



Enhancing Health Program Effectiveness through Strategic Partnerships in Makueni County

County:	Makueni		
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Introduction

Strategic partnership is a formal arrangement between two or more organizations to collaborate and achieve specific goals while maintaining their independence. This type of partnership is often established to leverage each other's strengths, resources, enter new markets, share risks, develop new products and foster capabilities to gain competitive advantages. Strategic partnerships can take various forms, including joint ventures, alliances, consortiums and contractual agreements. This arrangement can happen between organizations, companies and even governments.

Makueni County situated in the former Eastern Province, home to 987,653 residents with an area mass of 8,008.9 km² has previously faced substantial challenges due to the lack of a comprehensive partner mapping strategy. This oversight has led to multiple partners concentrating their efforts on already robust programs, resulting in an uneven distribution of resources and support.



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In some instances, partners are not willing to disclose their resource baskets. This lack of transparency has led to inefficient resource utilization, as the County cannot accurately assess the full spectrum of available support, resulting in either overfunding certain programs or leaving others under-resourced. Consequently, this has caused redundancy and overlap in efforts, with multiple partners unknowingly investing in the same areas, while critical programs suffer from neglect.



The absence of a clear understanding of partners' resource commitments has also obstructed strategic planning and the development of synergistic collaborations, reducing the overall impact and efficiency of the County's efforts. Further, it has weakened accountability among partners as undisclosed resources make it difficult to track contributions and measure progress effectively. Without clear partner mapping and records, many counties experience the challenge of partners seeking grants independently without consulting them. This issue is exacerbated by the absence of a dedicated department responsible for coordinating and managing all partner activities.

Makueni County Governor H.E. Mutula Kilonzo Jnr CBS emphasized the importance of strategic partnerships in his manifesto, highlighting their crucial role in advancing the County's development. This has been implemented through the establishment of a Directorate of Strategic Partnerships, which is responsible for coordinating and managing all partner activities within the County. The directorate ensures that resources are effectively allocated and that there is a balanced focus across all programs. It serves as a central point of contact for all partners, facilitating clear communication and signing of MoUs. Additionally, the directorate is tasked with mapping out existing and potential partners, monitoring their contributions and aligning their efforts with the County's strategic goals.

Different focal persons from all departments have been appointed to liaise with the Directorate of Strategic Partnerships. These focal persons serve as key contacts within their respective departments, ensuring effective communication and coordination with the directorate. Their roles include identifying potential partnership opportunities, providing updates on departmental needs

and priorities. The health sector, due to its numerous programs and extensive partners, was chosen as the pilot department to initiate and launch the strategic partnership initiative in the County. By organizing partner workshops, the sector has mapped out 79 partners contributing to various health programs across all sub-counties, in the County.

In August 2023, through partner workshops, the Department of Health coordinated with six eye sector partners-Fred Hollows, Kenya Society of the Blind, Lukenya University, Amor Foundation, Kasanga Mulwa, and Vision Sense to organize a free eye camp. The event drew over 1,000 attendees, with 300 individuals receiving cataract surgeries.



A photo of patients and doctors during an eye clinic camp

Implementation of the practice

The County Government of Makueni, led by Governor H.E. Mutula Kilonzo Jnr CBS, established the Directorate of Strategic Partnerships in September 2022. It deployed Partners Liaison Officers to oversee strategic partnerships and programs across all county departments.

In March 2023, the Health Department held its first partners workshop, attracting over one hundred partners from several sectors involved in various projects.

In October 2023, the department conducted a second workshop, requesting partners to outline their scope of work. These two meetings highlighted the need for partner clustering. For example, all partners involved in HIV programs were grouped together to share knowledge on their histories, implementation strategies and the existing gaps they aimed to address.



In April 2024, the Department of Health held its third workshop with the 79 partners and resolved to hold these workshops annually, in April. From this partnership the department facilitated various medical camps including eye care and fistula.

In May 2024, the Department of Strategic Partnerships facilitated the signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between the County Government and all partners. Previously, MoUs were signed by respective departments, but with the establishment of the Directorate of Strategic Partnerships, they are now signed by the Governor in the presence of the County Legal Department and the County Attorney. This new process helps to ensure consistency, enhance legal oversight and strengthen the commitment and accountability of all parties involved.

In the same month, the County developed a template guiding partners to provide key information, including their resource allocations, project implementation details and project reports. This initiative emerged from the need to promote accountability as partners are often supported by donors and such documentation serves as a means of verification.

The implementation of the strategic partnership initiative has significantly increased resourcing for the County, with the health department securing over Ksh200 million for the 2023 financial year, compared to Ksh100 million in the previous year (2022).

To promote the sustainability of this initiative, the County, through the Legal Department, has drafted a strategic partnership policy that is currently under review.

Results of the practice

- **Increased Resource Base** - The Health Department secured over KShs 200 million for the 2023 financial year, compared to KSh100 million in the previous year.
- **Improved coordination** among partners has led to more effective program implementation.
- **Enhanced accountability** through the introduction of templates for partners to provide key information, enhancing transparency and accountability.
- **Standardized MoUs** that are now signed by the Governor in the presence of the County Legal Department and County Attorney has promoted consistency and legal oversight.
- **Knowledge sharing** through conducting regular workshops that facilitate knowledge exchange and best practices among partners.
- **Identification of gaps** by clustering partners by focus areas, such as HIV programs that is key to identifying and addressing gaps more effectively.

Lessons learnt



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- Mapping out partners and their contributions helps in identifying overlaps, gaps and opportunities for better alignment and efficiency.
- Organizing structured workshops annually fosters better coordination, knowledge sharing and strategic planning.
- Grouping partners by their areas of focus enables more targeted discussions and collaborative problem-solving.
- Understanding the scope of work of each partner allows for more strategic allocation of resources and support.
- Regular and transparent communication among partners is essential for effective collaboration and resource allocation

Conclusion

The establishment of a Directorate of Strategic Partnerships and the implementation of regular workshops have proven to be highly effective in enhancing collaboration and optimizing resource utilization within the County. The practice has led to improved coordination among partners, more equitable distribution of support, and enhanced program effectiveness. Clear communication, partner mapping, structured workshops and partner clustering have guided the County in refining its approach and fostering stronger, more impactful partnerships.