

Info Note

Lessons Learned on Participatory Action Research (PAR) to Adoption of CSA Options with an Emphasis on Gender and Social Inclusion Across the 5 CCAFS Regions

Catherine Beal, Jesus David Martinez, Mathieu Ouedraogo, John Recha, Gebermedihin Ambaw, Abonesh Tesfaye, Abebe Nigussie, Paresh Shirsath, Peter Läderach, Osana Bonilla-Findji

DECEMBER 2021

Key messages

- Participatory action research (PAR) is a crucial component in the implementation of the Climate-Smart Village (CSV) approach and can positively influence the adoption of CSA for women and youth.
- The use of PAR is beneficial for both horizontal and vertical scaling, as it mobilizes communities and engages stakeholders at various levels.
- Approaches that are community-led, participatory and inclusive can result in CSA adoption that will be sustained by the community even after the project cycle.

This info note highlights the use of participatory action research (PAR) in the implementation of the climate-smart village (CSV) approach and how this may have influenced the adoption of climate-smart agriculture (CSA) options, with an emphasis on gender and social inclusion (GSI). It addresses the following key research questions:

- How were PAR approaches used in CSVs to support CSA adoption beyond planning, with a GSI lens? Did PAR approaches address gender in/equality dimensions?
- PAR is not a new concept, what was done differently or uniquely in the CSV approach? And specifically regarding GSI considerations?

- Which have been the key successes? What have been the challenges/lessons learned? Based on these learnings, what needs to be done differently in the future?

To sufficiently answer these questions, three methods of data collection were taken place: a portfolio review, interviews with CCAFS regional staff, and a survey for local partners. Further detail regarding the approach is discussed in the methodology.

Overview of Participatory Action Research

While there is no single definition for participatory action research (PAR), it can be described as “a long term, collaborative process in which groups of people act together in iterative cycles of goal setting, analysis, planning, implementing, monitoring, and reassessing progress” (CIFOR 2008). Notably, common characteristics across different versions of participatory research methods are that they minimize the distance between end users and researchers through action and dialogue, and that they involve continuous learning from all the participants (Johnson et al. 2003). Participatory methods have been used in agriculture to increase adoption and improve the impact of innovations (Lilja & Ashby 2001).

The use of participatory methods is central to the CSV approach. This approach was proposed as a means to

address the need for proven and effective location-specific climate-smart agriculture (CSA) options. Specifically, it is agriculture research for development (AR4D) approach to test technological and institutional agriculture adaptation options through participatory methods (Aggarwal et al. 2018). It aims to co-generate bottom-up evidence on what the best CSA options are for specific socio-economic, environmental and climatic conditions and use this evidence to inform stakeholders such as policy makers and development practitioners.

Methodology

Work on this report began with a portfolio review. The resources included a mix of journal articles and grey literature. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology (Moher et al. 2009) was followed for selecting the publications for review. The total number of publications reviewed was 116. In order to validate the findings from the portfolio review, fill any knowledge gaps, and to capture the anecdotal information that does not make it into publications, interviews with each region were conducted. A short survey was sent to local partners that worked on the ground with CSV implementation in order to capture their inputs. Additional details on the methodology can be found in the Working Paper (Beal et al. 2021).

Themes from Across Regions

While each region had its own unique experiences with PAR approaches, there are common, cross-cutting themes that can be distilled.

PAR stimulated the adoption of CSA

PAR approaches were key factors influencing the uptake of CSA options. The use of PAR in CSVs differed from most other approaches because it addressed the increasing need to incorporate an element of community participation into agricultural research. Community involvement in the identification of problems and solutions proved to be key to the adoption of new technologies. In East Africa PAR processes have been identified as crucial for sustainable agriculture and hence sustainable rural communities. Additionally, by using participatory approaches, more women in West Africa are now involved in the farming system and their capacity to implement some technologies and practices has improved. In Southeast Asia, PAR demonstrated the importance of women's role in adaptation because they were more receptive to the introduction of new technologies and practices due to participatory approaches. In Latin America, women's implementation of CSA and their control over the benefits from those CSA activities increased through the use of PAR. It is evident across regions that taking a participatory and inclusive approach positively influenced the adoption of CSA. PAR also improved the engagement of youth in

CSA activities. For example, in South Asia, due to PAR approaches, youth were exposed to new smart techniques and applications that resulted in more inclusion in agri-business.

PAR facilitated social learning

Since PAR aims to bring together various stakeholders, it is not surprising that the use of PAR methods fostered social learning. In East Africa, more climate-smart farms were developed, which were used as learning sites. In West Africa, CSV sites themselves were becoming learning platforms for stakeholder to discuss CSA interventions. In Southeast Asia, e.g the photovoice project served as a knowledge-sharing platform for farmers, enabling them to discuss effective climate change adaptation practices. These examples demonstrate that PAR approaches are not only useful for influencing adoption of CSA, but are also useful for continued learning and creating opportunities for farmers to share climate-smart knowledge.

Participatory approaches were used to enhance gender and social inclusion

In multiple regions, the use of PAR facilitated discussions around gender roles in agriculture. For example, in Colombia, participatory community workshops were used to gain perspective on gender roles and CSA practices. While in Southeast Asia, the participation of women in planning and implementing CSA technologies and practices challenged the gender standard and norm. In Ghana CSA women groups constituted to empower women in terms of decision making and income generation. These examples suggest that the use of PAR cannot only influence farmers at the household level but can impact their roles in communities as well.

PAR methods provided communities with a sense of ownership over project activities

An interesting finding from a couple of regions was that the use of PAR processes made interventions more sustainable beyond the CCAFS project cycle. In Latin America, since the whole CSV approach was locally led, the communities understood that it was a process they had to own. The CSV activities were particularly demand driven by the local community, and this provided them with a sense of ownership over the project. In Southeast Asia, notable outcomes from PAR use were small CSA projects that were community-driven, and therefore sustained by the community with limited/no additional support from CCAFS.

PAR was a springboard for scaling

The use of participatory approaches was also noted as being beneficial for scaling. In South Asia, PAR was instrumental in horizontal scaling because it mobilized the community. Instead of researchers choosing approaches as they see fit, the ideas came from the communities. As a result, scaling in similar typologies becomes easier. In

Colombia, there was a similar experience whereby CCAFS and the local partner, Ecohabitats, were able to engage the community and develop an appropriate process of co-creation of adaptation measures, allowing its multiplication within the Cauca CSV and its scaling to other Colombian regions. CSVs are participatory in the sense that they include a diverse array of stakeholders, not just farmers. The inclusion of various stakeholders, across different levels, is an important factor for scaling.

PAR was also helpful for vertical scaling. In Southeast Asia, the region started out with 7 CSVs but reached 90 due to the synergy with various partners. Scaling was achieved through a combination of the following pathways: knowledge transfer, policy incidence, commercialization, technology-driven and institution-driven processes (Barbon et al. 2021). In South Asia, CSA technologies and services were scaled up in vulnerable areas of India (Chanana et al. 2020).

Challenges with PAR

While the benefits of PAR are evident, there are challenges to its use as well. The most common challenge across regions was managing group dynamics/coordination between partners and farmer groups. In East Africa, challenges relate to engagement when on-farm labor was at peak demand. Maintaining strong partnerships was noted as a challenge in West Africa, in addition to the difficulty of linking the sub-national and national level. Southeast Asia had a similar challenge with limited commitment from provincial and district level stakeholders.

Another common challenge across regions were logistical factors, time constraints, sustainable financing and gender and social inclusion. Multiple regions observed that PAR was a time intensive process, and is difficult to complete under short project cycles. All regions emphasized the need to include gender sensitive activities in the budget from the start.

Recommendations from the ground

East Africa

Local partner recommended to further promote male farmers' participation in CSA sensitization, more financial management training to community groups, increasing innovation funds to assist in implementation of CSA activities, and enhancing knowledge and skills to the youth to enable their involvement in agricultural activities as a source of self-employment and income.

West Africa

A key recommendation is that gender should be mainstreamed into the design of all interventions to ensure that it is actually implemented in a way that includes men, women, and youth at every stage. Future projects should

focus on value chains that are can attract youth and/or are women-sensitive and aiming to specifically develop mechanism to overcome women's and youth constraints.

Latin America

The regional team highlighted the value of the partnerships between researchers and development partners with deep understanding of local communities believes, needs and priorities. They also recommended that future projects consider the different timeframes with respect to the community, local partners and other stakeholders' activities.

Local partners noted that the capacity of local communities as managers of change and direct contributors to citizen science should be much more highly valued, and that future projects should strongly foster the participation of younger farmers' generations.

South Asia

Local partner stressed the need to involve ensure that projects align with state policies and schemes for sustainability and scaling of the approach on a wider scale. They also recommended giving women farmers priority at every step of the project, generating information on the benefits of GSI and sharing it with stakeholders.

Southeast Asia

The regional SEA team recommended specific monitoring for GSI itself and that gender participation in CSV activities should be equal. Local partners added that gender roles need to be emphasized and detailed at an early stage so gender equity can be practiced throughout the implementation process, making women farmers benefit equally as men. Providing special training on gender and social inclusion directed towards those at the implementation level (not only management and governance levels) was also recommended.

A key recommendation was also improving engagement with sub-national district level officials and further highlighting the benefits for local governments at an early stage of a project. Securing sustainable funding for CSA adoption at local level was also identified as key.

Conclusion

Participatory research approaches have been around for decades, and add much value to projects, as this report demonstrates. The use of PAR methods can increase adoption rates, facilitate social learning, and increase access to appropriate climate-smart information to inform better decision-making. It can also foster conversations around gender roles and dynamics, improve women and youth's participation in CSA activities, and contribute to scaling. Additionally, PAR can provide communities with a sense of ownership, which makes interventions more sustainable after the project cycle has ended.

Further reading

- Aggarwal et al. 2018. The climate-smart village approach: framework of an integrative strategy for scaling up adaptation options in agriculture. *Ecology and Society* 23(1): 14.
- Beal C, Bonilla-Findji O, Läderach P. 2021. Lessons Learned on PAR to Adoption of CSA Options with an Emphasis on Gender and Social Inclusion Across the 5 CCAFS Regions. CCAFS Working Paper no. 390. Wageningen, the Netherlands: CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS).
- Barbon WJ, Punzalan B, Wassman R, Bui VL, Vidallo R, Villanueva J, Talsma T, Bayot R, Gonsalves J. 2021. Scaling of Climate-Smart Agriculture via Climate-Smart Villages in Southeast Asia: Insights and Lessons from Vietnam, Laos, Philippines, Cambodia and Myanmar. CCAFS Working Paper no. 376. Wageningen, the Netherlands: CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS).
- Chanana N, Khatri-Chhetri A, Pimpale A, Joshi R, Saini S, Shirsath PB, Joshi AK, Aggarwal PK. 2020. Project completion report: Scaling up resilient agricultural practices, technologies and services in the vulnerable areas of India. Wageningen, the Netherlands: CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS).
- CIFOR. 2008. Adaptive collaborative management can help us cope with climate change. CIFOR Infobrief No.13. Bogor, Indonesia, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). 4p.
- Huyer S, Simelton E, Chanana N, Mulema AA, Marty E. 2021. Expanding Opportunities: Scaling Up Gender and Social Inclusion in Climate-Resilient Agriculture: An Equality and Empowerment Approach. AICCRA Info Note. Accelerating Impacts of CGIAR Climate Research for Africa (AICCRA).
- Johnson, N.L., Lilja, N. and Ashby, J.A., 2003. Measuring the impact of user participation in agricultural and natural resource management research. *Agricultural systems*, 78(2), pp.287-306.
- Lilja, Nina, Ashby, Jacqueline Anne, Sperling, Louise (eds.). 2001. Assessing the impact of participatory research and gender analysis. *Participatory Research and Gender Analysis (PRGA)*, Program Coordination

Office; International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Cali, CO. 294 p

- Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., Altman, D. G., & Prisma Group. 2009. Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement. *PLoS medicine*, 6(7), e1000097.

Catherine Beal was an independent consultant for CIAT at the time of this report. She holds a MSc in Climate Change, Agriculture, and Food Security. Email: catherinebeal4@gmail.com

Jesús David Martínez is the coordinator of the climate-smart villages in Latin America, based at the Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT. Email: j.d.martinez@cgiar.org

Mathieu Ouedraogo is a Senior Scientist - Participatory Action Research for the CCAFS West Africa Regional Program, ICRISAT-Mali. Email: m.ouedraogo@cgiar.org

John Recha is a Participatory Action Research Specialist of the CCAFS East Africa Regional Program based at ILRI. Email: j.recha@cgiar.org

Gebermedihin Ambaw is a Research Associate at CCAFS EA Regional Program, ILRI. Email: g.ambaw@cgiar.org

Abonesh Tesfaye is a consultant for CCAFS-EA Regional Program. Email: abonesh.tesfaye@gmail.com

Abebe Nigussie is an Assistant Professor of Soil Science at Jimma University, Ethiopia. Email: abebe.nigussie@ju.edu.et

Pareesh Shirsath is Science Officer for the CCAFS South Asia Regional Program, based at CIMMYT. Email: P.Bhaskar@cgiar.org

Peter Läderach is the Leader of the Climate-Smart Technologies and Practices Flagship of CCAFS, based at the Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT. Email: p.laderach@cgiar.org

Osana Bonilla-Findji is a Science Officer for the CCAFS Climate Smart Agricultural Practices Flagship supporting the overall coordination of the participatory testing and evaluation in the Climate-Smart Villages, Email: o.bonilla@cgiar.org.

About CCAFS Info Notes

CCAFS Info Notes are brief reports on interim research results. They are not necessarily peer reviewed. Please contact the authors for additional information on their research. Info Notes are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) brings together some of the world's best researchers in agricultural science, development research, climate science and Earth system science, to identify and address the most important interactions, synergies and tradeoffs between climate change, agriculture and food security. Visit us online at <https://ccafs.cgiar.org>.

CCAFS is led by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and supported by:

