

Session 7: Project impacts on rural innovation capacity
Facilitator: Jonathan Hellin

Assessing impacts of farmer participatory research approaches: A case study of local agricultural research committees in Colombia
S. Kaaria, N. Lilja, V. Sandoval, J. García and F. Hincapié

Because they incorporate user perspectives in the research process, it is often claimed that farmer participatory research (FPR) approaches make research more oriented towards the needs of the poor, therefore leading to a greater impact on poverty alleviation. The premise is that user participation will lead to more efficient, effective design, and targeting of technologies. This may reduce diffusion time, increase adoption, and help to ensure that the intended beneficiaries are reached with technologies that are appropriate to their particular circumstances, needs and priorities. However, within the area of participatory research there are many types and degrees of participation with very different implications for the benefits and costs of research. Whether FPR makes research more pro-poor is essentially an empirical question. Therefore, to understand the relationship between FPR and poverty alleviation better, empirical evidence is needed on what impacts participatory methods have had on poverty in the context of specific projects and participatory methodologies. This paper presents preliminary results from this study, which aimed at beginning to fill this gap by examining the impact of one particular method of incorporating farmer participation: Local Agricultural Research Committees (CIALs).

For the last 15 years, CIAT has promoted the formation of community-based research services called Local Agricultural Research Committees (CIALs). In this study, we evaluated the changes in the livelihoods of the farmers and their communities attributable to the CIAL methodology. The CIAL methodology was developed at CIAT with the goal of increasing the efficiency of the agricultural research and technology development system by integrating farmers better into the process. The study assessed the effectiveness of the CIAL methodology, the extent to which the problems addressed by the CIAL are relevant to the community, and the benefits of the CIAL to its members as well as to the community in terms of the development of appropriate technologies and who benefits from the innovations. Particular attention was paid to how CIALs as institutional innovations affect the human, social and other capital assets available to individuals and communities, and what implications these impacts have for livelihood outcomes.

Preliminary results show that there are significant social and human capital benefits for CIAL members. CIAL members indicated that they had gained more knowledge about agriculture, were experimenting with new technology and were seen as agricultural experts and advisors in the community. They had also improved their communication and leadership skills, and had increased relationships with neighbors and with other outside institutions. CIAL members experimented more with new crops, had learned other new skills, and had higher levels of commitment to their communities, thereby leading to a higher level of community participation. In communities where the CIAL had identified new technology and converted into commercial seed producers, the communities benefited by having easy access to new technology (e.g. new

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varieties, such as early maturing maize variety and new bean varieties). The communities also consulted CIAL members when they had agricultural problems.

Agricultural development among poor small-holder farmers in Soroti district, Uganda: Impact assessment of agricultural technology, farmer empowerment and changes in opportunity structures

Esbern Friis-Hansen

A range of technologies, developed through participatory processes, that target poor small-holder farmers have emerged over the past decade from the CGIAR and other agricultural research organizations. In East Africa, many of these technologies are local adaptations of broad ecological principles that enable farmers to use natural resources more effectively (e.g. integrated pest and soil-fertility management). While such technologies target farmers' resource endowment well (e.g. low requirements of seasonal inputs) their spread and uptake have been mixed and largely linked to area-based projects rather than market forces. This study contributes to a better understanding of the poverty reducing impact of technological development among poor households and the context under which pro-poor technologies may be successful.

This paper is based on ongoing research on farmer empowerment and poverty reduction carried out in Soroti district, Uganda. It shows a significant reduction in poverty over a five-year period among farmers who have been empowered through contextual learning in farmer field schools and who have subsequently taken advantage of changes in opportunity structures introduced by demand-driven advisory service reform (NAADS).

On the basis of a thorough well-being ranking, qualitative in-depth interviews and quantitative statistical analysis, the study showed that two-thirds of the members of FFS and NAADS groups have shifted from "very-poor" and "poor" to "non-poor" well-being status over a 4–5 year period. It describes the most common pathways out of poverty and analyzes the reasons for this success in terms of (i) farmer learning based on informal adult education principles (in farmer field schools); (ii) farmers' organizational and institutional empowerment (as members of FFS or NAADS groups, farmer associations or farmer forums); and (iii) changes in opportunity structures (influence on content of and access to extension and technology options (NAADS and NARO reforms)).

This paper discusses the poverty assessment methodology used: 13 district-based indicators of poverty based on farmers qualitative perceptions were transformed into a poverty index that is applied on data from a stratified randomly sampled household survey.

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Participatory evaluation and impact assessment of a community-based learning process: “Strengthening folk ecology” for integrated soil-fertility management in western Kenya

J.J. Ramisch, M.T. Misiko and R. Verma

Since 2001, TSBF-CIAT has been involved in community-based learning initiatives in western Kenya focusing on integrated soil-fertility management. These initiatives aim at strengthening local expertise in ecosystem management (“folk ecology”) through a dynamic process integrating the knowledge of researchers and farmers. This process is an experiment in opening communication between different knowledge systems that must contend with significant differences in power, culture and assets. It has produced many useful and unexpected outcomes in terms of experimental methods, research methodologies, and soil-fertility management options suited to local conditions.

One component of the research has been building the capacity of farmers (and biophysical researchers) to conduct relevant monitoring and evaluation not only of the products of the learning, but also of the learning process itself. As the project begins its first phase in 2005, farmers, researchers and other local stakeholders are conducting an impact assessment of the research and research process thus far. This impact assessment is evaluating the empowering effects of participation in “research” on the farmers’ own terms. The value of this approach should be seen especially in documenting and assessing the areas where the project extended beyond simple soil-fertility management. Such areas include matters of group organization, communication strategies, and financing. It also covers the various activities that “branched off” from farmer-led research over time, such as women’s initiatives to explore the potential of soil-fertility management techniques on “non-traditional” crops like indigenous home-garden vegetables.

This paper uses the 2005 assessment process and examples from the ongoing participatory monitoring and evaluation to document and critique the community-based learning process and its sustainability. Issues include the trade-offs and tensions between science and action-oriented research, as well as the true potential of participatory methods for “leveling” power relations between different actors.