

strike a balance between too much - and too little - information. Good communication in a partnership creatively combines use of new ICT facilities with more conventional but costly face-to-face interaction.

- **Joint planning and M&E.** For effective implementation in a partnership mode, joint planning and M&E are essential. This requires good facilitation by the coordinating organisation, or another, to which the task is delegated. Joint M&E should encompass M&E of implementation, results and impact, as well as learning from the review of work done and constraints encountered.
- **Handling conflicts.** Problems will appear sooner or later in partnerships. But they can be managed through appropriate mechanisms such as regular reviews of roles and responsibilities, accepting differences in the pace of partners, limiting bureaucracy while ensuring quality facilitation, transparency about funds and effectively dealing with non-performing partners.

Implications for policy

- **Mainstreaming in ARD policies.** Facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships between farmers, non-governmental, governmental and private-sector organisations is an essential strategy to accelerate agricultural innovation – particularly in complex environments and when addressing major challenges

such as food security and adapting to climate change. The partnerships help to realise cost-effectiveness, value addition and synergies between areas of competence.

- **Institutionalising participatory innovation.** Partnership between different stakeholders is an important strategy to institutionalise participatory research and development or “Participatory Innovation Development” in agricultural and food-security programmes and organisations.
- **Creating space** in ARD organisations and programmes for multi-stakeholder partnership starts with identifying themes and teams where such partnership is critical for success. Managers need to provide appropriate structures, capacity building and incentives for staff to engage with other stakeholders.
- **Investing in multi-stakeholder partnership** needs specific attention in terms of mechanisms, structures and policy. A solid body of evidence now exists on ways to make partnerships work; core principles to be considered such as shared ownership of the process, openness and transparency; the type of facilitation skills required; and ways to handle potential or actual conflicts. This knowledge now allows investment to be well focused.

*This brief is based on the booklet *Facilitating Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Lessons from PROLINNOVA, Silang, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (2006)* edited by Will Critchley, Miranda Verburg and Laurens van Veldhuizen.*

Further references

- Gonsalves J & Niangado O. 2006. Review of the GFAR Global Partnership Programmes. Rome: Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR).
- Horton D, Prain G and Thiele G. 2009. Perspectives on partnership: A literature review. International Potato Center (CIP), Lima, Peru. Working Paper 2009-3.
- Rajalahti R. 2009. Promoting Agricultural Innovation Systems Approach: The Way Forward, World Bank, Washington
- Woodhill J & Van Vugt S. 2008. Facilitating multi-stakeholder and institutional change processes: a societal learning process. Wageningen: Wageningen International Occasional Paper.



PROMoting Local INNOVation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management is a community of practice involving partners in several countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Initiated by NGOs, this Global Partnership Programme under the umbrella of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) embraces both state and non-state organisations. It promotes recognition of local innovation by women and men farmers as an entry point to farmer-led participatory research and development. The ultimate aim is to integrate this approach into institutions of agricultural research, extension and education. Funding comes mainly from the Netherlands and French Governments, Rockefeller Foundation and partners' own contributions.

PROLINNOVA International Secretariat, c/o ETC Foundation, PO Box 64, 3830 AB Leusden, The Netherlands
Tel: +31-33-4326000 Fax: +31-33-4940791 Email: prolinnova@etcnl.nl Web: www.prolinnova.net



Policy Brief

Multi-stakeholder partnerships for more effective research and development

Policy pointers

- Multi-stakeholder partnerships are important for effective agricultural innovation processes in complex and dynamic environments: partnerships can create synergies and be cost-effective.
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships need to be part of agricultural and food-security policies and programmes in terms of mechanisms, structures and resources.
- Partnership between stakeholders is important to integrate participatory approaches into research and development organisations.
- A solid body of evidence exists on ways to make partnerships work, covering core principles, partnership operation and ways to handle conflicts.
- Agricultural research and development organisations need to create space and commit resources (capacity and structures) to engage in partnership collaboration.

Agricultural development can be accelerated by forging and facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships

The challenges of feeding the world and ensuring sustainable livelihoods for small-scale farmers remain greater today than ever before. But the past decade has shown that agricultural innovation under increasingly complex conditions – locally, nationally and globally – cannot be done alone by any single key actor. Effective interaction is needed between farmers on the one hand and business, research and development organisations on the other (Woodhill & Van Vugt 2008). None of these actors alone has the full insights, competences and resources needed to find answers to the challenges facing agricultural development. Functional links between them can be created at field and project level in participatory or interactive development and research programmes (Rajalahti 2009).

Much can be gained if project-focused collaboration is complemented by structured, well-facilitated partnership at the organisational level. These allow organisations to join hands in setting strategic directions and identifying complementarities at an early stage. Such platforms help build mutual trust and, if they function well, form a powerful alliance to promote the joint agenda.

PROLINNOVA, a network of over 160 organisations in Africa, Asia and Latin America promoting participatory approaches in agricultural research and development (ARD), has eight years of experience in building such partnerships at both national and international level. PROLINNOVA partners have recognised the need to break through institutional boundaries, and have been learning through joint analysis of their experiences in doing this.

PROLINNOVA vision:
A world where women and men farmers play decisive roles in ARD for sustainable livelihoods



Benefits and costs of partnership

Working through multi-stakeholder partnerships can bring numerous benefits:

- Partnerships mobilise complementary expertise and resources, including staff, facilities, hardware and funds.
- They provide avenues for improved coordination of work among stakeholders in the same area. This increases effectiveness by reducing confusion and conflict, using partnership-based mechanisms to handle any conflicts that may arise.
- They can make policymakers listen by amplifying the voice of individual organisations.
- Organisations and their staff learn, expand their horizons and access new knowledge – important for organisational strengthening and increasing the relevance of their work.

But “costs” need to be considered, too. The most visible costs are the resources needed to build and maintain the partnership: the funds, time and commitment of staff. Even though costs can and should be covered as much as possible by the partners themselves rather than by donors, the relevant resources are often scarce. Effective facilitation, avoiding time-consuming meetings, focused use of partnership events, and increased use of ICT-based tools can go a long way to optimise the use of resources. With a partnership approach, initial progress “on the ground” may be slow. This could be a serious “cost” if policymakers expect fast and visible results. There are also limitations to accommodating diverging views and interests in a partnership. When organisations are brought together without a basic interest in finding

common ground, conflicts are bound to frustrate the partnership and could increase rather than reduce inter-organisational tensions.

Key principles of successful partnerships

There is solid evidence from eight years’ work within PROLINNOVA, as well as in other development and research partnerships (Gonsalves & Niangado 2006, Horton *et al* 2009) on the main principles to which successful partnerships need to adhere. First and foremost, they should have shared ownership, i.e. partners feel collective responsibility. The design and facilitation of the partnership should enable this. This implies a *culture of basic equality* among partners in which contributions from farmers are valued as much as those from researchers. Ownership will develop only when the common agenda is *linked to individual interests*, when partners recognise their interests in the partnership agenda, even if only in specific agenda concerns.

A partnership can be functional only with *openness and transparency* in decision-making. This is especially important with regard to the use of both external and internal resources. Such transparency contributes to *breaking down barriers of competition and territoriality*. The key to a successful partnership lies in transforming existing competition and “territoriality” between agencies into collaboration.

Partnership design should be based on the *open nucleus* principle: the partnership must be prepared to change its composition if and when necessary. It may start with a small group, but others should be able to join,



Case 1: Benefits of 5-year partnership in PROLINNOVA–Cambodia

Since 2004, the PROLINNOVA–Cambodia partnership has grown from initially five to now 21 organisations. Coordinated by the NGO CEDAC, the partnership includes farmer organisations, NGOs, the national Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (MAFF), ten provincial Departments of Agriculture and several institutes of higher learning. The partners carry out self-designed activities to increase interest in, and attention to, participatory research and development approaches that build on local innovation. These include studies on local innovation, farmer-led participatory research, documentation, capacity building, awareness creation and policy dialogue.

Partners report important benefits from the partnership: the direct links created between farmer groups, NGOs and senior MAFF staff have raised awareness within MAFF and acceptance in its policy of the relevance of the PROLINNOVA approach. Partners’ backing to major policy-dialogue events contributed to this. Collaboration with NGOs and farmers’ groups have also given the universities entry points for students’ research in the field, and the involvement of staff in supporting them has started influencing formal teaching. With strong feelings of ownership, partners have mobilised resources locally, and thereby more than doubled the annual budget from the external donor.



Photos: CEDAC



Partners from West and East Africa share experiences at international meeting (Photo: PROLINNOVA)

Case 2: International ARD partnership

Cost-effectiveness of investing in multi-stakeholder ARD partnerships at global level is often questioned in view of high “transaction” costs. Domination of the partnership by one organisation may reduce the others’ interest and commitment to contribute. The experience of the international PROLINNOVA partnership that grew from a few partners in three countries to more than 160 partners in 18 countries in a period of eight years shows that such a partnership can work when:

- Planning, implementation and resource allocation are decentralised to the lowest possible level;
- The facilitating organisation can maintain a common focus and provide the necessary frameworks and content leadership;
- Communication mechanisms are used – both to involve partners and to keep them informed – in a clever combination of modern ICT-based media and highly interactive face-to-face sharing and joint planning;
- Transparent and inclusive governance mechanisms are put in place;
- The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system includes serious attention to the functioning of the partnership, allowing partners to learn and adapt as the need arises.

and some partners may have to be persuaded to leave if they contribute little. Finally, it is important that the *partnership itself is made part of the joint agenda*. The need for the partnership and the way it functions should be reviewed jointly and regularly. In this way, the partnership becomes a common area of interest and, if it functions effectively, can be seen as an achievement in itself.

Lessons from practice

- *Start with what is already there.* In many cases, there are relevant networks or platforms at least partly covering the partnership agenda. Overlap and competition should be avoided, following the principle of subsidiarity. Inception planning should take stock of existing experiences, e.g. through Stakeholder Analysis and/or Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems.
- *Capacity building for partnership management.* Stakeholders need to understand the rationale for partnership and what is expected of them. Staff of coordinating organisations can follow dedicated courses. Equally important is to include M&E and learning in the partnership-building process by making the partnership approach a regular joint-learning item on the agenda and documenting its key milestones.
- *Partner (self-)selection.* Strong partnerships are built if organisations make a committed decision to join. They may start small, allowing others to show interest to join as, and when, they want. When partners need to be sought, not only like-minded organisations should

be invited, but also relevant others who could make an important contribution to the agenda.

- *Role definition.* Clarity is needed about roles and responsibilities of each partner as well as resource allocations. Overlapping roles can be a source of inefficiency and conflict. Often roles and tasks agreed will need to be formalised in agreements; but to prevent bureaucracy and maintain flexibility of the partnership, care should be taken to formalise only the minimum required.
- *Governance.* Clarity on governance is essential. What is the structure and process for decision-making within the partnership? Who decides on what? What is the position of the coordinating organisation (which often holds the budget)? The process of forming the governance mechanisms therefore needs careful attention, allowing influence of partners and their constituencies.
- *Importance of rapid initial success.* A partnership quickly gains momentum if an initial, strategically chosen activity, is successful. “Entry-point activities” ideally involve several partners, yield interesting insights in a relatively short time and lead to tangible outcomes. If, in the process, materials and other resources can be shared, this helps to bond the partnership.
- *Effective communication.* Communication is a central component of partnership facilitation. It is needed to create openness and transparency and to coordinate implementation of activities. The challenge is to