

TRAINING

# forming cross-sector partnerships

Increasingly, companies, non-governmental organizations and governmental bodies are forming partnerships to tackle pressing global problems. A new course has been set up to help ensure that these partnerships achieve their objectives

Partnerships between governments, companies and non-governmental organizations are often heralded as an important means of tackling global problems, many of which – poverty, habitat loss, resource management – are too complex for any one agent to tackle. Positive change will only happen if the different sectors work together.

Now three organizations have come together to create a radical new learning experience that seeks to improve the success rate of cross-sector partnerships. Two of the organizations – the International Business Leaders Forum and the Copenhagen Centre – have been helping others to build partnerships for many years. The third, the Programme for Industry at the University of Cambridge, is a specialist provider of professional development programmes.

The 34 initial participants were from 21 countries and work for very different organizations, with a bird conservation body, the Israeli foreign ministry, a global mining company and a small UK printing company all represented. At the start of the course, they attended five days of lectures, workshops and project activities in Cambridge designed to combine intellectual challenge with practical training. The participants continue to collaborate through a bespoke e-learning facility.

For part of the course the participants are split into small groups and are set a seemingly straightforward task: to produce a report that illustrates good partnership practice based on real-life initiatives. In doing so, they learn not just about

partnership theory, but also its practice. All course tutors bring to the task a wealth of first-hand partnership experience. They help the groups explore how they are meeting the challenges of the group project, but do not otherwise interfere.

Each group is responsible for agreeing the internal decision-making procedures needed to complete its project, and has six months to submit its final report.

Historically, partnerships that work seem the exception rather than the rule. Svetlana Cenic, an advisor to Dragan Cavic, vice-president of Republika Srpska, believes a lot of partnerships have reached the end of a blind street. Cenic, who

is attempting to bring together different nationalities, religions and governments to address the social and economic challenges her country faces, cites the fact that partners are, more often than not, unequal, as one of the main reasons. That is something the new course hopes to address.

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The next course will begin in March 2003

**a lot of partnerships have reached the end of a blind street, in part because the partners are often unequal**

■ the participants at the first course came from 21 countries and their employers included companies, non-governmental organizations and governmental bodies. All were working to build partnerships



comment

## UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE PROGRAMME FOR INDUSTRY

The not-for-profit sector has been striving to build good practice in partnerships for many years. This course will help to support the work of United Nations agencies and other bodies involved in this area.

Notable features of this case study are:

- The participation of non-governmental organizations
- The wide range of course participants
- The value of lessons from previous partnerships that have not achieved their objectives.

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