

NGOs as development partners to the corporates: child football-stitchers in Pakistan

David Husselbee

Development partnerships

Partnerships are emerging between NGOs and the corporate sector (as distinct from the private sector, which includes small and micro enterprises), as large companies, and particularly multinational corporations (MNCs), become increasingly concerned about the impact of their activities in less developed countries. Most companies now have voluntary codes of conduct on social and environmental issues which they wish to see enacted, while also wishing to protect the values associated with their products from allegations that they are made using exploitative and hazardous working practices. NGOs in turn recognise the increasing importance of companies in development, both locally and internationally, as private flows of foreign direct investment to developing countries increase and flows of official aid fall,¹ and governments are less able to provide adequate services. Both businesses and NGOs see the need to move from a confrontational approach to one of collaboration, without losing the freedom to be critical when necessary. Whether a close liaison with the private sector compromises an NGO's freedom remains an open question for many NGOs.

Attitudes in the corporate sector to partnerships with NGOs are changing. As large companies use the developing world as a source for their products, so their responsibility – as viewed by themselves and consumers – to be involved in development issues rises proportionately. NGOs are seen as a valuable source of knowledge and experience of social and environmental issues, and as more approachable and trustworthy than government, because they, like businesses themselves, are private

organisations. Furthermore, their involvement may also help to neutralise campaigns against the companies concerned.

NGO attitudes to the corporate sector are also changing. The Save the Children Fund UK (hereafter SCF) is involved, for example, in the campaign against Nestlé and other producers of baby-milk formula which is promoted in contravention of the WHO marketing code. Its work has also led to confrontation with the arms industry. Thus SCF has given careful consideration to development partnerships with the private sector, but is now seeking chances of constructive dialogue with a more open corporate sector. This is also rooted, for SCF, in its broad strategic step away from operational work towards partnership with a variety of organisations. This offers the potential for new development opportunities and the scope to influence the international accountability of companies.

There is limited documentation, however, of development projects that involve the corporate sector and NGOs. This article seeks to raise issues about such collaboration, and to assess the essential elements of such partnerships, through the example of SCF's work with some of the sporting-goods manufacturers represented by the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) in Sialkot, an industrial city 144 km north-east of Lahore, in Pakistan, and their international partner brands, represented by the World Federation of Sporting Goods Industry (WFSGI), which wishes to guarantee that children are not employed in stitching footballs.

The elements of partnership, identified by the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum (Nelson 1996), are examined here in the context of the sports-goods industry. They include setting clear and common goals; strengthening intermediary leadership to build bridges between partners; understanding and consulting beneficiaries; ensuring clarity of roles and responsibilities; understanding the resource needs and capacities of the respective partners and their particular contributions to the partnership; improving communication and co-ordination; evaluating progress; and ensuring continuous learning and adaptation. The Sialkot case provides a model of a partnership involving a complex variety of players that will not be found in many partnerships between NGOs and the corporate sector. Nonetheless the approach offers pointers for those considering the possibility of working on the inside with the corporate sector, rather than campaigning from the outside. The issues involved will apply to many cross-sector partnerships and are particularly relevant for international and national NGOs.

Football and child labour: an approach to partnership

In Sialkot, child workers and their families would stitch footballs in their rural homes and communities, using panels supplied by sub-contractors who served to link the stitchers with the manufacturers in the city. Football stitching was also done in large factories, but this did not involve children. The manufacturers in turn have relationships with international companies, who acquire about 60 per cent of the world's footballs from Sialkot. This complex set of linkages within the private sector was something that had to be understood by the various partners. In early 1996, pressure groups began to focus international attention on the involvement of children in football stitching in Sialkot, raising the alarm about children being exploited, particularly in punishment rooms at the back of workshops.² The international industry invited several NGOs based in Pakistan to help them to develop a response. SCF visited Sialkot with a representative of one of the international brands in July 1996. Its resulting report suggested the need for a cross-sectoral partnership, and warned against hurried solutions which could push children into more hazardous and exploitative forms of work, as had happened in the garment industry in Bangladesh (Marcus and Harper 1996: 46).

Subsequently SCF conducted a situation analysis to obtain a detailed picture of the lives of the children involved, and to ensure that their voices could be heard above the international calls for swift answers. This analysis formed the basis of SCF's contribution to the development partnership which evolved in Sialkot in 1997. It had been difficult for international brand names to gain authoritative information about the role of children in the production processes of their suppliers, particularly as the production was home-based or community-based, rather than taking place in factories. The priority for SCF was to establish the facts about the children's lives and views, and to invest in gathering and moving information, rather than funding over-hasty solutions.

SCF found that football stitching was neither very hazardous or exploitative for girls or boys, nor was it a bonded form of work; and that most children were helping their families to meet basic needs. Children were deterred from attending school by the poor quality of education and not simply by the imperative of having to work. The study also raised concerns about the impact on women's employment of the proposed changes in the industry, and the relatively low rates of pay for adult

stitchers. SCF thus decided to establish a programme, in alliance with local NGOs, which would focus on improving education, offering credit and savings facilities and stitching centres for women, and monitoring the impact of changes in the industry on children and their families.

The SCF programme is an integral part of the Sialkot partnership, which is a multi-faceted collaboration between the Sialkot manufacturers represented by the SCCI, SCF, UN agencies (the ILO and UNICEF), Pakistani NGOs (Bunyard and Sudhaar), and the government of Pakistan (GoP), represented by Pakistan Bait ul Mal (a government-funded trust), the Department of Education, and the National Rural Support Programme (an NGO established by the GoP). The international companies are indirectly represented by the SCCI and WFSGI, one of whose members – the Sports Goods Manufacturers Association (SGMA) of America – was closely involved in facilitating the partnership and continues to monitor and promote the project.

The initial negotiations

The formal launch of the project took place in Atlanta in February 1997 at the Super Show, the annual sports trade fair in the USA, with the signing of an agreement defining the goals as follows:

1. *Elimination of child labour in soccer-ball production.* The primary goal of the Project is (i) to assist manufacturers seeking to prevent child labour in the manufacture or assembly of soccer balls in Sialkot District and its environs; (ii) to identify and remove children from conditions of child labour in the manufacture or assembly of soccer balls and provide them with educational and other opportunities, and (iii) to facilitate changes in community and family attitudes to child labour.
2. *Elimination of child labour in other local industries.* The Partners recognise that efforts to eliminate child labour in the soccer-ball industry in Pakistan can best succeed if they are complemented by similar efforts in other local industries, and by the creation of meaningful new opportunities for children in this district. It is the hope of the Partners that the development of the Project shall encourage other sectors of the business community in Sialkot, government of Pakistan, and other important institutions in Pakistan to explore how they might do more to contribute to the end of child labour.³

The process of drafting these goals involved compromise on all sides and provided the foundations of the partnership. For example, the sports industry insisted that the initial focus be football production, but SCF and the UN agencies advocated that other more exploitative and hazardous industries should be the target of the partnership's longer-term goals.

The agreement also describes the main elements as being the Prevention and Monitoring Programme, involving the monitoring of stitching locations by both the manufacturers' own monitors and the ILO as external monitors, to ensure that children are phased out of the work over an 18-month period; and the Social Protection Programme, involving SCF, UNICEF, and local NGOs, which aims to ensure that children who leave football-stitching work do not have to seek more hazardous and exploitative employment. The agreement also covers the co-ordination mechanisms, the specific responsibilities and contributions of the respective parties, and the resolution of disputes. This programme is particularly notable, because it pays careful attention to the lives of children once they have stopped stitching footballs – in contrast to some child-labour programmes that have concentrated primarily, or solely, on monitoring production processes in order to check that children are no longer involved, and so allowing businesses to convince consumers that their products are not made by children.

The international companies were strongly motivated by the need to create an internationally credible partnership which would be acceptable to its members, as well as to its consumers and to the pressure groups. Hence the involvement of international humanitarian organisations was viewed as essential. Such an industry-wide partnership (55 of the international brands have pledged to order footballs only from the Sialkot manufacturers involved in the project) had to be agreed at various geographical levels. Initial discussions between SCF and the industry took place in Sialkot; but, as the partnership grew, discussions soon took place in the respective head offices. The international company associations acted as the brokers which drafted the partnership agreement, which involved negotiations with the ILO in Geneva, UNICEF in New York, and SCF in London.

The speed at which the partnership developed placed stress on SCF's capacity to respond quickly and adequately. In general, SCF's partnerships are with Southern NGOs whose expectations coincide more closely with those of SCF. This allows relationships to evolve and deepen at a mutually acceptable pace, giving time for primary stakeholders to

influence the planning process. In Sialkot, SCF consulted the primary stakeholders – the children and their families – while the Atlanta Agreement was being finalised, thus ensuring that their views influenced the next phase in the planning process. This also helped SCF to be sure that its own role in the partnership would be justified by its protection of the rights of children.

The roles of the partners were further defined when the Partners Operational Framework – a UN project-funding document – was developed in April 1997 by the UN mission to Sialkot. This involved the ILO, the manufacturers, SCF, and UNICEF. This was the first time that the partners had discussed in detail in Pakistan how their respective roles would fit together into an effective partnership. The Atlanta Agreement had been a statement of intent and had set the goals, but the bonds between the partners began to grow during the operational negotiations.

The partnership evolves

The progress of the partnership depended on leadership emerging among people in the partner organisations who shared the vision of the project and were prepared to work collaboratively. These people also developed enthusiasm within their own organisations for the project, in spite of concerns about being associated with such a high-profile initiative.

Initially, the sports industry, both in Sialkot and internationally, felt closer to SCF, because the latter made early attempts to understand both the situation on the ground and the perspective of the manufacturers, and responded more quickly than the other partners. This process was particularly helped by a Punjabi member of SCF's programme staff, whose local knowledge helped to establish a rapport with the manufacturers.

To begin with, SCF played the role of mediator in Sialkot. The manufacturers were troubled by the ILO's institutional links with trade unions, this concern being exacerbated by the international-level negotiations which had limited communication and the development of mutual trust within Pakistan until the UN mission arrived. SCF facilitated communication at the beginning of the mission, based on its understanding of the views of all parties. The private-sector actors relied on this until personal contacts among the other organisations began to build the trust upon which the partnership is now based. SCF could then step back from the bridge-building role, in order to allow direct and strong relationships to grow across the partnership.

At various points in the confrontational stages of the discussions, SCF's role in explaining the perspectives of the corporate sector and the ILO to each other was misinterpreted by both SCCI and ILO as a lack of impartiality on SCF's part. Such issues were not resolved until the UN mission had left Sialkot, and the ILO invited SCCI and its international customers to visit Bangladesh to see the work of the ILO in monitoring the garment industry. Constructive discussion became the glue in the partnership, and confrontation was left behind

Putting children at the centre of the analysis

While the negotiations took place, SCF conducted an extensive situation analysis which focused on the views of the stitcher children and their families and consequently provided a bridge between them and those who were influencing the policies of the partnership. A more constructive balance of power resulted by moving the relationship between the stitchers and other stakeholders. The speed at which the partnership had grown before the signing of the Atlanta Agreement had not allowed time for the participation of the primary stakeholders, so the situation analysis was essential to opening the partnership to their views. This helped to evolve goals for the project which were not identical to the goals of the initial agreement, but would be mutually beneficial and acceptable to all stakeholders, including stitchers and consumers.

SCF's analysis sought to illustrate the complexity of the situation and to test the contentions of pressure-group campaigns which suggested that many children were working as bonded labourers for most of the daylight hours, and were not able to attend school because of their work. It also provided a chance to explain to communities the possible impact of proposed changes in the industry. It was very important for SCF to stress the concerns that it shared with the pressure groups as a result of the study.

Previous reports on the football industry in Sialkot had produced estimates of the numbers of children involved that ranged from 5000 to 17,000. The priority of the SCF study was not to verify these figures, but to focus on the *quality* of the lives of the working children. It was clear that thousands of children were involved in the football industry, but the nature of their involvement needed clarification. A combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques was used. The manufacturers had hoped that SCF would come up with a definitive number of children to be protected by the project, and took some convincing that the rural

community-based nature of the work made this difficult. Nonetheless, the report was welcomed as a balanced account of the problem. Details of methodology are included in this document.

The findings and recommendations proved to be a challenge to the proposed re-organisation of the industry, which would have seen all production moved out of rural communities into large factories. However, the views were received constructively by the manufacturers, because SCF was lobbying from within the partnership and from a position of trust. SCF would not have had such influence had it remained outside the partnership. The result was that some football production would stay in smaller production units in villages, which allowed women to continue to work close to their homes and children. Many of these women would have been prevented by cultural norms from travelling to the distant factories.

SCF also stressed that paying adults more to stitch footballs would be the most effective way to reduce children's need to work, although this recommendation has been acted upon by only a few manufacturers. Information about profit margins and whether pay could be increased has not been made available to SCF, but its consultations with children and their families had given SCF a clear and legitimate position on policy issues in the sports industry, and allowed it to retain its independence.

Independent monitoring

The roles of the other partners were fully clarified in the Partners Operational Framework developed by the UN mission; they continue to be refined through the co-ordination mechanisms of the project. A question which is not yet adequately answered for many involved in ethical business issues – i.e. which body should provide the independent monitoring of labour standards – was answered in this case by the ILO, who offered the technical assistance of a senior Dutch labour inspector to lead the independent monitoring of stitching locations. The international sports industry had favoured hiring a private accountancy or investigation firm for this role, but doubts about the impartiality of such organisations were raised by the pressure groups. The ILO was seen as impartial and gained the support of the sports industry because of its experience in child-labour monitoring in the Bangladesh garment industry. The ILO has subsequently accepted a similar role in the surgical instruments and carpet industries in Punjab, although there is now some internal debate about how widely ILO should replicate this model of monitoring.

The formal monitoring of production facilities by the ILO, and by the internal manufacturers' monitors, serves to check that children are not working. It provides the manufacturers with the endorsement that they need in order to protect their reputation, the value of their product, and the image of football as a sport. It also provides information about children who are displaced from work to the social protection programme which involves SCF, UNICEF, and local NGOs in education, credit and savings, and vocational training.

Before the signing of the Atlanta Agreement, SCF had been invited to serve as an independent monitor, but had declined. There was concern that this would involve the NGO in endorsing products that claimed to be child-labour free, rather than representing the broader concerns about the need to improve the quality of children's lives. This was not SCF's area of competence and would have threatened its independence and the value of its name as an organisation which represents the rights of children. However, as a member of the project, SCF shares responsibility with the other partners for administering sanctions against companies that do not comply with guidelines of the programme. Thus SCF's independence is essential, if the project is to claim that it has a viable system of controls.

SCF is developing local capacity in social monitoring to ensure that the rights of children are protected. Changes in the quality of children's lives and the lives of their families through the lifetime of the project are monitored, using indicators relating to their attitudes to and use of education, the changes in family incomes, and changes in the work of the children.

The Co-ordination Committee

The Project Co-ordination Committee was established through the negotiations for the Atlanta Agreement and is responsible, to paraphrase the Agreement, for 'facilitating communication ... promoting cooperation between the partners ... identifying individuals and organisations qualified to implement the various parts of the project ... integrating the monitoring and social protection elements of the project ... providing public reports on the project ... encouraging international sports businesses to support the project ... encouraging other businesses in Sialkot to join in efforts against child labour ... approving plans and proposals for the project.' The Committee works at the policy level, and a team was also created at the implementation level, with a secretariat based at the Chamber of Commerce.

It has not been easy for the Co-ordination Committee to create a shared vision of the aims of the programme. New manufacturers joining the programme have been resistant to the role of the partnership in improving education, which they see as the responsibility of the GoP. The Chamber of Commerce has co-ordinated the response of the 53 manufacturers and encouraged their commitment. It is significant that the most committed manufacturers have been those who receive the greatest encouragement on social responsibility from the international brands that they supply. The other manufacturers have taken a less active role and appear to be waiting for the programme to clear the name of their industry, rather than seeking to be involved in the development of the district. Nonetheless, the concept of corporate citizenship is taking a stronger hold because of the partnership; and this is also serving to develop the organisational capacity of the SCCI to be socially responsible. Internationally, SCF has encouraged the brands to request their suppliers in Sialkot to be active in the project.

Results to date

The programme had resulted, by August 1999, in 53 manufacturers having their production facilities monitored by the ILO; the establishment of a programme of savings and credit, and skills training, for 7500 households; school management committees set up in 104 government primary schools; courses to up-grade the skills of 220 teachers; and the establishment of more than 150 non-formal education centres. Social-monitoring reports assessing the impact on communities are available from SCF. The main outstanding issue for the partnership to resolve remains the institutional arrangements that are needed to ensure the local sustainability of the programme when the international organisations withdraw.

What makes partnerships between NGOs and the corporate sector possible?

The elements of successful partnership identified by Nelson (1996) are exemplified by this case study as follows.

Clear and common goals

The different expectations of the corporate sector and NGOs have to be reconciled in the early stages, if a partnership is to work. The corporate world expects results and the achievement of specific targets, especially when responding to criticism. By contrast, NGOs concentrate on process and encourage communities to define their own targets – something that can take time. SCF played a role in decelerating the process to allow time for primary stakeholders to be consulted, but had to show understanding of the needs of the sports industry and to move more quickly than usual, otherwise the partnership would not have worked. The Atlanta Agreement was signed to publicise the fact that the industry was taking action, and to create time for an appropriate programme to be assembled before further international pressure was applied. The proviso that the programme could be delayed if the ‘Coordinating Committee other than SCCI ... agree that this is necessary to protect the best interests of the children ...’ was included in the Agreement and helped to create realistic expectations about the speed at which a programme could be implemented.

Intermediary leadership to build bridges

Intermediaries from the respective partners were essential. High cultural hurdles had to be crossed to create the partnership between countries on opposite sides of the world and among organisations with vastly different approaches and aims. Strong intermediary vision and leadership has helped to build bridges between the organisations involved.

Partnerships with the corporate sector are often initiated by companies themselves, as approaches from NGOs to the private sector are frequently treated with mistrust. Companies need to be sure that a partnership will promote their aims and values and they tend to trust partnerships that they have initiated themselves. As cross-sectoral partnerships become more common, and NGOs develop experience with the corporate sector, this will change. SCF was initially cautious, being inexperienced in the implementation of development projects with the corporate sector, and concerned about potential threats to its independence. It therefore helped that the opening gambit was made by business, which provided much of the early intermediary leadership.

The commitment and understanding of individuals within the organisations concerned are what make cross-sectoral partnerships work. They need to understand the concerns and views of all parties and to

build the bridges that lead to strong ties. SCF had decided to work with the private sector, but the building of links was made easier by the fact that an intermediary representing one of the brands had extensive NGO experience. She encouraged SCF to accept an invitation to visit Sialkot to assess the problem of children working in football stitching. Other international NGOs declined the invitation, for a variety of operational reasons and because of concerns about possibly compromising their independence.

The partners have seen, as the needs of the programme have become clearer, the importance of appointing people who are inclined to work collaboratively at the interface between different organisations and who are not afraid to share with the other partners the credit for success and the responsibility for problems.

Understanding and consulting the beneficiaries and stakeholders

Business remains competitive if it has access to information and knowledge, and NGOs can act as an important source in cross-sector partnerships by providing an understanding of the primary stakeholders and therefore influencing commercial thinking. Business is good at making and selling products, but has not developed competence in consulting producer communities in a participatory way. This is partly because the vocal groups – the Northern consumers and pressure groups – are accepted by the corporate sector as stakeholders with an influence on the success of the business. By contrast, business is only beginning to recognise the producers and their communities, whose voice is not often heard, as stakeholders. In this case, the gap between stakeholders in this partnership was filled by SCF's situation analysis, which placed the views of children and their communities at the centre of the partnership's agenda. Consulting communities in collaboration with Southern NGOs, and representing their views in detail, also provided legitimacy to SCF and a position of strength from which to influence the direction of the partnership and to advocate policy changes that favour children.

Thus their capacity to glean independent knowledge can be a way for NGOs to inform the internal processes of change within a project, through an on-going dialogue with the primary stakeholders. This knowledge provides the NGO with an independent position, which is respected by business people, and also ensures that the NGO does not have to depend on the private sector for information which may be coloured by commercial perspectives.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities

Clarity was reached once the programme began work on the ground. The initial project documents had outlined the various roles, and this provided a basis for discussion, but eventually these roles were clarified by those responsible for implementation. The initial involvement of people in Sialkot would have resulted in roles being defined more clearly from the beginning.

Understanding resource needs and capacities

The clarification of roles depends on the ability of organisations to recognise the competencies and capacities of each of the partners. Roles cannot be clear if the partners do not recognise the strengths that the others can bring. Given the high profile of the sports industry, each partner in Sialkot has recognised that being accompanied by others provides the best chance of success and reduces the level of exposure of individual organisations. The experience of ILO in industrial monitoring, of UNICEF in education, of SCF in social and children's issues and education, and of the sports industry in communicating and planning, are all valuable aspects of the project.

Resource needs for the project were assessed during the drafting of the Partners Operational Framework. The partnership has provided leverage for the partners to gain funding – a task which would have been more difficult for organisations operating in isolation. SCF, for example, has designed a project for funding by the British government's Department for International Development (DFID) and has also attracted sources of expertise from within Pakistan, such as the National Rural Support Programme, which has strong credit and savings programmes.

Communication and co-ordination

Maintaining understanding among the partners has required regular communication among them through the co-ordinating mechanisms described above, and through meetings with individual partners to resolve particular concerns. The sports industry at times has been particularly demanding of partners to communicate clearly and promptly, and doing so represents a form of increased accountability for all involved.

Mechanisms for co-ordination and accountability provide each partner with equal power to influence and question the progress of the

partnership. The possible imposition of sanctions against partners who do not comply to the standards agreed has to be built into the way the partnership works.

Evaluating progress and continuous learning and adaptation

The nature and profile of the partnership involves all the partners in a new form of accountability – to each other and to the project’s stakeholders – in evaluating the progress of the project. Both the producer and the consumer will have a stronger influence over the organisations involved, which will benefit the organisations themselves and the children of Sialkot. This new accountability presents a considerable risk which none of the partners would take alone, and encourages thorough evaluation of progress. The partners have become more adaptable as trust has grown. This trust has enabled them to be more honest about the weaknesses of each other’s work, as the need to resolve problems collectively has become more apparent.

All the partners are learning from each other and have been prepared to adapt their roles as the project has developed. The way in which the external monitoring component implemented by the ILO emerged against the initial wishes of the private sector is an example, and the evolving approach of the Sialkot manufacturers to ethical issues is another. SCF has developed its analysis of child-labour issues from its involvement in the project, and is now learning about the particular issues arising from work with the corporate sector.

Conclusions for NGOs

- *Corporate-sector policy*: Before entering partnership negotiations, an NGO needs to have clear policy guidelines on engaging with the private sector, particularly on issues such as the endorsement of corporate-sector firms and their products. The absence of such a policy can place considerable pressure on those representing the NGO in negotiations, although inevitably there are times when policy emerges from experience. Particular policies relating to the partnership in question need to be based on the views of the primary stakeholders.
- *Distinctive advocacy*: An NGO needs to have a clear advocacy policy, using the views of the primary stakeholders, on the relevant issues. In this case, this role gave SCF a distinctive identity within the

partnership, ensuring that its views would not be confused with those of the corporate partners. (The relationship with local NGOs provided SCF with a vital link to the views of communities.) NGO opinion will, however, often converge with that of the corporate sector, and the reasons for this convergence need to be clearly articulated.

The combination of different organisations can provide a strong base for external communication and advocacy work, something that would not have existed for the respective organisations working alone. The innovative nature of this partnership has attracted wide media coverage, particularly during the launch in Atlanta and during the Oslo Child Labour conference in October 1997, and many opportunities have emerged for SCF to communicate its views on child labour. The partnership has also influenced the GoP, which is seeking to improve education in Sialkot through a government trust, Pakistan Bait ul Mal, and the Prime Minister's Literacy Commission. Members of the partnership have also gained access to policy makers and opinion leaders. One example includes a visit to Washington which included meetings with the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the Congressional Progressive Caucus responsible for drafting much of the US trade legislation in recent years, and the Child Labour Coalition, which includes the Foul Ball Campaign, labour groups, and consumer groups. The project has also facilitated links for SCF with trade unions in Pakistan and Europe on child-labour issues.

- NGOs need to *build trust externally and internally* through regular and timely contacts with the corporate sector and a willingness to understand their perspective. Initial commitment and reasonably prompt responses encourage confidence on all sides. Staff with local knowledge and language skills can help to break down cultural barriers and build links with the suppliers in a developing country. Confrontational approaches to negotiating agreements delay the growth of trust, but this does not obviate the need to negotiate from a clearly defined independent position.

Confidence in the partnership within the NGO can be created through consulting trusted external third parties who can assess the value and potential pitfalls of the proposed partnership and assist with the internal debate. The determination of community leaders within the SCCI to develop a partnership to benefit children, as well as their own companies, was important for SCF and had been confirmed by third-party observers.

- *Alliances* with similar organisations in the partnership help to protect the name of the NGO in a high-profile project, and mean that it can avoid the direct endorsement of products that might detract from putting forward the values of the NGO concerned.
- *Continuing public communication:* A project involving an industry of high concern to consumers will necessitate regular communications with those consumers, in order to explain the project and its value to them and to the products that they buy. This degree of public accountability is seldom found in partnerships involving development organisations, and a detailed and co-ordinated communications and media strategy helps to facilitate it. This may involve the NGO in presenting the project at events such as trade fairs, corporate-sector conferences, and press conferences at major events. The NGO can use these opportunities to present its own distinctive advocacy statements, and so to maintain its clear identity in the partnership. NGOs also need to be ready to respond to the considerable media attention that may be drawn to such partnerships. A consistent approach across an international NGO, including the press office, ensures that the NGO's role is effectively communicated. This partnership also has a communications strategy of its own, which includes producing a bi-monthly update and co-ordinated guidelines for working with the media. This strategy mitigates the considerable risk for such a high-profile project of adverse publicity that is based on inaccurate information .
- *Develop consistent response capacity across the organisation:* International companies often do not have staff based permanently in the country that is the source of their products, so discussions inevitably take place at head-office level as well as locally. This increases the danger that the primary stakeholders will not have their views heard, so these have to be communicated at all levels. Participation in a partnership with a private company whose economy may be larger than that of many developing countries can place considerable stress on relatively small NGOs. For this reason, clear policies and advocacy approaches need to be supported by staff who are committed to the partnership approach across the organisation in areas including programmes, policy, research, advocacy, marketing, and public and media relations. The approach also needs to be consistent at head-office level and within the country concerned, and it is best to hold discussions in-country if possible.

- *Maintain links with those campaigning from the outside:* The independence of an NGO on the inside of a partnership can be reinforced through links with NGOs and pressure groups who may be seeking to influence the corporate sector from the outside. The appropriate level of external pressure can push the partnership towards its goals, and the NGO that is working within the partnership can help to influence the degree of pressure applied. The corporate sector needs to be comfortable about the nature of the links between their partner NGO and external groups.

In conclusion, this case study can help companies and international and local NGOs to understand each other's perspectives as they seek to meet the development challenges of the future by working in cross-sectoral partnerships. The international aspect of these partnerships, and consumers' recognition of international NGOs, will ensure that such NGOs have a role to play in such partnerships until Southern NGOs also gain international recognition. The Sialkot case provides some pointers, which would benefit from examination through other case studies, to help NGOs to shape their role in the twenty-first century; and to be sure that they work closely enough with, but not too close to, the corporate sector.

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Notes

1 In 1996, official aid flows fell by four per cent to US\$55 billion, while private flows grew by 40 per cent to US\$234 billion. These figures are misleading, however, as 80 per cent of private investment flows went to just 12 countries, with much of the investment being speculative, rather than being invested in productive sectors.

2 The Foul Ball Campaign, part of the International Labour Rights Fund in Washington, took the lead.

3 The full text of the Atlanta Agreement is included in SCF's situation analysis report (SCF 1997), available from its offices in London, Islamabad, and Sialkot.

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