

Prioritizing the Common Good The Effective PRIME II Partnership Model



Like many large USAID global projects, PRIME II is designed for implementation by a consortium of partners who bring a broad set of complementary skills and capacities rarely available from a single organization. This is a strategy with many advantages, but it creates a complex structure to lead and manage. From the earliest stages of forming a partnership, responding to the Request for Application and the startup of operations, the five PRIME partner organizations have shared a powerful vision of the partnership in action. The resulting collaboration has proven unusually rewarding, and a review of its successes and lessons learned is provided here.

Partner Leadership Group

Composed of two senior leaders from each partner organization, the Partner Leadership Group (PLG) provides a stable and consistent mechanism for direct participation in the Project's strategic direction and technical leadership. This tight-knit group meets four times a year, rotating venues among partner offices. These leaders must set the example of a willingness to prioritize the common good of the Project and to seek win-win decisions.

Memorandum of Understanding

At the outset of the Project, members of the PLG collaborated to develop the PRIME II Partnership Memorandum of Understanding. This document, signed by each organization, provides transparent and practical guidance on topics such as partnership structure and process, annual planning and subcontracting processes, responding to new work opportunities, credit and recognition, representation, and strategic prioritization of technical assistance requests.

Reviewing Results in PRIME II

Oct. 2002–Sept. 2003

Policy, Advocacy and Services

- National RH Policy
- **Partnership**

Knowledge Advancing Best Practices

- PMTCT
- Scaling-Up PI
- Costing
- Supportive Supervision

Support to the Field

- Nicaragua: EONC
- Philippines: HIV/AIDS
- Paraguay: FP/RH Quality
- Mali: FGC
- Senegal: PAC
- Dominican Republic: RTL
- Mali, Benin, Ethiopia: PPPH
- Bangladesh: RTL

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Seconded Staff

The PRIME II partnership operates daily, in a very straightforward way, through seconded staff from the partner organizations based in the Chapel Hill headquarters. In addition, a number of partner staff are based in PRIME field offices. Many seconded staff hold key decision-making positions on the Project such as Unit Director and Regional Director. Seconded staff are so fully integrated into the Project that it is often not readily apparent to staff or outsiders which partner is their home organization.



Partnership Collaboration in the Field

The same collaborative relationship established among the US offices of partner organizations extends to the partners' regional and country offices. These relationships were purposefully built at the field level. In the beginning of the Project the organizations came together in the field to plan how they would work together. This collaboration frequently proves valuable in identifying new opportunities, helping start new country programs (e.g., in Honduras, Rwanda and Armenia) and sharing experiences and resources (e.g., in Kenya and Ghana).

Challenges of Partnering

Naturally, there have been challenges in building and maintaining the PRIME II partnership. Among the Project's accomplishments and lessons learned:

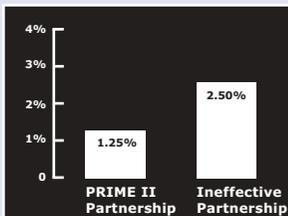
- Establishing and sustaining a trusting, synergistic partnership requires leadership commitment and resources. This level of commitment from all PRIME partner organizations, including USAID, has been exceptional.
- PRIME II has two supporting institutions, the American College of Nurse-Midwives and Save the Children. These affiliations were based on the need for specific, project-by-project technical assistance, and the organizations have not been PLG members. Consequently, the supporting institution relationship has not been as well defined as the partnership model and has proven more challenging to manage.
- The PLG structure has helped to ensure that communication channels are open and that appropriate staff from each partner organization stay informed about Project developments, aware of each partner's capabilities, and ready to access these competencies to meet the Project's needs.
- While the PLG has resulted in effective communications among partners, a more regular and formal feedback mechanism would enable partners to continuously monitor and improve partner relationships and performance.

- Each partner organization expects their technical resources to be utilized as fully as possible. PRIME's twin goals have been to assign the most appropriate technical resources to the job at hand, and to share the work so that each partner organization contributes to the Project's success. Decisions on work distribution have been guided by technical needs, not a predetermined portion of the work.
- Partners that initiated or led in developing new project opportunities, especially in the field, generally received larger portions of the work on those projects. This strategy has contributed to the large number of field support projects under PRIME.

Advantages of the Partnership

PRIME's success in creating a model of partner collaboration has resulted in significant benefits:

- The Project has maintained easy access to the partners' diversity, complementary strengths, technical expertise and management know-how.
- A sense of common purpose and shared commitment has encouraged partners to define together the Project's technical leadership areas and cutting-edge technical agendas in a collaborative and technically synergistic manner.
- PRIME has drawn from all partner organizations to constitute its interdisciplinary global teams, developing strategies to move technical agendas forward. This has helped to scale-up new initiatives faster and more successfully.
- The partnership helped the Project expand to new countries faster, bringing more depth of technical expertise, management experience, understanding of the context, and leveraging of other agency and donor contributions.
- Because the PRIME II partnership is effective, USAID has been less taxed to engage in fostering collaboration, solving problems and negotiating among partners. The partnership has played the role of ensuring that the technical competencies of the various agencies are considered and used to the fullest extent possible.



Costs of Partnership
As percentage of annual project budget

Value of the Partnership

Building and maintaining partnerships requires leadership attention and resources. PRIME estimates that the annual cost of the partnership is approximately \$210,000, which when annualized over the first four years of the Project is about 1.25% of the Project budget. As one way to gauge the value of effective partnering, PRIME estimated the cost of an ineffective partnership using both real examples of the costs of problem-solving and hypothetical examples of missed opportunities. PRIME estimates that annual costs of lost

productivity due to chronic ineffective partnership in a global project the size of PRIME II would be around \$500,000, or about 2.5% of the budget. As this exercise shows, the investment of time and resources in creating an effective partnership has paid off in the Project's overall productivity. However, the successes of the PRIME II Project in technical leadership, field support, producing results, and meeting performance expectations offer the best proof of the strength of this partnership.



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