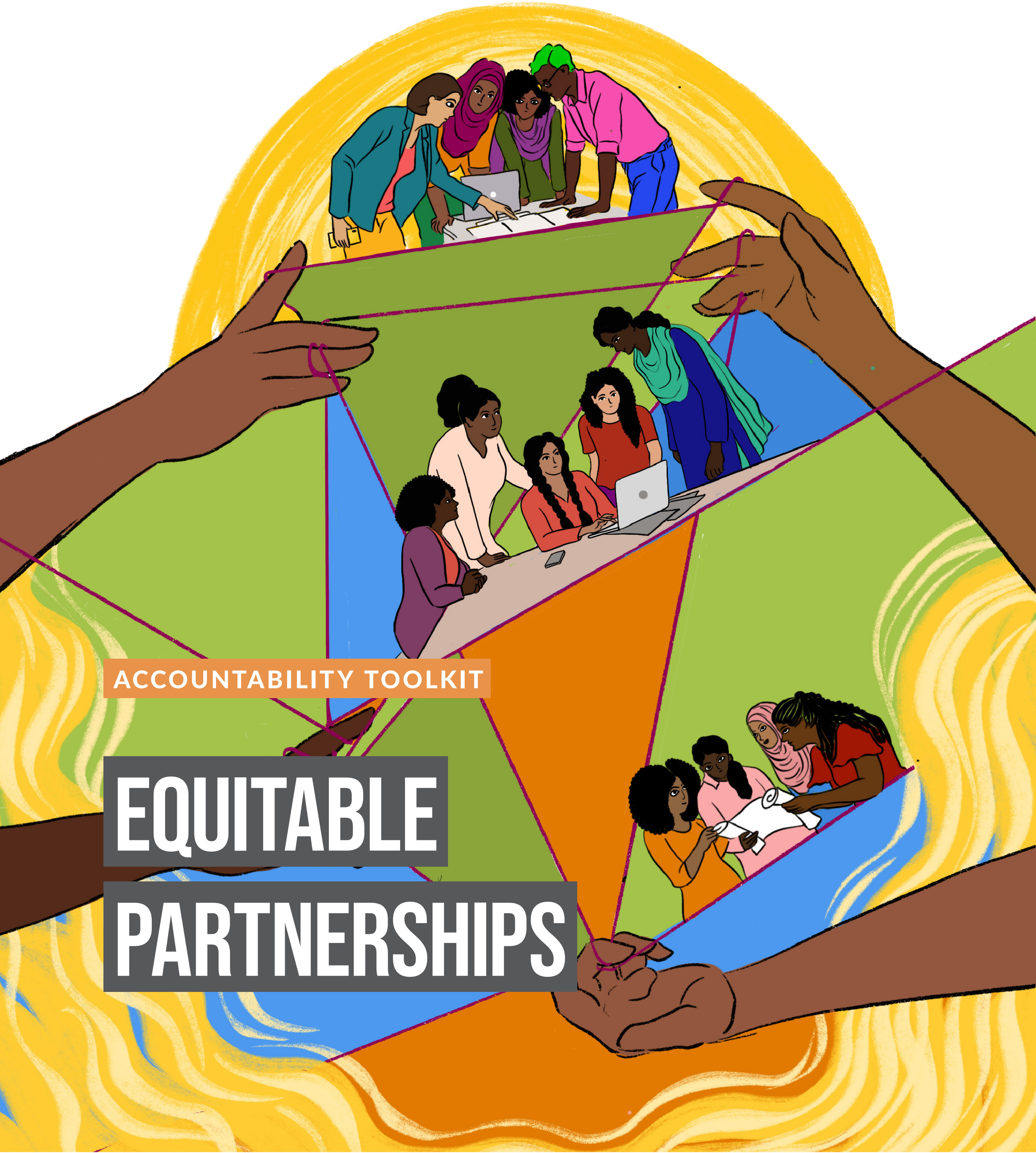


ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLKIT

EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS

"The way that we communicate, the mechanisms for communicating, as well as the messages that are shared from some organizations to others, or from donors to others can be key for a partnership to be successful, and/or, for it not to work."[1]

1 Quote from a local partner from Asylum Access' Partnerships Review, 2023. See more in asylumaccess.org/ep2023

INTRODUCTION

Asylum Access developed this Accountability Toolkit to offer a framework to strengthen accountability in partnerships with local civil society[2] in ways that are rooted in equity, power-sharing, and uplifting local and refugee leadership.[3]

While this Toolkit is mainly tailored towards peer INGOs in their partnerships with local CSOs, it can also be used by donors, multilaterals, regional and global networks and even by local civil society (host community-led NGOs and RLOs) in their partnerships with each other. As we view equitable partnerships as a tool to address and rectify power imbalances, it is important for the partner that has more access, connections, and resources in a partnership to acknowledge it. For ease of reference, we will refer to these actors as "Partner 1" in this document. We will refer to the local partner that has comparatively less access, connections and resources in a partnership as "Partner 2" in this document.

This Accountability Toolkit is comprised of two accountability "tools" that serve different, but complementary functions:

1. **The EP Self Assessment Tool (EP-SAT):** This is an internal, *self-assessment* tool that includes a checklist of questions that Partner 1 needs to address relating to different aspects of the partnership as it develops.

2. **Joint Partnerships Assessment Framework (JPAT):** This is a *tool for joint use* by the Partner 1 and Partner 2 to regularly and jointly reflect on the progress of a partnership.

2 While in this document we refer to host community-led organizations and RLOs as "local civil society," we know this is not perfect. Not all refugee-led groups are local civil society organizations, and host community-led organizations do not face the same challenges as RLOs. The exclusion of both groups needs to be addressed, though this exclusion is experienced more acutely by RLOs and with additional challenges.

3 In early 2023, Asylum Access underwent an 7 month-long independent, external review process ("Review") of 11 of our current and past partnerships with host community NGOs and RLOs (including with our national organizations in Malaysia, Thailand and Mexico). This review led to a revised definition and elements of Equitable Partnerships that was developed iteratively with Asylum Access staff and partners, as well as the two Accountability Frameworks which are shared in this document. Further information on the Review process, methodology and findings can be found in asylumaccess.org/ep2023review. We have also included our learnings from the Review in an updated version of our Equitable Partnerships Position Paper found in asylumaccess.org/ep2023.

Finally, this Toolkit is not intended to be a comprehensive accountability mechanism towards equitable partnerships. It is part of a broader set of learnings, tools and action that actors with more power in the sector need to take to realize greater local and refugee leadership.[4] To be most useful, this Toolkit should be read with V2 of our Equitable Partnerships Position Paper: Updated with New Learning: October 2023,[5] which contains more specifics of the five elements of equitable partnerships that these tools track. We encourage the content of this Toolkit to be adapted and integrated within existing MEAL frameworks in your organizations and piloted before being fully implemented.

Definition of Equitable Partnerships

Asylum Access defines equitable partnerships as "partnerships where systems, processes, and daily interactions help to rectify the power imbalances that enable exclusion".[6] The following elements shown below constitute equitable partnerships.

These elements are utilized and synthesized within the tools below, into simple monitoring activities through which partnerships can be assessed. Guidance on how to use each tool can be found in the rest of this toolkit.

4 Mustafa, S., Nambiar, D., and Balasundaram, R. (2022) Shifting power in forced displacement: the need for internal organisational change. Forced Migration Review: https://www.fmreview.org/issue70/mustafa-nambiar-balasundaram

5 See V2 Position Paper: asylumaccess.org/ep2023

6 See V2 Position Paper: asylumaccess.org/ep2023

EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL (EP-SAT)

The EP-SAT is designed in an Excel format, and can be found here. It is open access, and can be copied and adapted as needed.

Guide to using the EP-SAT

Purpose

The EP-SAT is an internal, self-assessment tool which centralizes all the questions you need to ask in order to ensure a partnership is equitable. It verifies whether specific and important conversations, actions, tasks have been completed as a partnership develops.

When to use

Each partnership / potential partnership benefits from an EP-SAT, which can be used to reflect on each stage of a partnership. The different stages that the partnership can be understood as follows:

1. Inception: This refers to all interactions with Partner 2 prior to any form of intervention, activity, or project formally commencing. The inception stage itself has many phases, so not all questions listed in the EP-SAT will always be applicable. For example, during the very initial interactions, you may only be speaking about your joint goals and values - rather than the specifics of the design of the project / intervention or how you will allocate resources.

2. During: This stage refers to partnership interactions following the commencement of activities and / or interventions related to the partnership's goals and purpose. For example, this could be related to the implementation of a project, campaign, or policy initiative.

3. End: This refers to the period leading up to the end of any joint action / activities associated with the partnership. This may be relatively short (if unplanned or sudden) or longer (e.g. if the partnership is linked to a specific project cycle).

Summary of EP-SAT tabs

The EP-SAT is divided into the following tabs:

- Tab 1: Read Before Use
- Tab 2: Dashboard
- Tab 3: Inception
- Tab 4: During
- Tab 5: End

Each of the tabs are discussed in detail below.

Tab 1: Read Before Use

This tab provides some definitions of terms used in the EP-SAT. It also provides a summary of which equitable partnerships elements and pillars you will be assessing at each stage, i.e.:

- At the "inception" and "during" stages: You will likely need to assess all five areas of equitable partnerships practice:
    1. Understanding Context, Culture & Power;
    2. Shared Ownership & Voice;
    3. Trust & Transparency;
    4. Flexibility;
    5. Learning & Accountability
- At the end stage: You will likely need to assess the following three areas of equitable partnerships practice:
    1. Shared Ownership & Voice;
    2. Flexibility;
    3. Learning & Accountability

Each stage has its own tab with different questions related to each element of equitable partnerships.

Tab 2: Dashboard

The Dashboard provides you with (a) an indication of the areas of equitable partnerships you need to assess and (b) a record of whether you have conducted these assessments.

The dashboard divides assessment periods into years of the partnership (Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, Year 4 etc, depending on the number of years your partnership continues) and within each year, quarters (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4).[7]

It provides you space to identify the stage and equitable partnerships element you need to assess. The drop-down lists are there for you to indicate prior to conducting your assessment:

- Which stage of the partnership you need to assess (i.e. inception, during or end), and;
- Which specific element of equitable partnerships you will need to assess (i.e. Context; Culture & Power; Shared Ownership & Voice; Trust & Transparency; Flexibility; and/ or Learning & Accountability).[8]

It also shows whether you have completed the assessment and, if so, the date it was completed. (Once you check the box in the column 'assessment conducted?' the box will turn green.)

Below we walk you through each step to using the Dashboard:

- Step 1: Determine which year of the partnership you are in (ideally, you would want to start partnership assessments at the beginning of the partnership, in which case, this would be Year 1), and which quarter you are conducting the assessment.
- Step 2: Determine which stage of the partnership you are at (e.g. Inception; During or End). Use the drop-down to select the stage.

7 The assessment can be done at intervals that are most suitable to your organization, and does not need to happen on a quarterly basis. However, once every 3 - 6 months is recommended.

8 The areas of assessment have been divided into these elements so that you have a record of which area of partnership practice has been assessed and when. You will probably find that not all areas of partnership practice are always relevant to the specific stage you are at in the partnership.

- Step 3: Depending on the stage of the partnership, use the drop-down in the next column to select the different assessment elements you will need to assess. See above 'Read Before Use'.

- Step 4: Conduct the assessment using the relevant tabs.

EXAMPLE

In the example below, the assessment is taking place at the 'Inception' stage, in Year 1 and Quarter 1. At the inception stage, all the Equitable Partnership elements are relevant to the assessment. The 'Assessment Conducted?' column is red, as no assessment has been completed yet.

Tabs 3 - 5: Conducting the Assessment

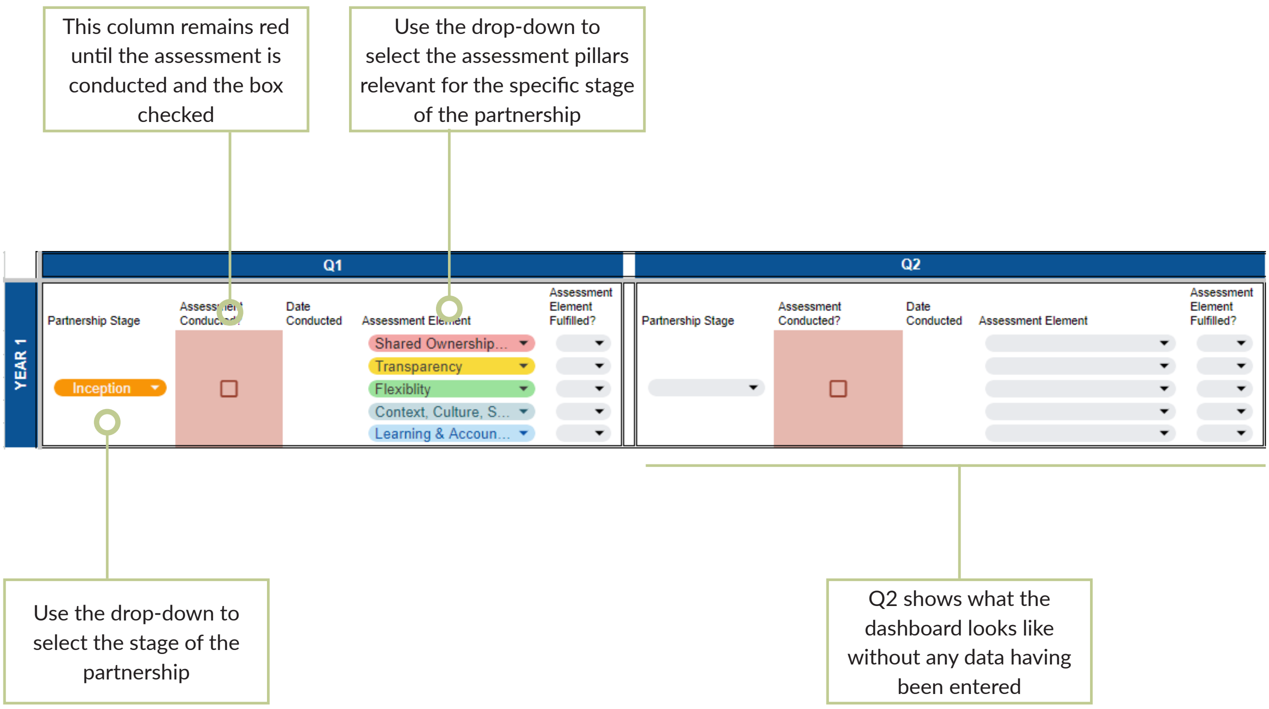
Depending on which stage of the partnership you are in, go into the relevant assessment tab to conduct the assessment. Each tab has a list of questions divided into elements and pillars of equitable partnership practice. The steps to completing an assessment are as follows:

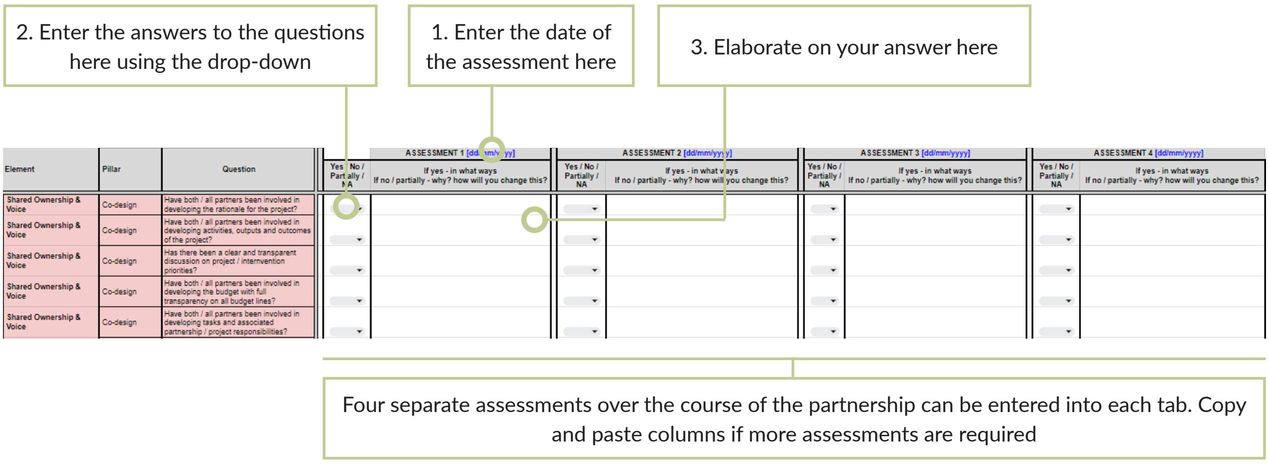
- Step 1: Go into the relevant tab. For example, if you are at the Inception stage, go into '3. Inception' tab. In Column F, make a record of the assessment date. Each tab has space to conduct four assessments. You can copy/paste to add more assessments.

- Step 2: Answer the questions in the tab. Questions are divided into assessment elements and pillars. All answers to the questions can be answered using the drop-down in column E: 'Yes / No / Partially / NA'. Please note that not all the questions will always be applicable / relevant. In this case, use the drop down to select 'n/a'.

- Step 3: In the following column provide further detail to your answer. The question refers to your answer in the previous column: 'If yes - in what ways / If no / partially - why? How will you change this?'

- Step 4: Go back to the dashboard to make a record of your assessment.



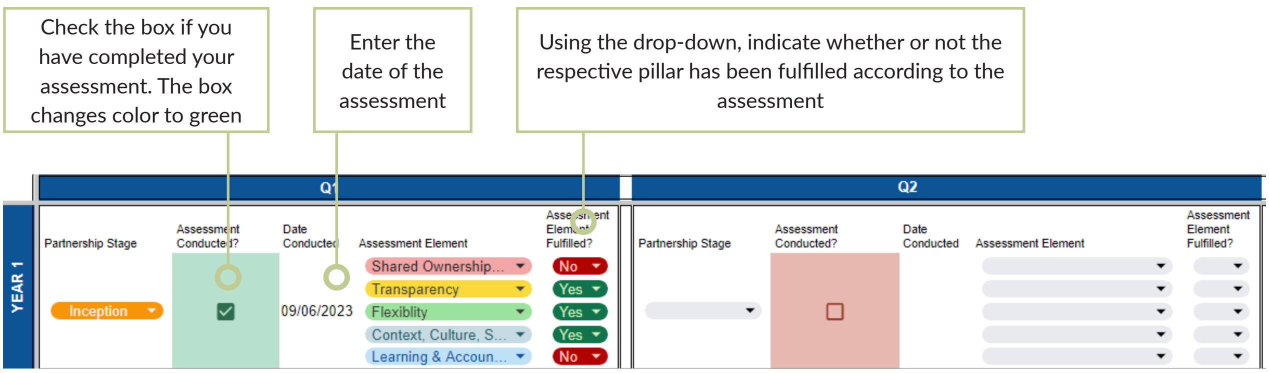


In the example below, the assessment is at the early inception stage. The assessment has now been conducted so the box is checked in the relevant column, turning the column green. The date the assessment was done is then entered in the next column.

In the 'Assessment Element fulfilled' column, 'Transparency', 'Flexibility' and 'Context, Culture & Power' have 'yes' indicated next to them. This means that all aspects of equitable partnerships related to these element have been fulfilled at this point in the partnership, i.e. you would have answered 'yes' or 'n/a' to all the questions during the assessment.

For the example below, more steps need to be taken to fulfill 'Shared Ownership & Voice' and 'Learning & Accountability', i.e. the answer to these questions would not have all been 'no' or 'partially'. This serves as a reminder to pay particular attention to these elements of equitable partnerships as you progress the partnership.

- Step 5: Make a note in your own personal / team calendar for when you will conduct the next assessment, suggested at least every 3-6 months or when there has been a change in the partnership, i.e., you are moving to a different stage of it (moving from inception → during → end).
- Step 6: Conduct any internal discussions or reflections on how to make necessary changes and improvements to the partnership based on the assessment, and take necessary action towards those changes.



JOINT PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT TOOL (J-PAT)

The J-PAT is designed in an Excel format, and can be found here. It is open access, and can be copied and adapted as needed.

Guide to using the J-PAT

Purpose

The J-PAT is an accountability tool which provides an opportunity for both / all partners in a partnership to appraise or critique the partnership at jointly agreed intervals. Each partner will complete a separate J-PAT initially, before the individual responses are consolidated into a shared J-PAT following a joint meeting.

Steps to completing the J-PAT

STEP 1: Jointly discuss equitable partnership principles and values

It is important that partners speak about the principles and practice as early as possible. During these discussions, partners can refer to the J-PAT as a tool to ensure accountability to equitable partnership principles and values.[9]

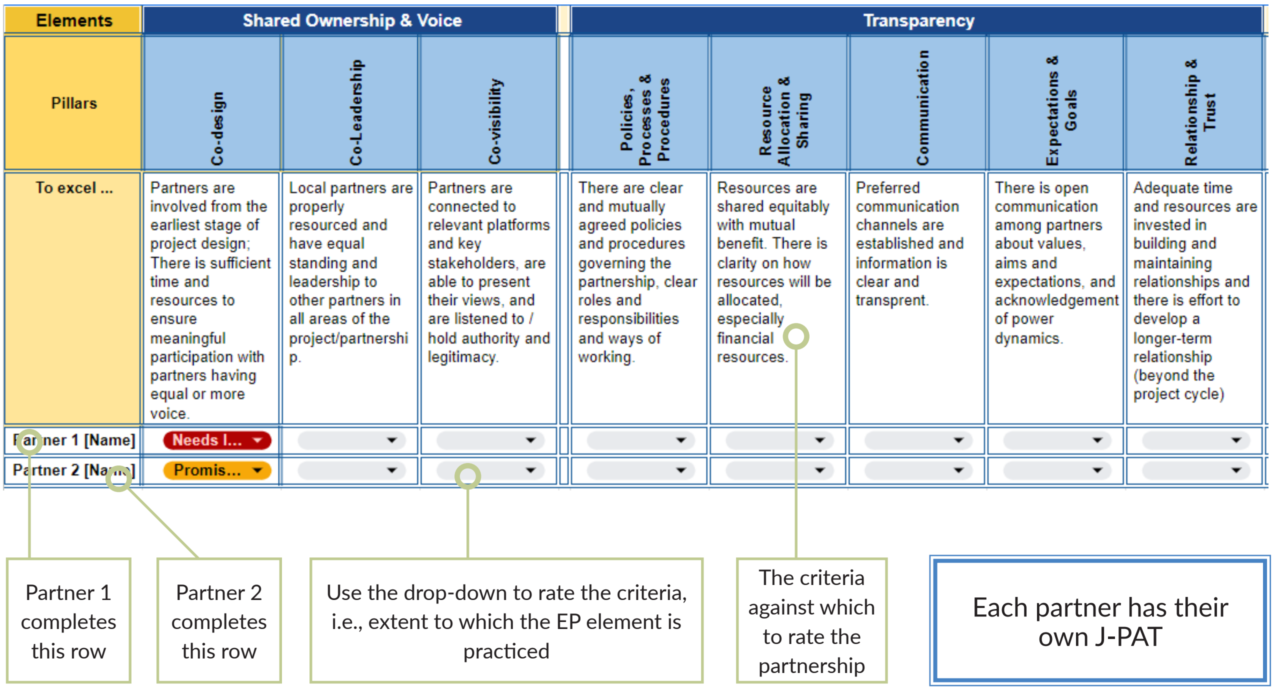
STEP 2: Jointly establish when the assessments will take place

As early as possible partners jointly decide how regularly to conduct the assessments. It is recommended that you conduct assessments at several regular intervals at the beginning, middle, and end of a partnership (e.g. every 3-6 months, or when there are significant changes in the partnership). Establish the date of your first assessment meeting. Prior to this meeting, Steps 3 & 4 (below) must be completed.

STEP 3: Conduct an assessment

Rate how the partnership has progressed: Using the same J-PAT but in individual files, each partner separately rates the partnership approach based on each of the elements and pillars of equitable partnerships in Rows 2 and 3. To ensure mutual accountability, each partner will reflect on both their, as well as the partner(s) approach in fulfilling the criteria.

9 See V2 Position Paper: asylumaccess.org/ep2023



Elements	Shared Ownership & Voice			Transparency				
Pillars	Co-design	Co-Leadership	Co-visibility	Policies, Processes & Procedures	Resource Allocation & Sharing	Communication	Expectations & Goals	Relationship & Trust
To excel ...	Partners are involved from the earliest stage of project design; There is sufficient time and resources to ensure meaningful participation with partners having equal or more voice.	Local partners are properly resourced and have equal standing and leadership to other partners in all areas of the project/partnership.	Partners are connected to relevant platforms and key stakeholders, are able to present their views, and are listened to / hold authority and legitimacy.	There are clear and mutually agreed policies and procedures governing the partnership, clear roles and responsibilities and ways of working.	Resources are shared equitably with mutual benefit. There is clarity on how resources will be allocated, especially financial resources.	Preferred communication channels are established and information is clear and transprent.	There is open communication among partners about values, aims and expectations, and acknowledgement of power dynamics.	Adequate time and resources are invested in building and maintaining relationships and there is effort to develop a longer-term relationship (beyond the project cycle)
Partner 1 [Name]	Needs I...							
Partner 2 [Name]	Promis...							

The ratings are as follows:

- 'Excelling,' where the partnership meets all the criteria consistently / to a high degree;
- 'Promising,' where the partnership meets the criteria most of the time / to a moderate degree; and
- 'Needs Improvement,' where the partnership meets the criteria occasionally / to a small degree.

STEP 4: Conduct an assessment Using SWOT Analysis

With your team / individually, assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the partnership.

- **S**trengths: *What has worked well, and why do you think that is?*
- **W**eaknesses: *Which areas require improvement?*
- **O**pportunities: *Where do the opportunities lie in the partnership? Are there any external opportunities? (e.g. prospective work with other local organizations, funding opportunities, etc.)*
- **T**hreats: *Is there anything in particular that threatens to compromise the partnership?*

STEP 5: Joint meeting

At the pre-arranged date (as jointly agreed in Step 2), partners come together to discuss and reflect on the ratings given to the partnership and the SWOT analysis. Additionally - and depending on the strength of the partnership - each partner can share their ratings and SWOT analysis prior to the meeting.

During / post this meeting, it is a good idea to combine J-PATs so you have a central record of how the partnership is progressing. Partners can also agree to use a shared J-PAT from the beginning, however that might affect responses from the other partner. This can be discussed and agreed upon by all partners prior to the assessment.

At the same meeting or via alternative forms of communication, partners agree:

1. How they will act on any changes required.
2. When they will revisit this process.

For all partners, internal discussion may be required to adapt their partnership practice. All partners may also want to address any discrepancies in the rating between themselves.

As a simple illustration of how these tools can support regular stocktaking and course correction in partnerships:

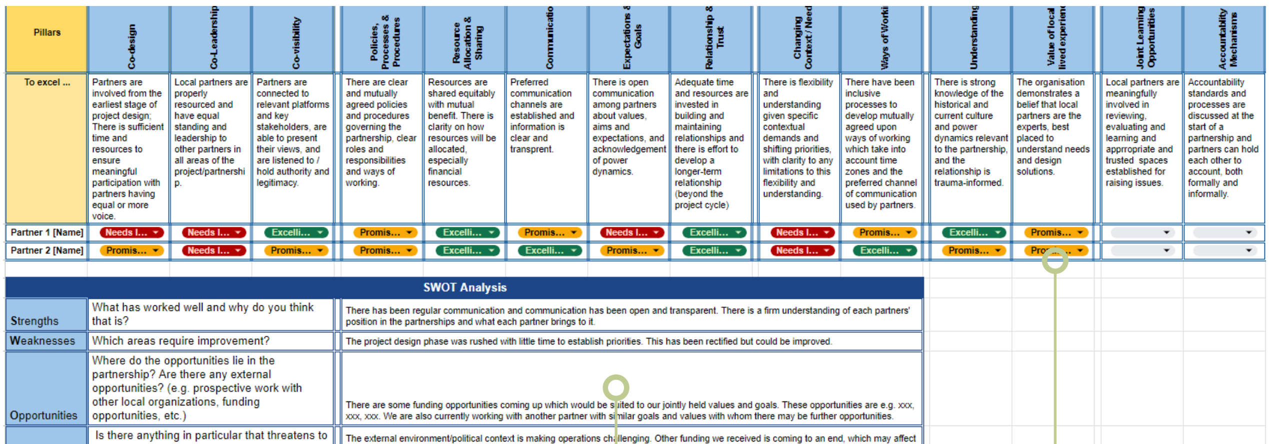
Imagine "International Hope for All," an international organization, has partnered with an NGO called "Local Impact" and an RLO called "Refugee Reliance" in Kenya. All partners are excited about a joint project to improve local policies and implementation around refugee work rights in Kenya. As they progress, International Hope for All takes the lead based on their capacity and connections to influential global and regional actors in the area of work rights, self-reliance, and policy advocacy. International Hope for All begins discussions with a donor they have connections with to explore prospects for funding for this joint project.

Around this time, they have a scheduled self-assessment using the EP-SAT. They realize that they have not included the Local Impact or Refugee Reliance in the conversations with the donor.[10] They discuss internally, meet with Local Impact and Refugee Reliance staff to acknowledge this and identify how to support direct relationship building and ensure that they are included in subsequent communications with the donor.

Around the same time, Refugee Reliance starts to notice decisions made around priorities without their input. Refugee Reliance, possessing invaluable local insights and community trust, worries that these initiatives may not resonate with the nuances and needs of their community. They also start to feel sidelined. However, they do not feel comfortable raising it immediately, especially as conversations with the donor are making good progress. However, during the scheduled J-PAT assessment, Refugee Reliance shares its concerns, referencing specific equitable partnership elements and pillars where International Hope for All is falling short. They collaboratively decide on adjustments to ensure a more equitable partnership.

Without structures like EP-SAT and J-PAT, these power imbalances and oversights might go unnoticed, resulting in project inefficiencies or even failures. When used regularly, however, these tools can act as a safeguard, ensuring that all voices are heard, valued, and integrated, amplifying the impact of collective efforts through our partnerships.

10 In the EP-SAT, a self-assessment question under "Shared Ownership & Voice" is "Are local partners speaking directly with donors / other stakeholders associated with the partnership / project?"



Pillars	Co-design	Co-Leadership	Co-visibility	Policies, Processes & Procedures	Resource Allocation & Sharing	Communicatio	Expectations & Goals	Relationship & Trust	Changing Context / Need	Ways of Worki	Understanding	Value of local lived experienc	Joint Learning Opportunities	Accountability Mechanisms
To excel ...	Partners are involved from the earliest stage of project design; There is sufficient time and resources to ensure meaningful participation with partners having equal or more voice.	Local partners are properly resourced and have equal standing and leadership to other partners in all areas of the project/partnership.	Partners are connected to relevant platforms and key stakeholders, are able to present their views, and are listened to / hold authority and legitimacy.	There are clear and mutually agreed policies and procedures governing the partnership, clear roles and responsibilities and ways of working.	Resources are shared equitably with mutual benefit. There is clarity on how resources will be allocated, especially financial resources.	Preferred communication channels are established and information is clear and transprent.	There is open communication among partners about values, aims and expectations, and acknowledgement of power dynamics.	Adequate time and resources are invested in building and maintaining relationships and there is effort to develop a longer-term relationship (beyond the project cycle)	There is flexibility and understanding given specific contextual demands and shifting priorities, with clarity to any limitations to this flexibility and understanding.	There have been inclusive processes to develop mutually agreed upon ways of working which take into account time zones and the preferred channel of communication used by partners.	There is strong knowledge of the historical and current culture and power dynamics relevant to the partnership, and the relationship is trauma-informed.	The organisation demonstrates a belief that local partners are the experts, best placed to understand needs and design solutions.	Local partners are meaningfully involved in reviewing, evaluating and learning and apprropriate and trusted spaces established for raising issues.	Accountability standards and processes are discussed at the start of a partnership and partners can hold each other to account, both formally and informally.
Partner 1 [Name]	Needs I...	Needs I...	Excelli...	Promis...	Excelli...	Promis...	Needs I...	Excelli...	Needs I...	Promis...	Excelli...	Promis...		
Partner 2 [Name]	Promis...	Needs I...	Promis...	Promis...	Excelli...	Excelli...	Promis...	Excelli...	Needs I...	Excelli...	Promis...	Pro[illegible]...		

SWOT Analysis		
Strengths	What has worked well and why do you think that is?	There has been regular communication and communication has been open and transparent. There is a firm understanding of each partners' position in the partnerships and what each partner brings to it.
Weaknesses	Which areas require improvement?	The project design phase was rushed with little time to establish priorities. This has been rectified but could be improved.
Opportunities	Where do the opportunities lie in the partnership? Are there any external opportunities? (e.g. prospective work with other local organizations, funding opportunities, etc.)	There are some funding opportunities coming up which would be suited to our jointly held values and goals. These opportunities are e.g. xxx, xxx, xxx. We are also currently working with another partner with similar goals and values with whom there may be further opportunities.
	Is there anything in particular that threatens to	The external environment/political context is making operations challenging. Other funding we received is coming to an end, which may affect

A joint J-PAT might look something like this

Summary of the SWOT analysis conducted by both / all partners

Both partners' ratings are entered here so you can see any discrepancies

CONCLUSION AND WAYS FORWARD

This Toolkit is an initial "beta" version that is currently being piloted internally in Asylum Access until mid-2024. During this phase, we encourage other organizations who are interested in using or adapting this tool (or who are developing your own accountability tools) to reach out to us to collaborate, share your learnings and questions and offer critique and suggestions on how it can be strengthened. Following the pilot phase, we will review the learnings and make revisions to strengthen its accessibility and utility and release a revised V2 of the Toolkit externally. We are keen for a V2 Toolkit to be a joint effort with other organizations to support cross-sector learning and accountability towards equitable partnerships.

We are also available to provide a more in-depth overview of these tools and how to adapt them to organizational needs, as well as training and peer exchanges on equitable partnerships. If you think our experiences and expertise can be beneficial to you and your organization, please reach out to our Director of Partnerships, Deepa Nambiar, at deepa.nambiar@asylumaccess.org, or to our Partnerships Coordinator, Baqir Bayani, at baqir.bayani@asylumaccess.org.

About Asylum Access

Asylum Access is a human rights advocacy organization that partners with forcibly displaced individuals and communities as they reclaim their rights, agency, and power. We have both an international presence (we are registered as a global organization in the United States) and national organizations run by local leadership in Malaysia, Mexico, and Thailand. As an international refugee-led organization and a family of local civil society organizations, we have partnered with other local organizations, including RLOs, in pursuit of refugees' human rights for over 17 years.

Acknowledgments

Asylum Access would like to thank Luminate Foundation and Porticus for their generous financial contributions and support for our vision of greater equity in our partnerships and in the sector. We are grateful to Lighthouse Partnerships for their dedication in conducting the External Review and co-producing concrete resources and tools to support our accountability. We also thank consultant Diana Essex-Lettieri for reviewing this paper and for staff at Asylum Access -- including at Asylum Access Malaysia, Asylum Access Thailand, Asylum Access Mexico, and Asylum Access Global -- who have offered important insights and input at all stages of its development. Last but not least, we express our deepest gratitude to all the partners involved in the Asylum Access' External Review, which added significant value to this updated position paper: Refugee and Asylum Seekers Information Center (RAIC), Refugiados Unidos, Basmeh & Zeitooneh, Arab Foundation for Sustainable Development, and many others.

www.asylumaccess.org

Cover and illustrations by Vidushi Yadav