



**Participatory technology development
and
long-term systems research
to enhance the
sustainability of agricultural systems
(significance, contribution and challenges)**



**A capacity development event held in Switzerland
(24th – 31st August 2014)**

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EXCELLENCE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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The Learning Event – focus, goal and target group

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), Switzerland hosted an international learning event from 24th – 31st August 2014, for researchers from the partner tropical countries (Bolivia, India and Kenya). The main focus of the event was to enhance understanding about the approaches of ‘participatory technology development and long-term systems research to enhance the sustainability of agricultural systems’ and to learn about their significance, contribution and challenges, particularly in context of developing tropical countries. The researchers working in the ‘long-term farming systems comparison project – SysCom’ and the ‘Green Cotton project’ of FiBL participated in the event. The learning event offered a unique platform and an exciting opportunity for experts from Bolivia, India, Kenya and Switzerland to come together for the first time and exchange their knowledge and experiences regarding the challenges faced under different settings and the potential local solutions. More than 15 researchers from Bolivia, India and Kenya participated in the event. The event program comprised of a diversity of interesting activities including seminars, group discussions, field visits, lab and farm visits, excursions and social events. Within the framework of the learning event, a symposium aimed at ‘Participatory research to foster Innovation in agriculture’ was held at ETH Zürich on 28th of August. This symposium was organised in cooperation with the ‘IDP Bridges program’ of the ‘Zürich-Basel Plant Science Center’ and attracted an enthusiastic audience of more than 87 researchers and students along with invited international experts.



The participants of the symposium on participatory technology development at ETH Zürich, Switzerland (Photo: Steffen Schweizer, FiBL)

Lessons learnt (learning effect for the participant)

Based on a constant dialogue during the learning event week, the participants from Bolivia, India, Kenya and Switzerland could build up a common understanding about the participatory and systems research within the different countries. Recognising their important role for the progress and implementation of the trials, they were able to identify their potential to work on existing problems together as a team. During the dialogue at the event’s week, it was concluded, that participatory research is crucial for the sustainable agricultural development. Further, the learning event helped to realize that participatory research should not only focus on the farmers and researchers, but at the same time on all other stakeholders of the value chain, including marketing and consumers. In addition to the technical part, the event was also successful in developing networks and bridges among participants from different professional, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Feedback from the participants

The feedback evaluation has shown that the participants thoroughly enjoyed the learning event and valued it as successful. More than 90 % of the participant answered the question of “did you enjoy the program” with “very much”. Notably, the following impressions about the event, were given by three of the participants – Fortunato Velasquez, Lokendra Singh Mandloi and Peter Omolo Owuor.



Fortunato Velasquez, entomologist and producer of bio-pesticides, Bolivia: “For me it has been very interesting to meet the colleagues from Kenya and India and to exchange with them about their scientific work and ideas. I have been enlightened, especially about the participation of farmers in research, where India is more experienced than us in Bolivia. On the other hand, we could give some input about the technical implementation of long-term trials.”



Lokendra Singh Mandloi, project leader for participatory technology development, India: “This is the first time, I have been outside India and that is why this is a special trip for me. We could advice our colleagues about how to integrate farmers into research. We are successfully doing this since a long time, for example with the soil improvements by manure fertilization and phosphorus supply, where we work with rock phosphate as well as buttermilk. At the same time, I learned a lot about agroforestry, which in our region is a little developed practice.”



Peter Omolo Owuor, organic farming consultant, Kenya: “For the establishment of organic farming systems, we have two main constraints: on the one hand we have a high demand for consulting and education for organic farming systems, especially for plant protection and fertilization. On the other hand, we have a marketing problem. We have to establish value chains and at the same time sensitize the costumers for the advantages of organic products. Especially, for these topics the exchange with the Indian colleagues was profiting for me.”

Concluding remarks and recommendations

The Learning Event has shown how necessary and fruitful knowledge and experience exchange between North-South, as well as South-South countries is. It has shown, that result-oriented dialogue between different stakeholders needs an appropriate time-frame, as well as good moderation and facilitation skills, in order to overcome cultural and language barriers. By ensuring these settings, the exchange between stakeholders can spread best-practices and lessons-learnt beyond country borders, as well as reduce the risk for wrong implementation of participatory technology development and long-term systems research in agriculture sciences.

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