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An Inclusive Approach to Partnerships for the SDGs: Using a Relationship Lens to Explore the Potential for Transformational Collaboration

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Author(s)

Stott, Leda Murphy, David F

Description / Abstract

Partnerships are positioned as critical for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations transformational agenda for 2030. The widespread use of terms such as 'collaboration', 'partnership' and 'cooperation' has, however, led to debates about the expectations of such relationships and calls have been made for more rigorous clarification and classification of these related concepts. Drawing upon a comprehensive literature review, we argue in this conceptual paper that the broad spectrum of personal and organizational interactions within, between and across different sectors, domains, disciplines and contexts makes the quest to delineate and categorize these diverse forms of collaboration a seemingly impossible task. We further suggest that such efforts advance a narrow view of partnership as little more than a means to an end, thus limiting understanding of the integrative and intrinsic value of working in this way. We believe that a more inclusive understanding of partnerships may be achieved by exploring them through a relationship lens that acknowledges the importance of inter-personal connections in partnerships more deeply. In doing so, the capacity of partnerships to generate the systemic change that is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development may be enhanced and ultimately realized.

DOI:[10.3390/su12197905](https://doi.org/10.3390/su12197905)

Publication year

2020

Publisher

Sustainability

Keywords

partnerships Sustainable Development Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs
relationships transformation collaboration inter-personal connections

Thematic Tagging

Gender Youth

Language English

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Source URL: <https://iwrmaactionhub.org/resource/inclusive-approach-partnerships-sdgs-using-relationship-lens-explore-potential>