

Constraints and opportunities for sustainable partnership between Universities, small-holder farming communities and development agencies: The case of the WATERCAP Project in Uganda

“If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far, go with others.”

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Abstract

Efforts were undertaken through the auspices of a collaborative project “Strengthening Universities Capacities for Mitigating Climate Induced Change Water Vulnerability – WATERCAP” to address a key challenge of water scarcity in dryland areas of Uganda. A multidisciplinary team engaged since 2009 has through implementation of this project observed the constraints and opportunities that impede and or enhance functional partnership in an inter and multi-disciplinary projects aimed at enhancing agricultural and community development. Nonetheless, functional partnerships create networks and sustainable innovation platforms that open opportunities for joint research and learning, community involvement and dissemination of new technologies, knowledge and innovation to the end-users. Sustainable partnerships also provide space for mentorship opportunities and bring together different partners with unique mandates and values to address real life problems. However, seemingly functional partnerships can also be constrained by failure to appreciate mandates and value alignment of different partners and failure to pursue a common goal among the actors. Partnerships are further constrained by poor communication and reporting skills of project outcomes as well as inequity in the sharing of project resources and ownership of project outcomes. Understanding the constraints and opportunities of partnerships between universities and development agencies enabled the WATERCAP project to find appropriate entry points to support the innovation platforms for enhancing the resilience of smallholder farmers to climate change induced water vulnerability.

Key words: Development agencies, innovations, partnerships, universities

Résumé

Des efforts ont été entrepris sous les auspices d’un projet de collaboration dénommé «Renforcement des Capacités des Universités Concernant l’Atténuation du changement de Climat induit à la Vulnérabilité de l’Eau – WATERCAP» pour répondre à un défi majeur de la rareté de l’eau dans les zones arides de l’Ouganda. Une équipe multidisciplinaire engagée depuis 2009 a travers la mise en œuvre de ce projet a observé les contraintes et les opportunités

qui entravent ou améliorent et le fonctionnement de partenariat dans un projet inter et multidisciplinaires visant à renforcer le développement agricole et communautaire. Néanmoins, des partenariats fonctionnels créent des réseaux et des plates-formes d'innovation durable qui ouvrent des possibilités de recherche conjointe et l'apprentissage, la participation de la communauté et la diffusion de nouvelles technologies, de connaissances et d'innovation pour les utilisateurs finaux. Les partenariats durables offrent également un espace pour des possibilités de mentorat et de réunir les différents partenaires avec des mandats et des valeurs uniques pour répondre aux vrais problèmes de la vie. Toutefois, il semble que les partenariats fonctionnels peuvent également être contraints par la méconnaissance des mandats et la valeur d'alignement des différents partenaires, et l'échec de poursuivre un but commun entre les acteurs. Les partenariats sont en outre limités par le manque de communication et de rédaction de rapports de résultats du projet, ainsi que l'inégalité dans le partage des ressources du projet et l'appropriation des résultats du projet. La compréhension des contraintes et les possibilités de partenariats entre les universités et les organismes de développement a permis au projet WATERCAP de trouver des points d'entrée appropriés pour soutenir les plates-formes d'innovation pour renforcer la résilience des petits agriculteurs aux changements climatiques induits à la vulnérabilité de l'eau.

Mots clés: agences de développement, les innovations, les partenariats, les universités

Background

Universities are undoubtedly hubs of scientific knowledge and technologies and therefore challenged to be more visible in influencing transformation of society. Knowledge and technologies are key ingredients of innovations for addressing poverty and enhancing food security among especially the smallholder farmers (Atchoarena and Holmes, 2004), however, such knowledge hardly gets out of the university system in a manner that can be accessed and used by the intended beneficiaries. Whereas universities are criticized for failure to influence societal change, by their very nature and functions, they may be unable to effectively fulfill that expectation unless they establish functional partnerships with the local development agencies. It is in this spirit that Makerere University, Egerton University, the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) and the University of Natural Resources and Life Science (BOKU) sought to enhance university engagement with development agencies and rural communities in implementation of a project entitled; "Strengthening Universities Capacities for Mitigating Climate Induced Change Water Vulnerability (WATERCAP)". The project is funded by the Austrian development Cooperation (APPEAR) to jointly develop strategies and practices for mitigation of climate change induced water stresses especially in smallholder farming. Enhancing engagement between universities and development agencies required first that the universities understand the internal and external factors affecting such partnerships.

A study was conducted by Makerere University in Uganda to explore the issues that affect its effective partnerships with development agencies, mainly the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) with a view of finding appropriate entry points towards strengthening the partnerships for improving the utilization of the knowledge and technologies that reside

in the university. Specifically, the intention of the study was to; (i) identify internal and external constraints that impede the effectiveness of partnership between the university and agricultural development agencies, and (ii) identify opportunities for strengthening the partnerships between university and the agricultural development agencies. The lessons derived from this study would inform strategies for partnerships for achieving the WATERCAP project of increased innovation capacity through partnerships for outreach, research and training. In particular, the WATERCAP project aimed at enhancing the capacity of smallholder farmers in Uganda and Kenya to mitigate and cope with climate change induced water vulnerability and uncertainty through innovation platforms.

Literature summary

Climate change induced water vulnerability, uncertainties and stress jeopardizes the performance of the agricultural sector and more so in Africa where agriculture is rainfall dependent. Climate change is the new security threat for Africa as increasingly scarce water; collapsing agricultural yields and encroaching desert are projected (Brown *et al.*, 2007). While equatorial precipitation increases, dryspells and droughts become more frequent on marginal lands and in ecologically disadvantaged regions (Thornton *et al.*, 2006). Therefore universities that house the “cream of knowledge” have a social responsibility of leading the search for solutions to such challenging developmental (Ahmad, 2012). Universities by their own structure and function cannot be continuously engaged with community and what is essential is for them to develop functional partnerships with the development agents to channel their knowledge and technologies to the community. One way of engaging universities in development processes is through innovation platforms (IPs). Innovation platform is multi-stakeholder arrangement aimed at operationalizing Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) thinking with reference to specific interest. The promise of AIS is based on the interactions between a wide range of actors including farmers, extension workers, service providers, processors, policy makers to jointly reconfigure technologies, institutional arrangements, markets and policies to work more effectively with the aim of increasing economic and social benefits to the actors (Leeuwis, 2004; Hall, 2006; Röling, 2009; Kilelu *et al.*, 2013). Through IPs therefore, community members will be more likely to support and participate in systems in which their local voices are heard (Blackburn *et al.*, 2002).

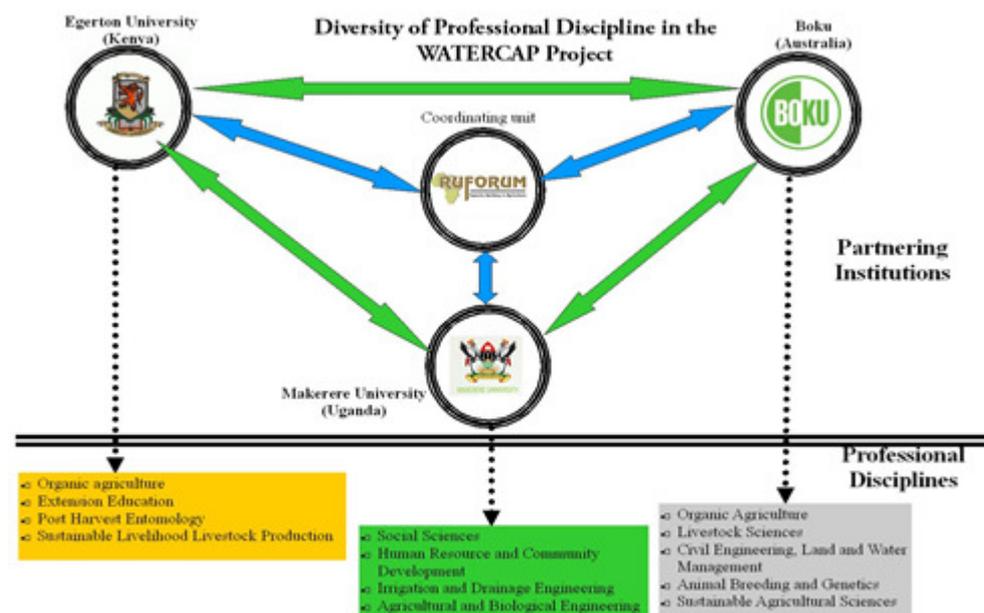
Study description

This study was conducted by Makerere University in conjunction with a network of civil societies and non-governmental organization through Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) to assess internal and external constraints and opportunities for effective partnerships between universities and Non-Government agencies working agricultural development. Within the university, the study involved 50 academic staff and 21 graduate students from the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES). The respondents were from different departments including; agricultural production, extension and innovation studies, forestry, biodiversity and tourism, agribusiness and natural resource economics and agricultural and bio system engineering. For the development agencies, 70 respondents representing local, international and faith based non-governmental organization

with focus on agriculture, environment, development and livelihood improvement, community service and gender, health and food security were sampled with the assistance of PELUM. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were used to gather data. On one hand, qualitative data was collected through key informant interviews with specific persons from Makerere and PELUM using a check list. On the other hand, quantitative data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. Simple descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data and narratives from the key informant interviews provided additional information for interpretation.

Research application

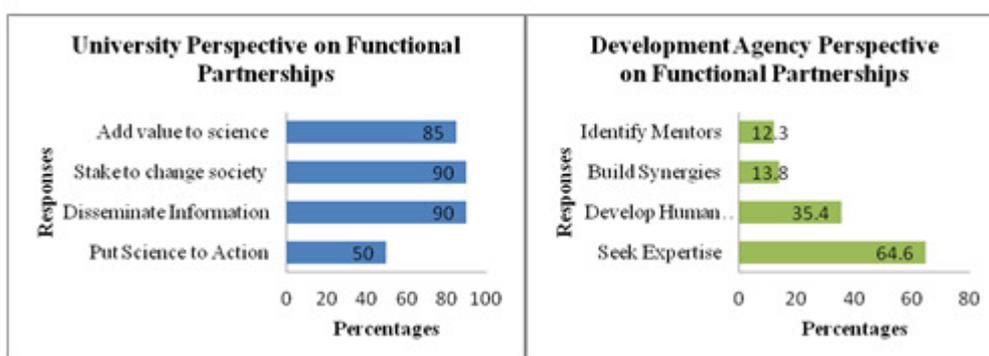
In a multi-partner initiative such as the WATERCAP, there is space to execute multi-disciplinary and trans disciplinary scientific research. Development in itself is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and often takes place in multi-cultural setting addressing multi-faceted problems. Functional partnerships provide the mechanisms for harnessing multi-disciplinarily to develop feasible solutions for addressing complex problems such as climate change. The figure below illustrates the multi-institutional arrangement for implementation of the WATERCAP project.



The Figure below shows the opportunities of functional partnerships between universities and development agencies. Partnerships with other universities and development agencies provide new avenues for lesson learning to better address the development challenges. In this arrangement, universities need to be sensitive to farmer problems and those of other partners. Partnering with farming communities and development agencies is therefore a pre-requisite for translating science into actions that influence change in society as emphasized

both universities and development agencies. Within the partnerships, universities also create space to disseminate new technologies, knowledge and innovation to the end-users.

Functional partnership among universities and development agencies create effective mentorship. Functional partnership among universities and development agencies create effective mentorship opportunities for young professionals. Though universities and development agencies have different mandates and values, within this diversity there lie great opportunities for building synergies and complementarities to reinforce achievement of each other’s mandates and goals. Through these arrangements, professionals trained by the universities would be able to combine theory with real life problem-solving experiences. In the view of the development agencies, functional partnerships would enhance the quality of human resources trained which the universities alone cannot produce with regard to practical experiences. Though this is true, many factors come to constrain good partnerships as indicated in the Table below.



Constraining factor	University (% respondents) n=70	Development Agencies (% respondents) n=70
Differences in mandates between universities and development agencies	70.5	80.3
Value misalignment between Universities and Development Agencies	74.6	73.3
Work with Universities does not translate into community impact	94.4	75.1
Poor sharing of resources and stipulation of partner roles	54.9	47.9

Differences in mandate and value alignment are some of the key constraints to partnerships between universities and development agencies. The universities are more output oriented focusing on graduates, knowledge created and research publications while the development agencies are more pre-occupied with results – i.e impact/development change. Whereas this is seemingly complementary in a sense that the development agencies would better achieve results using the outputs of the university, the challenge is in the priorities for

investment in terms of time and resources hence different forms of accountability. Under such circumstances, the universities are unlikely to stick together with the development agencies till the ultimate goal of development impact as they may lose motivation after their outputs are achieved and further engagement may not contribute to their performance assessment. The partnerships are further constrained by poor communication and reporting skills of project outcomes by partners. Lack of proper reporting strategies and responsibility to communicate is a lethal killer for seemingly good partnerships. Development agencies accused universities of poor communication and other people skills that impede the success and sustainability of development projects. Poor resource allocation and mobilization strategies though last constrains functional partnerships especially if there inequality in the sharing of resources and resource mobilization potential.

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