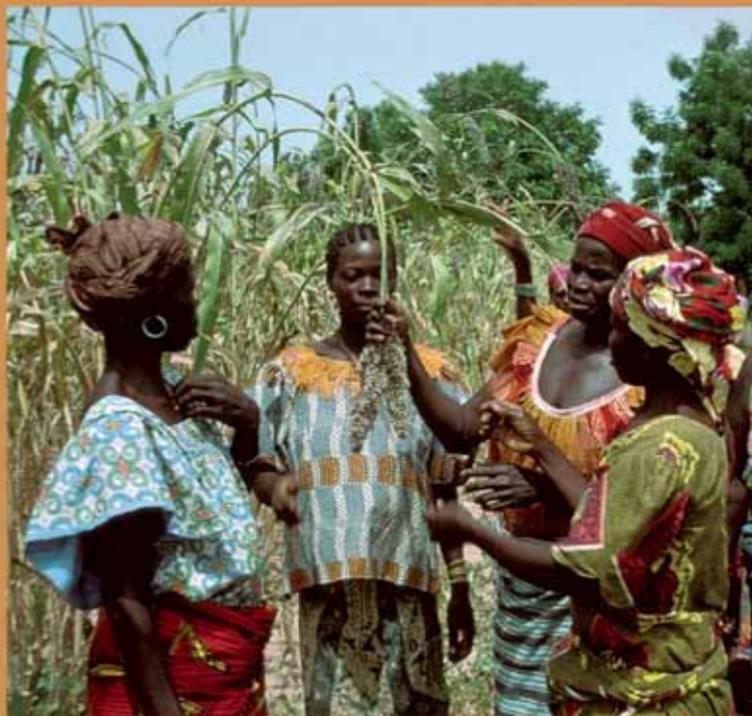




Innovating with rural stakeholders in the developing world

Action research in partnership

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13. Monitoring and evaluation

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Results of an action research in partnership (ARP) are measured using the concepts of effectiveness and efficiency (Garrabé, 1994). Efficiency relates to the analysis of relationships between the resources employed and results obtained, either during or after the project (ex-post evaluation). Effectiveness relates to the extent of divergence between the initial objectives, as decided before the action, and the objectives actually achieved during the process or after the action. Effectiveness is assessed through an appraisal of satisfaction of the ARP stakeholders or through indicators specified by actors outside the ARP.

Effectiveness can be evaluated according to a criterion of achievement or non-achievement of objectives and a criterion of degree of achievement.

We will limit discussion to ex-post evaluations. These evaluations usually fulfill external requirements designed to verify the proper use of resources (see Chapter 15, “Funding an action research in partnership: strategies and practices,” page 197). They usually originate from funding entities, which are not necessarily associated with the governance and control of the ARP process (see Part 3).

Similarly, we will focus on indicators which measure the satisfaction of ARP stakeholders rather than those set by external actors to gauge other objectives.

Can the results of action research in partnership be measured?

We will endeavor to highlight here the methodological difficulties in measuring an ARP’s results. To do this, we will distinguish between expected effects, unexpected effects, and unwanted effects. Expected or planned effects are generated by the implementation of solutions identified by the ARP stakeholders. Unexpected effects can sometimes turn out to be the most important ones. Finally, there can be unwanted effects such as a crises, conflicts, or failures.



▮ Fulfilling initial objectives

An ARP follows a nonlinear trajectory. The contents of ongoing activities are subject to change and can result in the modification of the original objectives. We must therefore distinguish the original and stated goals from those that emerge during the process, and then determine the extent of their implementation.

Indeed, given the qualitative nature of many of the outcomes, ARP stakeholders are hard put to define quantified objectives.

Consequently, the main purpose of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is to assess the degree to which objectives have been fulfilled. Not only does M&E constitute an opportune time for analyzing the extent to which the objectives have been met, but also for building a consensus amongst participants to define indicators for measuring this fulfillment. There are no standard “recipes” for doing so, except the recommendation to base this evaluation on a collective viewpoint and not on that of any particular participant (the project initiator, in most cases). Box 22 illustrates how the stakeholders participate in this M&E exercise.

Box 22. Characterization of a hybrid variety

Researchers and development officers had set quantified objectives in a project that partly relied on an ARP process for validating a new variety of hybrid plantain (Crpb39). The objectives specified a fixed number of experimenter-farmers and a fixed surface area planted with the hybrid per farmer.

However, during the process, the number of farmers conducting experiments far exceeded the target set. The planted surface area, on the other hand, remained below the target, and did not allow reliable conclusions to be drawn on the agronomic performance of the hybrid variety in comparison to local ones.

To evaluate the extent of achievement of targets, it was necessary to sit with the partners and rework their definitions from the point of view of collective experimentation, and not limit them to the point of view of research.

According to these new objectives, it was no longer necessary to compare the performance of the new hybrid with those of other varieties in terms of agronomic criteria alone. Rather, it was more useful to analyze how the introduction of this hybrid amongst the varieties cultivated by farmers would improve overall production and quality, which would lead to better plantain sales for the producers.



Meeting objectives that emerge over the course of the process and are collectively considered as positive is sometimes more important than meeting the original goals. Indeed, questioning, during the process, of the ability of the ARP collective to achieve the original goals can help identify major roadblocks that were not initially anticipated and direct the actions of participants towards overcoming them.

Collective learning from such situations helps create new social networks that increase the ability of stakeholders to address other questions and thus promotes their autonomy.

▮ Meeting “implicit” or “explicit” objectives

An ARP’s objectives can also change over time as a result of alliances formed between stakeholders or due to competition and conflicts that may arise. This development is due to the fact that there are, on the one hand, clearly declared collective objectives and, on the other, implicit goals held by certain stakeholders that the research process often reveals (see Chapter 6, “Enrolling stakeholders and the place of researchers,” page 79).

These goals are said to be implicit from the point of view of the ARP process. Here are two examples, one for researchers, one for technicians:

- Some researchers may want to create knowledge that is not related to ARP’s declared objectives;
- Technicians may seek to increase their credibility with farmers in their advisory role and that of transferring research results, without necessarily subscribing fully to all ARP objectives.

These implicit goals are difficult to characterize, let alone measure. Governance mechanisms can sometimes help reveal them.

▮ Lessons from failures

Sometimes an ARP process fails to meet its objectives. Thus, instead of creating synergies between different stakeholders, it can, for example, crystallize existing conflicts between the producers and traders, induce conflicts of interests in individuals, or even lead to negative learning (“I will never work with researchers again!”).

These failures can often be traced to the governance of the process (see Part 3) which did not permit a real joint construction of the problem-set and/or a real participation of all stakeholders in key stages of planning and evaluation.



However, the evaluation of results and effects of the same ARP may differ from participant to participant. What is a clear success for some can be regarded as a disaster by others.

Once “failures” have taken place, the best that can be done is to find out why. If the participants agree on the explanation of the causes, the ARP itself cannot be termed a complete failure. It will have created knowledge on the difficulties of collective action, useful for the future.

It is clear that characterizing an ARP’s outcomes is not easy, measuring them even less so.

Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating results

Monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of an ARP (see Part 3). It can respond to two related issues that sometimes overlap but which need to be differentiated: the first is the issue that we are focusing on in this book, relating to the management of an ARP by the stakeholders, the second is related to the impact assessment for external authorities.

Two principles determine the success of monitoring and evaluation in the case of an ARP:

- The need for a shared perception of the usefulness of this monitoring, i.e., a collective understanding of its role in guiding the process and the possibility for each stakeholder to valorize it to help guide its own actions;
- The need for building a consensus on the indicators that are relevant and useful to monitor and on the modalities for monitoring them (data collection, data processing). We must be able to define the indicators that are meaningful from the viewpoint of the stakeholders’ decision. We must also be able to assist stakeholders by training them to master techniques for assigning values to these indicators (see Part 5).

▮ Monitoring and evaluation to manage change

The first challenge of monitoring and evaluation is an analysis of the change and of how it is managed. This monitoring is an integral part of an ARP’s governance mechanisms (scientific committee, steering committee, local bodies, etc.) and provides inputs to them (see Section 3).

Participants are then actively involved in the self-assessment of results obtained and in the monitoring of indicators that allow results and



corresponding changes to be assessed. The participants' ability to manage these processes is strengthened. This self-assessment is necessarily participatory and oriented to the management of the action. It thus has a reflexive purpose.

The corresponding monitoring and evaluation is more oriented towards effectiveness, i.e., it is intended to assess the fulfillment of goals, rather than towards efficiency. It occupies a central place in the implementation of an ARP by generating information that influences the nature of stakeholder interactions, on the one hand, and helps capitalize knowledge and learning, on the other.

▮ Monitoring and evaluation to measure the effects

The second challenge is to “inform” the parent institutions of researchers, agricultural field advisors, and producers who are members of the ARP collective, or funding entities or government agencies that contribute to its funding.

This monitoring and evaluation usually assesses the project associated with the ARP according to these institutions' own objectives. For example, a funding entity will want to know if its funds have been properly used, and a government agency will want to know if the ARP has had an effect on economic and social development. Monitoring and evaluation is then more an analysis of the outcome and effects to assess the effectiveness and efficiency during or after the process (is there still an effect when the ARP ends?).

This objective implies an evaluation at the “end” of the project. This monitoring is generally based on indicators that are most often set in advance.

The aim of measuring an ARP outcome is to provide information on the immediate consequences of the activities undertaken. This information can be arrived at by using indicators such as the number of producers involved, the number of member groups of producers benefitting from advice from the extension services, or the cost per member.

Measuring the effects of an ARP helps assess the short- and medium-term changes among beneficiaries, such as changes in decision-making processes at the farm or the community level, or changes in production techniques.



These effects may be direct or indirect. The direct effects concern ARP participants. Indirect effects are those that, by extension, affect actors outside the ARP or result in some participants using the results of the ARP in other contexts such as those of a district or a producer organization.

Monitoring and evaluation tools

Monitoring mechanisms (Beuret *et al.*, 2006) use conventional consultation and cooperation tools such as surveys, meetings, and relevant indicators. Although these indicators are not always measurable, they can be verified objectively. These are mainly based on a method of recording activities and reflections, using a log-book approach, which takes into account reformulations, open and abandoned paths, as well as milestones and other temporal aspects of an ARP approach.

Several difficulties are encountered during monitoring:

- Harmonizing the various tools of monitoring and evaluation;
- Deciding which ARP stakeholder or stakeholder group is in charge of monitoring and the degree of involvement of the various partners (see Chapter 8, “Governance mechanisms,” page 107);
- Collectively defining the evaluation criteria and the set of indicators;
- Defining the elements that characterize the indicators.

Two types of monitoring and evaluation tools are frequently used as part of an ARP: collaborative workshops and surveys.

Collaborative workshops among participants may, depending on the case:

- Collectively analyze the relevance of monitoring indicators, i.e., their ability to reflect the degree of achievement of goals, and the ability of stakeholders to assign values to them;
- Collectively evaluate the factors that limit appropriation of indicators by the participants;
- Evaluate the effects at the end of one of the ARP cycles for a comprehensive review, whose content is shared with all the participants.

Surveys can be of several types:

- Occasional and light monitoring of activities just to obtain the data required for referencing selected indicators;
- In-depth surveys to answer questions asked by participants to achieve the goals of the ARP or characterize the results obtained. These surveys can either be participatory or not, with individuals or with groups.



Monitoring and evaluation is mainly done by ARP stakeholders who need to collect and format information in order to manage their set-ups, conduct their activities and evaluate their results. In some cases, particularly in ex-post situations, investigators external to the ARP may be called upon. Box 23 presents an example of stakeholders using data and conducting analyses as part of a monitoring and evaluation exercise.

Summary

The ARP helps revisit so-called basic scientific approaches by incorporating social science and economics approaches for an improved understanding of changes resulting from action.

However, the results of an ARP are not all predictable. Academic valorization is sometimes difficult because the approach, which is often interdisciplinary, has to strive to meet the requirements of most experimental disciplines.

Another difficulty is in incorporating monitoring and evaluation in an ARP set-up managed by the stakeholders since this will require ethical aspects to be considered. ARP influences the development of values and consequently the institutional determinants of collective action.

The variability observed in ARP situations and the nature of the approach itself call for a specific approach to monitoring and evaluation. Beyond the generic positions and principles of M&E outlined in this chapter, every M&E system must be tailored to individual cases. A flexible approach to M&E is essential to an ARP's success.



Box 23. The survey set-up for participatory monitoring and evaluation in central Cameroon

An ex-post monitoring and evaluation methodology was tried out as part of an ARP on plantain in Cameroon. Data collection was alternated with discussions and negotiations between the partners: farmers, producer organizations, field-advisors, and researchers.

The first phase consisted of defining, in collaboration with the stakeholders, the evaluation goals and of asking them to collect available data such as notebooks of records, minutes of meetings, organizational statuses, and project audits.

In the second phase, field visits to experimental plots – plots and nurseries – were organized. This presented an opportunity for partners to continue their discussions on the field.

In the third phase, a three-part meeting for all ARP participants was organized.

In the first part, lasting for three hours, the participants (farmers, technicians, nursery owners) were each given 10 minutes to recount their experience according to a suggested format: What changes were implemented in the practices employed by farmers and what indicators were used by them to assess these changes? In what way did the relationships between farmers change and what indicators were used to assess these changes? In what way did the relationships between farmers and other stakeholders change and what indicators were used to assess these changes?

After three presentations, a 10-minute group discussion was held to collectively validate the presentations and encourage sharing and comparison of experiences.

In the second part, lasting for 90 minutes, the meeting facilitator asked questions concerning the effect of the ARP on the interactions between partners, conditions that participants would lay down for including newcomers in the groups formed, and, finally, suggestions for improving the innovation process.

In the third part, lasting one hour, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire on quantified effect indicators. A technician was at hand to help clarify the issues to everyone, and also assist illiterate producers in filling in the questionnaire.

The fourth stage of the ex-post monitoring and evaluation exercise consisted of data collection by participants and data input, analysis, and the drafting of a report by researchers.