The *'What?'* and *'Why?'* Prompt Sheet
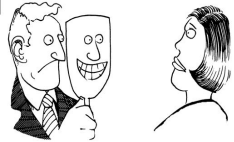
This is tool is designed to start a process of exploration, enquiry and 'de-layering' – to help partners get beneath unchecked assumptions and simplistic deductions. Everything explored below could probably apply to all types of partnership and multi-stakeholder collaboration, however practitioners working remotely do acknowledge that at least some underlying concerns and issues may be significantly more challenging and / or harder to address because of the additional factor of working long-distance.

Understanding Partners' Concerns[1]

What is the concern?	Why might it be important?	What are some of the key considerations?	Aiming to achieve:
Anxiety about difference	Many go into partnerships with real anxieties about how possible it will be to work in close collaboration with those operating in different entities (especially different sectors). They often have a genuine fear that any difference of views will quickly lead to divergence, conflict and, possibly, relationship breakdown.	• How was the partnership set up – did individuals / organisations choose to be involved or were they required to operate as a partnership – perhaps as a pre-requisite for accessing funds? • What will it take to reassure partners that there may be some unexpected gains to be had by aligning with the other ways of thinking and operating (without necessarily 100% agreeing with everything they say or do)? • What opportunities can be found to 'get inside' each other's way of working by getting beneath unchecked preconceptions and / or outright prejudice?	**Added Value**
Power imbalance	Power comes in many forms and is a valid aspiration for those who feel powerless, but all too often partnerships can be held hostage by individuals or organisations wielding power inappropriately. A partnership in which some partners are, or feel, marginalised has serious problems that need to be addressed.	• How do partners build a better balance between different players – where power is shared and not exerted as a means of control? • How are all contributions (sometimes less tangible but equally important as those that are more tangible) properly acknowledged and valued? • How is 'bullying' behaviour called out and challenged? • How are those who feel they have less power, that their voices are not heard and / or that their opinions are dismissed as unimportant given space to assert themselves?	**Greater Equity**

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[1] Adapted from *The Partnering Toolbook* – cartoons by Guy Venables

Hidden agendas	There is a difference between information that needs to be confidential (for commercial or legal reasons) and information that has a bearing on the partnership and is intentionally kept secret. Partnerships quickly get stuck where there are (or are perceived to be) hidden agendas and this can seriously impede progress and the achievement of results.	• You don't need to know everything about your partners – that is neither desirable nor possible – but you do need to feel that partners are being open and that their motives for partnering are genuine. How do you achieve this? • Trust cannot realistically a precondition for partnering – how can you trust people you have not worked with before, perhaps have never even met face-to-face? • Trust is, however, an important aspiration in a partnership and can be a good measure of a partnership's health over time. It is particularly important in scenarios where partnering itself is seen as high risk. What reassurances and approaches are needed in such scenarios?	**More Trust**
Competitiveness	Competitiveness seems to be the 'modus operandi' for many – perhaps particularly for those working in the same sector where competition for funding can lead to the kinds of behaviours that are highly destructive when striving to create a collaborative model.	• How is it possible for partners to carry two potentially conflicting roles in a partnership – one that protects the interests of their own organisation and another that works to evolve a common interest? • What evidence is needed to demonstrate / prove that benefits from partnering significantly outweigh the risks? • Is it possible to widen the concept of 'benefit' beyond just the financial? • What does healthy interdependence look like and how can it be achieved without any partner feeling they have lost out or given too much away?	**Mutual Benefit**
Uncertainty	Perhaps the only thing that all partners have in common at the start of any partnership is their uncertainty about each other, the partnership itself and whether it will be worth the investment of time and other resources. The certainty: uncertainty axis is challenging and can take some skilful and confident management.	• How do partners identify those things that are clear and relatively simple to agree and then act on them quickly so that there is a sense of progress? • How do those managing or facilitating the partnering process help partners to hold space for solutions to those things that are less clear or more complex to emerge and evolve when the time is right? • Even a well planned and prepared partnership has many unknowns in relation to the complex issues it seeks to address that require those involved to be bold rather than tentative if they are to achieve breakthrough results.	**Courageous Action**

Exploring Dilemmas and Contradictions:

On the one hand…		On the other hand…
Partnership must be shaped by **local** priorities – what are the implications of this?		Partnership must be shaped by **global** priorities – what are the implications of this?
There is **too much** participation – some just do too much and leave no space for others – why?		There is **too little** participation – some never seem to contribute – why?
Partner organisations **add value** the partnership – how? By bringing a wide range of resources and ways of working – this is the essence of what makes partnering valuable.		Partner organisation's systems **hold partnerships back** – why? Because they all too often fail to take account of how partnerships are not 'business as usual' and what they need that is different.
Interests of **resource providers** should prevail – what are the implications of this?		Interests of **resource recipients** should prevail – what are the implications of this?
Accountability must be **vertical** (between partners and donors or decision-makers) to ensure due diligence – why does this matter?		Accountability should be **horizontal** (between partners) to ensure the partnership is inclusive and equitable – why does this matter?
Communication is a **dream scenario** – why? Because of the capacity for instant contact and rapid response across the globe and access to insights into cultures, contexts, needs and issues.		Communication is a **nightmare scenario** – why? Because of communication fatigue; imposition of global rather than local norms and expectation of instant responses and quick fix solutions.
Remote Partnering is a just a '**problem to be solved**' – why? Because: *"Partnering long distance is too hard, it would never be our first choice"* *"Cannot ever be a substitute for face-to-face partnering"* *"Often frustrating and inadequate"* *"The main experience of working remotely was a terrible sense of isolation"*	Source of quotes: Interviews at the DEPP Learning Event in Nairobi, Nov 2016	Remote Partnering is a real '**opportunity for change**' – why? Because: *"It can be a real 'leveler' and reduce some of the damaging power dynamics"* *"It gives space for people to work in very different ways and independently"* *"It's the only way to really shift power"* *"Getting better at partnering long distance is the best way to reach scale and impact"*

WHAT…

Needs to change in the way we think about and work with our partners and other stakeholders?

HOW…

…can we **defy distance** and work across boundaries to transform 'good enough' into 'great' partnering practices?