]. Shortly after submitting the bid he got a job [here]. He was my boss. He then left and wasn't replaced, so I got it!" (Local authority representative)

Selection

"The actual people involved ... were actually hand-picked in many cases. They were hand-picked by myself and my boss. So it was quite a 'top-down' process I suppose. So we basically hand-picked the people representing each of the organisations." (Partnership coordinator)

Interest

"During the course of [an] application I spoke to [the coordinator] at great length and I was asked to become Chair." (Partnership chair)

"I was invited to my first meeting and it just led on from there really.... And of course, when you are a local parish councillor and people say that money is available for projects, then you're all ears aren't you?" (Partnership committee member)

"If I go to this sort of meeting then I am getting paid for attending, as would the local authority and the WDA people. But if the local hotelier goes along to such a meeting to represent the local tourism industry, then he is not paid and is not attending to his business whilst he is there." (public agency representative)

Although local enterprises do often contribute in kind to community-based partnerships, at a wider territorial scale the only enterprises with the size and profit margins to allow effective participation in partnerships are frequently the privatised utility companies. More usually, the employer sector is represented by public sector institutions such as colleges and hospitals. Business interests are represented by chambers of commerce and farming unions, or through TECs.

Community engagement

The promotion of partnership working in rural policy has strongly emphasised the potential of partnerships as a means of engaging local communities in regeneration. Partnerships are seen as a mechanism for devolving decision making and assisting a transition from 'top-down' to 'bottom-up' planning in rural development. A number of rural partnerships, including the EU LEADER groups and the DBRW's Market Town

Initiative, have been explicitly charged with encouraging community participation. However, the effective engagement of local communities can be as problematic as enrolling private sector partners, and the extent of community participation in partnerships is similarly limited.

Partnerships tend to be structured fairly formally, often at the insistence of funding bodies. They usually require constitutions, management committees, auditing procedures and so on. However, this is a structural form which favours the enrolment of *organisations* as partners, as opposed to positioning more ambiguous entities such as 'the local community' as partners. Of partnerships surveyed in Mid Wales and Shropshire, only two listed 'the community' as one of their partners. More commonly 'community organisations' are enrolled to represent local organisations.

For partnerships focused on individual communities, this commonly involves enrolment of the town council, or parish council (in England) or community council (in Wales). For partnerships operating over a wider territory, the definition of the 'local community' may be more difficult, and 'local representation' is frequently provided by county or district councils, and, in England, by the county rural community council (the Community Council for Shropshire was a partner in five of the seven partnerships in Shropshire responding to our questionnaire; there is no equivalent organisation in Powys or Ceredigion). Very rarely are 'grassroots' community groups enrolled as partners.

However, the enrolment of local councils and councillors as 'community representatives' on partnerships raises questions about their actual representativeness. This is especially problematic in areas – such as large parts of our study region – where there is a strong tradition of non-party local politics and where many councillors are elected unopposed. Furthermore, councillors may not always be willing participants in partnerships. A number of community-scale partnerships in the study region had experienced frosty relations with the local county councillor or the local town, parish or community council, because the councillors feared that their role or authority was being challenged by the new partnership.

Although the formal involvement of community groups as partners may be limited, most partnerships are engaged in some form of wider community consultation. Only two of the

partnerships surveyed claimed not to liaise with local people at all. Over 80% of the partnerships felt that engaging local people was important to their work, though the scope of this engagement tended to be concentrated particularly on the identification of needs, finding solutions, and, to a lesser degree, with the implementation of projects (Table 3). A minority of the partnerships considered engagement of the community in providing or exchanging information, or in giving feedback on partnership activities, to be 'very important'.

However, for many partnerships, local liaison involved consultation with community representatives – local councillors, 'key individuals' or other community groups – rather than with the community at large (Table 3). Just over half of the partnerships surveyed in Mid Wales and Shropshire liaised directly with the local community, most commonly through public meetings, although some partnerships employed newsletters, noticeboards, or 'planning for real' and 'community appraisal' exercises, as well as publicity in the local media (Table 3).

The employment of more direct forms of community engagement does not necessarily mean that the views received will be any more representative of the population as a whole. The turnout at public meetings tends to be low, often attracting a relatively small group of people who are known to be active in the community:

> "What you tend to find then of course is that it is the same faces that attend.... You see the same people who sometimes wear a different 'hat', but essentially there are the same people there. So there is a 'clique' – I suppose this is an unfair word – but there is a section of the community which is well geared up, and which is on everybody's invitation list." (Partner in a facilitative partnership)

> "We have had articles in the newspaper and we have urged groups that have received support to communicate that. So I don't think that it is not for the want of trying, or whatever. It is just the nature of these things, I think, that those people who are 'in the know' are 'in the know', and it is very, very difficult to broaden things out and widen involvement." (Partner in a facilitative partnership)

Table 3: Community engagement by partnerships

Partnerships' assessment of the importance to their work of community engagement through specific tasks (%)	Very important	Reasonably important	Not important
The provision/exchange of information	42	42	16
The identification of local needs	82	15	3
Finding solutions to local needs	73	18	9
Involvement in projects	67	18	15
Feedback on partnership action	45	39	16

Methods employed by partnerships to liaise with local communities	% of partnerships surveyed
Liaison with local councillors	42
Liaison with other key individuals	67
Liaison with community groups	61
Public meetings	52
Through the local media	12
Newsletter	9
No liaison with local community	6
Flyers	3
Noticeboard	3
Postal survey	3
'Planning for real' exercise	3

Source: Questionnaire survey

The true value of forms of direct community engagement, such as public meetings, may therefore be not in the compilation of a 'community viewpoint', but rather in the identification and mobilisation of a core of active volunteers willing to work for a partnership in a community.

Proactive involvement in partnership activity by communities and community organisations does vary. Interviewees in one part of the study region suggested that parish councils exhibited a greater ability to mobilise their communities to engage with partnership initiatives than small town councils; but evidence from other parts of the region would contradict this. More generally, the socio-economic profile of a community can be a factor. In West Wales, it was suggested that villages around the university towns and communities with high proportions of active retirees produced relatively more grant applications than remoter, more agriculturally-focused communities. In Shropshire, interviewees noted that community engagement was often difficult in commuting areas due to the lack of an

'active voluntary workforce' in the villages during the day. Similar observations were made about the differences between areas attracting different types of in-migrants:

"So much community development also depends on the typesets of the people involved. [In area x] you have got a lot of people who have come in and who are looking for the 'rural idyll'. I am not being rude at all but you are talking about the hippies and these types of groups. But they are people who have come from elsewhere and have always been 'busy' types of people and have moved into this area and want to get things done. But in [area y] you have had people moving in who have come to the area for a quiet life and don't really want to get involved in community development issues."
(Partnership coordinator)

Previous experience of working in and with partnerships is also significant in raising the willingness and capacity of communities to

become engaged with new partnerships. The EU LEADER programme is judged to have played an important role in this respect in stimulating the development of community participation in rural regeneration:

> "The presence of a LEADER programme has been a major factor in generating interest and in getting people actively involved." (Partner representative in a facilitative partnership)

> "I think that it is more difficult to get people to do things when there is no legacy of a LEADER programme." (Partnership coordinator)

However, across all areas, two major factors appear to restrict the extent of community engagement. First, the partnership process is seen as being too formal and bureaucratic. Untrained community representatives can find it difficult to contribute equally with public sector representatives in partnership meetings, while community groups seeking to form partnerships or apply for grants can be put off by the paperwork involved:

> "Because of the probable over-weighting of the bureaucracy involved, we are alienating the grassroots. It is quite frightening for the small local village group to be faced with something like 30-odd pages of application forms. It is quite horrendous. So they look at the forms and say, 'Well we only want £500 to start something going', and so they don't bother making an application in many instances." (Partnership chair)

Second, partnership organisations themselves frequently feel that they have insufficient resources to adequately engage with local communities:

> "At the moment [the partnership] is not really doing anything to expand and widen involvement in community development activities. It is very difficult for us to do this because we just don't have that sort of money." (Partnership coordinator)

> "It was also impossible to do much meaningful work with local communities as there was only [one person] working at a local level." (Partner representative on a facilitative partnership)

These issues could be addressed through a number of measures. Project work explicitly aimed at encouraging proactive participation by community members in identifying community needs and developing strategies to meet them could be extended, including the targeting of such schemes in areas with limited previous experience of participatory community development. More resources need to be devoted within partnerships more broadly to supporting engagement with local communities. Partnerships and funding organisations can help broaden community involvement by reviewing their procedures and practices to cut unnecessary bureaucracy and maximise the use of accessible language. Finally, specific training for parish and community councillors and other community activists in partnership working would facilitate their more effective engagement in the partnership process.

Effective community engagement can help to enhance the perceived legitimacy of partnerships in the areas they cover. Partnerships should aim to consult with local communities as broadly as possible, and more could follow the good practice of some partnerships in the Market Town Initiative with 'community representatives' elected to the management committee at public meetings (Box 5). Other techniques for informing and listening to local people, including newsletters, noticeboards, surveys, exhibitions and 'planning for real' exercises, could be adopted more broadly.

The organisation of partnerships

The organisational structure of a partnership is usually the product of formulation by the partnership itself and the direction of lead partners and funding agencies. So, while there is some variety, few partnerships differ significantly from the standard model of a formally constituted organisation in which executive authority is vested with a management committee or equivalent.

The size and make-up of the management committee, and the balance of its responsibilities between strategic direction and day-to-day administration, is, however, more mixed. In delivery partnerships, the management committee

Box 5: Case studies – community representation

Curiad Caron

Curiad Caron was established in 1994 by local people in Tregaron, Ceredigion, concerned about the community's economic and social decline. The 10 original members were drawn from the local churches, Womens' Institute and local businesses, and operated informally with monthly meetings. The group applied for funding under the DBRW's Market Town Initiative in 1996 and adopted a more formal organisation as a non-profit-making company limited by guarantee, which is managed on a voluntary basis. The management committee of the partnership includes invited representatives of organisations and interest groups in the town, such as the WI and farmers, in an attempt to achieve a unified community approach. However, the appointment of a 'youth' representative proved difficult, with the Young Farmers Club and the head pupils of the local secondary school all declining invitations to participate. Following receipt of funding from the Market Town Initiative, the territory of Curiad Caron was expanded to cover the whole of the former Tregaron Rural District Council area, and applications were invited for five additional directors. More than five applications were received and elections held on a constituency basis, with the new directors elected to represent specific communities within the partnership's territory.

Menter Aberteifi

Menter Aberteifi was established by Cardigan Town Council in partnership with the town's Chamber of Trade in 1995. Originally the group was driven by the town council, which had six members on the partnership's committee. However, the degree of town council involvement was reduced following the award of Market Town Initiative funding in 1996. The re-structured executive committee now has 12 voting members. Four of these are appointed members representing the main partners – the town council, the chamber of trade, Ceredigion County Council, and the Teifi Estuary Environmental Millennium Initiative (TEEMI) – while the remaining eight, including the four officers, are elected annually at a public meeting. In addition there are 12 non-voting members who attend the executive committee meetings, representing other partners and interested organisations, including the Welsh Development Agency, the TEC, Local Agenda 21, the Antur Teifi LEADER group and the local college, as well as all of the town's county councillors. Four public meetings were held during the first year, but limited attendance has led to this being reduced to two meetings per year. Particular attention has been paid to targeting people who have been critical of the work of Menter Aberteifi to achieve wider community involvement in the initiative. As a result of concerns about increasing the involvement of young people, a youth sub-group was established in 1998, with a non-voting representative on the main committee.

may consist of a fairly small, tight-knit group of partner representatives with direct technical knowledge and authority who are in effect responsible for the administration of the partnership. In facilitative partnerships, the committee may have a more strategic and discursive role and the aim of bringing together different sectors of opinion may produce a large membership, although this may be offset by the existence of specialist sub-committees (see Box 6).

The level of commitment expected from partners can also vary. Of the partnerships studied in Mid Wales and Shropshire, the extreme is represented by the Mid Wales Partnership, a strategic partnership which demands not just that all

partners attend committee meetings, but that they are represented by senior personnel or board members. This high level of representation is deemed necessary in order to maximise the perceived authority of the partnership when representing the region's interests to government at a Welsh, British and European level. In contrast, in just under a quarter of partnerships surveyed in Mid Wales and Shropshire, one or more partners were not represented on the management committee. In some cases, the excluded partners were those whose contribution to the partnership was essentially limited to specialist expertise or resources; in others, those not present were 'partners' whose only role in the partnership was as a source of funding.

Box 6: Case studies – committee structures

The Mid Wales Partnership

All 17 partners are represented on the board of the Mid Wales Partnership, although representation is not equal. The Welsh Development Agency has two delegates and two advisors at meetings, while the three county councils each have three representatives (two elected councillors and one officer) and two advisors. All other partners, mostly from the voluntary and private sectors, have one member each. The partnership insists that all partners are represented at meetings by senior officials who have the executive authority to take decisions on behalf of their organisations and to commit resources. Thus, the councils are represented by the council leader, the chair of the economic development committee and the chief executive. The WDA's representatives include the chair of its board, who is also chair of the partnership.

Beneath the board are six working groups responsible for strategic planning and policy formulation in the areas of transport, skills and training, rural development, information technology, tourism and European issues. Not all partners are represented on all working groups, with membership reflecting the partners' interests. Partners are represented on the working group by personnel with specialist interests or responsibilities in the areas concerned.

Menter Powys

The Menter Powys LEADER II Local Action Group is 'hosted' by Powys County Council, which is the lead partner, originally as part of the chief executive's office, but later in the community, leisure and recreation department. The partnership has a management committee comprising representatives from the four 'funding partners' – the county council, the WDA, Powys TEC and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority – and is attended by three senior officers of the council, and one representative from each of the other partners. The management committee meets quarterly, and is responsible for strategic decision making, such as formulating the business plan. Below the management committee is an officers' group which is responsible for implementation of the partnership's work. Meetings of the officers' group are attended by specialist personnel from the core partners and by representatives of the eight non-funding partners.

Llwybr

The Llwybr partnership, funded under the EU TIERRAS Programme to develop an 'information society' in rural Wales, has four main groups. It is managed by a steering group composed of seven representatives from the original partner organisations plus an observer from the Welsh Office. The steering group meets quarterly to evaluate applications to the partnership's fund, and every two months to define work programmes. An operational group develops the work programmes and comprises 15 officers drawn from 14 organisations, appointed by the main partners. Alongside these committees are two task groups, responsible for carrying out the partnership's projects, with up to 28 members with specialist technical expertise, drawn from the partner organisations.

The frequency of meetings of partnerships' management committees varies, with most meeting on either a monthly or a quarterly basis. The formality of the meeting location also varies, with regional- and county-scale partnerships tending to meet at formal locations such as council offices; many community-scale partnerships, however, favour more informal locations such as hotels and tea rooms. A number of partnerships rotate the location of meetings between different parts of their territory. However, in the majority of partnerships surveyed, there was also much more frequent informal liaison between the key partners, often on a weekly and in some cases on a daily basis. Several partnership coordinators felt this informal contact to be more important in the effective working of the partnership than the formal meetings.

If partners' commitment to meetings can vary, so does their contribution of resources. Many partnerships make at least an implicit distinction between 'funding' and 'non-funding' partners. While all but three of the partnerships surveyed in Mid Wales and Shropshire received funding from more than one source, in the majority of cases all funding agencies were in the public sector. Thus an implicit privileging of funding partners as the partnership's 'core partners' serves to reinforce the dominance of the public sector in partnership working:

> "The 'core' partners are the ones that provide the money.... So the local authorities, the WDA and the TEC – well those are the big people." (Partnership board member)

The public sector, and notably local authorities, also takes the leading role in the provision of material resources to partnerships, including office space, administrative support and personnel. Nearly half of the partnerships surveyed were serviced by employees of one or more of their partners working on their behalf. County councils, TECs, Menter Powys and the Shropshire Rural Community Council all seconded employees to work for partnerships they funded.

Three quarters of partnerships surveyed employed their own staff, usually in a managerial or project implementation role, although a third had only one full-time member employee. Most partnerships therefore rely heavily on volunteer labour. The Llanidloes LINK Market Town Initiative, for example, recorded over 170 hours of voluntary contributions between October 1997 and March 1998 (Llanidloes LINK Interim Report, March 1998).

By comparison with the public sector, the contribution of voluntary sector partners in particular is often less tangible. Voluntary and community sector partners are commonly enrolled to provide local representation and/or specialist skills and knowledge. This division of roles can produce tensions, as funding partners exert more influence. Voluntary sector partners enrolled to shape the direction of the partnership's activities feel not only marginalised, but even that the dual role of the funding partners is producing a conflict of interest:

"The message that you get is that people are not generally happy with partnerships or their experiences of partnerships.... The issues are very much about the 'weight' that is given to the voluntary sector within partnerships, literally, in terms of voting rights and so on, and what they can bring to the table and how this is recognised. This subsequently opens up another whole set of issues for us about whether you can have people in 'equal' partnerships where they are actually in a client relationship to one of the other partners as funders." (Voluntary sector representative)

Despite these concerns, partnerships do appear to be blending resources from different sources and sectors, and although sometimes undervalued, the contribution of voluntary sector or community partners is often fundamental in providing a partnership with the legitimacy, local knowledge and voluntary labour it requires to create a 'capacity to act'.

Summary

The organisation and structure of a partnership provide the architecture of its future operation. The constitution, aims and objectives, partners enrolled, funding arrangements, committee structure and the role of community engagement, all shape the working practices and culture of a partnership, and hence contribute to the effectiveness of the partnership process. These structural factors can construct obstacles and challenges which militate against the effectiveness of partnership working, and colour participants' experiences of working in partnerships. These experiences, and the lessons that may be learnt from them, are examined in the next chapter.

Working in partnership

Introduction

Setting aside the policy rhetoric of the benefits of partnership working – which emphasises community capacity building, developing services appropriate to a community's needs and encourages initiatives that come from communities rather than developing as top-down approaches – this discussion concentrates on *the experience of working in partnership*. In our wider survey of partnership activity discussed in Chapter 3, lead partners and partnership coordinators and officers sharply identified both advantages and disadvantages associated with this mode of working (Box 7). Their views, however, capture one perspective on partnership working, and while they confirm many of broader issues raised in the established literature on partnership, they give only a partial insight into the views of other actors in the partnership process.

To explore these wider participants' views, 63 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with partners in both facilitative partnerships (FP) and delivery partnerships (DP) in order to examine their experiences of partnership working and develop an understanding of how effective partnership working might be defined. (To retain confidentiality quotations are attributed to partners working in different roles.) As noted earlier, the criteria that were considered as the benchmarks against which effective partnership working might be judged included adequate cross-sectoral representation, pooling of resources and ideas, consensual decision making, avoidance of replication of activities and a full engagement by the community with problem definition, process and solutions. This chapter addresses these criteria by discussing three themes. First, the experience of working in partnership in general is explored; second, the experience of working specifically in facilitative or delivery partnerships is examined; and finally, these two elements are drawn together to consider best practice in effective partnership working. Throughout this chapter, the text highlights the key issues that have arisen in these discussions and the opinions of respondents are set out in boxes to allow those working in partnership to speak in their own terms about their experiences.

Experiences of working in partnership

People working in partnerships bring with them varied baggage. For some it is a delegated task from a major agency and they may, on behalf of their organisation, serve on many partnerships. For others, such service provides an opportunity to contribute, as they may have been selected through private contacts or local pressure to represent the voluntary or the community sector. Among these, some partners will have experience of a number of partnerships and comparative judgements can be arrived at. As one partner noted:

> "Partnership is an 'industry' now. I am 'collaborated out' ... you shake a tree these days and a partnership falls out of it." (Partner representative, DP)

For others, this may be their sole experience and their judgement of it is framed through one model of procedure and practice, from their expectations, or through the rhetoric of expectation surrounding partnership working in the public domain. Each will travel with their own expectations of potential outputs, some seeking a fair return for their investment in the annual statutory balance sheets, others wishing to

Box 7: Advantages and disadvantages of partnership working: the views of lead partners and coordinators

Advantages

- Greater credibility with funding organisations (range of partners involved)

- Sharing of finance

- Economies of scale in discussion and delivery

- Sharing of expertise (cross fertilisation of ideas/coordination/cooperation)

- Avoidance of work duplication and wasted effort

- Independent decision making

- Greater legitimacy (more accountable and inclusive – community engagement)

Disadvantages

- Policy can be driven by funding not need

- Partner status can depend on funding input leading to inequality between partners

- Problems can arise in coordinating the actions of different partners

- Establishing trust between partners can take time

- Different partners may make unequal contributions

- Dependence on a few key actors

- Problems can arise in sustaining partnership engagement

- Policy making can be slowed down

see outputs for their area of interest, and others simply grateful to see small advances in development of whatever type. The time given to such activity may be regular or occasional, paid or voluntary, limited or extensive. Judgements made on the experience of partnership working reflect these varied backgrounds of participants and, in such circumstances, their reflections on their experiences are inevitably going to be positive and negative, diverse and conflicting.

Cross-sectoral representation and participation by partners

In all of the partnerships commented on in these interviews a balance of cross-sectoral representation has been achieved, but the presence of different sectors, while appearing inclusive, does not always lead to equal participation. Therefore, the experience of partnership working is for many partners problematic. In most partnerships, an open distinction is drawn between partners who are there fundamentally because they are *funders*,

Box 8: Funding roles

"The district councils, as well as the county council are key partners in what goes on ... they provide the money." (Partner representative, FP)

"The paternalistic view of local authorities is still prevalent in some instances." (Partner representative, FP)

"One local authority partner said, 'You are not a true partner as you are not contributing any money...'. It was just about turf wars at the beginning." (Partner representative, FP)

"I would suspect that the partners putting in the money are the crucial ones." (Partner representative, FP)

"The roles of the other partners are to provide matching funds." (Coordinator)

"To get commitment from partners you need to ask for money." (Partner representative, FP)

directly or through matched funding of the initiative, and those who are there to facilitate *delivery*. Invariably these roles parallel the division between those with statutory responsibilities and those who are present in the search for broader voluntary or community representation. Inevitably, this produces a clear demarcation of roles and authority within the partnership from the outset that can only be transcended by time and mutual commitment to the broader, shared goals of partnership working. For funding partners their position is obvious:

"I suppose I am there to represent the borough council ... but basically I report on things that we are helping to fund." (Partner representative, FP)

"We are the main partners because we are funding the partnership ... without this funding the partnership wouldn't exist." (Partner representative, FP)

This position structures their relationship with others:

"I am on the group because I represent a community project that has come up from the community and I possibly have quite a lot in common with the aims of the group. And it is good that there is the odd person like me on the group because there is still heavy representation from the statutory sector." (Partner representative, DP)

"Partners not bringing funding to the table are not always regarded as equal partners." (Partner representative, DP)

However, others see their role rather differently as a catalyst to partnership activity, working to generate the type of 'joined-up' thinking that the rhetoric of partnership espouses, but even here financial imperatives are critical.

"I think that our role is to link one regeneration programme with another ... and this has helped to provide matched funding for different projects." (Partner representative)

Consequently, these judgements shape the views of the roles of others within the partnership. As Box 8 illustrates, opinions about other partners clearly relate directly to their funding roles and how they are delivered.

When difficulties arise in delivering that role then criticisms emerge. One chair said: "X [funders] are bloody useless. It is an administrative chore for them to consider what we are doing".

In contrast, those participating for representative or delivery purposes, drawn from the community or voluntary sector, are seen to perform a different function and are judged according to their input by others (Box 9).

Here, the expectations against which they are judged reflect their level of interest, their degree

Box 9: Delivery partners seen as …

Interested participant

"The parish council representative is quite active and is genuinely interested, so I would say that he is one of the better members of the group." (Partner representative, DP)

Sectional participant

"The YFC [Young Farmers' Club] is stereotyped by other partners as just having the same views as the farming unions." (Partner representative, FP)

"Some of the councillors in X felt that the aims and objectives of the partnership were actually district council functions and so it was lucky that there was an understanding within the council more generally that these were actually partnership functions and not district council functions." (Partner representative, DP)

Supportive or reluctant participant

"Community councils are an 'intermediary' … they feed things through that are coming up from local communities and vice versa." (Coordinator)

"The community councils can be very issue-orientated and see funding structures as impeding programmes of work." (Partner representative, FP)

"There is probably a handful of local businesses that you could count on one hand that have given support." (Partner representative, DP)

"I think that X has recognised that she does not have time to do all the work so the initiative has spread the capacity building workload out across other agencies." (Partner representative, FP)

of sectionalism, the clarity of their purpose and commitment to partnership practice. This can undermine their authority in debate or allow their voices to be heard only on particular topics and it may create a sense of exclusion from key aspects of discussion and lead to frustration.

For the practice of partnership working to be successful there clearly needs to be a coalition of blended interests where all feel equal participants. Adequate and inclusive representation is important, as is a sense of inclusion with clear roles and achievements, as indicated below:

"The feeling is [one] of having adequate representation in [the community]." (Partner representative, DP)

"We are there with community interests … we are not made to feel as if we are just filtering community ideas through … we

are part of the whole thing." (Partner representative, FP)

"Local partnerships have secured community involvement through the running of projects." (Coordinator)

In practice such inclusion is often hard to achieve, but some of the difficulties that have been experienced may arise through inadequate representation of certain key groups in some of these partnerships which in turn contributes to the dominance of the statutory sector:

"There isn't that much grassroots involvement in LEADER at the moment … if there were just a few more representatives from the grassroots or from the parishes then that would help." (Partner representative, DP)

"Most people on our committee tend to be elderly white males." (Coordinator)

"Our problem is that the majority of businesses have under five employees, so they haven't got the resources to provide significant amounts of funding or other resources." (Partner representative, FP)

Much depends on how representative partners are enrolled (discussed in Chapter 3) and this can carry through into working practice. Often the availability of time and strong local interest encourages particular participants. For certain key roles, a representative from particular organisations may be called upon.

Often, whatever the representation, many delivery partners feel that they are secondary in the process of debate and that either the Chair or the dominant funding agencies exert tight control on partnership operation. Box 10 illustrates the reactions that occur across the range of partnerships surveyed about the way many operate, which suggests that far from producing open and equal engagement, in many cases partnership operation is far from smooth. Coalitions of interest often develop that work against the full inclusion of all partners; as a result, decisions may be taken with little consultation or no more than token discussion. This can lead to a sense of exclusion and to dissatisfaction with the uneven engagement and outcome of partnership working.

These findings indicate that the engagement of partners in partnership working is uneven and that the practices which are developing are raising interesting questions about how partnerships might be made more democratic and produce more effective participation. Some of these difficulties may arise from the character of the participants themselves and from the culture and attitudes that have dominated past rural development and regeneration practices; others appear to emerge from the operational contexts of partnership working.

Organisation contexts and partnership problems

The organisational structure of a partnership plays a key role in shaping its effectiveness and influencing the experiences of those who give time to it (Box 11). While partnerships need effective leadership to shape the trajectory and

pace of partnership initiatives, such strong leadership may also generate tensions. The real cost and time cost of working together over an extended period can lessen commitment, while the frequency of meetings and their location may also contribute to how partners react to the partnership process. These factors are critical in creating the opportunity for partners to develop a consensual strategy and frequently, if not properly handled, dissatisfactions arise with the process of partnership engagement.

Problems that emerge from ineffective partnership working may arise from five key factors (Box 12). Irritations may occur as a result of equivocal commitment from key partners expressed through attitudes in meetings, perhaps arising because of the delegated representative's uncertainty over the importance of the initiative from their organisation's perspective. This can work both ways; as one chair of a facilitative partnership stated:

"The individuals representing a partner on a committee of a partnership can be clear about the role of the partnership, but this is not always the case in terms of the partner organisation itself."

It may be reflected in poor attendance at meetings and can contribute to 'what's in it for us attitude'. Invariably this arises because of uncertainty over the purpose of the initiative and how that purpose might be realised. Interestingly, this is often a problem that faces facilitative partnerships rather more than those involved directly in delivery. It may also lead to the encouragement of an overlap with the work of other agencies, differential expectations and to the withholding of funding contributions or to the search for direct funding to particular ends.

When partners are uncertain contributors then partnerships flounder and the experience of working within them – far from leading to the pooling of resources and ideas, consensual decision making and the avoidance of replication of activities – becomes fraught with tensions. All partnerships have points where they struggle to find ways of handling these issues; many rapidly outgrow such difficulties and develop a willing and committed engagement with the task and this is part of the 'learning curve' that constitutes the development of effective partnership practice. However, it is important to chart these difficulties through partners' experiences, for without these partnership working might appear straightforward.

Box 10: Problems in partnership working

Control

"There is a perception of the public sector having all of the control and making all of the decisions." (Partner representative, DP)

"The idea of community development is fine as long as they [statutory organisations] make all of the decisions." (Coordinator)

"Any dissent is frowned upon. The project officer has much influence." (Partner representative, DP)

Internal coalitions of interest

"Similar sector partners are more integrated." (Coordinator)

"There is a tendency for statutory organisations to talk amongst themselves." (Partner representative, DP)

"Partners from different sectors 'group off'." (Partner representative, DP)

"I think that when we started there were certain individuals on the LDG [local development group] who tended to discuss things in their own small groups ... in the early days you would tend to get people that knew each other well sitting together, and they would have little conversations with each other.... I did actually complain because everybody at the opposite end of the table seemed to be talking and a few of us down the other end seemed to be left out. But involvement has now widened and everybody is more relaxed now. It's natural, isn't it?" (Partner representative, DP)

Lack of consultation

"The fact of the matter is that people like making decisions without consulting others because it is does seem to be based very much on the recommendation of the project officer." (Partner representative, DP)

"There has been no 'real' consultation with communities.... You just go ahead and you do it." (Chair)

Sense of exclusion

"We get 'consulted' ... but I am not happy with the way things are done.... They send us an appraisal form, but not the application form of a group wanting funding and so this makes it very difficult to know what the thing was about in the first place ... and they also don't give us much time to examine it and say that they will take a nil response as an agreement." (Partner representative, FP)

Inadequate/uneven initiatives

"Partnerships often focus their activities where previous initiatives have taken place as links have already been established with local groups in that area." (Partner representative, FP)

Box 11: Organisational problems in partnership working

Dominant chair or partner

"If the chair of a partnership has too much power then this can cause disaffection amongst the rest of the partners." (Coordinator)

Meetings

"What happens is that you don't get full attendance at all the meetings ... people who don't attend are reminded that they should do so." (Partner representative, FP)

"The partnership group only meets every six months. So you could hardly call this active membership." (Partner representative, FP)

Time and resource costs

"It can take a significant period of time before partners feel ready to input readily into partnership debates as they are often not sure of the agenda of the partnership or other partners initially." (Partner representative, FP)

"We lose out compared to some other partners in that most of the organisations that are in partnership are a lot bigger than what we are and so have the time and the financial and staffing resources to contribute effectively." (Partner representative, FP)

"It is embarrassing to say that [X partnership] has actually been my responsibility for 18 months now ... but it is problematic to cover everything that you want to cover ... so in practical terms I have attended very few meetings." (Partner representative, FP)

"What you have is a lot of professionals there who are on at least £20,000 a year ... and to reach the most simple decision there are 18 people there probably on about £20 an hour for about three hours. So it is mind-boggling how much money is wasted." (Partner representative, DP)

"The local authority recognises that it now has to work in partnership but has also realised the costs of doing this in that it has had to restructure its staff and departments in order to make corporate responses." (Partner representative, FP)

Social relations personal links and tensions

"People work with other individuals they believe they can get the most benefit from working with." (Partner representative, FP)

"There has to be consensus for effective partnership working." (Partner representative, FP)

"There are no noticeable tensions probably because we are covering a small area and we all tend to know each other and we have all met in other roles or in other ways." (Partner representative, DP)

"I think that there might be a bit of resentment from town councillors because they are not in LEADER II." (Partner representative, DP)

"It is a well-known fact that we have had lots of problems with Government Office procedures because we haven't worked with them before." (Partner representative, FP)

Box 12: Ineffective partnership working

Equivocal commitment

"I don't think that 'the partnership' has worked at all ... what we needed was commitment from partners officers ... we haven't got this as well as we would like ... we have probably got it better from the voluntary sector ... the statutory bodies hardly deliver at all really." (Chair)

"The Government Office for the West Midlands has representation although ... they rarely attend meetings.... They see the delivery end of it as being our responsibility and not theirs." (Partnership representative, FP)

Uncertainty of agenda

"There are one or two others there who really have no idea ... they are not quite sure why they are there." (Partnership representative, DP)

"You go to the first couple of meetings and you think, 'Perhaps this is me – I just haven't tuned into this'. But then after two or three meetings you think, 'Oh, it isn't me'. So I thought that it couldn't operate like this ... so after a couple of meetings I started to voice concerns politely at first, and then with increasing force as time went on because other partners just didn't have any idea as to what the partnership should be doing." (Partnership representative, FP)

Overlap with the work of other agencies

"If a partner wants the partnership to serve its own agenda, this can have knock-on effects for the other partners involved, and could result in partners leaving partnerships if, for example, the work of the partnership became quite politicised." (Coordinator)

"There have been tensions between the partnership and partners because of replication of activities." (Partnership representative, FP)

Funding

"Funders can heavily influence the work programme of the partnership." (Partnership representative, FP)

"The lead funder doesn't know what it is funding ... I try to tell them what we are about ... ultimately by using words of one syllable.... We are keeping a very close eye on them ... they seem incapable of understanding what the partnership is about." (Chair)

Different expectations

"The voluntary sector is too fragmented and needs to organise itself better." (Chair)

"Cultural barriers exist between many partners, such as the local authorities and the police, because they want things done yesterday." (Partnership representative, FP)

"Somebody from the voluntary sector wanted to do something but other partners were looking for the hard economic outputs." (Partnership representative, DP)

"I think that it is a well-known fact that the private sector doesn't see youth projects as being their concern." (Partnership representative, DP)

The independence and autonomy of partnerships

While operational procedures and partnership practices may be far from perfect, much has been made of the potential this mode of operation offers to address local problems with local solutions drawing on the skills of key local actors. To some extent this is certainly the case with many delivery partnerships, where the community has been engaged in reviewing and appraising local needs and developing strategies to address them. It is also equally true that regionally- or locally-based agencies involved with development are clearly well informed of the regeneration needs of their territories and how these might be met. Such knowledge has informed the development of facilitative partnership strategies. However, funding programmes for regeneration programmes (invariably with a requirement that partnership working is adopted) contain within them other more specific requirements that inevitably shape many partners' experience of joint working.

The authority of both statutory agency and community may be tempered by the requirement to work in partnership. As one partner in a delivery agency noted:

> "When you are working in a partnership, there is always a loss of sovereignty ... so you end up doing something which wasn't quite what you wanted to do."

Often, however, it is evident that any innovation that might arise from the blending of their respective capacities is to a large extent restricted by the control that arises through programme specification and bidding criteria.

As Box 13 illustrates it is apparent that many partners feel that the prior designation of target specification and the auditing of outputs become critical factors in shaping their perspective on the process. Partnerships, especially those that are delivery-focused, tend to be output driven. It can be difficult to achieve the necessary outputs without agreeing to accept all the local initiatives proposed, irrespective of their quality. Given that delivery plans have to be drawn up annually which detail all outputs, the indicators that these are measured against and the tight control that emerges is invariably viewed as constraining. The lack of adaptability to new goals in some programmes is also commented on. This

inflexibility may result from unrealistic specification in the original bid, but can also emerge through circumstances that have changed or new opportunities that arise. By allowing for these possibilities, partnership engagement could become more responsive and be seen to benefit from the growing experience of the partners.

Interestingly, one partner reflecting on her experience commented that partnership working is a new form of government strategy rather than a new form of empowerment:

> "At the outset it was a completely new process with a different language. And it seemed very prescribed. You often look at things and think whether it is simply finding another way of funding something that they used to fund." (Partner representative, FP)

What these findings suggest is that partnership working is a regulated task with clear responsibilities – money is never provided without accountability – but that these responsibilities need to be more explicitly evident in the promotion of partnership engagement. Far too often the process is promoted as enabling and integrative, which it can be, without recognising that a key measure of capacity building is the growth in an ability to define deliverable and appropriate projects to necessary programme deadlines with purposive outputs, so that the community see a product for their efforts and funding bodies see an output for their investment. In the light of these findings it is not surprising that many partners working in partnership have little sense of their own autonomy or independence as part of the process. The project for many is viewed as both enabling and constraining.

Box 13: Constraints on partnership practice

Bureaucracy and control

"Funding bodies are picky and make things too bureaucratic. And so it can be difficult to develop your own plans of action. We have to operate within very strict funding guidelines.... I have the feeling that we are being 'manoeuvred' or 'manipulated' by where X wants us to go." (Partnership representative, DP)

Bidding criteria and control

"There was certainly quite a lot of flak from local people who said, 'We have won £1 million – now hang on a bit; we don't want you to do X, we want you to do Y'. But the response from the organisations involved in the bid was that they couldn't change anything that had been approved by the funders in the original Approval Document." (Partnership representative, FP)

"We end up having to fit the bidding ... but if you are not careful you end up doing something that actually didn't need to be done." (Partnership representative, DP)

"There are certain projects that are scored in a way which will mean that they succeed to fit guidelines. Other partnership projects are dealt with more severely." (Partnership representative, DP)

Audit/output control

"It is the other thing about having targets that must be met within certain years, and about having 'spend profiles'." (Partnership representative, DP)

"Funding organisations have great power locally in guiding partnership outputs." (Partnership representative, DP)

"The European bid was drawn up in great haste and landed the partnership with a number of fundamental problems ... where it all went pear-shaped was that somebody wrote in that there would be X outputs in X communities ... and this completely missed the point that the partnership was not directly about doing this and saddled it with unachievable outcomes." (Partnership representative, FP)

"There are times when you have got to say, 'We have got to get these outputs; where can we get them from best?'. So you might pick one target area that you are pretty sure you will get results on. And then this gives you more time with the ones that need a little bit more effort." (partnership representative, FP)

"We made a mistake by saying to funders that the partnership could deliver certain outputs which were not really related to the focus of the partnership." (Partnership representative, FP)

Approval of outputs

"It is difficult to feel that you are assessing projects ... there is a tendency to want to rubber-stamp things." (Partnership representative, FP)

"Because the projects are so broadband, as long as you get somebody with the right qualifications to say, 'Oh well, it looks good to me', then nobody bothers you ... so nobody is really saying, 'Is [what you are doing] terribly good value for money?'." (Regional partnership coordinator)

Box 13 continued

Need for shift in outputs over time

"You need the confidence to say, 'Obviously when this was put together ... the ideas were fabulous at the time. But over a period ... and through experience the outputs that we originally thought were going to be appropriate have got to change.' And so you need to be confident to say that the programme needs remoulding." (Partnership representative, FP)

"It takes time for funders to realise that the nature of outputs may change over the lifetime of that partnership." (Partnership representative, FP)

Working in facilitative and delivery partnerships

The challenges and constraints that have been outlined concerning partnership working in general map themselves out in the experience of both facilitative and delivery partnerships in our case studies. However, the task and responsibility of each type of partnership is rather different and so some of the specific pressures felt by those involved in these partnerships with different remits are worth specifying. Details of partners' reflections on the operation of facilitative partnerships are presented in Boxes 14-17.

As Box 14 illustrates, positive experiences of partnership working develop through clear aims and working with the 'right' people, and trust emerges through the establishment of identifiable roles as does a sense of inclusion and effective organisation. Central to this is evident commitment to a 'way of working' and to the ownership of the partnership process by the agencies involved (Box 15).

Facilitative partnerships carry the task of coordinating practice and policy between statutory and other sectors, developing enabling strategies and mobilising activity at the community level. Such tasks depend on developing effective shared visions and policies for implementation. This inevitably poses problems and requires both adaptability in programme specification and adequate resourcing to meet the tasks proposed (Box 16). This occurs frequently across wide territorial areas where responses to initiatives can be uneven and therefore the territorial reach of facilitative partnerships and their capacity to develop local specificity (Box 17) becomes critical in the effective implementation of partnership policy.

Here lies clear evidence of the desire to create a bridge between top-down policy requirements and local needs.

Much has been made of the capacity that partnerships have to blend 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' initiatives, but as already noted tensions do remain in the working out of statutory and community involvement. Interestingly, however, both groups of actors are aware of the difficulty in achieving this integration.

At the level of delivery partnerships this is expressed through recognition that local work is not enough and regeneration policy needs to be integrated with wider strategic thinking. This point was made by the chair of a delivery partnership, by a local authority member on another and by a number of other partners working in such partnerships. All emphasised that lasting benefit could only be achieved if decisions matched local strategic priorities and activities, otherwise replication of provision occurs serving too local a market and is unlikely to be sustainable. This recognition of the wider case may be seen as one realistic change in attitude that has emerged through partnership engagement in delivery partnerships and it does create a bridge between the top-down concerns for effective planned regeneration and the desire of communities to see their needs satisfied locally.

Box 14: Key issues in the operation of partnerships

Clarity of aims

"Partners need to be clear as to what is the focus and remit of the partnership." (Coordinator)

Right people

"We are a very slim partnership but we can get away with it because people are familiar with each other – there are the right people there to make it function." (Partnership representative, FP)

Trust

"All partners need to trust each other and have the same aims and objectives." (Coordinator)

Clear knowledge and expectation of roles

"It is difficult to control the work programme of such partnerships on a part-time basis because partners are unsure how much time and energy is being put into the partnership by the coordinator." (Partnership representative, FP)

"Partnerships work fitfully because at anyone time, people only commit a small proportion of their time and resources." (Chair)

Operate inclusively

"Partnerships that have a lot of partners have to show that they are including all the views of the partners involved to work correctly." (Coordinator)

Good organisation

"Administrative arrangements need to be addressed at an early stage for the partnership to function efficiently." (Partner representative, FP)

"The partnership's management group didn't have much control over the partnership ... there were just masses of paper chucked onto the table when you got there ... so it was not very clear what the point of it all was." (Partner representative, FP)

"Where the management group of a partnership is not formally constituted this can cause problems as funders tend not to commit funding for more than twelve months because of the restrictions placed on them [in terms of their ability to commit funds by government bodies]." (Partner representative, FP)

Box 15: Commitment and ownership in partnerships

Commitment to a way of working

"If the various bodies are just paying lip-service to the partnership, and it doesn't actually change their behaviour in any shape or form ... and so in itself it is neither here or there." (Partner representative, FP)

"Partnership working itself needs to be viewed as integral to each partner's way of working outside of the partnership." (Partner representative, FP)

Ownership by partner groups and a commitment to dissemination

"There is a need for commitment from each partner and the cascading of ideas through partner organisations." (Coordinator)

"I worked in a local authority on a joint (rural) SRB programme with another local authority and a lot of that was really about, 'How can we shaft the others without seeming uncooperative?'" (Regional partnership coordinator)

"Organisations that have a territorial scale of operation greater than that of the partnership itself often have difficulty in 'cascading' the importance of being involved in that particular partnership through organisational divisions/departments outside the territorial remit of the partnership." (Partner representative, FP)

Box 16: Adaptability and adequate resourcing

Adaptability

"Processes need to change to have meaningful involvement, rather than for it just to expect it happening at the top table." (Partner representative, FP)

"Chasing targets is a problem ... if the partnership wanted to change its structure and foci to reflect changes within the partnership then it probably couldn't do this ... targets are rubbish and you cannot work in a partnership-type manner to achieve targets ... what's the point in evaluating partnership activities if you cannot change the work programme." (Coordinator)

"You need to have a flexible funding framework otherwise you can end up channelling millions of pounds of funding into parishes which have extremely high rates of unemployment (for example, 50%) at a first glance, but in reality had eight people unemployed out of a total population of 16 people in that area! ... However, these eight people are still just as much in need on an individual basis as others elsewhere and that is why area-based regeneration can be a problem – it is not the area that needs the money but the people." (Partner representative, FP)

Adequate resources

"The partnership is only going to work really if it is better resourced, and if there is greater commitment from the partner agencies at the most senior level." (Chair)

"When the budget of the main partnership funder was slashed, we had to look for alternative sources of funding and this, in turn, changed the territory of operation and the way of working of the partnership." (Partner representative, FP)

Box 17: Territorial competence and local specificity

Territorial competence

"We are tending to spend more time on partnership X because it is solely working within the county where we operate, and not outside our boundaries." (partner representative, FP)

"X initiative was about need. But it is also about opportunity. And balancing these two differing aspects is difficult. If you then geographically restrict yourself then the 'opportunity' bit starts to become more difficult. However, there is no point in spending money in areas that don't need it. So there has to be some sort of geographical targeting for certain things." (partner representative, FP)

"There are problems with geographical targeting in that you end up with 'dead zones' ... for example, 'deep rural' areas suffer from significant 'rural' problems ... they have geographical distance and location problems and so these areas get the funding. You have also got 'middle of town' areas which have their own regeneration budgets from Europe and elsewhere. And then you have a gap in-between which is neither but where communities may be three miles nearer to the town but are not that much better off than communities in the 'deep rural' areas – the bus still doesn't go through villages in these areas and the doctor and jobs are seven miles away instead of 10 miles away. But that doesn't make it easier to get to such places." (partner representative, FP)

Local specificity

"We have shifted towards working with X ... because they have got a clear strategy for involving the community." (coordinator)

"It would be good to have local partnerships set up and to delegate grants to them so that they could delegate funding themselves to areas in most need based on their local knowledge." (partner representative, FP)

"To make a partnership work that is focused on communities, you need a consistent view from a local community as to what needs to be done. Local organisations that the partnership can facilitate also need to be committed." (partner representative, FP)

A further problem arises in delivery partnerships of raising awareness in the local community and encouraging engagement. In such partnerships, partners are aware of how difficult it is to mobilise and empower those residents they represent. These concerns are captured by comments drawn from an interview with a chair of one such partnership:

"Many individuals in rural areas are not clued up as to how to obtain sponsorship – we presume that people do know about how to go about obtaining commercial sponsorship but this shouldn't be assumed.... You need huge publicity of partnership activities locally – a PR person for a partnership is a very good idea."

Partners are also very conscious of the expectations for delivery that they have to meet, whether it is in structuring work programmes or in raised expectations, as one reflected:

"Less successful projects can occur due to loss of impetus, initiators moving on and over-estimation of effects that project might have."

Although the experience of partnership working at a community level seen from the residents' point of view has not been the concern of this project, there is a clear need for work on this theme to be undertaken. However, our evidence does reveal that while community engagement in partnership practice is essential, it must be a practical engagement centred on what can

realistically be achieved. As one partner commented:

> "You need to have a balance between having adequate community representation on the partnerships and to have something that is practical at the same time."

Where a partnership is focused on delivery at a community level there should be delegation of decision making and responsibilities to that local level where capacity has been sufficiently developed to undertake such activities. Where it has not, both delivery and facilitative partnerships should work with local rural communities to develop such capacities and have sufficient resources and time to undertake such activities (for example, training).

These findings add to those discussed earlier describing the experience of partners and allow the development of an outline of what might constitute effective partnership working.

Towards best practice in effective partnership working

To claim that it is possible to identify precisely all the elements that make for successful and effective partnerships and partnership working in rural regeneration would be inappropriate. Many practitioners in rural regeneration would assert that they have been 'working in partnership' with rural residents, communities and organisations throughout their professional lives and that the recent formulation of a partnership mode of engagement is nothing new. What is relatively new in a rural context, however, is the requirement to tackle regeneration issues through a designated and formal cross-sectoral approach. This coupled with the necessity for community engagement in the partnership process is framing regeneration as a task that involves working *with* people rather than *for* them. In such circumstances there are inevitably trade-offs in terms of independence, power and central control.

The imperative for this change in practice has come from three sources. From residents and communities determined to meet their needs through local actions, from Brussels in their expectations over the use of EU Funds and from

Whitehall, Cardiff and Edinburgh in their search for new modes of policy delivery. To these a fourth initiator might be added, namely the range of governmental and quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations (quangos), which prior to the insistence on this mode of working had already recognised the contribution that might come from 'joined-up' practice in delivering policy. In such a context, with its emphasis on both a collective policy and local commitment, any recommendations concerning how such a strategy can maximise its effectiveness must bear in mind two critical factors: *time* and *people*.

In the search for models of best practice far too little attention has been given to the 'learning curve' along which new policy instruments have to travel to maximise the expectations held of them. It is apparent from the research undertaken that many engaged in partnership activity and those directly involved with working in partnership travel willingly down that road, but are frequently frustrated by its uneven surface. This is not to argue that they have been sent the wrong way, but rather to suggest that they need to learn from the wrong turns they have taken. The evidence presented here indicates that many participants are learning fast how best to navigate this path, but successful journeying and practice takes time.

Time is needed to prepare and train for a new form working, both at statutory level and in the community. In the former case impatience can arise through the unprofessional and collective nature of decision making. In the latter, prior experience can play a key role in accelerating engagement and building capacity in local communities, but where such engagement has not taken place then the delivery of outputs slows down and the process of partnership working is slow to develop:

> "Where groups were already in place and were not set up to access funds, they appear to have been able to move forward more quickly to address regeneration issues." (Partnership representative, FP)

It therefore takes time to mobilise the community and certainly to prepare them for the task of arguing their case and balancing their needs with those of others in a formal setting. The same argument can be advanced for statutory bodies

and their representatives in adjusting to this new form of delivery.

Given the importance of this key factor once partnership working has become established, projects themselves take time in defining needs through appraisals or in getting developments started. This can cause further frustrations.

> "Speed is of the essence – I keep coming back to the smaller applicant that has a 'spark' or germ of an idea. And they often put it to the community and they want to take it forward. But then the trouble is that nothing happens for eight weeks or so. So the impetus is lost and once that has gone you will never be able to motivate that group again." (Coordinator)

Once established, the issue of length of engagement and the time available to build effective partnerships is critical, but rarely recognised when the emphasis is on delivering outputs and investing resources:

> "The priority has been to spend money – 'no messing about' and so less time has been available for community consultation." (Coordinator)

In an organisational sense, the nature of the fixed duration of some delivery partnerships generates particular pressures to spend money and, consequently, there is selectivity in the time spent on certain developments to achieve this.

> "I have to prioritise where I can make most impact." (Partner, FP)

Then, once moving, the fixed period of partnership programmes provides uncertain opportunities for continuation and frustration may arise that capacities now built become effectively 'mothballed' with no clear future.

> "As it is now we are starting to get into it and get more experienced and people are starting to come to us with their projects. But now the whole thing is about to stop – gone. And it doesn't even peter out. It stops dead. So it would be better to have a longer timescale." (Partner, DP)

> "From a strategic point of view it would be crazy to wrap everything up under an existing programme and then six months

later try and get everybody back together ... so we need funding for any interim phase." (Partner, FP)

In any consideration of effective partnership working and future partnership development far more attention needs to given to the length of time necessary to build such partnerships and develop experience of their working practices. Only then can an adequate assessment of the process be attempted.

The second key variable in partnership working is the people involved. In judging the effectiveness of policy and procedures often far too little attention is given to the role of key individuals in shaping that process. All the evidence presented here indicates that particular people matter whether as leaders or participants.

In many rural initiatives operating at a community level it is the role of such individuals, whether parish or community councillors, local leaders in the teaching, religious and medical arena, volunteers in various aspects of community life or simply committed residents who have struggled to develop local initiatives. This same group may have been proactive in their response to LEADER or Heritage Fund or Lottery initiatives and willingly engage in the opportunity that new forms of partnership working offer. They are often already aware of the challenges of mobilising local people, satisfying their needs for outcomes and of nurturing and developing local capacities to achieve these regeneration goals. As yet, unfortunately, many places lack such leaders and building the capacities that will allow them to emerge may take both time and a change in attitudes towards commitment and the community.

At an agency level, there are also people deeply committed to inclusive policy development. In many cases, the pressure to move towards more inclusive modes of consultation and delivery has been driven by their reading of regeneration requirements and the need to develop effective policy instruments to deliver them. Often within these organisations such views may be contested, but there is a growing realisation at this level too, that partnership working is becoming an essential trajectory for future policy delivery.

As Box 18 indicates, successful partnerships depend on people to work effectively, whether as leaders or participating partners. Developing

such characteristics can best be achieved by highlighting those elements that contribute to effective practice and then seeking to develop such capacities in those who participate.

These issues all need to be considered in developing criteria to benchmark the performance of partnerships. Our experience of listening to people who willingly give of their time to this mode of working is that a series of checklists, rather than one, are appropriate in assessing the effectiveness of those partnerships that are in operation.

As noted in the introduction, from a policy perspective such a checklist might include a clear purpose and objective, appropriate cross-sectional representation, adequate resources, effective process and organisation and appropriate outputs. In those partnerships that are succeeding, all such characteristics are met and are invariably recognised by those who participate.

This study, in specifying a checklist from the discussions that have taken place, would include these criteria, but add additional elements. The impressions we have gained from our respondents indicate that, as Table 4 records, effective partnership working can be judged in terms of not only the regeneration product, but also the quality of the process that produces those outcomes.

Although considerable attention has been given in this chapter to the difficulties that arise from working in partnership, these findings suggest that those involved see enormous potential in this mode of working. They may at times recognise the constraints imposed by the process with its emphasis on outputs and be sensible to the responsibilities and consequences of participatory rather than central, programmed delivery. These insights shape their own capacities to act both inside and outside the partnerships they work in and emphasise the challenges facing integrated and participatory rural regeneration strategies.

Box 18: Key factors in effective partnership working

Process

"Partnerships that develop naturally are the best ones ... you know, people are used to forging partnerships in Wales because they have had to ... people are sociable and they like talking to each other." (Partner representative, FP)

Leadership

"The chairs of the working groups are the key to getting things done." (Partner representative, FP)

"Chairmen need to be experienced." (Partner representative, DP)

"The partners involved do not always use me as effectively as they might ... because I have a certain amount of 'reach' simply because I have been around the system for so long." (Chair)

"Good chairmanship and good meetings help. It is no good having the best bombs in the world if nobody has organised the feeding of the troops and the re-fuelling of the planes, and so on." (Partner representative, FP)

"Our sustenance has been down to a number of key individuals, especially the chairperson. However ... the danger when you have such activated individuals is that the rest of the partners are not really on board." (Coordinator)

"New individuals representing partners on a partnership can be beneficial or detrimental to the partnership's activities – it can depend very much on their abilities and attitudes to working in partnership." (Coordinator)

"I think that the development officer is the key person as there would certainly be the a danger of people representing certain areas taking over the decision-making processes if this person wasn't there." (Partner representative, FP)

"Appointing the manager of the partnership was the best thing we have done ... it just wouldn't happen otherwise ... but if he got fed up and left then the whole thing would fall as nobody would have the expertise or knowledge to replace him." (Partner representative, FP)

People

"One of the interesting features of area X is that there are incomers with professional skills and 'outside' links, as well as people who have been in the area forever and have local roots.... And they talk to each other and there seems to be a right balance. And this is a really powerful mixture." (Regional partnership coordinator)

"The same organisation is now represented by a different individual and is much more active ... partner X hardly ever turned up before ... so the perception of them is much more positive now." (Partner representative, FP)

"You need sufficient representation from the local community and not too much representation from the statutory sector...." (Partner representative, FP)

"A key element is commitment." (Partner representative, DP)

"You have got to have the right people involved and they have to stick with it." (Partner representative, DP)

Table 4: A checklist of effective partnership working

1.	Pre-training to engage in partnership working (for example, visits to other partnerships, projects, prepare community groups, attendance at courses, and so on)	✓
2.	Adequate lead-in time for bidding	✓
3.	A clear focus, objective and mission for partnership action	✓
4.	Non-overlapping role with other agencies	✓
5.	A precise agenda for action	✓
6.	Definition of timescales for implementation	✓
7.	A selection of appropriate partners (for strategy formulation and/or policy delivery)	✓
8.	Commitment and informed understanding from *all* partners	✓
9.	Effective commitment and dissemination within partner organisations to support representatives	✓
10.	Clear leadership from the chair	✓
11.	Mutual trust between partners	✓
12.	Effective delivery at officer level	✓
13.	Clear roles and respect between partners	✓
14.	Inclusive processes and shared expectations	✓
15.	Adequate funding contributions	✓
16.	Recognition of non-funding contributions	✓
17.	Minute meetings, define actions, set fixed delivery dates	✓
18.	Achievable and appropriate targets	✓
19.	A simplified auditing process	✓
20.	Flexibility in implementation strategy	✓
21.	Adequate time to achieve specified goals	✓
22.	A defined exit strategy	✓
23.	Long-term commitment	✓
24.	Other (please specify)	✓

Partnerships and rural governance: implications for future strategy

As the preceding chapters amply demonstrate, the discourse and practice of partnership working now dominates the rural development arena. Rural government is no longer the province of local authorities, working in tandem with other public sector agencies such as development boards and commissions. Instead we find a whole host of agencies now involved in rural governance, drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors, and usually working 'in partnership'. However, this very prevalence can cause problems, in that partnership working has become established and accepted, almost by default. As two of our interviewees said:

> "Thirty years ago the county council were all-powerful. They dealt with *absolutely* [emphasis original] everything. And gradually their functions have been eroded. And now everything is in partnership.... Well, what I don't understand, and what I want to ask you is, whose brainchild was this partnership business? Wasn't it working well previously when they had the one organisation that did everything themselves?"

> "It would be just much more streamlined and straightforward if we didn't have to work in partnership. We could just go ahead and do something without having to consult. Partnership working takes time. Absolutely."

Behind the almost uniform acceptance of partnerships as a 'good thing', there lies a whole host of issues that need to be addressed in order to promote effective rural regeneration strategies, which involve local people and promote community development. The establishment of a regeneration partnership does not guarantee benefits for the various interests, which it represents, nor does it automatically lead to either community involvement or community development. As this study has shown, the impact of such schemes is critically dependent on the processes, which are followed during their establishment and implementation. This in turn means that those charged with formulating policies for rural regeneration need to think not only about the aims and content of their various projects, but also about the processes through which these can be most effectively implemented and delivered. One without the other will not work. And, the establishment of successful processes of partnership working cannot be assumed, but has to be built into the very fabric of rural regeneration policy. This concluding section develops this theme and draws out the implications of our research for practitioners and policy makers alike.

Resources and funding

We noted earlier how issues of resource can affect the relationships between partners within a partnership. Given that partnerships are seen primarily as a means of accessing funding, resource implications emerge as a key policy issue throughout, and indeed beyond, the life-span of the partnership. In particular, the current inflexibility of funding arrangements stands out as a key concern, and we would stress the need for funding guidelines and targets to be able to take into account the changing needs and circumstances of the partnerships themselves (within limits of accountability and assurance). Future programmes must also recognise that community empowerment and capacity building is of necessity a long-term process, and that

sustainable benefits are gradually accrued over many years. This contrasts markedly with the short-term nature of most current regeneration funding. Longer lead times are needed to allow workable relationships to be established between those involved in the new rural governance. In addition, dedicated 'start-up' funding (not tied to specified outputs) may well be required before those resources associated with project implementation and delivery are drawn upon.

Scales and places of operation

A critical set of processes is centred around the scales and places within which rural regeneration partnerships work, and the networks which are consequently involved. Issues of scale should not be reduced here to those of territorial coverage – for the scale of a partnership has implications for which organisations and individuals can and cannot be enrolled, for what can and cannot be achieved, and for which resources can and cannot be accessed. The strong identification of partnerships with community engagement has, again implicitly, encouraged the view that the new rural governance involves a re-scaling of power downwards, offering new possibilities of endogenous, or bottom-up, development. However, a case can also be made that the new governance in fact involves a re-scaling of governance upwards, to inter-county or regional levels. Furthermore, where local scale partnerships operate as part of a wider programme, as with LEADER or those funded by the SRB in England, they may simultaneously involve a rescaling of power and governance both upwards and downwards. However, as we noted, it tends to be the more focused, delivery-oriented partnerships, of more limited duration, which operate locally. In contrast, the more strategic (and usually more powerful) facilitative partnerships operate more at county or regional scales. The question for policy makers to consider is not so much at which scales partnerships can operate at most effectively, but which types of partnerships should be operating at which scales.

This can have strong implications for the 'rural' nature of any particular rural partnership. The new governance may well consist of networks reaching well beyond the rural. While this can have advantages for drawing in additional resource and expertise, it can also involve individuals and organisations that are representing county, regional and even national interests, which may not necessarily be 'rural'. The new scales of governance may also operate at an extra-rural level. The Mid Wales Division of the Welsh Development Agency, for instance, is part of a national organisation and has replaced the Development Board for Rural Wales, which previously had a purely rural remit. And the new RDAs in England, for example, each have a board member responsible for rural issues – but by definition this ensures that the rural agenda can be somewhat forgotten, or at worst ignored, by the rest of the board.

The situation is a complex one, and there is no simple pattern emerging. What does seem to be the case, however, is the continuing dominance of the public sector in both initiating and resourcing partnership activity. Our research has suggested that very few partnerships emerge organically from the grassroots. Instead, the majority of partnerships are initiated at a higher level, often by public sector agencies in response to competitive funding programmes. In other words, the public sector – whether at county, regional, national or European level – acts as lead funder and chief organiser. It sets the rules of the game, and is able to determine the types of partners enrolled, the life span of the partnership, its working practices and evaluation procedures, and its functional scope and territorial scale. Local authorities and development agencies will also often provide office space and administrative support. As a result it might be argued that the new rural governance has not, as is often claimed, involved a dispersal of state responsibilities but instead has actually produced a new way of discharging what are still largely public sector responsibilities.

Where these duties are discharged is also of importance to policy makers and practitioners. The complexity of the new rural governance has led to a very uneven implementation of policy. There has been a lack of regularity in the establishment, structure and operation of rural regeneration. Many were formed in response to competitions for limited funding opportunities, often tied to specific central initiatives, and consequently regeneration organisations have been created to perform certain functions in some localities but not in others. The competitive policy mechanism promoted by such schemes as Rural Challenge, SRB and LEADER results in 'winners' and 'losers' – some areas become rich in regeneration schemes, others are poor – and the

process is cumulative and reinforcing. We noted earlier how those partnerships which are in a second or later round of funding are better placed to win future monies, confirming the fact that the feasibility of forming and sustaining regeneration partnerships favours linking with those who already have relevant resources, expertise and skills. In contrast to the territorially-comprehensive competencies of the old rural government, what is emerging is a very uneven geography of rural governance – with some areas becoming 'partnership rich', and others remaining 'partnership poor'. One key challenge in the future will be to spread the benefits of regeneration resources more widely by ensuring that the partnerships themselves are less geographically concentrated.

Empowerment and accountability

This in turn raises considerable questions concerning the linkages between the new rural governance and empowerment. Switching to a partnership culture has meant that decision making requires a collective negotiation of policy and strategy. While this can be inclusive and empowering, it can also lead to problems. Trust has to be earned and given; shared strategy has to be agreed; defined territorial areas of operation have to be demarcated; and medium- to long-term policies have to be negotiated. Such collective negotiation of policy can also lead to the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues. This can lead to blame avoidance, or to 'scapegoating', and there can be difficulties for the public in identifying which agencies are responsible for policy delivery. This in turn means that lines of accountability are also blurred – there is often a significant 'accountability deficit' in the new rural governance, given the lack of directly elected representatives on rural partnerships. Yet basic questions concerning which communities and which interests are being represented, and by whom, are rarely raised.

Following on from this, most funding agencies will demand community involvement in order for a partnership to win, or even take part in, the bidding process for competitive funds. Often, however, this can amount to little more than the co-option of key individuals. In fact 'the community' representative is often chosen from a 'representative' organisation – the local authority, the young farmers, the chamber of commerce –

rather than from the community itself. The substance of community involvement is variable, with the local community being more commonly engaged in the initial identification of needs than in either project implementation or providing feedback and monitoring. As such, it could be argued that the much-vaunted 'community engagement' is simply used by many partnerships as a 'resource' which must be enrolled and demonstrated in order to secure funding, rather than as a necessary system of accountability and capacity building. This in turn raises questions as to who is being 'empowered', and for what ends.

Frequently, however, partnerships are not able to appropriately address issues of empowerment and engagement, because they are essentially output driven. The emphasis placed on outputs in both the awarding of funding and the evaluation of success deflects time and resources from the task of public consultation and the necessity to consolidate relationships between partners. As such, the structural framework within which partnerships operate may serve to hinder the effective realisation of the benefits of partnership working, highlighting a contradiction between the intention and practice of government policy.

Full empowerment would stress the development of a rural policy programme designed specifically to enhance community capacity. An emphasis on partnership and participation alone assumes a level of capacity – local knowledge, skills, resources and influence – and an availability of support, which may well be lacking in isolated and small rural communities. Instead, building such capacity means: developing programmes which improve the skills and confidence of individuals; strengthening the capacity of local groups to develop and manage their own rural regeneration strategies, rather than relying on the resources of other partners; and investing in sustainable community services that contribute to economic, social and environmental regeneration.

Training will be required to allow all partners to contribute effectively to the new rural governance. The ability to work in partnership should not be assumed, especially as the new governance involves a drawing together of different cultures and different ways of working. Trust needs to be built between partners, to overcome any prejudices which may exist and time is required to develop good working practices and collaborative procedures.

Whose regeneration?

Raising questions concerning empowerment and accountability inevitably brings us on to a final area of concern in terms of who actually benefits from rural regeneration partnerships. The first issue is the contested meaning of regeneration itself. Most partnerships are pursuing economic regeneration, although some prioritise social or cultural issues and others favour environmental concerns. All four areas – economic, social, cultural and environmental – need to be addressed in any comprehensive and integrated regeneration strategy, and this is certainly the approach which informs both Agenda 21 and the current reform of the EU structural funds in rural areas. In practice this has been hard to achieve, especially given the continued separation of the key public sector agencies responsible for agriculture, tourism, environment and economic development. Since these agencies fund most regeneration activities, much of this continues to proceed along sectoral lines.

Linked to this are continuing concerns over who benefits from regeneration activity, and a clear distinction needs to be drawn between regeneration *in* an area (which often involves no more than the inward movement of employment, not necessarily filled by local people), regeneration *of* an area (which will bring other developments alongside the jobs) and regeneration *for* an area (which will involve an integrated strategy contributing to the sustainable development of social, economic and cultural resources). The three processes will produce different results, and only the latter will fully contribute to community development, yet all are usually bundled together under the catch-all term of 'regeneration'. We say 'contribute' to community development, because perhaps the most vital form of regeneration through partnerships is regeneration *by* an area, which would involve the local community as full partners in any project rather than as recipients. As our research has shown, such a situation is very rare at the moment.

To begin to raise these issues is to step into the policy future. There are no easy solutions to any of them, and we are aware that each will be difficult to negotiate in practice. However, by raising them we are seeking to contribute to a wider debate – one aimed at ensuring that rural partnership working marks the beginning of a significantly new process of engagement and empowerment in the countryside.

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Appendix A: Case study partnerships

The Mid Wales Partnership

Date of formation: 1996

Territory: WDA Mid Wales region (Ceredigion, Meirionnydd, Powys)

Funding source: Contributions from partners (c £80,000 per annum)

Partners: 17 partners including WDA, county councils, LEADER groups, TECs, voluntary and private sector representatives

Focus: Strategic policy making and planning

Organisation: Partnership board of senior representatives of all partners; specialist working groups

Staff: One part-time secretary

Notes: Established to provide a strategic framework to promote and develop coherent and inclusive policies in response to issues of common concern and interest across the Mid Wales region. Replaced the Mid Wales Development Forum. Recognised as the Economic Forum for Mid Wales by the National Assembly for Wales

Empowering Enterprise in Local Communities

Date of formation: 1996 (for seven years)

Territory: Marches Objective 5b area in Herefordshire and Shropshire; targeted on 15 communities

Funding source: SRB, additional funds from European Regional Development Fund and from local authorities

Partners: Shropshire County Council, Herefordshire County Council, HAWTEC, Shropshire Community Council, Herefordshire Community Council

Focus: Community economic development

Aim: To support community economic enterprises to support community development, via SRB Challenge Funds

Organisation: Two steering committees operating in Shropshire and Herefordshire respectively

Staff: Four part-time staff

Notes: Economic enterprise is the main focus of the programme but voluntary, community, sporting, cultural and environmental enterprises can be eligible for grants. However, individual businesses are not eligible. Grants of up to £5,000 can be allocated, but 50% match-funding is required. Examples of projects funded include community shops, childcare provision, community buses, cooperatives and crime prevention schemes

Jigso

Date of formation: 1987; re-structured 1995

Territory: Rural Wales

Funding source: EU Objective 5b programme, supplemented by the Countryside Council for Wales, Camelot, and the WDA

Partners: 13 partners from public, private and voluntary sectors

Focus: Community development

Aim: To facilitate community participation through the provision of training and the subsequent awarding of grants

Organisation: Managed under contract by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action; management committee of partner representatives, excluding Camelot and Manweb (funding only)

Staff: Two full-time staff

Notes: The present work programme involves the promotion of the benefits of community participation to organisations; the coordination, development and delivery of training in participatory approaches to intermediary bodies; and the encouragement of good practice in participatory approaches to community development, advising intermediary bodies and community groups on sources of funding

Oswestry Hills LEADER II Local Development Group

Date of formation: 1996

Territory: Nine parishes around Oswestry, north west Shropshire

Funding source: EU LEADER II programme, matched funding from RDC, Oswestry Borough Council, Shropshire County Council and the Community Council for Shropshire

Partners: Partners drawn from across the public, private and voluntary sectors

Focus: Community and economic development

Aim: "To create opportunities for people living and working in the Oswestry Hills LEADER area to develop sustainable communities by: strengthening economic, social and environmental resources; promoting local people's use of these resources to rejuvenate the local rural economy."

Organisation: Local development group of 24 members

Staff: One full-time project worker and two part-time administrative/managerial employees

Notes: The Local Development Group can allocate up to £5,000 of readily accessible funding to support local community events and projects, while larger projects requiring greater funding are passed to a Marches-wide LEADER II Regional Sub-committee with recommendations. A Community Action Grant Scheme administered by the borough council has also enable local groups to directly access LEADER II grants of up to £1,000 matched by up to £1,000 from the council. Programmes have focused on rural innovation, the acquisition of skills, and transnational cooperation

Menter Powys LEADER II Local Action Group

Date of formation: 1992 (for LEADER I; under LEADER II 1995-99)

Territory: Powys, excluding Ystradgynlais area

Funding source: EU LEADER II programme, matched funding from Powys County Council, DBRW/WDA, and Mid Wales TEC

Partners: 11 partners including county council, WDA, TEC, Brecon Beacons National Park, farming unions and voluntary sector partners

Focus: Community development

Aim: "To pilot innovative projects aimed at the regeneration of the rural economy."

Organisation: Management committee comprised of funding partners; officers' group includes other partners and interested parties

Staff: Over 20 full-time staff

Notes: Originally funded under LEADER I and continued under LEADER II. Hosted by Powys County Council. Priorities under LEADER II have included helping communities to take action at a local level, piloting the use of new technology in order to promote rural tourism, small firm development and craft enterprises, and protecting and enhancing rural services

The Market Town Initiative

The Market Town Initiative was launched in 1996 by the then DBRW and is now administered by the WDA. It is a competitive partnership programme aimed at stimulating and supporting community development in small towns in rural Wales. Grants of £90,000 of revenue funding over three years were awarded to 10 groups in two rounds of awards. In this project we have focused on the funded partnerships in Hay-on-Wye, Penrhyndeudraeth, and Tregaron, details of each of which are given below. Groups are also funded in Abercraf, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Cardigan, Dolgellau, Llanfair Caereinion, Llanidloes, and Rhayader.

United Hay

Date of formation: 1997 (for three years)

Territory: Hay-on-Wye and neighbouring communities

Funding source: WDA Market Town Initiative

Partners: Partners include the WDA, Hay Town Council, Menter Powys, the Brecon Beacons National Park, Dial-a-Ride, and local societies

Focus: Community development

Aim: To develop a year round economy through the provision of recreational facilities for all, the restoration of the natural and built environment, and to build consensus within the community

Organisation: Committee elected at public meetings, all members are 'independent' rather than delegates of organisations

Staff: One full-time development officer

Notes: Established in order to bid for MTI funding. Major activity has focused on identifying a site for a community centre, streetscape improvements and creating a riverside walk

Deudraeth 2000

Date of formation: 1997 (for three years)

Territory: Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd

Funding source: WDA Market Town Initiative

Partners: Partners include the WDA, Penrhyndeudraeth Town Council, and local societies

Focus: Community development

Organisation: Committee elected at public meetings

Staff: No staff employed

Notes: Deudraeth 2000 opted to draw on the expertise of its committee members rather than to employ a development money. It has instead spent funds on high quality independent reports on traffic reduction and town enhancement schemes

Curiad Caron Market Town Initiative

Date of formation: 1994. Formally constituted in 1997 as part of the Market Town Initiative

Territory: Former Tregaron Rural District, Ceredigion

Funding source: WDA Market Town Initiative

Partners: Two – Curiad Caron and the WDA: Curiad Caron is a non-profit making company with representation from 10 local organisations

Focus: Community development

Aim: To enhance the economic vitality of the area through helping the community to realise its full potential. It aims to achieve this in harmony with an affirmation of the traditional and cultural values and linguistic integrity of the communities within which it operates

Organisation: 15 member board of volunteer directed. 10 represent local organisations; five are elected to represent surrounding communities

Staff: One full-time development officer

Notes: Membership of Curiad Caron is open to anyone living in the Tregaron School catchment area who subscribes to its aims. Projects have included publishing a diary of events, a history booklet and a book of walks; resurrecting the Ffair Garon; helping to establish a youth group; compiling a guide to game fishing; and assisting in school sports pavilion and memorial hall projects

B

Appendix B: Characteristics of partnerships responding to the questionnaire survey

A postal questionnaire survey was sent to 50 partnerships operating in the study region. Thirty-eight organisations returned questionnaires, but six of these were subsequently excluded from analysis as they did not conform to the project's working definition of a partnership organisation. The key characteristics of the 33 remaining partnerships are detailed in the table below.

Focus

Facilitative partnerships	8
Delivery partnerships	25

Scale and territory

Regional or above	**8**
Wales	7
England	1
County	**11**
Ceredigion	4
Powys	4
Shropshire	3
Sub-county	**12**
Ceredigion	2
Gwynedd	1
Powys	6
Shropshire	2
Inter-county (Ceredigion/Powys/Gwynedd)	**1**
Cross-border (England/Wales)	**1**

Programme membership

EU LEADER programme	2
Other EU programme	2
DBRW Market Town Initiative	8