

## Is FRG All About Technology Transfer? Or Why Does Such Perception Still Exist?

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FRG approach has been in action for not less than a decade. The perception about this approach also swings between research and extension. Though it shares features from both sides, the balance towards its research face does not seem to come out distinctly and convincingly. What forms the expectation that FRG is more like extension than research? Why is FRG not yet well assimilated into the research system? This article tries to summarise the salient points that possibly explain underlying reasons for 'widely' held perceptions, and suggest ideas for improvement. In so doing, it provides some useful insights on latent constraints and possible actions for the institutionalization of FRG approach into our research system.

Obviously, experts from extension are more likely to take FRG as a technology transfer tool as such emphasizing its role of technology diffusion. Researchers, more often than not, are not distant to this notion. The latter has been rather a daunting challenge that undermines the research side of it, even if it is a research approach that actively engages farmers. There are certain premises that may reinforce the researchers' position.

The first one is linked to the perceived role of the research-extension unit in the research system. The unit emerged to address the prevailing poor linkage between research, extension and farmers. It mainly served as a route to link these actors and disseminate shelved technologies through a more or less extension like activities. Although there were feedback loops from farmers to researchers, the tendency was inclined to getting the technology across (technology transfer: as some of the projects were called exactly so) than providing opportunities for farmers to be a part of the problem solving process. The attachment of FRG with this unit may have created the impression to construe it rather as 'purely' extension activity than a research approach in its own right. Furthermore, the term 'participatory' itself usually clicks thoughts of extension as it has been more often a buzzword used by most NGOs whose main role usually fall within the domain of extension services.

The second one is associated with wrongly conceived theory of innovation in the research system. This can be seen from various dimensions: i) because the engagement of farmers in the research process does not

involve good level of control, like the on-station one, researchers tend to undervalue its 'scientific merit' and consider it inferior to 'real research'. This was reinforced by the weaknesses to demonstrate the merit in scientifically persuasive arguments and tame the old thinking of innovation held by most bio-physical scientists; ii) poor assimilation of a farm as a socio-technical production system. As a result on-farm research is more or less defined in agro-ecological terms. "While most researchers favoured the idea of on-farm research, this did not mean they systematically took into account the views of the farmers. Consequently, they undermined the variability among the farmers and focussed on the bio-physical environment disregarding the social context that dictates the uptake and adoption of research outputs. Innovation was defined only in the hard sense and the soft part of it was taken for granted expecting farmers to be recipient of researchers' 'good' technologies" (Baur and Kradi 2001). This strengthened the position that working with FRG is more about technology transfer than generation.

Obsessions, such as these present a formidable challenge to systematically engage farmers in the 'real research' and provide a space for them to contribute from their knowledge domain. Due to the prevailing thinking of innovation theory, the research system was not that ready to embrace institutional change required to increase farmers' participation, and scientists had a hard time taking participatory research as a research approach. Now, what can be done to deal with this puzzle?

To begin with, the task of participatory research must be expressed in terms i) allocating enough space for farmers to act, and ii) reforming long held conception of innovation. Creating new types of goods and services constitutes a powerful lever of modernizing the research institution. The necessary transformation, therefore, must include redefining the product the research system is expected to deliver.

Redirecting the conception of FRG approach, particularly by bio-physical scientists should include the need to enhance research orientation of the research-extension unit; demonstrate the research outputs (tangible or not) developed with farmers using scientific standard; actively engage bio-physical scientists in the process; establish a standardized research protocol (methodological) and ensure its use in developing and executing on-farm research proposal; provide forum for frequent interaction on the subject and keep up with changes and progresses taking place within individuals, groups, institutions and organization.

Important shifts are also needed in the bigger picture as well. That is, shift in focus from science and academic research to a broader view of innovation, which in all likelihood will include a great deal of adaptive research and innovation support services; and the need to give ample consideration to the overall strategy and policy environment of the research organization (Baur and Kradi 2001).

The assimilation of participatory research is not primarily a matter of methods or of participatory mechanisms. It is rather, as Baur and Kradi (2001) undelined, a matter of institutional strategy, of political context and the way in which senior research managers conceptualize the innovation process. In an environment where involving farmers is not customary, a total rethinking is a necessity, or a mere addition of a participatory mechanism to existing strategy and research routine is less likely to serve the purpose .

Perceptions will not change in a while. But we need to keep updated as it changes. This requires, for example, conducting pilot studies on certain intervals both at researchers' and institutional levels. That would be more concrete and directing. Of course, measuring such actions and perceptions requires establishing basic institutional and individual level indicators- an important task that must be accomplished.

#### Reference

Baur, H. & C. Kradi (2001) Integrating participatory research methods in a public agricultural research organisation: a partially successful experience in Morocco. *Agricultural Research and Extension Network (AgREN)*.

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## Gender in onion production

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A discussion among male and female farmers has brought changes in perspective of farmers and researcher on gender roles at farm, household and community levels. A gender sensitization



session as a part of the FRG based research process was conducted on 25th July, 2013 with FRG member farmers at Albion German Kabul, Adami Tulu Jido Kombolcha District. An FRG based research project on onion seed treatment has been conducted at the village by Adami Tulu Agricultural Research Centre since 2011. The objectives of the gender session were to analyse the gender roles in the onion production in the area and identify necessary interventions to provide women more opportunity in

agricultural research, which eventually enhance the quality of onion production technologies and their dissemination.

The farmers analysed the gender situation in the community and in the onion production using tools such as daily calendar, access and control, etc. for visualizing existing gender gaps. It was found that men and women had more or less equal access to resources. Men have total control over the land while there is equal control between men and women over food grain, livestock, and family labour. Furthermore, the men have more access to and control over transport means, bicycle and cart, and cash from sales of produce.

Women have both productive and reproductive roles. With regard to the onion production, women participate most of the activities from seed treatment to marketing. Activities of transplanting and topping are the work of women only. Women also participate in local self-help organizations known as 'jigi' where women of the same interest cooperate during transplanting and harvesting time. They also have a social role through a local social security organisation 'eidir' for funerals, weddings, etc. to help each other with material and labour. The farmers also listed some cultural sayings, which discourage men to work at home. The session found that women have more diverse roles in the productive, reproductive and community activities than what it has been perceived.

The farmers developed an action plan at the end of the session to promote men sharing works such as child care, food preparation and house cleaning when women participate in research activities. It was also agreed to refrain from using the sayings, which discourage men to cooperate women in reproductive activities, to accelerate the change in the community.

From the participation in the session as facilitators, the researchers understood how women involved in onion production while they filled the roles in domestic and community activities. Such women's multiple roles have not been well recognized and their participation in as well as their possible contribution to the research were not properly facilitated in the past. Based on what was identified in the session, the researchers realized the importance women in research and facilitating their participation in research process to obtain better outputs.

The central rift valley is known for its onion production which involves women from the beginning to the end. Since there are roles specific only to women in the production process, their participation in the research will ensure the onion production technology for the area to fit into the current socio-economic situation and maximize the skill of women in the production. It is interesting to monitor the male member farmers keeping their promise in the action plan to facilitate women's participation in research.