

- Research Brief -

Ingredients for successful partnerships

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For the development of new cross-sector partnerships it is required to know what the essence of successful partnership projects is. Which factors influence success or failure of partnerships is highly related to the specific context where partnerships operate. The literature on critical success factors (henceforth CSF) for partnerships is enormous, this is for understandable reasons since scholars see CSF's as a first step towards the development of workable and efficient partnership.¹ Researchers and practitioners aim to understand those elements that are necessary to achieve the joint mission of the partners or in other words: *"those few key areas of activity in which favourable results are absolutely necessary to reach goals"*². CSFs can be defined as: *"the limited number of areas, the result of which, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful performance for the partnerships. They are the few key areas where 'things must go right' for the partnership to flourish"* (ibid: 3).

Our research highlights several factors that are crucial for successful partnerships³:

- Beforehand, it is important to recognise that the problem **cannot be solved by only one of the partners**.
- Make sure there is a **shared understanding on the cause** of the societal problem: whose responsibility is it, which stakeholders should be involved, what would be their potential contribution?
- **Be pragmatic**: trust is neither a necessary precondition, nor a sole ingredient for partnership success. Naturally, partners from complementary sectors display only limited trust due to their contrasting interests. Nevertheless, a partnership demonstrates that cooperation between sectors is possible. Therefore it is not: *'we work together because we trust each other'*, but mostly, *'we trust each other because we work together'*.
- **Continues learning**: share expertise and learn from each other.
- **Institutionalise**: ensure that the partnership is embedded in the individual organisations; moreover it should be represented on a strategic level.
- **Take time** to get to know each other, to discover suitable pathways of cooperation, and to develop shared enthusiasm.
- **Manage expectations**: be open about your own interests and curious on the interests of the partner(s).
- **Governance**: properly distribute the power within partnerships.
- **Exit**: not only specify entry but also exit conditions are required. When there are no specified exit conditions from the beginning, it can influence the partnership dynamics.

¹ Zhang, X. Q. (2005). Critical Success Factors for Public-Private Partnerships in Infrastructure Development. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*, 131 (1), pp. 3-14.

Brinkerhoff, J.M. (2002) *Partnership for international development: rhetoric or results?* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

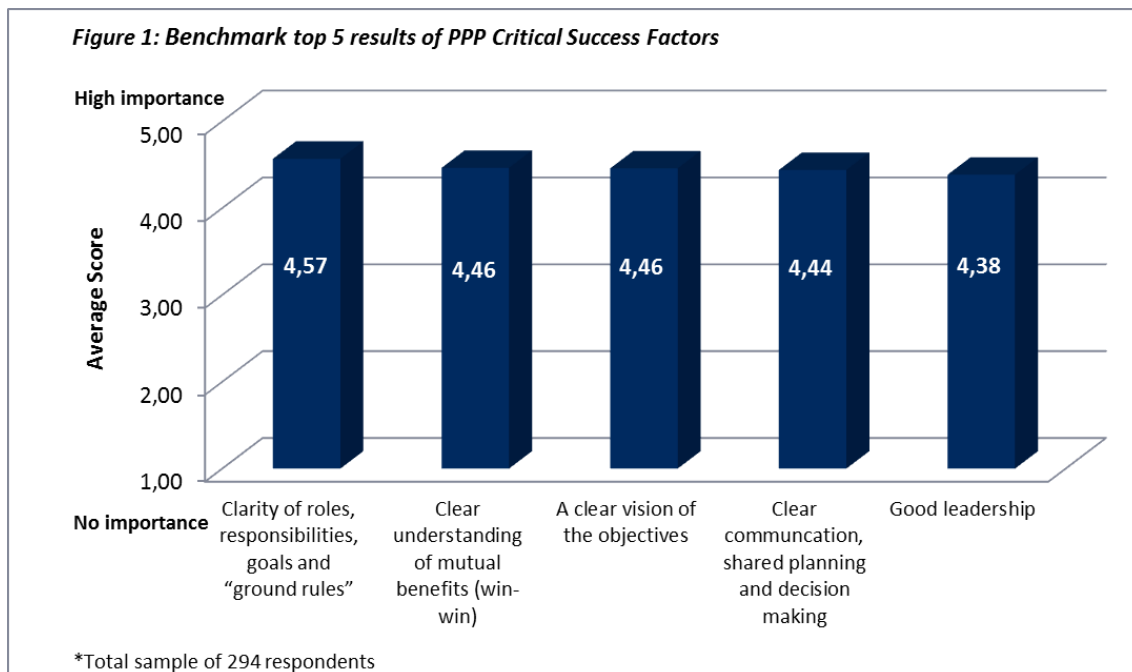
² Rockart, J. F. (1982). The Changing Role of the Information Systems Executive: A Critical Success Factors Perspective. *Sloan Management Review*, 24 (1), pp. 3-13.

³ Van Tulder R., De Wal M. (2011) 'De Hype voorbij', *Vice Versa Leert - Vakblad over ontwikkelingssamenwerking*, 45: pp.32-35.

Existing research⁴ on partnerships for development points out that there is no simple checklist or blueprint for successful partnership building. The WBCSD notes “It is often an intuitive and constantly evolving “voyage of discovery” based on organizational and individual learning, trust and experimentation”. However, a compilation of existing research on CSFs for PPPs⁵ provides with a list of key-critical success factors highlighted in the literature. These success factors can be classified in the following categories:

- Partnership building and design
- Partnership commitments and relations
- Partnership governance and management
- Measurement
- External factors.

The Partnerships Resource Centre uses this list for developing a benchmark of critical success factors for partnerships. So far, 294 respondents involved in different PPP projects from many different countries and sectors filled out the questionnaire and ranked the critical success factors on a scale from 1 (unimportant) to 5 (very important). According to these practitioners, the **top five critical success factors** for effective partnerships are (see Figure 1):



⁴ WBCSD, 2005, *Business for development. Business solutions in support of the Millennium Development Goals*, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Geneva.

OECD (2006). *Evaluating the effectiveness and the efficiency of partnerships*, Workshop on evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of partnerships. Paris: OECD Environment Directorate, ENV/EPOC (2006)15.

⁵ Hardcastle, C., Edwards, P.J., Akintoye, A., & Li, B. (2006). Critical success factors for PPP/PFI projects in the UK construction industry: a factor analysis approach, in Ng, T.S. (Eds), *Public Private Partnerships: Opportunities and Challenges*. Centre for Infrastructure and Construction Industry Development, University of Hong Kong: Hong Kong, pp.75-83.

Harris, S. (2004). *Public private partnerships: Delivering better infrastructure services*. Proc., Conf.: Investment in Infrastructure in Latin America and the Caribbean: Second Generation Issues and Perspectives. Inter-American Development Bank: Washington, D.C.

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McKague, K., Snelgrove, A., Prada, M., Medalye, J., Stein, G., Alam, R. & Greenspoon, J. (2004). *The Private Sector & Development: Scan of Activities and Research*. York University: Toronto.