



Ensuring research relevance through participation

Participatory research: whatever you think, think again

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Participation is a guiding principle of ORC's research that all staff past and present work to attain

ORC is committed to working with farmers and other stakeholders to identify problems, co-create knowledge and work towards practical and applicable solutions for organic farming systems. How do we do participatory research?

1. Diagnosis, Prognosis and Falsifiability

To be “science”, the work should deliver a ‘falsifiable’ discovery, or result: others must be able to control it, retrace the steps by which it was produced, and potentially end up with different conclusions. Participatory research is often seen as less rigorous than pure research. In reality, the appropriate involvement of “non-researchers” enables and empowers more people to control the results, making them more rigorous. A clear diagnosis – identifying the research question – and prognosis – work to generate the answer – are the two key steps to conduct collaboratively and, as such, must be reviewed throughout.



Involving varied participants in research will bring about different perspectives to critique the hypothesis

2. Context matters

Participatory research and on-farm experiments can enhance the relevance of results. However, the planning and experimental design requires extra attention. The essence of good participatory research is addressing a tangible problem in a specific context whilst creating new knowledge generalisable to other contexts. A scientific result must not only be ‘falsifiable’, but hopefully also ‘hard to falsify’, i.e. having a low probability of being an ‘artefact’ of the research.

3. "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"

A robust experimental design must be supported by a functional group. Context does not just mean location within the environment: the way the group works (or not) to move towards creating the result will add to the rigour. Space needs to be created for all group members to be heard and contribute at their appropriate level. It is possible for the ‘discovery’ to be constructed by joining the skills, needs and values of as many involved different players as possible.

FURTHER READING

1. ORC Bulletin 198, pp. 6-7: tinyurl.com/vp6avupf
2. Probst and Hagmann (2003) tinyurl.com/3ueee9fh