Advancing a Partnership Model of Extension to Support the Kenya National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Program (NALEP) in Rural Livelihood Improvement

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Abstract

This paper explores the notion of “partnership building” from the standpoint of the management expertise needed by the National Agriculture and Livestock Program (NALEP) in Kenya for addressing challenges facing contemporary rural extension policy analysis and execution. The sharing of knowledge across organizational boundaries, which promotes the formation of trusted relationships and builds social capital that sustains collaboration, enhances the emergence of collaborative partnerships. The partnerships are a vehicle for accelerating organizational learning and for coordinating communities of practice – scientists, extension educators, and farmers. The recognition of the wide diversity in agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions under which many farmers operate has led to the general realization that research and extension agencies do not have the capacity to tailor technologies to the level required by farmers. As extension services have become increasingly ineffective and non-functional, the gap in effective dissemination of knowledge and improved technologies has been largely filled by a variety of NGOs and in some cases by community-based organizations. In turn, this suggests that conventional institutional structures, such as those normally associated with a national extension system, are probably ill prepared on their own to play the necessary transformational role needed to improve the impact of extension. This is especially so in the complex field of sustainable rural livelihoods policy. There is an urgent need for NALEP to embrace new partnerships and ways of working that utilize results-oriented management to bridge rational knowledge and local knowledge as a tool to foster and support farmer innovation as the basis for robust solutions to developing strategies for rural livelihood improvement.
Introduction

This paper deals with partnership building for public extension policy making in Kenya. It has been written partially as a reflection of experiences recently gained in a collaborative capacity building project in Kenya by ICRAF but it may also be seen as a contribution to how to deal with two crises – the apparent failure of the national extension system to contribute meaningfully to sustainable economic development in the country and the difficult financial state many of its component institutions are apparently in. The National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP) is a policy framework that assists in the implementation of the National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP). The policy has been prepared to bring on board both public and private sector providers of extension service. This is in an attempt to find a different path of adequately resolving the complex, systemic issues that face rural communities today. This shift is agitated by an increasing recognition of the socio-economic and agro-ecological conditions of resource poor farmers as being complex, diverse and risk-prone (Farrington, 1998) and the general realization that research and extension agencies do not have the capacity to generate a mix of technologies to the level required by farmers (Thrupp & Altieri, 2001). Moreover, the diversity and complexity of rural livelihoods means that efforts to alleviate poverty in rural areas will have to be multi-faceted and holistic (Carney, 1998). Rural livelihood is defined as ‘the process by which households construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities for survival in order to improve their standard of living’ (Ellis, 1998).

The purpose of this paper is to suggest ways and means of addressing the challenges that the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Program (NALEP) face in forging partnerships between and among other actors in realising a Partnership Model of Extension (PME). In particular the paper looks at what principles and functions are required to support a Partnership Model of Extension that is sustainable not only in the short run, but also in the long run.

Agricultural Extension in Transition

The importance of extension in rural development is widely acknowledged. In developing countries in particular, where the majority of the population live in rural areas and agriculture is the main source of livelihood, agricultural extension is considered as one of the key drivers and a vital catalyst in rural development (Wanga, 1999; Moris, 1991). Extension has however not lived up to its expected impact. Various reasons have been advanced to explain this failure by Chambers (1993, p. 67). In the 1950s and 1960s, the problem was said to be farmers’ ignorance, apathy, inadequate social arrangements and lack of local leadership. In the 1970s, the problem was said to be farm level constraints such as lack of credit and poor access roads. In the late 1980s, the lack of participatory processes was identified as one of the primary causes of economic decline and social disintegration. In the 1990s, the failure was attributed to lack of technological ‘fit’ to the needs of the potential adopters. In its more recent guise, it has been attributed to poor governance and lack of institutional innovations to ensure greater efficiency and accountability in the mobilization, organization and control of national resources.

Various strategies with varying degrees of success have been advanced to address these issues (Rivera, 1996, 2001). The first strategy has been through decentralization of the burden of extension costs through fiscal system redesign. This has been an attempt to
enhance greater participation of the local government in financing and managing agricultural extension services. The second has been to decentralize government responsibility for extension through structural reform, which is intended to shift extension from central to subgovernment institutions with the notion of improving institutional responsiveness and accountability (Antholt, 1994). The third strategy has been to decentralize the management of programs through farmer participatory involvement in decision-making and, ultimately taking the responsibility for extension programs. However, the fast rates of change at all levels in economic systems have become complex, thereby making it even more complex for the small farmers in developing countries. The effects of liberalization, privatization, commercialization, and globalization continue to affect the smallholders while pressure for new innovations mounts (Pretty, 2002).

The Government of Kenya through the NALEP initiative has recognized the need to diversify and decentralise the provision of agricultural extension services to respond to such challenges. This strategy is based on the Agricultural Sector Investment Programme (ASIP) concept, a sector-wide programme that aims at ensuring sustainable development in the agricultural sector through a more integrated and holistic approach (Republic of Kenya, 2001). In theory, NALEP incorporates among the attributes of ASIP a partnership concept that entails deliberate investments and participation of the various stakeholders in agricultural sector, a move towards more participatory approaches that involve farmers directly in setting and fulfilling their own development goals, making extension become “demand driven”, increased efficiency in extension service provision, putting into place alternative funding procedures that do not rely so much on external funds such as increasing budgetary allocation to extension services, promoting gender issues in extension and supporting efforts to curb environmental degradation. However, the focus on the dual public-private partnerships as outlined by NALEP has subsumed the position of the farming communities.

**Theoretical /Philosophical Perspectives**

**Partnership Building**

Although partnerships may not be a panacea for all the possible institutional problems, they provide strong leverage for improvement in institutional performance. Partnerships are modes of cooperation in which social actors involved share similar or compatible interests or objectives, as well as relevant strategies for which they put together required resources (Hounkonnu, 1992). Others define partnerships as instruments for accelerating organizational learning and for coordinating communities of practice – scientists, extension educators and farmers (Samii et al., 2002). With increasing recognition of problems from conventional approaches to agricultural and rural development, and growing demands for change, many individuals and organizations are working to develop alternatives, through changes in practices, technology transfer processes, and policies (Pretty, 1995). The efforts have coalesced into formation of partnerships or collaborations for technology transfer processes, encompassing more collaborative relations between external actors and farmer groups, and new forms of interaction and learning. Partnerships enhance ownership and setting up of common goals and objectives, achieving economies of scale (Castillo, 1997); enable social actors to capitalize on the comparative advantage of each other and thereby increasing their efficiency of their roles (Zeigler & Hossain, 1995); seek to reduce information asymmetry among the partners and enhance joint creation of knew
knowledge (Koza & Lewin, 2000); prevent duplication of roles and functions and address complex needs by enabling communities establish links with external knowledge and resource sources (Fesenmaier & Contractor, 2001); promote sustainable benefits to the local community such as self-reliance, self-determination, self-management and assertive form of self-organization (Kibwana, 2000); deliver local solutions to local problems and promote social cohesion (Uphoff, 1996); provide access to complementary capabilities, specialized skills, and new suppliers and markets (Carayannis et al., 2000). In view of the significance of partnerships, efforts to better integrate research and extension organizations and to make the public sector more responsive to the needs and priorities of a broad range of clients have taken root (Alsop et al., 1996). This is in response to both domestic and global forces that demand more effective management and higher levels of organizational performance (Wholey, 2003).

Nature of Collaborative Partnerships

One of the major challenges facing extension in Kenya is how to re-orient and renew extension with a vigorous emphasis on partnership, participation and sharing of knowledge and information in development effort and how to balance continuity of extension service provision (Republic of Kenya, 2001; Wanga, 1999). There are multiple conceptions of partnerships depending upon the sectors involved, the parties, and where the collaboration occurs. In this regard, four main institutional arrangements of partnerships to restructure and reform extension have been mooted based on modes of delivery and funding (Farrington et al., 2002; Anderson & Crowder, 2000; Rivera, 2000):

1. **Private delivery and private finance**: This is totally a private extension with little or no government participation, such as commodity out-grower schemes, or delivery through producer associations. This has been predominantly linked to commercial crops grown in well integrated areas and hence is an arrangement that does not seem to serve the low-income producers though it may benefit the poor as consumers or laborers.

2. **Private delivery and public finance**: The approach commonly promoted as an essential element of reforming extension services entails outsourcing or ‘contracting out’ the responsibility for extension delivery to private sector providers (private commercial firms, NGOs, farmers’ associations, registered individual extension consultants, etc).

3. **Public delivery and public finance**: This is the typical government extension service. This has been characterized by top-down delivery modes of operation and faces shortages of funds and problems to retain staff in difficult locations.

4. **Public delivery and private finance**: The Government staff can also be contracted in by private agencies.

The NALEP implementation framework plans to focus primarily on the first three institutional arrangements. What seems to have been lacking in the previous institutional arrangements is a lack of understanding partnership management, performance indicators, and pitfalls of partnerships and how to deal with them. Bringing all the multi stakeholders into collaborative planning mode is an educational activity for all individuals involved (emphasis italicized). Chambers (1989) explains that the multi-directional environment created is very different from the traditional “top-down” approach of scientists and extension educators and regulatory agencies. This learning environment creates an interactive two-way
communication. Kanter (1994) explains that such interaction entails building new relationships about sharing (risks, costs, markets, information, practices, technology, expertise, rewards etc.) and not controlling, having open discussions and dialogues, and being simultaneously teachers as well as learners. This practice encourages interaction, diversification of thought and ultimately a greater understanding of the complexity of problems and the range of possible solutions (Christiansen & Hunt, 2000).

In as much as participation by local communities has been a key phrase in the rhetoric of development, insufficient documentation exists about the development of collaborative partnerships between community groups and both public and private sector agencies and its practical application to the planning and implementation of projects. The effect of this has been observed in a recent evaluation of the implications for civil society organizations of the current level of extension in local cross-sectoral partnerships in Vihiga district (Amudavi, 2002). A number of concerns were raised in the study, at the center of which was the need for the government to loosen up top-down prescriptions of the ways in which partners should work together and how performance of partnerships should be measured. From the perspectives of different social actors, “performance” may focus on the products and services delivered by agencies and programs, the clients and populations served, service quality or efficiency, intermediate outcomes, unintended outcomes, or end results achieved. This calls for a practical and realistic model.

**Development of Partnership Model of Extension (PME)**

This model recognizes the need for developing sustainable relationships between people, and between people and their environment. Whereas public institutions have been operating more effectively and rationally in stable environments (enhanced by availability of resources and dominant development initiatives) for the implementation of strategies and policies, flexible network structures are crucial in more rapidly changing environments and in situations where progress is contingent upon, decentralized, voluntary cooperation, communication and more informal relations (Söderbaum, 2001). It recognizes that a single organization or agency, may not have all the relevant resources internally and so forms a social and knowledge network, drawing in other organizations, which hold the missing knowledge, in order to develop new products or processes (Newell & Swan, 2001). The sharing of knowledge across organizational boundaries, promotes the formation of trusted relationships and builds social capital that sustains collaboration, thereby enhancing the emergence of collaborative partnerships. NALEP in its implementation framework has accentuated the notion of extension pluralism but has not shown systematically how the partnerships should be managed and what should be the indicators of partnership performance. In suggesting a partnership model to extension, this paper draws insights from the diffusion or “technology transfer” model (Rogers, 1983) and the induced innovation model (Hayami & Ruttan 1971, 1985) which have provided contexts for various approaches of extension so far practiced in Kenya.

The *diffusion model* is derived from mechanical models of communication and focuses on the supply of knowledge by experts. The research institutions have the monopoly of controlling and passing on information and technological innovations to extension agencies, which in turn, are expected to transfer such knowledge and technologies to farmers for adoption, in a hierarchical top-down manner. The practical application of this model is to
increase productivity through increased rate and completeness of agricultural innovations (Lacy, 2001). This model is based on social-psychological notions of individual decision making and conceptualizes adoption process as a complex pattern of mental processes and activities occurring linearly as: awareness, information, evaluation, trial, and adoption (Vanclay and Lawrence, 1996). Failure to adopt the innovation is attributed to communication failure or potential adopters’ irrationality. This model has been limited by lack of a clear understanding between knowledge due to instrumental rationality and experiential knowledge and does not sufficiently explain farmer behaviour (Buttel et al., 1990; Lightfoot and Barker, 1988).

In the induced innovation or demand-driven model, scientific and technical innovations are expected to develop in response to relative factor scarcities (i.e. land, labor, and capital). Hayami & Ruttan (1971, 1985) advance a theory of induced innovation that attempts to make more explicit the process by which technical, technological and institutional changes are induced through the responses by farmers, agribusiness entrepreneurs, scientists and public administrators to resource endowments and to changes in the supply and demand of these factors and products. Consequently in regions where labour is scarce, scientists and researchers develop labor-saving innovations, and where land is scarce, land-saving innovations. Reliance on a ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ framework as suggested, however, leads to identification problems of what is meant by ‘technical change’ and ‘technological change’ (Burmeister 1995, p. 52), and creates the impression that the emergence of new techniques, technologies and institutions can be explained exclusively in terms of market-oriented phenomena (Hogg, 2000, p. 112). In addition, this market-oriented view assumes the availability to farmers of information concerning innovations from which they can choose, and the availability of the innovations themselves. This model provides the basis of public-private partnerships. Whereas there is evidence that public service provision can benefit from a more empirical approach to institutional arrangements that involve public-private interaction (Christoplos, 2001), as critical as the question ‘Is such an arrangement that handles rural communities implicitly sustainable?’ are the questions, ‘Who benefits and who loses from the surpluses of extension, who is included/excluded in the process? and, Who has control of resources and decision making process?’ These questions underly what Beck et al. (1994) observe that the demand for forms and forums of consensus-building cooperation among industry, politics, science and populace require a model that is not couched in instrumental rationality. Addressing these questions with a view of bringing communities of practice- all social actors, into the inter-organizational framework legitimizes the partnership model to extension (PME).

In the partnership model of extension, the horizontal and equitable interaction replaces the past top-down relations between scientists, extensionists, and farmers. According to Farrington et al. (2002), getting insights as to what kinds of interventions could be effective in improving rural livelihood is important to extension in several ways. First, agricultural and rural development strategies have to be located in the context of the rights and livelihood aspirations of the rural communities. Second, that production (e.g., subsidies, credit, training) and protection (e.g., pensions, access to health facilities) strategies have to complement each other. Third, an extension approach that is geared broadly to livelihoods contexts rather than narrowly to crops or livestock production contexts is more likely to be of benefit to the rural communities. The partnership model of extension as shown in Figure 1 is
cognizant of these observations. Within this model, extension takes on more functions related to the wider context, and in particular facilitation on ways of doing and organizing.

Rationale of the Partnership Model of Extension (PME)

The rationale of the PME model is that facilitating approaches are likely to be more appropriate in addressing wider aspects of rural livelihoods and providing the balance between the growth potential of a market-orientation, and some distributional objectives associated with collective action (Christoplos, 2001). The model thus focuses on the role of the farmers as clients in the broadest sense in creating a demand for technology and extension education, as well as on the role of social actors within the public agencies, private agencies and non-governmental organizations in creating a supply. It is an interactive system with partnerships among the various actors. Moreover, it reflects the belief that innovations are shaped by social structures and that they often perform a specific social function, which reflects the interests of particular sectors of society (Hogg, 2000). Underlying such a societal system is the need for intervening agencies to respond to clients’ research and extension demand, demand not exclusively expressed through market orientations but through processes of social learning, negotiation, information exchange, accommodation and consensus (Rölling & Jiggins, 1998). Röling (1990) argues that the generation, transformation, transmission, storage, retrieval, integration, diffusion and utilization of knowledge and information in such a system should be undertaken by all the major parties in the system. The NALEP framework also recognizes that agricultural and knowledge systems (AKS) are diverse and networking is a key pathway in optimizing the availability to those who need it (Republic of Kenya, 2001). But there seems to be a disconnect between acknowledging the significance of partnerships and operationalizing their working.
Figure 1. A possible framework for a Partnership Model of Extension

Conditions for Effective Partnerships

The partnership management and performance indicators have not been adequately articulated by NALEP in its efforts to embrace extension pluralism. Wholey (2003) provides a succinct solution to management of partnerships through a results-oriented management framework. Results or performance-oriented management aims to shift management’s focus from inputs and process to results, in order to improve program effectiveness, strengthen accountability to key stakeholders and the public, support resource allocation and other policy decision making, and improve public confidence and support. Its application in the management of partnerships holds promise in fulfilling the gap in NALEP’s implementation framework. It is accomplished through a three-step iterative process: (1) developing a reasonable level of agreement among key stakeholders on missions, outcome-oriented goals, and strategies (resources and processes) to be used to achieve the goals; (2) measuring
performance (in particular, outcomes achieved) on a regular basis; and (3) using performance information to improve program effectiveness and strengthening accountability to key stakeholders and the public. Given the complex nature of interrelationships among all the collaborators, this model requires some guiding principles to enhance its efficacy in managing possible synergies and tensions that are inevitable in partnerships. These include, but not limited to:

1. **Proper groundwork**: providing sufficient background information and materials, allowing networks to evolve over time as knowledge is shared and exchanged; and enabling parties to feel they are all owners of the process (IFAD, ANGOC & IIRR, 2001).

2. **Transformed staff**: partnerships require new, unique management skills, values and attitudes that support conflict management and resolution, community organization, group-building, intensive communication, facilitation, and documentation of the evolution of internal and external knowledge networks (Fesenmaier & Contractor 2001).

3. **Proper identification and active participation of stakeholders**: stakeholder analysis is essential for ensuring a balance in representation of sectors/groups as well as a balance of power relations and dynamics among the groups and individuals. Successful inclusion would require that those involved in designation, management and incentives for livelihood improvement need to be aware of, and respond to all interests involved (O’Riordan & Stoll-Kleen, 2002).

4. **Commitment by all stakeholders**: commitment and involvement at the highest level of the partners’ organizations as well as by those implementing the initiative is critical. This can be achieved through adequate allocation of time and resources, which fosters reciprocal appreciation and synergistic opportunities among the partners (Samii et al., 2002).

5. **Clarification of goals of partnerships**: the objectives and purpose of building collaborative partnerships must be clear to all parties concerned, and roles and responsibilities to be played by each of the key stakeholders and supporting partners should be made clear.

6. **Determining mode of partnership**: the partnership modalities envisioned (cost recovery, cost sharing, redistribution of negotiating power etc) with various stakeholders should be negotiated.

7. **Capacity building**: working with key stakeholders who are the smallholders entails developing their capacity to voice their views and concerns and capabilities in the pursuit, validation, dissemination and use of knowledge (Pretty, 2002, p. 74). “Capacities” here is understood not only at level of technical knowledge, but also at the level of organizational structure with actors assuming new values, roles, attitudes and responsibilities (Morgan, 1999, p. 4).

8. **Availability of human / financial resources**: networking and partnership building need considerable time and investment in human and financial resources. In particular, financial contributions are regarded as an additional sign of commitment to a program or project as opposed to a substitute of technical backstopping.

9. **Mutual trust and regular communication**: mutual trust and regular open communication and interaction enhance the quality of learning opportunities and information flow
among different actors and create the required transparency in the decision making process, key elements in partnership building (Samii et al., 2002).

Challenges to Building Effective Partnerships

Building and maintaining collaborative partnerships is a difficult task, especially at the beginning, as a result of divergent interests and agendas, disagreements over decision-making, differences in power and control of funds (Thrupp & Altieri, 2001; Wholey, 2003). This is especially so in cases where NGOs’ and some community based organizations activities are considered by the official agencies as being controversial, where they challenge the official establishment’s decisions, where they mobilize people against the vested interests of local authority, or where their participatory approaches lead to empowerment of groups which are traditionally exploited (Clark, 1995). The envisaged partnerships therefore call for new mechanisms for research and extension management, which take into account the dynamics of working with communities of farmers as partners rather than consumers. Consequently, in order to achieve an appropriate and complementary balance among all the actors, major organizational and managerial changes, as well as reorientation in the values and attitudes of researchers, educators and users and their organizations are required (Lacy, 1996). Long-term success will be more likely when symmetry of strategic intents is present during formation and is maintained as a product of continuous mutual adaptation by all the partners (Koza & Lewin, 2000).

Conclusions and Implications

The main argument of this paper has been that the revitalization of the national extension system through the development of partnerships among various relevant organizations working with farming communities in Kenya will need substantial amounts of organizational innovation. This institutional innovation requires a new mode of working among agencies supporting rural livelihoods. Strategies of “business-as-usual” will no longer do, not only because of financial constraints but also more importantly because the role of knowledge as facilitated by rural extension to support agricultural and rural development can no longer be managed in traditional ways. The environment in which the current extension is operating has changed dramatically due to effects of liberalization, privatization, commercialization, and globalization. In addition, extension education is challenged not to be seen in isolation from the broader educational needs of enabling people to pursue a diverse array of agricultural and non-agricultural activities (Christopolos, 2001). Organizations and community groups therefore need to access information and knowledge from outside their boundaries in order to be able to develop new technologies and ways that enable adaptation to turbulent and uncertain environments (Conway, 1995).

The proposed partnership model of extension recognizes the importance, as well as the difficulties involved in nurturing collaborations among the diverse social actors due to different objectives, agendas, contributions, and modes of absorbing benefits. Hence applying this model, the functions of extension will be nested within a broader service delivery environment, which directly supports development of livelihood alternatives among the rural communities through the creation of dynamic linkages between communities of farmers and external support sources to pursue sustainable agricultural and rural development.
Educational Importance and Application

This paper nuances the thought that if NALEP’s initiatives are to succeed, it is imperative that it engages in fundamental reforms of the institutions working with different rural communities in Kenya by taking on board six functions if extension is to be sustainable not only in the short run, but also in the long run, as suggested below:

- A performance-based function: This is the results-oriented management, which is the purposeful use of resources and information in efforts to achieve and demonstrate measurable progress toward partnership outcomes. Formation of umbrella bodies of all players to work out mechanisms of setting up monitoring and evaluation of all the actors’ activities will support in streamlining the management of the partnerships and facilitate the implementation of the partnership performance indicators.

- Knowledge sharing function: Collaborative partnerships should be looked at as platforms for knowledge exchange rather than transfer. By building learning alliances that are mutually complementary, strong form trusted relationship develop where the knowledge exchange creates a repeatable pattern of expectations and reciprocation and facilitates the development of shared values and norms within the relationship (Carayannis et al., 2000).

- The organizational learning function: The partnership arrangements should be used as channels for learning among all the organizations and communities being reached. It also means learning new forms of organization, association and platforms for collective action (Pretty, 2002). A facilitative support framework should be established, including: education and training, marketing, management and simple project appraisal writing for grants, and the development of collaborative partnerships.

- Capacity building function: The creation of the capacity no longer to rely exclusively on external assistance but gradually to master and retain the capacities to undertake livelihood improvement programs and projects locally.

- An institution building function: Institutional strengthening is necessary in providing voice for the poor rural folks. One of this is the organization of civil society, in demanding certain type of information and technology as well as in the planning of agriculture, and related activities that increase their income-generating options. This involves developing a competence in the process of network building to foster social and organizational networks.

- A consultation function: The drive for informing or providing analytical data, on deepening the methods of analysis, on canvassing possible policy options, or on incorporating the views of others means that wide consultation by various actors is necessary (O’Riordan & Stoll-Kleen, 2002).

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