



Vienna Action Statement on Partnerships

I. Preamble

The Vienna Action Statement on Partnerships (the “Action Statement”) was prepared by the Forum Committee of Experts, which comprises selected partnership practitioners with in-depth knowledge of partnership working. It was amended and agreed by participants of the 3rd Annual Meeting of the OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance (the “Forum”) on 1-2 March 2007 in Vienna. The participants of the meeting included partnership managers and stakeholders from the local/regional level, national partnership coordinators, representatives from government departments and organisations interested in the development and promotion of partnership working, and academic researchers.

The Action Statement aims to enhance governance by improving the dialogue and co-operation between policy makers, and between policy makers and other stakeholders, at the local, regional and national levels, in turn fostering economic development, social cohesion, environmental sustainability and quality of life.

This Action Statement will be reviewed by the members of the Forum every three years in light of the results achieved through its implementation, with the next review date being March 2010.

II. Background: the role of partnerships

The partnerships which together make up the OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance are governance frameworks which allow local and regional actors to work together to develop a joint strategy and implement measures relevant to a specific territory. These partnerships primarily focus on employment, social issues and economic development.

Partnerships are becoming increasingly common in OECD countries as a governance tool to: link up policies at the local level, connect local actors with other governance levels, stimulate initiatives, increase effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources and enhance policy outcomes.

Partnerships have traditionally attempted to work within the existing policy framework, tailoring programmes to local needs. However, more and more partnerships across the OECD are now seeking to play a broader role, influencing the development of policy itself. Partnerships are thus endeavouring to become an integral part of both policy design and delivery, at all governance levels.

The Forum underlines the importance of this process, believing that local partnerships can add considerable value to the policy development process through:

- Bringing together diverse local partners and policy areas, and facilitating the development of cross-cutting perspectives and integrated approaches to multi-dimensional problems.
- Improving vertical communication between policy makers from different governance levels.
- Supporting the better adaptation of policies to local circumstances, needs and opportunities.
- Identifying the potential conflicts and synergies which exist between different policies.
- Providing leadership, building trust and consensus on priorities.
- Integrating the concerns of civil society and the private sector into strategic planning exercises.
- Sharing good practice, which has been tested on the ground, and offering know-how from practical experience on what works and what does not.

III. Actions/ Statement

The participants of the 3rd Forum Meeting in Vienna recognise that in order for partnerships to contribute to the policy development process fully, they need to have a strong impact on:

- *multi-level collaboration*: the involvement and consultation of stakeholders (particularly policy makers and social partners) from supra-national, national, regional and local levels; and
- *cross-sector collaboration*: the involvement of stakeholders from various economic sectors/branches, businesses and their representative organisations, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and broad policy fields including labour market, education, economic development, environmental and social policy.

In order to achieve such multi-level and cross-sector collaboration, partnerships require a receptive culture among policy makers in regional, national and supra-national government institutions.

If the value of local partnerships' input to policy making is to be accepted, there will be implications for governments as well as for partnerships themselves. These include:

- the need for government policies which are flexible and adaptable to change;
- the need for channels of communication within multi-level governance arrangements that are open to inputs from the bottom up; and
- the need for a recognition within the policy process of local diversity and the value of evidence from practice.

In addition, on the side of partnerships there is a need to:

- ensure transparency and accountability of partnership structures;
- work on the basis of sound local knowledge and expertise, making reference to local data and indicators;
- demonstrate a strategic approach which goes beyond the delivery of projects and programmes and can adapt to changes in a globalised economy;
- demonstrate capacity to enhance policy outcomes through appropriate monitoring and evaluation; and
- network partnerships at the national level and learn lessons from international experience to ensure efficient dialogue with government.

The participants of the 3rd Forum Meeting in Vienna therefore invite governments and partnerships to work together with the aim to:

- (1) *Ensure flexibility in policy implementation.* This means ensuring that the legal framework, the performance management process and the allocation of budgets is sufficiently flexible to allow government agencies and public services to work closely with local actors from other policy areas on the development and implementation of effective area-based strategies.
- (2) *Establish robust communication mechanisms through which partnerships can influence and comment upon policy developments which will impact upon their areas.* This will require government departments to improve their internal communication links and establish mechanisms for feedback from their representatives within partnerships. Governments should also encourage social partners and civil society organisations to adopt similar mechanisms. Dialogue with partnership networks at national level should be strengthened.
- (3) *Better align policy objectives.* In implementing strategies, partnerships often face the challenge of inconsistent policy objectives set by different government departments. In order to facilitate greater coherence of policies and programmes, on-going co-operation and co-ordination within government, and between government officials and external actors is necessary to ensure that everybody is working towards common goals.

- (4) *Establish strong evaluation tools for measuring added value.* Though many partnerships frequently report on project results, the achievements of partnerships as a whole, and their overall added value as a governance tool receives less attention. In order to evaluate the contribution of partnerships more comprehensively, it is recommended that holistic evaluation tools be developed that assess the added value of partnership collaboration itself, and not just individual project outcomes.
- (5) *Build the capacities of local, regional and national stakeholders to work effectively in partnership through training and development.* This will include equipping representatives from government, civil society and the private sector with the skills needed to participate in and co-manage collaborative activities and partnerships.
- (6) *Provide a secure financial base.* A solid, sustainable financial basis for operation is key to enabling partnerships to take a long-term view on local issues and problems and contribute fully to better policy outcomes. Such financial security needs to be linked to good performance. This will normally require the possibility of renewable multi-annual funding that covers both partnership management (core costs) and specific activity costs.

Vienna, 2 March 2007