Innovating with rural stakeholders in the developing world

Action research in partnership

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Action research in partnership combines knowledge production, transformation of social realities and the building up of individual and collective skills. This book provides the foundation for understanding the theoretical background to action research in partnership in the field of agriculture and putting it into practice. The key intermediate steps and milestones of the approach are presented and discussed. The initial step – defining the problem and structuring the team that brings together all stakeholders – is crucial to the success of subsequent activities. The processes and methods that allow all stakeholders to be actively involved in the design, planning, monitoring and evaluation of results are described, as are those related to assessing the relevance of the results in terms of knowledge produced, capacity building of the actors or problem solving. The book draws on a wide range of experiences in agriculture and rural development in developing countries, and especially in Africa and Latin America. Together, they illustrate how practitioners have responded to the challenges of implementing an approach that has to be tailored and fine-tuned to the specificities of each situation.

This book is intended for researchers and professionals working in the field of rural development. Representatives of rural and farmers’ organizations in developing countries, often dealing with complex development challenges, will also find it useful.

About the authors:

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Box 20. Technical innovations for plantain producers in central Cameroon

_L. Temple and M. Kwa_

Plantain producers in central and southern Cameroon find it difficult to expand their plantation with high-yielding resistant plants. In fact, conventional techniques of propagation by suckers encourage viral contamination.

An ARP was initiated in 2000 involving researchers, the staff of a development project, and producers. It helped perfect new techniques among the farmers for producing healthy suckers through micro-cuttings. The techniques were subsequently adopted by nursery owners who proposed modifications to the original methods based on their expertise and experience. This led to the establishment of a network of nursery owners that notched up sales of 100,000 seedlings. A monitoring and evaluation program of the corresponding partnership set-ups since 2002 led to the updating of concerns facing agricultural research. In this particular case, the success of the new techniques led to an increase in thefts from nurseries, so much so that nurseries had to be moved closer to human habitation. However, the use of sawdust in these nurseries led to the proliferation of termite hills, thus posing a risk for houses. Consequently the ARP, which had initially aimed at the creation of a new technology, had to initiate new research to solve the problem of termite attacks.

Box 21. Institutional innovation

_L. Temple and M. Kwa_

The ARP approach implemented in central and southern Cameroon created conditions for the emergence of two organizations that are complementary but located in different areas.

The first is an inter-professional network for plantain (Ribap, Cameroon) that consists of about 50 nursery owners (growers) and supervisors (field advisors). Its objective is to improve the techno-economic performance of member nurseries.

The second organization is an association of plantain growers in Leikie at Sa’a (Aspabal). It consists of 11 nursery owners whose main activity is the sharing of information on marketing opportunities, sharing of experiences, and commercial promotion of the new plantain material. These different initiatives institutionalize a network of experimenter-farmers based on seedling production.