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.

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interpretations of the same rule by different stakeholders should be avoided. Such an effort helps create the conditions for trust to grow and strengthens each participant’s commitment to the project (see Chapter 7, “Context and issues,” page 97).

Different examples of the construction of rules are presented below. Keep in mind that each ARP has to find its own way to build its own rules; there is no fixed rulebook that can be applied to every case.

**Work charter**

Few projects start by drafting a work charter. The project “Varietal Innovation Platforms on Bananas and Plantain in West and Central Africa” (Innobap) did just that (see Box 11). Innobap is a regional network of exchange platforms for improved identification of farmer needs and the dissemination of new banana and plantain varieties in central and western Africa.

**Box 11. An example of a work charter: the Innobap project**

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Research teams working on banana in four French-speaking African countries came together to undertake a project called Innobap (Varietal Innovation Platforms on Bananas and Plantain in West and Central Africa). In a conventional research project, the kick-off workshop focuses, sometimes almost exclusively, on experimental protocols and mechanisms. However, in each of the four countries, the core project initiative takers, consisting of representatives of farmer organizations and one or two researchers, gave the workshop a totally different orientation by focusing on:

– Drawing up specifications for varietal evaluation;
– Formalizing the commitments of the various participants;
– Constituting a steering committee in charge of determining operating rules;
– Defining varietal experimentation set-ups (tests) either on-station or on-farm;

This set of four points, designated “platform,” constitutes a formal mechanism of collaboration between users and researchers. The draft of the charter was hammered out during the workshop based on these four points. At the end of the workshop, the charter was dated and signed by the members of the steering committee.

There is no doubt that launching a project by formalizing commitments is no mean task. And it cannot be automatically assumed that commitments made will eventually be honored.