

Organizational Implications for Mainstreaming Participatory Research and Gender Analysis



The effectiveness of Participatory Research and Gender Analysis (PR&GA) approaches is critically constrained by an organizational structure based on a supply-driven system of innovation. Results of several studies conducted by the Program with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) centers demonstrates three separate but inter-related constraints:

- 1) Fragmented investment in and application of PR&GA approaches across the CGIAR system leads to repeated testing of proven approaches and as a result of which *international agricultural research centers (IARCs) do not evolve beyond a researcher-led type of participation.*
- 2) In a researcher-driven participatory research process, the likelihood of technologies matching farmers' priorities is small because *end-users, such as women, tend to be brought into the participatory research process at a relatively late stage*, to evaluate technologies that have already been developed and are ready for dissemination.
- 3) Even in those cases where innovations have resulted from farmers' feedback, it is unlikely that such learning and change can be sustained beyond the life of the project. One major reason for this is that *PR&GA approaches largely remain isolated from, and often contradict the dominant paradigm of innovation practiced within organizations.*

While there is a need for increased focus on capacity development to enhance skills in conducting PR&GA, such capacity development processes need to be combined with **transformations in the structure and culture of the organization** to create an enabling organizational environment for participatory approaches to become an integral part of its functioning.

The System-wide Program on Participatory Research and Gender Analysis for Technology Development and Institutional Innovation (PRGA Program) was established in 1997 with two major goals:

- ❑ To assess and develop methodologies and organizational innovations for gender-sensitive participatory research approaches (PR&GA).
- ❑ To **mainstream** what is being learned worldwide from the integration of PR&GA approaches with Plant Breeding (PB), crop and natural resource management (NRM) research.

The PRGA program is aiming to develop a set of 'best practices' in mainstreaming PR&GA approaches through organizational change. Three studies were commissioned among centers of the CGIAR to generate an understanding of the opportunities and constraints for mainstreaming such approaches through organizational transformation. The three centers are: the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT); the International Potato Center (CIP); and the International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Land Areas (ICARDA). Learnings in this paper are from the CIAT study.



Three Dimensions of the Organization

The organizational framework that informs this analysis consists of three separate but inter-related dimensions.

- 1) The **Technical Dimension** is the visible and tangible components of an organization and can be accessed through printed publications, policy statements, public relation manuals and the like. This is the public face of the organization and it consists of three discrete elements: the *policy or mandate*, the *tasks and responsibilities*, and the *human resources* or expertise of an organization.
- 2) The **Political Dimension** of an organization is less tangible and is also referred to as the socio-political dimension. This dimension represents those aspects of an organization that are more 'hidden' from both public scrutiny as well as some internal members. The 'hidden' nature of this dimension suggests that it is a more 'fuzzy' and subjective arena in which *decisions* are made, *policies* are formulated, and individual members negotiate 'spaces' in which to *manoeuvre and innovate*.
- 3) The **Cultural Dimension** is the non-tangible aspect of an organization. This represents those often unquestioned but embedded organizational elements that influence the norms and values underlying the running of the organization; the way work relations between staff and outsiders are organized; and the way members feel and think about their work environment and about other members. This dimension is comprised of three elements: *organizational symbols*, *cooperation* and *attitudes*.

Taken together, the **three dimensions** and the **nine elements** are contained in a framework, where they cannot be viewed as separate and distinct aspects of an organization but rather, as an axis of meaning that runs across and down the elements.



Table 1. Organizational Framework

	Mission/Mandate	Structure	Human Resources
Technical Dimension	<p>I. Policies and Action</p> <p>The guiding policy and its operationalization in action plans, strategies, approaches and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.</p>	<p>II. Tasks and Responsibilities</p> <p>The way people are positioned and the way tasks and responsibilities are allocated to each other through procedures, information and coordinating systems.</p>	<p>III. Expertise</p> <p>The number of staff and the way requirements and conditions to allow them to work, such as job description, appraisal, facilities, training, etc.</p>
Political Dimension	<p>IV. Policy Influence</p> <p>The way and extent management, people from within the organization and people from outside influence policy and running of the organization.</p>	<p>V. Decision-Making</p> <p>The patterns of formal and informal decision-making processes; the way diversity and conflicts are dealt with.</p>	<p>VI. Room for Maneuvre/ Innovation</p> <p>The space provided to staff (through rewards, career possibilities, variety in working styles) or created by staff to define their work.</p>
Cultural Dimension	<p>VII. Organizational Culture</p> <p>The symbols, rituals, traditions, norms and values underlying the running of the organization and the behavior of staff. Also, the economic and social standards that exist.</p>	<p>VIII. Cooperation/ Learning</p> <p>The way the work relations between staff and with outsiders are organized, such as working in teams and networking as well as the norms and values underlying these arrangements.</p>	<p>IX. Attitude</p> <p>The way staff feel and think about their work, the work environment and about employees. The extent to which staff stereotype other staff – the extent to which a staff member identifies with the dominant culture of the organization.</p>

Source: Groverman and Gurung, 2001 (Adapted from Tichy, 1982)

Based on a major study at CIAT (2002), the following issues emerged as critical to conducting participatory research.

Technical Dimension

- ❑ There should be a specific policy statement at the level of the organization to ensure that participatory approaches are integrated into the structure of the organization.
- ❑ If there is not one, funding for the majority of projects that use participatory approaches may not come from the core funds of the organization. Instead, funding is tied to specific project life.
- ❑ Formal structural mechanisms are important to ensure that learning and change that occur as a result of using participatory approaches in projects extend to the organization.

Political Dimension

- ❑ ‘Key’ members within the organization have been instrumental in initiating an environment in which participatory approaches have become ‘accepted practice’, however, the role of donors in influencing practice is instrumental in sustaining such practices.
- ❑ It is important to take advantage of room to innovate within the organization. Projects use extensive number of participatory approaches, ranging from achieving instrumental or empowering objectives. However, the room to innovate often is closely linked to one’s status or position in the organizational hierarchy.
- ❑ The organization’s incentive system should reward those scientists who use participatory approaches. Otherwise, this has implications on the quality of participation that is employed.

Cultural Dimension

- ❑ Symbols and organizational image may be clearly ‘pro-poor’ but there should also be an explicit statement of methods that would promote or enhance equity or democratic processes in research decision-making.
- ❑ Organizations may demonstrate bias towards the instrumental use of participatory approaches, while they should place emphasis on empowering participation to “hand over the stick to clients and relinquish their position of influence in relation to the poor.”



Participatory Approaches and their Uses: Survey Results

Results of a survey conducted in CIAT (2002) shows that there are approximately 58 projects, approximately 34% of the total number of projects, employ some form of participatory research approaches in their work. These participatory approaches are used in a wide range of cases and their use can be categorized into the following three general categories:

1. **enhancing extension through participation**
2. **integrating local and scientific knowledge through participation**
3. **enhancing end-user ability to make demands on research systems**

Most of the project (26) fall into the first category, using participatory approaches to extend technologies that are developed by researchers. Mechanisms for the participation of end-users range from more conventional on-farm trials and evaluation of technologies to participatory varietal selection (PVS) and participatory plant breeding (PPB), farmer field schools and farmer research committees such as CIALs. Though there are some capacity development initiatives, particularly in PPB, the major objective is **the transfer of technologies developed largely by researchers to end-users**. As a result, there is less emphasis on developing capacity of end-users to more actively engage in the decision-making or research process.

A smaller number of projects (2) fall into the second category. These are projects that engage end-users as a source of local knowledge to be adapted and integrated for scientific solutions. The major objective is to **compare 'expert' knowledge with 'local' experience to create a mechanism for communication between the two groups**. The level of farmer participation in terms of decision-making varies in these projects. Relatively more projects (15) in this category focus on **developing the capacity to enhance farmer participation**, particularly through engagement in the research process as well as through strengthening their local institutional capacities to make demands on the research system.

The 16 remaining projects fall in between these three major categories in that they exhibit some elements of each category.

The general conclusion that emerges from this analysis is that a large number of projects use participatory approaches in a functional or instrumental manner. That is, participatory approaches are used to transfer technologies developed by researchers but there is still relatively little or no emphasis on developing the capacity of end-users to participate in the research process or decision-making that will affect the research agenda. Hence, the type of participation used is generally researcher-driven.



Source: Johnson, N., N. Lilja and J.A. Ashby. 2000. Using Participatory Research and Gender Analysis in Natural Resource Management Research: A Preliminary Analysis of the PRGA Inventory. PRGA Working Document 10. CIAT, Cali.

Looking Ahead

In summary, the lessons that emerge from this case study are:

- ❑ There is a broad and extensive range of experience in using participatory approaches: ranging from the 'functional' to 'empowering' approaches.
- ❑ The use of participatory approaches in projects is dependent on individual researcher interest and donor influence and as a result, these learnings are largely isolated to project experience.
- ❑ The absence of organizational mechanisms to ensure 'accountability' for the quality of participation being used has the potential to diminish the accomplishments of individual project learnings achieved.

Recommendations

To ensure consistency in the use of approaches and maintain **quality of participation**, the following organizational structures need to be in place:

- ❑ Structural improvements to enhance vertical and horizontal communications, including participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) systems that link feedback across stakeholders, communication between projects within the organization and development of processes that encourage trans-disciplinary (as compared to multi-disciplinary) teams.
- ❑ Existing terms of references (TORs) of scientists need to be altered to include the expertise or appropriate use of participatory methods.
- ❑ Existing incentive structures of the organization need to recognize and reward expertise and appropriate use of participatory methods.

Such changes in organizational processes need to be complemented and accompanied by larger initiatives that focus on the following:

- ❑ Capacity development to encourage a process of gender-equitable stakeholder-client representation in the decision-making process and networking with “champions” who are in a position to make a difference.
- ❑ To continue building compelling evidence of impact.
- ❑ Action research partnerships through organizational change with a critical mass of international and national agricultural research centers.
- ❑ Communication and partnerships strategies that are constantly evolving.

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