

Participatory action research



UpgradePlus: Decentralised postharvest processing of underutilised species into innovative value-added products for improved food and nutrition security in West Africa
and



NaviNut: Enhancing women's agency in navigating changing food environments to improve child nutrition in African drylands

Presentation by
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incorporating contributions from
the UpgradePlus team and the NaviNut team

What is participatory action research (PAR)?

PAR is defined as a

“democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes”

(Reason & Bradbury 2005)

Core elements:

- collective inquiry, action, and experimentation within the activity system of the local actors
- co-creation of activity-oriented knowledge that considers of contextual conditions and room of manoeuvre of local actors



Co-development of innovations is seen as means to accelerate change

What kind of innovations are co-developed in UpgradePlus?



Photo by Ugochi Akalonu

Example:
Potato chips production in Saanu women's group in Nigeria



In the UPGRADE Plus project, we work together with women's groups to develop **micro-scale processing of underutilised species**



Steps in participatory action research

Support women's groups in creating, maintaining and growing a **sustainable business model** with the processing of underutilised species.

- Establish women's motivations and build on their experience
- Enhance women's agency by:
 - focusing on their goals, needs and constraints
 - facilitating learning from practice
 - testing and improving the processing business



Team Formation	Dialogue	Discovery	Discovery/ Application	Application
Assessment of individual women's groups	Joint definition of processing-related goals, constraints and needs	Testing, participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME)	Co-assessment of sustainable business model	Co-development of outreach materials with women's groups

What kind of innovations are co-developed in NaviNut?



NaviNut aims at **co-developing nutritional innovations** by integrating knowledge, perspectives and interests of diverse societal actors: e.g. mothers from different socio-economic backgrounds, food processors and retailers, community health workers, regulators & various scientific disciplines.

The **objectives** are to

- understand women's decision-making in child feeding
- increase accessibility and desirability of locally available, highly nutritious, traditional foods
- design appropriate nutritional dialogue models that enhance women's learning on child nutrition.



Preparing *Boyri*, a food used in child feeding by Peul

Photo: Enock Zinho

Changed roles of societal actors in participatory action research



Gain
control



Chérif Issifou

We chose together with the women the heads of their groups to create a consultation group. We agree with the consultation group on the objectives and activities to be carried out.

Influence
research
methods



Ina Cramer

We used the suggestions of the women's group to test packaging attributes that we would not have tested otherwise. When designing the choice experiment we wait for their go-ahead before proceeding with the study.

Influence
decisions



Dr Georges Djohy

During the food fair, the women provided convincing arguments for their choice of traditional foods, as opposed to what the researchers would have preferred.

Gain
attention



Patricia Kiprono

The mothers grew in confidence and have been able to freely share their experiences. A Rendille mother said: *"... I have never stood in front of so many people like this and presented to them, and so I am grateful"*.

Institutional conditions favouring PAR

For funding institutions:

- Two-stage calls allow societal stakeholders to influence the definition of research problems and aims,
- Flexibility allows accommodation of changes in project activities based on stakeholders' suggestions,
- Availing some funding resources (e.g. action funds) for stakeholders allows them to have more say in co-creating innovations

For researchers and research institutions involved:

- Accept and promote a changed role as scientists
- Adopt a reflexive research mode



It is a transformative experience to collaborate with all actors – and particularly those at the grassroots – to establish a foundation and gradually build this transdisciplinary action research process.

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For more information:

<https://www.ditsl.org/en/research/projects/upgrade-plus>

<https://www.ditsl.org/en/research/projects/navinut>



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