

Expanding the Role of Partnerships for Innovation in Food and Agriculture in Developing Countries

A Project Description

International Food Policy Research Institute
2033 K St. NW
Washington, DC 20006-1002 USA
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Innovations in food and agriculture in developing countries are an essential means of alleviating poverty and stimulating economic growth and development. Certain types of social, economic and technological innovations can only be achieved by public sector organizations, private firms, or civil society working together. Thus, the objective of this project is to examine how the role of partnerships in food and agriculture can be expanded and sustained to improve the reach, effectiveness, and efficiency of research and innovation for the poor.

Partnerships – public-private, public-private-civil society, and private-civil society – have emerged in recent years between various entities, including international and national agricultural research centers, universities, multinational crops science firms, national and local agroindustrial firms, small and medium enterprises, farmers’ organizations, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The partnerships are often complex, combining research with product development, marketing, and outreach throughout the agrifood chain, and engaging research organizations, private companies and small-scale, and small-scale, resource-poor farmers in developing countries.

There is evidence to suggest that partnerships can generate some extraordinary results. However, despite the evidence and popular rhetoric, the reality is that we do not sufficiently understand the reasons for success and failure, and therefore have not learned how to realize the full potential this partnership approach holds for marginalized groups in developing-country agriculture. Partnerships are constrained by persistent, negative perceptions across sectors; insufficient organizational mechanisms with which to manage risk and liability; high costs, both actual and hidden, associated with building and sustaining partnerships; a lack of political will to incorporate private participation in many public sector activities; and limited institutional capacity in the public sector to engage with private interests.

IFPRI’s research on pro-poor public-private partnerships covers policy and organizational aspects of the food and agricultural sector, including conventional crop breeding, agricultural biotechnology, processing and value addition, and small-scale

agro-industry.* An important element of this agenda is continued analysis of partnerships within the CGIAR, and how the System's public-private interactions (of which there are approximately 50 past or ongoing projects) are improving access to pro-poor innovations for small-scale, resource-poor farmers, food-insecure households, and other marginalized groups in developing countries.

The aim of this project is to develop a framework for analyzing the complex dynamics that determine the efficiency and effectiveness of partnerships in innovation in food and agriculture in developing countries. The purpose of the project is to develop tools and methods of analysis and apply them to an in-depth study of partnerships in the CGIAR. The project will pursue a step-by-step approach by

- Developing state-of-the-art research methods for evaluating and assessing partnerships, including identification of key indicators, survey instruments, and relational mapping tools
- Analyzing the lessons learned from partnerships in other sectors, e.g., health, water, sanitation, and infrastructure, with an emphasis on public policy options, organizational mechanisms, risk management tools, and benefit-sharing arrangements
- Compiling an inventory and analyzing information on CGIAR Center and Program partnerships through reviews of project documents, academic literature, and key informant interviews
- Communicating the information and analysis to stakeholders so as to share experiences and lessons learned from partnerships in food and agriculture.

The framework being pursued here offers a way of understanding the rationale underlying partnerships, necessary conditions for their success, a typology for partnerships, and key elements of their design and implementation. Ultimately, the framework will inform policymakers, research managers, private investors, donors, and other key stakeholders on how to

- mobilize resources for research and development and encourage innovation processes relevant to the poor in developing countries
- utilize innovative approaches to organizing and financing partnerships—including private provision and delivery of public goods—and to managing intellectual property rights, risk, and liability
- identify priority areas in which partnerships can reduce poverty, improve food security, and contribute to agriculture-led development.

The project begins on January 1, 2006 for a period of one year.

* See <http://www.ifpri.org/events/conferences/2005/20050928PPP.htm> for details from IFPRI's international dialogue on "Pro-Poor Public-Private Partnerships for Food and Agriculture" held in Washington, DC on September 28-19, 2005.