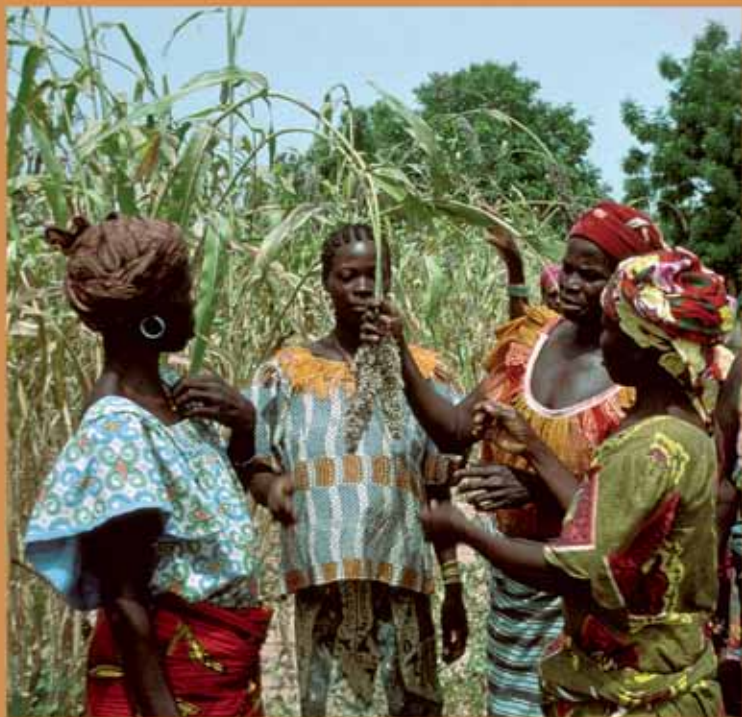# Innovating with rural stakeholders in the developing world

Action research in partnership

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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.