

Paradox of strategic partnerships for sustainable value chains: Perspectives of not-for-profit actors

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Abstract

The study explores strategic partnerships themes for Sustainable Agricultural Value chains (SAVC) dimensions. Acknowledging the role of stakeholders, business and not-for-profit actors, and their engagement in such partnerships, this study focuses on the latter's perspective. Literature review followed by five exploratory case studies are used to examine SAVC partnership themes. The study identifies three themes influencing strategic partnerships: the interaction between partners through cooperation, coordination, and collaboration; management of information flow between partners; and product flow management with demand–supply coordination between partners. The level of information sharing between partners also influences SAVC value creation. The findings extend value chain literature by stressing the theoretical association between the identified antecedents and partnership in the sustainability value chain in general and the SAVC in particular. The exploratory case studies provide real-life perspectives and a practical framework in the context of SAVC. Managers, policymakers and international funded programs can also benefit from the current key findings and the new framework as a referential basis to form a partnership strategy in agricultural sectors. This research suggests a further test for the conceptual framework using large-scale surveys in diverse geographic contexts and looking at trans-border value chain partnerships, especially in different country contexts that influence sustainable development and partnerships in SAVC.

KEYWORDS

not-for-profit, stakeholder engagement, strategic partnership, sustainable collaboration, sustainable development, sustainable value chain

1 | INTRODUCTION

Several researchers have called for examining partnerships in supply chain management (Lambert et al., 1996; Paul et al., 2021; Spekman et al., 1998). According to Porter (1985) and Croom et al. (2000), supply chain actors are inextricably bonded throughout various types of

partnerships connecting the earliest supplier with the final consumer. To justify its existence, a competitive supply (value) chain needs value creation and transformation over its costs and challenges. Value chain analysis assumes that a business creates value for itself by undertaking a series of activities to deliver value to its users (Aguilera et al., 2018; Jensen et al., 2019; Porter, 1985). In this era of Big-Data,

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information is the new fuel for the economy (Stewart, 1998). Since information is a primary input to one's value chain operations for better performance (Danese et al., 2021; Mukhuty et al., 2022; Stewart, 1998), information generation, gathering, storage, and sharing are likely to play a critical role in value creation. In this paper, interactions among the agricultural value chain actors as critical stakeholders aimed at information sharing and value creation are referred to as the Sustainable Agricultural Value Chain (SAVC) partnership.

This research has identified several research gaps to be addressed. Firstly, partnerships between actors of agricultural value chains based on information sharing and value creation are still relatively underexplored. Secondly, extant research has studied relationships among actors from a product flow perspective and little attention has been paid to the information flow as compared to product flow in the value-chain (Amara et al., 2016), especially in agriculture (Martinez & Poole, 2004; Tasca et al., 2017; Van der Vorst et al., 2007). Thirdly, prior research considering the cross-functional multi-party relationship concerning information sharing and value creation has suggested that their interface exhibits many unclear characteristics (e.g., Niall & Rich, 2015; Porter & Millar, 1985; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Xue et al., 2011). Fourthly, there is an undefined association between information sharing and value creation (Danese et al., 2021; Mukhuty et al., 2022; Porter & Millar, 1985). Therefore, the aim of this research is original in examining partnerships in the SAVC from a multidimensional perspective (Esfahbodi et al., 2016). In order to appreciate how are information sharing and value creation associated, first one must identify the factors that influence this association and then explore these factors by effectively linking them to partnerships in SAVC (e.g., Bailey & Francis, 2008; Luzzini et al., 2015; Taylor & Simons, 2004). Apropos, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How are key themes of interaction, information flow and product flow associated with SAVC partnerships?

RQ2. How and why do these key themes be effectively linked to the partnership of the professional and not-for-profit entities in practice?

This study uses literature review and exploratory case studies to examine SAVC partnerships and answer the above two research questions. This is achieved by identifying high-order themes to develop a conceptual framework for SAVC partnership (Pagell & Shevchenko, 2014; Suchek et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2020). This research provides novel theoretical contributions where the key findings extend value chain literature by stressing the theoretical association between the identified antecedents and partnership, proving a new conceptual framework in the sustainability value chain in general and the SAVC in particular. Practical contributions are also provided where managers of both the not-for-profit organizations and value chain actors who work towards improving SAVC partnership outcomes can benefit from the conceptual framework. This framework can be identified as a guideline for both policymakers and international organizations who are looking to improve the empirical context of SAVC.

This paper takes the perspective of not-for-profit organizations working for a long time with various agricultural firms. Firstly, literature on SAVC, SAVC partnership and not-for-profit actors is presented, followed by research methodology. Then a conceptual framework and propositions are developed, and key findings and discussions are illustrated. Lastly, managerial implications and future research are provided.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Sustainable agricultural value chain (SAVC)

Traditionally, the sustainable value chain has been studied in various disciplines from diverse lenses, production, flow management of information and products, supply and demand, relationship management, logistics, processes and technology, risks, marketing, consumption, and added value activities (Amara et al., 2016; Esfahbodi et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2021; Pang et al., 2015; Selsky & Parker, 2010; Zhu et al., 2020). Extant research usually focuses on understanding value creation and sustainability improvement for value chain partners (Aguilera et al., 2018; El Amrani et al., 2021; Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020; McAdam et al., 2008; Niall & Rich, 2015; Pagell & Shevchenko, 2014; Paul et al., 2021). A representative summary of extant work on SAVC partnerships is provided in Table 1. The authors listed in this table were selected based on a selective-intensive literature review that followed the seminal works from journals with supply chain management, operation, sustainability, and social and behavioral focus. References cited in the seminal papers were also selected based on usefulness for the present study. Based on the analysis of the listed studies, the fundamental concepts underlying SAVC partnership are identified as product flow, information flow, interaction, partnership, information sharing, and value creation.

Literature review reveals that the sustainable value chain has emerged as a significant field of study (Acquaye et al., 2014; Aguilera et al., 2018; Durugbo et al., 2020; Lazar & Chithra, 2021; Luzzini et al., 2015; Matos et al., 2020; Mead et al., 2020). Several authors have analyzed the SAVC partnership (Aggarwal & Srivastava, 2016; Ding et al., 2011; Giannakis, 2008; Kembro et al., 2014). Studies have also focused on the antecedents and consequences of SAVC partnerships (McAdam et al., 2008; Pagell & Shevchenko, 2014). Studies on agricultural partnership identify partnership amongst various actors involve several types of interactions, including cooperation, coordination, and collaboration as key factors contributing to SAVC (Esfahbodi et al., 2016; Fearn, 1998; Tasca et al., 2017). A sustainable value chain is a way to generate sustainability for the environment, society and economy in order to create better performance for actors involved in businesses (Aguilera et al., 2018; Jensen et al., 2019). Some research studies have examined the associations between interaction and partnership to understand SAVC partnerships (Martinez & Poole, 2004; Mikkola, 2008; Pang et al., 2015; Tasca et al., 2017; Taylor & Simons, 2004; Thiele et al., 2011). There was, however, a scope of capturing these concepts in a holistic framework for not-for-

TABLE 1 Representative authors for SAVC

| Author | Underpinning concepts (key themes) | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|----------------|
| | Product flow | Information flow | Interaction | Partnership | Information sharing | Value creation |
| Fearne (1998) | x | x | x | x | x | |
| Walters and Lancaster (2000) | x | x | x | x | x | |
| Wymer and Samu (2003) | x | | | x | | |
| Berger et al. (2004) | x | | x | x | | |
| Reardon et al. (2009) | x | | x | x | | |
| Thiele et al. (2011) | x | x | x | x | | |
| Pang et al. (2015) | | x | | x | x | x |
| Barroso-Méndez et al. (2014) | | | x | x | | |
| Luzzini et al. (2015) | | | x | | x | |
| Amara et al. (2016) | x | | | x | | x |
| Esfahbodi et al. (2016) | | | | x | | |
| Aggarwal and Srivastava (2016) | x | x | | x | x | x |
| Tasca et al. (2017) | x | x | x | | | |
| Ivanov and Dolgui (2020) | x | x | x | | x | |
| El Amrani et al. (2021) | x | x | | x | x | x |
| Paul et al. (2021) | x | x | | | x | |

profit actors in the agricultural context from the sustainability perspective. This gap reinforces the rationale to explore the two questions listed above.

2.2 | SAVC partnership

A partnership is defined as *a tailored business relationship based on mutual trust, openness, shared risks and shared rewards that yield a competitive advantage resulting in greater performance* (Lambert et al., 1996, p. 2). There can be no one benchmark partnership format appropriate for all cases in practice. However, most partnerships share common themes/underpinning concepts while being different in other aspects such as motivation/antecedent (Lambert et al., 1996; Spekman et al., 1998; Luzzini et al., 2015). Most research has argued that strategic positioning should have a relationship based on the themes aggregated into the value chain. An analysis of representative themes for SAVC partnership can be done based on internal and external-focused partnership drivers. These drivers highlight to what extent a partnership is focused on managing relationships among actors linking earliest supply with final consumers (El Amrani et al., 2021; Paul et al., 2021; Thiele et al., 2011; Zhu et al., 2020) and also how the focal actors connect with service providers such as not-for-profit actors for enhancing the sustainability quotient of these activities (Thiele et al., 2011; Wymer & Samu, 2003). Based on the extant literature, we have identified the interaction dimensions of cooperation, coordination and collaboration as three themes for internal-focused partnership drivers (Barroso-Méndez et al., 2014; Fearne, 1998) and product flow and information flow as two key themes for external-focused partnership drivers (Tasca et al., 2017).

A limited number of researchers have studied business relationships based on themes such as information sharing and value creation to form a partnership between actors in SAVC (Aggarwal & Srivastava, 2016; Danese et al., 2021; Huo et al., 2020; Mukhuty et al., 2022). A partnership can be divided into three types (Han, 2014; Walters & Lancaster, 2000). When partners have distinct competencies and can create value independently but still come together to enhance the value for all stakeholders, this is called a symbiosis relationship. In the commensalism relationship, one partner benefits from the interaction while the other side is neither harmed nor appropriate for any significant value. In parasitism, one of the partners benefits at the expense of others to the extent that the weaker partner may eventually exit the transaction. An alternative perspective suggests that concerning collaborative value creation, partnerships can be four types: philanthropic, transactional, integrative and transformational (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Barroso-Méndez et al., 2014; Han, 2014). Highlighting the critical role of information in the transactions, insights from the transaction cost theory suggest that a partnership can help the partners reduce the costs related to information search, negotiation, transaction enforcement, and relationship management and become more sustainable (El Amrani et al., 2021; Han, 2014; Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020; Paul et al., 2021; Williamson, 1987). The institutional theory wisdom complements these findings from the literature on value creation, appropriation, and transaction cost economics by highlighting the institution's important role. The institutional theory suggests that institutions set up rules and constrain participants' behaviors. Such practices can concern eligibility for participation, expectations about the roles and responsibilities of concerned stakeholders concerning value creation and appropriation, and acceptable behavior regarding innovation and

information gathering and sharing. Hierarchically organized SAVC needs a new institution that can discharge such governance functions (Han, 2014; Kumar et al., 2021; Reardon et al., 2009; Thiele et al., 2011). Teegen et al. (2004) suggest that not-for-profit actors can provide legitimacy in the face of institutional voids. Hence, the SAVC partnership between the supply chain actors could be based on their mutual interactions, information flow management, and product flow along the SAVC. The resource orchestration, financial, value creation and appropriation, and legitimacy lending benefits of interaction between business and not-for-profit actors along the value chains has been noted by many researchers (Aggarwal & Srivastava, 2016; Christopher, 1998; Horvath, 2001; Luzzini et al., 2015; Porter, 1985; Teegen et al., 2004).

2.3 | Not-for-profit actor: From cooperation to collaboration

Emphasis on sustainable value chains within agriculture-based businesses has grown over time (Esfahbodi et al., 2016; Pang et al., 2015; Tasca et al., 2017). Emphasis on rampant mechanizations, use of ecologically hazardous agricultural techniques, and unplanned ecological resource exploitations have created negative externalities over ecological, socio-demographic, and economic spheres in the past (FAO, 2013; Luzzini et al., 2015; Tasca et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2020). With the advancement in ecological and agricultural science and technologies and data and network technologies, governments worldwide are under pressure to promote SVAC partnerships between not-for-profit actors and businesses to serve the needs of society at large. The current literature suggests that not-for-profit actor is used as a broad-based term representing non-profit organizations (e.g., non-governmental organizations) (Freeman, 2010; Giannakis, 2008). Teegen et al. (2004, p.4) defined NGOs as *private, not-for-profit organizations that aim to serve particular societal interests by focusing advocacy and operational efforts on social, political and economic goals, including equity, education, health, environmental protection and human rights*.

Business actors usually possess four types of resources: Financial (e.g., profit and income), intangible (e.g., knowledge and reputation), organizational (e.g., structure and culture) and physical (e.g., equipment and machine) benefits. But they may lack reputation and legitimacy (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Graf & Rothlauf, 2012). Finding the “right fit” between the two partners is critical for any partnership. These partnerships can provide considerable sustainable opportunities to engage with partners beyond simply financial support (Casey, 2016). The not-for-profit actor can help foster a climate of mutual respect when partnerships are established, mainly when the business actors rely on the support programs from the not-for-profit side. However, some authors have ignored institutional voids and questioned the relevance of not-for-profit organizations in SAVCs alongside business actors (Barroso-Méndez et al., 2014; FAO, 2013).

The interactions between not-for-profit and business actors are an exciting link to manage and orchestrate resources as an approach

to problem-solving (Andreasen, 1996; Lucea, 2010). This interaction, however, also presents several challenges for all the actors, including differences in ideologies and goals (Cojocar & Sfetcu, 2013). With the proliferation of SAVC, not-for-profit actors have become a facilitating hub as they connect their organizations to business actors for better, long-term, sustainable development activities (Thiele et al., 2011). They help the business actors in governance functions, capacity building, sustainable agricultural technology, gender groups, market information and trade activities (Barroso-Méndez et al., 2014). These interactions in agricultural value chains can take forms of cooperation, coordination and collaboration (El Amrani et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2011; Paul et al., 2021; Selsky & Parker, 2010). SVAC partnerships that focus on value chain innovation can promote sustainable development for economic growth and poverty mitigation (Barroso-Méndez et al., 2014; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Schaltegger & Burritt, 2014). In a time when these not-for-profit actors have become essential partners in local and global supply chain plans, they need to deliver dual goals of poverty reduction and business development (Kim et al., 2011; Porter & Kramer, 2011). Thus, the present research posits that not-for-profit actors will play fundamental partnership roles in SAVCs.

3 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Research design

This research is aimed at developing a conceptual framework. This is achieved using a qualitative methodology involving identifying underlying concepts and clarifying the associations between these concepts (key emergent themes) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The present research reflects views of not-for-profit organizations working for a long time with various agricultural firms in Jordan. This research uses secondary and primary data to examine information sharing and value creation in SAVC partnerships (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Secondary data is analyzed following an extensive review of books and peer-reviewed journals. For primary data, especially where partnerships in SAVC are still in their infancy, a case study method is a rich source for exploring complex emergent phenomena (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2014). Case studies can provide in-depth insights into understanding what happens in the natural context and the reasons and obtain different internal subjective views (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014). Multiple case-study types are applied in this research, which involves a multi-site study. This is more appropriate to obtain an in-depth, rich data understanding of partnerships in SAVCs (Miles et al., 2020). A triangulation approach is applied using existing research (e.g., journal articles) and case studies exploration (e.g., multiple-case study) to ensure construct validity (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010). Comparable previous research has employed the case study method to generate theoretical and practical insights into SAVC partnerships (e.g., El Amrani et al., 2021; Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020; McAdam et al., 2008; Niall & Rich, 2015; Pagell & Shevchenko, 2014; Pang et al., 2015).

3.2 | Case selection and study protocol

This section explains both case study selection and case study protocol (Stuart et al., 2002). The cases are partnerships in the context of SAVC, which are primarily located in a developing country, Jordan, and identified as sustainable partnerships by renowned not-for-profit organizations such as UN and World Bank. This sampling selection is based on the online directory of not-for-profit organizations with at

least 10 years of experience with Jordanian agricultural firms. Hence, following purposeful sampling (Miles et al., 2020), this led to a list of nine organizations, of which five cases are shortlisted based on positive email responses, initial interviews and availability of secondary records. The five cases represent a sustainable approach and working partnerships with local business actors towards partnerships for better collaboration in information sharing and value creation in SAVCs. Thus, the unit of analysis is individual partnerships (working/business

TABLE 2 Case study in the context of SAVC

| Case | Relationships | Age | Partnership description |
|---|---------------|-----|---|
| A Milk producer & international agency 1 | A1 | 3 | For improving production, managing logistics, and collaborating with local factories. In this relationship, the agency provides training and workshops, equipment and technology for production development, quality control, and reasonable financial support for animal feeds and visit tours. A1 and A2: Are sustainable partnerships and have information sharing and value creation in their SAVC. |
| | A2 | 5 | |
| B Dairy product supplier & international agency 2 | B1 | 5 | For improving processing, reaching advanced technology, collaborating with local retailers. In this relationship, the agency provides training and workshops, equipment and technology for processing development, quality control, and reasonable financial support for exhibition and visit tours. B1 and B2: Are sustainable partnerships and have information sharing and value creation in their SAVC. |
| | B2 | 7 | |
| C Pickling supplier & international agency 3 | C1 | 3 | For improving production and processing, using better packaging, collaborating with local and international buyers. In this relationship, the agency provides training and workshops, equipment and technology for processing development, quality control, and reasonable financial support for exhibition and visit tours. C1 and C2: Are sustainable partnerships and have information sharing and value creation in their SAVC. |
| | C2 | 3 | |
| D Fruit processor & local agency | D1 | 4 | For improving processing, using advanced technology, collaborating with local and international retailers. In this relationship, the local agency provides training and workshops, specific equipment and technology for processing development, quality control, and support for exhibition and visit tours. D1 and D2: Are sustainable partnerships and have information sharing and value creation in their SAVC. |
| | D2 | 4 | |
| E Fresh fruit & vegetable (FFV) supplier and local non-governmental organization (NGO) | E1 | 10 | For improving production, building better logistics, collaborating with local and export markets. In this relationship, the local actor provides membership for those suppliers, training and workshops, various projects, quality control, certification body, social networks, database, and reasonable exhibition and visit tours. E1 and E2: Are sustainable partnerships and have information sharing and value creation in their SAVC. |
| | E2 | 15 | |

actor-not-for-profit actor). Of the five cases examined, three are international agencies (cases A, B, C), one is a local agency (Case D), and one is a local non-governmental organization (Case E). Both literal replication and theoretical replication is followed by applying multiple cases for the same partnership type and cases for different partnership types, both multiple levels of managers for the same partnership and same manager type for different partnership types (Eisenhardt, 1989; Voss et al., 2002). Hence, the case study method was used since the number of available sustainable partnerships is limited and also the identified cases are agreed to be a new trend in developing countries such as Jordan, where the government looks to expand on their new approach towards SAVC for sub-sectors in agriculture.

The case protocol includes an overview, field procedures, interview questions and report guide (Yin, 2014). This protocol is applied for all cases for better research reliability. The basis for information generation for cases analysis was semi-structured interviews with four staff members at each not-for-profit organization (see Table 3). Based on purposive sampling, managers were asked to identify a sample of relationships with working actors in their agricultural value chains in Jordan, which they believed to have included partnerships in information sharing and value creation for at least 3 years. Ten relationships were identified in the context of the agricultural sector (Table 2). Thus, two relationships of the same type for each case were explored using the same protocol. This is where semi-structured interviews, five observation days and document collection are applied for each relationship. Jordan is one of the key countries which has agreements and initiatives with international agencies and not-for-profit organizations such as FAO, UN, EU, World Bank, IFAD, ILO, and so on to support rural development, agricultural industries and also sustainable agricultural value chains related to refugees in Jordan (e.g., FAO, 2013; Jordan Response Plan (JRP), 2015).

3.3 | Data collection

Data collection for this multiple case study research design is based on three sources: interviews as a critical source and observation and related documents as secondary sources (Table 3). In total, 20 managers based on purposeful sampling were interviewed for the five cases (two interviews for each relationship) that ranged from 1 to 2 h were obtained from the managers (two different managers/same relationship; 10 partnerships) involved in partnerships and have

experience in SAVC in March 2017. Face to face, semi-structured interviews were performed as participants were more willing to share information by oral narration to receive reliable information in response to the interview question to collect primary data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles et al., 2020). The aim was to gain answers on how far partnerships in information sharing and value creation is, what are the roles of information sharing and value creation within the value chain, how those actors cooperated, coordinated and collaborated for better interactions, and how top management linked supply with demand with better information and product. Through emails, phone calls, and document exchanges, several contacts were made with those managers to obtain reflective practitioner inputs that created trust and mutual benefits (Yin, 2014). Two authors conducted and recorded interviews with all the participants who were asked the same questions using a comprehensive case protocol. The interviews were also transcribed and then sent to the managers for revisions. The approved interviews developed the case studies analyzed through cross-case analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the same time, two authors attended meetings between April and May 2017 that were organized between the not-for-profit actors and working actors. Each author attended one meeting at five different relationships as a silent observer. The final case report was validated by uninvolved experts of four policymakers who are familiar with SAVC and partnerships of not-for-profit actors and working actors. In the end, two essential documents (e.g., from annual reports and websites) were also obtained about each relationship for a triangulation purpose (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.4 | Data analysis

To summarize the themes constituting a piece of text, transcripts and associated key documents are analyzed using thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first data analysis stages included coding, following an initial themes/codes list generated from the literature review, for data reduction and display for each case using interview transcripts and other sources (observation and documents) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The second refinement of the selected themes is to be more focused on non-repetitive themes (Voss et al., 2002). Each case was assessed based on the key themes identified in stage one and related interview quotes to support the formulation of propositions were identified (Yin, 2014). The third was a cross-case comparison to enhance replication logic by providing both the working actor/not-

| Method type | Source type | Subtotal | Total |
|---------------------------|---|----------|-------|
| Semi-structured interview | -Manager of training and information | 5 | 20 |
| | -Manager of economic and social development | 5 | |
| | -Manager of cooperation and programs | 5 | |
| | -Manager of regional office | 5 | |
| Observation | -Partner meeting | 10 | 10 |
| Document | -Annual report | 10 | 17 |
| | -Business plan | 7 | |

TABLE 3 Sources for data collection for a case study

for-profit actor level-focused themes (Eisenhardt, 1989). This analysis resulted in nine first-order themes, which were then coded as three second-order themes and associated with one overarching theme, “partnership,” to establish the association for the conceptual framework.

To summarize, two approaches are followed: the first is the nested approach to analyze data gathered from each case (Voss et al., 2002; Yin, 2014) by multiple sources from two managers/relationships as opposed to one case (four managers, two relationships) for a better opportunity to examine partnerships (Five cases A, B, C, D, E) in SAVC. The second is the cross-case approach to analyze the commonalities between the five cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). The process was iterative, moving backwards and forward, exploring their value chain before the partnership and how and why they started to change. The benefit of this analysis method was to develop insights into the information sharing and value creation association from the five not-for-profit organizations and to help clarify the conceptual framework. According to Yin (2014), this research has achieved quality validity and reliability (Table 4).

4 | CASE STUDY LEVEL: CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROPOSITIONS

According to Walters and Lancaster (2000) and Porter (1985), the concept of the “value chain” epitomized the role and interactions of value chain actors in value creation and appropriation. The value chain framework dominates as a tool for the strategic analysis of firm value creation, information transfer, and a conceptual map for describing activities actors perform in inter-firm relations. The value chain for a partnership amongst actors in an industry should be embedded in a more significant stream of activities that we term “value wheel” in the present research (Croom et al., 2000; Giannakis & Croom, 2004). The

value wheel includes the value chain of several working actors and not-for-profit actors under the explored topic (Barroso-Méndez et al., 2014; Berger et al., 2004; Pang et al., 2015).

The literature review guided the selection of variables for the initial conceptual framework. The review helped identify several base themes as influence the partnership between actors. These themes included management interaction, coordination and collaboration; information flow; and product flow towards partnership. This framework attempts to encourage actors to interact within various activities to supply products with added value based on the visibility of information and feedback across SAVCs. The literature review further revealed that the partnership across diverse functional areas contributes to improved sustainability orientation in the value chain. These initial themes were then developed through each exploratory case. The choice of sample size is determined by judgment on data saturation (Miles et al., 2020). Multiple-case research looks at analytical generalization (Yin, 2014), where the replication lies in the sampling frame. Eisenhardt (1989) stated that the selection of cases is based on both literal and theoretical replications. Case analysis reveals that demand–supply dynamics and information flow at the business actor's end guide its degree of interaction—cooperation, coordination, and collaboration—with the not-for-profit actor, which then influence the not-for-profit actor's weightage and contribution to information sharing and value creation. The initial framework and the findings of the first case study were validated by uninvolved experts of four policymakers who are familiar with SAVC and partnerships of not-for-profit actors and working actors (Figure 1).

4.1 | The influence of interaction on partnership

Many scholars view the interaction as a powerful wheel for partnership and speeding up sustainable orientation in the value chain

TABLE 4 Research quality

| Validity and reliability | Research design | More related stage |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Construct validity | -Building trust with interviewees -Multiple sources of evidence at data collection: Interviews; observation (meetings); documents -Chain of evidence at data collection: Two relationships for each case and use the same case protocol -Transcripts are refined by the interviewees | Research design Data collection |
| Internal validity | -Explanatory approach: Develop a theoretical association between interaction and partnership [at both case level/cross case level] -Chain of evidence at data analysis: Key theme matching and coding via support of key literature and key interview quotations [at case level] -Chain of evidence at data analysis: Key proposition development [at case level] -Data triangulation: Comparing quotes from interviews with observations and document material [at cross case level] | Data analysis |
| External validity | -Multiple cases: Replication logic among the 10 partnerships for five cases -Analytical generalization: Building a new holistic framework | Research design |
| Reliability | -Case study protocol is the same for all cases -Case database: Interview quotes, meetings, and documents -Key themes guided propositions and discussions -External review: Final case report was validated by uninvolved experts (policymakers) | Data collection |

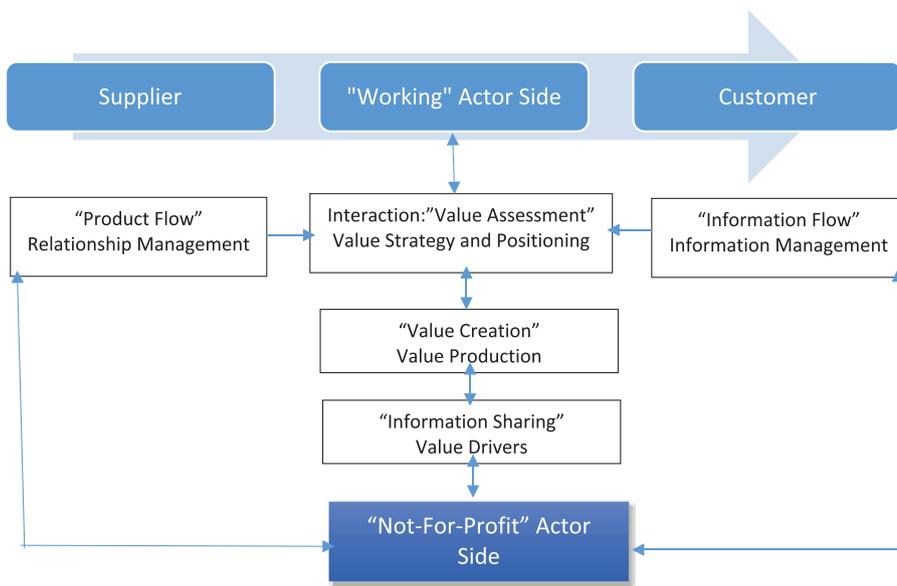


FIGURE 1 Initial framework for partnership in SAVC “Value Wheel.” Source: Literature review (e.g., Walters & Lancaster, 2000) and cases studies

(Durugbo et al., 2020; El Amrani et al., 2021; Luzzini et al., 2015; Paul et al., 2021). The concept of interaction includes sub-themes that impact the partnership between SAVC actors. The literature review and exploratory case studies illustrated three interaction themes: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration in this research.

Cooperation. Spekman et al. (1998) identified that cooperation is the most basic level of interaction and is necessary as the starting point for the value chain. In itself, cooperation is not sufficient. According to Mikkola (2008) and Tasca et al. (2017), cooperation is when actors share some vital information and engage some suppliers/customers in longer-term contracts. Other supply chain actors influence the resources utilization of a supply chain actor, and these resources (e.g., information, finance, etc.) must be obtained through the cooperation of network members (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020; Jarillo, 1990). The case studies analyses reveal that all ten relationships recognized the importance of developing a cooperation approach. The manager for training and information in the international agency A explained: *We are looking for a win-win solution, where we can work cooperatively with producers to develop a relationship of trust and agree on beneficial options for competitive resource agenda and training programs [...]. All the managers favored cooperation and programs design and documents exhibited evidence of cooperation between them and the working actors through the development of trust and joint meetings. A few relationships showed little evidence of cooperation in exchange information and value assessment, and these relationships were the least effective in partnerships in SAVC. It is proposed that:*

Proposition 1. Cooperation between working actors and not-for-profit actors will affect their partnership with respect to information sharing and value creation.

Coordination. Coordination is the next stage in the interaction ladder, whereby both product flow and information flow are exchanged

(Spekman et al., 1998). Coordination between value chain partners can occur in various ways, such as using modern-day information technology tools (e.g., electronic data interchange) and traditional methods such as sharing plans (e.g., production targets and timelines), exchanging resources and experts, cross-organization coordination teams, and deputing employees across actors (Danese et al., 2021; Mikkola, 2008; Tasca et al., 2017). Value chain actors can coordinate certain activities but still may not behave as true partners. Like cooperation, coordination is also necessary but insufficient for a true SAVC partnership. The cases found that all 10 relationships recognized the importance of having coordination as a critical link between the actors, including the not-for-profit actor, for working towards partnership. The manager for cooperation and programs at the international agency C highlighted: *[...] still coordination is applied with cooperation outline and we try always to have better trust and commitment with our working partner, but still we do more coordination efforts in sharing some plans of production and providing services of quality control [...]. It is proposed that:*

Proposition 2. Coordination between working actors and not-for-profit actors will affect their partnership with respect to information sharing and value creation.

Collaboration. Collaboration is the third stage of interaction that occurs when actors have already achieved cooperation and coordination levels (Spekman et al., 1998; Tasca et al., 2017). The transformation from cooperation to coordination to collaboration may appear linear. However, moving from one level to another requires actors' intent, dependence, strategic objective, orientation, and emphasis on partnership. The movement from coordination to collaboration requires high commitment and information sharing, leading to stronger relationships. In this integration stage, long-term strategic partnerships for a product, markets, geographical access, raw material and resource supplies are formed (Durugbo et al., 2020; Esfahbodi

et al., 2016; Jraisat & Sawalha, 2013). Martinez and Poole (2004) have identified that collaboration may be enhanced through joint planning and problem-solving at both strategic and tactical levels. For example, partners can support their collaborative actors in natural capital (e.g., water management), physical capital (e.g., infrastructure for road and quality system), financial capital (e.g., grants and loans) and human capital (e.g., technical; advice and market information) (Cheng, 2011; Danese et al., 2021; Mikkola, 2008). Collaboration has become a vehicle for reducing costs and increasing the customer value proposition in SAVC (Luzzini et al., 2015; Simatupang & Sridharan, 2005). The case analysis revealed that managers across the five cases agree to apply the concept of co-planning with the working actors. Most of their partners know effective and efficient collaboration for integrating business activities. The manager of a regional office at local agency D said: Our regular following up is for getting together and putting joint planning together [...] actually we share the success of our partner in the way of sharing costs and also the positive performance with them [...]. Literature review and the case studies indicate that collaboration is essential to establishing a partnership in information sharing and value creation for SAVC. There are synergies between interaction and other themes. It is proposed that:

Proposition 3. Collaboration between working actors and not-for-profit actors will affect their partnership with respect to information sharing and value creation.

4.2 | Information flow and interaction

The findings highlight information flow promotes interaction. Effective internal formal interactions (e.g., meetings and conferences) and informal interactions (e.g., casual contacts) are used to develop cohesive strategies as well as to break down functional silos (Luzzini et al., 2015). The dissemination of information across all actors in value chains aids interaction (Danese et al., 2021; Porter & Millar, 1985). Including information flow, including collection and dissemination processes, into interaction is essential to developing partnerships (Rottman, 2008). The value chain members may share both functional information (e.g., operations and logistics) and strategic information (e.g., competitive intelligence, trade secrets, access to lobbying network) (Hsu et al., 2008). The case analysis found that all five not-for-profit actors recognized the importance of developing strong information flow links.

Although information technology tools are widely available, the costs for setting up and operating an information-sharing system between partners are still substantial (Danese et al., 2021). The manager of cooperation and programs at the international agency C said: [...] the companies ask us to provide them with information and we also do the same [...]. The manager of training and information at the local non-governmental organization E explained: Yes, there are various methods of exchange for interactions through social networks, social events, workshops, mail, face-to-face meetings, telephone, internet, and

faxes [...] we plan together and form budgets. A transparent and efficient process flow enhances information sharing. This promotes stronger value chain relationships for better decision making (Bailey & Francis, 2008; Mukhuty et al., 2022; Tasca et al., 2017). Disseminating and sharing information is believed to underpin true SAVC partnership. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 4. Information flow (management of sources, types, flows, methods, and value) between working actors and Not-for-Profit actors will affect their interaction along the value chain.

4.3 | Product flow and interaction

There is strong evidence in the literature that partnership cannot be formed without the link between demand and supply where products flow from the leading supplier to the end-consumer (Flynn et al., 2010; Thiele et al., 2011). Lambert and Cooper (2000) have indicated that the supply chain constitutes all producers and service providers with whom the focal actor interacts directly or indirectly (Fearne, 1998). According to Barroso-Méndez et al. (2014), it is necessary to manage product flow to facilitate and guide other information and financial flows. These aid in knowledge sharing and dissemination across the chain activities. The manager of training and information at the international agency A said: [...] in fact, we discuss the product flow with our actors so it is the way to understand where actors should interact [...] and develop their partnership more and more from the supply to the demand side [...].

Firms occasionally adjust their scale and scope of operations. This may accommodate a change in relationship paradigm and information management (Thiele et al., 2011). The adjustments may also be due to external shocks such as demand uncertainty, macro-economic issues, seasonal supply and demand variations, and environmental regulation (Amara et al., 2016; El Amrani et al., 2021; Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020; Paul et al., 2021), as well as internal contingencies such as inappropriate organizational staffing, structure or control systems (e.g., no expertise and low information visibility). These issues have led working actors to bond with international actors to gain legitimacy, expertise, and professional support (Flynn et al., 2010) against such context-related ambiguities. The benefits of such partnership on how to create value and what information to share, for instance, is already apparent in the emergence and acceptance of collaborative quality control and systems (e.g., HACCAP, Global GAP, etc.) and legal frameworks (e.g., local authority or international authority) (Jraisat et al., 2013). The manager of economic and social development at the international agency B explained that: Our working actors always ask about how we can help in managing their product flow with other actors [...] we do that in different ways such as provide a holistic support for quality systems at the firm level, negotiate with their government to solve their contracting approach [...]. How the working actor-not-for-profit actor value chain is governed is significant for the working actor as this brings solutions to let them access the market.

The way in which the raspberry value chain is coordinated and governed is significant for primary producers, because it has major implications for their access to markets (Humphrey & Schmitz, 2001). While agri-food globalization has unfolded unevenly, with varied implications for the food retail sector globally (Singh et al., 2021), a clear trend has been the consolidation of market share by large supermarkets in North America and western Europe and, increasingly, in developing countries (Reardon et al., 2009). In the case of horticultural produce in general, and specialty produce in particular, supermarkets have increasingly sought control over agri-food supply chains in order to ensure product quality and continuity of supply, and to achieve traceability. The need to control upstream segments of the chain has arisen out of intensifying competitive pressure to innovate and compete on the basis of product quality and differentiation; rising demands from consumers and NGOs for ethical sourcing and sustainable production; and increasing legal requirements for retailers to safeguard consumer health and safety (Dolan & Humphrey, 2004). The latter factor is of particular importance in the US market, where the national regulatory framework is focused on science-based risk mitigation, and retailers and food handlers are motivated to avoid corporate legal liability for non-compliance with applicable food safety laws and regulations (Skogstad & Carruth, 2006).

Regulation for food safety in the EU is also oriented towards public health and safety, but places more emphasis on engaging with and informing consumers about the social and environmental sustainability of food production (Dolan & Humphrey, 2004).

Proposition 5. Product flow (management of demand and supply sides) between working actors and Not-for-Profit actors will affect their interaction along the value chain.

5 | CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS: KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research focuses on interactions, information, and product flow between actors within value chain partnerships. More importantly, the key focus is on the importance of partnership levels between working actors and not-for-profit actors based on information sharing and value creation for SAVC activities. There is some research on the issues, frameworks and contingencies in SAVC partnerships (e.g., Esfahbodi et al., 2016; Fearn, 1998; Pang et al., 2015; Selsky & Parker, 2010). However, expanding research in the SAVC partnership domain is needed to produce consistent and generalizable findings (Amara et al., 2016; El Amrani et al., 2021; Esfahbodi et al., 2016; Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020). Thus, the present research originally contributes to this research stream by proposing a holistic conceptual framework of SAVC partnership incorporating information sharing and value creation between working actors and not-for-profit actors (Figure 2). This framework should help clarify the key underlying concepts to build partnerships and identify possible associations and interactions.

At the cross-case level, we examine how these key themes are linked in practice. The framework derived from the literature review was refined through inputs from the case studies. It emerged that key themes should be categorized into three wheels:

Wheel one: comprising of the interaction of cooperation, coordination and collaboration. This wheel is about those activities that may be used to improve the information sharing and value creation interface between actors.

Wheel two: comprising of information flow and related sources, types, methods and value. Wheel two includes information flow related activities and considers sharing mechanisms that can support the interaction across functional activities.

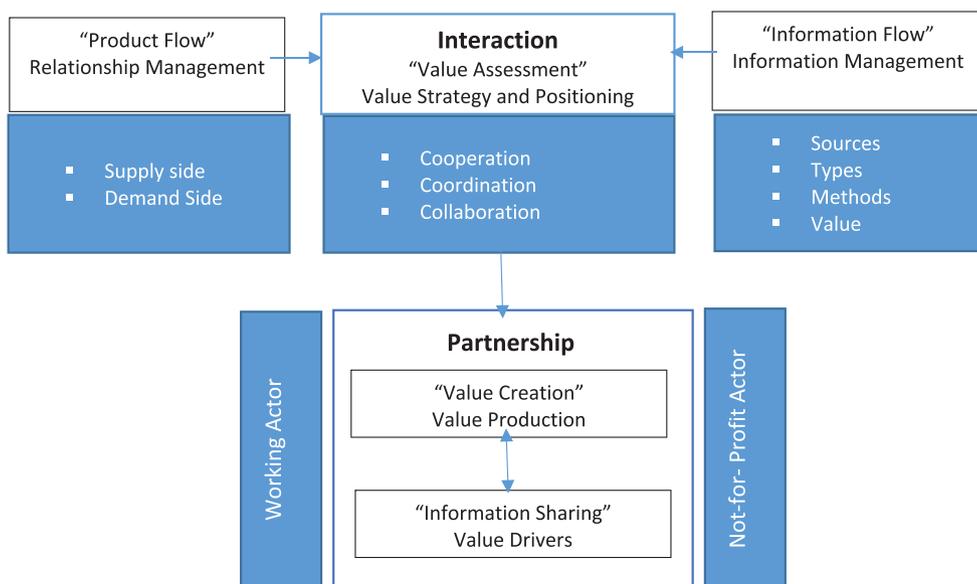


FIGURE 2 A conceptual framework for partnership in SAVC “Value Wheel”

Wheel three: comprising of product flow and is about managing supply and demand for the product flow.

Amongst these, wheel one has become the central wheel influenced by wheels 2 and 3. The working actors are several actors surrounding the focal actor as a supplier or service provider. These include a consumer who is provided value by a supplier in the value chain. A supplier firm provides inputs to a buyer in the value chain. The focal supplier's product often passes through various channel members' activities systems on its way to the ultimate customer. Finally, the penultimate supplier pushes its purchased input to its customers' value chains. The not-for-profit actors are the service provider actors that find "the right fit" for a partnership to create sustainable value along the SAVC of several working actors. Table 5 illustrates the key themes of partnership, their definitions and critical supporting research.

Table 6 shows data triangulation, including quotes from interviews with observations and document material. The interviewed managers from the not-for-profit actors in all cases among the 10 relationships have indicated the importance of interaction: cooperation, coordination and collaboration as three critical themes for internal-focused partnership drivers (Barroso-Méndez et al., 2014; Fearné, 1998) and both concepts of product flow and information flow as two critical themes for external-focused partnership drivers (Danese et al., 2021; Tasca et al., 2017; Thiele et al., 2011). This is also supported by evidence of meetings between working focal actors and their not-for-profit actors and the related documents of annual reports and business plans.

The research has identified nine antecedents to partnership and highlighted three key themes of these antecedents. Cooperation, coordination and collaboration may be integrated into the framework as different layers of interaction from short to gradually longer-term form and more strategic approach. Four antecedents, namely, sources, methods, types, and value, may be used for information flow. Two themes, namely, supply-side and demand-side, may be used for product flow. Both literature review and cross-case findings support that collaboration is the primary key for interactions between working actors and not-for-profit actors that affect their partnership, and this is also based on good information sources from both actors and

demand-side focused (Caiado et al., 2022; Francis, 2004; Taylor & Fearné, 2006; Taylor & Simons, 2004). Findings from cross cases analysis, summarized in Table 7, highlight that working actors' level-focused and not-for-profit actor level-focused themes usually interact over the long term, and this interaction reflect a positive partnership approach. The key findings highlight that both actors in all relationships of cases A, B and C generally identify the high effects of the antecedents in forming a partnership in SAVC. The relationships of cases D and E show low to medium effects of the antecedents in forming a partnership in SAVC. Overall, the most significant antecedents are collaboration, information source, information type, and demand-side towards partnership, as seen in overall scores of cross cases analyses. On the other hand, the rest of the antecedences reflect the medium effects of the antecedents in forming a partnership in SAVC (Table 7).

This research finds high support for the propositions in cases A, B, C and D, where working actors and not-for-profit actors strive to build and strengthen their partnership of information sharing and value creation based on their interaction. Information flow and product flow also affect this interaction (Table 8). In these cases, the not-for-profit actors are mainly international organizations that form strong partnerships with their working actors by helping them with training and workshops, sourcing equipment and technology for product development, quality control, and proper financial support for input purchasing and various visits. These findings are consistent with works of Fearné (1998), Martínez and Poole (2004), Mikkola (2008), Bailey and Francis (2008), Pang et al. (2015), Porter and Kramer (2011), Barroso-Méndez et al. (2014) and Paul et al. (2021) who indicated that the themes noted above drive SAVC partnership. However, case E offers weak support for these propositions. In this case, not-for-profit actors is a local NGO that provides minimal partnership support such as a membership for the focal suppliers (e.g., producers of fresh fruit and vegetables), training and workshops within specific projects, quality control programs, certification body, exhibitions and visit tours for local and export markets. This finding confirms similar observations made by Taylor and Simons (2004), MacMillan et al., 2005; Van der Vorst et al. (2007), Mikkola (2008) and Jraisat and Sawalha (2013) and Zhu et al. (2020).

TABLE 5 Key themes of partnership in SAVC, their definitions and key supporting author

| Key theme | Definition (present research) | Key supporting author |
|------------------|---|--|
| Interaction | A powerful wheel of cooperation, coordination and collaboration for value assessment moving towards partnership and for speeding sustainable results in the value chain. | Porter (1985); Amara et al. (2016). |
| Information flow | Both effective formal and informal interactions for information management where chain actors working at cross-purposes with a focal actor to develop cohesive strategy and systems for information sharing, which is essential for partnerships. | Porter and Millar (1985); Rottman (2008). |
| Product flow | Both direct and indirect interactions for relationship management where chain actors working at cross-purposes with a focal actor to exchange products along the value chain forming a link between demand and supply for partnerships. | Croom et al. (2000); Horvath (2001); Flynn et al. (2010). |
| Partnership | A business relationship between working actors and not-for-profit actors based on information sharing and value creation that yields in a competitive advantage resulting in a greater sustainability business performance. | Lambert and Cooper (2000); Spekman et al. (1998); Luzzini et al. (2015). |

TABLE 6 Data triangulation: Interview quotes, observations and document material

| Case | Relationship | Interview | Observation | Document |
|--------|-----------------|--|---|---|
| Case A | Relationship A1 | <p><i>Partnership is a mechanism that is managed by us and the milk producer we interact in cooperating, coordinating and collaborating for better production and local factory's links ...</i> (Manager of cooperation and programs)</p> <p><i>When something comes up and needs to be assessed for value creation, we just collaborate for sustainable economic long-term performance</i> (Manger of training and information)</p> | A meeting between the milk producer 1 and the two managers of international agency 1, April 2017. | Annual Report 2016 Business Plan 2016–17 |
| | Relationship A2 | <p><i>... planning many activities and share information with the milk producer, which we hope to support for this family business and good feed costs</i> (Manager of economic and social development)</p> <p><i>... we are available in our offices to support producers with training and sharing information</i> (Manager of regional office)</p> | A meeting between the milk producer 2 and the two managers of international agency 1, April 2017. | Annual Report 2016 Business Plan 2016–17 |
| Case B | Relationship B1 | <p><i>Actually, we support for good practices and quality technical issues are resources to share with the supplier for better economic results</i> (Manager of cooperation and programs)</p> <p><i>We have close relationships with our partner, which leads to collaboration with very beneficial information and dairy processing development. We also link the dairy suppliers with potential buyers in exhibitions</i> (Manger of training and information)</p> | A meeting between dairy supplier 1 and the two managers of international agency 2, April 2017. | Annual Report 2016 Business Plan 2016–17 |
| | Relationship B2 | <p><i>This partnership should encourage using technology to deliver timely supply to the market and also environment consideration ...</i> (Manager of economic and social development)</p> <p><i>I do not believe that if we have strong business collaboration with our exporter that will make him share all his information with us</i> (Manager of regional office)</p> | A meeting between the dairy supplier 2 and the two managers of international agency 2, April 2017. | Annual Report 2016 Business Plan 2016–17 |
| Case C | Relationship C1 | <p><i>Demand and supply sides, information content and sources ... They make me share all these requirements with my partner</i> (Manager of cooperation and programs)</p> <p><i>it is all about interaction and collaboration for better value creation ... this is what the partner need from us ...</i> (Manger of training and information)</p> | A meeting between the pickling supplier 1 and the two managers of international agency 3, May 2017. | Annual Report 2016 Business Plan 2016–17 |
| | Relationship C2 | <p><i>Partnership should be used for full information sharing between us and our partner ... we do training, coordination, cooperation to add value for the human resources and then for products ...</i> (Manager of economic and social development)</p> <p><i>It is the believe of our partner on high bond with us for better flow of information and product and then better continuity in the markets ...</i> (Manager of regional office)</p> | A meeting between the pickling supplier 2 and the two managers of international agency 3, May 2017. | Annual Report 2016 Business Plan 2016–17 |
| Case D | Relationship D1 | <p><i>I do not believe that if we have strong collaboration with our partner that make him share all his information with us or depend on us</i> (Manager of cooperation and programs)</p> <p><i>We have close relationships with our partner, which leads to efficient information source with very beneficial information types. We depend on the</i></p> | A meeting between the fruit processor 1 and the two managers of local agency, May 2017. | Annual Report 2016 Business Plan 2016–17 |

TABLE 6 (Continued)

| Case | Relationship | Interview | Observation | Document |
|--------|-----------------|---|---|--------------------|
| | | <i>direct contacts and experts to communicate and share information (Manger of training and information)</i> | | |
| | Relationship D2 | <i>Our friendships in the market ..., but sometimes I am afraid to share with my partner information gained from weak sources (Manager of economic and social development)</i> <i>it is important information, such as the costs and profits, leading to new planning to create value to make better performance, to be coordinated well and emanating from cooperation nowadays and good collaboration in the future (Manager of regional office)</i> | A meeting between the fruit processor 2 and the two managers of local agency, May 2017. | Annual Report 2016 |
| Case E | Relationship E1 | <i>We really faced many problems with our actor to engage them with collaboration for better training and market information, however, we believe this should take more time and efforts and interaction ... (Manager of cooperation and programs)</i> <i>... We have specific training programmes with our partner (on harvesting, and post-harvest training) that make us provide them with the right information to do better way, however, the collaboration is still initial ... (Manger of training and information)</i> | A meeting between the FFV supplier 1 and the two managers of NGO, May 2017. | Annual Report 2016 |
| | Relationship E2 | <i>It is a weak relationship as collaboration and information we need are not always available ... our FFV supplier is always looking just for benefits and outside free tours and in return they do not show good performance (Manager of economic and social development)</i> <i>... To be honest ... there are things should be changed related to interactions, information source, value and types ... in this FFV, we need timely sharing for all information to take right actions, but our partner does not do that (Manager of regional office)</i> | A meeting between the FFV supplier 2 and the two managers of NGO, May 2017. | Annual Report 2016 |

6 | THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

An essential theoretical contribution of this research is the joint consideration granted to previously separately studied themes of value chain partnership and extending their application to the SAVC context. These key findings are a response to initial calls from Martinez and Poole (2004), Mikkola (2008), Bailey and Francis (2008), Porter and Kramer (2011), Pang et al. (2015), Barroso-Méndez et al. (2014) and Paul et al. (2021). Previous research examined these themes individually and has not focused on associations amongst interaction, information flow and product flow, and partnership in the agricultural value chain. This work provides a new conceptual framework generated with support from literature review and exploratory case study (see Figure 2). The case study approach has both within an individual case and cross-case comparison based on working actor/not-for-

profit actor level-focused themes for better validity and reliability. The key findings point out a high association between the identified antecedents and partnership of information sharing and value creation. The findings extend value chain literature by stressing the theoretical association between the identified antecedents and partnership in the sustainability value chain in general and the SAVC in particular (Barroso-Méndez et al., 2014; Danese et al., 2021; Tasca et al., 2017).

From a practical perspective, managers of both the not-for-profit organizations and value chain firms who work towards improving SAVC partnership outcomes can benefit from the conceptual framework. This framework offers a guideline to form and describe partnerships between actors along the value chain based on information sharing and value creation. Forging partnership to improve sustainability across the value chain, actors should cooperate, coordinate, collaborate, and adopt good management practices information flow and product flow (Cho & Lee, 2013; Tasca et al., 2017; Jensen

TABLE 7 Antecedents of partnership in SAVC: Cross-case comparison based on working actor/not-for-profit actor level-focused themes

| Case study | Working actor level-focused | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|--------|------|--------------|--------|--------|---|
| | Interaction | | | Information flow | | | Product flow | | | |
| | Cooperation | Coordination | Collaboration | Source | Method | Type | Value | Supply | Demand | |
| Case A | Relationship A1 | H | H | H | H | M | H | H | M | H |
| | Relationship A2 | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H |
| Case B | Relationship B1 | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H |
| | Relationship B2 | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H |
| Case C | Relationship C1 | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H |
| | Relationship C2 | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H |
| Case D | Relationship D1 | M | M | H | H | M | M | M | M | H |
| | Relationship D2 | L | L | M | M | L | L | L | L | H |
| Case E | Relationship E1 | L | L | H | H | L | L | L | L | M |
| | Relationship E2 | L | L | M | M | L | L | L | L | M |
| Overall score | M | M | H | H | M | M | M | M | M | H |

Note: Level of scoring from the perspective of not-for-profit actor: High (H), Medium (M), and Low (L).

TABLE 7 (Continued)

| Case study | Not-for-profit actor level-focused | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|--------|------|--------------|--------|--------|---|
| | Interaction | | | Information flow | | | Product flow | | | |
| | Cooperation | Coordination | Collaboration | Source | Method | Type | Value | Supply | Demand | |
| Case A | H | M | H | H | M | H | H | M | H | H |
| | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H |
| Case B | M | M | H | H | H | H | H | H | H | H |
| | H | H | H | H | M | H | H | H | H | H |
| Case C | M | H | H | H | H | H | M | H | H | H |
| | H | M | H | H | H | H | H | M | H | H |
| Case D | M | L | M | M | M | M | M | M | M | H |
| | M | L | M | M | M | H | M | M | M | H |
| Case E | L | L | M | M | M | M | M | M | M | M |
| | M | M | M | L | L | M | L | L | L | H |
| Overall score | M | M | H | H | M | H | M | M | M | H |

Note: Level of scoring from the perspective of not-for-profit actor: High (H), Medium (M), and Low (L).

TABLE 8 Partnership in SAVC: Cross-case comparison based on working actor/not-for profit actor level-focused themes

| Case study | Working actor level-focused | | Not-for profit actor level-focused | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|----------------|
| | Information sharing | Value creation | Information sharing | Value creation |
| Case A | Relationship A1 | H | H | H |
| | Relationship A2 | H | H | H |
| Case B | Relationship B1 | H | H | H |
| | Relationship B2 | H | H | H |
| Case C | Relationship C1 | H | H | H |
| | Relationship C2 | H | H | H |
| Case D | Relationship D1 | M | M | M |
| | Relationship D2 | M | M | M |
| Case E | Relationship E1 | L | L | L |
| | Relationship E2 | L | L | L |
| Overall score | M | M | H | M |

Note: Level of scoring from the perspective of not-for-profit actor: High (H), Medium (M), and Low (L).

et al., 2019). Nine antecedents to a partnership are highlighted that may focus on improving the level of information sharing between partners that leads to better value creation in their functions and the product flow within the agricultural value chain.

To improve information sharing between the partnering actors, managers should identify a good source of information, classify information types, apply various sharing methods and indicate which value of the information they need. Managers then may apply the shared information (e.g., data or knowledge on quality control, demand, packaging, etc.) into their value generation activities and the actor activities for sustainable value-added in SAVC. Policymakers and international funded programs can also benefit from the current key findings and the new framework as a referential basis to form a strategy for partnerships in agricultural sectors (Bailey & Francis, 2008; Pang et al., 2015). From a strategic perspective, this research contends that partners need to interact mainly based on collaboration rather than coordination and cooperation (Durugbo et al., 2020) to respond to the complexity of the value chain through interaction and lining up information visibility and product value without removing the uniqueness of every single function from production to consumption.

This research leaves opportunities for future researchers in SAVCs. Being based on qualitative methodology, the study's outcomes, however, cannot be generalized beyond the case study context. It is suggested to further test the conceptual framework using large-scale surveys in diverse geographic contexts. Also, as the study considers only local value chains, future research may complement this study by looking at trans-border value chain partnerships. Another potential area of study is the role of dyadic relationships (e.g., lack of ties among partners) in partnership from the perspective of both partners. It remains to be verified how information sharing and value creation influence sustainable development and chain dyad's performance, especially in agriculture. It also remains to be examined to what extent different country contexts influence partnership in SAVC.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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