

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the main lessons and conclusions from the booklet. It presents a checklist of 30 key considerations which, from our experience, will guide the building of a strong multi-stakeholder partnerships.



Learning and sharing knowledge (Laurens van Veldhuizen)

6.2 The importance of partnerships for promoting innovation

1. To accelerate innovation at the local level, effective collaboration between resource users and farmers and research, extension, marketing and other organisations is required: they need to collaborate to pull their knowledge and resources together to find better ways of developing agriculture and NRM.

2. Partnerships are needed at different levels, each with its own dynamics: at the level of communities and farming activities, at national and regional levels, and again on the international stage.

3. Partnerships *can* work if well organised and facilitated.

4. NGOs are in a unique position to help build partnerships in the area of research and development in agriculture and NRM.

6.3 Cost-effectiveness, value addition and synergies

5. A central justification for building partnerships is, simply put, to do with making the best use of available resources, financial as well as human resources. In the words of practitioners main benefits are:

- *Sharing of expertise and (human and other) resources;*
- *Learning and sharing of knowledge;*
- *Creating opportunities for dialogue with policymakers;*
- *Creating platforms for coordination of approaches and conflict handling.*

Limited levels of funds available can form a strong incentive for partnership building in order to access facilities and resources of partners.

6. These benefits outweigh the “costs” of working though partnerships:

- *Investments in time and money;*
- *Slow progress on the ground;*

- *Limitations related to accommodating diverging views and interests;*
- *Time taken to establish credibility of the facilitating organisations.*

6.4 Principles and prerequisites

7. Partnerships can be effective only when partners adhere to basic principles – and allied to these principles are prerequisites. Here are the most important considerations (points 8-14).

8. *Partnership as part of the agenda:* partnership *itself*, the need for it, and best ways to build it, should form part of the overall agenda amongst partners.

9. *Shared ownership:* partnership implies shared ownership of agenda and programme of activities, and an overall sense of joint responsibility for outcomes.

10. *A culture of equality:* shared ownership and responsibility imply equality.

11. *Matching individual interests with the common agenda:* partnerships should link the common agenda to important interests of the partners.

12. *Openness and transparency:* a partnership cannot work unless there is openness and transparency in making decisions, including those on use of funds.

13. *“Open nucleus”:* the platform needs to be prepared to change its composition if and when necessary; start small and grow as need arises.

14. *Breaking down barriers of competition and territoriality:* partnership can work only when competition between agencies is turned into positive synergies.

6.5 Partnerships in practice

15. *Capacity building and learning by doing:* efforts are needed to help stakeholders understand the potential benefits and what is expected of them.

16. *Start with looking into what is already there:* an entirely new partnership may not be required – there may already be existing networks ready to be built upon.

17. *Role definition; specialist input, backstopping and facilitation:* clarity is needed about roles and responsibilities. There may be a need for formalisation of roles through the signing of MOUs.

18. *Governance:* a partnership implies that some of the power and control from the initiating/budget-holding organisation is moved to the other partners. This is essentially what a governance mechanism should cater for.

19. *Commitment grows from successful first actions:* partnerships need to be built on a shared will to succeed pooling together knowledge and resources. The partnership quickly gains momentum if an “entry-point activity” is strategically chosen.

20. *Ensuring effective communication:* good and effective communication is the central strategy to achieve openness and transparency. A regular flow of information is critical for implementation and coordination of activities.

21. *Joint planning, monitoring and evaluation:* to achieve joint implementation, joint planning and joint M&E are required. And to achieve this, good facilitation is needed: that is the role of the main facilitating agency.

6.6 Trouble shooting

22. *Clarification of roles and responsibilities:* overlapping roles can be a source of inefficiencies, confusion or even conflict. Clarity is needed from the outset.

23. *Addressing attitudes and values:* partners’ attitudes and values may determine the success of partnerships. Pay attention to these and, when needed, create opportunities to reflect on them.

24. *Bureaucracy:* paperwork can become a burden under an expanding partnership. Steps need to be taken to minimise and share this burden.

25. *Facilitation:* good facilitation is critical. Is there need for training or a need to hire external expertise? The facilitating organisation must focus on mediation through assuming a neutral role.

26. *Prevent conflicts on money or other benefits:* partnerships can falter because of conflicts over resources; money is the main one. Disagreements over financial resources must be prevented – and not allowed to descend into conflict.

27. *Non-performing partners:* steps need to be taken to prevent “free-riding” by under-performing partners so that this does not become a source of conflict: this can include peer pressure techniques, creative sanctions and, ultimately, ending of membership.

28. *Engaging farmers and their organisations and researchers:* in practice, it is not easy to involve both farmers and researchers in partnerships, but it is vital to address this challenge. Both groups need specific attention.

6.7 Final reflections

29. *Bottom-up planning:* when building international partnerships (in particular), a bottom-up process using participatory planning methods is critical: from the sub-national and national levels upwards. It seems the only way to create a really jointly owned multi-stakeholder partnership at the international level.

30. *Problems are inherent to any partnership:* working together in multi-stakeholder partnerships is a challenge for which there is no perfect model that will guarantee success. Most lessons will be learnt by doing. Monitoring, analysing and understanding this process is fundamental to build a strong programme while, at the same time, providing learning grounds for the partners.