



CHALLENGES OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS FOR AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT SERVICES PROVISION IN RICE PRODUCTION IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Recent approaches at enhancing the provision of agricultural support services to rice farmers in Nigeria involve multi-stakeholder partnerships. For effective performance, there is the need for right mix of partners' interests and resources otherwise conflicts may become inevitable. This study therefore investigated challenges in a multi-stakeholder partnership in rice production in Benue state that may predispose the system to conflicts and make it unsustainable. Using simple random sampling technique, 170 rice farmers were selected from the list of cooperative societies that participated in the scheme. Interview schedule containing respondents' level of interaction with other stakeholders (17-33), access to agric-support services (8-24) and potential sources of conflicts (mean score) was used to collect data. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and PPMC. The result indicated that 57.1% of the farmers had high level of interaction with stakeholders. Multi-stakeholder partnership was found to have enhanced farmers' access to improved rice varieties (1.83 ± 0.42), guaranteed market (1.75 ± 0.50) and timely delivery of extension services (1.62 ± 0.63). The farmers ranked distrust as most severe source of conflicts (2.88 ± 0.41). There was a weak negative relationship between farmers' level of interaction with other stakeholders and sources of conflicts. It is evident that the enhanced delivery of agricultural support services through multi-stakeholder partnership has not been without some hitches. There is therefore need for open communication with effective feedback mechanism to reduce frictions and build trust and transparency among partners.

Keywords: Conflict, Multi-stakeholder partnership, Agricultural support services

INTRODUCTION

Rice has become a major staple crop in Nigeria. It is of prime importance compared to maize, yam and cassava (Olawale, 2010). This might be connected with rapid population growth, preference of urban lifestyle for food which requires less time to prepare, and rising household income (Ojehomon *et al.*, 2004). In fact, rice has become so popular that most Nigerian families consume the grain at least once every day. More so, with 80% of domestic rice production in the hands of smallholders, the cereal has become an important source of income for this category of farmers (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). Thus, there is no gainsaying the fact that rice occupies a strategic position in the national drive towards food security and poverty alleviation.

Despite high increase in consumption, the domestic rice production has not been able to meet up with demand. The consequence of this is rice importation in order to bridge the gap from the domestic rice production and consumption in the country. The issue then is that despite expansion in land area for rice cultivation, the average yield of rice in Nigeria still remains unchanged (Okuneye, 2002; Phillips, Nkoya, Pender and Oni, 2009). Factors for the shortfall include among others; uncoordinated interaction among stakeholders in rice value chain, unorganised farmers' networks, insufficient access and untimely delivery of agricultural support services, unreliable input market, inadequate improved rice varieties, low technology know-how and poor policy

environment for agricultural investment to thrive [USAID/MARKETS/NIGERIA (2010)].

There is therefore the urgent need for innovative approach to improve both downstream and upstream rice value chain. Such an approach as multi-stakeholder partnerships have been identified as an important vehicle for mobilising and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to address developmental issues. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can be defined as voluntary, collaborative arrangements between actors from two or more domains of society, i.e. state, market and/or civil society, which have an institutionalised, yet non-hierarchical structure and strive for a sustainability goal (Glasbergen *et al.*, 2007). According to Omobowale *et al.* (2010), multi-stakeholder partnerships are initiated whenever private and public sector partners realise their inability to single-handedly solve the multifaceted problems confronting society. The typical goal of such value chain partnerships is the inclusion of smallholders and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) into commercial chains. Such collaborative arrangements between private and public actors are increasingly popular to overcome market or government failures, and to increase efficiency in the value chain, because partners can pool their resources, knowledge and capabilities (Kolk *et al.*, 2008), and can offer advantages in terms of increased flexibility, productivity, cost reduction and innovations (Jenkins, 2007). The underlying assumption is that by pooling these resources, value chain partnerships can generate results which they could



not have achieved on an individual basis, a so called 'collaborative advantage' (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Kolk *et al.*, 2008).

It is against this background that this work focuses on initiative involving multi-stakeholder partnership along rice value chain in Benue state, Nigeria. Actors in the arrangement are; farmers (they are responsible for growing the specified rice varieties); Benue State Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (BNARDA) (the agency responsible for technology transfer); First Bank Nigeria Limited (disbursement of agricultural loans to participating farmers); Nigeria Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC); (the body that provides crop insurance); OLAM Nigeria Limited (the miller that rolled out agricultural inputs and guarantee market to farmers); Benue State Ministry of Agriculture (supply of fertilisers at subsidised prices) and USAID/MARKETS (the agency responsible for capacity building).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the expected gains from multi-stakeholder partnership may be challenged due to unbalanced power structure, lack of trust, inadequate accountability and information asymmetry. Thus, the marriage of stakeholders of different minds and interest can breed distrust and conflicts which may serve as constraints to effective partnerships. This might be as a result of difficulty in allying resources and individuals from two or more sectors to focus on a complex issue within a developing country. Thus, there is the need to examine the nature of each identified conflicts sources in agricultural support provisions in rice production. This becomes necessary in order to expand, sustain and as well understand how the system can become stronger in the face of possible challenges.

The main objective of the study was to examine challenges to multi-stakeholder partnership in agricultural support provisions in rice production in Benue state, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. ascertain the level of interaction between farmers and other stakeholders in the partnership arrangement in rice production,
2. examine the performance of stakeholders in rendering agricultural support services to the farmers,
3. identify potential sources of conflicts in multi-stakeholder partnership in rice production.

Hypothesis of the study stated in null form, that there is no significant relationship between farmers' level of interaction with other stakeholders and sources of conflicts in the partnership arrangement.

METHODOLOGY

A multi-stage sampling procedure was used for this study. Benue state was purposively selected as a result of the presence of well established multi-stakeholder partnership in rice production. There are 15 local government areas that participated in the partnership arrangement in rice production generally known as 'OLAM out-growers extension scheme' in the state. From this, 25% (i.e. 4 local government areas) were selected through simple random sampling technique. Then, proportionate sampling was used to select 50% of cooperative societies in the 4 local government areas: thus, 42 cooperative societies from the 85 identified cooperative societies were selected. Furthermore, a total of 170 rice farmers (representing 20% of the population) from the list of members of the 42 cooperatives societies were randomly selected. Farmers' mode of interaction was assessed using the knowledge-sharing platform in the partnership arrangement which is the use of "lead farmers". Lead farmers from each of the cooperatives were trained through organised workshops and field days on three major aspect of rice production (namely; pre-season activities, in-season activities and post-harvest activities) by subject matter specialist. How much knowledge was shared with other farmers by the lead farmers was used to determine the level of interaction among the rice farmers in multi-stakeholder partnership. It was on this basis that the level of interaction (premised on the degree at which the knowledge was shared) was measured on a three point scale of well shared, moderately shared and not shared for 20 items. The score of 2 was assigned to well shared, 1 to moderately shared and 0 to not shared. Rice farmers' access to the services provided by the stakeholders was measured on a three point scale of always accessible, sometimes accessible and never accessible. Scores of 2 was assigned to always accessible, 1 to sometimes accessible and 0 to never accessible. Items with the mean score of ≥ 1.25 are regarded as high access and ≤ 1.25 are regarded as low access (Dimelu *et al.*, 2014). Farmers' sources of conflicts were measured on a 3 point rating scale of severe conflict source, mild conflict source and not a conflict source. Severe conflict source was scored 2, mild conflict source 1 and not a conflict source 0. The mean of each of the item was then used to rank the sources of conflicts in order of severity. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies and percentages) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Farmers' level of interaction in partnership arrangement

Table 1 shows the extent to which multi-stakeholders approach has facilitated interactions



among the farmers. Results reveal that the lead farmers shared their acquired knowledge on improved practices on rice production very well on subject areas such as seed germination tests ($\bar{x}=1.76$), varietal selection ($\bar{x}=1.75$), bagging of paddy ($\bar{x}=1.75$), bird control ($\bar{x}=1.73$), insect/disease control ($\bar{x}=1.69$), plant spacing ($\bar{x}=1.67$), planting methods ($\bar{x}=1.65$), weed control ($\bar{x}=1.64$), threshing methods ($\bar{x}=1.64$) and rodents control ($\bar{x}=1.61$). Meanwhile, knowledge on land preparation ($\bar{x}=0.82$), site selection ($\bar{x}=0.47$) and record keeping ($\bar{x}=0.46$) were not well shared to the farmers. The lead farmers may have taken these aspects for granted as interview with extension

personnel indicated that they were well trained on these activities and are thus expected to step down the trainings to their members. Nevertheless, with the majority of the farmers indicating that other subjects were well shared or moderately shared is an indication that the lead farmers were able to have high level of interaction among their members and in the process disseminate the acquired knowledge to other participating farmers. This result support the findings of Alene and Manyong (2006) who found lead farmers to be technically competent in disseminating information to farmers on improved cowpea technology uptake in northern Nigeria.

Table 1: Distribution of farmers according to their interaction with lead farmers in public-private partnership (n= 170)

Activities	Well shared		Moderately shared		Not shared		Mean	SD
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Site selection	16	9.4	48	28.2	106	62.4	0.47	0.66
Land preparation	39	22.9	62	36.5	69	40.6	0.82	0.78
Record keeping	16	9.4	46	27.1	108	63.5	0.46	0.66
Varietal selection	138	81.2	22	12.9	10	5.9	1.75	0.55
Seed germination test	142	83.5	15	8.8	13	7.7	1.76	0.58
Transplanting method	35	20.6	112	65.9	23	13.5	1.07	0.58
Planting methods	118	69.4	44	25.9	8	4.7	1.65	0.57
Spacing	122	71.8	40	23.5	4	4.7	1.67	0.56
Fertiliser application	120	70.6	9	5.3	41	24.1	1.46	0.86
Weed control	123	72.4	32	18.8	15	8.8	1.64	0.64
Disease control	129	75.9	29	17.0	12	7.1	1.69	0.60
Bird control	137	80.6	20	11.8	13	7.6	1.73	0.59
Rodent's control	121	71.2	31	18.2	18	10.6	1.61	0.67
Harvesting methods	14	8.2	142	83.6	14	8.2	1.00	0.40
Drying methods	23	13.5	135	79.4	12	7.1	1.06	0.45
Threshing methods	114	67.1	51	30.0	5	2.9	1.64	0.54
Cleaning of threshed grains	79	46.5	55	32.3	36	21.2	1.25	0.79
Drying of cleaned paddy	123	72.4	23	13.5	24	14.1	1.58	0.73
Bagging of paddy	134	78.8	30	17.6	6	3.5	1.75	0.51
Storage of paddy	117	68.8	30	17.6	23	13.6	1.55	0.72

Farmers' level of interaction in the partnership arrangement

Table 2 shows that more than half of the respondents (57.1%) had high level of interaction with the lead farmers. This supports the findings of Emodi and Dimelu (2010) that farmers had a high level of interaction with other stakeholders in rice innovation system in South Eastern Nigeria. This result implies that majority of the farmers were

reached by the lead farmers and are expected to have acquired new skills and knowledge of improved rice production practices. Also, the high level of interaction is expected to foster peer pressure among the participating farmers which will serve as motivation and influence in adopting production practices and as well as prevent individual farmers from breaching the contract terms.

Table 2: Categorisation of farmers' level of interaction in the partnership (n=170)

Level	Scores	Frequency	%	Mean	SD
Low	17.0 – 28.0	73	42.9	28.0	3.0
High	29.0 – 33.0	97	57.1		
Total		170	100.0		



Farmers' access to agricultural support services and provisions

The rice farmers' access to agricultural support services in Table 3 shows that the multi-stakeholder partnership has enhanced farmers' access to all the components of agricultural support services. For instance, farmers had high access ($\bar{x}=1.83$) to provision of improved rice varieties. The high access to improved rice varieties is anticipated as the purchase of rice paddy by OIAM is on the premise of growing the specified rice varieties. This must have invariably served as incentive for the farmers to grow the improved rice varieties as they are sure of market for their output. It is invariably expected of the farmers to experience increase in yield from the high access to improved rice varieties. This is in agreement with Buah *et al.* (2011) who found that average yield of farmers that participated in an USAID supported programme in Northern Ghana was increased by 92% as a result of enhanced access to quality seeds.

Similarly, Table 3 shows high access ($\bar{x}=1.75$) to the provision of buy-back arrangement. The result suggests that the farmers are better linked to the markets. This is a great improvement

to the current situation in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan Africa where majority of farmers lack access to reliable produce markets. Wiggis and Keats (2013) found that 25% of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from market failure as they are not linked to markets for a variety of reasons namely; remoteness from major markets and low scale of production. Further to this development, the farmers are expected to be motivated to go into rice production as they are sure that their produce will be bought by the processor. In the same vein, table 3 also show high access ($\bar{x}=1.62$) to extension services delivery in rice production. This implies that the multi-stakeholder partnership has made agricultural extension services to be more accessible to the farmers. This finding is corroborated by the submission of Nambiro, Omiti and Mugunieri (2005) that partnerships arrangement involving farmers' organisations in Kenya has increased both the awareness and access of the farmers to agricultural extension services. Thus, the farmers are expected to be more informed on modern practices and technologies in rice production.

Table 3: Farmers rating of access to agricultural support services provisions (n=170)

Agric. support services	Level of access	F	Percent	Mean	SD
Tractors for land preparation	Never accessible	85	50.0		
	Sometimes accessible	59	34.7	0.65	0.73
	Always accessible	26	15.3		
Agricultural loans	Never accessible	36	21.2		
	Sometimes accessible	65	38.2	1.19	0.76
	Always accessible	69	40.6		
Provision of improved rice varieties	Never accessible	3	1.8		
	Sometimes accessible	23	13.5	1.83	0.42
	Always accessible	144	84.7		
Fertilisers supply	Never accessible	21	12.4		
	Sometimes accessible	58	34.1	1.41	0.70
	Always accessible	91	53.5		
Herbicides supply	Never accessible	14	8.2		
	Sometimes accessible	61	35.9	1.48	0.65
	Always accessible	95	55.9		
Extension services delivery	Never accessible	14	8.2		
	Sometimes accessible	36	21.2	1.62	0.63
	Always accessible	120	70.6		
Buy-back arrangement	Never accessible	5	3.0		
	Sometimes accessible	32	18.8	1.75	0.50
	Always accessible	133	78.2		
Insurance premium/crop compensation	Never accessible	82	48.2		
	Sometimes accessible	44	25.9	0.78	0.83
	Always accessible	44	25.9		

Potential sources of conflicts in the partnership arrangement

Table 4 reveals that distrust ($\bar{x}=2.88$), breach of contract agreement ($\bar{x}=2.82$), inadequate incentives ($\bar{x}=2.78$) ranked as the most important and most critical sources of conflicts by the farmers in the partnership arrangement. This supports the

findings of Ezezika and Daar (2012) on agricultural biotechnology public-private partnerships on cowpea in Nigeria, in which they found trust and transparency among the stakeholders as the major key to successful partnerships arrangement. This is also consistent with Nijhoff (2010) who found that farmers in contract farming in Ethiopia do carry out



check on the company's reputation in keeping with terms of delivering of inputs, delivering credit and services on time, providing production support and paying purchased produce on time in order to reduce the risk of contract breach.

Also ranked in order of severity are meeting quality criteria ($\bar{x}=2.75$), poor access to credit ($\bar{x}=2.72$) and unattractive market prices ($\bar{x}=2.70$). The farmers may find the quality standards to be new and difficult to meet. This agrees with Eenhoorn (2009) that farmers often lack the knowledge to use inputs properly and may as well not realise the need for high quality.

Similarly, poor infrastructure ($\bar{x}=2.64$), poor market information ($\bar{x}=2.52$) and weak extension system ($\bar{x}=2.50$) were also ranked as severe sources of conflicts in the study area.

Meanwhile, inadequate monitoring and feedback ($\bar{x}=1.98$) and unbalance power structure ($\bar{x}=1.87$) ranked among the less severe sources of conflicts experienced by the respondents. This implies that farmers did not consider the unequal power relation as a potential source of conflicts as long as the gains of the arrangement accrued to them remain mutual.

Table 4: Potential sources of conflicts in a multi-stakeholder partnership (n = 170)

Conflicts sources	Degree of severity			Mean	SD	Rank
	Severe	Mild	Not a Constraint			
Unbalance power structure among stakeholders	32.4	22.4	45.2	1.87	0.87	11 th
Poor market information	71.8	8.2	20.0	2.52	0.81	8 th
Breach of contract agreement	90.0	2.4	7.6	2.82	0.55	2 nd
Meeting quality criteria	82.4	10.0	7.6	2.75	0.59	4 th
Weak extension system (knowledge and training)	65.3	19.4	15.3	2.50	0.75	9 th
Inadequate monitoring and feedback	33.5	30.6	35.9	1.98	0.84	10 th
Poor infrastructure (road network, electricity, storage)	70.0	24.1	5.9	2.64	0.59	7 th
Poor access to credit	78.8	14.7	6.5	2.72	0.58	5 th
Inadequate incentives	81.8	14.1	4.1	2.78	0.51	3 rd
Distrust	91.2	5.9	2.9	2.88	0.41	1 st
Unattractive market prices	81.8	6.4	11.8	2.70	0.70	6 th

Hypothesis testing

The result of Person Product Moment Correlation in Table 5 shows a significant association between level of interaction with stakeholders and sources of conflicts. The PPMC coefficient of -0.20 indicates a weak correlation between the two variables. It implies that as level of interaction among stakeholders' increases sources of conflicts reduces. It is therefore expected

that frequency of interaction would be ideal for performance with less conflicts in partners' ability to cooperate with one another. This agrees with findings of Burt (1992), Jones *et al.* (1997), Ziggers *et al.* (2010) that the more interaction between members of a network the more information each member of the network knows about all of the other members and the more constraints there are on each player's behaviour

Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing significant relationship between farmers' level of interaction with other stakeholders and constraints to accessing stakeholders' services

	Mean	r-value	p-value	Decision
Level of interaction	27.62	- 0.2	0.004	S
Conflicts sources	28.16			

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of lead farmers had fostered interactive learning among the farmers as majority of the farmers experienced high level of interaction. This is premised on the fact that farmers mostly utilised other farmers within their community to access information and advice. The high level of interaction is expected to have encouraged open communication leading to enhanced access to agricultural support services as provided by the stakeholders. Distrust and breach of contract

agreement were identified as the leading sources of conflicts in the partnership arrangement. This support the fact that bringing individuals with different interests and resources can be challenging. This level of distrust may create a feeling of insecurity among the farmers and pose a danger to the sustainability of the intervention. Further to the fact that conflicts are inevitable in a multi-stakeholder partnership, use of lead farmers should be promoted. So far that the study rated distrust as critical constraint to farmers in accessing services



provided by stakeholders in the partnership arrangement, concerted efforts must be used in selecting partners who can and are willing to fulfil their obligations. Thus, local organisations should be given priority for partnership in order to foster trust and improve sustainability. Meanwhile, it should be noted that trust cannot be considered as a given and needs time to develop within partnerships that will result into social trust relationship.

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