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Partnerships to Achieve Impact

Five Principles

BRUCE M. CAMPBELL, LOUISE POSTEMA, ISHMAEL SUNGA, AND ROBERT B. ZOUGMORÉ

Highlights

- Partnerships are crucial for outcome-focused research.
- The selection of diverse strategic partners is key and should be guided by theories of change.
- Complementary visions are important but do not always need to be tightly structured.
- Multi-level partnerships help promote action at different levels.
- Collaborative arrangements are important but can be informal and flexible.
- Many successful longer-term partnerships are deep and trustful at their core, often with informal relationships.

16.1 Partnerships Are Crucial for Outcome-Focused Research

Partnerships are crucial for fostering change in society, particularly in the solving of complex problems such as climate change. They are particularly important for researchers interested in societal change, given that research in the strictest sense is only about knowledge generation. While this is one element for driving societal change, we also require knowledge dissemination, the mobilisation of public opinion, the change of narratives, the implementation of solutions, and the scaling of solutions, processes, and finance. Previous chapters have given examples of partnerships that are tackling diverse challenges such as food loss and waste, dietary change, the improvement of agricultural markets, and the expansion of digital advisories.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular SDG 17, show the importance of partnerships, for example, calling for ‘effective public, public–private, and civil society partnerships’. Leda Stott and colleagues suggest that the SDG 17 text leaves one with a rather empty understanding of partnerships, failing to convey the vibrant, multi-level, multi-actor, strategic, interpersonal character-

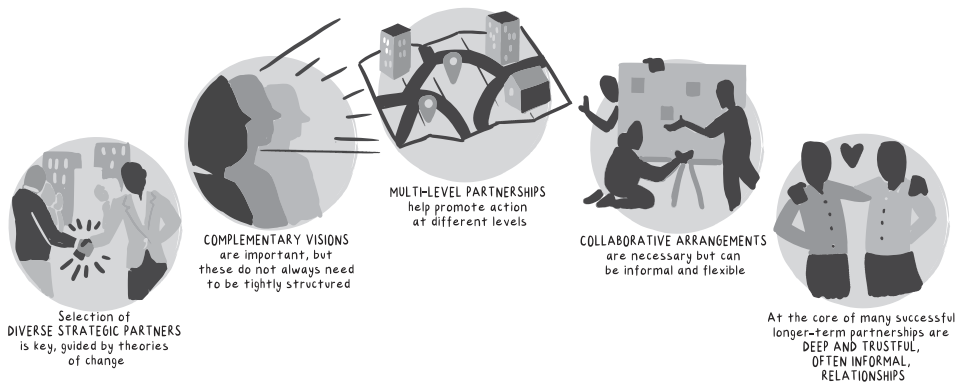


Figure 16.1 Five key principles for research partnerships to achieve societal outcomes

istics needed in partnerships (Stott & Murphy, 2020; Stott & Scoppetta, 2020). Collaboration among stakeholders with different functions, skills, and perspectives generates an atmosphere that allows for sharing, exchange, and creative problem-solving, though power differences can be problematic.

This chapter aims to bring partnerships alive. These partnerships can focus on implementing specific time-bound activities at the local level, or on influencing and realising transformations through longer-term strategic partnerships. In the following sections we focus on five key principles for research partnerships to achieve societal outcomes. These are drawn from the experience of implementing the CGIAR research program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), and cover the following points (Figure 16.1):

1. Strategic selection of diverse partners
2. Complementary visions
3. Multi-level partnerships
4. Collaborative arrangements
5. Deep and trustful relationships

Selection is obviously a key step, but the other theme running through all the above-mentioned features is the tendency towards informality rather than a formalised partnership approach, and we underline that trust – and deeply interpersonal relationships – is in many cases the key to success. Several case studies are used to illustrate the principles (Table 16.1).

16.2 Principle 1: The Selection of Diverse Strategic Partners Is Key

Outcome-focused research – as was the objective in CCAFS – needs theories of change (ToCs) (Chapter 16). Preliminary ToCs were the starting points for

Table 16.1. *Examples of partnership reasons drawn from different partner types, plus lessons learnt*

Partners	Examples of partnership results	CCAFS ¹ reason for partnership	Partners' reasons for partnership	Lessons learnt
ANACIM, ² URACS, ³ MoA ⁴	7 million rural persons received climate-informed advisories.	MoA and ANACIM ensured in-country capacity and sustainability. URACS enabled wide reach.	ANACIM and MoA benefited from scientific and technical capacity building; URACS gained capacity to deliver probabilistic weather forecasts.	Strategic selection of partners is crucial; commitment to the long term helps ensure change.
University of Leeds	CGIAR scientists made a major contribution to IPCC ⁵ reports; many high-impact journal articles were published.	The university was a source of cutting-edge science.	CCAFS helped ground Leeds' work in local realities and provided opportunities for students in developing countries.	Strategic partnership selection helps cover diverse roles, from knowledge generation and policy advocacy to on-the-ground implementation.
CARE	The partnership shaped CCAFS global gender messaging and delivered impacts on the ground in Tanzania and Vietnam.	CARE gave CCAFS global credibility related to social outcomes and helped CCAFS reach farmers on the ground.	As a knowledge partner, CCAFS provided science-based evidence and enabled CARE to reach new audiences.	Multi-level partners deliver actions at different levels, e.g., among farmers and in terms of global policy processes.
World Bank	US\$250 million was invested in climate-smart agriculture in Kenya; multiple joint submissions were made to the UNFCCC COP. ⁶	World Bank was a key partner on the impact pathway through its investments in climate change action in different countries.	CCAFS offered a source of cutting-edge knowledge relevant to the Bank's operations.	Multi-level partners deliver actions at different levels, e.g., national investments and global policy processes; collaborative arrangements can be relatively informal.

Table 16.1. (*cont.*)

Partners	Examples of partnership results	CCAFS ¹ reason for partnership	Partners' reasons for partnership	Lessons learnt
Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU)	The concept of climate-smart agriculture was taken up by farmer organisations; SACAU's capacity for climate programming and advocacy was enhanced.	SACAU helped CCAFS understand farmers' needs, shaped possible solutions to climate challenges, and built the legitimacy of CCAFS.	CCAFS was a source of knowledge about climate change relevant to farmers and of content development for programming and advocacy.	Deep and trustful relationships help maintain effective partnerships.

¹ CGIAR research program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS).

² Senegal National Meteorological Agency (ANACIM).

³ Union of Rural Community Radios of Senegal (URACS).

⁴ Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).

⁵ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

⁶ UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP).

Box 16.1

Partnering with the Senegal National Meteorological Agency (ANACIM), the Union of Rural Community Radios of Senegal (URACS), and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) (Chiputwa et al., 2020)

To deliver climate-informed agricultural advisories to as many households in rural Senegal as possible, a partnership was fostered with ANACIM, URACS, and the MoA. This partnership also involved local farmers groups, local extension workers, the International Institute for Climate and Society, and even the regional research organisation (CORAF), so that successful models of such work would be applied in other jurisdictions.

As the agency responsible for delivering weather forecasts in Senegal, ANACIM was a key partner. The International Institute for Climate and Society brought in some of the latest technologies to improve forecasting and helped build ANACIM's capacity to deliver such forecasts. The MoA was crucial given its role in the national extension service. URACS was key to reaching households in Senegal through its 82 community radio stations.

CCAFS and its partners helped build the capacity of the radio broadcasters to deliver probabilistic radio messages; on the ground, messages were translated to farmers by multi-disciplinary working groups, involving local civil society organisations, for example women's groups, extension workers, etc.

This multi-level, multi-actor partnership resulted in roughly 7 million people in Senegal receiving climate-informed agricultural advisories. Impact studies showed significant changes in farm management by users, for example, a 23 percent increase in the use of rainfall onset forecasts to inform the timing of planting.

selecting partners by identifying the stakeholders that can bridge existing gaps towards realising the identified goals. In Senegal, for instance, the ToC focused on reaching millions of households with climate-informed agricultural advisories. To cover the whole country, the ministry of agriculture, the association of community radio stations, and the national meteorological agency were selected as key partners to make that happen (Box 16.1).

The ToCs included generating new knowledge, scaling up, enhancing capacity, bringing in new resources, and advocacy aspects, etc. All these roles had to be covered through the partner selection process. Later, the ToCs would be modified as partnerships emerged and as partners introduced new perspectives. To cover the multiple roles needed, diverse partnerships emerged, for instance, with policy think-tanks, civil society organisations, multilateral and bilateral development agencies, government agencies, financial institutions, philanthropic organisations,

Box 16.2

Partnership Selection in the CCAFS Global Policy Team

At the global level, the one objective of the CCAFS ToC was to contribute to a changed global narrative where agriculture would be seen as key means to solve the climate crisis. This narrative would shape global policy debates on food and agriculture, and ensure that resources flowed to tackle the crisis. To realise this ambition, CCAFS needed influence in multiple areas of the food system: in discussions among farming organisations, private-sector players, major development agencies, and the major funders of development and climate action, as well as in processes under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

To build credibility and consensus in all these areas, partnerships with a diverse set of actors were needed. Thus, CCAFS set about identifying one to three key strategic partners to have from each group of actors: the private sector, multilateral financial institutions, farmers' organisations, multilateral development agencies, bilateral development agencies, and non-governmental agencies. This was done in internal workshops with core CCAFS staff of 5–20 persons on different occasions. During the workshops, several possible partners for each category of actors were identified and then each possible partner was analysed for their capabilities in relation to our needs.

private-sector umbrella organisations, private-sector partners, and farmer organisations. Some partnerships were in essence based on single individuals in partner organisations, while others had multiple connection points within partner organisations. Some were structured through detailed work plans and accompanied by funding, while others were unstructured and relied on informal relationships. The reasons for partnerships were as diverse as the partners (Table 16.1).

There is literature on partner selection, particularly from the business community, that documents the aspects requiring consideration, including an extensive due diligence process. The CCAFS process was more informal and relied on the knowledge, experience, and intuition of the core staff (Box 16.2). Thus, the process was relatively quick and consumed few resources, though experienced and open-minded staff members were crucial. In a few cases, the due diligence process was insufficient and partners had to be dropped; these cases, however, rarely involved funded partnerships. For example, one multi-level strategic partner had complex distributed power structures, which came with high transaction costs to making relationships at different levels.

Partner selection was not a static one-time process. Some partnerships were ineffective and decisions were taken to drop partners and seek others; in other cases, new opportunities arose and new partnerships developed. However, having too many, poorly serviced, non-strategic partnerships should be avoided.

To bring about the needed transformations, strategic and diverse partnerships based upon identified ToC needs and goals are required. The process of selecting the right partners is iterative, ongoing, and often dominated by experience.

16.3 Principle 2: Complementary Visions Are Important, but Do Not Always Need to Be Tightly Structured

The importance of complementarity is widely recognised in partnerships (Mousavi & Bossink, 2020). Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) suggest that jointly setting high ambitions and precise targets is conducive to successful multi-stakeholder partnerships. In time-bound projects, activities, and campaigns, CCAFS and its implementation partners would agree on specific deliverables and goals, for example, reaching at least 100 000 farmers in Rwanda with climate-informed advisories, and campaigns to introduce the concept of climate-smart agriculture into the global development community narrative. However, for longer-term strategic partnerships, this was often different. Specific longer-term goals and targets were not spelt out, or spelt out in very generic terms. In these cases, our overall ambitions often aligned. For example, CCAFS had the aim of building the resilience of millions of small-scale agricultural producers, which aligned with similar objectives of other partners such as the Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) and the World Bank. Longer-term partnerships were often built on mutual trust rather than formal agreements, a theme we will revisit in Principle 5.

16.4 Principle 3: Multi-Level Partnerships Help Promote Action at Different Levels

Transformative climate actions that impact farmers and farming systems need enabling conditions and resources. To deliver such impacts, action is needed at multiple levels (Chapter 18). Through multi-level partnerships, these actions can be connected and supported. Currently, literature on multi-level partnerships is scarce, though most present in forestry management where higher-level forest governance is seen as crucial for success in managing local forests (Ros-Tonen et al., 2007).

It is possible to work with different partners at different levels, for example, with producer groups at the local level and national agencies to facilitate national strategies, but multi-level partnerships can be particularly successful. In strategic partnerships with CARE and the World Bank, we both worked to inform and influence global processes, for example through joint products and events, and to deliver national or local actions (Table 16.1 and Box 16.3).

Box 16.3

A Multi-Level Partnership with the World Bank

The CGIAR research program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) decided early on that the World Bank should be a strategic partner, given its huge investment portfolio in low- and middle-income countries. In the first year of the partnership, together with the World Bank, CCAFS put on the first ‘Agriculture Day’ at a UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP), at COP 15 in Copenhagen. This brought together 450 persons to debate the role of agriculture in climate change, as part of the problem but also part of the solution. The joint work on Agriculture Day continued until 2015. This was followed by many joint submissions by CCAFS and the World Bank to the agricultural negotiations at UNFCCC COPs.

In the mid-2000s, two CCAFS staff were seconded into the World Bank. Their work in the Bank helped inform CCAFS scientists about the Bank’s knowledge needs to drive action on the ground. The World Bank and CCAFS jointly prepared a web-based guide to facilitate the implementation of climate-smart agriculture.

The global work led to many country-focused opportunities:

- Climate-smart agriculture profiles were prepared for dozens of countries to help shape investments.
- CCAFS evidence from Niger’s climate-smart villages was used to inform the World Bank’s multi-million-dollar investment in Niger.
- Similarly, risk profiles conducted in multiple counties in Kenya helped inform the multi-million Kenyan Climate-Smart Agriculture project.

16.5 Principle 4: Collaborative Arrangements Are Important but Can Be Informal and Flexible

Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) and other analysts suggest there is a clear correlation between the effectiveness of a partnership and its process management. They note that inadequate resources, time, and thinking are spent on the managerial aspects of a partnership. Suggested governance structures and collaborative arrangements that may promote effectiveness include small governing boards, common strategic plans, a clear division of roles and responsibilities, and multi-level forums to coordinate funding and resources.

In general, the approach adopted by CCAFS, particularly with longer-term strategic partnerships, was much simpler and less structured. In most of these cases, a single CCAFS person was identified as a partnership relationship manager with a particular partner, their task being to foster a successful partnership. It was

Box 16.4

Success Factors for the Partnership between CCAFS and Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU)

Several factors were behind the mutually reinforcing, rewarding, decade-long CCAFS–SACAU partnership. These include:

- The vision's alignment and ambition informed and capacitated farmers on climate-change issues, as well as recognising the importance of farmer-centric climate change policy advocacy.
- The partnership highlighted SACAU's respect for knowledge-based advocacy, programming and service provision to farmers.
- Both partners complemented each other: SACAU needed CCAFS's technical capabilities while CCAFS needed SACAU's outreach platforms to disseminate work to support farmers and policymakers.
- Both partners mutually respected the other for the equal value each brought to the arrangement.
- There was an environment of openness and transparency, with no hidden agendas, suspicion, nor imposition, and a deep mutual trust built over the years.
- SACAU appreciated that the science was always in the background and never at the centre or forefront of the partnership.

A further factor related to the modus operandi of the partnership, which came with very low transaction costs. Arrangements were flexible, with limited structured programming, and with joint activities based on specific needs. No financial commitments were involved and each party financed its own costs. This also led to limited power dynamics.

up to those individuals and the partners to find the best collaborative arrangements. In some cases, this was based on Memoranda of Understanding and legal contracts, but in many cases, on more informal mechanisms. For example, with the global partnerships with the World Bank (Table 16.1; Box 16.3) this was mostly based on a single yearly in-person meeting between CCAFS and World Bank staff, where some key deliverables and activities were selected for that particular year. The relationship with SACAU was even more informal, and yet extremely rewarding (Box 16.4).

As Macdonald et al. (2019) note, a considerable amount of energy needs to go into partnership-fostering, and while initially there may be great enthusiasm this can wane over time, requiring extra effort to maintain momentum. We at CCFAS have found that trust and friendship help nurture partnerships over a longer period (see Principle 5). Where partnerships with relatively unfamiliar stakeholders are

established, extra effort – as well as conflict resolution arrangements – may be more important. In general, flexible, agile, and opportunistic arrangements allow partnerships to best respond to changing circumstances, the needs of different stakeholders, and opportunities.

16.6 Principle 5: Deep and Trustful Relationships, Often Informal, Are at the Core of Success

Atouba and Shumate (2020), in their analysis of hundreds of partnerships, showed that trust and communicative effectiveness were related to satisfaction with partnership outcomes. In much earlier writing (Campbell et al., 2006), we wrote that ‘... partners feel motivated to collaborate with each other due to mutual trust, respect for differences, transparency and openness’; ‘... face-to-face activities should be sufficiently frequent to enable more in-depth communication and strengthen relationships’; and ‘Activities together would go beyond exchange of information and seek to generate creativity and enthusiasm for problem solving.’ The CCAFS experience has supported those earlier writings, with the most effective and impactful partnerships resulting from very strong individual relationships and friendships. Stott and Murphy (2020) contend that much greater consideration needs to be given to personal connections in organisational relationships.

Building trusted partnerships was helped by allocating a relationship manager to a particular partner, and by the approach towards partners, including to be inclusive on authorship, logos, and activities; to be attentive to partnership needs rather than pushing the ‘CCAFS agenda’; to be behind the scenes rather than steal the limelight; to be attentive to power differentials and help empower weaker partners; to be transparent, particularly around resources, and to meet partners outside office hours, when diverse interests could be pursued and relationships strengthened. A more formal mechanism used was to second CCAFS staff into other agencies (e.g., Box 16.3). Another mechanism was to initiate a CCAFS student-training programme on low-emissions development. The students helped foster the links between CCAFS and their home agencies.

With a limited set of high intensity strategic partners, there is the possibility of developing deeper and more trusting relationships. This makes selection of that limited set of partners – Principle 1 – a key success factor. One challenge for personalised partnerships is that when there is a high turnover in staff, there are resultant ‘costs’ of starting over to develop the necessary relationships.

16.7 Way Forward

CCAFS partnerships, particularly the longer-term, more strategic ones, tended to be quite informal rather than relying on highly structured arrangements. This goes against what is commonly found in the literature. For example, Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) write that the effectiveness of a partnerships depends on a high level of precision in rules and norms, meaning that there is only limited room for interpretation. They state that lower degrees of precision open the space for discretion and interpretation, or even render the rules so vague and broad that they impede compliance, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation, consequently limiting accountability and transparency. Their writings do apply to projects, often short-term, where one partner is funding the other. For longer-term, more strategic partnerships, however, we found that such precision was unnecessary. We also had rather informal mechanisms for selecting partners, relying on experienced staff to make judgements about which partners to pursue. Formalisation takes time that could otherwise be well spent on delivering outputs and outcomes. The core team of CCAFS and many of its partners contained experienced individuals with a ‘good feel’ for what would work. In addition, personalised partnerships meant that formality and structure were often not needed; rules to maintain accountability were replaced by relationships that fostered accountability.

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