

## Agriculture research, multistakeholder partnerships and the SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) articulate the series of complex problems facing the world today. Addressing these will require systemic change: transformative, systems wide innovation involving inter-linked technological, institutional and policy change across scales.

No single organisation can achieve this systemic change on its own. It requires an architecture of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) operating at local to global scales. One response to the complex nature of development challenges has been the emergence of global MSPs that link across scales (See Box).

The CGIAR, CSIRO and other international agricultural research organisations recognise that partnership is key to their impact ambitions and contribution to the SDGs. It is less clear, however, what types of partnership strategies and practices research organisations should adopt, how they should map onto the emerging architecture of MSPs tackling the SDGs, and what

their role and comparative advantage is in these arrangements going forward?

These questions have been addressed in a recent report commissioned by the Independent Science and Partnership Council of the CGIAR, titled *Strategic study of good practice in Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) partnership*, authored by Kumuda Dorai (LINK Ltd), Andy Hall (CSIRO), and Jeroen Dijkman (CGIAR ISPC).

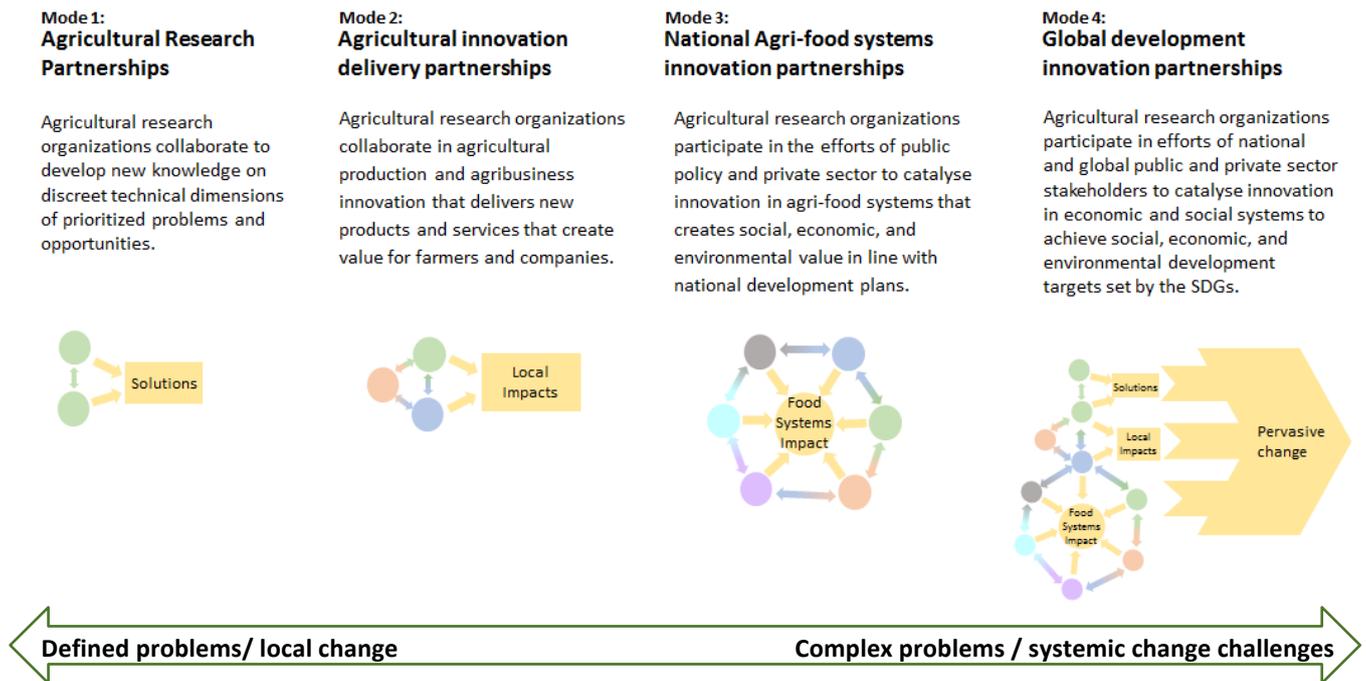
The study develops a framework for exploring different modes of innovation and partnership practice that occupy a continuum from local scale impact to systemic impact (see Figure). This framework is used to reviews MSP practice in two domains: (i) AR4D approaches typified by the CGIAR's Corporate Research Programmes (CRPs) and, (ii) global MSP approaches typified by organisations like the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), Roll Back Malaria and the World Economic Forum's New Vision for Agriculture.

### Box: GLOBAL MSPs FOR DEVELOPMENT

Over the past two decades there has been an explosive growth in collective action for international development, to explain their growth include recognition that the scale and complexity of major global challenges cannot be addressed successfully by single actors, the decline in confidence in established aid structures and business models, the rapid spread of new technologies and the increasingly well-organised and effective advocacy on specific issues by NGOs. The operational expression of these global MSPs varies from lofty platforms with little connection to ground realities, to truly multi-scale architectures that link global and local agendas and global initiatives to local expression and impact organised around development challenges rather than research problems. The initiators and leaders of agenda, this modality of partnerships is likely to play an increasing role in future.

Source: Sonja Patscheke, Angela Barmettler, Laura Herman, Scott Overdyke and Marc Pfitzer (2014). *Shaping Global Partnerships for a post-2015 World*. Stanford Social Innovation Review, Leland Stanford Jr University: USA

**Figure: Modes of innovation and partnership practice**



Adapted from Peterson, K., Mahmud, A., Bhavaraju, N. and Mihaly, A. (2014). The Promise of Partnerships: A Dialogue between INGOs and Donors.

FSG: [www.fsg.org](http://www.fsg.org).

## Key messages

**1. There are a common set of partnership practice principles across all modes of innovation and partnership.** There is a remarkable similarity in the ‘nuts and bolts’ of MSP good practice in different modes: transparency, performance measurement, communication, facilitation, role definition, defining a common agenda. There is an abundance of documented good practice for operating at local scales. What distinguishes practice in modes 3 and 4 is the architecture of partnerships that helps connect changes across scales and links technical change processes with system innovations (policies and markets) that enable transformative change.

**2. A key institutional innovation in MSP’s tackling global challenges is the creation of backbone organisations.** Successful global MSP have acted as a backbone structure, providing coherence around a common theme, developing shared monitoring and learning systems and communication, facilitating partnerships at different scales, but at the same time building coherence across scales.

**3. Current agricultural research partnership practice restricts the scale of impact.** Most MSP practice in international agricultural research currently fits into modes 1 and 2. Innovation platforms are a key implementation tool. These are legitimate modes of innovation and partnership. However, unless these modes have functional links to an architecture of partnerships operating in modes 3 and 4 the scale of impact is going to be restricted and localised.

**4. International agricultural research organisations’ contribution to the SDGs requires engagement in new partnership architectures.** Generally it will not be necessary for international agricultural research organisations to create their own global MSP. Critical will be the ability of research organisations to identify existing architectures or backbone structures and to contribute to these constructively in supporting or leading roles.

**Table: Summary of implications for international agricultural research.**

	Mode 1: <b>Agricultural research partnerships.</b> - for discrete technical challenges	Mode 2: <b>Agricultural innovation delivery partnerships.</b> - for discrete agricultural impact challenges	Mode 3: <b>National Agri-food systems innovation partnerships.</b> - for complex agricultural impact challenges	Mode 4: <b>Global development innovation partnerships.</b> - for complex global impact challenges
Practice	A research consortia to address pest resistance, analytical frameworks, models and platform technologies, etc.	Partnerships, platforms and alliances with the private sector, NGO and farmers groups creating value for farmers and companies to deliver agricultural productivity/ business competitiveness.	Inter-linked farm to policy multi-stakeholder processes and partnerships action changes in food systems that create social and economic value for Food security/ poverty reduction/economic growth.	Global architectures of MSP platforms create coherence between global and local agendas and implementation strategies and action that brings about systems' adaptation for development challenges framed by the SDGs
Impact pathway	<b>Invention</b> Research makes knowledge and technologies available to others for use.	<b>Technology transfer</b> Research collaborates with technology delivery and adoption stakeholders.	<b>Strengthened innovation capacity</b> Research forms part of the capacity of agricultural innovation systems to continuously create integrated sets of technological, policy, and institutional innovations.	<b>Societal adaptation in response to global challenges (Systemic change)</b> Research embedded in global multi-stakeholder processes to create new policy and institutional regimes that reframe the way knowledge, investments and behaviour of the public and private sector and individuals are mobilized to address global challenges.
Scale of impact	Dependent on linkages to other delivery, innovation and societal change processes.	Quick wins, but restricted to scale of project, mission or commercial opportunity.	Long-term, but enduring impacts at value chain or national scales.	Long-term, enduring impacts at global scale.
Science agenda	- Science discovery. - Building scientific capability.	- Learning technology delivery practice. - Trouble shooting application challenges.	- Learning innovation practice. - Identifying new research priorities.	- Communicating existing knowledge and evidence. - Reframing science enquiries and practice.
Role of Agricultural Research	- Leading science discovery research.	- Leading technology delivery practice research. - Leading technical capacity building - Convening and brokering delivery partnerships.	- Leading innovation practice research. - Research service provider and or trusted advisor. - Catalyst in innovation capacity development. - Convener of community of practice.	- Trusted advisor. - Service provider. - Agriculture domain expert and stakeholder.

**5. International agricultural research organisations will need to play different roles at different levels in global MSPs.** The emergence of global MSPs as a core approach of SDGs efforts provides a useful opportunity for international agricultural research organisations to clarify their role in the different levels of MSPs that reflect their core science strengths and mandate. This may include the need to act as service providers and trusted advisors, as well as science leaders (see Table).

**6. Establishing a common framework to understand the link between MSP practice and systemic change and impact.** There is a danger of assuming that MSP's are an intrinsically good thing without ever building the evidence that they are delivering. Currently there is no widely accepted framework for assessing the effectiveness of MSP or partnership. Creating such a framework is of particular importance to international agricultural research organisations as a way of underpinning choices and strategies for effective impact delivery. This is also important for funders who will increasingly need to find ways to evaluate investments targeting systemic changes and the SDGs.

### For more information

The information contained in this factsheet is based on ISPC, 2015. *Strategic study of good practice in AR4D partnership*. Rome, Italy. CGIAR Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC), viii + 39pp + annex 49pp.

For more information about this report contact:

Dr Jeroen Dijkman, CGIAR ISPC at [jeroen.dijkman@fao.org](mailto:jeroen.dijkman@fao.org), or

Dr Andy Hall, CSIRO at [andrew.hall@CSIRO.au](mailto:andrew.hall@CSIRO.au)