Matching public and private interests for inclusive business impact? A case study on the CREATE project in Ethiopia

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Public-private partnerships and inclusive business: a popular aid modality

Since the start of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, increasing attention has been paid to public private partnerships to solve the recurring problems on poverty and food security. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are specifically heralded for their ability to pool knowledge and capabilities of the different parties involved, where the private sector in particular is thought of as appealing due to its foreseen innovation in agricultural research, education, and new technologies (IOB, 2013; Kolk, Tulder & Kostwinder, 2008; Jamali, 2004). Moreover, a public-private partnership is considered to be an attractive financial instrument since the private sector can ensure additional monetary resources besides official development aid. Additionally, it is believed that the private sector can increase the impact and sustainability of development interventions by means of stimulating investment in so-called 'inclusive business models' which link smallholders to market opportunities via value chain integration (Carana Corporation, 2014; Kelly et al., 2015).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands is a pioneer in collaborating with the private sector. Since 2002 the Dutch government has increasingly used public-private partnerships in Dutch development programs. The Aid & Trade agenda on development cooperation initiated in 2012 emphasizes even more the crucial role which the private sector has to play to stimulate inclusive business and growth, and contribute to poverty alleviation and food security in developing countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2013). In the Global South, governments are also gradually turning to public-private partnerships to stimulate investment in agriculture (Oxfam, 2014). Their aim is to create a win-win situation where the partnerships support (foreign) agribusiness firms in their efforts to establish robust supply chains that simultaneously offer new market opportunities to local farmers that may result in additional income generation and food security (Kolk, Tulder & Kostwinder, 2008; Rankin, Nogales, Santacoloma, Mhlanga & Rizzo, 2016).

To ensure that (foreign) agricultural investments also result in poverty reduction of these populations, inclusive business models have made their entry. Inclusive business is a private sector approach to providing goods, services, and livelihoods in commercially viable and scalable ways, to those populations at the base of the pyramid by making them part of the value chain of companies' core business as suppliers, distributors, retailers, or customers (Carana Corporation, 2014; Rösler, Hollmann, Naguib, Oppermann, & Rosendahl, 2013). Such business models are intended to circumvent existing market failures and can help the poor by increasing their productivity and providing better services and inputs such as knowledge and market access (Rösler, Hollmann, Naguib, Oppermann, & Rosendahl, 2013). In addition, providing support for inclusive business models within a PPP, is another way for donors (public sector) to reach traditionally underserved populations by means of durable and eventually, self-sustaining private sector led solutions (Carana Corporation, 2014). Over the past decade, an increasing amount of development aid has been invested in PPPs. In 2010, donors channelled around 900 million US dollars into the PPP modality, a sharp increase compared to the 234 million US dollars in 2007 (Oxfam, 2014). This number is still rising, as the Dutch government alone spent 135 million Euros on PPP funds for water and food security in 2014 (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). Clearly, these financial figures illustrate the growing prominence of PPPs as an aid modality.

What do we know about the impact of inclusive business PPPs?

Following the increased development funding via PPPs, there is a growing body of literature that has enhanced our understanding on the effectiveness and impact of these partnerships as an aid modality. In a case study performed by Sarpong and Anim-Somuah (2015) on PPPs in the agricultural value chain in

Ghana it was found that the PPP had positive impacts on development outcomes such as improved household food security, increased smallholder productivity and access to farm inputs, services and infrastructure. However, there was also a clear need to identify and quantify the risks facing each stakeholder in PPP arrangements so that mechanisms for sharing risks and benefits can be agreed upon. In addition, more transparency was requested, particularly around contractual arrangements (Sarpong & Anim-Somuah, 2015). A case study conducted by van Wijk and Kwakkenbos (2011) on five PPPs engaged in sorghum beer highlights another important topic. While increased market opportunities had been witnessed, it was seen that governments only played a limited role. This raises the issue that value chain partnerships potentially replace rather than complement governments in setting up sustainable value chains as the government should be making durable institutional changes (van Wijk & Kwakkenbos, 2011). Oxfam (2014) and Bachke (2010) touch upon the potential risks in case the partnership ends. Engagement of the private sector in a development project is often not financially viable or desirable in the absence of donor support due to the high costs of trainings. This illustrates a risk for smallholders if donors decide to pull out of the partnership or if NGOs reduce or even stop their support (Oxfam, 2014; Bachke, 2010). Finally, literature review and stakeholder interviews conducted by the Carana Corporation (2014) suggests that companies applying an inclusive business model only reach the top segment of the base of the pyramid. Many inclusive businesses prefer to engage the 'next billion up'—the segment of the poor that are above the poverty line- as this segment typically has access to capital and assets but have a lack of access to markets (Carana Corporation, 2014).

Enhancing our knowledge on inclusive business PPP impacts

The abovementioned findings suggest that there are limitations to the ability of PPPs to increase the impact and sustainability of development interventions, and not all PPPs inherently benefit the poor (Carana Corporation, 2014). In an attempt to further enhance our understanding on the effectiveness and local development impact of inclusive business PPPs, this research paper has explored the livelihood and food security impact of the CREATE project, a Dutch PPP implemented in Ethiopia which aims to contribute to local economic development and food security via local sourcing of malt barley by Heineken.

Empirical findings are based on mixed method field research in Addis Ababa and Arsi, one of the main barley production areas in Ethiopia, in February-May 2016. A total of 148 contracted farmers took part in a questionnaire survey, and two focus group discussions were held comprising 30 farmers. In addition, to gain a broader picture of the CREATE project, stakeholder and value chain analyses were conducted. These analyses were carried out by means of 15 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with multiple stakeholders such as cooperatives, micro-financing institutions, NGOs, Heineken, and Ethiopian and Dutch governmental departments.

Case study: the CREATE project

Heineken brewery has a long history in Africa. Back in 1900, Heineken was already exporting beer to various African countries and now the Dutch company owns 45 breweries across the African continent. Local sourcing plays a vital role in Heineken's business strategy to assure a long-term and reliable supply of agricultural material needed for Heineken's breweries across Africa. In 2011, Heineken acquired the Harar and Bedele Breweries in Ethiopia and in the beginning of 2015 it opened its newest brewery in Kilinto, near the capital Addis Ababa (Heineken N.V., 2013). These investments come with no surprise, as Ethiopia has experienced one of the fastest increases of beer consumption in recent years, with per capita consumption rates steadily rising 15 to 20 per cent every year since 2011 (Ethiopian News Agency, 2016). Due to a rise in income, Ethiopian households switch from domestically brewed beverages based on sorghum and other grains, to bottled beer which is based on malt barley (ATA, 2013). Hence, there is a large and growing domestic market for beer and its key ingredient malt barley. At the same time, the local malt barley value chain is faced with several challenges that prevent the local supply of malt barley from keeping up with the growing domestic demand. While Ethiopia accounts for about 25 per cent of the total barley production in Africa (FAO, 2014), most barley farmers do not have access to credit and consequently have difficulty in accessing inputs: only a minority of barley farmers has access to input supply and agricultural produce marketing. Moreover, market linkages are inefficient as federal credit unions and traders lack the financial and operational capacity required to aggregate and deliver barley to large commercial buyers (ATA, 2013).

To overcome these bottlenecks and to respond to the growing market opportunities in barley and beer, the Ethiopian government invited Heineken to set up and develop its own malt barley supply chain (ATA, 2013). This invitation led to the implementation of the Community Revenue Enhancement Through Agricultural Technology Extension (CREATE) project, a public-private partnership in which Heineken's business opportunities and the development interests of the Ethiopian government and the Dutch aid & trade agenda are brought together. The CREATE project runs from 2013 to 2017 and is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and Heineken International. Key implementing partners are the Ethiopian government (Agricultural Transformation Agency) and the Dutch NGO EUCORD[2] (Levy, 2014). The project aims to improve the food security and livelihoods of 20.000 smallholder malt barley farmers and their families. In addition, to meet the high demand for an adequate supply of good-quality malted barley and to substitute 20,000 MT of imported barley by locally produced barley, reliance on imports should be reduced by developing local barely production and connecting farmers to Heineken's supply chain in Ethiopia (Levy, 2014). The latter reason in specific is important since the Ethiopian government wants to substitute imported barley to save precious foreign currency (Gessesse, 2015). Hence, all key stakeholders have much to gain from this project that seeks to build a strong and reliable malt barley value chain.

This public private partnership was implemented to address the triple interests of firstly Heineken, secondly the Ethiopian government, and thirdly the Dutch government. It therefore lends itself to investigate if and how private and public resources, capacities and objectives come together within a PPP modality that seeks to address developmental issues. The main question to be answered in this paper is: what are the implications of the inclusive business PPP on the main beneficiaries, the local smallholder farmers, when looking at their livelihood and food security situation?

Findings from the field: PPP impact on local smallholders

Through the CREATE project, participating smallholders have been able to improve their yields, and experienced a rise in their income. Thousands of farmers have been reached with agronomic supports, pre-financing of inputs, and provision of basic inputs. Additionally, the new seed variety boosted productivity up to 7.2 tons/ha, compared to the national average of 1.7 tons/ha (What's Brewing, 2015).

The collected survey data indicates that participating farmers have gained better agricultural skills and knowledge on for instance soil preparation, sowing, weed control, and market linkage. As a result, the majority has a higher productivity and income, improved access to better seeds, better access to credit services and the malt barley market, and improved living conditions. A positive side effect occurred as

[2] EUCORD (European Cooperative for Rural Development) is a Brussels-based non-profit organization incorporated under Dutch Cooperative Law since 2003. EUCORD is also involved in a CREATE project in Rwanda, funded by the Dutch government and Heineken International.

farmers' children were sent to school more often due to an increased income, expanding the developmental impact from an individual to a household. In terms of food security, much progress was reached on the stability and accessibility component. Farmers stated to eat three meals a day instead of two meals, which shows an improvement in their food security status over time. Moreover, accessibility to the malt barley market strongly improved since farmers have a fixed buyer and a fixed market place to sell their barley. More attention needs to be paid to the accessibility of other food markets as farmers are often unaware of the precise distribution channels for their remaining crops.

In terms of food availability, farmers chose slightly different livelihood strategies to cope with the new malt barley variety. Roughly two third of the farmers chose to allocate more plots of land to the barley crop to increase their yields. The increased yields were sometimes used for home consumption, but roughly 85% of the farmers sold the barley for having a higher income. One third of the farmers chose to produce the same amount of barley on fewer hectares and allocated plots of land to different crops and/or agricultural activities. None of the farmers applied mono-cropping. Almost 90 per cent of farmers grow at least three different crops, which is similar to the average number of crops grown before the start of the project. This seems to contradict with findings of other case studies which showed that contract farming led farmers to shift their cultivation from food crops to cash crops (Glover, 1994; Clapp, 1994; Morvaridi, 1995; Rehber, 1998, all cited in Kirsten and Sartorius, 2002).

Digging deeper: concerns and risks

The research findings indicate that, at least on the short-term, the CREATE project's main objectives regarding increased productivity, income and food security of participating smallholders have been largely achieved. However, when digging deeper in their lives as contracted farmers, three main concerns were excavated that need to be acknowledged and addressed to ensure a long-lasting and sustainable development impact.

The first issue is related to the exclusive nature of an inclusive business model. As was suggested by the Carana Corporation (2014), companies mainly target the top segment of the base of the pyramid as this segment typically has access to capital and assets. When reviewing the selection and contractual procedure of the CREATE project, it was seen that farmers who are 'better off' have precedence over farmers who cannot meet the selection criteria such as having collateral, owning/renting sufficient plots of land, and having the knowledge to grow barley. Hence, the top segment of farmers tends to capture the contracts, leaving the true base of the pyramid out of the project. This shows the exclusionary nature of inclusiveness, as was also suggested by Poulton et al. (2008, as cited in Vermeulen & Cotula, 2010). It also raises the question whether this programme has truly reached its full development potential, as it is likely that this top segment of farmers already has a better income and food security status than farmers who are part of the base of the pyramid.

Questions can thus be raised on how suitable this business model is in a developing country context as it may actually increase the gap between well-resourced and poor-resourced farmers in developing countries, enlarging the gap between the base of the pyramid and the 'next billion up'. Being included in the value chain also led to increasing production and transportation responsibilities and risk bearing of the cooperatives, which continuously trickled down to the smallholder farmers by means of the contractual agreement. Many farmers also claimed that they were not aware of the fact that they could only sell their harvest to Heineken. Hence, there is a need for both governments and companies to better understand the (power) dynamics of value chain integration, and to assess the risks and opportunities especially for poor persons in developing countries. Incorporating actors in the value chain (i.e. farmers) is mainly concerned with the question of how these actors can gain access to the skills, competencies and supporting services required to participate in global value chains, while power and governance should form an integral part of the discussion (The Partnership Resource Centre, n.d.). As farmers in developing countries often do not have the means, the knowledge, and the capacity to exert any degree of influence, more emphasis should be placed on power asymmetry, transaction costs and the inclusion of (poor) farmers in establishing the contract to reach economic growth in a sustainable and responsible way (The Partnerships Resource Centre, n.d.). Such a role of exerting influence in contractual procedures could be played by the Dutch government, since they have the interest and the responsibility to maximize the development impact.

The second concern relates to the farmers' dependency on the lead firm. Heineken plays a vital role in the malt barley value chain as it is responsible for input supplies (specific seed variety and chemicals), support activities (pre-finance schemes and agricultural trainings) and it is the main distribution channel. Hence, local smallholder suppliers are fully dependent on Heineken, not only making the value chain vulnerable to collapse, but also increasing risks for farmers if Heineken cannot address all duties. An example of this, reported by local farmers, is an untimely seed supply by Heineken due to a shortage. As a result, farmers were unable to sow the seeds at the right time of the year and could not maximize their malt barley yield. Another noted issue is the timely payment by Heineken. Cooperatives and model farmers indicated they often receive their payment after contractual agreements, meaning that they are unable to pay their member farmers on time. Consequently, side-selling to traders who pay directly is an attractive option for some farmers and cooperatives.

The Ethiopian government could better support the investment climate for MFIs, as these currently charge interest rates between 15 and 20 per cent due to the high interest rates set by governmental banks. The difference in interest rates can discourage many farmers from lending money to cover their expenses, since an interest rate of 20 per cent presents a much higher financial burden and a much higher risk in case harvest losses occur. In addition, such a high interest rate might not even equal the profit margin gained by producing malt barley. A strong financial backbone is necessary to strengthen the malt barley value chain and to make the chain profitable. Another issue related to dependency concerns agricultural trainings and input supply. According to Oxfam (2014) and Bachke (2010), contract farming in a PPP is often not financially viable or desirable in the absence of donor support due to the high costs of trainings. The financial support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs in the CREATE project was used by Heineken to contract EUCORD for project implementation and to provide agronomical trainings. While it is not likely that Heineken will stop financing these trainings when financial support of the Dutch Ministry is reduced or stopped due to foreseen market opportunities, a cost-benefit analysis will possibly be made. At this point, farmers claimed to lack the specific knowledge, input, and machinery to grow the seeds to the full maximum, making them still dependent on donor support. To make these farmers resilient economic actors and to ensure a strong malt barley value chain, investments from the private sector will be needed.

The third and final issue is concerned with the governance structure of the newly created supply chain. Before being part of the CREATE project, the local farmers could sell their malt barley to any trader at any preferred time and place and no contractual agreements were signed with firms and/or cooperatives. As of now, participating smallholder farmers have obligations and restrictions due to contractual agreements. Being in such a 'captive network' offers more certainties to the local farmers, such as a fixed price, a single buyer, and secure market access. However, concerns were raised by participating farmers on the loss of a certain degree of freedom to sell their malt barley to any preferred trader and not being able to act and react according to (local) market demand. This corresponds with the literature as contract farming limits the farmer's direct access to influence market governance due to terms and conditions under which the farmers are contracted (Repar, Onakuse & Bogue, 2013; Vorley, 2002). In addition, by means of the contractual obligations, Heineken partially puts the production risks in the hands of the cooperatives, unions, model farmers and Micro-Financing Institutions (MFIs). It has been argued -in rather strong words- that contract farming can be regarded as just another form of exploitation since it would transfer production risks to the contracted farmers (Glover, 1987). While there are no signs of exploitation in the CREATE project, the contractual agreements do tend to transfer most production risks to the local cooperatives, unions, models farmers, and MFIs. In turn, these risks are, albeit to a lesser extent, transferred to the individually contracted farmers. As a result, both these organisations and contracted smallholders are more vulnerable in their exposure to these risks. Hence, to make farmers less vulnerable and to fully include them in the economy, they should become independent suppliers who can freely respond to market dynamics.

Conclusion

The CREATE project is a fine example of the Dutch policy on development cooperation in which private and public interests come together in a public-private partnership to achieve a developmental impact. Perceived market opportunities in a developing country were explored by the private sector and the public sector was able to convert these market opportunities into a development project to improve the food security and livelihoods of thousands of Ethiopian smallholder farmers. The vital questions remains whether and how public sector objectives and private sector objectives can be merged into a PPP to contribute to local development. In other words; how effective are inclusive PPPs and what impact does this aid modality have on the livelihood and food security of smallholder farmers? The case study on the CREATE project is an initial step in answering those questions.

It is seen from this explorative research study that a PPP project can have positive development impacts on the livelihoods and food security situation of local farmers. Although it is difficult to generalize the results on a wider scale, this research can partially answer the question how private sector objectives and public sector objectives should be combined. First, it is important that the smallholders are the starting point. Governmental and business objectives should be built around the needs of the farmers, and to a lesser extent to the needs of the private sector. In addition, more emphasis should be placed by both the private sector and the public sector on power asymmetry, transaction costs and inclusion of farmers in decision making processes. Second, a risk analysis should be conducted to identify the risks facing each stakeholder. Such an analysis could minimize the risk of exclusion and should governments give the opportunity to emphasise the focus on inclusive and sustainable local development. Third, since farmers are part of multiple value chains (e.g. barley, faba beans, oilseeds), attention and assistance must be given to develop and strengthen all value chains, not just the malt barley chain. A holistic approach, such as the landscape approach, is required to transform these smallholders into independent economic actors, who are then able to respond to market demand. Fourth and finally, parties involved in a PPP are in a unique position as they can tap into and benefit from each other's resources. Within a PPP, strengths, knowledge, expertise, and sphere of control can be combined to create synergy. This entails that public and private actors should share and divide responsibilities according to competitive advantage. Moreover, to reach a sustained common objective, the third P of the PPP has to entail a joint alliance in which both sectors collaborate beyond the traditional contractual relationship. Such collaboration will bring the best of each partner's competence to optimize the achievement of the common objective (Pessoa, 2006). In that way, business and development can be combined to strive towards joint goals.

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