UNDERSTANDING EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS ON RURAL GROUPS IN IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS IN KENYA

David M. Amudavi, PhD
Department of Agricultural Education and Extension
Faculty of Education and Human Resources,
Egerton University, P.O. Box 536, Njoro Kenya
Tel: +254 51 62620, Fax: +254 51 62527; Email: damudavi@africaonline.co.ke

Margaret M. Kroma, PhD
Cornell University, New York, USA

Kristin Davis, PhD
International Food Policy Research Institute, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Abstract
This paper focuses on the effects of institutional partnerships on farmers’ groups to leverage livelihood outcomes in Kenya. The key question addressed is: Do partnerships between agencies and rural groups enable the groups to generate beneficial outcomes for rural households? This is important in understanding the viability of rural organizations in a context marked by government and market failures. Data were collected through a household survey and focus group discussions. The findings indicate that partnerships matter to performance of groups in offering goods and services. However, not all group types are equally likely to spawn partnerships. Partnership building is more likely in supra groups making them realize more value out of collaborations, but there remains untapped potential in these groups that could be realized through targeted partnerships and those gaps are likewise greatest with supra groups. This is revealed by an increase in the variance of local groups’ performance by 2.5% and in supra groups by 10.2% when respondent preferred partnerships are analyzed. Finally, the main gap comes from the need to improve access to finance necessary to invest and expand productive assets. The gap also comes from absence of a coordinating mechanism that identifies potential partners and facilitates allocation of responsibilities and resources to groups. The study demonstrates the critical import of groups as sustainable vehicles for agricultural, natural resources and rural livelihood extension. Future partnerships to enhance rural groups’ capacities must be different from present practice, both in nature of partnerships and in the types of activities promoted.

Introduction
From the beginning of the 21st century institutional partnerships in Kenya and other parts of the developing world have gained currency as mechanisms for enhancing efficacy of rural organizations in improving the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and rural families, in addition to stimulating economic growth and development (Korsching & Allen, 2004; Franzel, et al, 2004). The improvements lead to higher incomes, greater food consumption, better nutrition, and favorable allocation of individual and household assets (Menzin-Dick et al, 2003). Such improvements are catalyzed through enhancement of agricultural productivity, improvement in sustainable use of natural resources, lowering consumer prices for food, and accumulation of physical and human capital (Spielman & Grebmer, 2004). The continued attention on
partnerships is, thus, partly due to a decline in the partnership outcomes and partly due to increased pressures for new extension strategies to address the constrained budgets and organizational resources (Anyonge et al., 2003; Kenya, 2001). Yet changes in the global political economy continue to have implications on livelihood initiatives by rural communities, thereby calling for improving present livelihood practices. Against this background, institutional partnerships are claimed to provide the basis through policy, regulation and program sponsorship by which rural groups and private and public sectors can overcome development shortcomings (Miraftab, 2004; Crowder & Anderson, 2002).

Communitarians (Mayo, 2000; Mayo & Graig, 1995) suggest two viewpoints for group popularity. First, rural groups provide an alternative to government provisioning and this perspective is reinforced through financial support from organizations at local, national and global scales. A rural group here refers to an organization which acts on behalf of and, is generally accountable to its membership and which is involved in rural development activities (Esman & Uphoff, 1984). This includes women, youth and self-help groups and farmers’ cooperatives and organizations. On the other hand, provisioning refers broadly to “decisions made through collective choice arrangements regarding the kinds, quality, and quantity of goods and services by a designated collectivity and how their production can be financed, distributed and monitored” (Ostrom, et al., 1993:74).

Second, rural groups are social structures capable of helping communities to absorb the unintended negative effects of neoliberal policies of privatization (Miraftab, 2004) and to fill the institutional vacuum created by the global market-led strategies (Chambers, 1997; Crowder & Anderson, 1997). Rural organizations, therefore, are charged with the responsibility of attending to policy functions including providing food for all, raising rural incomes and reducing poverty, and sustainably managing natural resources at a time of budget cuts in public research and extension (Rivera, et al, 2001; Pretty, 2002). The capacity to carry out these functions depends partly on the social structures internal to the groups, structures that organize the formulation and enforcement of rules, collective decision making and implementation of joint actions (Serageldin & Grootaert, 2000). It also depends on the groups’ relationship with the state and other external agencies, the basis of partnerships (Poole et al, 1996). Two main types of groups emerge from these relationships, community/local and supra groups. The former are groups formed endogenously within a community of their own accord based on their own identified needs, whereas the later are formed exogenously by or in cooperation with external agencies in response to some anticipated resource flow between external entities and the community.

The partnerships literature identifies ways in which partnerships may be useful to rural communities. These include (1) improving agricultural production and rural services, and facilitating scale economies (Noordin, et al, 2002); (2) stimulating common working, collaborative planning, and process of mutual learning (Franzel, et al., 2002); (3) helping people utilize communication to solve problems by sharing and enhancing their knowledge and capabilities (Pence & Grieshop, 2001); (4) enhancing coordination in resource use by facilitating utilization of both vertical and horizontal linkages (Romeo, 2003), and (5) enhancing accountability in multi-organizational networks (Acar & Robertson, 2004).

In spite of the nuanced efficacy of partnerships, little empirical work has explored whether partnerships lead to beneficial outcomes. Such a development begs the question: Do partnerships between agencies and rural groups enable rural groups to generate beneficial outcomes? In doing so, are partnerships more or less effective in local groups than supra groups? This is important in understanding the viability of rural groups that attempt to deal with scarce
financial, human and physical resources necessary to secure the empowerment of rural people and to reduce dependency on government intervention.

**Purpose of the Paper**

The aim of this paper is to investigate how institutional partnerships affect efficacy of rural groups in leveraging Extension outcomes for better livelihoods. Comparing the performance of local and supra groups provides insights about the impact of partnership arrangements on the groups towards improving livelihoods. Insights generated inform how and under what conditions partnerships can yield greater positive payoffs for rural communities in agriculture and other rural livelihood activities and understanding the viability of rural organizations as alternative extension vehicles.

**Theoretical Base**

The subject of partnerships with rural communities is one of the widely discussed topics in both high and low-income countries. Rosenau (2000) defines a partnership as the formation of cooperative relationships between the public sector (charged with responsibility and accountability vis-à-vis society), profit-making organizations and non-profit sector (considered more competent and efficient) to fulfill a policy function. Such functions include poverty alleviation, social welfare, education, research and development, organizational capacity building, and the development of civil society (Marra, 2004). Hulme (1996), on the other hand, considers partnering as a process to design, organize, and implement action for development in a participatory way, including non-governmental organizations, (NGOs), grass root organizations and research and development (R&D) institutions.

The private sector is believed to facilitate access to finance, knowledge of technologies, managerial efficiency, and entrepreneurial spirit (UNDP, 1998). This assumption is premised on the sector’s efficiency and effectiveness in undertaking economic tasks, promoting innovations, producing goods and providing services (Marra, 2004; Brinkerhoff, 2002a). On the other hand, the public sector focuses attention on such services as public interest, stewardship, and solidarity considerations. It also oversees policy management, regulation, ensuring equity, preventing discrimination or exploitation, ensuring continuity of services, and ensuring social cohesion (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Due to such responsibilities and in addition to its large size, lack of incentives and vulnerability to outside forces, the public sector is inefficient at providing low-cost services on its own (Kamiecki, 2000). The choice of who should provide what goods and services can be based on various approaches, one being classification of services according to its economic character, using the principles of substractability and excludability (Crowder & Anderson, 2002).1

A key underlying assumption in the meaning of partnerships is that partnerships lead to synergistic rewards, where the outcomes as a whole are greater than the sum of individual parts (Brinkerhoff, 2002b; Hall, et al, 2001). They are also assumed to address project/program relevancy, enable cost-sharing and cost recovery, and contribute to institutional capacity development (Marra, 2004). This results from complementary organizational styles, pluralism in funding and delivery, and technical comparative advantage among partners who have different capabilities and institutional energy (Rivera et al, 2001).

While there is an extensive literature on why partnerships are necessary and what makes partnerships succeed, there is little evidence on whether they influence performance of rural groups. Whereas some scholars attribute the success of partnerships to their underlying costs and
benefits (e.g., Rosenau, 2000), others argue that successful outcomes are influenced by social relations among the actors (Johnson & Wilson, 2000; Stringfellow, et al, 1997). On the other hand, building such relationships according to Kanter (1994) is about sharing for example, risks, costs, markets, information, practices, technology, expertise, and rewards and having open discussions and dialogues, and being dialectically teachers as well as learners.

Our analysis examines these issues further. As has been indicated by different authors, several reasons are advanced for the success of partnerships and not the efficacy of the partnerships. Understanding what partnerships can do and what they cannot do in building capacities of rural groups is critical in identifying relevant interventions. Our intention is to ascertain whether partnerships produce bigger effects in local or supra groups, and if so, in what kinds of outcomes. We explore this through qualitative and quantitative methods the efficacy of partnerships on groups in leveraging beneficial outcomes.

Methods/Procedures and Data Sources

The research design involved two phases carried out between July 2003 and May 2004 in three districts Embu, Vihiga and Baringo. Embu is close to Nairobi, the largest market in East Africa and located within eastern highlands; Vihiga is closer to Kisumu, the second largest capital, and located in the highlands of western Kenya; and Baringo is fairly distant from either city and is situated within the Great Rift Valley. Phase one collected data on rural groups. Phase two involved interviews of 480 households that provided data on: (1) functions of most useful rural groups, (2) partner agencies and type of support provided to groups, (3) benefits of partnerships, and (4) respondents’ preferred partnerships.

The respondents were selected using a multistage, purposive sampling with simple random sampling. Two divisions were purposively selected from each of the three districts to reflect diversity in socioeconomic development. Basing on current organization of extension services, six sub-locations (villages) in each division were purposively chosen from the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP) focal areas and six from non-focal areas. A sample of 40 households was randomly selected from each village household list, which was constructed with the help of the local leaders and the extension staff. The sample population eligible for the interview included members of the households that are central in making household decisions.

The question of whether partnerships affect performance of rural organizations was analyzed by a multivariate regression. This helps to understand how marginal changes in one variable, holding other explanatory variables constant, affect the expected value of the dependent variable, and also indicates how important each explanatory variable is to this value. The household was taken as the unit of analysis. The analysis was intended to ascertain whether households benefit equally from local and supra groups. A multivariate regression used for this analysis is:

\[ \text{GPI}_i = b_0 + b_1M_{1i} + b_2C_{2i} + b_3P_{3i} + b_4D_{4i} + \varepsilon \]

Where: \( i = 1, \ldots, N \) (Households),

\( \text{GPI} \) - Group Performance Index, the first principal component of functions of the perceived most useful rural groups is the dependent variable. It was captured through consideration of whether memberships in certain groups provide access to: (a) social services, (b) economic opportunities (e.g., credit), (c) extension services (e.g., technologies), (d) empowerment (e.g.,
civic engagement), and (e) natural resource services. Access to such outcomes connotes the
groups’ capacity to leverage benefits. A higher value indicates higher performance by a
particular group type. Two indexes, one for local and one for supra groups were constructed.

The explanatory variables are:

\( M_{1i} \) - Number of group memberships: This is the total number of groups, either local groups or
supra groups, a household belongs to. It is logical to expect that a higher membership in a
particular group type potentially increases benefits accruable to a participating household.

\( C_{2i} \) - Current partnership support index: This is a unitless index derived from the first principal
component of the PCA output of benefits enjoyed by the respondents’ group(s) and attributable
to partnerships with support agencies during the last three years. It is expected that goods and
services accessed by such groups due to partnerships increase the groups’ capabilities to carry
out their functions, consequently increasing their outcomes/benefits.

\( P_{3i} \) - Preferred partnership support index: This is an index derived from the first principal
component of the PCA output of recommendations by participants. These are desirable resources
to groups, notwithstanding the costs of providing them. The index is a proxy for partnership
resources identified by group participating households. It is expected that higher consideration of
participating individual’s preferences increases the benefits achieved.

\( D_{4i} \) - Location: This represents the physical location where respondents reside and accounts for
the unobserved heterogeneity across the districts. Because of the three districts, two dummies are
used with first dummy being, 1=Vihiga otherwise 0, and second dummy 1=Embu otherwise 0;
Baringo=0 is the reference district.

\( b_8 \) - regression coefficients of the independent variables, \( b_0 \) the intercept and, \( \varepsilon = \text{the error term} \).

An increase in PI, controlling for the number of groups a household belongs to and district where
the household resides, identifies the effects of partnerships on local and supra groups in
generating beneficial outcomes for rural households.

**Results and Discussions**

About 29%, 21% and 19% of survey households do not participate in any local group in
Baringo, Vihiga and Embu Districts, respectively. In the same order of districts, 71%, 77%, and
74% participate in 1-3 groups. Embu has 6%, Vihiga 3% and Baringo no households
participating in at least four local groups. A similar pattern is observed in supra groups, although
these are far less common in Baringo than in the highlands sites. Sixty percent, 9% and 9% do
not participate in any supra group in Baringo, Vihiga and Embu, respectively, while 40%, 89%,
and 80% participate in 1-3 supra groups. Embu has 11% farmers participating in at least four
supra groups, while Vihiga has only 3% and Baringo none. The results suggest that most
households belong to a group but very few, except Embu farmers, belong to more than three
groups.

About 56% of the respondents did not mention any institutional partner providing support
to their groups. While more households in Vihiga (32%) accessed support through church
organizations, those in Baringo (26%) enjoyed support from NGOs and the highest proportion in
Embu (17%) received governmental support. The financial sector had a significant presence in
Embu, confirming its strategic position. The main pathway of partnership is through technology
adoption, improved creditworthiness, improved health care and better resource use. Table 1
presents results of the factor analysis of nine variables representing the kinds of partnership support accessed.

Table 1. Rotated Varimax Factor Loadings for Partnership Support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnership support variable</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial support- credit, loan, funds</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.230</td>
<td>.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building support – training on project proposal writing, group management, keeping records</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension support - crop and livestock information, knowledge, enterprise skills, etc</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>-.137</td>
<td>.731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural technology-water harvesting, post harvest technologies, crop technologies</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistical/facilitation support – registration for legal identity, rural infrastructure facilities</td>
<td>.684</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start up assets-livestock, seed, etc</td>
<td>.768</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>-.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical facilities- water, factory equipment, construction materials, etc</td>
<td>.774</td>
<td>.201</td>
<td>.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing support – inputs and outputs, price, information, and advice on market opportunities</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.839</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing support</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>.855</td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue (5.5) 2.28 1.68 1.56
Variance explained (61.2%) 25.3 18.6 17.3


Factor 1 with 25.3% of total variance explained shows that the most important contribution of partnerships is associated with agricultural technology, logistical support, wealth generation and physical facilities. Factor 2 (18.6%) is related to marketing and processing support. Lastly, Factor 3 (17.3%) is associated with issues of financial, human and capacity building. Taken collectively, the three factors cover the range of issues that partnerships could help local and supra groups to address. In turn, this suggests the need for coordination in goods production and service provision to avoid applying fragmented and competing interventions that are ineffective to groups.

On the other hand, partnership outcomes include utilization of new technology, enhanced capacity to borrow loans and utilize resources, enhanced production and incomes, and improved infrastructure (Table 2). Factor 1 (18.5%) which represents the main pathway of partnership support to respondents is associated with the adoption of new technologies, improved creditworthiness, enhanced group stability, improved health care and increased knowledge on efficient resource use. Factor 2 (12.5%) is associated with increased income, improved food security, and growth in income-generating activities. This suggests that this partnership support is associated with the generation of pure private goods and services. Factor 3 (10.6%) is associated with improved infrastructure (roads), and improved living standards, a possible common as well as public good. Lastly, Factor 4 (10.0%) is associated with strengthening cooperation and links between different groups and institutions, farm assets and individual member behavior aimed at mobilizing comprehension, willingness, cooperation and compliance necessary in solving individual and group problems.
Table 2. Four Aspects of Group Partnership Outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnership outcome variables</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Improved access to technical knowledge, technology, etc</td>
<td>.822</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Enhanced capacity to be credit worth</td>
<td>.752</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>-.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Improved group stability</td>
<td>.597</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Improved community health care</td>
<td>.567</td>
<td>.320</td>
<td>-.126</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Enhanced utilization of resources</td>
<td>.537</td>
<td>-.117</td>
<td>.520</td>
<td>-.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Improved natural resources management - soil and water, grazing lands, forests, etc</td>
<td>.488</td>
<td>.477</td>
<td>-.053</td>
<td>-.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Increased income-profits from sales</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.745</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Improved food security - Increased food availability and access</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>.657</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Productive, income generating activities</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>-.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Improved rural infrastructure-especially roads for marketing, transport, etc</td>
<td>-.077</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.767</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Improved living standards</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>.447</td>
<td>-.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Enhanced collaborative relationships</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>.470</td>
<td>.475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Increased farm assets and facilities</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>-.096</td>
<td>.475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Enhanced individual behaviors</td>
<td>-.093</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.815</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue(7.20) 2.58 1.74 1.49 1.40
Variance explained (51.49%) 18.46 12.45 10.61 9.98


A viable inference from these findings then is that when partnership support is available and an agency is willing to work with a rural organization then there is higher likelihood for enhanced group performance if partnerships are partly targeted toward mutually identified needs. As a precautionary measure, having genuine negotiation with the rural organizations to explore various viewpoints over partnership actions may help arrive at such options. Otherwise, assuming that prescribed partnerships significantly improve economic welfare may not only fail to bring about desired social change, but may also impede efforts to improve the efficacy of partnerships. The example of fodder technology transfer among farmers in central Kenya underscores the relevance of strategic partnerships.

In 1990, the World Agroforestry Center, the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) and the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) worked in collaboration to promote the planting of fodder shrubs (*Calliandra calothyrsus*). By 1999, about 1000 farmers living close to on-farm sites had adopted the technology (Franzel et al., 2003). The technology, however, faced problems of diffusion to more needy farmers. Again, in 2000-2001 the same partners in partnership with the International Livestock Research Institute amplified the fodder technology to 180 farmer groups with 3200 memberships in seven districts in central Kenya. Each group member was enabled to raise enough fodder shrubs capable of supporting one dairy cow. Also, about 20,000 others were reached with information and planting material within a year (Place et al, 2004; Franzel et al, 2004).

Table 3 shows that the number of groups of a particular type to which a household belongs significantly increases the benefits accessed from the same group type. Controlling for group memberships and district effects, the results evidently show that partnerships with groups...
over the last three years significantly improve the performance of both local and supra groups, with a greater marginal effect in supra groups (local: $\beta=0.085$; supra: $\beta=0.116$). This implies that a one unit of partnership support provided during the three year period increased performance of local groups by 0.085 units while that of supra increased it by 0.116 units.

### Table 3. Comparison of Group Performance under Current and Desired Partnerships (N=475)

| Independent variable | Local group performance index (PI) |   | Supra group performance index (PI) |   |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|   |-----------------------------------|---|
|                      | Current  | Preferred | Current  | Preferred |
| Memberships in Local Groups | 0.227***  | 0.206***  | -0.073*  | -0.116**  |
|                      | (0.041)  | (0.041)   | (0.040)  | (0.038)   |
| Memberships in Supra Groups | -0.182*** | -0.173*  | 0.218**  | 0.241***  |
|                      | (0.042)  | (0.042)   | (0.042)  | (0.039)   |
| Current partnership support index | 0.085**   | 0.014    | 0.116*** | 0.058     |
|                      | (0.041)  | (0.045)   | (0.040)  | (0.041)   |
| Preferred partnership support index | 0.193***  | -        | 0.380*** | -         |
|                      | (0.048)  | (.048)    | (0.044)  | (0.044)   |
| Vihiga District      | -0.718*** | -0.716*** | -0.209*  | -0.210*** |
|                      | (.109)   | (.108)    | (.107)   | (.100)    |
| Embu District        | 0.02     | -0.127    | 0.461*** | 0.160     |
|                      | (0.132)  | (0.136)   | (0.129)  | (0.126)   |
| Adjusted R-squared   | .213***  | .238***   | .234***  | .336***   |
|                      | (.887)   | (.874)    | (.871)   | (.810)    |
| Constant             | .206***  | .265***   | -.305*** | -.184**   |
|                      | (.081)   | (.082)    | (.080)   | (.076)    |

Statistically significant levels: * p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01

Similarly, considering variable of preferred partnership support - a composite variable representing the respondents’ recommendations on what needs to be done to make groups more productive- the explained variance in local group performance increases by 2.5% and that in supra groups by 10.2%. For every one unit increase in the recommended partnership support the local group performance index increases by 0.193 units compared to supra 0.380 units. The findings suggest that partnerships form an important organizing principle capable of unlocking the potential of rural groups in supporting rural livelihoods. On the other hand, the survey evidence shows that the potential can be enhanced further by forging strategic partnerships that take into account people’s preferences and views about what kinds of partnerships should be forged with groups. Group performance is amplified more in supra groups than in local groups. A possible explanation for this is that the local groups are less endowed with resources and organizational capacity necessary to deliver on outcomes.

From the factor analysis results of recommendations for effective partnerships, increases in group performance can be achieved through better groups’ access to financial services, market access, sustainable and long-term productive assets, appropriate technologies and relevant technical assistance. This resonates with observations made in some focus group discussions. The focus discussions indicated that local groups receiving support by agencies that involved technical advice, participatory planning processes, and funding of community group activities
tended to do much better in achieving their goals than those that relied solely on their own scarce resources.

The importance of strategic partnerships has been underscored in other studies. Vagas (2002) shows how some women in Costa Rica advanced the practice of sustainable development through partnerships created by their grassroots organization, COFERENE. She explored the nature of partnerships, the contextual factors that shape them, the successes that can be realized from their wise use, and the problems that may also arise. She found that whereas partnerships are complex, they can be a vehicle through which local organizations such as women groups, can support sustainable development. Such complexity draws upon the organizational structure of partners, their institutional opportunities, constraints, history, their expectation for the future, and interaction in the present (Rosenau, 2000).

Strategic partnerships support Uphoff and colleagues’ (1998:1) conceptual assertion that “enhancing the capacities and well-being of the poor could make them greater net contributors to their economies and societies.” Rather than imposing partnership resources on communities for which there is no broad consensus, the alternative should be to listen more to communities’ voices to maximize the efficacy of partnerships (Rosenau, 1999). By resorting to sound partnership designs, policy makers and practitioners shall, perhaps, be responding to the challenge raised two decades ago, and still very relevant today, by Esman & Uphoff (1984:17) for improvements that can substantively “contribute to higher productivity and a better quality of life for rural people and can, over time, enhance their ability to influence their future.” Extension can then become more responsive and accountable to end-users by promoting demand-driven systems (Rivera & Zijp, 2002).

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

Developing the capacity of rural groups to improve rural livelihoods is one of the concerns of rural communities, extension practitioners and policy makers. These concerns are founded on social, economic, and environmental reasons. Empirical results of factor analysis suggest that rural groups engage in partnerships with other actors in order to increase operational efficiency, synergy, and power through networks, broadened activities, accessing complementary resources and improving capabilities to better utilize resources. The partnerships also promote mutual learning and create new investment options in high-opportunity activities. Outcomes accruing from these efforts include utilization of new technology, enhanced capacity to borrow loans, enhanced production and incomes, improved infrastructure, and compliant behavior for collective action.

The findings indicate that partnership resources and services accessible through groups significantly increase performance of both local and supra groups. The marginal effect, however, is greater in supra groups than in local groups. Similarly, adding the preferred partnership index variable, this increases the explained variance in supra group performance more than it does in local groups. The evidence underscores importance of considering beneficiaries’ interests and views in partnership designs, not withstanding the costs of providing for them. Evidently, the findings suggest that the potential of rural groups in improving livelihoods can be unlocked by strategic partnerships that act on mutually agreed priorities. The lesson here is that future partnerships must be different from present practice, both in nature of partnerships themselves and in the types of activities promoted.
Educational Importance, Implications, and Application

Understanding the potential of different groups and effects of partnerships on their performance is relevant to resource targeting for sustainable livelihoods improvement including agriculture. Thus knowledge of support provided to groups might not be sufficient without understanding what outcomes are generated by groups through partnership formation. Our study demonstrates to extension educators, practitioners and policy makers how the conditions within rural groups play a part in the generation of benefits necessary for varied livelihood options. Several implications emerge from the study findings.

First, if partnerships are to enhance the material welfare of the rural populations, then local groups require opportunities that include sustainable financial support. Second, if farmers’ recommendations are considered in partnerships, then there is a greater likelihood of superior group performance in leveraging livelihood outcomes. The study highlights that attempts to superimpose partnership arrangements on rural groups would exhibit a lesser effect than desired on group performance. Third, improving the efficacy of partnerships may require identifying certain agencies to take on specific tasks and charging others to support this responsibility. It would be prudent for various actors to prioritize their activities based on their strengths and weaknesses. Forth, emphasis on financial support and projects longevity suggests the need to focus on developing capacities to organize and acquire knowledge and generate tangible outcomes. Finally, further research on local groups as an alternative pathway to goods and services provisioning is necessary to validate the observed findings.

Notes
1. A NALEP focal area is an extension unit consisting of about 400 households earmarked for intensive participatory extension activities (situational analysis and development of farm plans) by the extension staff for a period of one year moving to another extension unit.
2. Excludability applies when access is denied to those who have not contributed to the production of the product, while subtractability (rivalry) applies when an individual’s consumption of a good or service reduces its availability to others. Public goods have low subtractability and excludability, with provision for anyone person implying availability to all. Private goods are those having high subtractability and excludability.

References


