Establishing learning alliances between extension organisations: Key learnings from Laos

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Abstract. Learning alliances are partnerships established between organisations such as research institutes, government agencies, private enterprise and Non Government Organisations (NGOs) to identify, share and develop proven agricultural practices with farmers. Learning alliances are based on innovation systems theory and have been developed by organisations working with rural farming families in developing countries. These partnerships can play a key role in extension by sharing information, knowledge and experience of those working with farmers. This paper describes the development and evaluation of a learning alliance in northern Laos aimed at spreading the use of legumes as supplementary pig feed by poor upland households. In 2008, two years after the creation of this alliance, we conducted research to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning alliance approach as an extension tool for improving livestock production and rural livelihoods. A qualitative approach was used, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with seventeen alliance participants across all of the organisations involved, at a range of staffing levels. The outcomes of the learning alliance included a dramatic increase in the number of farming households using the legume technology. Major benefits articulated by alliance partners were the productive and labour saving aspects of the technology, the provision of supporting materials, the extension methodology used and the creation of a strong network. The qualities of government and NGOs complemented each other and highlighted the value of working together. Despite different institutional cultures and operational procedures, alliance members worked to overcome constraints by building trust among partners. The three key learnings from this study were that learning alliances can: 1) build the capacity of extension staff from multiple projects to use technologies with farmers; 2) increase and spread the impact of technologies to more farmers in remote areas; and 3) form a strong, lasting and supportive network among extension staff. Examination of the elements underpinning the success of this learning alliance reveals a number of factors requiring attention if these successes are to be replicated in other extension situations.

Keywords: learning alliance, partnership, mutuality, organisational identity

Introduction

The evolution of innovation systems approaches over the past decade promises much for the development and extension of appropriate agricultural technologies. In a successful innovation system, the focus of extension moves from the technology to the capacity of people to learn, adapt and adopt the new technology. Approaches are participatory and based on a learning cycle of planning, action, evaluation and reflection (Van Mele et al. 2005). Integral to successful innovations systems are linkages or partnerships between multiple stakeholders (Conroy 2008; Van Mele et al. 2005).

Building on these concepts, the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) has been forming learning alliances in countries across Africa, Latin America and southeast Asia since 2001. In these cases, a learning alliance is described as a partnership between research, development and other organizations, which jointly implement a set of activities in an area of mutual interest and begin a process of learning from the activities (Douthwaite et al. 2009).

CIAT sees four major benefits in forming learning alliances: They help to develop and share successful approaches and methodologies, as well as knowledge about why successes or failures occurred; they greatly expand learning opportunities for participants; they promote synergy through collaboration; and they provide a flexible mechanism adaptable to many fields of interest (Lundy et al. 2005).

This paper uses the results of an evaluation of a CIAT learning alliance funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and situated in northern Laos as a case study to illustrate key success factors in forming a learning alliance for extension. It sets out the context of agriculture in the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (PDR) and the history of the 'Legumes for Pigs' learning alliance before presenting the case study of the Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance Evaluation. Finally, this paper draws on the case study, examples and literature to discuss key success factors in establishing learning alliances for extension.

Background

Agricultural extension: the Lao context

In Laos approximately 76 percent of the population is involved in agriculture (FAO 2005). The demand for agricultural products, including livestock, is increasing, with growing regional and international markets (Millar and Photakoun 2008). The livestock sector is moving from subsistence to market based livestock production. Increased smallholder, livestock production offers opportunities to increase household income, reduce labour requirements, and reduce practices such as shifting cultivation (ACIAR 2006). Farmers are encouraged to change their systems to take advantage of developing markets and to improve their livelihoods.

Lao PDR relies heavily on partners such as international donor funding, international NGOs and multilateral projects, for research and development. Extension is delivered through the Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF) and the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES) via Provincial and District Office staff (PAFO and DAFO), and funded by the Lao government and development partners. At the village level, a community funded village extension system operates (GOL, 2005, Schroeter, 2006). The Lao government has instituted the Lao Extension Approach (LEA), wherein all extension staff are to receive training in approved extension methods. The LEA is designed to be decentralised, pluralistic, participatory, needs based, integrated, gender sensitive, group based and sustainable. The initiating LEA project set out a country wide system of extension networks, and has produced a toolkit of participatory methods ranging from a needs analysis to the creation of production groups and evaluation (GOL 2005).

However, extension services in Laos have been identified as a weak link in delivering technologies to upland (northern) farmers. This has been attributed to lack of staff motivation, skills, knowledge and ability to reach remote villages (ACIAR 2006) Furthermore, the requirements of extension services are expanding. As subsistence farmers move into more commercialised agriculture, their skills and knowledge requirements also expand from basic production into productivity and managerial areas (Van den Ban and Samanta 2006). At the same time their needs may be particular to their physical location, climate, family situation and farming system. Addressing these particular and localised needs requires more than just the transfer of technical knowledge; it requires the creation of an environment where a wide range skills and knowledge are accessible and the people are motivated to learn (Sulaiman et al. 2006; Van Mele et al. 2005).

Evolution of the Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance

In 2006, CIAT Asia initiated a research project 'Forage legumes for supplementing village pigs in Lao PDR (or Legumes for Pigs project). The project is implemented in northern Laos by CIAT in collaboration with the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (QDPI&F), and is funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). The project has a research component and an extension component. The research component investigates options for improving feeding systems for village pigs and works directly with research partners at national level and government extension partners at three project district sites in two provinces in northern Laos. The extension component is achieved by linking up with a range of development partners in northern Laos through a learning alliance platform (Stur et al. 2009).

The Legumes for Pigs project had sufficient field evidence to warrant the scaling out of a forage technology for pigs. The supplementation of fresh or dried leaves of the forage legume *Stylosanthes guianensis* CIAT184 (Stylo) can double pig liveweight gains and significantly save labour for women. As previous attempts by CIAT and NAFRI to disseminate promising forage interventions through NGOs and development projects had only limited success, the project team proposed an active, long-term engagement with development partners. They envisaged an alliance of researchers and development practitioners that would build the technical capacity of alliance partners through workshops, training and mentoring: the Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance (the alliance).

The alliance established a learning partnership between research institutions (CIAT Asia) and NAFRI, and international development NGO's working in the northern provinces of Laos (World Vision Laos, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) and German Agro Action (GAA)) and some donor-funded development projects, and regional and local Department of Agriculture and Forestry offices. CIAT offered the Stylo forage technology including training for NGO and government staff in all aspects of growing and using the forage for pig production, and a framework in which the partnership could operate. The terms of the partnership and how it would operate were negotiated by the organisations willing to participate, with the key principle

being semi-annual workshops to share experiences with the introduction of pig production technologies and deliver needs-based training on pig production technologies. The alliance has operated for two years with great success in the scaling out of the fodder technology for pig production. Over the course of the project, CIAT responded to participant requests for a much broader range of training than expected, and the alliance developed a synergy of its own (Stur et al. 2009).

The quantitative data from the Legumes for Pigs project (see Stur et al. 2009) show that the number of NGO projects participating in the learning alliance increased from five projects (nine staff) in 2006 to seven projects (25 staff) in 2008. Partners only stopped participating in alliance meetings when their project was completed. From 2006 to 2008, one NGO project was completed and three new NGO projects joined the alliance. In one case, NGO staff moving to a new project also brought that project into the learning alliance.

Engaging with NGOs and other development practitioners in the alliance resulted in a much greater geographical reach than would have been possible by working only with government extension services at the three Legumes for Pigs project sites. By working with learning alliance partners, the Legumes for Pigs project was able to extend its reach to 16 districts in eight provinces. Similarly, the Legumes for Pigs project was able to build the capacity of many more development practitioners than would have been possible by working only at pilot sites. Twenty-three NGO staff participated in the 2008 mid-season workshop compared with eight government extension workers at the Legumes for Pigs project sites.

At the end of 2005, 170 households had planted Stylo in 15 villages in the three district project sites managed by district extension offices. By 2008, adoption of Stylo and improved feeding and management practices had increased to 450 households in these three districts. Through other alliance partners, the Project had reached an additional 750 households. In total, alliance partners had reached more than 1,200 households in more than 120 villages in 16 districts by 2008 (Stur et al. 2009).

Evaluation of the Development Alliance

In 2008, the Legumes for Pigs project team invited members of another ACIAR funded project, 'Extension approaches for scaling out Livestock Production in northern Lao PDR' (EASLP) to evaluate the learning alliance component of the project. The aim was to evaluate the effectiveness of the formation of an alliance between research and development agencies as an extension approach, including outcomes, benefits, constraints and suggested improvements to the Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance.

Research Methods

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 17 alliance members over a two week period in July 2008. Two English speaking interviewers worked with two Lao translators, both of whom had knowledge of the agriculture sector in Laos. Interviewees were two leaders of the Legumes for Pigs project (one from CIAT and one from NAFRI), four leaders of the NGO projects involved in the learning alliance, six NGO field staff, and five government extension staff.

The government extension staff who were interviewed were livestock extension specialists involved at the provincial and district level in planning and delivery of project extension activities, communicating with NGOs, data gathering and reporting. The NGO project leaders who were interviewed oversaw the involvement of their organisation in the alliance as a small part of their overall development programme. Similarly, for the NGO field staff who were interviewed, involvement in the alliance was a small part of their overall development role within their NGO projects. The roles of NGO field staff ranged from livestock development including fisheries, poultry, pigs and cattle, to horticulture, forage extension, animal registration, grassland survey and regulation (in the case of government seconded staff), distribution of donated livestock and introduction of micro-credit systems. All of the interviewed NGO field staff were actively involved with the alliance and related project activities at a local level and they had attended at least one project training course. All but one had also attended alliance workshops. NGO project leaders had attended some of the workshops and training courses. They maintained contact with their project teams via meetings, phone and email. The role of the CIAT and NAFRI project leaders was to coordinate project activities and facilitate the learning alliance.

Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed and analysed in Australia. Analysis involved the organisation of individual responses into an evaluative framework (participant's experiences, their perceptions of the benefits and constraints of the alliance, and their ideas for improvement) and drawing out common themes across transcripts.

Research Findings

Benefits

Features of the formation of the alliance and dissemination of the Legumes for Pigs technology particularly valuable to participants included the provision of seed and supporting technical materials, the participatory extension methodology of farmer to farmer learning and village learning activities, the creation of a field staff network, and the participatory action research approach used.

As a result of the alliance process, participants had a greater understanding of the capacity and limitations of different partner sectors. For example, NGOs were perceived as offering a concentrated focus at the village level, financial support, community development expertise, ability to involve the poorest villagers, and ability to reach remote areas and work with ethnic minorities. On the other hand, Government staff offered technical advice and extension planning and reporting expertise at a broader level and contributed an overview of the Lao agricultural situation. The contributions of the different partners were seen by all participants as complementary.

Participants believed that working together as an alliance can provide efficiency gains in planning and the allocation of resources, sharing of knowledge, skills and ideas, and increased impetus in working towards the common goal. Above all, participants articulated the benefits to their farmers/clients, not only from the new technology, but from the support offered in it's delivery through the alliance. They acknowledged the synergy created through the partnership, which allowed results beyond their scope when working alone. For example, while NGO field staff specialised in methods for working with the poor, they often lacked useful agricultural technologies to introduce. Through the alliance they were able to "gain knowledge from nothing and have knowledge to help farmers and villagers". The project "opened their eyes" to a whole new technology (NGO informants in Stelling and Millar 2009 p18).

Constraints

A number of factors were perceived as limitations or constraints to the alliance including differences in educational levels of government and NGO staff, a general lack of staff with appropriate education and experience, regular staff turnover, attitudes such as parochialism and an emphasis on hierarchy, and differing institutional priorities.

Systemic constraints also affected the functioning of the alliance, including systemic disincentives to the free sharing of information in both government departments and NGO projects. NGOs were constrained by factors such as inflexible budgets and project schedules, as well as bureaucratic procedures and onerous reporting requirements.

Another constraint was the remoteness of project villages, with attendant difficulties of communication – an important factor for both information flow and in the case of disease outbreak - time and financial impost due to the travel required for monitoring, staff training and fieldwork, and the different cultural outlooks and needs of remote ethnic groups.

Recommendations for Improvement

Ideas from participants for improving the functioning of the Legumes for Pigs project included improving the range and presentation of technical materials, sharing technical information between government and NGO staff regularly, jointly setting up a comprehensive resource of champion farmers and demonstration sites, and training staff in the production of extension materials, business skills, and livestock production.

Strengthening networks, promoting staff friendships and facilitating greater understanding between the partner organisations was a major feature of participant aspirations. Suggestions included organising study tours of NGO and government sites, creating a map of projects and activities, planning together at NGO management and national government level, pooling of data and sharing results and reports, and increasing the frequency of project network planning meetings and district staff meetings.

All participants wished to see the project scaled out to new villages and districts in current project provinces, to other branches of current NGOs and by creating new alliances with other NGOs in Laos.

Discussion – Key factors in the successful establishment of a learning alliance

Focus on the partnership, as well as the programme

The success of this alliance, when coupled with participants' articulated experiences as alliance partners, highlights the elements of good practice evident in the formation and maintenance of the partnership.

Defining partnership. Brinkerhoff (2002 p21) defines an ideal partnership as "A dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labour based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. Partnership encompasses mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decision making, mutual accountability and transparency." This definition is consistent with those found in agriculture and rural development spheres. Ojha (2001) and Kalis (2000) both stress mutual accountability, equality of status within the partnership arrangement, and the importance of shared vision, goals, objectives and interest.

The ideal partnership is a dynamic relationship that is not only clearly of mutual benefit to all partners, but creates a synergy that becomes 'more than the sum of its parts'. This synergy became evident in the Legumes for Pigs alliance through the increased scope of production related training requested by participants and the unsolicited entry of new NGO projects into the project (Stur et al. 2009). By the time the alliance was evaluated, the 'Legumes for Pigs' technology had already expanded far beyond the original bounds of the participating project sites, with one NGO reporting that they had made a training video and distributed this to their other sites across Laos (Stelling and Millar 2009).

Dimensions of partnership: Mutuality and Organisational Identity Brinkerhoff (2002) defines two measurable dimensions of partnership. The first is **mutuality**; encompassing mutual dependence, mutual commitment to goals and objectives, and the extent to which these are consistent and supportive of each others mission and values. The second is **organisational identity**; defining that which is distinctive and enduring in a particular organisation, and that organisation's ability to maintain its core beliefs and values across time and contexts. In a true partnership, organisations have high mutuality and high organisational identity. These dimensions encompass many of the 'keys to success' identified through partnership evaluations and organisational learning studies over the last decade (see Ojha 2001; Brinkerhoff 2002; Kalis 2000; Peacock-Taylor 2004; Danielsen et al. 2005; Husain 2005; Van Mele et al. 2005; Sulaiman et al. 2006). These studies show that successful partnerships maximise mutuality through:

- Focusing on commonalities in philosophy, aims and objectives
- Focussing on common interest in both the particular field, and in working together
- Ensuring that partners benefit equally from the partnership
- Ensuring that staff with appropriate expertise are included in the planning and management (i.e. gender skills)
- Building the capacity of staff, both in the area of interest and in the practices of working together
- Promoting understanding and trust between staff through a) mutual articulation of each organisation's identity, b) mutual negotiation of the goal of partnership, c) actively creating opportunities for dialogue between partners
- Equal input in the planning, monitoring and evaluating of the programme.

Evaluation of the Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance revealed many of these elements of mutuality: the common aim of reducing poverty and improving the lives of women, the common mode of operation in working in the field with northern Lao villages, the common interest in working with farmers. The goals of the alliance were mutually negotiated. Capacity building of staff was a particular focus and workshops included opportunities for feedback, reflection and evaluation of the programme and the training. As a result of this, alliance field staff expressed greater confidence in their roles and responsibilities within their programmes. Interviewed staff were particularly enthusiastic at the opportunities for dialogue created between the different organisations, and commented that they felt that their input was valued equally in the workshops. They had also developed new friendships through the alliance (Stelling and Millar 2009).

Participants' ideas for improving the alliance also reflected their strong desire for increased mutuality. The technical improvements proposed all aimed to boost the capacity of staff to improve the lot of their farmers. Many ideas related to the partnership itself, such as the exploration of each organisations project sites by the partners, the pooling of data and

resources, and increasing planning and evaluation opportunities (Stelling and Millar 2009). These ideas may seem difficult, even superfluous from a technical 'pig production' perspective, but all add to the strengthening of bonds between the people and the organisations involved, and the creation of synergy.

The evaluation revealed - and possibly also contributed to – elements of the maintenance of organisational identities within the alliance. Again drawing on the work of Ojha (2001), Brinkerhoff (2002), Kalis (2000), Peacock-Taylor (2004), Danielsen et al. (2005), Husain (2005), Van Mele et al. (2005), and Sulaiman et al. (2006), successful partnerships maintain organisational identity by:

- Articulating each organisations mission, aim and values, and the stakeholders to which it is responsible
- Articulating the unique contribution (comparative advantage) of each partner, to the partnership
- Formalising processes for planning, monitoring and evaluating both the programme and the partnership itself
- Formalising the commitments of each partner to the programme
- Documenting successes.

All of the alliance members were large, well established organisations, with strong and clearly articulated missions, aims, values and stakeholders – unlikely to be threatened individually by their participation in a finite and mutually negotiated arrangement. The processes by which the arrangements would operate and the expectations of how each partner would contribute were negotiated and agreed by all parties at inception.

The qualitative evaluation of the alliance also allowed the formal articulation of the unique contributions of each partner. During the evaluation process participants drew out the particular benefits that government and NGO staff brought and the complementary nature of their organisations foci. For example, NGOs focus on the village and poor farmers, whereas the government focuses more on the district and agricultural environment. Respective areas of expertise are also complementary, for example NGOs work in rural community development and helping the poor whilst the government has expertise in agricultural technology and policy). Government and NGO participants stressed how much they had gained in understanding and respecting the aims and objectives, and the modus operandi, of the partner organisations, through the alliance (Stelling and Millar 2009).

Expect the unexpected

The results of the evaluation of the alliance also highlight the need to build in mechanisms to allow flexibility and the ability to act opportunistically. As Stur et al. (2009 p 7) report: "Researchers from CIAT and NAFRI were challenged by requests for information and advice that was well outside their own area of knowledge", including issues from animal health and husbandry to business management and marketing. Farmers also took the stylo and other forage technologies and applied these to different animal species (cattle, poultry and goats), and then requested information in these areas as well. Only a flexible attitude and strong personal network of technical expertise within Laos allowed the CIAT project team to respond to these needs and deliver training in many of these areas.

Building in flexibility requires a fine balance in the planning and initiation of a learning alliance. Van Mele et al. (2005) emphasise that a planned approach with budgets, goals, timelines and expected outcomes may actually interfere with creativity and scope to respond to new learning and unpredictable change. Consideration of the learning aspect and the expectation that unexpected outcomes will emerge must be part of the approach.

Select partners with care

Consistent with the dimensions of mutuality and organisational identity discussed above, evaluation of the alliance emphasised the need for careful matching and selection of potential partners. The CIAT project team initiating the alliance emphasised the need to understand the NGOs objectives in the field prior to inviting them into an alliance, in order to be able to offer them what they needed. They felt that the project must have something to offer that would have a real impact for the NGO project villages, and as a starting point, established that the Stylo technology indeed had this potential. This 'point of entry' answered a strong common desire as a basis for negotiating the alliance partnership.

One NGO project leader stressed the importance of maintaining the balance of membership in the partnership, regarding both numbers and types of NGO partners. He felt that too many would make meetings difficult to co-ordinate and impersonal for participants, while too few

would limit the knowledge exchange. NGO partners should be similar in size and objectives and have things to learn from each other (Stelling and Millar 2009 p22). While linking with large bilateral projects may seem desirable in terms of broadening access to funds and information, the NGOs participating in the alliance expressed reluctance in terms of the bureaucratic constraints this may entail (Stelling and Millar 2009).

According to Brinkerhoff (2002 p22), including such large projects may in fact change the partnering relationship towards one of "contracting" (where organisations have high organisational identity but low mutuality), "extension" (low organisational identity and low mutuality) or "co-optation and gradual absorption" (high mutuality but low organisational identity). An imbalance between mutuality and organisational identity may well be the cause of many partnership failures. An International Fund for Agricultural Development example from Bangladesh shows that high expectations of the benefits of partnering with NGO's were often not met on the ground. IFAD approached 'partnership' as a straightforward contract relationship, with NGOs functioning as subordinates. Most arrangements were simply contracting NGOs to deliver services for government agencies, which in turn deterred more established NGOs from seeking participation. While genuine, effective partnerships were the stated aim, "so far this has not materialised" (IFAD 2006 p42). Similarly, Maniates (1992) evaluation of partnerships between the state and NGOs aimed at scaling out improved cookstove technology in India found that larger and more capable NGOs did not participate as they felt their organisational identity was at risk, while NGOs with little technical expertise and few successful programmes were attracted to the programme - as a learning experience, to gain extra resources and to gain entrée into communities. The capacity of the partnership to deliver was ultimately undermined by failure to select appropriate partners.

Anticipate constraints

The constraints and limitations revealed through evaluation of the alliance reflect common stressors of mutuality and organisational identity when government and non-government organisations partner.

Peacock-Taylor (2004) and Ahmad (2006) document constraints such as suspicion between parties regarding each other's capacity, motives and methods, and the complications arising from trying to link often vastly different administrative systems. These types of issues were evident within the Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance. Some tension existed due to different levels of staff education and experience, with NGO staff being generally better educated (having a degree or doctorate) than government staff. On the other hand, government staff were seen as often older and more experienced than NGO staff. Some staff attitudes were also seen as problematic, particularly the 'top down' working style of government staff that emphasised rank and the superior status of technical expertise, and a general parochial attitude which made staff doubtful of the knowledge of remote practitioners (Stelling and Millar 2009). Bureaucratic procedures also constrained the alliance, particularly budgetary inflexibility and high reporting requirements (Stelling and Millar 2009).

In rural development spheres, people are acknowledged as "…the glue that makes partnerships successful…" (Van Mele et al. 2005 p. 262). It is no surprise therefore that 'people' issues also surfaced as a major constraint to effective partnership in the alliance. Ojha (2001) cites staff turnover, amongst all parties but particularly NGOs, as a factor in making maintaining relationships and project momentum difficult. This issue was raised by CIAT leaders and government staff in the alliance evaluation as leading to constant training requirements and difficulties with continuity of relationships with the farmers working with the pig production technology (Stelling and Millar 2009).

Staff education and training was another limitation within the Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance. A general lack of suitably qualified and experienced staff to fill both government and NGO positions was exacerbated by a lack of training opportunities. Government field staff noted that NGO field staff were more likely to be trained in areas other than livestock and therefore relied more on government staff for livestock related advice. From their perspective, NGO staff often found themselves spread too thin amongst the wide ranging activities of their NGO; stressed by the need to be the expert in too many areas (Stelling and Millar 2009). This is a common issue in rural development spheres. While the enthusiasm of NGO project staff is not questioned, their capacity to deliver is; they are often from an urban background, with little understanding of the rural context (Van den Ban and Samanta 2006). They are also most likely to be trained in social, rather than agricultural, science (Danielsen et al. 2005; Van den Ban and Samanta 2006; Biradar et al. 2006).

According to Van Mele et al. (2005) grassroots NGO staff are, however, directly in touch with the major motivational factors of the professional pride and personal satisfaction of working through problems with clients – an environment which other partners' staff may miss, to the detriment of the partnership. Government research staff, for example, while working on the very technology being implemented successfully by NGO projects, may never have the opportunity for direct positive feedback. Motivation falls as a result (Van Mele et al. 2005). Danielsen et al. (2005 p199) also points to "...the difficulties many government employees have in keeping motivated, as they are caught in a bureaucratic, inflexible system with limited resources or rewards to accept new responsibilities". Issues with the motivation of government staff within the alliance were reported by one NGO project leader working in remote communities (Stelling and Millar 2009), but this did not surface as a widespread constraint.

Conclusion

The formation of learning alliances is recognised as a key tool in increasing innovation capacity in agricultural development. In the case of the Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance, the process proved successful in building the capacity of staff both within and beyond the alliance borders. As a result, the alliance also expanded the impact of the technologies for farmers within the project districts and beyond to more remote areas.

Limitations to the alliance - including staffing issues, systemic constraints in partnering vastly different organisations, and issues around the remoteness of project communities – were acknowledged by participants as being greatly outweighed by the benefits. According to participants, one of the major benefits of the alliance was the formation of a strong, lasting and supportive network between government and NGO staff, which they believe will last beyond the Legumes for Pigs project itself. Evaluation of the alliance highlighted the great value participants – particularly field staff - placed on the relationships formed through the partnership, and the emphasis they placed on future activities they felt could further consolidate of these relationships.

The success of this alliance therefore lies not only with the effectiveness of the Stylo technology, but with the successful formation and maintenance of the partnership itself. This was achieved firstly through the careful selection of partners and then through the incorporation of processes and activities which reinforced the key dimensions of effective partnerships: mutuality and organisational identity. The innovation capacity of the alliance was maintained by partner's willingness to change approaches and provide flexible responses to emerging issues.

The case study of the Legumes for Pigs Development alliance indicates that such alliances can greatly improve extension capacity and illustrates the importance of conscious attention to the partnership in equal measure to the technical quality of the programme.

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