Perspectives on Partnership

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

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**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

- Research
- Professional evaluation literature
- Practitioner-oriented literature reviews
- Guidelines and assessment tools
- CGIAR-related reviews, evaluations, policy documents
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research studies</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<td>▪ Management and organizational development</td>
<td>▪ Use of methods and “hot topics” of home disciplines</td>
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<td>▪ Public policy and public management</td>
<td>▪ Collaboration can lead to new ways of working, new institutions</td>
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<td>▪ North-South partnerships in international development</td>
<td>▪ Public-private partnerships to improve public sector delivery, can also lead to “multiple accountabilities disorder”</td>
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<td>▪ Science and technology policy</td>
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<td>▪ Knowledge-action linkages</td>
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<td>▪ Public-private partnerships in agricultural research</td>
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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

- Diversity of partners
- Formality of organization

- CG networks 1980-90s
- Communities of practice, 2000s

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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
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”
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)