NASCEE Collaboration initiative - Thought piece 1

Collaborative partnerships for collective impact on education outcomes

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Contents

Acronyms

AAHE	American Association for Higher Education
ABCD	Assets Based Community Development
BEN	Bangladesh Early Childhood Development Network
CDT	Community Development Team
CSQBE	Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education
FEC	Faridabad Education Council
JNNE	Japan NGO Network for Education
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PETS	Public Expenditure Tracking System
PPP	public private partnership
SCA	strategic compatibility assessment
TICZA	Teacher Internship Collaboration South Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Collaboration in education has shifted from traditional partnerships to more complex models. The choice of collaboration model depends on factors like organisation size, team dynamics, and goals. Effective communication is crucial, involving both verbal and nonverbal aspects. Soft skills, trust building, and interpersonal communication all contribute to successful collaboration. The teaching and learning sectors have evolved towards collective impact partnerships as is evident in the case studies investigated in this thought piece, emphasising the importance of understanding collaboration dynamics, including openness, governance, and effective communication.

Inter-organisational partnerships are crucial for community development, emphasising compatibility, recognition of differences, and trust. Community capitals, including natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built capitals, play a role in asset-based community development. Various models like the CDT model, train-the-trainer model, and strategic co-funding model facilitate community development.

Case studies of collective impact initiatives in education globally, such as Strive Partnership in the US and initiatives in India, Japan, and Bangladesh, demonstrate the importance of backbone support, shared measurement, and continuous communication. In Sub-Saharan Africa, civil society coalitions like CSACEFA in Nigeria and CSCQBE in Malawi address education exclusion. South Africa's NECT and TICZA collaborate for education improvement.

Applying collaboration models to case studies, the collective impact model is prevalent in initiatives like Strive Partnership and JNNE in Japan. Backbone organisations, collaborative consultation, and quantifiable information use are common features. Collaborative models and initiatives showcase the success of stakeholder collaboration in solving complex social issues. The collective impact model is prevalent, emphasising cross-sector partnerships. Success in any of these initiatives depends on stakeholders' willingness to collaborate and gain value from participation.

Collaborative partnerships for collective impact on education outcomes

Abstract

This paper examines collaborative partnerships as a means to achieve collective impact on education outcomes. In recent years, there has been a shift from the traditional approach of addressing education challenges solely within educational institutions to a more holistic and collaborative approach. Various stakeholders, including schools, government agencies, non-profit organisations, businesses and communities are recognising that education outcomes are influenced by factors beyond the classroom and are increasingly forming collaborative partnerships.

The paper emphasises the importance of shared goals, mutual trust and coordinated efforts among collaborative partners. By pooling their resources, expertise and networks, these partnerships can effectively address complex educational challenges. The paper further identifies key components of successful collaborations, including effective communication, inclusive decision-making processes and clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Sustained commitment, long-term planning and ongoing evaluation are also essential for ensuring the impact and sustainability of collaborative efforts.

The paper then presents examples of successful international and regional collaborative partnerships in the field of education. These partnerships have demonstrated improved student achievement, increased access to quality education and enhanced community engagement. Additionally, the paper acknowledges the challenges and barriers faced by collaborative partnerships, such as resource constraints, power dynamics and conflicting priorities. It provides recommendations for addressing these challenges and promoting effective collaboration.

1   Background on the Collaboration Landscape

Collaboration of organisations has long been a common practice in the teaching and learning sectors, with new forms of collective impact partnerships evolving from traditional partnership models (Scearce, 2011; Umar, 2020). There are various forms of collaboration initiatives identified in the literature. Each of the collaboration models has a unique approach as well as strengths and weaknesses. According to Produção, et al., (2021) the most effective approach will depend on the specific project, the team and goals. Choosing the right collaboration model depends on several factors (Levine & Prietula, 2014), such as the size and type of the organisation, the work dynamics, the skills and experience of the implementing team members and the goals the team wish to achieve.

Pisano & Verganti (2008) identified two factors defining the nature of collaboration: Openness and Governance. Some collaboration initiatives have an open policy, where any organisation who would like to become a partner is welcomed, whereas others are selective when choosing actors to work with. The open approach invites solutions to a problem from unlimited and potential actors who may contribute significantly to the collaborative work. Levine and Prietula (2014) added that an open collaboration performs well when co-operators are a small group and when diversity is lacking. Although the closed approach may help the implementers to select the relevant collaborators in accordance with the field and the purpose of collaboration, some potential philanthropies and funders may be left out if the onboarding of actors is

streamlined. Collaboration initiatives also differ in their form of governance. In some, the power to make decisions is vested only in the backbone organisation. Pisano & Verganti (2008) defined such activities as completely hierarchical, whereas other collaboration initiatives are egalitarian (Lorini, Chigona & Garbutt, 2018) in nature, with all actors being equal partners in the process and sharing the powers to decide on key issues of the initiative. Structuring of coordination processes and the establishment of roles is critical for the purpose of harmonising the relationships in order to obtain the desired results.

Although there is no consensus among scholars regarding the ideal structure of a collaboration initiative, the majority of structural arrangements are horizontal rather than hierarchical (Pisano & Verganti 2008; Lorini, Chigona & Garbutt, 2018; Produção, et. al, 2021). The horizontal arrangement provides individual actors the opportunity to maximise their influence and benefit from equal recognition. This ensures that every actor in the collaboration feels valued and their morale remains high.

Achieving the greatest impact with the most efficient use of funds drives the push for evidence-based approaches to designing, implementing and sustaining programmes that better the lives of citizens and communities (Sagrestano, Clay & Finerman, 2018). Practitioners and scholars in public administration and related fields use the term 'collaboration' to describe both the structure and collective/shared processes of both individuals and agencies working together for mutual benefit (Winer & Ray, 1994). Collaboration has further been described as the activity of designing a new process for group decision-making which, according to Brown, Rizzuto and Singh (2018), is an important function of actionable partnerships. Networks, coalitions or partnerships are also used to describe collaborative structures and processes. Further compounding the definitional complexity of collaboration are the administrative tools of coordination, cooperation and collaboration used to reflect group members' different purposes, relationships and resource commitments (Keast, Brown, & Mandell, 2007). Collaborative activities, as highlighted by Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006), also require attention to both informal and formal dynamics, as well as a recognition that processes tend to be inherently cyclical and iterative. Austin and Seitanidi (2012) have added to these definitions of collaboration by defining four primary sources of collaborative value: 1) complementary resources, which refers to resources that the different partners bring to the collaboration to create new resources; 2) resource nature, which refers to the types of resource competencies that different organisations contribute to the collaboration; 3) resource directionality and use, which indicates the need for bi-directional collaborative relationships; and 4) linked interests for example, the connection of mutual self-interest and the creation of value for social good.

For any collaboration to take place effectively, each organisation or person needs to be able to explain their context, opinions and perspectives, encourage contributions from other members and arrive at a consensus. In short, recognition and appreciation of each participant's expertise is imperative (Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb & Nevin, 1995, 334). From a more holistic perspective, the content of interaction encompasses meaning (semantics), symbols and organisation (Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb & Nevin, 1995). The use of symbols, also known as nonverbal language, involves a wide range of actions and postures, such as proximity, territory, personal style, time management, kinesics and paralanguage (Jones, 2002; Brown, 2006). While much of this nonverbal communication is beyond conscious control, individuals who possess a comprehensive understanding of its various aspects can better comprehend and manipulate it (Idol et al., 1995; Smith, 2001; Johnson, 2004).

The ability to perceive subtle nonverbal cues is thus crucial for effective communication, as perception checking enhances the listener's understanding of these cues and reduces misunderstandings and distortions (Idol et al., 1995; Brown, 2006). Perception checks should be descriptive rather than judgmental in nature (Idol et al., 1995). Additionally, Gordon (1980) has developed an effective communication system with

techniques such as 'door openers' (invitations to talk), passive listening (remaining quiet) and acknowledgement responses (eye contact and nodding) to ensure accurate message reception (Gordon, 1980; Smith, 2001).

Therefore, according to Verderber (1981), the communication process is dynamic and constantly evolving. The rules and norms established or perceived by communicators change and solidify as they become more familiar with each other (Verderber, 1981; Johnson, 2004). These interpersonal communication processes, often referred to as 'soft skills' of collaboration, contribute to building trust and developing a shared vision among partners (Clay & Martin, 2010; Smith, 2012). These skills play a critical role in resolving the technical and systematic complexities that arise during collaboration (Clay & Martin, 2010; Johnson, 2015). Ultimately, significant changes occur when all members of a collaborative endeavour to redefine their psychological routines and schemas related to collaboration (Sagrestano, 2018, 99), leading to an evolution in how they collaborate (Johnson, 2015).

2 Models of Partnerships

2.1 Collaborative communities

Establishing greater community ties is one of the primary goals of collaboration. 'Community' is a slippery concept, however, having been employed in a range of senses for at least 500 years, denoting actual groups of people (as when community is coterminous with village, neighbourhood or ethnicity), as well as particular qualities expected of relationships among those people (as in 'a sense of community') (Regents of the University of California 1999). Beyond the individuals and local associations that make up the asset base of communities are all of the more formal institutions which are located within the community. These include private businesses, public institutions (such as schools and libraries), and nonprofit institutions (such as hospitals and social service agencies). These organizations can be seen to make up the most visible and formal part of a community's fabric (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). The problems experienced by communities have been shown to have their roots in structural inequalities and institutional oppression within society as a whole, with apartheid in South Africa or the institutionalised racism within the United States of America serving as examples of this (Butcher, 2007, 18). Communities are best able to tackle such complex social issues, however, when the solutions are achieved collaboratively (Brown et al., 2018). This thus requires an understanding of the controversy cycle; relying on the community to proceed from categorising, organising and deriving conclusions from present information and past experiences to then having that conclusion distributed amongst others, as they present opposing viewpoints and positions (Idol et al., 1995). An underlying assumption here is that not everyone starts at the same place, with some people needing different resources and support to achieve similar outcomes. A proactive reinforcement of actions, attitudes, policies and practices that produce equitable access, impacts, opportunities, outcomes, power and treatment for all is thus required. Three aspects of equity commitment (capacity, meaningful inclusion and targeted action) are therefore positively associated with systems changes that address structural barriers, while targeting specific groups (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018).

In order to further advance such community developmental initiative goals, collaboration across multiple organisations and sectors is required (Austin et al., 2012). These organisations could include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civic organisations and government departments. Such varied collaborative and partnership forms, including cross-sector interactions and associations between social enterprises, further serve as an enduring ethic of social entrepreneurship and social innovation (de Bruin, Shaw & Lewis, 2017, 575). Social innovation has been described as developing innovative solutions and new

forms of interactions to tackle social issues, as well as the creation of new collaborations to improve the 'capacity to act' in order to address social needs (Bureau of European Policy Advisors, 2011, 341).

2.2 Community capital model

For cross-sector, inter-organisational collaboration to take place effectively, high functioning communities are needed. High-functioning communities can further be seen as communities that foster social well-being and cultivate assets across seven essential community capitals, as displayed in the table below:

Table 1: Seven Essential Community Capitals. (taken from Emery & Flora, 2006)

Community Capital	Description
Social Capital	the values, resources and supports that are attained through networks and group relationships
Human capital	the skills and abilities of people to develop and enhance their resources, as well as to access outside resources and bodies of knowledge in order to increase their understanding
Natural capital	assets that abide in a particular location, including weather and natural resources
Cultural capital	the way people "know the world" and how they act within it, encompassing their traditions and language
Political capital	reflects access to power, organisations and connection to resources and power brokers
Financial capital	the financial resources available to invest in community capacity-building, to underwrite the development of businesses, to support civic and social entrepreneurship and to accumulate wealth for future community development
Built capital	includes the infrastructure supporting all of these activities

It must be noted, however, that these classifications are subject to variation (Mueller et al., 2020, 537). For example, while natural capital is considered an economic element for biorefinery due to its importance as a fuel feedstock, it could also represent environmental and social health, thereby making it a social element as well. Specific classifications of the community capitals can thus result in a loss of nuance (Mueller et al., 2020, 537). It is for this reason that Fernando and Goreham (2018) have asserted that the relationships amongst all these capitals are quite complex, with each capital affecting the others in ways that are, to a large extent, dependent upon the context of the community. These more complex and interrelated conceptualisations of community capitals tend to better explain overall community health, since considering community health using only one capital omits many important dynamics and variables within a community (Mueller et al., 2020, 538). This stands in contrast to the more isolated capital studies, such as those by Putnam (1995) on social capital, Becker (1994) on human capital or Bourdieu (2011) on cultural capital.

As a result of these shortcomings, the concept of community capitals has been expanded. This has resulted in the introduction of the Assets Based Community Development (ABCD) concept, which asserts that

community assets also include a range of traits that do not neatly fit into traditional capitals frameworks, such as weather and knowledge-bases (Mueller et al., 2020, 538). This concept serves as a positive alternative from the needs-based approach to community development that is so entrenched in both government and non-governmental service delivery. ABCD therefore rests on the principle that a recognition of the strengths and assets of a community is more likely to inspire positive action for change in a community than an exclusive focus on needs and problems would be (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The ABCD process first involves identifying the positive capabilities of a given community by mapping assets in order to create a capacity inventory of resources, skills and talents (Forrester et al., 2020). Therefore, at its core are associations of community members, both formal and informal. As engines of community action, as well as being sources of power and leadership, these associations are thus considered assets of the community (Greene, 2000). ABCD is therefore a strategy for sustainable community-driven development, focused on community mobilisation rather than institutional reform, although there is potential complementarity. By treating relationships as assets, ABCD is furthermore a practical application of the social capital concept, with its central theme being the relocation of power to communities, which power has otherwise been held by external agencies. In practice, this means that external agencies such as NGOs and local governments that use the ABCD approach are deliberate in leading by stepping back, strengthening the associational base of collective action in communities, and encouraging their federation as a means by which communities engage with external institutions on their own terms. Whether loose or tight, this 'federation of associations' is at the centre of a web of linkages with external institutions – public and private, for-profit and non-profit – that provide the information and other resources necessary to sustain community development (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Critiques of ABCD, as noted by Missingham (2017), point to a lack of consideration of the fundamental causes of poverty and disadvantage and the structural inequalities and social injustice which exist in communities around social class, gender and ethnicity, for example. Additionally, MacLeod and Emejulu (2014, 436) caution that the ABCD model renounces the role of the state and its ability to operate for the benefit of society and presents communities as 'nurturing environments which empower citizens'.

2.3 Inter-organisational partnerships

Strong capital relationships are further based on the norms of reciprocity and the expectation that each party contributes resources and gains valued resources in the exchange. Inter-organisational partnerships are therefore strongest and provide the greatest benefit to communities when the relationships are mutually compatible (Brown et al., 2018). This is generally the case when the need of one group is met by the asset of another, meaning inter-organisational collaborations have been shown to take shape amongst local businesses, NGOs and government agencies that serve a single community. Furthermore, strategic inter-organisational partnerships, such as alliances, consortia and cross-sector partnerships, represent collaborations between distinct and autonomous organisations instrumental in obtaining benefits such as optimising resources, sharing risks, creating new sources of competitive advantage and facing complex issues, especially in situations that single organisations cannot tackle on their own (see Barringer & Harrison, 2000; Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa & Bagherzadeh, 2015; Selsky & Parker, 2005). The four principles of inter-organisational collaboration can therefore be summarised as follows (1) organisational ownership of the identified problems; (2) recognition of individual differences in developmental progress through multiple levels or stages; (3) the use of reinforcement principles (fueled by enthusiasm) and practices (such as communication), resulting in improved skills, knowledge and attitudes amongst all the organisation members; and (4) data-based decision making through analyses (Idol et al., 1995, 344). This would result in collective identity formation, which is commonly defined as 'the process by which a set of actors come to define themselves as a collective instead of a set of disconnected entities'. The term either refers to single organisations (organisational identities) or to category-based aggregates, such as industries, markets, social

movements and institutional fields (i.e. collective identities) (Gioia et al., 2013; Patvardhan, Gioia & Hamilton, 2015). These aggregate forces would then lead the participants in the same institutional field, community or profession towards recognising themselves as members of the same broad legitimating category, as well as to experience a shared emotional connection, fate or perception of similarity (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Patvardhan et al., 2015; Wry, Lounsbury & Glynn, 2011). This new identity formation would then serve both as a mobilising force, especially in the earliest episodes in the life of the partnership, and as a source of inertia, stabilised through reification processes (Ungureanu et al., 2020). For this new collective identity to be maintained, however, inter-organisational trust must be obtained (Davis, 2016). This refers to the organisation-wide expectation that a partner will fulfil obligations, behave predictably and act with goodwill when it is possible to be opportunistic (Gulati, 1995; Das & Teng, 1998; Zaheer, McEvily & Perrone, 1998). Trust is also an important foundation for intensive alliances because it enables partners to make commitments and take risky actions without implementing costly safeguards to protect against a partner's betrayal (Gulati, 1995; Uzzi, 1997). Below are two tables from different authors highlighting the different types of inter-organisational partnerships that can occur:

Table 2: Types of partnerships (Kernaghan, 1993)

Type of partnership	Characteristics
Collaborative partnerships	Pooling of resources such as money and information. Each partner exercises power in decision making. Partnerships can be mutually dependent, share goals and build a consensus. Partners bring an equal amount of resources to the decision-making process and there is a sense of balance of power.
Operational partnerships	Typified by work-sharing rather than decision-making power. Sharing of resources. Power is retained by one partner. This type of partnership is not as empowering but can lead to efficient and more responsive operations.
Contributory partnerships	Do not require active participation of all the partners in decision making. Organization agrees to provide funding with little operational involvement.
Consultative partnerships	Take the form of advisory committees or councils whose main task is to advise on a particular policy issue.
Phony partnerships	Usually established by a public organization for co-opting various stakeholders. The likely result is disempowerment.

Table 3: Types of partnerships (Gaster & Deakin, 1998)

Type of partnership	Characteristics
Information exchange Action planning	Involves cross boundary working.
Action planning	Involves mutual learning, joint problem solving and identifying the need for new partners.

Type of partnership	Characteristics
Coordination	Involves active coordination process, where a coordinator knows what is going on and draws on each partner as appropriate to develop and involve new partners.
Collaboration and full partnership	Involves shared values, pooled resources, blurred boundaries, constant change and providing support.

The 'alliance' is another type of inter-organisational partnership which is defined as '...a close, long-term, mutually beneficial agreement between two or more partners in which resources, knowledge and capabilities are shared with the objective of enhancing the competitive position of each partner' (Spekman et al., 1998, 748). Strategic alliances further develop from an organisation's strategic intent and are viewed as a mechanism to deal with uncertainty (Doz, 1988), cost reduction (Sriram, Krapfel & Spekman, 1992), to facilitate learning and to gain access to new technology (Powell, 1990; Parkhe, 1991; Mohr & Spekman, 1994). However, regardless of the intention, a major issue facing a strategic alliance is the cultural compatibility of the particular organisations (Willcocks & Choi, 1995). More stumbling blocks for inter-organisational partnerships will now be highlighted.

Such collaboration is a complex process, however, not always leading to successful outcomes (Brown et al., 2018). Such complexities and obstacles to the creation of inter-organisational partnerships can be seen in the different perceptions of resource competition, collaboration inefficiencies and an imbalance in partnership gains (i.e. one organisation benefitting more than the other). Lack of coordination, organisational self-interest, competition and different organisational cultures have also been cited as common barriers to inter-organisational collaborations that span multiple sectors (Brown et al., 2018). Such tensions are also resource intensive, in that they demand attention if they are to be addressed and thus require a diversion of resources if they present an ongoing pull between domains for the individuals or organisations involved (de Bruin et al., 2017). Another aspect of inter-organisational partnerships that must be considered is structural separation (Kauppila, 2010). Structural separation is necessary because individuals who have operational responsibilities cannot explore and exploit simultaneously, as dealing with such contradictory frames creates operational inconsistencies, as well as implementation conflicts (Benner & Tushman, 2003; Gilbert, 2006). As Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) have further outlined, structural independence ensures that distinctive processes, structures and cultures within explorative units are not overwhelmed by a culture of exploitation. Such nuanced integration tactics include behavioural integration amongst the upper management (Lubatkin et al., 2006), cross-functional teams and processes (Jansen et al., 2005; Jansen, Van Den Bosch & Volberda, 2009), a synergetic combination of optimised organisational practices (Kim & Rhee, 2009), paradoxical mindsets (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009) and an emphasis on both performance management and supporting contextual attributes (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). As Cohen and Levinthal (1990) have claimed, organisations need absorptive capacity in order to recognise the value of new, external information, assimilate it and apply it. Non-profit organisations are critical to the success of such community development initiatives, often having the greatest resource needs, while also standing to gain the most from cross-sector partnerships (Brown et al., 2018).

2.4 Public-private partnerships

Serving as an example of inter-organisational partnerships, public private partnerships (PPPs) are defined as contractual agreements that are entered into between the public (the government) and private sector for

the provision of a particular service with pre-agreed conditions such as quantity, quality, cost and time period (Patrinos, Osorio & Guáqueta, 2009; Uzankaya & Sarmento, 2017). There is generally a larger proportion of private sector resources which are utilised to achieve the aims of these arrangements, although the core elements of PPPs tend to have a strong public interest (Uzankaya & Sarmento, 2017).

The popularity of PPPs in both developing and developed countries continues to grow (Uzankaya & Sarmento, 2017; Aslam et al., 2017; Romero & Sandefur, 2021) despite the complexity of the processes as well as varying objectives and capacities of public and private partners in the agreement (Uzankaya & Sarmento, 2017; Patrinos, 2023). Uzankaya and Sarmento (2017) and Patrinos (2023) indicate that PPPs can have both social and fiscal benefits for governments, while they provide attractive financial benefits for the private sector partners.

A number of instances that allow for the successful implementation of PPPs have been outlined by Patrinos (2023). These include a private sector that has excess capacity in a certain area in which capacity is lacking in the public sector, especially in hard-to-reach areas; a reduction in the cost for public services whilst quality is maintained; adopting a holistic approach to development by addressing issues that are outside of the main scope of work; and allowing the private sector some level of autonomy whilst still being held accountable.

PPPs in both the developed and developing world have not managed to yield optimal results, and therefore Uzankaya and Sarmento (2017) caution that such arrangements should be carefully evaluated both before and after entering into them so that there is no doubt behind the rationale for implementing PPPs. Weaknesses in the design of PPPs have led to a lack of oversight on the side of governments, which affect the integrity of such initiatives negatively (Patrinos, 2023) and also, in some instances, have led to negative results such as increased dropout rates (Romero & Sandefur, 2021). In PPPs focusing on education, Crump and Slee (2005) found that the provision of infrastructure alone for schools did not improve learning outcomes if other services in the school environment were not improved as well.

2.5   Collaborative consultation model

Many models have been created that aid in the creation of inter-organisational partnerships, and this thought piece will highlight some of the major ones. One of the first models of this nature can be seen in the collaborative consultation model, derived from Tharp (1975). This model enables people with diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems (Idol et al., 1995, 329). Such diverse expertise can be seen to stem from multiple levels, including system leaders, organisations/agencies, practitioners and consumers (Chamberlain et al., 2011, 285). The leadership process in this model is defined as an influencing relationship among mutually dependent team members (Idol et al., 1995, 339). This means that the leadership is operationally distributed amongst the role players in a 'give-and-take' fashion. Therefore, instead of having a designated leader, all the members help to achieve the partnership's goal (Idol et al., 1995, 339). The two important outcomes of such distributive leadership are therefore (1) use all resources and (2) fully commit to the team's cause (Johnson & Johnson, 1978). As the respective leadership decisions are made, implemented and revised, team members complete certain functions in order to operate effectively. Such functions include setting mutual goals, enabling everyone else to proceed towards those goals, providing necessary resources and ensuring that all the members are satisfied. This requires a certain degree of flexibility from everyone involved. The outcome is enhanced, altered and produces solutions that are different from those that the individual team members would produce independently (Idol et al., 1995). The major outcome of collaborative consultation is thus to provide comprehensive and effective collaborative programmes. Such comprehensive and effective programmes are also a result of the fact that collaborative consultation facilitates appropriate and beneficial liaison with a great variety of community

agents. These agents would further benefit from cost-effective models, as well as from access to quantifiable records that document the progress (Idol et al., 1995). One potential barrier to such a diverse, community-centred model can be seen in the amount of time required to assemble such a stakeholder cast (Reinhiller, 1999).

2.6   Community development team model

Building on this model is the Community Development Team (CDT) model (Chamberlain et al., 2011). This also involves stakeholders from multiple levels (system leaders, organisations/agencies, practitioners and consumers) who participate in development team meetings which include: (a) information about specific evidence- based practices and the fit with the contextual needs and policies; (b) peer-to-peer exchange for identifying barriers, planning for implementation and examining data for fidelity monitoring; and (c) support and feedback about progress and problems encountered throughout the adoption/fidelity/implementation/ monitoring and sustainability process. The difference with this model is that the leadership operates less in a 'give-and-take' fashion, with consultants enjoying a more prominent role. Here, CDT consultants operate as 'boundary spanners' across formal and informal groups to achieve specific goals, including initial identification of a local need and the selection of a corresponding treatment model. These consultants have a broad understanding of the relevant research literature, as well as the advantages and challenges of implementing evidence-based practices in their communities. CDTs are used to monitor and support the implementation and enhance organisational capacity (Chamberlain et al., 2011). The train-the-trainer model subsequently operates in a similar fashion to the CDT model, in that the leadership is not as shared as the collaborative consultation model (Chamberlain et al., 2011). This model thus refers to a programme, or course, where individuals in a specific field receive training in a given subject, as well as instruction on how to train, monitor and supervise other individuals in the approach (Pearce et al., 2012).

2.7   Strategic compatibility assessment model

Building on from these models of identifying such inter-organisational collaborative capacities both within and across sectors is the strategic compatibility assessment (SCA) collaborative model (Brown et al., 2018). This model involves researchers who measure the existing degrees of collaborative behaviour within a system of organisations. Identifying such collaborative capacities subsequently acts as a means with which to motivate collaborative behaviours that are essential to community change initiatives that advance collective impact. Researchers thus use the SCA model to describe the degree of collaboration amongst organisations that operate within a given area, identifying potential points of mutual compatibility within the network and creating pathways for leveraging collaborative behaviour to promote community capitals. A key process in establishing collaboration amongst organisations is by negotiating formal and informal agreements about the purpose of the collaboration and how the relevant organisations will manage and protect their funding and resources; this allows for collective strategic action within the partnership. This can occur by investigating the types of resources and assets the relevant organisations value most when seeking inter-organisational partnerships in order to establish a typology of collaboration contexts (Brown et al., 2018). What helps with the establishment of inter-organisational collaboration is the fact that many organisations recognise that complex problems can best be solved with larger numbers of organisations, resources and people. Additionally, communication amongst such diverse professional disciplines can also lead to an increase in the sharing of material and human resources (Idol et al., 1995).

2.8   Strategic alliance model

The management literature defines strategic alliance as long-term co-operation between at least two parties for mutually agreed purposes. According to (Elmuti et.al, 2005), the partnership permits two or more organisations to share resources such as knowledge, information, personnel and finances in order to undertake specific work toward a common goal that will benefit both.

Strategic alliance is a partnership model often used in profit-making organisations or companies such as construction and technology industries. For example, a company may enter into a strategic alliance with the aim of expanding into a new market, improving its product line, or developing an edge over a competitor. The alliance is less common in non-profits and institutions that work in the education space (Eddie et.al, 2004; Elmuti et.al, 2005).

Though not easy to identify an example of a strategic alliance initiative in the education sector, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) is one of the few examples in the non-profit sector. The AAHE was founded in 1870 and evolved through several generations until it was reformed and renamed in 2007. The AAHE is currently governed by a twenty-member board of directors, elected each year. Apart from appointing committees to sit in various departments, the board formulates policies and operational programmes. The AAHE is one of the oldest independent non-profit collaborative entities that seeks to improve the learning outcomes by fostering quality teaching and learning at the college and university level. It also promotes public advocacy on the importance of higher education in the United States.

In a strategic alliance model, partners remain legally independent even after the alliance has been established. However, they do not create a new legal entity to define the new relationship. Against this philosophy, Harapko (2015) in her survey entitled *Joint Activity without Establishing a Legal Entity: Comparison with Similar Forms of Collaboration* argued that joint activity represents a separate business form and therefore needs relevant accounting and legal provision. Therefore, it is vital for the new collaboration initiative to register as a legal entity with its own identity and legal provisioning such as banking accounts. Apart from protecting the alliance managers, registering the partnership may also promote access to government and corporate funding.

Although strategic alliances are considered a long-term collaborative relationship, the success rate of this partnership is not convincing. In fact, scholars generally agree that only about forty percent of those alliances succeed (Masoud et al, 2020; Umar, 2020). The study conducted by Umar (2020) revealed that among several alliances in Western Europe, Japan and the United States, less than forty percent remained in force after about five years, forty percent ceased their operations after successful completion of their tasks, and the remaining thirty percent broke up. Other shortcomings of the strategic alliance model include fears of information leakage, intellectual property rights, insufficient trust, inability to align with the partners' objectives, incompatible organizational values and cultures and diversity of policies among the partnering institutions (Elmuti et.al, 2005; Zamir, et.al, 2014; Masoud et.al, 2020). Besides the shortcomings, strategic alliances provide opportunities for partners to combine resources, knowledge, finance and human capital to create competitive advantages which might not be achieved when the organisations are working in silos.

2.9   Strategic co-funding model

In a strategic co-funding model, participating organisations align their programmes and administrative functions for the purposes of adopting complementary strategies. Bartczak (2015) defines strategic co-funding as a collaboration model in which participating actors work in pursuit of a common goal by aligning their resources to make more efficient progress on the goal. The author refers to this kind of collaboration

as a strategic alignment of funds model because of its pooled funding nature. Just like the strategic alliance model of collaboration, strategic co-funding also defines partnership among organisations in terms of the pursuit of a common goal.

The institutional arrangements in strategic co-funding takes a variety of shapes according to the purpose of interventions. Grantmakers for Effective Organisations (2012) identified three strategic co-funding modalities: pooled funding, targeted co-funding and strategic alignment, which may occur in various combinations. In pooled funding, each actor contributes to a single pool of funds which is then used for various aspects of the initiative without identifying the donor. Targeted co-funding on the other hand allows actors to commit their finances to the same initiative, but each separately donates money directly to the shared account. Strategic alignment is the most loosely structured of the three, with each actor administering its own funding processes. Hence, governance and administration requirements for funders are typically less in strategic alignment than in other co-funding efforts, and no one actor plays a leading role. As Bartczak (2015) notes, some strategic co-funding initiatives maintain individual funding autonomy more than others. Rigid structures with strict rules might put unnecessary application and reporting burdens on the participating organisations, which might result in more time being spent on administration than in pursuit of the vision of the collective.

In the strategic co-funding model, various sources of funding such as public agencies, private institutions, foundations and individual donors make their resources available to increase the impact and efficiency of tackling large and complex challenges. According to Mahmood and Gull (2016), co-funding allows the participating actors to substantially expand their operations and to achieve greater levels of operational efficiency and improved effectiveness than what the individual actor's networks of funding may produce. Umar (2020) added that strategic co-funding approach minimises risks by allowing them to be shared and spread across several funders. Besides all these accrued benefits, the strategic co-funding approach is not free from limitations. One of its major drawbacks is that the model may not be ideal for donors who would like to have greater public recognition of the value they are donating.

The prime example of a strategic co-funding collaboration model is the Adopt a School Foundation. The initiative was established in 2014 with the purpose of creating a dynamic, transformed and accessible schooling environment that produces capable global citizens to meet the developmental needs of Southern Africa. The project is co-funded by Shanduka Foundation and Kagiso Trust's holistic model for improving education. To date, the foundation is active in more than four hundred schools across all nine provinces of South Africa, and its four areas of improvement are: leadership and management, infrastructure, curriculum development, welfare and community involvement.

## 2.10 Collective impact model

Among the most recent models used for identifying inter-organisational capacities is the collective impact model (Edmondson & Hecht, 2014). This framework, also researcher led, addresses the complex issues of high-risk communities through the alignment of cross-sector partnerships that build on existing assets, strengths and resources (Edmondson & Hecht, 2014). It therefore involves stakeholders such as organisations, community leaders, government and business coming together to develop a common understanding of a problem and working collaboratively to address it (Ennis et al., 2020, 33). The theory of this model is that large-scale change is better accomplished via coordination across sectors than from an 'isolated impact' model in which individual organisations work independently to solve problems (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Collective impact is a particularly context-based, inclusive approach that has been used to guide work ranging from small neighbourhood-sized projects through to long-term, multi-state programmes

with great levels of success (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018; Ennis et al., 2020). The collective impact model shares features with similar models that make use of networks, partnerships, and collaborations (Kania & Kramer, 2011; ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018). The specific features of the collective model are as follows:

- Common agenda: all participants must have a common understanding of the social issue and a shared vision for change that is reached through joint problem-solving.
- Backbone support organisation: a dedicated, separate staff who plan, manage, implement internal (partners and initiative structures) and external (media presence) communication activities and support the coordination of the initiative from the beginning, with the strength of its leadership and governance structures reflecting its maturity.
- Shared measurement: pre-agreed common indicators that enable measurement across different partners. This enables learning from each other's successes and failures, whilst also holding all partners accountable for their responsibilities.
- Mutually reinforcing activities: stakeholders are encouraged to pursue activities which fall under the ambit of their expertise, without duplicating other partners' efforts, so as to collectively achieve the common agenda through a division of effort and expertise.
- Communication and sharing: in order to enhance trust relationships between partners, create a common vocabulary and develop a shared measurement system, it is essential that a steady stream of communication is maintained in a collective impact model.

Below is a schematic representation of the collective impact framework as developed by Kania and Kramer (2011).
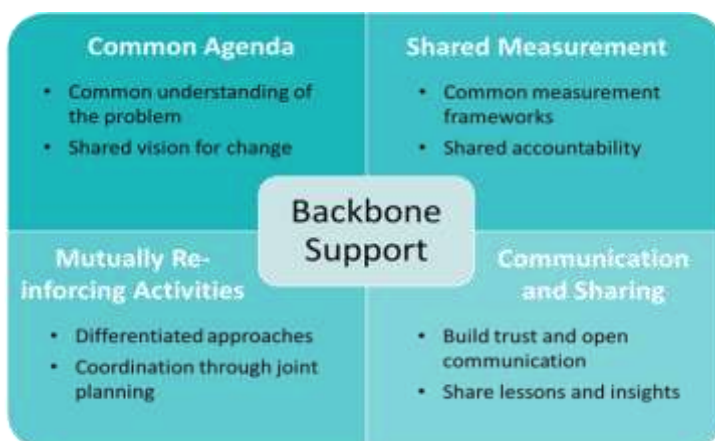
It must also be noted that, similar to the community capitals classification described earlier, each of these components are asynchronous and interrelated (Sagrestano, 2018). For example, building a common agenda arises from the group developing a shared understanding of the problem and then agreeing on an approach and action plan to solve it. This shared vision of change comes only from continuous communication: through regular meetings over a sustained timeframe, stakeholders gain experience with partners, better appreciate one another's motivations and develop trust (Sagrestano, 2018). One of the most challenging aspects of launching a collective impact initiative is developing a shared measurement system, comprising a common set of indicators to monitor performance, track progress and identify what is working or what is unsuccessful (Hanleybrown, Kania & Kramer, 2012). This measurement system is of the utmost importance, as the four other aspects of the collective impact initiative depend upon all stakeholders agreeing on how success will be measured and reported (Sagrestano, 2018). Many collective impact initiatives also deploy eight additional

principles of practice, which are increasingly recognised as important to achieving change (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018, 17):

- Design and implement the initiative with priority on equity;
- Cultivate leaders with unique system leadership skills;
- Include community members in the collaborative;
- Focus on programme and system strategies;
- Recruit and co-create with cross-sector partners;
- Build a culture that fosters relationships, trust and respect across participants;
- Use data to continuously learn, adapt and improve;
- Customise for local context.

Three types of systems changes, falling into multiple categories among the types below (table 5), have been associated with collective impact:

Table 4: Categories of Systems Change (ORS Impact; Spark Policy Institute, 2018, 37).

Informal	Formal (one organisation)	Formal (multiple organisations)
Experiments or temporary strategies led by/primarily in one organisation	Formal changes within a single organisation	Multiple organisations making the same change
Experiments or temporary strategies **undertaken by many organisations collaboratively**	Formal changes within a single organisation that **ripple across multiple organisations**	Multiple organisations **changing in unique, but aligned ways**

Critics have noted, however, that decisions to use the collective impact framework tend to come from above, rather than from communities or populations experiencing the social issue being addressed (Wolff et al., 2019). This top-down approach is therefore seen to replicate unjust power dynamics (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018). In the NASCEE collaboration pilot project, this has been mitigated by involving stakeholders from every level during each phase of the project, from the crafting of workshop content, to adopting the collective impact framework for the specific context of the John Taolo Gaetsewe district in the Northern Cape, to developing the monitoring and evaluation framework needed for the pilot. Similar to the collaborative consultation model, however, the implementation of the collective impact model is also time-intensive, requiring committed leaders to work through power dynamics and foster communication, trust, understanding and willingness to overcome the various administrative challenges (Sagrestano, 2018).

3 Review of Examples of Collective Impact Initiatives Around the World

The following sections provide case study examples of initiatives modelled against the collective impact framework at an international, regional and national level and the lessons for South Africa.

3.1 International examples

Proliferation of partnerships in education for improving interventions has become a global phenomenon in the past two decades (Henig *et.al*, 2015). This cross-sector collaboration of NGOs, civic organisations and government departments is perceived as an effective approach to improving the educational outcomes of learners by international, regional as well as national communities. The Strive partnership by Kania and

Kramer (2011) in the United States of America is the easiest and the most cited collaborative example in the literature. In addition, the Say Yes to Education and Alignment Nashville are further examples of collective impact networks aimed at improving educational outcomes, also in the United States. Outside of the United States, the Faridabad Education Council (FEC) is an independent organisation backed by philanthropists and donors in order to create processes for collective impact in the education eco-system in India (Vacchrajani, 2020). In the Far East, the Japan NGO Network for Education (JNNE) is a prime example of a partnership aimed at improving the educational outcome in Japan (NGO Joint Report of Japan, 2009). Delivering Social Change is a collaborative network funded by Atlantic Philanthropy in Northern Ireland. The framework was designed to break the long-term cycle of cross-generational challenges and to produce a persistent reduction in poverty and related problems across all ages as well as to improve children's and young people's health, well-being and life opportunities. The next section identifies projects which make use of the collective impact model across the world to generate positive change in the education sector.

3.1.1   United States: The Strive Partnership

The literature on collaboration of actors in education suggests that many initiatives in the United States have used the Strive Partnership approach as a blueprint (Henig *et.al*, 2015, Vacchrajani, 2020). The Strive Partnership model was presented by Kania and Kramer and was implemented in Cincinnati, a city in the state of Ohio (Barnes et.al, 2014). After the Strive Partnership model was launched in 2006, many other similar initiatives emerged on various states. Say Yes to Education and Alignment Nashville are further examples of collective impact initiatives aimed at improving educational outcomes. Another example is the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI). According to Henig *et.al*, 2015, the GLISI offers an illustration of how the five key conditions of collective impact can be adapted to address resource constraints common in rural districts, while still realising the benefits of the overall collective impact concept.

Literature on the subject of collaboration and partnership of NGOs in education points to the Strive Partnership of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky in the United States of America as the earliest and yet the most prominent example of a cross-sector collective impact model. According to Jolin, Schmitz & Seldon (2012), the Strive Partnership was established in 2006 with more than three hundred cross-sector members. The Strive Partnership includes members from schools, businesses, philanthropies, non-profits and government agencies. Gaines and Mohammed (2013) affirmed that the Strive Partnership is touted as one of the most successful examples of a collective impact that targets an educational issue. In the midst of a national economic crisis, the Strive Partnership has helped district leaders create conditions for improved student outcomes, with the aim of improving the academic achievement and life opportunities of students. The partnership has been able to maintain the upwards trend of the students' outcomes since inception. According to Barnes et.al. (2014), many projects on collective impact followed the structural model incorporated into the Strive Partnership approach, which was described by Kania and Kramer in 2011.

The initiative focuses on children's development from early childhood to career opportunities. Gaines and Mohammed (2015) commented that the initiative's partner organisations understood the importance of co-developing a common vision for what the collective aimed to achieve. It is therefore imperative for cross-sectoral representatives to reposition their own programmes in order to support the common agenda in pursuit of collaborative partnerships for collective impact on education outcomes.

The Strive backbone organisations comprise presidents of three regional universities as well as school superintendents from Cincinnati, Ohio; Covington, Kentucky; and Newport. Hening *et.al* (2015) argued that a separate organisation is required to provide the administrative, logistical and coordinating support necessary to create and sustain a successful partnership. Unlike in other collaboration networks where there

is one backbone organisation, the Strive initiative comprises more than two backbone organisations. The establishment of multiple backbone organisations seems to be ideal for successful collaborative networks as can be seen from the successes initiatives such as the FEC in India (discussed below) and Delivering Social Change in Ireland (Witten, 2023).

Shared measurement systems which are commonly agreed by all participants is one of the criteria of success adopted by the Strive Partnership. As Zimmerman (2011) stated, 'Data is a key part to this work and coming up with your shared goals and outcomes and developing a baseline report that demonstrates how you are doing on these big goals is a critical first step'. The report further revealed that collecting data and evaluating results in the collaborative is the best way to ensure that efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable. In the Strive Partnership, all of the preschool programmes agreed to measure their results on the same criteria and use only evidence-based decision making. According to Winter & Pemberton (2011), shared measurement systems increase efficiency and reduce cost. The system improves the quality and credibility of the data collected and also provides a platform for the cross-sector representatives to learn from each other's performance.

As successful as the Strive Partnership has been, challenges are inevitable. The initiative has struggled to raise funds. A collective impact requires funding to support a long-term process of social change. However, most of the funders are not willing to commit to a long-term contract. The Strive Partnership focuses on the metropolitan areas of Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. It only represents what can be accomplished in a large metropolitan area and not in rural areas in which the collective impact may be required the most. In his study, Hlalele (2014) observed that the rural environment in South African schools is notably less rich, not only in terms of human resources, but also in learning as well as livelihood resources. Nevertheless, there are golden nuggets of learning that can be gleaned from this collective impact and adapted for successful implementation in other settings as well (Gaines & Mohammed 2015). The Strive approach focuses on children's development from cradle to career in the American curriculum context. The application of this approach in the South African context might require the inclusion of Early Child Development (ECD) Centres in the collaboration equation. The Strive Partnership approach fosters the relationships among the universities and their feeder schools, and the inclusion of the three regional universities as founding actors in the collaboration has helped to sustain the Strive Partnership. Jung & Lee (2019) maintained that universities have opportunities to generate extra-income through fundraising. Most of the collaboration partnerships in South Africa are not able to survive after their pilot phase due to lack of funding. Therefore, universities might be ideal actors to serve as institutional homes and/or as backbone organisations.

3.1.2   Japan: The Japan NGO Network for Education (JNNE)

Following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, Japan saw the proliferation of cross-sector collaboration in educational recovery operations (Matthew et.al, 2017). The Japan NGO Network for Education (JNNE) is a prime example of a partnership aimed at improving educational outcomes. Besides being a member of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), the JNNE is a coalition of twenty-eight Japanese NGOs working for education development. Like in many other successful collaboration initiatives, the inclusion of three universities, Hiroshima, Nagoya and the Ochanomizu Women's University might have been a key to the coalition's success. The JNNE's shared vision was founded on the premise of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Inclusive education for all) through advocacy, campaigning, capacity building, research and networking. Additionally, the JNNE provides lesson materials to help students and other participants understand the situations of education around the world (Japan NGO Network for Education, 2023).

The majority of organisations collaborating in the JNNE are working in international spaces and also have projects in many other countries. For example, World Vision Japan has projects in thirty countries around the world, Plan International Japan is active in fifty countries and Save the Children Japan is working in eight countries. Although partnering with international NGOs brings unprecedented experiences and expertise into the collaboration, local culture and approaches into teaching and learning is often compromised. The study conducted by Oluwatoyin (2014) recommends that NGO leaders must study and understand the dynamics of the environment within which they operate as essential determinants of their overall performance. Therefore, local actors who understand the culture of the beneficiaries should always be considered for inclusion in the collaboration.

Unlike the majority of collaboration actors that concentrate on a particular level of education, the JNNE focuses on a wide range of educational levels, including primary schools, middle schools, high schools and universities. Both private and public educational institutions as well as community learning formations around Japan are benefitting from the JNNE. In contrast, in South Africa, non-profits are encouraged to prioritise rural public schools where resources and support are needed the most. Pierre and Raj (2019) maintain that rural public schools in South Africa are still experiencing severe challenges such as lack of parental interest in children's education, insufficient funding from the state, a lack of resources, underqualified teachers and multi-grade teaching – even in the post-apartheid era.

3.1.3   India: The Faridabad Education Council

The Government of India formed the Faridabad Education Council (FEC) as an independent organisation with the aim of improving the quality of school education in the Faridabad District. Faridabad is one of the twenty-two districts of the Indian state of Haryana. The FEC is backed by philanthropists and donors in order to create processes for collective impact in the education ecosystem in the area.

Before the formation of the FEC, various non-profit actors were working in the district to address the poor quality of education in government schools in the area (Vacchrajani, 2019). Their intervention was in forty out of three hundred and seventy-four schools in the district. The actors had invested billions into education programmes such as remedial classes, provision of science and maths kits, setting up language labs, school adoption for physical infrastructure development, and many others. Yet the district remained one of the worst-performing in the state of Haryana. Vacchrajani (2019) noted that the non-profit organisations in Faridabad were working in isolation and that their impact has thus been limited, unsustainable and non-measurable. For these reasons, the FEC was formed and adopted and implemented the five key conditions that are the foundational elements of the collective impact model as proposed by Kania & Kramer (2011). The elements are: the backbone support, common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities and continuous communication. These are elaborated on below.

1.   **Backbone support**

The FEC conducted a rigorous process in terms of identifying the backbone organisation. According to Vacchrajani (2019), six organisations were shortlisted and studied by the core team in order to explore the possibility of making one of those organisations a backbone support. Three criteria were adopted in the selection of the backbone organization: the type of the organisation, the capacity of the organisation (social influence, infrastructure and staff) and the nature and size of the organisation's funding.

The success of the FEC is founded on backbone support which is apolitical, independent and sustainable funding (Vacchrajani, 2019). The FEC employed dedicated staff with a specific set of skills to manage the

collaboration. The role of universities such as Faridabad Manav Rachna in setting up and running the FEC has been crucial to its success. Universities are important partners to consider in collaborations due to their ability to conduct fundraising as well as their capacity for social mobilisation (Tierney, 2021).

2. **Common agenda**

Once formed, as a first step, the FEC conducted a survey of three hundred and fifteen government schools in the Faridabad District to identify key areas in need of development. The five identified areas were infrastructure, engagement with stakeholders, capacity building of teachers, pedagogy and an optimal learning environment (Manav Rachna Report, 2018). The survey helped the members to adopt an informed, shared vision so that all partners have a common understanding of the problem. The shared vision was to be achieved within three years (Vacchrajani, 2019).

3. **Shared measurement**

A critical lesson we learn from the FEC is the creation of a comprehensive rubric for the purpose of constantly measuring the outcomes by all partners. Green et.al, (2023) affirm that having a common set of indicators that monitor performance, track progress and identify what works and what does not is critical to enabling collaborators to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.

4. **Mutually reinforcing activities**

The FEC schedule has been designed to accommodate integrated planning of mutually reinforcing activities. The expectation is that actors would conduct activities, not by duplicating the same activities as others, but by engaging in unique activities that support and complement the activities of other collaborators, but with a common agenda in mind. Like many other collaboration projects, the activities of the Faridabad Education Council is targeting particularly the rural and government schools in which the support is needed the most.

5. **Continuous communication**

The FEC created consistent and open means of communication among all the interested stakeholders. Scheduled meetings, workshops, WhatsApp groups, conference calls, a Facebook page and reports are among the platforms created to update members and to help build trust and motivation among the stakeholders. Zuckerman el.al, (2020) argued that continuous communication is enhanced through interim updates provided by the backbone organisation. Thus, the backbone organisation has a critical role to play in providing platforms for continuous communication.

Although the intervention by the FEC seems to have improved the educational outcomes in the district, it is too early to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the model. Furthermore, the initiative is not yet established enough to have had a measurable impact.

3.1.4 Bangladesh Early Childhood Development Network

The Bangladesh Early Childhood Development Network (BEN) is a collaboration of government, non-profit and international organisations supporting ECD in Bangladesh. BEN was established in 2005 and comprises one hundred and fifty-nine organisations to date. Membership of the collaboration is always open for new organisations. However, there are criteria to be fulfilled by organisations that aspire to become members. BEN is registered under the Register of the Joint Stock Companies in Bangladesh. However, if BEN had

adopted the collective Impact model, registration would not have been necessary since one or two organisations would serve as backbone organisations. BEN management comprises the Executive Board which is elected to serve for a period of three years. It has a resourceful steering committee of thirteen members elected from different organisations.

BEN has been in existence for more than seventeen years, an indication that its sustainability strategies are worth examining. Though BEN does not have a backbone organisation, the key executive positions are occupied by influential members of the public. For example, Dr Manzoor Ahmed who is the current chairperson of the board is also a Professor Emeritus at BRAC University in Dhaka. The sentiment is also echoed by Zuckerman el.al, (2020), who believe that the backbone organisations should consist of large organisations with more funding and staff for the purposes of sustaining the collaboration. However, there is a need to strive for balance so that small organisations do not feel neglected in the collective.

Another factor contributing to BEN's sustainability is seen in its ability to share information among its stakeholders. BEN has established various communication platforms and materials to constantly update and inform members. The initiative is able to share reports, invitations for meetings, newsletters and ECD documents on their website and Facebook page as well as on other electronic platforms. Sharing information and constant communication is ideal and healthy in a collaboration. Nielsen (2004) argued that sharing information contributes to building trust in a collaboration relationship.

BEN aims at improving the interventions of actors who are investing in children's optimal and holistic development. Since its establishment, BEN has been advocating for policy development and change, building the capacity of stakeholders, generating new knowledge, establishing partnerships and sharing knowledge. However, there is no evidence to demonstrate mutually reinforcing activities. Unlike what Kania and Kramer (2011) suggest, in BEN there is no evidence of integrated planning of activities by participating actors. Instead, the executive and the steering committee guide, assist and support the actors without actors being directly involved in the planning process.

3.2   Regional examples

NGOs have become key actors in responding to the poor state of education in Africa (Spaull, 2015). The non-profit sector continues to grow more rapidly in Africa than on any other continent (Brophy, 2020). In South Africa alone, there are more than one hundred thousand registered non-profit organisations (Matthews, 2017). As Henig et al (2015) has noted, collaboration and partnerships with other organisations can increase the impact of NGOs and help Africa to grow.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion of the six developing world regions. About one-fifth of primary-aged children in sub-Saharan Africa are not in school (Segura, 2022). The author added that the number of out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa has actually been steadily rising since 2010. COVID-19 related school closures have exacerbated a problem that was already worsening before the pandemic. The study conducted by Dibie (2008) on NGOs and sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa recommended the collaboration of NGOs, the private sector and public sector for improving the state of education in the region. Unlike in the Western countries, where concepts such as collaboration, partnership and collective impact are frequently used, the majority of sub-Saharan countries have established civil society coalitions.

To combat the high rates of education exclusion in sub-Saharan Africa, many countries have established civil society coalitions (Klapper & Panchamia, 2023). Examples include the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA) in Nigeria, the Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) and the Civil Society

Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSCQBE) in Malawi (discussed below). The Child Learning and Education Facility (CLEF) is a new funding coalition across public and private sectors which was established in Côte d'Ivoire to improve access to and enhance the quality of education for millions of children.

3.2.1 Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education

NGOs and civil society have long been involved in education in Malawi. Many NGOs now focus on delivering policy and advocacy work to improve the quality of education, as opposed to their previous focus on enhancing service delivery. The Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSCQBE), created in 2000, consists of sixty-seven civil society groups in Malawi, including NGOs, community-based organisations, teachers' unions, religious-based organisations, and district networks. CSCQBE provides these networks with technical assistance to strengthen their capacity to support local efforts. It is hoped that once these district networks are fully operational, they will encourage member organisations to engage in budget monitoring in other spheres besides education. CSCQBE has made a long-term commitment to monitor Malawi's progress toward achievement of the Education For All goals agreed on at the April 2000 Dakar Conference, as well as the Millennium Development Goals. (In 2000, the UN adopted a resolution recognizing eight Millennium Development Goals that are to be achieved by every country. They range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education by 2015).

CSCQBE has received recognition for its efforts to keep track of the Ministry of Education's expenditures. Implementing surveys that look at public expenditure presents a number of challenges for CSCQBE. First, it might be challenging to track spending and assess how much the government is working to improve the educational system since officials from the government occasionally withhold portions of their budget and expenditure data for investing in education. At the same time, officials frequently provide insufficient information or refuse to give it while claiming to be still gathering the data.

CSCQBE's Public Expenditure Tracking System (PETS) is a methodology for tracking public expenditures that presents revenues and expenditures in a format that enables users to reconcile budgetary flows. Using PETS, an organisation can track the flow of resources through various levels of government to the end users and identify leakages. For example, PETS can be used to track education funds sanctioned by the central government for school repair as the money flows through the district administration to the school itself. CSCQBE has achieved important successes through PETS. For example in 2003, it was discovered that a number of teachers received their salaries late or not at all. Civil society groups pressured a parliamentary committee to look into the issue. The committee returned a report to the National Assembly.

In 2004, the government undertook its own expenditure tracking survey after observing CSCQBE's successful work. Civil society was involved in planning and monitoring the survey. Civil society groups have also pressured the government into making budget allocations aimed specifically at children with special needs. In addition, the government is now seeking to address the educational disparities between rural and urban areas. It plans to introduce incentives to attract teachers to rural areas and construct housing for rural teachers.

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that CSCQBE has faced several challenges in implementing the public expenditure tracking surveys. First, government officials do not always fully release budget and expenditure data, which makes it more difficult to track expenditures and determine the extent to which the government is working to improve the educational system. Second, in many instances officials provide information that is incomplete or refuse to provide it, claiming they are still compiling the information. Third, many coalition members have only limited technical capacity to analyse education budget data. Fourth, coalition members

are busy with multiple commitments and can invest only limited time in the PETS process. In some cases, this affects the quality of the reports submitted by those who are collecting information for the survey.

In its activities, CSCQBE has worked closely with international organisations such as the World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Global Campaign for Education, and the Africa Network Campaign for Education For All. It also has been invited to participate in government meetings and working groups on education. The coalition has used these experiences to help widen civil society's space and influence in Malawian society and enhance its capacity for monitoring and evaluation.

3.3   National

Various collaboration platforms were created in South Africa to encourage the cross-sector collaboration of NGOs, civic organisations and government departments towards achieving the education goal cited in the National Development Plan in order to ensure that 90% of learners pass mathematics, science and languages with at least 50% by 2030. The collaboration platforms were created at the National, Provincial and the District levels. The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), comprising business, government, labour and civil society, was established in 2013 to provide a platform for actors to work together.

The Teacher Internship Collaboration South Africa (TICZA) is another multi-stakeholder partnership modelled against the collective impact framework, supported by government departments, funders, trade unions, non-profit organisations, universities and implementing partners. The collective impact initiative was formed in 2021 and focused on educator support programmes such as student teacher training. An example of a provincial-based collaboration project is the Public School Partnerships in the Western Cape. The stakeholders in the project include the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), the group of funders, the support office, and the School Governing Body (SGB) and the principal of the school involved in the Collaboration Project (Collaboration School Pilot Office, 2017b). The collaboration aims at improving the provision of education to children who cannot afford to pay fees and whose academic performance is affected by their economic conditions. The project targets to improve the poor and underperforming schools in the Western Cape.

Therefore, though there are many collaborative initiatives in the education sector, it remains imperative to study their successes in order to draw lessons to shape future engagements. Unfortunately, there have been very few academic studies or rigorous programme evaluations of collective impact or other cross-sector collaborations for education (Henig et. al, 2015). Another challenge is that most of the collaborative partnerships do not last long enough for in-depth assessment, with the majority of the collaborative projects reviewed for the current study not passing the pilot line.

3.3.1   Teacher Internship Collaboration South Africa

The Teacher Internship Collaboration South Africa (TICZA) is a multi-stakeholder partnership supported by government departments, trade unions, non-profit organisations, universities and implementers. TICZA holds that teacher quality is a key determinant in improving educational outcomes. Hence, its work is directed to improving the quality of teaching by encouraging student teacher internships for improved teacher practice. TICZA was initiated by Trialogue, the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Cape Town, the Global Teachers Institute and JET Education Services in 2021. The implementing partners are: Acorn Education, Global Teachers Institute, Jakes Gerwel Fellowship, Khanyisa Inanda Seminary Community Projects, More Than A Teacher, Teachers Plus, Save the Children South Africa, Teach the Nation, Thuto Trust and Thandulwazi Maths and Science Academy. The common agenda for the

partners is to enable systemic change in initial teacher education in South Africa by demonstrating the value and impact of extended student teacher internships. The participating stakeholders believe that if the model is widely implemented, the change can lead to a new generation of high-quality, effective teachers for South African public schools.

TICZA has adopted a model which provides backbone support through the Convening Group which comprises Trialogue, the Bertha Centre, BRIDGE and JET Education Services. A Project Steering Committee is made up of representatives from the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), South African Council for Educators (SACE), funders, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) curriculum implementers, NGOs, teacher unions and universities. According to Crespin & Moser (2018), and as discussed above, backbone organisations in a collaborative partnership are essential to guide vision and strategy, support aligned activities, build public will, establish shared measurement practices as well as to mobilise funding.

A feature of TICZA is its tools for shared measurement. In addition to the tools, TICZA has co-created a theory of change (ToC) which forms part of the vision pursued by all the participating stakeholders. The initiative has also formulated a common monitoring and evaluation framework which makes it easy for the cross-sector partners to evaluate and measure their activities in order to align their work with the common vision.

Another feature of TICZA is that it has brought together expertise from various fields. One of the most important achievements of the collaboration has been bringing parties involved in extended student teacher internships together for the purpose of learning from each other as well as thinking together (Professor Sarah Gravett, TICZA Webinar meeting 22 September 2022). However, the TICZA process and its collective impact approach have not been without challenges. Rockey (2022) mentioned the need for the TICZA stakeholders to source additional indirect funding for the project. It was also revealed in the TICZA webinar meeting that substantial amounts of time and effort are required to build and maintain relationships and communication.

3.3.2   The Jala Peo Initiative

Jala Peo (Sesotho for 'plant the seed') is an initiative established to promote nutrition education in schools and to improve school food and nutrition gardens. The initiative was piloted in three districts in three provinces of South Africa: Vhembe East District in Limpopo, Fezile Dabi District in the Free State and West Coast District in the Western Cape. The pilot programme was funded by the FirstRand Foundation from 2017 to 2022. The Jala Peo pilot programme started with a total of sixty-seven schools across the three provinces, and was expanded to reach an additional thirteen schools in Limpopo and five in the Western Cape in 2022, bringing the total number of schools to eighty-five.

During the pilot phase, project governance comprised of the National Steering Committee consisting of the DBE as the project owner, the FirstRand Foundation as the project funder through Tshikululu Social Investments, and JET Education Services as the managing agent. The National Steering Committee provided overall project governance and coordinated activities across the three pilot provinces. At the local level, district forums were created in each of the three provinces and were supported by a full time Project Coordinator. These forums were multi-stakeholder partnerships which worked to improve efficiency between government departments, private sector organisations, non-profits/NGOs and communities in order to better deliver on mandates relating to school food and nutrition gardens.

The objective of the Jala Peo initiative was two-fold: to supplement school meals and also use the food gardens for teaching and learning. From the programme's inception, participating schools began producing large quantities of fresh produce, enough to supplement the learners' meals in the majority of participating

schools. Various studies have confirmed that improved dietary intake has a positive impact on learners' outcomes (Burrows, et al., 2017). The gardens were also used as teaching and learning laboratories to provide meaningful learning. Both educators and learners were able to relate the curriculum content to the context through educational excursions to agricultural facilities and the curriculum integration demonstrations conducted in the schools.

Furthermore, the Jala Peo initiative was able to encourage parental involvement in schools though the Homestead Garden Programme. Homestead gardening provides a platform for parents to impart their indigenous knowledge of crop production to their children. Learners were thus encouraged to grow crops in their backyard gardens and were able to harvest plenty of produce during the pilot phase in all the provinces. They were even able to sell the surplus.

As reported earlier, the Jala Peo pilot was conducted in the three provinces. However, only the West Coast District forum of the Western Cape Province managed to secure enough funding to appoint a full-time coordinator as well as to cover project logistics costs, post-pilot phase. The Jala Peo initiative in the Western Cape is still a success to date. Unfortunately, Limpopo did not manage to secure funding to sustain the programme after the pilot phase, and although schools are still producing some crops, without the project coordinator the initiative is not being fully realised. In the Free State, ten of the nineteen schools were adopted by EduPlant (Food and Trees Africa). Without additional funding, the project was halted in the remaining nine schools.

Although the initiative was fully successful in only one of the three provinces post-pilot, it remains a classic example of a collective impact model with a common agenda advocated by Kania and Kramer (Kania & Kramer, 2013). The initiative was successful in all the provinces during the pilot period because all the stakeholders had a common understanding and shared vision of what should be achieved and of the activities needed to do this. In addition, the participating stakeholders agreed on the shared measurements of success during their initial meetings when progress measuring systems and tools were discussed and shared among the members. District forum meetings were conducted systematically to build trust as well as share lessons and insights in all the pilot provinces. One thing that was not completely achieved in the Jala Peo initiative was to secure a backbone organisation in Limpopo and the Free State. Forum members were from various organisations although the initiative was supposed to have been located in a particular institutional home, which might have served as a backbone organisation. The West Coast District in the Western Cape Province successfully secured the University of Stellenbosch as the backbone organisation, which contributed significantly to the Jala Peo initiative's success in the province.

4   Discussion

This section of the thought piece discusses how the various collaborative models and initiatives employ the collaborative theories and models highlighted earlier. In all the examples of inter-organisational collaboration initiatives provided in the previous section, the models discussed in Section 2 have been applied to varying degrees, although some elements of the models are more prevalent than others. This discussion will focus on these elements.

In the Strive Partnership in the United States, the most prevalent model applied is the collective impact model, as this addresses the 'complex issues of high-risk communities' through the alignment of cross-sector partnerships (Edmondson & Hecht, 2014). This is relevant in the context of the Strive Partnership, as it sought to target an educational issue in the midst of a national economic crisis. A similar crisis setting can be observed in the JNNE, which was formed following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

However, in this instance, the collective impact model's context-based approach was not applied. An example of a South African initiative using the collective impact model is the inter-organisational collaboration in the John Taolo Gaetsewe district in the Northern Cape, which sought to address the reading crisis there. The presence of backbone organisations within the Strive Partnership is also a feature of the collective impact collaboration model. This feature is also present in the FEC in India, the Delivering Social Change in Ireland project and the South African TICZA partnership and Jala Peo initiative (to a certain extent). Collaborative consultation as well as the collective impact model's feature of employing quantifiable information to document progress can also be seen in the Strive Partnership, where all of its preschool programmes agreed to measure their results on the same criteria and engage in evidence-based decision making. The employment of quantifiable records is also present in the TICZA partnership, which has provided tools for shared measurement, as well as formulated a common monitoring and evaluation framework which makes it easy for cross-sectoral partners to evaluate and measure their activities in order to align their actions with the shared vision.

In the collaborative consultation model, the leadership of collaborative projects is operationally distributed in a 'give-and-take' fashion (Idol et al., 1995, 339). This essentially means that there is no designated leader. The Jala Peo initiative highlighted the weakness of this approach: in the Limpopo pilot province there was no provincial coordinator, and no Forum meetings were conducted in the post pilot phase, which led to the demise of the Jala Peo initiative in that province. The failure of the Jala Peo initiative in Limpopo can also be attributed to the lack of a backbone organization. This is in contrast to the success of the project in the Western Cape, described above, which had a backbone organisation as well as a provincial coordinator in place.

5 Conclusion

The preceding sections have indicated that the most successful manner in which to solve complex social problems is collaboration amongst all the stakeholders, with the collective impact model proving the most relevant in the present context for establishing such collaborations. A common thread amongst all the case studies at an international, regional and national level is that stakeholders overlooked their individual agendas and came together as a collective to find contextualised solutions to complex social issues that would otherwise be very challenging to solve in their individual capacities. Perhaps of most importance is to realise that inter-organisational partnerships are strongest and provide the greatest benefit to communities when relationships are mutually compatible. Some of the more successful initiatives were those in which stakeholders contributed to the initiatives but also gained value by participating in such partnerships. The collective impact model thus provides a solution to solving complex social issues in a collaborative manner, bringing about contextualised solutions for beneficiaries on the ground, although it helps to employ various elements from other models as well. It thus makes sense to conclude that inter-organisational collaboration requires an inter-modal approach.

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