

## Addressing Challenges and Seizing Opportunities: Developing Effective Partnerships in RAS

Video input to the GFRAS Annual Meeting to introduce to the topic of partnerships in RAS

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Good day to all of you and I'm very sorry I cannot be with you for this exciting event! But I'm glad that I can contribute in a small way by helping to provide a foundation for what we mean by partnerships in rural advisory services, or RAS.

Let's start with a definition of "partnership." I am happy with a modified definition from a 2008 paper on partnerships, defining them as: "collaborative arrangements in which actors from two or more organizations are involved in non-hierarchical processes to achieve a [joint] goal."

Of course, there are many types of partnerships, and this is a very commonly-used word in international development—often with little meaning. Partnerships may have different purposes, durations, and degrees of formality. I believe subsequent speakers will give various examples of partnerships. But basically, you can look at partnerships from two perspectives. The first is the *institutional perspective*, which looks at partnerships as arrangements in governance and management of RAS. It's more focused on the process. The second is the *actor perspective*. This frames partnerships as strategic instruments for achieving goals and solving problems of individual actors. It's focused on the people or the institutions and organizations involved.

Dr. van Huijstee, who wrote the definition that I just cited on partnerships, lists various reasons for partnerships from the literature. These include

- Agenda setting
- Policy development
- Project implementation
- Generation and dissemination of knowledge
- Bolstering institutional effectiveness
- Facilitating solutions
- Learning in networks and
- Broadening participation and giving voice to different groups.

With that definition, let's come back to why partnerships so important and why we are focusing on partnerships in RAS at the GFRAS Annual Meeting.

We talk a lot about pluralism in extension and advisory services. Public sector, private sector, non-governmental organizations, and producer organizations are all involved in RAS and often work together in planning, providing and/or financing RAS.

For rural advisory services to be effective in facing current challenges, they need to take up increasingly complex topics and thus consider increasing numbers of partnerships, beyond the traditional RAS ones and even beyond RAS. Today's challenges require increased coordination, co-location, and collaboration between different actors to allow use of each person or organization's comparative advantage.

Advantages of partnerships, according to van Huijstee, are

- access to financial resources or to knowledge and expertise
- innovative solutions, and
- legitimacy.

However, there are also risks, such as

- blurring of tasks and responsibilities
- loss of legitimacy
- cultural differences and
- insecure outcomes.

These can be avoided through careful choice of goals, partners, subjects, and activities. The risks that I mentioned can be further minimized through respectful and open ways of working; trust; and through facilitating factors, such as support from outside parties such as the media, policymakers, and funding agencies.

I recently did an analysis of the past eight themes of the GFRAS Annual Meeting with my extension colleagues Dr. David Dolly, Dr. Kevan Lamm, and Dr. Alexa Lamm for a paper on the future of extension from the perspective of network emergence. What we found is that GFRAS has evolved over time in response to the demands of the network and the issues of the day to become much broader-based, with more stakeholders and more complex topics. GFRAS first built and consolidated a network of global extension members and then moved to an outward focus in terms of relations within and outside of RAS. Our analysis showed that the network first focused on simple, basic themes of interest, then slowly expanded to wider and more complex topics that involved a richer network of actors. What this implies is that RAS, which are on the front line of trends stemming from societal shifts, are positioned to play a crucial role in societies on global agricultural issues. And of course, the 2018 meeting here in Korea as the culmination of this evolution to a focus on partnerships.

So I would like to wish you all the best for the next few days, and hope that what you learn together is going to improve rural advisory services around the world.

## **Reference**

Mariëtte M. Van Huijstee , Mara Francken & Pieter Leroy (2007) Partnerships for sustainable development: a review of current literature, *Environmental Sciences*, 4:2, 75-89, DOI: 10.1080/15693430701526336. To link to this article:  
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