

Wetlands International Partnership Policy

Background and rationale for a Partnership Policy

Working in and through partnerships is essential for Wetlands International. Complementing its own strengths with that of others allows WI to stay a small and flexible organisation. It is a central philosophy and practical necessity for WI to create greater and more sustainable impact through partnerships. It also provides the opportunity for a broader dispersion of WI values to a wider public and geographic range. Furthermore it increases the visibility and recognition of WI, thus enhancing the chances for continuity and sustainability of WI in the long term.

Over the years WI at different levels and regions has engaged itself increasingly in many partnerships, alliances and other relationships, formal and informal, some successful and some less successful. With the increasing number of different ways of collaboration, the need has grown to define the boundaries of what Wetlands International considers as partnerships, and to classify partnerships and other alliances. This will create more transparency, internally and externally, and will also help to move from an ad hoc approach to a more pro-active and strategic approach.

Besides defining the boundaries and classification the Supervisory Council recommended to develop a more standard approach, criteria and process for partnerships development and implementation. An assessment of WI staff experiences with partnerships confirmed this need for practical guidance on the development of partnerships and how to make them more successful. Additionally, there is a need for a public statement for present and potential partners clarifying WI partnership principles, what WI considers as partnerships, what WI has to offer in partnerships and what it means to be a WI partner. This partnership policy document has also been preceded by a review of partnership policies of other organisation and this policy document is in line with those of other international conservation and development organisations.

The Partnership Policy consists of three distinct parts:

1. A Partnership Policy Statement defining what WI considers as partnerships, its principles for partnerships and how it classifies partnerships (the “why” and “what” of partnerships)
2. A Practical Guidance document to facilitate the development and management of partnerships and improve the quality and effectiveness of partnerships, saving time and other resources (the “how” of partnerships)
3. A Public Outreach document for present and potential partners

The first part of the Policy is the Partnership Policy Statement that is adopted by the Supervisory Council. The other parts, i.e. the practical guidance document (1.2) and the public outreach document (1.3) are still in draft but are developed based on, and in relation with the Partnership Policy Statement.

The partnership policy is a “living document” that might need to be adapted over time when it is applied. It should be noted that the practical guidance document together with the Working Policies on Gender and Position on Human Rights shall together comprise a resources manual for Wetlands International offices (and partners) to refer to for the design, implementation and review of activities.

Wetlands International Partnership Policy Statement

The “Why” of partnerships

Wetland International works to sustain and restore wetlands and their resources for people and biodiversity. It is an independent, not-for-profit, global organisation. Based mostly in the developing world, it has 20 regional, national and project offices with a presence in all continents and headquarters in the Netherlands. With the support of governmental and NGO members and donors, we promote and demonstrate the positive role that wetlands can play in addressing biodiversity loss, poverty and climate change in over 100 countries.

Working in and through partnerships is one of the core values of Wetlands International. It is a central philosophy and practical necessity for the success of the work of Wetlands International. Wetlands International considers collaboration with a wide range of partners, including conservation and development sectors, civil society, government(s), scientific institutions and private sector essential for creating sustainable wise use of wetlands and sustainable development. As there are many other organisations working on such goals, Wetlands International considers in every situation whether and how to work with others.

Wetlands International values other independent organisations working towards congruent goals. It will not seek to establish or expand its own capacities in certain fields or locations, where those capacities already exist in other organisations – or where WI can assist the development of complementary capacities in local organisations. By working through partnerships Wetlands International expects to have a greater and more sustainable impact, in a wider geographic area, than by working on its own. In partnerships, the partners jointly determine which role each will play in order to contribute optimally to the desired results, hence different models of collaboration emerge.

Furthermore Wetlands International seeks to complement its own skills, knowledge and resources with those of others to generate more chances for creating impact. Wetlands International also seeks to strengthen the capacity of partner organisation(s) as well as its own by working in partnerships.

Over the years Wetlands International has engaged itself increasingly in many partnerships, alliances and other relationships, formal or informal, ad-hoc or long-term. Because of the significance of partnerships for Wetlands International, it wants to create transparency about what it considers as partnerships and its guiding principles for developing partnerships and ensuring their effectiveness.

The “What” of partnerships

Wetlands International considers as partnerships relationships where it works with the partner organisation(s) at the basis of equity to achieve jointly formulated objectives, with distinct contributions of each partner.

More specifically Wetlands International uses the following criteria to delineate a partnership:

1. Joint initiative and effort with distinct contributions of each partner to achieve mutually agreed goals and objectives in the field of conservation and wise use of wetlands
2. Mutual/equal relationship in terms of monitoring and reviewing – formal or informal - and adapting or ending the partnership, i.e. neither party is more in control than the other

A partnership can be with one or several partners. Key words are “jointly” and “equity”. Envisaged contributions can be of financial, technical, human or material nature, expertise, knowledge or any other kind of resources. To emphasise the commitment of each partner and to be able to monitor the progress and effectiveness of the partnership, it should be formalised in a legally binding partnership agreement.

Wetlands International distinguishes three categories of partnerships:

1. Institutional level or strategic partnerships
2. Programmatic partnerships
3. Project related partnerships

Institutional or strategic partnerships are partnerships that are not directly related to one specific programme or project and that are linked to one or more of WI's strategic goals or to improve and strengthen Wetlands International's capacity to achieve its strategic goals, either at global or regional/local level. The partnership should also benefit the development of all partners.

Programmatic partnerships are related to Wetlands International Programmes, e.g. Climate Change, Livelihoods, Biodiversity, Flyways, Water management, or Knowledge Base.

Project related partnerships are undertaken to contribute to and with the resources of a certain project, e.g. the Wetlands and Livelihood Project, and is therefore expected to end when the project ends. However, some partnerships might develop from project related to programmatic or from programmatic to institutional/strategic partnerships. Hence partnerships can vary from national to global level, from big to small. Wetlands International will manage and support all partnerships at its appropriate level.

Besides what can be classified as partnerships Wetlands International collaborates in many ways with other organisations, institutes, governments, companies, etc. These relationships can be formal or informal, ad hoc or at a more permanent basis and are also important for achieving Wetlands International strategic goals. An informal collaboration or a sub-contract might grow over time into a formal partnership.

Guiding principles

For engaging in partnerships Wetlands International is guided by the following principles, that express our expectations of partnerships and of partners we work with.

From a partnership and partners we expect:

1. ***Contribution to our Global Goals:*** i.e. the partnership should contribute to achieving our strategic, programme or project goals and objectives and ultimately our vision of “*wetlands and water resources conserved and managed for their full range of values and services, benefiting biodiversity and human well-being*”.
2. ***Mutual respect for core values and principles:*** i.e. respect for each partner's identity, mission and values. Important values for Wetlands International are the willingness of each partner to continually improve its contribution to achieve a more sustainable world that benefits people's well-being and biodiversity, to respect traditional values and knowledge, to be committed to gender equality, and to give high importance to quality standards of work.
3. ***Commitment, complementarity and added value:*** i.e. commitment, complementarity and distinct contributions of each partner to achieve clear and shared objectives. The added value of working together is clear and recognised by each partner. Each partner brings in different

capacities and resources and strives to achieve a mutually beneficial relationship. The diversity and the value of all contributions are acknowledged, as well as the limitations of what each partner can contribute.

4. **Transparency, accountability and flexibility:** i.e. willingness to communicate, work together and take decisions in a transparent, accountable and collaborative way; based on agreed roles and responsibilities in implementation and decision-making processes, and arrangements to monitor and review performance against the set objectives and targets in regular intervals with the aim of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the partnership, adapting the partnership when deemed necessary and enhancing the capacity of each partner to achieve joint or own goals and objectives.
5. **Respect the independency of each partner:** i.e. the liberty to express own views wherever and whenever seen fit and have diverting views stated publicly in joint reports; the liberty to bring in outside consultants – experts to aid and peer review conclusions; and the provision to end collaboration if there is considered to be a conflict of interest or if core values are being compromised.

As a result of the above Wetlands International will not work with organisations that purposely harm the environment, disrespect human rights, ignore traditional values and knowledge, enhance poverty or are otherwise engaged in activities that Wetlands International does not want to be associated with.

The “How” of partnerships

To develop and implement effective partnerships Wetlands International is guided by standard procedures and requirements that are formulated in a separate guiding document. These guidelines are aimed at facilitating the process of developing and implementing partnerships and improving the quality and effectiveness of partnerships.