

Partnering in International Agricultural Research for Development: Lessons from the ILAC Learning Laboratory Summary

Organizations throughout the world are working in partnership to address complex social, economic and environmental problems. In the field of agricultural research for development (AR4D), the decline in funding for national agricultural research institutes, the growing recognition of the importance of market forces in driving technological change and the emergence of innovation systems approaches have all stimulated the development of partnerships to promote agricultural innovation and reduce poverty.

In the context of AR4D, a partnership can be defined as 'a collaborative relationship with mutually agreed objectives and the exchange or sharing of resources or knowledge for generating research outputs or fostering innovation'. A partnership may operate as a network, alliance, consortium or other similar arrangement that brings together organizations to focus on a specific task or set of tasks. Typically, partnerships involve a diverse set of actors, from researchers, policy-makers and extension and market agents to non-governmental, civil society and farmer organizations.



In September 2009, the Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) Initiative organized a workshop in Nairobi, Kenya to discuss AR4D partnerships. ILAC was established in 2005 to promote organizational learning and institutional change in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) centres and their partner organizations. Central to its strategy is a Learning Laboratory where collaborative AR4D programmes come together to share knowledge and experiences. The participants in the Nairobi workshop included representatives from the Learning Laboratory programmes. Drawing on the workshop discussions, the participants collaborated to produce a paper summarizing their experiences and drawing out common themes and lessons. This Summary presents highlights of the paper¹.



The current learning programmes are:

- African Highlands Initiative (AHI)
- Alianza Cambio Andino (CA)
- Learning in Knowledge Intensive Agricultural Systems (KIA)
- Musa Network for Latin America and the Caribbean (MUSALAC)
- Smallholder Dairy Project (SDP)
- Users' Perspectives with Agricultural Research and Development (UPWARD) network

The paper opens with an overview of partnerships in AR4D, demonstrating considerable diversity not only in the reasons why organizations enter into partnerships, but also in the dimensions and types of partnerships. It then focuses on the Learning Laboratory programmes' experiences with partnering, and discusses partnership objectives and modes of farmer engagement, the geographic scope and duration of partnerships, types of partners involved and their role in the

partnerships, and the role played by the CGIAR centres in the partnerships.

All the Learning Laboratory programmes aim to reduce poverty and engage resource-poor actors (e.g., farmers and informal traders) in the R4D process. They use different entry points and modes of farmer engagement to achieve these goals (see the table). These factors relate to both patterns of partnership establishment and management and to the environment in which the partnership operates.

	Main objective	Poverty focus	Farmer engagement
AHI	Market- / value-chain development	Improving rural livelihoods of communities in the humid highlands of eastern Africa	Farmers are involved in all stages, from problem diagnosis, priority setting and planning to implementation, monitoring and evaluation
CA	Research	Implementing participatory methodologies and approaches that favour local development and improved livelihoods of the Andean poor, to build evidence and influence public policies and innovation systems	Farmers and rural organizations actively apply the participatory methodologies for research, monitoring and evaluation, empowerment and market articulation
MUSALAC	Research	Improving the targeting of and access to banana and plantain production and processing technology, including germplasm, for smallholder farmers in Latin American and Caribbean countries	Links between researchers and farmers are strengthened by involving the farmers in validating production technologies and increasing their capacity for value addition
KIA	Policy dialogue	Exploring how learning occurs in knowledge-intensive (compared with input-intensive) agricultural systems, with specific emphasis on enhancing sustainable alternatives for small and marginal farmers in India	Farmers participate actively in testing ecological farming methods and innovations as part of work on reconfiguring research systems for better uptake
SDP	Market- /value-chain development	Changing policies that affect the marketing of milk by Kenya's small-scale operators (farmers and traders) in ways that improve their livelihoods	Small-scale informal operators provide or use information to develop acceptable trade practices and influence policy
UPWARD	Sustainable livelihoods and market-chain development	Enabling farming households in the Philippines engaged in sweet potato cultivation to overcome socio-technical constraints to improving their livelihoods	Farmers are engaged through the use of participatory research and development approaches, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal, Farmer Field Schools and participatory monitoring and evaluation.

From these discussions emerged a set of factors that the workshop participants considered fundamental to the success of partnerships. The set was divided into two groups:

● Success factors related to partnership establishment and management

- Leadership
- Vision, goals and agenda
- Partner commitment
- Process facilitation
- Roles and responsibilities
- Communication, knowledge sharing and joint learning
- Individual and collective benefits
- Change management

○ Success factors related to the environment in which a partnership operates

- Partner organizations' culture, policies and procedures
- External socio-economic and political environment



The workshop also identified three priority areas for more effective partnering. The first is to review organizational policies and management practices that support partnering; (2) capacity development for partnership management; and (3) the evaluation of partnership processes and results. Attention to these areas within the CGIAR and throughout the AR4D community will help to strengthen the role of partnerships in achieving development goals.