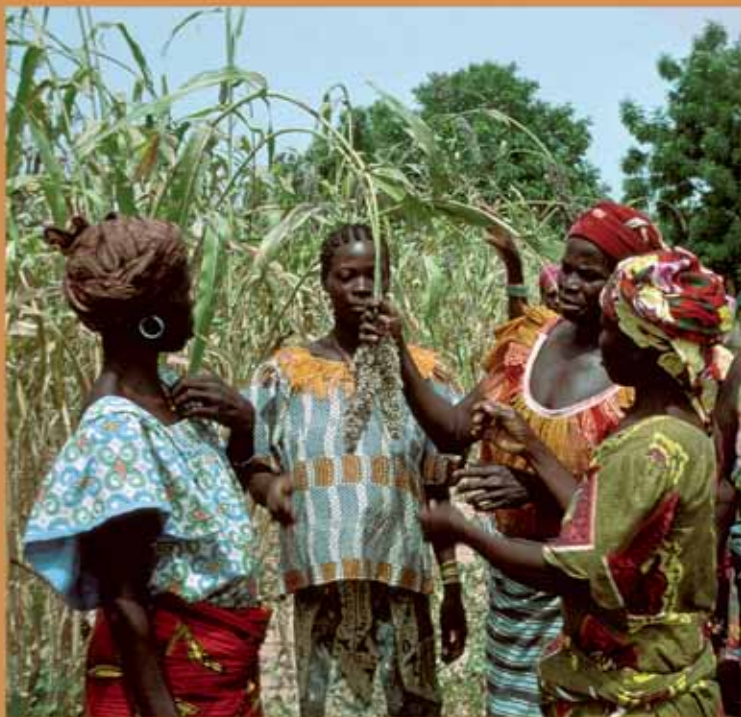




Innovating with rural stakeholders in the developing world

Action research in partnership

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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.