Perspectives on partnership: A literature review

Description

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Abstract

This paper reports on a wide-ranging review of the literature on partnerships and other closely related forms of collaboration. It aims to contribute to knowledge of the actual and potential roles of partnership in international agricultural research for development.

The paper summarizes conclusions and insights from four distinct professional literatures: research studies; professional evaluation literature; practitioner-oriented reviews, guidelines and assessment tools; and CGIAR-related reviews, evaluations and policy documents. It identifies and analyzes key cross-cutting themes and success factors, highlights gaps in current knowledge, and identifies high-potential areas for further study. A wide range of research-based publications is reviewed, including studies in such fields as management and organizational development, public administration, economics and international development. Work in these fields covers such diverse topics as the role of inter-organizational collaboration in strategic management, publicâ??private and cross-sector partnerships, Northâ??South partnerships, roles of partnership in linking research with action, networking and transactions costs.

The different literatures talk little to each other and are highly self-referential. Nevertheless, some common patterns, themes and concerns emerge related to definitions, partnership drivers and dynamics, trust and mutuality, power asymmetries and inequities, and success factors.

It is noteworthy that empirical studies of partnerships are rare, particularly in-depth case studies. Theoretical pieces seldom present empirical tests of hypotheses, and practical guidelines are seldom grounded in theory. There is a clear need for more systematic and in-depth empirical research on partnership experiences.

Although partnership is now considered an essential way of working in many fields, several authors caution that the costs of working in partnership may often exceed the benefits. Before establishing a partnership, one should identify a clear value-added proposition.

Many reports on partnership prepared for the CGIAR are available only in grey literature, leading to difficulties in accessing them and risking a loss of knowledge. Gaps in knowledge are identified at the level of individual partnerships, the level of the organizations that participate in or manage portfolios of partnerships, and the level of research or innovation domains that are characterized by networks of partnerships.

Tags

1. partnerships

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