Participatory Research and Gender Analysis, 1997–2009: The Work and Impact of a Systemwide Program

Participatory research and gender analysis were still in their infancy within the CGIAR when the Systemwide Program on Participatory Research and Gender Analysis was established in 1997. The Program was mandated to identify, adopt, adapt, and develop suitable participatory and gender-analysis methodologies for agricultural research; build capacity in the use and understanding of these methods in the CG and its partners; develop appropriate research partnerships and networks; and promote the institutionalization (mainstreaming) of gender-sensitive participatory research approaches (within the CG and its partners).

During its first 5 years (Phase I, 1997–2002), the Program and its partners helped build strong momentum for the implementation of participatory approaches in agricultural research both within the CGIAR and on a wider scale.

The Program demonstrated that participatory research and gender analysis:

- Embody rigorous methods that are scientifically grounded, confirming that the results produced are valid.
- Produce broad impacts through technologies and resource-management options that are well suited to end-users' needs, thereby significantly reducing the likelihood of farmers rejecting the technologies developed.
- Produce process impacts in the form of human and social capital, which help sustain rural development and innovation.
- Are especially beneficial to women, the poorest and marginalized groups—all of whom were frequently overlooked by conventional research.
- Are cost-efficient, primarily because of the increased impact and shortened time for technology development.
- Were being used by a large and growing number of CGIAR scientists.

Key lessons learned by 2003

At the end of its first phase, the Program distilled 'major lessons' from its work (Saad, 2003), which formed the foundation for the Program's future work.

- While there was increasing interest in the use of participatory approaches, there was little evidence that gender analysis was being given due attention.
- The CG Centers had not achieved a critical mass in the use of equitable participatory research and gender analysis methods.
- There was a great and unmet need for capacity-development in the use of these methods.
- In cases where participatory approaches had been applied, there was enhanced learning as a result of experimentation with methods; however, much of this learning and change remained isolated from the project cycle and did not extend to the organization level.

These factors severely restrict the extent to which equitable participatory research and gender analysis approaches are integrated into the research process, thereby limiting the extent to which their positive impacts can be scaled up.

State-of-the-art and emerging issues

The PRGA Program conducted and commissioned several key studies, and developed extensive inventories of participatory plant breeding (PPB) and participatory

natural resource management (PNRM). These set a global benchmark of quantity, quality, and scope for participatory and gender-sensitive research. The work also enabled the Program to identify the main achievements of and obstacles to participatory research and gender analysis, along with emerging challenges and issues for further research.

Demystification of participation and gender analysis

An important insight gained through the inventorying process was that the question was no longer whether projects used participatory and gender-aware approaches, but rather how well they used them. The Program dedicated significant resources to this 'demystification' process, "not to prescribe any particular type or mode as the correct one, but rather to understand the effect of different modes of participation on the outcomes of research" (Saad, 2003). Consequently, by 2003, the scientific community knew much more about the diverse nature and potential applications of participatory research and gender analysis than it did in 1997, and researchers were better placed to decide when and how to use participatory and gender-sensitive methods, and which methods to use.

Community of knowledge and practice

The Program established several communities of knowledge and practice—in particular, PPB, PNRM, and (somewhat later) gender working groups. Electronic mailing lists enabled the working groups to share information and discuss relevant issues. For example, the PPB Working Group contributed guidelines for PPB and a study of intellectual property rights. The Program also established a website for interaction and exchange of information, and as a repository for resources, including its publications.

International meetings were another mechanism for the exchange and discussion of experiences, knowledge, and research findings. A PNRM workshop and three regional PPB symposia provided regional state-of-the-art analyses, enabled networking among practitioners, and reviewed and revised the PPB guidelines. The Program also ran several larger international seminars on participatory research and gender analysis themes.

Capacity building

Learning and capacity building were essential components of many of the Program's activities and projects, especially in the use of participatory, gender analysis, and impact assessment methodologies. The Program and its partners conducted numerous training events around the world. They also provided mentoring and backstopping to research partners, who often conducted training workshops as part of small-grant projects.

By the end of Phase I, ongoing demand for training surpassed the Program's resources to deliver it!

Capacity building on the design, planning, and implementation of participatory efforts have implications not only for improving the delivery and impact of research but also for wider human and social capital formation among the actors as well as in the targeted communities. The Program in this regard has made good progress. The effort of two regionally based (Asia and Africa) PRGA fellows has been instrumental.

(Internally Commissioned External Review, Prain et al., 2000)

Cutting-edge research and research partnerships

The Program both supported and engaged directly in 'cutting-edge' research. Partnerships have been key in the PRGA Program's achievements. During its first phase, the Program engaged in 48 partnership-based activities with 84 partners and, during the second phase, 30 activities with 40 partners. Many of these were funded by small grants from the Program to the partner organizations. During its first phase, the Program awarded at least 26 small grants for participatory and gender research in plant breeding and natural resource management. Each small grant recipient produced at least one project report, and several of the projects led to research papers in PRGA-sponsored proceedings.

The Small Grants have certainly enhanced the reach of the Program across geographical areas, subject matters and stakeholders. Because of their capacity building and multiplier effects, they have contributed to the progress of the Program in mainstreaming [participatory research and gender analysis] in the CG System and their partners.

(Internally Commissioned External Review, Prain et al., 2000)

Partnerships were formed across the spectrum of gender and participatory research stakeholders, from advanced research institutions and fellow CG organizations, through a sub-regional organization, universities, the private sector, national research and extension services, and NGOs, to farmers and communities.

The inclusive nature of the program, resulting in a multiplicity of partners, is one of the hallmarks of the PRGA.

(External Review, Walker et al., 2007)

Evaluation of impacts and costs

The Program believed that empirical evidence of the impact of participatory research would encourage researchers and research managers to incorporate such approaches in their research. To help provide such evidence, the Program developed and applied a range of tools to study the impact of PPB and PNRM—in particular, an impact assessment framework for participatory and gender-sensitive research. The Program analyzed and systematically documented direct comparisons between participatory and other approaches to research, and then looked at the effects of participation at various stages in the research process. Case studies suggested that increasing the degree of farmer involvement and control in the research process leads to increased farmer empowerment, gives voice to farmers' technology preferences (including those of women farmers), speeds technology adaptation, increases human capital, increases adoption, and increases farmers' profits. Moreover, participatory research reduces the cost of technology development (by not developing technology that farmers reject) with minimal impact on project operating costs.

The Program identified that simple economic assessment was rarely adequate for gender and participatory research. In addition, there are far more stakeholders interested in such assessments than just donors, and these various stakeholders often have different requirements from the assessments than the donors.

The importance of impact assessment to the field of gender and participatory research in general, and the PRGA Program in particular is highlighted by its high profile in the second and third PRGA International Seminars (1998 and 2000) and in subsequent Stakeholder Meetings (2001 and 2002). In particular, the second Program International Seminar focused on impact assessment of gender and participatory research, with 15 invited presentations and over 100 participants. Donors supported two further international workshops: the Impact Assessment Workshop, co-organized with the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico in 2005, brought together about 30 impact assessors, mostly from the CG system, and its 'findings' were summarized in a book. Moreover, the presentations, full papers, and abstracts were made available 'immediately' via the Internet, along with summaries of daily discussions. This medium channeled information into the public domain much quicker than the 'conventional' route of publication, though the organizers recognized the long-term value peer-reviewed publication and produced two special-issue journals with 12 of the workshop papers.

Impact assessment is itself an area of impact and is one of the strengths of the program. Impact assessment in the PRGA significantly exceeds expectations in a systemwide or ecoregional program and rivals the amount and quality of work conducted in some of the better CGIAR Centers (in this area). Research on impact assessment has benefited from strong collaboration with other social scientists in the convening center and with economists outside the CGIAR.

(External Review, Walker et al., 2007)

The Workshop on Rethinking Impact: Understanding the Complexity of Poverty and Change (Cali, 2008), co-organized with the Innovation Works program of the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the CGIAR Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) Initiative, brought together about 55 R&D practitioners with an interest in assessing and evaluating the impact of agricultural R&D on poverty. Just over half of the participants were from the CGIAR, reflecting the organizers' recognition that the CG has much to learn from outside. Again,

papers, presentations, and abstracts were made available on line. Moreover, daily newsletters were produced and video-interviews released on line. A summary of the meeting was published, along with several targeted 'briefs' and 'working documents.' As with the 2005 workshop, a special issue of a journal included eight of the workshop papers. Moreover, connections made at the workshop resulted in new partnerships for research in this field (e.g., ILAC et al., 2009).

Taken as a whole, it seems that a majority of impact assessors active in the field of agricultural R&D and poverty concur that assessment of economic impact alone is inadequate. Moreover, there is a sense that impact assessments are still widely under-used—they are still commissioned by donors and other stakeholders with an interest in attributing positive developments to project activities, rather than being used by project-implementing organizations to learn and change so as to 'do development' better.

Mainstreaming gender-sensitive participatory research

In its second and third phases, the Program focused on mainstreaming gender analysis and equitable participatory research to promote learning and change in agricultural R&D organizations, so that they could better target the demands of beneficiary groups—particularly poor rural women.

Over 8 years, the Program helped at least 30 organizations in gender-mainstreaming activities—CG Centers, NARS, NGOs, and universities. For many of these organizations, the Program helped them to assess the status of gender or participatory research (or both), often using the Framework for Organizational Analysis (Groverman and Gurung, 2001), either in the organization itself or in a wider context (e.g., country-wide in China). Other activities included workshops and other training activities on topics such as learning and change, farmer-participatory research, and PPB.

Throughout the period, 'flagship' activities were conducted in the eastern Himalayan region and Lao PDR with various NARS and NGOs, and in Eastern and Central Africa with the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA).

Lessons from Asia highlighted the critical role of women's leadership in driving organizational change; the need for improved innovation in four key areas of organizational change (political commitment, technical capacity, accountability, and organizational culture); that identifying and building the capacity of change-agents was an effective tool; and that the insider-outsider model works.

Meanwhile, ASARECA and its NARS identified a number of 'good practices' for gender-mainstreaming, including incentives for scientists to do gender-sensitive work, having a gender coordinator or team, documenting case studies, gender seminars, networking, and continued capacity building.

Gender-mainstreaming is a process, and often takes a long time. All the partners and NARS involved in these projects are continuing in this process. They can take heart, however, from the experience of CARE Laos, which made a determined effort to mainstream gender in its activities in 2002–2004. In 2004–2005, the PRGA Program helped CARE Laos assess 'best practices' for gender-mainstreaming, and then CARE Laos was involved in the Asian gender-institutionalization project as a 'primary' partner from 2005 to 2008.

In 2007, independent initiatives brought the PRGA Program into a much closer relationship with its host center, CIAT. The Program external review recommended that it "should accelerate its efforts to introduce [gender analysis] into the wider CGIAR System," using CIAT as a case study. At the same time, the CIAT focal point of the Gender and Diversity (G&D) Program started to build a new strategy taking personnel's perceptions and knowledge as a baseline. Consequently, the PRGA Program, in close collaboration with the G&D Program, conducted a gender audit of CIAT. The results of this audit and similar gender assessments elsewhere confirm the key lesson that gender is not widely institutionalized, and is insufficiently understood by agricultural researchers.

CIAT is moving ahead with gender-mainstreaming by introducing gender-sensitive indicators in project proposals, and project, program, and staff evaluations. The PRGA Program (now CIAT) staff are to be involved in CIAT's peer-review team that evaluates all project proposals, and will continue to be available for gender backstopping and training.

Participatory plant breeding

While gender-mainstreaming and impact assessment were handled by Program staff, momentum in PPB was sustained through the Program's strong partnership with key leaders in the field, in particular the barley breeding program of the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), the sorghum breeding program of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), and the UK-based Centre for Advanced Research in International Agricultural Development (CARIAD, formerly CAZS Natural Resources).

In a short time span of ten years, results in participatory plant breeding have substantially exceeded expectations. Three plant breeding programs have contributed to the development of PPB. They account for the majority of publications in an expanding peer-reviewed literature and for the majority of emerging success stories in the field. ... All three have had close interactions with the PRGA.

(External Review, Walker et al., 2007)

In the last few years that the Program was 'Systemwide,' it small-grant funded ICARDA to make one of its barley breeding program gender-sensitive, which saw women farmers in Syria take part in PPB for the first time (after 10 years of exclusively male-dominated PPB in the country). The Program also provided small grants for work to conserve sorghum biodiversity on farm in Ethiopia; to investigate the role of women (both individually and as members of associations) in the adoption of genetically modified cotton in Colombia; to determine when the sexes might agree on variety choice in East Africa; and work on evolutionary-PPB in North Africa and West Asia.

Looking forward

In the midst of transition from being a Systemwide entity to becoming a CIAT core activity (2009–2010), the PRGA Program's unique expertise in gender and participatory research was being recognized through invitations to make (or contribute to) presentations at the Colombian National Congress on World Rural Women's Day, at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs global meeting with the Alliance of CGIAR Centers in Rome, at the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD), at a special session on climate change at ICESI university (Colombia); and to conduct awareness-raising with ICARDA in Jordan and Syria, and most recently at the steering committee of the Eastern and Central Africa Bean Research Network (ECABREN). In addition, the Program Coordinator was invited to be a Jury Board Member for a call for proposals by RUTA (Unidad Regional de Asistencia Técnica).

Meanwhile, CIAT has embraced a new focus on 'eco-efficient agriculture,' while committing itself to include gender aspects in all of its work (as a direct follow-up to the Center-wide gender audit). The Center has embraced gender to enhance its work in all regions, and the PRGA Program is the cornerstone of its gender-responsive research. Consequently, several training sessions (in both English and Spanish) have been conducted, and gender-screening criteria developed, together with the Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA), to enhance the gender responsiveness of the Center's research.

The PRGA Program has been supporting a process to engage in gender-responsive research at the CG level during this time of CGIAR reform. In June 2009, the Program took part in an e-consultation coordinated by IFPRI and also supported by the G&D Program, which included self-assessments of the Centers' gender-sensitive work to inform the Strategy and Results Framework document. The Program then attended the GCARD meeting to identify a sound pathway to enhance gender, including recommendations to adopt a mechanism for gender inclusion in the new mega-programs.

In June 2010, CIAT will be hosting an 'action' workshop on 'Repositioning Gender-Responsive Participatory Research in Times of Change' to determine the ongoing role of the Program within the CGIAR as a whole. The Program is bringing the following to the discussion table:

- Providing human and methodological resources for gender-responsive participatory research in agricultural R&D organizations (most likely to be taken up by CGIAR Centers and mega-programs).
- Providing hands-on guidance and direction to include gender and participatory research in CIAT programs and projects.
- Taking the lessons of the PRGA Program into the 'New CGIAR.'
- Developing a mechanism for linking scientists and their partners in a new community of practice to increase learning and feedback to upstream programs.

The workshop will look into strategic avenues for the new PRGA-CIAT Program to continue its groundbreaking work in participatory research with a gender perspective, while navigating the landscape of a more comprehensive and effective CGIAR.

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