

Alliance Sufosec

Alliance for Sustainable Food Systems
and Empowered Communities



EMPOWERED PARTNERSHIP GLOBAL REPORT

SUMMARY

The Global Report on Empowered Partnership was co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation SDC through its Programme Contribution to the Sufosec Alliance.



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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Swiss development organisations Aqua Alimenta, Fastenaktion, Skat Foundation, SWISSAID, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse and Vivamos Mejor formed the Alliance on Sustainable Food Systems and Empowered Communities (Sufosec). Building on the strengths of each member and its partner network, the Alliance developed a joint four-year programme 2021-2024 with the overall goal to secure local livelihoods through agroecological transformation and empowered communities.

In order to, create synergies and foster joint learning the Alliance started several learning groups (LG). The LG on 'Local Ownership' started its work beginning of 2021 with the objective to build evidence on effective approaches/partnerships that strengthen local ownership at different levels and put a strong emphasis on the partner's needs and perspectives.

The Background Study conducted by RavelWorks Africa Limited Kenya, revealed key observations, such as – for example – that true partnership creation must include building trust, a sense of purpose, transparency, accountability and value-addition, and that this requires substantial mindset shifts on the part of all actors involved (development organisations, donor agencies, local actors etc.).

Based on the RavelWorks thorough background study as well as on experience and tools developed under the Sustainable Development Goal 17 on Partnership, the present thorough quantitative and qualitative assessment intends to build a baseline and help foster meaningful, effective, impactful and sustainable partnerships within the Sufosec Alliance. It was designed and implemented by Dr. Katrin Imhof Consulting in close collaboration with the Sufosec Learning Group. This summary compiles the key findings and recommendations.

Participation during the process was fostered through virtual and in-person stakeholder exchanges, especially when a) kicking-off the overall assignment, b) feeding back on the assessment tools/approach, and c) feeding back on the final report.

2. METHODS AND PARTICIPATION

The report reveals the feedback from 151 organisations, the 73% out of the total 208 invited organisations, that completed the quantitative survey questionnaire. Out of the 151 respondents, 104 were from Fastenaktion, 15 from Swissaid, 13 from Vétérinaires Sans Frontières, 7 from Skat Foundation, 7 from Vivamos Mejor, and 5 from Aqua Alimenta

Demographics

- ❖ 74% of the Global South partners have an annual budget equal or lower than 250'000 USD.
- ❖ 13% of all Global South partners have more than 50 staff; the majority of 64% has less than 20 people working in the organisation.
- ❖ 32% of partnerships are rather new (less than five years), while a higher 37% look back on a long-term 11+ years of cooperation.
- ❖ 78% of the Global South partners consider themselves as 'community-based' or 'other civil society organisation'. Research & Training (21%) as well as Movement & Network (33%) are rather low, and Government institutions make only 3%.
- ❖ Out of the 151 respondents 60% were male and 40% were female and 78% of respondents hold senior management or executive team positions.

The report also reveals the inputs from 24 senior leaders from 24 selected organisations that participated in qualitative interviews carried out by the consultant and the three regional Sufosec Focal Points. The four interviewers asked the interviewees key questions that were formulated complementary and based on the findings (lowest scores) of the quantitative survey

3. KEY FINDINGS

The assessment revealed very high scores and overall very positive feedback from Global South partners related to their relationship with Global North partners.

Trust, a constant dialogue and transparency topped the attributes that define present partnerships between the Sufosec Alliance members and their Global South partners; and sharing the same vision, objectives and values were repeatedly mentioned as ‘must have’ for a successful partnership.

Areas with overall less favourable ratings concern a) formalised transparent decision-making and flexibility for budget adaptations, b) the meaningful involvement of beneficiaries, c) leveraging fundraising and impact, and d) due diligence/compliance.

As cut-off for areas rated low and – hence – indicate a need for improvement in partnership relationships, statements for which more than 20% of the respondents answered ‘I don’t agree’ (level 1 and 2) can be grouped as in the following table. Global South partners also mentioned a ‘wish for more’ related to the same or similar categories:

Low-rated survey statements – room for improvement in partnership relationship	Wish for more by the Global South partners (comments from survey and interviews)
<p>Transparent joint decision-making for projects and budgets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Flexibility related to budget adaptations ❖ Budget flexibility if/when humanitarian emergencies happen ❖ Transparency of decision-making ❖ A participatory approach to changing demands ❖ Shared meeting minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Transparent partnership, empowerment, communication & collaboration, joint decision-making ❖ (mentioned 25 times)
<p>Beneficiary agency and empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Relationship with beneficiaries (joint development of activities and project information shared with beneficiaries) 	
<p>Leveraging funds and impact together</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Lasting improved living condition (impact) ❖ Sufficient personnel and funding ❖ Existence of local fundraising ❖ Having enough information about the Swiss context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Capacity building, coaching & organisational development (mentioned 20 times)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Program relevance for the sensitisation of the Swiss public ❖ Need for Swiss technical or managerial expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Long-term strategies and partnerships (5-10 years) with sustained and scalable positive impact (mentioned 9 times) ❖ Networking & (good practice) exchange with others in the same or other country (mentioned 6 times)
<p>Due diligence and compliance</p> <p>In the area of compliance, safety at work and the immediate reporting to the Swiss partner when corruption is detected in the project/program is rated high, while all other compliance issues may need further attention and elaboration.</p>	

While most of the above points are related to structure, systems and processes, Global South partners wish more ‘Welcomed Critical Feedback’ and ‘Discussions on Values, Vision and Goals’, on a **behavioural side of relationship**.

When it comes to **‘don’ts’**, Global South partner recommend avoiding:

- ❖ high-levels of reporting frequency; for example suggest to focus on annual reports rather than various project reports over the year
- ❖ sending very short-notice unplanned requests: the Global North partner to well-balance (buffer) urgent sudden needs from the Swiss office or their back donors with realities and previously agreed plans in the field
- ❖ unilateral or non-consultative decision-making in the Global North
- ❖ high levels of the Global North partner’s involvement in Global South in-country operational aspects of project/program implementation
- ❖ substantial delay in funds release

Additional findings: Differences between sub-categories

In addition to the survey results four demographic data categories were selected by the Alliance members for more detailed analysis of their groups’ similarities and/or differences. Key observations were:

- ❖ Region: Partners in Asia rate flexibilities in partnership and existence of due diligence policies/processes higher, and the partnership more impactful than partners in other regions, but they raise less funds in-country.
- ❖ Budget Size: The smallest organisations rate their partnerships more participative, impactful, with transparent decision-making and good information sharing than the other organisations.
- ❖ Duration: Partners in already longer partnerships have better due diligence processes in place, but do raise less funds in-country than others.
- ❖ Intervention Areas: Training & Capacity Building institutions have less likely safeguarding policies and processes in place.

4. ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES

Regarding the conducted policy review, it was found that the organisational policies and guidelines reviewed tend to be developed and driven by the standards of the Global North partner. Neither the policy development process nor the policy content is inclusive with Global South partners.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This concluding chapter of the assessment suggests concrete areas of change with complementing roles and responsibilities for Global North (N) and Global South (S) partners as well as back donors (D). The recommendations are organised into four key areas of action

Transparent joint decision-making for programs and budgets

- ❖ Review and revise processes for program development and budget allocations (N, S)
- ❖ Jointly define long-term strategy/goals (N, S, D)
- ❖ Establish constant critical dialogue to be able to review processes regularly (N, S, D)
- ❖ Allocate fixed budgets for capacity development for partner organisations (N, D)
- ❖ Enlarge monitoring and control to a coaching system (N, D)
- ❖ Strengthen South-South exchange (N, S, D)
- ❖ Co-develop partnership policies (N, S, D)

Beneficiary agency/empowerment

- ❖ Co-develop roadmaps for each partnership to ensure beneficiary agency (N, S)

Leveraging funds and impact together

- ❖ Allocate budget for institutional development, networking and fundraising (N, D)
- ❖ Communicate on good practices and challenges and learn from experiences (N, S, D)

Due diligence and compliance

- ❖ Review expectations and co-develop minimal standards (N, S, D)

6. LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE PROCESS

The courage to onboard such a complex and highly participatory assignment by the Sufosec Alliance Learning Group is commendable. It demonstrates an already started mindset shift in 'how things can be done differently' with a view on more equality among partners in international cooperation and aid.

A highly participatory approach needs time and commitment of all involved and may be at risk due to complex structures and coordination needs.

The creation and nurturing of a sustainable Sufosec Alliance-focussed approach of participation rather than generated participation for specific exercises or in each Alliance member organisation separately should be considered.

Creating more equity in Global South - Global North relationships is a separate project by itself that deserves time, and resource/budget allocations throughout a multi-year process as well as the support of back donors.