



*Nourishing the Future
through Scientific
Excellence*

CSO-CGIAR Partnership Study

In 1995 the Centers supported by the CGIAR recognized linkages with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as imperative to a fully effective CGIAR system. A decade later, a survey of CGIAR Center collaboration found that although 17% of Centers' collaborators are CSOs, Centers rarely consider them "highly relevant". To shed light on the paradox revealed in the 2005 survey, a recent CSO-CGIAR Partnership Study looked at six partnership projects between CSOs and Centers. This brief presents key insights and lessons learned from the analysis as well as CSO perspectives on these findings.

Key insights about Center partnerships with CSOs

Stronger partnerships have a history — The partnerships that function most effectively have a "shared history" that facilitates success through pre-existing trust, known working modalities and, in some cases, localized or specialized knowledge.

Partnerships are built on resources — Successful partnerships tend to be well resourced and allocate resources toward strengthening the partnership itself in addition to meeting project objectives.

Effective partnerships are "articulate" — Articulate partnerships have both an internal and external ability to communicate clearly, resulting in a common and clear understanding of goals, roles, and ways of working together.

From outreach to a learning loop — Considerable resources are invested in outreach to CSOs. However, relatively few resources are directed towards completing the partnership loop by sharing lessons, research and best practices in both directions.

Partnerships face divergent policy agendas — Multiple policy agendas can place additional strain on partnerships as they try to meet multiple demands. For example, inherently local partnerships are increasingly asked to demonstrate impact in terms of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Partnerships with CSOs often produce International Public Goods (IPGs) — Successful partnerships often result in unforeseen outcomes that have relevance beyond the local context, such as new ways to organize agricultural research for development and insights into institutional innovation.

Lessons for successful partnerships

Invest in the 'partnership platform' itself — Thought, time and resources are needed to develop the partnership platform itself. Support is needed to foster communication, build reciprocal relationships and establish trust.

Develop long-term learning relationships — Partners should be encouraged to reflect and capitalize on the lessons garnered from their experiences. Consideration should be given to how to encourage effective institutional learning and internalization of best practices.

Think systemically — Partnerships should be systemic about how knowledge flows, how responsibility is assigned and how activities are pursued. This approach facilitates effectively relating the partnerships to broader contexts, beyond the partnership or project itself.

Develop institutional 'partnership' strategies — The approach to partnership development needs to be reconsidered. Many partnerships are *ad hoc*, developed by chance or reactively rather than proactively. Deeper consideration should be given to the role and relationship of partnerships within individual Centers' institutional strategies, in order to develop better, longer-term and more appropriate partnerships.

Rethink partnership funding — Evidence shows that partnerships function best and have the biggest impact when they are long-term, and not just based on one project. Resources, human and financial, are needed to build and sustain partnerships. Consideration should thus be given to the development of funding mechanisms that acknowledge and fund these additional costs.

One approach would be to have "core" funding for partnership building and "non-core" for output delivery. Evidence suggests that provision of the

'core funding' necessary to support and develop partnership platforms themselves will in itself produce positive impacts such as institutional learning, an adaptive long-term network of partners, capacity building, organizational innovation and perhaps IPGs.

CSO and CGIAR Center staff perspectives on the CSO-CGIAR Partnership Study

The findings of the study were discussed by CGIAR Center staff and CSO partners through an online dialogue open for two weeks in November 2007. Key points raised in the discussion included:

- Communication and methodological problems with current partnerships may be the root of the perception that CGIAR Centers own the partnership process, and should be reconsidered.
- Good methodologies for monitoring and evaluation, process documentation and capturing and sharing knowledge should be built into partnerships, in order to enable joint learning processes.
- The process of engagement is important for achieving innovations. Partnerships should contribute to the research-development process, not just delivery.
- Under the current CSO funding model, building local capacity is difficult and doing world class development work is almost impossible.
- Beyond time and resources, another key constraint is "know-how," ideas and approaches.
- The tools, approaches, formats, and mechanisms used by "articulate" partnerships should be shared.
- There is no single recipe for successful partnerships, and time is needed to develop sustainable partnerships that produce sustainable results.

Further Information

Visit the Science Council website for the complete study and updates on next steps: <http://www.sciencecouncil.cgiar.org/>

