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Evaluating Partnerships: Equitable Participation for Effective ODA Delivery



Primer in Brief

Evaluating Equitable Partnerships for ODA: What You Need to Know ¹

The United Kingdom Government will increasingly deliver Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) through partnerships with other governments, civil society, the private sector, and the university sector. This primer is written for monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) practitioners including advisors, evaluators, and commissioners who want to develop and strengthen evaluation of such partnerships.

Working with partnerships for ODA is not only a technical challenge. It is also about establishing and supporting equitable partnerships through participation by ODA-receiving governments and communities. There are challenges to achieving equitable partnerships for ODA with any partners, but there are additional challenges to be aware of in fragile and conflict-affected settings where resources are constrained, societies divided, partners may have experienced violence and trauma, and where acute vulnerabilities render considerations of power dynamics even more sensitive and important.

Key Takeaways

1. **Partnerships based on principles of participation will be more equitable and effective.** Participation has the potential to improve the effectiveness of ODA delivery and outcomes through inclusive dialogue, increased legitimacy, building trust, and greater knowledge of context.
2. **Participatory partnerships do not happen automatically.** Ongoing design, evaluation, and adaptation is required.
3. **Evaluating partnerships for ODA requires focusing on both the results (outcomes/impact) and the process (how partners work together)** to ensure equitable, effective collaboration.

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This primer has been prepared by the Warwick Interdisciplinary Research Centre for International Development and the Humanitarian Advisory Group, in collaboration with the members of an expert network established at the event ‘Partnership and Participation – Policy in Partnership with Conflict and Peace Affected Communities’ which took place at the University of Warwick on 14 July 2025.

This is the second in a series of three primers published as an output of the ‘Partnership and Participation’ event. Primer 1 focuses on Participatory Approaches to Monitoring and Evaluation: Learning and Accountability Through Inclusion. Building on Primer 1 and its focus on partnership and inclusion within MEL processes, this primer focuses on evaluating partnerships for ODA to ensure:

- **A partnership agenda which is sensitive** to the challenges and realities of partners, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- **A partnership agenda which centres principles of partnership** to ensure equitable and effective ODA processes and outcomes.

Recognising the changing and challenging landscape of ODA, the UK Government recognises that working in partnership with ODA-receiving countries and communities is vital for greater accountability as well as more effective international development efforts in the fields of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. These partnerships will require evaluation and maintenance.

This primer collates knowledge from research, policy, and practice on how partnerships for ODA can be participatory and equitable. It highlights the common dilemmas and trade-offs and advises on how MEL teams can evaluate equitable partnerships for ODA. The primer also suggests further resources and offers reflections on emerging trends and opportunities for institutional change.

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Partnerships for ODA

ODA will increasingly be delivered through a partnership model that is intended to be equitable. The key question is what will make these partnerships equitable and participatory?

Partnerships in ODA: Current Policy and UK Government Direction

The UK Government is responding to current challenges and changing funding models. ODA will increasingly be delivered through partnerships. Importantly, the UK's development partnerships can no longer be understood through traditional donor-recipient frameworks and will include varied partners from governments to the private sector, civil society and the university sector. Today, the expectation is one of equitable partnership, built on mutual respect, mutual interest, mutual accountability, and mutual learning. As such, these partnerships will require evaluation and maintenance.

The UK Government has articulated this vision through four key shifts in how it approaches development. As Baroness Chapman argues, the goal is to move away from old, paternalistic donor-recipient models toward a modern development model that treats partner countries as equals. This model is underpinned by four shifts: from donor to investor, from service delivery to system support, from grants to expertise, and from international intervention to local provision². This is a model for modern development centred on partnership, investment, and systems rather than charity, one that genuinely aligns with what partner governments and communities want: autonomy, investment, and locally led solutions.

However, this vision of equitable partnership exists within an increasingly constrained fiscal environment. In February 2025, the UK announced a reduction in aid spending from 0.5% to 0.3% of GNI by 2027, a cut of £6.5 billion by 2027/28, to fund increased defence spending³. As Dodds⁴ notes, the scale of this reduction raises serious questions about

² Chapman, J., The Rt Hon. Baroness Chapman of Darlington. (2025) 'Four Shifts', in Wood, I. and Coolin, G. (eds.) Promising Development: New Approaches to UK International Development. Fabian Ideas 670. London: Fabian Society.

³ House of Commons Library (2025) UK Aid Spending. London: House of Commons.

⁴ Dodds, A. (2025) in Wood, I. and Coolin, G. (eds.) Promising Development: New Approaches to UK International Development. Fabian Ideas 670. London: Fabian Society.

whether the ambition for genuine, locally led partnerships can be sustained. It is precisely within these constraints that understanding how different partnership models operate becomes not just useful, but essential.

Partnership Models

Possible ODA partnerships could vary widely, and as the UK Government moves towards the modern development approach outlined above, more non-traditional partnership arrangements will emerge. In the meantime, this primer focuses on three models which the FCDO could use for evaluation purposes, highlighting lessons which will also be useful for the monitoring and evaluation of non-traditional partnerships of the future:

Government-to-government collaboration often involves technical advice and policy support, frequently operating with limited direct funding in addition to established bilateral donor-to-recipient models. This raises a critical question explored throughout this primer: what does good MEL look like when there's no money changing hands, and how do we evaluate partnership quality beyond financial transactions?

Civil society-led approaches in fragile contexts involve partnerships with local CSOs in humanitarian or conflict-affected settings, where tight timelines, peace and security constraints, and resource scarcity create unique evaluation challenges. In these contexts, the question becomes: how do we maintain participatory principles when operating in complex and highly pressurized environments?⁵

University-government research partnerships mobilise UK expertise to support capacity-building in partner countries. Evaluation challenges include ensuring genuine collaboration, clarifying ownership of research outputs, and balancing academic rigour with policy timelines.

Each model varies in structure, funding, context, and purpose, and each presents distinct implications for the partnerships that can and should be evaluated. Across all three models, a common tension emerges between those named as partners and those who really hold decision-making power in the relationship⁶.

It is important to note that the delivery of ODA through partnerships happens on an uneven playing field shaped through historically unequal resource distribution, legacies of colonialism, and different positionalities in geopolitical power shifts. A core question

⁵ This challenge is directly addressed in Primer 3, where GLOW Consultants note that 'participation in conflict-affected settings is not a technical MEL tool but a prerequisite for credible evidence and ethical engagement.' See Primer 3, Contribution 3: GLOW - Learning from Pakistan.

⁶ Fransman, J., Newman, K., & Bharadwaj, S. (2019). Rethinking Research Impact through Principles for Fair and Equitable Partnerships. IDS Bulletin, 50(1), 21–42.

thus arises: what makes a partnership equitable? This leads us to consider levels of participation in the partnership, as well as the connected issue of local and community voices in ODA-receiving countries.

Equitable Partnerships in Principle and Practice

Partnerships based on principles of participation will be more equitable and more effective.

What Makes an Equitable Partnership?

Equitable partnerships are based on values of fairness, respect, care, and honesty⁷. These are important goals, not only for the ethics of partnership but also for its outcomes⁸. As ODA funding models change, it is important for MEL teams to be able to assess ODA partnerships against relevant questions:

1. Are the principles which define the partnership based on equity between partners?
2. What are the scope and boundaries of the partnership?
3. Do the partners share the same vision, goals, risks, financial control?
4. Can each partner participate equally in the different aspects of the partnership related to decision-making, programming, goal setting, outcomes?

These questions are all concerned with not only who is able to call themselves a partner, but who is included as an equal in decision making, defining success, and ownership of knowledge. This distinguishes partnership from other forms of collaboration through an emphasis on equality, participation, and mutual benefit. It is therefore important to be able to evaluate partnerships for ODA based on how participatory they are, given the importance of this for equitable and effective partnership outcomes. While there is limited evidence of exactly how equitable partnerships for ODA can ensure more effective outcomes⁹, a growing literature indicates the importance of equitable partnerships in research and programming for tackling global issues¹⁰. In the context of

⁷ TRUST (2018). The TRUST Code: A Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships. <https://doi.org/10.48508/GCC/2018.05>.

⁸ UKCDR (2024) Research for development: the meaning of equity in funder-level partnerships, <https://ukcdr.org.uk/publication/research-for-development-the-meaning-of-equity-in-funder-level-partnerships/>.

⁹ Price, R., Snijder, M., & Apgar, M. (2021). Defining and Evaluating Equitable Partnerships: A Rapid Review. Institute of Development Studies, University of Edinburgh. Available at: <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/37731>.

¹⁰ Dodson, J. (2017) Building Partnerships of Equals: The Role of Funders in Equitable and Effective International Development Collaborations. UKCDS available at: https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Building-Partnerships-of-Equals_-REPORT-2.pdf.

development and social equity research, more equitable partnerships are increasingly associated with more contextually grounded, adaptive, and impactful forms of knowledge production and better research outcomes¹¹. Research and knowledge activities also extend into development practice. An OECD report in 2024 references an emerging evidence base which shows that “equitable partnerships are a critical enabler for valuing local knowledge and capacity sharing, which is fundamental for local actor agency in locally led development co-operation”¹².

Common Dilemmas and Trade-offs

Partnerships rarely operate under ideal conditions but are more often shaped by timelines, funding, institutional pressures, and the realities of working across different contexts. As a result, many challenges are not only problems to be addressed but become dilemmas and trade-offs that need to be navigated both by the partners themselves and by any evaluation of the partnership, but also within the evaluations themselves.

Participation vs time: Meaningful engagement takes time to build relationships, create space for dialogue, and allow different perspectives to shape decisions. Yet ODA partnerships are often under pressure to deliver quickly. In these situations, participation can become compressed or delayed, with local partners brought in once key decisions have already been made. The intention to be inclusive may still be there, but such conditions make it difficult to realise in practice.

Outcomes vs process: Partnership itself, when operating in an equitable way, can be a step toward more accountable and inclusive process. On the other hand, navigating partnerships takes time and resources, and challenges to coordination could often delay the positive outcomes. In conflict-affected and fragile contexts, the dilemma is even more pressing given that effectiveness could mean lives saved or quick responses to humanitarian crises.

¹¹ Dickson, E., Magarati, M., Boursaw, B., Oetzel, J., Devia, C., Ortiz, K., & Wallerstein, N. (2020). Characteristics and Practices Within Research Partnerships for Health and Social Equity. *Nursing Research*, 69(1), 51. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NNR.0000000000000399>; Fransman, J., Newman, K., & Bharadwaj, S. (2019). Rethinking Research Impact through Principles for Fair and Equitable Partnerships. *IDS Bulletin*, 50(1), 21–42; Yorke, L., Kim, J. H., Hagos Hailu, B., & Ejigu Berhie, C. (2023). Equitable North-South partnerships for ethical and policy relevant research in times of uncertainty: A collaborative autoethnography from Ethiopia. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 26(5), 599–613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2023.2173840>.

¹² OECD (2024), *Pathways Towards Effective Locally Led Development Co-operation: Learning by Example*, OECD Publishing, Paris, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/51079bba-en>, p.60.

Capacity building vs voluntary labour: Questions of labour and value also surface quickly when partnerships are framed in terms of capacity exchange. In practice, such exchange may not always be felt equally. Local partners might take on significant roles in data collection, coordination, or community engagement, sometimes without recognition or appropriate compensation. What can be described as participation or collaboration can be instead felt as extractive by those involved, particularly when contributions outweigh benefit¹³.

Donor accountability vs local ownership: International organisations are often accountable upwards to funders, governments, and reporting requirements while local partners are commonly accountable downwards, to communities and the realities on the ground. Such forms of accountability do not always align. Decisions about priorities, methods, or interpretations of findings can be shaped more by external expectations than by local needs, even within partnerships that aim to be participatory.

Tokenism vs meaningful involvement: Being included in a partnership does not necessarily mean having the ability to shape it¹⁴. There are many instances where local actors are present in discussions or represent their communities, but have limited influence over agendas, resource allocation, or final decisions. The line between inclusion and tokenism in partnership can be difficult to identify from the outside, and even harder to challenge from within.

Outsider vs local knowledges: International actors are often positioned as technical or objective, while local knowledge can be treated as contextual or anecdotal¹⁵. This can shape whose perspectives are taken seriously, and whose contributions are seen as authoritative. At the same time, local actors are sometimes expected to be neutral or

¹³ Primer 3 illustrates this tension through Peace Kitchen's experience, noting that communities 'are often expected to continuously provide stories, reflections, or evidence of change in ways that ultimately serve donor accountability more than the people involved.' See Primer 3, Contribution 2: Peace Kitchen - Relational Participation.

¹⁴ Primer 1 describes participation as a spectrum ranging from 'periphery or token involvement to full-fledged collective ownership of the MEL process.' Primer 3 reinforces this, noting that participation 'should not mean being invited to confirm decisions that have already been made or be used as a token that legitimizes a MEL process.' See Primer 1, 'Understanding Participation in MEL' section and Primer 3, Contribution 4: Everyday Peace Indicators.

¹⁵ Primer 1 recognises that 'external evaluators may have biases or gaps in understanding which need to be addressed by including stakeholders with different world views and perspectives.' Primer 3 illustrates this through GLOW's experience, noting that 'local researchers and facilitators understand language, silence, hesitation, humour, coded expressions, hierarchy, and local risk.' See Primer 1, 'Understanding Participation in MEL' section and Primer 3, Contribution 3: GLOW - Learning from Pakistan.

apolitical, even when they are deeply embedded in the social and political dynamics at the centre of programming.

This points to a wider risk of technocratic solutionism: treating complex political and social dynamics as problems with technical fixes. In conflict-affected and fragile settings, politics and context must remain central. Evidence from 15 years of FCDO programming confirms that conflict dynamics and political context fundamentally shape what is feasible for external actors (Carter et al., 2026).

Participation vs protection in fragile contexts: There may be limits to what can be said, who can be involved, or how openly disagreement can be expressed in fragile or politically sensitive contexts¹⁶. Efforts to increase participation must be balanced with considerations of safety, risk, and potential consequences for those involved.

Donor risks: In future ODA partnership arrangements which are more oriented towards investment there will be risks for donors concerned with monitoring outcomes, and risks for recipients concerned with equitable partnership arrangements. Establishing arrangements which allow outcomes to be monitored over time and which balance accountability with equity will be paramount.

These dilemmas do not have straightforward solutions but show trade-offs in considering participation within partnerships. Recognising these tensions is a necessary step in understanding how partnerships function in practice, and what it takes to make participation more meaningful within them.

Complexities and Practices of Equitable Partnerships

Equitable partnerships are not an endpoint but need to be planned, managed, nurtured, and evaluated as an ongoing process of negotiating complex contexts and trade-offs.

¹⁶ Primer 3 illustrates this tension directly through GLOW's experience in Pakistan, noting that 'participation must be designed around who can speak safely, who may face risks, who is usually excluded, and who may be punished for sharing views.' See Primer 3, Contribution 3: GLOW - Learning from Pakistan.

Achieving equitable partnerships requires the navigation of many complexities, and evaluation processes which are sensitive to this. This section provides some useful questions to consider when setting up partnerships and when thinking through the complexities in practice.

Beyond Checklists and Tokenism

Despite longstanding advocacy and commitments for a power shift in ODA, there is a lack of evidence of such an explicit shift taking place in practice¹⁷. Even with intention and awareness, working towards such a shift within programming and implementation can easily remain more of an aspiration than embedded within partnership development.

While principles of equitable partnership provide an important foundation, partnerships in the delivery of ODA rarely unfold in neat or ideal ways. They are shaped by ongoing constraints, competing priorities, and uneven power relations that require constant negotiation.

Marginalised members or those who may be positioned as local voices may come to feel part of a performative or extractive system in which they are there more for their identity and representation than their actual input, influence, and authority. It is crucial to continually consider throughout any partnership and collaborative process whether participation could be veering towards invitation over influence, or superficial visibility over meaningful inclusion.

Power and Voice in Practice

Equitable partnership does not happen automatically. Ongoing design, evaluation, and adaptation is required to address inherent power asymmetries that ultimately shape benefits for all partners¹⁸. The concept of community itself is highly subjective and plays an important part in the ethics of engagement and representation in collaborative partnership¹⁹. Communities themselves include and exclude and can be described differently depending on who is identifying their community. The answers to the following questions will ultimately determine perceptions of equity across any partnership.

¹⁷ Duhem, M., & Suzuki, M. (2025). Localising sustainable development: A call for a paradigm shift in official development assistance (ODA) studies. *Development in Practice*, 35(8), 1272–1277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2024.2428303>.

¹⁸ Snijder, M., Steege, R., Callander, M., Wahome, M., Rahman, M. F., Apgar, M., Theobald, S., Bracken, L. J., Dean, L., Mansaray, B., Saligram, P., Garimella, S., Arthurs-Hartnett, S., Karuga, R., Mejía Artieda, A. E., Chengo, V., & Ateles, J. (2023). How are Research for Development Programmes Implementing and Evaluating Equitable Partnerships to Address Power Asymmetries? *The European Journal of Development Research*, 35(2), 351–379. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-023-00578-w>.

¹⁹ O’Sullivan, S., Desmond, E., & Buckley, M. (2023). The Ethics of Engagement and Representation in Community-based Participatory Research. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 17(2), 159–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2023.2211756>.

- Who is the community?
- Who sets the agenda?
- Who controls the resources?
- Whose knowledge counts?²⁰

Relationships as Key to Partnership

Much of what shapes participation, inclusion, and power sits in the process itself. Partnerships evolve and are often reshaped through interaction, negotiation, and how different actors influence them as they develop²¹. Relationships become key. Trust is not a given, especially where there are differences in power, resources, or institutional positioning²². It often builds over time, through everyday interactions, transparency, and whether people are seen to follow through on commitments. It is important to be intentional about learning from all partners equally and trusting different expertise. A basic but fundamental question to ask at any point is whether partners feel able to speak openly, raise concerns, or disagree without consequences²³. Communication is very much part of this. Not just meetings and reports, but how information moves, who is heard, and who shapes decisions:

- Are local partners involved early, or only once things are already decided?
- Is communication shared, or mostly one-way?

Conflict also plays out in any partnership, whether acknowledged or not. Differences in priorities, expectations, and ways of working are normal. The issue is how they are handled.

- Are there spaces to raise disagreements?
- Are tensions addressed or avoided?

²⁰ Primer 1 identifies this as a core challenge, noting that participation involves questions around 'who participates and whose knowledge counts in both processes and outputs of MEL.' Primer 3 illustrates this through EPI's experience, noting that communities 'produce the evidence that programs tend to present in technical and exclusionary language.' See Primer 1, 'Principles of Participatory MEL' section and Primer 3, Contribution 4: Everyday Peace Indicators.

²¹ Hustad, O. (2023). From global goal to local development policy: How partnerships as a policy idea changes through policy translation. *Development Policy Review*, 41(2), e12659. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12659>.

²² Primer 3 illustrates the centrality of relationships through Peace Kitchen's experience, noting that 'trust-building depends on slowness, care, and people feeling free not to participate out of obligation to evaluators.' See Primer 3, Contribution 2: Peace Kitchen - Relational Participation.

²³ Wong-Pérez, K. J., Kajumba, T., Swiderska, K., Mardon, M., Nicolini, G., Nakyeune, A., & Bigg, T. (2024). Towards equitable partnerships: Addressing barriers and enabling equity among unequal partners. IIED. <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2024-11/22476IIED.pdf>.



- Who can push back, and who cannot?

In these contexts, conflict can be managed or avoided in ways that protect systems and relationships, rather than being used to question how power operates within the partnership²⁴.

²⁴ Midgley, T., El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, S., Ahmed, R., & Carr, A. (2023). Beyond box-ticking: How conflict sensitivity can help bring about a more equitable aid system. *Development in Practice*, 33(5), 633–638. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2022.2081315>.



Evaluating Equitable Partnerships for ODA

Partnerships for delivering ODA and evaluation of them are not separate approaches. Rather, how we evaluate ODA partnerships reveals how participatory they are. Evaluating partnerships requires focusing on both the results (outcomes/impact) and the process (how partners work together) to ensure equitable, effective collaboration. Effective evaluations of partnerships need to be themselves participatory²⁵. Achieving this in practice – especially when resources are constrained – remains a challenge (ALNAP, 2025). However, the methods we choose, who designs the evaluation, who owns the findings, and who benefits from them all expose whether partnership is genuine or merely performative:

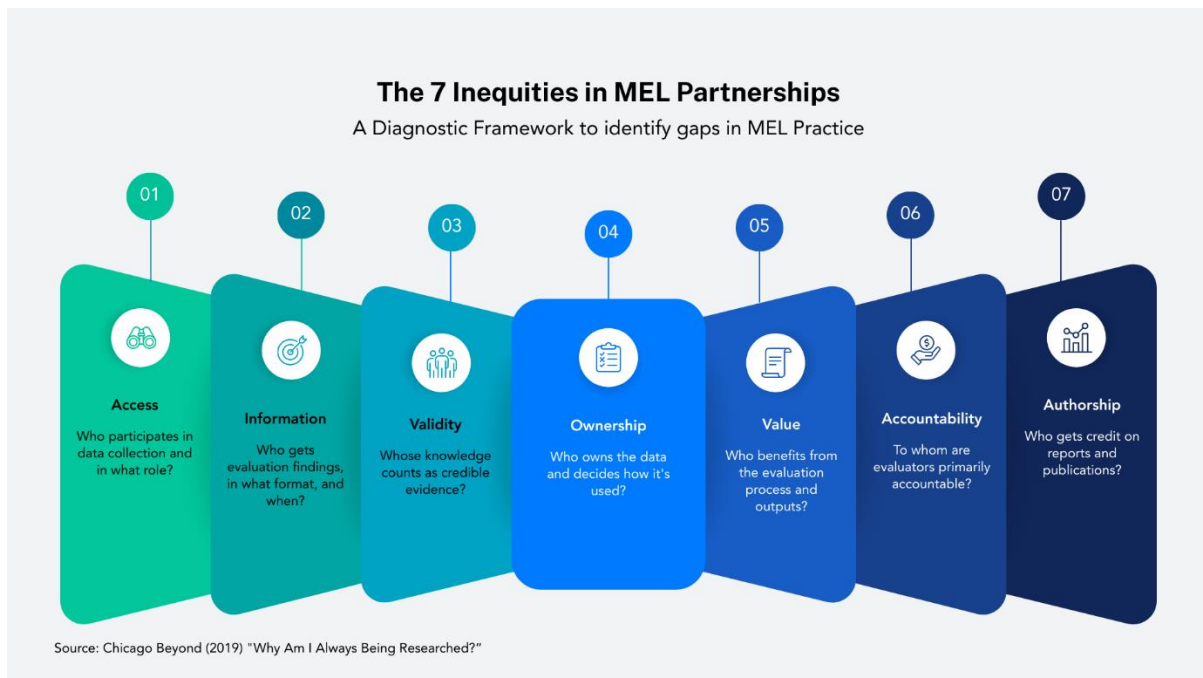
1. What are the power dynamics within contexts as well as between donors and recipients?
2. Who is a 'local' actor?
3. Are local actors meaningfully involved?
4. Are their lived experiences and realities being surfaced or further rendered invisible?
5. Whose voices are being amplified and whose are being silenced?

These power dynamics are not abstract. They manifest in concrete and measurable ways across the MEL process, as the following diagrams illustrate.

Chicago Beyond²⁶ identifies seven inequities that routinely surface in MEL partnerships, offering a practical diagnostic framework for identifying where genuine participation breaks down: access, information, validity, ownership, value, accountability, and authorship.

²⁵ Primer 1 sets out the foundations for this approach, noting that 'participatory MEL is about working with intended community beneficiaries to shape both the evaluation process and the results, extending ownership to all those involved rather than keeping it in the hands of external actors.' See Primer 1, 'Principles of Participatory MEL' section.

²⁶ Chicago Beyond (2019) Why Am I Always Being Researched? Chicago: Chicago Beyond.



These seven inequities provide a practical way to assess whether partnerships are genuinely equitable or merely performative. The diagnostic questions are straightforward:

1. Who participates in data collection, and in what role (Access)?
2. Who receives evaluation findings, in what format, and when (Information)?
3. Whose knowledge is valued as credible evidence (Validity)?
4. Who owns the data, who can feasibly access the data, and who decides how it's used (Ownership)?
5. Who benefits from the evaluation process and outputs (Value)?
6. To whom are evaluators primarily accountable (Accountability)?
7. Who gets credit and bylines on reports and publications (Authorship)?

These questions directly operationalise the partnership assessment questions outlined above. If partners cannot participate equally in decision-making, programming, and goal setting, inequities will surface across multiple dimensions. If a partnership's scope and boundaries remain unclear, ownership and accountability become contested. The seven inequities framework thus transforms abstract partnership principles into concrete evaluation criteria.

Practitioners working across humanitarian and conflict contexts reveal critical challenges in building equitable partnerships. In Cameroon, effective partnerships required moving beyond capital-city coordination to establish field offices closer to affected communities, ensuring evaluation priorities emerge from ground realities rather

than distant headquarters²⁷. In peacebuilding contexts like Sri Lanka and Yemen, co-production depends fundamentally on continuity: "every new rotation requires rebuilding relationships from scratch, losing institutional memory"²⁸. Perhaps most critically, practitioners stress that equitable partnerships require addressing underlying power structures.

Equitable partnerships for ODA can be measured by examining who holds power at each stage of the MEL process. A partnership becomes extractive when it concentrates power with external actors: decisions, data ownership, and authorship remain in donor hands, while local partners are consulted but not empowered. Conversely, addressing even a few of these inequities can begin shifting power dynamics toward more equitable practice. Identifying who has power in each of the partnerships is not easy in practice, especially if not all partners are invited to identify it. The question of representation and who counts as local further complicates identifying actors. The 'local' is not a fixed category, meaning that participatory and equitable partnerships require context-specific consideration of which actors are seen as legitimate, representative, and influential within a given setting²⁹. Terms such as "local," "locally-led," and "participatory" are often used interchangeably, despite referring to different forms and scales of partnership. In some contexts, local partnership may primarily involve national government leadership and country ownership. In others, partnerships may need to engage regional or local government, civil society, informal networks, community actors, or hybrid governance structures³⁰.

HAG³¹ propose four focus areas across the MEL lifecycle as diagnostic checks for equity in partnerships: from agenda setting and design, through implementation and co-

²⁷ Victoria Martinez (2025) 'The UN does not only work in New York or Geneva' podcast in the series 'Why Care' by the Swiss Development Cooperation. Released 23.04.2025 and available at: <https://www.deza.eda.admin.ch/en/why-care-the-podcast-of-the-sdc>.

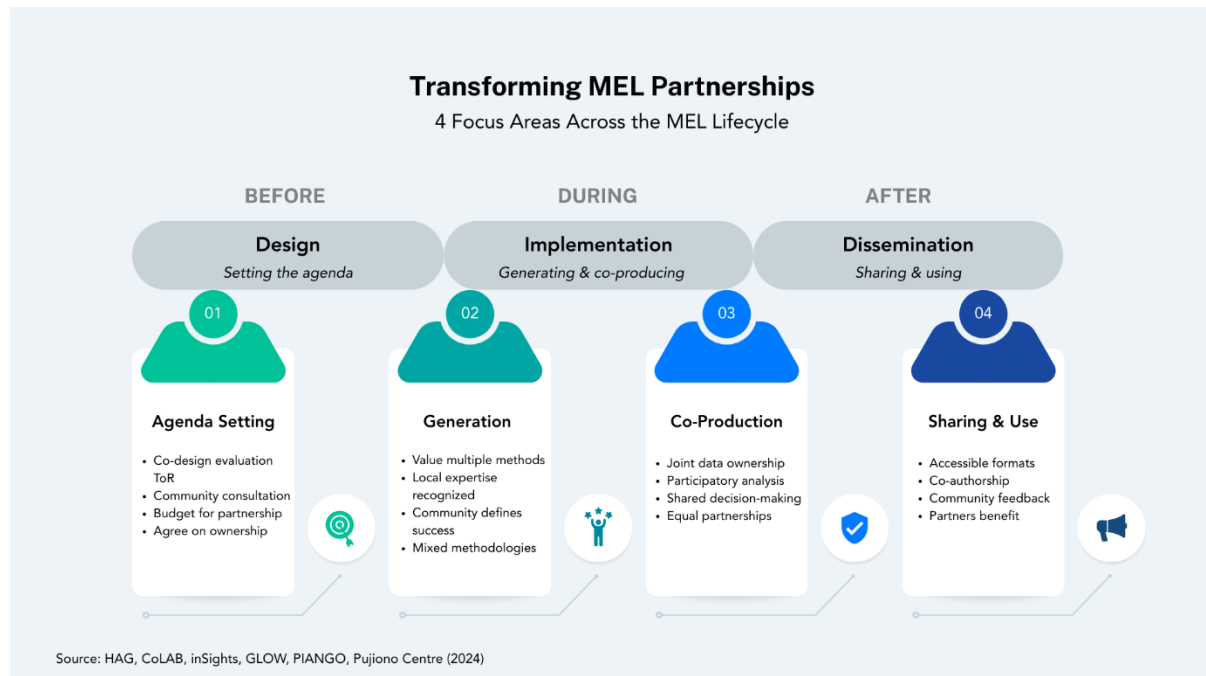
²⁸ Anne Grobet (2025) 'Realistic Peacebuilding – Between Diplomacy, Caution, and Clear-Sightedness' podcast in the series 'Why Care' by the Swiss Development Cooperation. Released 22.10.2025 and available at: <https://www.deza.eda.admin.ch/en/why-care-the-podcast-of-the-sdc>.

²⁹ James, M. (2025). Looking for the Local: The Politics of Humanitarian Recruitment in DRC. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 98(3), 479–506.

³⁰ Decentralization Net (2023, March 22). Localizing development ? When does 'local' means 'local' ? <https://decentralization.net/2023/03/localizing-development-when-does-local-means-local/>.

³¹ HAG (2024) Making the results of Humanitarian Evaluation Accessible to Communities: Why it frequently fails and what to do about it, <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/making-the-results-of-humanitarian-evaluation-accessible-to-communities-why-it-frequently-fails-and-what-to-do-about-it/>.

production, to dissemination and shared use. As articulated below, this offers practical entry points for transforming partnership practice at every stage of evaluation.



Within each of the four stages, there are key areas of enquiry to evaluate the extent to which partnerships are participatory³²:

- **Partnership quality:** Evaluate the quality of partnerships between local actors (e.g. local organisations often forge partnerships with other local actors such as community-based organisations), and between international and local actors. Assess how these partnerships are formed, negotiated, and maintained, and the extent to which they foster equitable collaboration, risk-sharing and mutual respect.
- **Partner leadership in the programme:** Analyse the structural and operational barriers that limit the influence of partners and recommend how these can be overcome.
- **Participating partners are not a homogeneous group:** they operate with different priorities and relationships within their communities (professional, cultural, or

³² Adapted from HAG (2024) Making the results of Humanitarian Evaluation Accessible to Communities: Why it frequently fails and what to do about it, <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/making-the-results-of-humanitarian-evaluation-accessible-to-communities-why-it-frequently-fails-and-what-to-do-about-it/>, ALNAP (2025) Adapting the OECD criteria for the evaluation of humanitarian action, <https://alnapp.org/help-library/resources/evaluation-criteria-guide-e-report/>, and CHS (2024) Core humanitarian standard on quality and accountability. Second edition <https://alnapp.org/help-library/resources/core-humanitarian-standard-on-quality-and-accountability-2024/>.

geographic). Consider how these variations influence their ability to equitably participate, how they relate to the population affected by crisis, and whether certain groups face barriers to participation or resources.

- **Agency and decision-making:** Evaluate the extent to which partners (especially those also affected by crisis) have been able to influence decisions made throughout the response/programme. Look for concrete ways that programmes have been led by or have responded to partners' preferences and priorities in a timely manner.
- **Quality engagement and communication:** Evaluate the nature of the relationship between programme partners. Assess cultural sensitivity, diversity and inclusion, and dynamics of power and trust between them.
- **Results and resources:** Evaluate the extent to which the success of the programme is judged by its effectiveness in involving partners in decision-making and in responding to their concerns and feedback. Look for evidence that indicators of effectiveness have been identified by all participating partners. Has partner engagement been included as a specific outcome indicator, or prioritised by leadership? Have sufficient resources – funding, personnel and time – been allocated to facilitate meaningful participation of partners in decision-making processes?
- **Coordination and collaboration:** Review systems and partnerships for active involvement in defining the programme and evaluation success criteria, the use of local metrics and indicators, and maintenance of high ethical standards, recognising that evaluating partnerships can raise challenges around confidentiality, power dynamics, and trust. Partners will not be a homogenous group so initial actor mapping may be advisable³³.

³³ For further details on methods and the relevance to questions of participation and partnership see Primer 1

Core Considerations for Evaluating Equitable Partnerships for ODA

There are no equal partnerships. Yet striving towards more equitable partnerships can be a shared goal among those involved and will be fundamental for ODA policy and outcomes. In practice, whether partnerships meet an ideal standard is not always the most important consideration, but whether choices are made consciously and transparently, and whether attention to power, participation, and consequences are considered throughout partnership development.

Participatory Partnerships Checklist:

1. Partnerships should be designed with equitable participation of each partner in mind.
2. Partnerships should be designed with recognition of the potentially unequal contexts within which each partner works.
3. Participation of each partner should be in decision-making, programming, goal setting and outcomes otherwise there is a risk of tokenism.

Core Questions for Evaluating Participatory Partnerships:

1. What are the goals, ways of working, expected outcomes for each partner and to what extent do these overlap or stand in tension?
2. What is the relative power and resource balance between the partners and how might this shape the way the partnership can achieve its goals?
3. How is partnership defined by each of the partners?
4. With whom does decision-making, accountability, and control of finances lie?

Further Resources

HAG guidance on equitable partnerships:

1. Equitable Research Partnerships Between Global North and Global South Research Collaborators: Making it Happen <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/equitable-research-partnerships-between-global-north-and-global-south-research-collaborators-making-it-happen/>

HAG guidance on localisation and partnerships:

2. Interrogating the Evidence Base on Humanitarian Localisation: A Literature Study (see Section 3 and Page 27 on what is local) <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/interrogating-the-evidence-base-on-humanitarian-localisation-a-literature-study/>
3. Measuring Localisation: Framework and Tools (a baseline for localisation including participation and partnerships) <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/measuring-localisation-framework-and-tools/>
4. Localisation in Protracted Crises and Fragile Settings (see Sections 2 and 3 on partnerships in localisation) <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/localisation-in-protracted-crises-and-fragile-settings/>
5. Localisation Through Networks and Collectives: Localisation Learning Brief (evaluating localisation in networks and partnerships) <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/localisation-through-networks-and-collectives-localisation-learning-brief/>

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