

# Can cultural understanding, strong relational values, and effective communication, create stronger, longer lasting, strategic alliances in agribusiness?

Strengthening strategic alliances between smallholder farmers and agribusiness by emphasizing cultural understanding, strong relational values and effective communication.

## Background: Creating longer lasting strategic alliances in agribusiness

Partnerships are an important way for any Agribusiness to increase their impact. In East Africa, strategic alliances are increasingly standing out as a form of partnership as they offer a range of benefits from competitive positioning to innovation. They, however, face challenges such as the lack of understanding of relational values, cultural nuances, good governance, transparency, and open communication between partners. Existing frameworks on strategic alliances fall short in offering practical solutions to these barriers and lack the contextual knowledge required for navigating the intricacies of East African contexts. Recognizing this gap, our framework aims to fill the void by guiding partners on the ground and incorporating essential elements such as cultural understanding, strong relational values, and effective communication.

## Conducting the research

After a thorough review of available literature, we shared a preliminary framework aimed at initiating partnerships and evaluating existing frameworks. To evaluate the framework in the context of partnerships in East Africa, we developed an IDI guide and a checklist for KIIs. We had an interview with the Agri-Consortium and IShamba to understand better their experience with partnerships and learnings they could share. Lastly, to refine and disseminate the findings, we have conducted a co-design workshop with a selection of key stakeholders from Busara and CIAT.

## project facts

### Key words

Agribusiness, strategic alliance, partnerships, smallholder farmers, cultural understanding, agriculture

### Behavioral themes

Collaboration and competition

### Research design

Qualitative research: In depth-interviews, Key Informant Interviews and co-design workshop

### Scope

Literature review and Key Informant Interviews

Start date: August 2023

End date: December 2023

### Location

East Africa

### Partner

CIAT

### Ethics approval

NA



- » **Culture:** Formalize partnerships to move away from informal networks, define roles clearly and create channels for open communication. Embrace a culture of adaptability and learning in diverse partnerships. Prioritize transparency, trust, and clarity in partnership culture.
- » **Leadership:** Appoint a dedicated partnership coordinator for momentum. Define clear roles and responsibilities from the outset. Encourage an open mindset and honest communication.
- » **Communication:** Develop practical tools for framework implementation. Offer technical assistance for practical application. Pilot and adapt the framework as needed. Integrate with existing models like the business model canvas. Use effective communication and engagement strategies.

## Implications

### This framework improves strategic alliances for smallholder farmers by:

- helping foster collaboration between smallholder farmers,
- building a culture of trust and transparency,
- helping with knowledge creation, sharing and joint learning, and
- improving resource distribution and allocation.

### This framework improves strategic alliances for agribusiness owners by:

- creating better and more efficient business models through resource and knowledge sharing,
- driving innovation and joint value creation,
- encouraging communication and transparency, and proper management of data, and
- creating clarity on the opportunity costs and goals of the partnership to ensure expectations.

## Recommendations for future research

- » **Contextual Considerations:** Recognizing the importance of contextual factors and cultural nuances, future research and documentation should concentrate on partnerships within the East African context. This research should explore the region's unique contextual factors, challenges, and success factors.
- » **Policy & Strategy:** Policymakers and business strategists should consider the regional context and cultural factors when designing and implementing partnerships in East Africa. Insights from existing case studies and research can inform more effective partnership strategies tailored to the region.
- » **Collaboration & Knowledge:** Encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing among organizations, researchers, and policymakers in East Africa is crucial. This collaboration can help address existing knowledge gaps, promote best practices, and facilitate the development of successful partnerships in the region.

## Further reading

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