



# PAEPARD



THEMATIC BRIEF #4



Strengthening the capacity of multi-stakeholder partnerships in ARD



## Managing power differences in ARD partnerships

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## Power in ARD partnerships

Although it is not always acknowledged, power differences between partners fundamentally affect Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) partnerships. In referring to its African-European ARD partnerships, PAEPARD has often alluded to aspects of power without naming them as such. The project was established to create “equitable and balanced partnerships” between: a) researchers and research users, and b) African and European partners. It referred to a focus on “inclusive” issues, the need for partners to “recognize and value each other’s uniqueness and cultural differences”; “co-learning”; “co-ownership”; “mutual trust”; “mutually beneficial collaboration”. All of these terms have something to do with relative power between partners.

At its most basic level, power is about the ability of people or organizations to achieve their goals. When you want to change something – to innovate – differences in power become more evident and can hinder progress. Yet power is not something tangible and not always obvious. It changes depending on one’s context – on place and time. Power dynamics form a complex but sensitive issue that is often avoided – the “elephant in the room”. Reflecting on these issues and making them explicit is necessary if mutually beneficial and equitable partnerships are to form and function effectively.

ARD partners typically include research and non-research organizations, national or local government, business, civil society (such as farmer organizations) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). When working in a group or team, especially when wanting to build a partnership, there needs to be awareness of the inequalities that exist, and to strategize about how to deal with them. If inequalities are ignored, tensions can develop and build within the partnership, which leads to obstacles in working together.

## Power dynamics

There are four ways in which actors can express power, either in a negative or positive way:

- 1. Power over:** Coercive, dominating or controlling power. In practice, this is found in authority, brute force. But it is also exercised by influencing or manipulating what others think they can do. Power over is the expression of negative power.
- 2. Power to:** Individual ability to act, or “agency”. In practice, this is rooted in the belief that every individual has the power to make a difference.
- 3. Power with:** Collective power/action, the ability to act together. In practice, this brings together different interests, knowledge, resources and strategies, to become stronger as a group.
- 4. Power within:** Empowerment, individual or collective sense of self-worth, value, rights. In practice, enhancing people’s power within builds their capacity to imagine and helps raise aspirations on change.

Secondly, power is not always tangible or visible – it can be “hidden” or even worse “invisible”:

**Visible power** refers to decision-making that is observable, particularly to the public or political sphere where formal decisions are taken. It involves the formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision-making (e.g. laws, elections, policies in local, district or national government – or the governance and decision-making processes of any organization]. In ARD partnerships, power is often in the hands of those who have access to finance. The requirements for much donor-led ARD funding, for example, require research organizations to be the applicants or partners, and put emphasis on scientific excellence rather than development impact, thus giving less power to the potential users of the research.

**Hidden power** sets the political agenda behind the scenes. This refers to often exclusive consultation processes (e.g. making attendance very expensive or “by invitation only”) behind closed doors, maintained by those who control it. Vested interests can control the

backstage – whether in politics or inside organizations – excluding or devaluing the concerns of less powerful players (such as small-scale farmers, poor people, minorities...). An example of this type of power was evident in PAEPARD’s conclusion that “conventional competitive funding mechanisms skew participation towards research organizations with more resources” (PAEPARD, 2017).

**Invisible power** is the most difficult kind of power to change, as it refers to cultural norms, attitudes, rules and behaviours that shape meaning in our lives. They create inequality and restriction (e.g. gender roles, negative stereotypes on ethnicity, religion, minority, age, level of education...); and shape the way issues are seen, including our own internalized assumptions and views. Invisible power can be so subtle that individuals, groups and organizations may not even be aware of their own prejudices towards others. While such issues are invisible and therefore undocumented, it is reasonable to assume that they play a role in ARD partnerships, both in PAEPARD and elsewhere.

## Resolving power issues

Clearly, when these complex power dynamics come to play in ARD partnerships of different stakeholders who hold different elements of power, it is not easy to discern or understand them clearly, much less resolve them. Even so, a better understanding of power dynamics can be helpful to ARD processes in different ways.

To start with, looking at power helps ARD partners to understand and define the research problems more clearly, and then develop a strategic plan of action and partnership. ARD seeks innovative solutions to problems to help those who are in less powerful positions, for example to improve agribusiness options for smallholder farmers or processors. Yet, farmers’ groups inevitably start from a position of less power in determining the research agenda as it is often only researchers who are eligible to apply for research funding in the first place. In the PAEPARD project, dissatisfaction of this power imbalance by sub-regional farmer organizations

in Africa resulted in the project developing the “Users-Led Process” (ULP) in order to address this imbalance. Under the ULP, and with PAEPARD support, farmer organizations identified a “federating theme” of interest to them, conducted a desk review to see what knowledge existed on the theme and to identify relevant stakeholders; held introductory and “multi-stakeholder research question” (MSHRQ) workshops to bring these stakeholders together and identify researchable issues; and then defined concept notes and eventually proposals for funding (Figure 1). While this resulted in research that was much more attuned to needs of farmers and the private sector, and in spite of much advocacy with funders by the project; it still remained difficult to find financing for this type of research where priorities had been set by users (thus demonstrating that power is in the hands of the funders).

Whenever seeking to make a change, it is helpful to first understand the current situation. A good approach to this is to analyse the context and the power dynamics at play - what Green (2016) calls a “Power & Systems Approach”. By first developing a better understanding of the agricultural innovation system (see Thematic Brief 2: Systems thinking) and the power dynamics in which the research will take place, it becomes easier to come up with strategies that deliver mutually beneficial results. In other words, more attention can be given to bringing benefits to all rather than only to the more powerful ARD partners.

Understanding power relationships helps ARD partners to collaborate effectively

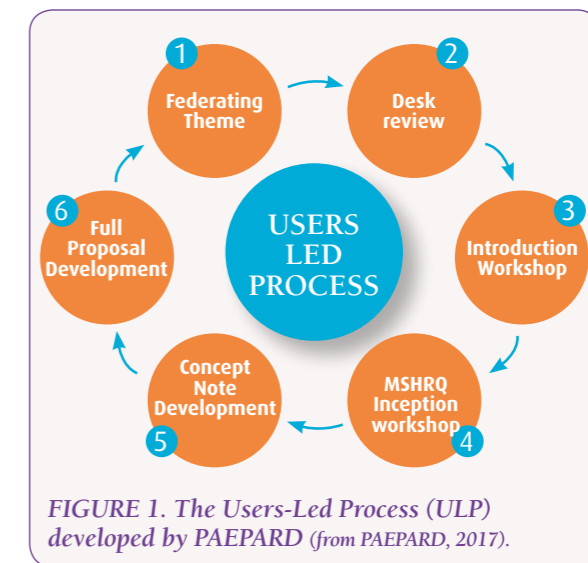


FIGURE 1. The Users-Led Process (ULP) developed by PAEPARD (from PAEPARD, 2017).



Second, reflecting on power dynamics will help facilitators/coordinators guide multi-stakeholder partnerships to function well. ARD involves (research and non-research) partners that have different strengths to contribute; these may involve stakeholders who operate at different levels (international, national, regional, local), in different spheres (policy, research, business, government, non-government, etc.), as well as varying cultural and country contexts. How the partnership leaders deal with the varied power dynamics will influence the levels of trust, openness and the overall legitimacy of the process. In a multi-stakeholder context with African and European partners, with different resource and membership bases, there is clearly a situation of unequal actors that need to work in concert if ARD projects are to be successful and rewarding to all.

enhanced when the facilitator or coordinator can understand and analyse whether power dynamics are in fact intruding on group processes - including an honest look at their own power. In theory, external or “neutral” facilitators (as contrasted with project leaders invested with formal authority) can more dispassionately address such power differences. In practice, as shown in PAEPARD experience, many partnerships find it difficult to find, fund and effectively use external facilitators.

Addressing these issues, and consequently building trust among ARD partners to enable them to collaborate effectively, is therefore not easy. Tool 1 below gives an idea on how to analyse (potential) ARD stakeholders in terms of power dynamics. Understanding power balances is helpful at partnership level, but also when conducting workshops and meetings. A facilitator who is sensitive to different levels of power in a group will ensure that some do not dominate, while creating conditions to give everyone the opportunity to be heard.

## Tools for addressing power imbalances

**Analysing and addressing power relations** in multi-stakeholder partnerships is part of the role of the partnership coordinator, facilitator, or leader (see Thematic Brief 3: Adaptive leadership in ARD partnerships). The functioning of the partnership is

### Tool 1: Importance & Influence matrix

The importance & influence matrix helps to analyse who are the powerful and less powerful stakeholders, and how to deal with these imbalances.

Stakeholders are ranked in terms of importance and influence within the ARD partnership (e.g. using scale of 1-5; 1=low, 5=high) using the following definitions to guide the ranking:

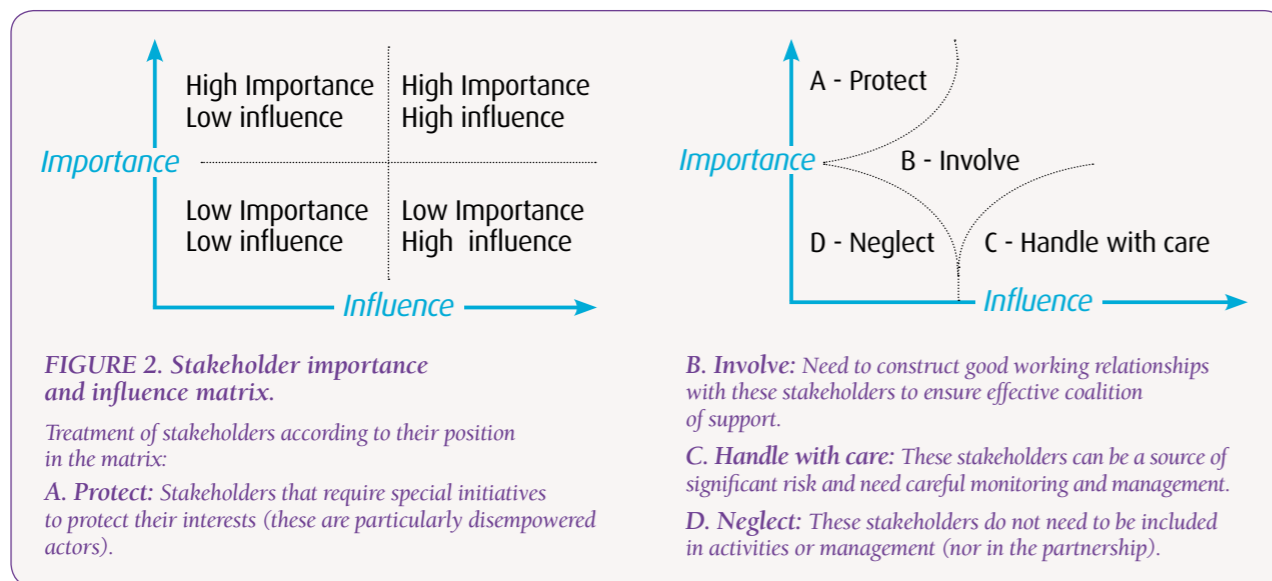


TABLE 1. The Power Matrix. (Adapted from Miller et al., 2006)

MECHANISMS	EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE POWER POWER OVER	STRATEGIES TO CONFRONT NEGATIVE POWER POWER WITH, POWER WITHIN, POWER TO	TRANSFORMING POWER
<b>Visible Power:</b> Making & enforcing the rules. The formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision-making.	Biased laws or policies. Decision-making structures favour the elite or powerful. In spite of principles of equality being law, in practice governance bodies do not represent the less powerful.	Argue for more democratic and transparent processes. Analyse decision-making processes, and how excluded groups can use these formal spaces more effectively. Lobby, monitor, demonstrate, go on strike, use votes strategically, or stand for office.	Build collective power
<b>Hidden Power:</b> Setting the agenda behind the scenes. Consultation processes devalue the interests and even exclude less powerful players.	Leaders are labelled trouble-makers or unrepresentative. Powerful actors lobby for their own interests (often against objective evidence; e.g. “fake news”). Smallholder production systems are treated as not economically viable.	Mobilize and strengthen organizations of excluded people, democratise their leadership and accountability, increase the visibility and legitimacy of their issues and demands. Expose and challenge how issues are framed, strengthen people’s voices and capacities to speak out.	Confront, engage, negotiate
<b>Invisible Power:</b> Shaping meaning and values considered normal. Cultural norms, attitudes, rules and behaviours that create inequality and restriction (e.g. gender roles, negative stereotypes, etc.).	Socialisation processes within the partnership, in which belief systems such as patriarchy and racism can create inequalities, distrust, lack of agency.  Lack of information / knowledge that inhibits ability to question, participate in change.	Raise awareness, so that people recognize how deeply embedded attitudes and beliefs block change and transform the way in which they see themselves and the world. Build confidence to speak out, do strategic research to expose the ideological basis of things presented as universal truths, and propose credible alternatives.	Build individual & collective power

**Importance:** How important is the ARD partnership or issue to the stakeholder? How interested are they in it? How big is their stake in it?

**Influence:** How much can the stakeholder influence decisions made, or affect the innovation (both negatively or positively)?

The resulting importance and influence of the stakeholders is then mapped out according to ranking. Curved lines are then drawn on the matrix to show how these stakeholders should be treated (Figure 2).

Based on this analysis, make a plan of how to approach different stakeholders. Find ways to move stakeholders of Categories A and C into the B category. The position of stakeholders (and who the stakeholders are) changes over time, so it is useful to repeat this exercise at different stages of the ARD process. Some questions to reflect on include:

- Where and what are the most serious changes needed?
- Where are the potential dangers? How to deal with them?

- Where are the potential opportunities? How to engage with them?
- Which “power champion” stakeholders could be potential allies and collaborators?
- What collective power do we have now and what do we need to develop/mobilize?
- Who will be the most difficult/easiest stakeholder to engage with?
- Who are the unknown actors who might affect success of our work?
- What can we do within our organizations?
- What can we do with others in our networks?
- What help do we need from others?

### Tool 2: Power matrix to help design strategies to improve power imbalances

Table 1 looks at how to improve responses and strategies to deal with negative power related to the three dimensions (visible, hidden and invisible) described above.



## PAEPARD experience in addressing power relationships

PAEPARD was designed to address power imbalances between a) researchers and research users, and b) European and African stakeholders. Although these power imbalances were not specifically analysed using the framework suggested in this brief, the strategies used in the project can be described in terms of the power matrix shown above. Some of

these strategies are summarized in *Table 2*, allowing for insights into how power relations may have been behind challenges hampering ARD project processes.

These strategies have met with mixed success. Providing seed money to bring together research users (farmer groups, NGO, private sector) and research organizations (universities, government research institutes) was successful in enabling potential ARD partner groups to jointly develop proposals which responded to the needs of the traditionally less powerful user group. However, in many cases, these proposals then had to be modified to fit the requirements of specific funding mechanisms, which favoured more traditional research.

TABLE 2. Examples from PAEPARD set in the Power matrix.

	CHALLENGES	RESPONSES & STRATEGIES
Visible Power	<p>Current competitive funding mechanisms for agricultural research favour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>research organizations with more resources (e.g. Europeans) and capabilities to develop quality proposals, rather than smaller research organizations in Africa,</li> <li>research-research partnerships, rather than partnerships between researchers and research users,</li> <li>research products (information) measurable in the short term, rather than change and innovation outcomes in the longer term.</li> </ul>	<p>Upgrade proposal-writing skills of researchers and research users to improve quality.</p> <p>Leverage resources from multiple sources, and extending the time to allow less powerful organizations to make good proposals.</p> <p>Develop brokers and information systems to raise awareness of funding opportunities among less powerful research communities and networks.</p> <p>Advocate for funding that better responds to the research needs identified by smallholder farmers.</p>
Hidden Power	<p>Farmers' organizations have little influence in setting of research agenda.</p>	<p>Provide seed money, and capacity strengthening, for farmers and researchers to meet and jointly identify research needs.</p> <p>Encourage ARD partnerships (and provide seed funding and capacity strengthening) for "neutral" consultants to facilitate ARD partnerships.</p> <p>Strengthen the capacity of farmer organizations to identify research needs and collaborate with researchers (Users-Led Process).</p> <p>Strengthen capacity of farmer organizations to lobby for more appropriate research funding.</p>
Invisible Power	<p>Highly educated research professionals - and funding mechanisms managed by such professionals - value "scientific" and explicit knowledge over farmers "tacit" knowledge.</p> <p>Research reporting formats and Incentive systems for researchers (e.g. publication systems) favour explicit "scientific" knowledge and communication with "peers" and not with users.</p>	<p>Develop "capitalization and documentation" processes that document tacit knowledge, processes of stakeholder interaction.</p> <p>Make information available to partners that is timely and accessible, up-to-date, open source, multi-lingual, etc.</p>

Less successful – at least in the short term – has been the lobbying for more inclusive funding mechanisms. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the policies and practices of major donors have been difficult to influence during the lifetime of the project, although the longer-term influence is difficult to judge.

Providing funding for "neutral" facilitators to facilitate such initial interactions and address power imbalances during these interactions was successful in some partnerships. In others, there was confusion between the roles of the formal partnership "leader" and the

facilitator, or the role was discontinued after this initial funding was discontinued.

More successful has been the strengthening of capacity of farmer organizations to identify and prioritize their own needs, work with research organizations to turn these into research questions and develop into concrete partnerships. Although specific research proposals were often unsuccessful in early attempts, persistence and leveraging of funds from a variety of sources eventually led to the themes identified by farmer organizations being addressed.

Good facilitation can help to identify and resolve power issues in ARD partnerships

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# PAEPARD



## Executive summary

**Power dynamics** form a complex but sensitive issue that is often avoided when trying to understand the reasons behind seemingly intractable conflicts - it is the “elephant in the room” that nobody wants to talk about. Yet power differences can often be the cause of conflicts between stakeholders in a partnership, or even between individuals in a group. Power can be deployed in visible, hidden or invisible ways. Being more aware of the ways in which power differences arise, and ways in which these power imbalances can be addressed, helps reduce tensions in ARD partnerships; enabling them to be more inclusive, more trustful, more strategic in planning, and ultimately more effective in reaching their goals.

**The PAEPARD project** was specifically designed to address power imbalances between African and European research

organizations, and between research organizations and research users (farmer groups, private sector, NGO). However, the ARD partnerships formed under the project did not typically analyse power differences explicitly. While some of the strategies used by the project to address these power imbalances were successful, particularly in terms of building the capacity of research users to express and lobby for their needs, it remained difficult to change institutional factors such as the requirements of research funding agencies.

**This brief describes two tools** for analysing and addressing power imbalances. These show how to look at the importance and influence of stakeholders, as well as how to more explicitly develop strategies for dealing with visible, hidden and invisible power.

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