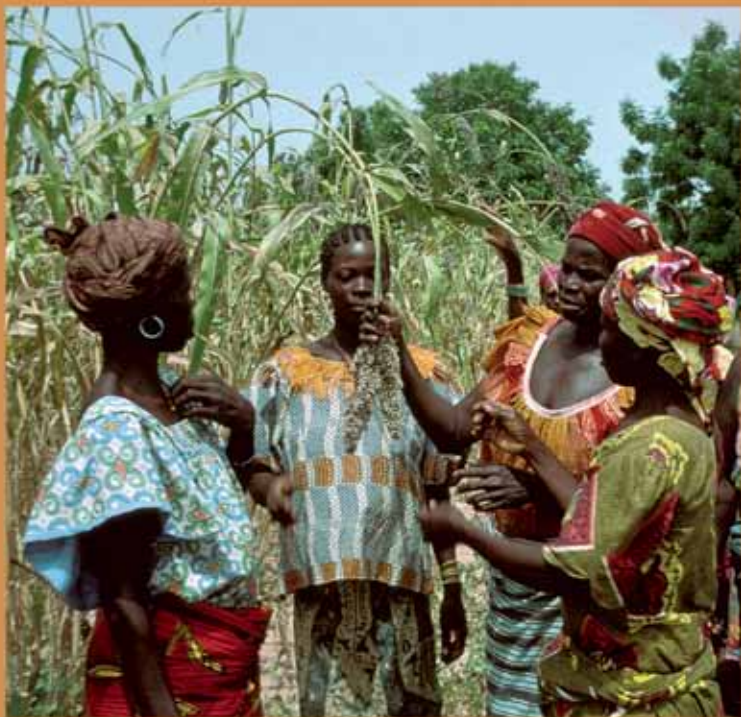# Innovating with rural stakeholders in the developing world

Action research in partnership

G. Faure, P. Gasselin, B. Triomphe,
L. Temple, H. Hocdé – SCIENTIFIC EDITORS

6. Enrolling stakeholders and the place of researchers

C. Castellanet and P. Pédelahore

The success of an ARP is linked closely to the ability of stakeholders to build trust between themselves and to manage tensions that may arise within the collective. The role of researchers in this collective also needs to be clearly defined. These aspects will be discussed in this chapter.

Enrolling stakeholders and building trust

The involvement of stakeholders in the collective presupposes a base of shared values and the availability of time and resources necessary to build trust. This process can be facilitated by a person who assumes the responsibility of managing the process and/or meditating between the parties.

As we will see, it is equally important to identify and take into consideration the various asymmetries and disparities inherent in the diversity of ARP partner stakeholders.

▥ Importance of shared values

As seen in Chapter 1, an ARP is often a bearer of social change. Often, it also leads to organizational changes, even institutional ones, by addressing power equations within partner organizations. It modifies the traditional roles and positions of professionals and researchers, manual workers, and intellectuals (Freire, 1969).

Irrespective of the situation (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991), the ARP's ethical and political dimensions remain central. Without an agreement between the participants on a minimum core of common social and political values, fundamental conflicts will be inevitable and could erupt at any time. It is therefore essential from the very beginning to confirm that there exists a sufficient consensus on these values (Liu, 1997).

Two questions can help do so and they should be asked at the end of this initial phase, before taking the decision to launch an ARP:

– Do participants sufficiently agree with the others' viewpoints and on the ethical implications of the planned action?

– Are there explicit or potential common aspirations for all participants?

These shared values apply to a common worldview and ethics as much as they do to a desire for change. For example, are researchers ready to work with a farmer organization very closely linked to a given political party? Similarly, will an organization of smallholder farmers be willing to work with a research team specializing in farm mechanization or genetically modified organisms (GMOs)?

As it is difficult to determine both the desirable scope of shared values and the participants' real attitudes beyond their initially declared positions, it may become necessary to rely on personal experiences and even intuition.

It may also be possible to put the declared values to the test by simple experiments during the initial phase. For example, the fact that researchers can directly meet any member of the partner organization without its hierarchy being present is indicative of a willingness to be open and to strive for internal democracy.

The bigger the social and cultural gap between the various stakeholders, the more difficult becomes the mutual understanding and the verification of shared values. For example, communication between researchers and farmers is, without doubt, more difficult and requires more time than that between researchers and technicians, more so if the context is intercultural as is the case with projects involving international cooperation.

▶ Building trust

Identifying common values and shared aspirations takes time. To be really effective, this process has to be accompanied by the building, in parallel, of an environment of mutual trust. In turn, trust will be built gradually and requires time; in fact, it often is a result of an ARP. Good mutual understanding is required, which develops via respectful dialog (see Chapter 5, "Emergence of the collective," page 69), respecting also of local codes of behavior such as those dealing with hospitality or the consumption of a ritual foodstuff, such as cola, adopting attitudes suitable for the rural environment concerned (language used, personal attitudes, respect for the tempo of life, etc.), or fulfilling agreed upon commitments.

Once this mutual understanding is in place, to build trust, one still has to consider whether one's interlocutor is reliable, confirm that he is not manipulating and twisting his proposals to suit his own narrow interests. In other words, one must know how to disassemble proposals, adjust all information received to take into account the oratorical style of the speaker and the little liberties with the truth commonly found in any speech, and analyze the eventual strategies used for deviating or instrumentalizing the project.

For researchers, this means, for example, to go from an initial stage of suspecting their farmer partners of hoping to benefit from project resources to one of discernment between opportunism and a genuine interest.

For the farmers, this means giving up a general mistrust of city folk – "Why would they want to have anything to do with us?" – to accepting their status as "bureaucrats" paid for observing and studying, yet without having any direct interaction with the rest of the State apparatus: politicians, police, etc.

There is no doubt that farmers find it harder to change their attitude than do researchers. In fact, researchers can gradually immerse themselves into the rural society whereas the farmers do not have the opportunity to do the same into the researcher's world, except when they participate at conferences, scientific debates, or study tours. But these opportunities are rare and, when they are do present themselves, require serious preparation and good organization, as shown in Box 4.

Box 4. Farmer-researcher roundtables: simple exchanges or true debates?

B. Sogoba, M. Togo, H. Hocdé

The international symposium on the management of agricultural genetic resources in the savannahs of West Africa, organized in Bamako, Mali, in May 2007, marked the conclusion of a participatory research project. It encompassed a wide range of topics such as biological diversity, decentralized varietal creation, participatory breeding, seed distribution and networks. It was a challenge to make the participants work together; many were not used to sharing such a stage. On the one hand, there were about 60 researchers, all used to academic debate, and on the other, about 30 farmers and some ten NGO personnel, not used to the verbal give and take in an amphitheater.

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How to make the farmers participate in the debate in an arena where the rules are usually those of the researchers? The answer was to organize roundtables to give voice to farmers, promote exchanges and advancing of varied viewpoints, and brainstorm the various forms of knowledge present at the Symposium.

During the roundtables, the coordinators, when they thought it necessary, would translate discussions or statements in Bambara to explain some essential points as well as to maintain the attention of an audience not fluent in French, the official language of the Symposium. Feeling more at ease, most of the farmers did speak and expressed their views openly..

What did the farmers have to say during the roundtables? "We discovered that varieties do not fall from the sky, they have to be created by man." They also learnt to define ideotypes, to select plant material, and to characterize local varieties and their behavior in very diverse situations. They recognized that it is only in the climate of trust that was created during the project that farmers and researchers could really work together for creating millet and sorghum varieties (Grinkan, Kenikeni) and take initiatives such as the establishment of seed cooperatives.

Farmers left the roundtables satisfied to have been recognized and admitted to the world of the researchers. The organizers achieved their goal: their innovative way of concluding the project was a success and they showed the way for a dialog between two worlds used to working separately rather than together.

In practice, at what precise moment is trust initiated? How to trigger it? We begin to trust another person when he demonstrates his commitment. Box 5 illustrates this point.

Box 5. Building trust by being put to the test
H. Hocdé
At the start of an ARP process, researchers are tested, often without their knowledge, in several ways by their interlocutors, i.e., the farmers – and even by the farmers' wives and families. The farmers test their ability to understand the environment they are setting foot in, their knowledge ("They know nothing about beans, but do have a good knowledge of the local geography"), their skills ("They are clueless about how our producers' organization works, but they can very clearly summarize all we tell them"), and their positions

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("He had a brush with the minister's technician – who knows little – and put him firmly in his place"), their commitment ("He is not afraid to stick his neck out at this institution that is always scolding us over something or the other; he did us a valuable service"), their persistence in making the farmers participate ("We were not keen to present our work ourselves; he went to a lot of trouble to convince us and, finally, it all worked out"), their willingness to work ("Ah! Those ones, they are not afraid to roll up their sleeves; they are hard workers"), and thus arrive at "we can rely on them, on their word, we trust them."

In addition, the more the asymmetries and disparities between stakeholders are pronounced, more is the time required to establish trust. One has to pass some severe tests ("We want you to identify yourself, now, otherwise we will leave you here in the village and not take you back to headquarters; proper words and beautiful speeches are all well and good, but we want to know who you really are before we can continue") or have a good reputation already ("So-and-so, in whom I have total trust, told me: This one is ok, you can proceed with him!"). One has to decode the proposals ("Who amongst the decision- and policy-makers will attend this meeting, our meeting?") or be measured by actual work done ("We've been watching you for over a year and have spoken to our neighbors to make sure that you have not fallen into a trap and that there are no GMOs hiding in your 'improved' varieties").

There is really nothing out of the ordinary in all this. It is daily life and the expression of human nature, irrespective of the location and the teams we are working with. Whenever someone comes to a new place, he is tested. We should not forget this when we embark on an ARP!

◗ Mediator's role

Relationships between stakeholders become much easier if there are mediators within the group. A farmer's son who is now a researcher or a professor, a farmer who worked as a research assistant, a local religious leader, or a teacher respected in the community can quickly "translate" the viewpoints of either side while retaining the trust of all concerned. They can play a special role as a facilitator of dialog within the action-research framework, not only during organized and official meetings but also during unofficial exchanges – which are as important, if not more so.

However, this situation is not always a comfortable one for the mediators themselves; they may be subjected to considerable pressure from the various participants. Mediators can also be tempted to benefit from their special position of true "brokers of development" (in this instance, of the ARP process) with the opportunity to manipulate the

various stakeholders, for example, by selectively filtering out some information for their own ends.

◗ Asymmetries between stakeholders and roles in the collective

ARP advocates the recognition of the different types of knowledge contributed by the stakeholders and strives for a balance between the different types of stakeholders in the decision-making and coordinating processes (see Chapter 3, "Recognizing others' knowledge and developing a common language," page 41). Yet, building an ARP collective brings together stakeholders who have disparate levels of material and non-material resources and who thus find themselves in an asymmetrical position vis-à-vis each other.

This asymmetry should be recognized and dealt with to prevent the domination of any one stakeholder over another. In fact, these disparities determine the initial distribution of positions and roles between the stakeholders. Having access to resources can automatically lead some stakeholders to dominate the decision-making process and to adopt a coordinating and planning role. It also affects their level of participation in the project with respect to the other partners.

Differences in social status

The first source of asymmetry is the difference in social status, which translates into a difference of reciprocal recognition and legitimacy. The difference in status and educational level between researchers and technicians, on the one hand, and between technicians and farmers, on the other, translates into an asymmetry in ability on the farmers' part to argue their case and advance their viewpoints in the face of more or less explicit disdain.

The researchers are representatives of public institutions having a State mandate to fulfill their mission and are often perceived as such by the other partners. Because of this, they carry a significant weight when they air their views, irrespective of the relevance of their opinions or of the suitability of their proposals.

Conversely, researchers too may not initially recognize that the representation and concerns of their non-researcher partners have legitimacy and value. Even when researchers are well-disposed and are eager to enter a dialog, they often perpetuate an unequal and asymmetric

relationship, which reinforces the farmers' inferiority complex. Darré (2006) refers to this as "symbolic violence."

The farmers' ability to adopt and defend their own viewpoints and have them recognized and respected depends, in particular, on how structured is the local environment, on how spokespersons are chosen, and on collective work already done on defining and hierarchizing local concerns and projects.

In some situations, quite common in countries of the South, there does not necessarily exist any already-formulated "farmer or local demand or requests." In such conditions, researchers have a tendency to put forward their own themes and approaches. This leads to ARP approaches that are researcher-led and thus asymmetric, and this in spite of declared intentions of giving a voice and lending support to the weakest section of stakeholders.

In any case, it is only by the "reflexive" practice of a respectful dialog, in implementing what Darré (2006) calls "coactive research" or what Freire (1969) calls "conscientization," that researchers and their partners can learn to reduce these deep social inequalities.

Unequal access to resources

Asymmetry also results from unequal access to information or financial and material resources such as computer centers and vehicles. Thus, in exchanges with a group of maize farmers ill-informed of market prices, an industrialist with up to date price information is in a position to "impose" his viewpoints and proposals.

Similarly, the fact that State bureaucrat or NGO representatives often have vehicles to help them get around gives them an upper hand in deciding the frequency, the dates, and places of collective meetings or of field visits.

Finally, the researcher or the bureaucrat is assured of his or her monthly pay and can thus invest his or her time in the ARP collective and leave an imprint. The farmer, on the other hand, has to think first of feeding the family and is therefore often less active within the collective.

Differences can also be more symbolic in character (the prestige of the dress, the educational degree, or position, for example) or can relate to the various participants' unequal abilities of expression and of negotiation. Indeed, not all participants will have the same capacities to be

heard, to express themselves clearly, and assert their convictions in a meeting that brings together different types of stakeholders.

Training and education (with specific modalities going beyond those of on-the-job learning processes, see Part 5, page 181) can play an important role in reducing these types of asymmetries, as Box 6 shows. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that asymmetries can even increase between ARP participants and non-participants or between those forming the inner core of the process and those on its periphery.

Box 6. A farmer university in north-east Brazil for co-constructing knowledge

J.-P. Tonneau and E. Coudel

The decentralization of public policies in Brazil has confirmed the immense need for skills and knowledge for local stakeholders to be real proponents of local and territorial development projects. Cirad, in partnership with the Federal University of Campina Grande and the Dom Helder Camara project, participated between 2003 and 2006 in coordinating a training programme for young rural residents in sustainable local development. The project, called Unicampo, was conducted in the semi-arid region of Cariri, Paraiba State, in the north-east of Brazil.

The challenge was to allow the stakeholders to valorize and strengthen their knowledge by organizing an exchange between local knowledge and university knowledge. This exchange took place via debates between participants, teachers, and researchers, made possible by the gradual building up of trust and respect. This training process – a sizeable investment – was part of a 12-month course for building human resources in a given area.

To promote real learning, the pedagogical process, inspired by Freire (1969), was structured around seven key questions: Who are we? What are our resources? What are our production systems? How to improve our situation? What are our projects? How to best implement them? How to manage them? The training consisted of classroom and practical sessions, valorization of the participants' knowledge, sharing of experiences, monitoring of the on-field implementation of the knowledge, etc.

These questions forced the stakeholders to question their own reality. They rediscovered it and then learnt to analyze it. In doing so, they gradually defined the projects that they wanted to implement in their communities and the manner of doing so, all the while affirming their identities and attempting to promote the use of local resources.

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This type of training to build up stakeholder skills shakes up established habits by introducing a new way of looking at knowledge and its creation. The young people can then become true advocates in their communities: they are trained to better understand their environment and to participate in negotiations with influential or "important" actors.

However, it must be admitted that going against traditional transmission structures, which generally are the source of power in public or private organizations, has a drawback. At the end of this training course, the young rural people have problems finding work in institutions entrusted with local and territorial development. Some are not even hired, being seen as potential "boat-rockers." Others are often frustrated by their inability to find the freedom of action necessary to pursue this approach within the organization.

We thus see the limitations of individual empowerment and responsibilization: territorial organizations also require transforming.

Managing tensions

An ARP is a demanding and disrupting process. At the practical level, it requires time, effort, and discussions between people who are not in the habit of talking to each other. In addition, it can call into question the participants' positions and public image. In fact, it asks frank questions, dismisses false evidence and ready-made truths, and uncovers hidden conflicts of interests.

◗ Managing information, a sensitive topic

An ARP produces validated information, hence difficult to contest, a benefit derived from following strict research procedures. This often modifies the power relationships between various stakeholders and organizations since information is an essential component of power. Its impact depends on the way it is disseminated, to whom, and at what time.

Researchers often find themselves confronted by the age-old dilemma: Should all truths be revealed? In our context: Should some research findings be held back, at least temporarily, in an effort to prevent a rise in tensions or to avoid drawing the ire of powerful people who can hamper or even block the process?

Another dilemma for the researchers: How should they handle the sensitive situation of a participant confiding in them on a confidential basis and revealing sensitive information, on his organization's political strategy, for example? Researchers can also "forget" to consult

their partners when publishing articles or books originating from the ARP approach, which may see print several months or even years after the active phase of the ARP. Is it desirable, ethical, or even practical to submit all publications originating from the ARP to stakeholders for their approval?

On the flip side, farmers may hesitate to reveal sensitive information about debates and internal conflicts within their organization. If revealed this information may aggravate existing conflicts or upset delicate balances.

Researchers' observations sometimes contradict the official viewpoint of farmer organizations on sensitive topics such as the environmental and social impact of their agricultural practices and policies. In such cases, the organizational leaders may be tempted to "control" the public speech of the researchers and to limit their contacts with their farmer-members or with public administrations.

◗ Temporal aspects of the research and the action

The "researcher's time" is not the same as the "farmer's time." The researcher's activities, such as a survey, a measurement, or an experiment, take place over short and planned periods. Activities of the other stakeholders, especially the farmers, on the other hand, can go on for long and uncertain periods (a crop cycle, field activities subject to climatic vagaries).

Conversely, the researchers' findings are less easily planned and are often delayed, whereas the other stakeholders' expectations *are* urgent and impatient: they want applicable results and advice fast. This difference may lead to a disinterest in the project and engender doubts on the abilities and real intentions of the researchers and on the hundreds of interviews they conducted and thousands of notes that they took. Insidious rumors may make the rounds: "Who are they really working for? Are they giving advice only to the rich investors? Are they helping foreign firms appropriate farmers' lands and varieties?"

Holding regular report-back sessions to present and discuss research findings, even provisional ones, helps bridge this divide to a certain extent. Presenting the initial results of agronomic tests as quickly as possible, just after the harvest, helps the farmers concerned to compare their experiences and to draw lessons for the following year.

However, such presentations and feedback will not resolve all dissatisfaction. They can even contribute to the frustrations, especially if the

results seem insignificant or apparently just repeat what the farmers already knew, for example the history of their farms or the tensions between crop farmers and livestock breeders. Was it really necessary to spend six months in collecting data to come up with this trivial result?

Sense only begins to emerge when these presentations lead to collective debates. Questions and doubts can then be discussed openly which were taboo or simply kept unnoticed until then for one reason or another. A survey can reveal, for example, the phenomenon of concentration of land ownership and rural exodus, known by all but never discussed in community forums so as not to antagonize farmers with large landholdings.

◗ Inevitable conflicts

One may take all the precautions one can but an ARP can still provoke tensions and conflicts due to the disruptive nature of the information it generates and disseminates. These conflicts often reveal the stakeholders' strategies (see Chapter 5, page 69). It is an opportunity to analyze the interests involved, the stakeholders who are reacting, and their reasons for doing so. Negotiations should then be conducted to resolve or overcome these conflicts.

Negotiations will go easier if the conflicts had been anticipated at the launch of the ARP and if suitable resolution mechanisms have been put in place (see Chapter 5, "Criteria for selecting members of the collective," page 69 and Part 3, page 107). Nevertheless, safeguards and mechanisms initially put in place in consultation with the partners may not be able to handle some conflicts, especially since agreements entered into within an ARP are relatively weak and temporary and rarely involve long-term contractual institutional arrangements.

Role of researchers

Action-research situations lead researchers to question their professional practices. They view their place in an ARP mechanism as unique, either because they are at its origin or because they are entrusted with specific roles as leaders, managers, translators, or mediators, or because they represent a world and knowledge unfamiliar to other stakeholders. It is therefore necessary to examine their interests, the functions they assume, and the roles they play.

⏵ Interests of the researchers

Taking the stakeholders' rationales into account, for example that of farmer families, in any research or development activity is now relatively common. On the other hand, explaining the rationale of the researcher in doing so is less common. And yet, the researcher is also a social actor who is answerable to the institution that employs him or her and who is making a career by following certain established norms and practices, including those of scientific publishing.

This may not be taken for granted by the non-researcher stakeholders. For example, the publication of findings from research conducted within the framework of an ARP can be perceived by some local stakeholders, who contributed to it "in confidence," as espionage, a betrayal or a theft in pursuit of benefits they little understand but which they assume are significant or dishonorable. A simple effort to explain things to them, often via trusted intermediaries, goes a long way in avoiding such potential disillusionment.

⏵ Specific role in managing the collective

When the researcher is the ARP's proponent and the provider of material resources, he or she usually assumes the role of the manager of the emerging collective and of being the intermediary with other researchers. The researcher can also play the role of translator between different scientific domains or scientific approaches, on the one hand, and perceptions and concerns of the local stakeholders, on the other.

To be able to play this role properly, the researcher has to step back from his or her own discipline, perceptions, and personal or institutional goals. He or she should also be able to be involved as much as possible in action as in generating knowledge and should fully participate in the transformations taking place. The traditional researcher, neutral and playing the role of an external observer, has to be substituted by an actor-researcher whose involvement in the action is an integral part of the research process (see Chapter 2, "Main justifications," page 31).

⏵ Specific role in constructing the problem-set

The researcher plays an active role in the "maieutics" exercise (constructive dialog) which helps the collective construct the problem-set that has to be addressed. Starting from difficulties expressed by the farmers as complaints or concerns, "We cannot sell our cassava as well as we would like to," the researcher can clarify the specific problem(s) encountered by asking these questions: Are you left with

unsold produce? Or is it a question of selling price? Do you have difficulties in selling the whole year? How can the sale of cassava be improved during the most favorable periods?

A direct exchange is not always the most effective form of dialog between researchers and farmers. A mediator should sometimes be called upon to help formulate not only the questions for resolving a problem, but also the research questions themselves. There are different reasons to involve him: he "speaks the local language better" (the language itself and, more importantly, the way of saying things, see Chapter 5, "First steps of the collective," page 69) and can help reduce disparities in status and their consequences.

Researchers are often in a hurry, imposing their reasoning and their rhythm on the farmers (the notion of "symbolic violence" mentioned above). Calling on one or more mediators slows down the pace since the researchers' findings and the questions they want to ask have to be first explained to the mediator. Only then can a second meeting with the farmers be held, a meeting which will be managed by the mediator. The involvement of mediators complicates the process but can end up improving its effectiveness.

Researchers can also help identify approaches and tools appropriate for defining the problem-set and to point the way to its possible solutions. Thus, revisiting the previous example, after having shown that the problem was primarily one of oversupply and the resulting low prices of fresh cassava tubers, researchers can propose to analyze the functioning of the cassava supply chain to identify implementable solutions.

The researchers should therefore be willing to modify their original research questions to reorient their work towards finding a solution to the problem as defined with the stakeholders. They should also recognize the knowledge of all stakeholders and their ability to produce new knowledge (see Chapter 2, "Main justifications," page 31). It is more a matter of the clash between different types of knowledge than of its diffusion (from the technician or scientist to the farmer), as can be seen in Box 7.

⊪ Balance between impartiality and involvement

The researchers have a special position in an ARP group, not only because of their skills but also because of their supposed objectivity and impartiality in analyzing observed phenomena or situations.

Box 7. Malagasy farmers question researchers: Who are you?
H. Hocdé

In March 2001, farmers of Anandrobe village in the region of Lake Alaotra in Madagascar play host to some thirty visiting researchers from various countries. They take them all over the area to show them their plots and their adoption of mulch-based direct-seeding techniques. The visitors divide themselves into three groups. One of these groups, consisting of seven persons, interviews three male and one female farmer at length. The researchers are most interested in the history of their association called Tafaray (which means "uniting successfully") consisting of 60 members from a total of 250 families spread out over the village.

As the discussions are fruitful and time is running short, they decide to meet again the next day (thus disrupting the official tour program). Only a single condition is attached to this second meeting: a reversal of roles. The researchers will refrain from asking questions; it will be the farmers who will ask them questions.

The next day, the farmers accordingly meet with a group of 10 researchers: a weed specialist, a biometrician, an agrologist-biostatician, two agronomists, a zootechnician, two physiologists, a systems agronomist, and a morphopedologist. These researchers work in France, Mexico, Brazil, and in Cameroon. Some of them have worked in Madagascar in the past.

The farmers decide to find out more about their visitors: "Who are you? Introduce yourself. What is your specialty? What work do you do? If you asked us so many questions yesterday, it means that you can contribute something to us."

Some examples of the questions they asked:

– "Why do you ask us questions about our velvet beans since it is you, the *vazaha* (foreigners), who asked us to cultivate it? You tell us that you have been in Mexico for eight years, that you work with velvet beans and direct seeding. Then what is the stage you have reached since all this time, where as for us, we have just started cultivating it?"

– "If you are working on the association of agriculture with livestock, can you tell us which is better for us: growing crops or animal farming? Can we maintain a herd of 1000 heads of cattle on 110 ha of hilly terrain during the rainy season?"

– "If you are mapping our lands, can you tell us where to plant our crops? Which of our plots are suitable for direct seeding? Can you tell us where to find rubies?"

– "You specialize in weeds, so what do you know about herbicides? How do the herbicides we use get rid of the weeds? Do you make herbicides at Montpellier? What are the long-term risks of the herbicides we use?"

– "What do you think of the soil of the plot (maize with velvet beans) that we visited?"

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> – "I hear you are from Brazil. Can you tell us something of the performance of the "8FA3731" rice cultivar that comes from there?"
>
> It goes without saying that the subsequent discussions were intense and wide-ranging. The visitors came out of the meeting impressed by their hosts' knowledge and perseverance. They always knew that farmers have their own ideas and areas of interest, but they had never thought of creating an environment that would allow them to find out what the farmers think about and what they want to say. After all, how many interviews, surveys, and meetings conclude by "And now, if you asked me questions instead of answering mine..."? "You specialize in weeds, so what do you know about herbicides? How do the herbicides we use get rid of the weeds? Do you make herbicides at Montpellier? What are the long-term risks of the herbicides we use?"
>
> – "What do you think of the soil of the plot (maize with velvet beans) that we visited?"
>
> – "I hear you are from Brazil. Can you tell us something of the performance of the "8FA3731" rice cultivar that comes from there?"

Nevertheless, this impartiality has been called in question for quite some time now from the epistemological point of view and due to changes in the relationship between science and civil society (see Chapter 2, "Main justifications," page 31).

The involvement of researchers comes into focus when technical, social, ethical, or political choices have to be made as part of solutions to local problems. For example, should middlemen be eliminated? Wouldn't the recommendation of using chainsaws lead to faster destruction of virgin forests?

Moreover, the trust – or sometimes even respect and friendship – that builds up between researchers and some partners can interfere with the analysis of results due to a lack of the necessary distance.

Finally, the involvement of researchers in action requires them to make explicit choices, take risks, and specify activities which they will be responsible for. If the solution they have proposed for on-field implementation fails, will they still be able to analyze and present the results of failure and their causes objectively, even if they lose the recognition of the group and their own legitimacy is endangered?

These difficulties should encourage the researcher to work as part of a team of several researchers, if possible from across disciplines, and to adopt a habit of self-reflection. It also helps to establish scientific authorities outside the ARP collective, such as scientific committees

(see Chapter 8, "Governance mechanisms," page 107). These two modalities will go a long way in helping the researcher take the necessary distance from dilemmas and from the inherent contradictions of an ARP.

◗ Researcher motivations

Even if a researcher acquires the same knowledge and skills as the other stakeholders as part of an ARP approach, his specific position allows him to also derive professional satisfaction from helping resolve a problem (increased revenues for cassava farmers, for example) and from being part of a process for enhancing the other stakeholders' knowledge and skill sets. In addition, it allows him to produce publishable knowledge, which has a generic value because it is valid beyond the specific local context in which it was generated.

On the flip side, the ARP researcher finds himself often out of step with his colleagues and his institution. In fact, many researchers and institutions view ARP as a form of marginal scientific activity and attach little prestige to participating in one. They find it to be time-consuming and something that distracts researchers from their core responsibilities (see Box 8).

We, however, look at it differently: an ARP can be very productive from a purely scientific viewpoint because it forces the researchers to continuously question their paradigms and methods of working. It is a powerful generator of new research questions and methods which, once identified, may often be dealt with in the framework of more conventional research. Many major discoveries have resulted from observations made during applied research, in close interaction with the stakeholders.

Box 8. Managing relations between ARP researchers and their institution
B. Triomphe

Even if individual researchers can be convinced, due to personal interest or their own past experiences, to participate in an ARP, the institution they are attached to may not feel the same way. Both in countries of the North as well as those of the South, institutions may be reluctant to let their researchers participate in an ARP. The difficulties that a researcher could confront are of several types:

– An unfavorable institutional culture which is characterized by hierarchical decision making, by not being used to working in partnership, by harboring prejudice against stakeholders from the development sphere and against the legitimacy of their knowledge and abilities, by weak interdisciplinarity, and by internal competition for resources – which leads more often than not to their allocation to conventional commitments and approaches;

– The rules, conventions, and values (more or less explicit) that exist within the institution or the scientific community in general (the famed issue of peer recognition and approval) and which shape and limit the individual's or the team's freedom of action. For example, inflexible work schedules, evaluation modalities that are not sympathetic to risk taking and working with stakeholders, inflexibility in the types of research products expected (priority for academic scientific publication), and inflexible funding methods and conditions;

– Difficulties in identifying and mobilizing persons with sufficient skills and experience to undertake an ARP approach.

Nevertheless, a researcher also has the possibility of asking for and obtaining the necessary approval from his or her research institution, even, ultimately, of contributing to changing its perceptions and practices. Some practical suggestions to help him do so:

– Relying on the experience and advice of others in the institution who may have participated in ARP or similar approaches in the past;

– Enlisting the support of a mentor who is amenable and is well-placed in the institution's hierarchy, and who is able to open doors and to protect the researcher in case of subsequent difficulties;

– To be ready, if necessary, with counterarguments when presented with concerns and the usual criticism of the ARP approach and its proponents. Common statements one has to address include, "An ARP is not research, it is development." "We researchers do not need the help of others to design innovations and to transmit them; it is *our* job." "ARP is not an established approach; just simple concepts whose value has never been proven." "It is complicated; we wouldn't know how to go about it. It is a subject for specialists in the social sciences; other disciplines should not get involved." "It does not allow a researcher to do 'proper' science and to publish articles." "ARP has misplaced pretensions of substituting other types of research."

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– Active involvement in intra- and inter-institutional communications on the ARP project, via the organization of seminars, meetings with partners, etc.;

– Regular renegotiation with his institution of deadlines, budgets, and time commitments to the project, and of products expected from it based on concrete results obtained at the end of each stage of the ARP project. This is because an ARP project evolves dynamically and this helps update expectations and keep them realistic.

– If possible, organizing training sessions such as researcher-courses and theoretical-practical workshops to raise awareness amongst colleagues, maybe even enroll some of them;

– Finally, remembering to publish as often as possible in scientific journals, presenting and valorizing various intermediate results or methodological aspects.