

Vienna Action Statement on Partnerships

2010

I. Preamble

The Vienna Action Statement on Partnerships (the “Action Statement”) was approved by participants of the 3rd Annual Meeting of the OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance (the “Forum”) on 2nd March 2007. The Action Statement aims to enhance governance by improving the dialogue and co-operation between policy makers, and between policy makers and other stakeholders, at the local and national levels, in turn fostering economic development, social cohesion, environmental sustainability and quality of life.

As had been agreed, the Actions Statement was reviewed at the 6th Annual Forum Meeting in Vienna on 17 February 2010, based on a proposal by the Forum Committee of Experts, which comprises selected partnership practitioners and experts with in-depth knowledge of partnership working, and the Forum Board. The document was agreed by the participants at the meeting, who included partnership managers and stakeholders, national partnership co-ordinators, representatives from government departments and organisations interested in the development and promotion of partnership working, and academic researchers.

All Forum members are invited to circulate the Action Statement to their partners, and review their own performance against the principles formulated in the Action Statement. The OECD (LEED Programme) and the European Commission (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) will disseminate the Action Statement to all relevant government departments in OECD countries and EU Member States.

This Action Statement will be reviewed in 2013 by the members of the Forum in light of the results achieved through its implementation.

II. The role of partnerships in the recovery

The partnerships, which together make up the OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance, bring local actors together to develop a joint strategy and implement measures relevant to a specific area. These partnerships primarily focus on employment, social issues and economic development.

Partnerships have become increasingly common in OECD and non OECD countries alike as a governance tool to: link up policies at the local level; connect local actors with other governance

levels; stimulate initiatives; increase effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources; enhance policy outcomes; and develop strong capacities at a local level.

As countries are striving to lead their economies out of the recession and into sustained economic recovery, they have to do so in the context of tight budgets that require clear prioritisation and stronger collaboration across different policy areas.

Governments, therefore, will have to link policies not only at national, but at least as importantly at local level to better combine employment, social, education and training, private sector, non-profit sector and social economic development policies or initiatives into one common strategy. A much better synergy is required especially between education/training, labour market and economic development policies so that the needs of companies are met by the skills of the workers. Partnerships can make a major contribution in this respect.

Traditionally, partnerships have worked within the existing policy framework to adapt programmes to local needs and foster the development of local initiatives compatible with those programmes. In recent years partnerships have increasingly been seeking to play a broader role in policy development processes, influencing policy design and contributing to evaluation. Partnerships are thus endeavouring to become an integral part of both policy design and delivery, at all governance levels.

The Forum underlines the importance of this process, believing that local partnerships can add considerable value to public policy design and implementation during the recovery and fiscal adjustment process through:

- Bringing together diverse local partners and policy areas, and facilitating the development of cross-cutting perspectives and integrated approaches to multi-dimensional problems.
- Improving vertical communication between policy makers from different governance levels to create a joined up approach.
- Supporting the better adaptation of public policies to local circumstances, needs and opportunities.
- Identifying the potential conflicts and synergies which exist between different public policies and signalling them to policy makers.
- Providing local leadership, building trust and consensus on priorities.
- Integrating the concerns of civil society and the private sector into strategic planning exercises.
- Sharing good practice, which has been tested on the ground, and offering know-how from practical experience on what works and what does not.

III. Actions

The participants of the 6th Annual Forum Meeting in Vienna recognise that in order for partnerships to fully contribute to the economic and social recovery process, they need to have a strong impact on:

- *multi-level collaboration*: the involvement and consultation of stakeholders (particularly policy makers and social partners) from supra-national, national, regional and local levels; and
- *cross-sector collaboration*: the involvement of stakeholders from various economic sectors/branches, businesses and their representative organisations, trade unions, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and broad policy fields including labour market, education, economic development, environmental and social policy.

In order to achieve such multi-level and cross-sector collaboration, partnerships require a receptive culture among policy makers in local, regional, national and supra-national government institutions.

The establishment of area-based partnerships is not a sufficient condition for better policy co-ordination. Yet, if the value of local partnerships' input into policy making is to be accepted, there will be implications for governments as well as for partnerships themselves.

On the side of government there is a need to ensure:

- public policies which are well co-ordinated horizontally and vertically, but also flexible and adaptable to change;
- effectively-functioning channels of communication within multi-level governance arrangements that are open to inputs from the bottom up;
- recognition within the policy process of local diversity and the potential strength of local actions, as well as the value of evidence from local practice; and
- facilitation of the development of a supportive environment and trust relationship in which local actors are able to contribute efficiently to problem-solving in the partnership area.

In addition, on the side of partnerships there is a need to:

- ensure transparency and accountability of partnership structures, and create trust networks to improve the social capital of their area;
- improve local and regional information systems through better use of local data and indicators in order to work on the basis of sound local knowledge and expertise;
- demonstrate a strategic approach which goes beyond the delivery of projects and programmes that can adapt to the new challenges of the post-crisis economy and which can help directing the global economic system towards more social cohesion and quality of life for everybody;
- develop foresight capacity and take account of challenges and opportunities offered by emerging sectors (for example, in relation to climate, technology and demographic changes);
- open up to align with new partners to create the basis for long-term development strategies;
- network partnerships at the national level and learn lessons from international experience to ensure efficient dialogue with government; and

- demonstrate a capacity to enhance policy outcomes through appropriate monitoring and evaluation.

The participants of the 6th Annual Forum Meeting in Vienna therefore invite governments and partnerships to work together with the aim to:

- (1) *Ensure flexibility in policy implementation.* This means ensuring that the legal framework, the performance management process and the allocation of budgets is sufficiently flexible to allow government agencies and public services to work closely with local actors from other policy areas on the development and implementation of effective area-based strategies.
- (2) *Establish robust communication mechanisms through which partnerships can influence policy developments which will impact upon their areas.* This will require government departments to improve their internal communication links and establish mechanisms for feedback from their representatives within partnerships. Governments should also encourage social partners and civil society organisations to adopt similar mechanisms. Dialogue with partnership networks at national level should be strengthened.
- (3) *Better align policy objectives.* In implementing strategies, partnerships often face the challenge of inconsistent policy objectives set by different government departments. In order to facilitate greater coherence of policies and programmes, on-going co-operation and co-ordination across ministries and between government officials and external actors is necessary to ensure that everybody is working towards common goals.
- (4) *Establish strong evaluation tools for measuring added value.* Though many partnerships frequently report on project results, the achievements of partnerships as a whole, and their overall added value as a governance tool receives less attention. In order to evaluate the contribution of partnerships and their overall added value as a governance tool more comprehensively, it is recommended that holistic evaluation tools be developed that assess the added value of partnership collaboration itself, and not just individual project outcomes.
- (5) *Build the capacities of local and national stakeholders to work effectively in partnership through training and development.* This will include equipping representatives from government, civil society and the private sector with the skills needed to participate in and co-manage collaborative activities and partnerships.
- (6) *Provide a secure financial base.* A solid, sustainable financial basis for operation is key to enabling partnerships to take a long-term view on local issues and problems and contribute fully to better policy outcomes. Such financial security needs to be linked to good performance. This will normally require the possibility of renewable multi-annual funding that covers both partnership management (core costs) and specific activity costs.

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