



# Perspectives on Partnership

**What the literature says about success and failure in collaborative research for development**

**Gordon Prain, Douglas Horton and Graham Thiele**

# ***Background***

- **Partnership increasingly central to the R4D discourse**
  - The Paris Declaration, 2005, deployed the root term 111 times in 12 pages
  - The draft Strategy and Results Framework 211 times
- **Partnering seen as the key mode of doing agricultural R4D research**
  - Increased complexity of research means more stakeholders involved
  - For demand-driven, results-oriented culture, offers increased innovation, inclusiveness and opportunity to go to scale
- **Do we know what we mean by partnership and partnering?**

# ***Challenges***

---

- Literature rich, diverse, but fragmented
- Different fields of study and practice emphasize different aspects of partnering
- The term “partnership” loosely defined, inconsistently applied and rapidly evolving

## ***Four main types of literature deal with partnership issues***

***Analytical***

- Research
- Professional evaluation literature
- Practitioner-oriented literature reviews
- Guidelines and assessment tools
- CGIAR-related reviews, evaluations, policy documents

***Normative***

## ***Research studies***

- **Management and organizational development**
- **Public policy and public management**
- **North-South partnerships in international development**
- **Science and technology policy**
- **Knowledge-action linkages**
- **Public-private partnerships in agricultural research**

## ***Characteristics***

- **Use of methods and “hot topics” of home disciplines**
- **Collaboration can lead to new ways of working, new institutions**
- **Public-private partnerships to improve public sector delivery, can also lead to “multiple accountabilities disorder”**

# ***Cross-cutting themes and issues***

---

## **1. Partnership versus partnering**

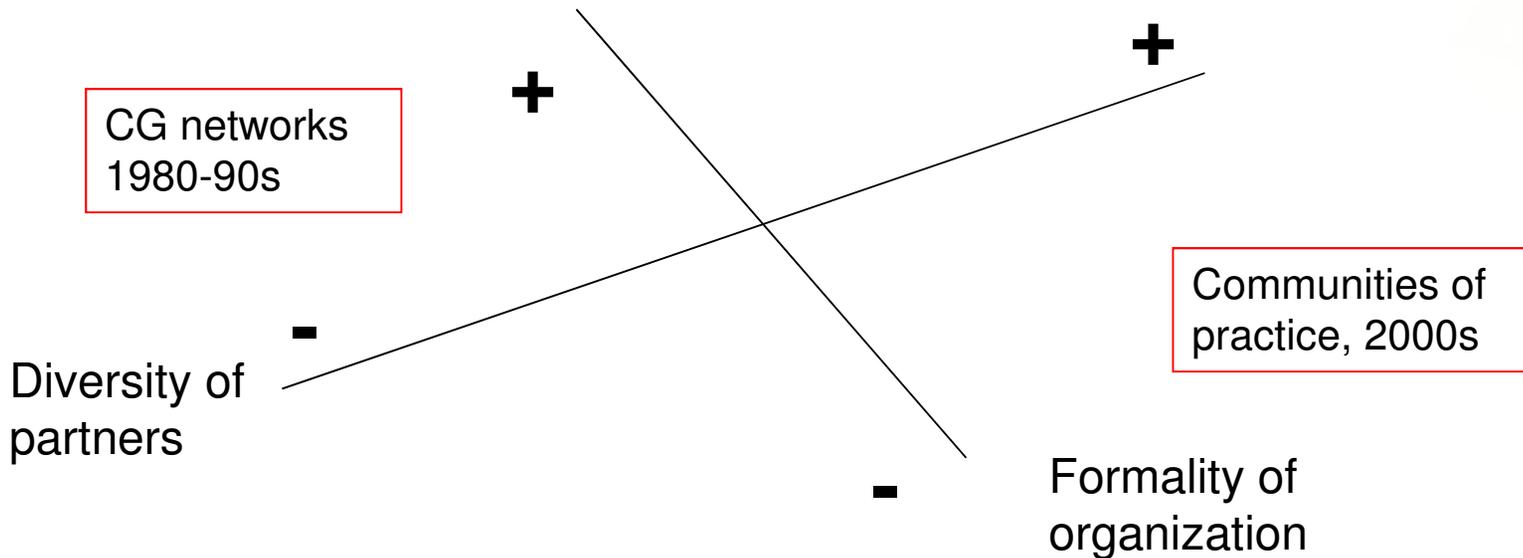
- **Heavy focus on structure and management, clarity and accountability of (mutual) goals, resources, costs and benefits.**
- **Less focus on partnering as a behavior involving values, mutual respect and reciprocity, organizational culture, leadership style, and incentives. Both are crucial**

## **2. Partnership dynamics**

- **Moving targets, from loosely networked to highly organized, from less to more structure and not the other way.**
- **Some, less dynamic, with more stable needs**

# Cross-cutting themes and issues (cont)

## 3. Types of partnerships



# ***Cross-cutting themes and issues (cont)***

## **4. Success factors: no single recipe**

- **Common shared vision**
- **Support from participating organizations**
- **Equitable sharing of resources, responsibilities, benefits**
- **Transparent governance and decision-making**
- **Creation of genuine respect and trust**
- **Pursuit and achievement of higher level outcomes (beyond partnership itself)**

**BUT: PARTNERSHIPS HIGHLY DEPENDENT ON LOCAL  
CONTEXT – NO SINGLE SET OF FACTORS APPLY**

# ***Cross-cutting themes and issues (cont)***

## **5. Incentives and other drivers of partnership**

- **Reasons for partnering can be different among partners (accessing a new region/country or accessing resources)**
- **For partnerships to prosper, benefits must exceed what can be achieved alone (collaborative advantage)**
- **Divergent incentives, styles, expectations can lead to collaborative inertia**
- **Donors can pressure to include numbers and types of partners in projects and programs**
- **Disincentives, donor pressure and other factors can lead to “pseudo-partnerships”**

# ***Cross-cutting themes and issues (cont)***

## **6. Trust**

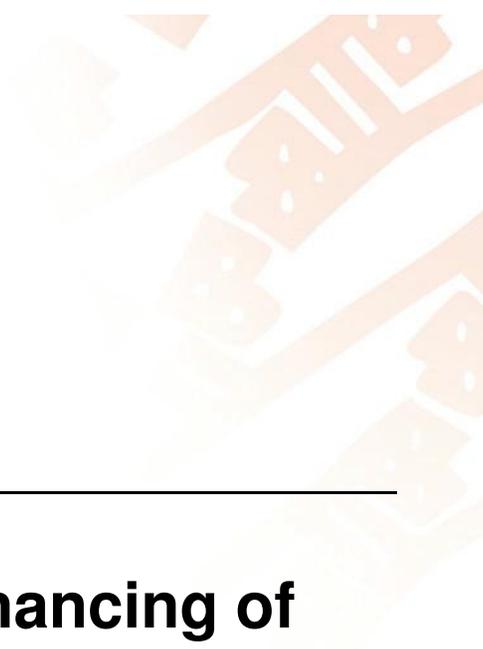
- Often a success factor – “the glue” – of partnership
- Not necessarily present at the beginning
- If not built, or if lost, partnerships cannot be sustainable

## **7. Power and equity: the elephant in the room**

- Everyone experiences but nobody mentions?
- Often ignored or dealt with indirectly (consultations, knowledge exchange etc)
- Sharing of benefits especially critical
- North-South partnerships especially exposed

# ***Implications***

- **A partnership for what?**
  - Purpose the single most important issue
  - Mix of partners responds to purpose.
  - Structure and formality linked to purpose
- **Seek clarity on responsibilities in partnerships and evolution of responsibilities – dynamics of partnership**
- **Need for specificity and common understanding. Partnership term widely used, means different things. What do we mean?**

- 
- 
- 
- **Need to invest in partnerships – pre-financing of projects, programs**
  - **Accountability in partnerships often fiscal. Ethical accountability also central and “up front”**
  - **Leadership of partnerships – facilitative rather directive**
  - **Learn from experiences outside the agricultural R4D domain (eg Partnering initiative)**