International Institute of Rural Reconstruction

IIRR Partnership Policy/Guide

May 2013

1.0   Introduction and Background

Even before 1960 when IIRR was formally established, its predecessor organization pursued its poverty reduction goal through collaborative work. In the 1960s and 1970s, IIRR focused its attention on forming and strengthening, people's organizations, member organizations in the rural reconstruction movement and IIRR training alumni associations around the world. After most of

the national rural reconstruction movements and alumni associations had become self-sufficient in the early 1990s, IIRR continued joining forces with various development organizations and community groups to attain its poverty reduction goal. The 2011-2015 Strategy puts greater emphasis on partnership as one of the key pillars to attaining the mission and the goals of IIRR. This policy aims to guide IIRR as it engages in meaningful relationships with like-minded organizations and communities in pursuit of its development goals.

1.1   About IIRR

The International Institute of Rural Reconstruction is an international grassroots development, training and research organization with the mandate of reducing poverty through innovations and community empowerment.

1.1.1   Vision

We envision a world of equity, justice, and peace where people achieve their full potential and live a life of quality and dignity in harmony with the environment.

1.1.2 Mission

We enable communities and those who work with them to develop innovative yet practical solutions to poverty through a community-led development approach and widely share these lessons to encourage replication.

1.1.3   Values

We are inspired and live by our credo. Our continuous effort to build the capacity of the poor and those who work with them is based on our belief in productive, beneficial partnerships which are discussed in section 3.0, IIRR principles of sustainable partnership.

1.2   IIRR – Partnership Context

Globally, partnership is emphasized among nations, development partners, donors, the private sector, and Civil Society Organizations. Development actors have come to realize that no single organization can work in isolation as long as the needs of the communities that they serve remain many and diverse. IIRR is part of this global community.

All IIRR policies are approved by the trustees who have an oversight and governance responsibility. In 2011/2012 the IIRR trustees approved several such policies. These include; HIV/AIDS, gender equality, conflict of interest, whistleblower, donor privacy, and document retention policies. The partnership policy is one that aims to further strengthen systems and procedures as outlined in 2011-2015 strategy. This policy is formulated within the broader global context where partnership is seen as one of the main pillars of IIRR's Strategy 2015 and Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

2.0   Our Working Definition of Partnership

IIRR defines partnership as a *formal relationship between IIRR and other development actors to achieve a common development goal or objective*. The "partnership concept" generally refers to any formal working arrangement involving one or more independent bodies from any sector who share responsibilities and agree to cooperate toward a common goal.

2.1 Rationale and Purpose of Partnership

IIRR is an advocate for the idea that people's participation is the foundation for sustainable change. Currently IIRR is working with over 150 partners around the world. By joining forces, IIRR leverages the resources and talents of organizations and people who work with these organizations. For example, community members and grassroots partners may bring to the partnership "practical do-how" while our staff may contribute to "technical know-how" in the words of our founder. These two actors complement each other's skill sets. The community members and local partner also bring local traditional knowledge and expertise that reside with people, are affordable, and will contribute to sustainability. In addition, partnership stimulates collaboration which will build a collective voice and action that will have greater impact on policy and governance. We believe that local communities and other civil society partners can better understand, represent and address the needs and aspirations of poor people by forming alliances. From an aid effectiveness point of view, the various actors find themselves in situations where they are obliged to work with others to fulfill their mandates and attain strategic goals, ensuring that actions are not duplicative or un-supported.

The knowledge, skills and experience that partners offer each other allow us to make a greater impact than if we worked independently.

2.2 Who Do We Partner With?

Development actors could be community or People's Organizations (POs) also commonly known as Community Based Organizations (CBOs), national/local or international NGOs, national or local governments, UN agencies, academic and research institutions and resource organizations or donors.

IIRR works with these diverse organizations which fall into four broad groupings which may not have clear dividing lines. Relationships may fit into more than one category at a time or over time:

2.2.1 Learning Community Partners

These are organized community groups like POs, CBOs, Cooperatives and other formally organized structures with a legal identity whose efforts aim to benefit the larger community. In this context, IIRR will also collaborate with organizations that support efforts of organized community groups, like local government, local NGOs, International NGOs and/or the private sector who work in the same geographic location. These partners are strategic because they enable IIRR and communities to achieve the poverty reduction goal. These partners work together over time with sufficient alignment of goals and objectives toward achieving a lasting impact on poverty.

2.2.2 Consortium Partners

These are partners (typically other development organizations) that IIRR enters into a formal agreement with for a specific period of time to accomplish a specific task.. Such partnerships are often project-specific

and time-bound. When a given project is complete, such partnership may end or continue with a new project. In the future, IIRR may act as the lead in forming consortiums of its own.

2.2.3 Capacity Development Partners

These are demand-led partners who seek capacity development support from IIRR. These partners utilize IIRR trainings, study programs, and/or technical skills. These partners could be UN agencies, national or international development organizations, faith-based organizations that are involved in developmental activities, grantees of donors, etc. In most cases, these partners pay for the services of IIRR in full or at a subsidized rate or the cost is paid for them by a sponsor.

2.2.4 Resource Support Partners

These are partners who support IIRR through funding. These are foundations, corporations, governments, and bilateral or multi-lateral agencies. It also includes individuals who, through large, use-restricted gifts, support IIRR's programmatic or administrative costs.

2.2.5 Knowledge Partners

IIRR is engaged in joint knowledge-development through publications. Over the years, IIRR has worked with research and academic institutions, NGOs, donors and their grantees, and UN agencies to publish numerous manuals, toolkits, field-guides, etc. through writeshops. In such publications, IIRR promotes joint ownership and copyright-free releases to encourage wider circulation and use of the material. *If any of the publications will be used for a commercial purpose, IIRR will require a written request.*

3.0 Our Principles of Sustainable Partnership

Our partnership principles are built around productive, beneficial partnerships that reflect our core values of mutual respect, mutual knowledge, mutual trust, and mutual help. These are defined as follows:

3.1 Mutual Respect

At an individual level, IIRR recognizes that all people have worth and a right to make their own decisions and lead their lives. Acceptance of this principle leads IIRR and partners to treat each other with respect and dignity. At the organization level, IIRR and partners recognize and respect each other's autonomy and find common ground that enables both organizations to attain their development goals.

Equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership regardless of size or power. The partners must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. True partnership is impossible without mutual respect; however, mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.

3.2 Mutual Knowledge

IIRR recognizes that all people and organizations have experiences, resources, talents, and local and traditional know-how which will form key ingredients for a successful partnership.   IIRR and

partners will work together to discover, identify and utilize these unique skill-bases and strengthen each other.

3.3   Mutual Trust

True and lasting partnership is built on trust. Mutual trust is achieved through dialogue (on equal footing), with an emphasis on frequent consultations and open sharing of information. Communication and transparency, including financial transparency increase the level of trust among partners.

3.4   Mutual Help

The diversity of our partners (POs, CBOs, NGOs, and LGUs) is an asset and allows both partners to build on and complement the other's contributions. Local knowledge of POs and CBOs is one of the main assets to leverage and build upon. The local partners are more knowledgeable about specific social or cultural contexts and IIRR will bring knowledge or technical "know-how" and resources from outside which will complement contributions of communities and their support organizations. IIRR and partners will work and learn together to achieve success.

3.5   Mutual Accountability and Good Governance

IIRR and its partners are accountable to each other and more so to the public and communities as well as the development process at large. Special emphasis will be placed on financial accountability of funds both organizations will be entrusted with. Accountability is a fruit of good governance. Both organizations will work to put in place systems (financial, human resources and others) that will ensure good governance and accountability.

4.0   Policy Statement

IIRR works with and through partners to achieve its development goals for overcoming poverty. The partnerships are based on leveraging complementary skills and respect for the contribution that each party brings. IIRR's partner relationships are informed by and managed by a set of principles of: mutual respect, mutual knowledge, mutual trust, mutual help and mutual accountability. These principles underpin our programs and partnership decisions in development work at every level of engagement. More specifically:

4.1   IIRR will conduct all of its Learning Community work with and through partnership with POs, CBOs, Cooperatives and other formally organized structures which have a legal identity and whose efforts aim to benefit the larger community. In this context, IIRR will also collaborate with organizations that support their efforts, like local governments, local NGOs, International NGOs

and the private sector who work in the same geographic location with the aim of overcoming poverty. These organizations will bring resources (technical, financial or others) that will complement the efforts of IIRR and its learning community partners.

4.2   At each Learning Community site, IIRR will establish a project office or attach a team to a local partner organization in order to provide capacity support, monitoring and mentoring to local partners and community organizations.

4.3   Partners will be selected based on their commitment and track record in community work or specific program areas. IIRR will ensure that potential partners and its leaders are free from political and religious biases and other negative practices such as discrimination against women/girls; drug use and abuse, or engaging with or supporting activities of terrorism.

4.4   Partners will have a common or complementary purpose, program or project that adds value which will contribute to the poverty reduction goal of IIRR.

4.5   For all Learning Community Partners, a formal organizational assessment will be undertaken to determine the fitness and capacity of these organizations to deliver on the intended partnership outputs. This assessment will determine if the organization has the basic institutional structure and systems needed to do business, like legitimacy, strong leadership, financial procedures and a professional staff. IIRR will use a standard organizational capacity statement tool to determine organizational fitness.

4.6   The IIRR Learning Communities are model learning sites for other communities and organizations. As such, the partners agree to allow IIRR to use these learning sites to conduct exposure visits, action research and document lessons.

4.7   All IIRR partnerships will be entered into in writing for specific purpose and time with options for renewal. These agreements will be signed by IIRR leaders and leaders of various partner organizations at the same level. IIRR leaders at various levels will inform their supervisors in writing before entering into any formal agreements with outside entities. Local, national, regional and international partnerships will be entered into by leaders who will have responsibilities for the respective jurisdiction.

4.8   The partnership agreement will explicitly define the roles, responsibilities, decision-making levels and key deliverables, including standards of accountability by IIRR and the partner.

4.9   IIRR and partners will review annually their progress and challenges. Free and open communication between IIRR and partners will be encouraged.

4.10   IIRR and partners will jointly document lessons and challenges. Both parties are acknowledged for their contribution. IIRR can freely use these lessons as case studies in its trainings and other Applied Learning activities.

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