



RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Leveraging cross-sector resources and expertise in product development partnerships for neglected diseases

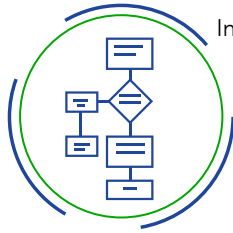
Neglected diseases are communicable diseases that are prevalent in developing countries and receive little attention from the medical industry, since the research and development of the products that would result in their prevention and treatment often has few financial incentives. In their recent article, “Can Medical Products be Developed on a Non-Profit Basis? Exploring Product Development Partnerships for Neglected Diseases” in *Science and Public Policy* (academic.oup.com/spp/article-abstract/42/3/315/1628840/Can-medical-products-be-developed-on-a-non-profit?etoc), Viviana Muñoz, Fabiana Visentin, and Dominique Foray, Chairs in Economics and Management of Innovation, and Patrick Gaulé, Professor of Economics, investigate one possible solution to this issue — how research and development (R&D) for neglected diseases can occur through product development partnerships (PDPs).

PDPs are non-profit, self-governing partnerships, generally staffed by a small cross-sector core of project managers with experience in public health and the medical industry, and overseen by a cross-sector board, with occasional engagement from external technical or scientific experts in advisory roles or committees. PDPs stimulate cross-sector collaboration in R&D to reformulate existing drugs and vaccines and create new drugs and vaccines for neglected diseases.

The authors found that PDPs act as “systems integrators,” leveraging the resources and capabilities of business, government, and non-profit partners. From the business sector, biotechnology companies and large pharmaceutical firms often act as knowledge sources, negotiate access for compound libraries in the discovery phase, and later assist with manufacturing. Governments typically contribute public funds in the planning stages before product development begins. Academic and research institutions contribute knowledge and expertise in the discovery phase, and infrastructure and staff time during manufacturing — important to keeping costs of production low. Funding is often spread across the involved entities, which ensures that no one sector is fully bearing the risk of the project itself. With these traits, PDPs emerge as an innovative example of how cross-sector collaboration can incentivize efforts to solve public challenges that otherwise would remain unsolved.

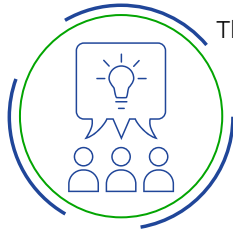
TAKEAWAYS FOR PRACTITIONERS

INCREASE TRANSPARENCY IN INTERNAL OPERATIONS



Increase transparency in internal operations by entrusting a more neutral party, such as a public funder or international health organization, with oversight of the PDP’s activities, policies, and partner interactions.

COORDINATE EFFORTS AND RESOURCES AMONG PDPs.



The authors provide the example of the interactions between the TB Alliance and the Drugs for Neglected Disease Initiative (DNDi). The TB Alliance granted DNDi a royalty-free license to develop anti-TB compounds for use against other neglected diseases in their R&D portfolio.

SHARE INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE AMONG PDPs.



The authors suggest that PDPs can share knowledge gained from their experiences negotiating with pharmaceutical firms, for example, allowing other partnerships to gain “a better understanding of how firms define terms such as: ‘at cost,’ ‘no loss,’ ‘fully burdened manufacturing cost,’ and ‘cost plus’” and improve the partnerships’ negotiating position.

SET BENCHMARKS FOR A DESIRED OUTCOME.



This clarifies expectations among partners and subcontractors. For example, as one component of what is called “product profiling,” PDPs sometimes set benchmarks for product manufacturing cost and the final price, key to partnerships aiming to produce life-saving drugs with a price tag that’s affordable for the people who need them.

FOR FURTHER READING



From The Intersector Project Toolkit:

- Engage Potential Partners: The identification of and engagement with individuals and organizations that have a stake in the issue at hand to address their suitability for and interest in a cross-sector partnership (intersector.com/toolkit/engage-potential-partners)
- Account for Resources: The determination of financial and non-financial resources from existing and potential partners (intersector.com/toolkit/account-for-resources/)
- Share a Vision of Success: The agreement on a set of project goals and ideal outcomes that clarify the mission and priorities of the collaboration (intersector.com/toolkit/share-a-vision-of-success/)
- Establish a Governance Structure: The creation of a formal or informal organizational system for project management (intersector.com/toolkit/establish-a-governance-structure/)
- Commit to Information Sharing: The requirement that partners share data relevant to the collaboration's efforts (intersector.com/toolkit/commit-to-information-sharing/)

Other Resources:

- For examples of PDPs, see “Product Development Partnerships” from DSW (dsw.org/uploads/tx_aedswpublication/1408_PDP_UK_A4_web.pdf).

ABOUT RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Academic research often holds knowledge that can benefit the many practitioners working in cross-sector collaborations. For our Research to Practice series (intersector.com/tag/research-to-practice/), we examine these articles and interview their authors to highlight key facts, actionable takeaways, and additional resources practitioners can turn to for guidance in their cross-sector work.

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