Everyday Experts: How people's knowledge can transform the food system

The People's Knowledge Editorial Collective

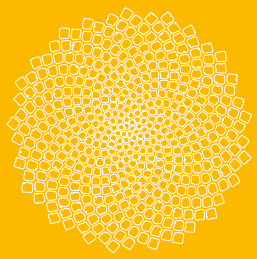
Reclaiming Diversity & Citizenship

Everyday Experts explains how knowledge built up through first-hand experience can help solve the crisis in the food system. It brings together fifty-seven activists, farmers, practitioners, researchers and community organisers from around the world to take a critical look at attempts to improve the dialogue between people whose knowledge has been marginalised in the past and others who are recognised as professional experts.

Using a combination of stories, poems, photos and videos, the contributors demonstrate how people's knowledge can transform the food system towards greater social and environmental justice. Many of the chapters also explore the challenges of using action and participatory approaches to research.

The chapters share new insights, analysis and stories that can expand our imagination of a future that encompasses:

- making dialogue among people with different ways of understanding the world central to all decision-making
- the re-affirmation of Indigenous, local, traditional and other knowledge systems
- a blurring of the divide between professional expertise and expertise that is derived from experience
- transformed relationships amongst ourselves and with the Earth to confront inequality and the environmental crisis



The *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship* Series seeks to encourage debate outside mainstream policy and conceptual frameworks on the future of food, farming, land use and human well-being. The opportunities and constraints to regenerating local food systems and economies based on social and ecological diversity, justice, human rights, inclusive democracy, and active forms of citizenship are explored in this Series. Contributors to the *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship* Series are encouraged to reflect deeply on their ways of working and outcomes of their research, highlighting implications for policy, knowledge, organisations, and practice.

The *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series* was published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) between 2006 and 2013. The Series is now published by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, at Coventry University.

To read any of the 28 chapters in this book freely available to download, please visit:

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Cover photos:

(left): Field teaching by Farmer Research Team members about planting methods, Lobi area. Photo taken by C. Hickey, December 2014. Used with the permission of project participants.

(right): The Coventry Men's Shed participatory video project exploring "What's Eating Coventry' and unpacks social justice issues related to food in the city of Coventry. More information at www.peoplesknowledge.org

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The People's Knowledge Editorial Collective*:
Colin Anderson
Christabel Buchanan
Marina Chang
Javier Sanchez Rodriguez
Tom Wakeford

*Listed in alphabetical order. This book was a collective endeavour and work and responsibility was shared evenly amongst the editorial team. All chapters have been peer reviewed by a minimum of two reviewers and revised accordingly as a part of a non-blind open peer review process.

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The Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR) is driving innovative, transdisciplinary research on the understanding and development of socially just and resilient food and water systems internationally. Unique to this University Research Centre is the incorporation of citizen-generated knowledge - the participation of farmers, water users and other citizens in transdisciplinary research, using holistic approaches which cross many disciplinary boundaries among the humanities as well as the natural and social sciences.

The Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR)
Coventry University
Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane
Coventry, CV8 3LG
United Kingdom

E-mail: CAWROffice@coventry.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0) 2477 651 601
Web: http://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/agroecology-water-resilience/

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Professor Michel Pimbert is the coordinator and editor in chief of the *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series.*

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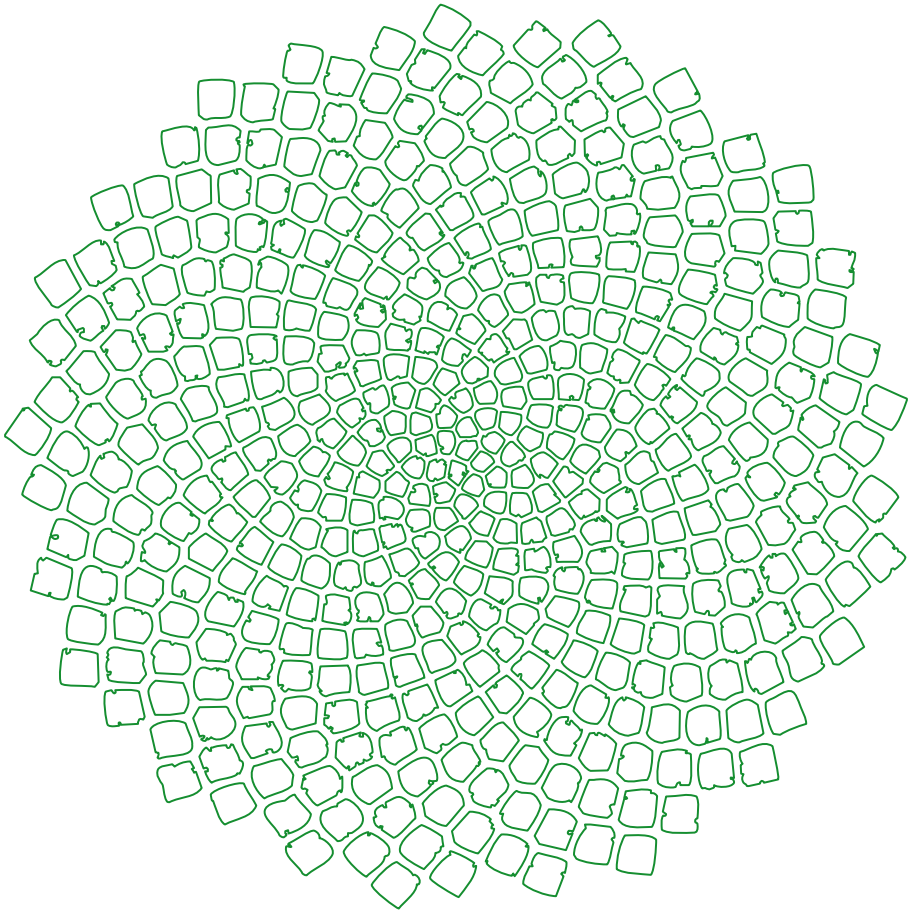

Participatory action research transforming local food systems in India, Iran and Peru

Michel P. Pimbert, Periyapatna V. Satheesh, Alejandro Argumedo and Taghi M. Farvar

Geographical location: India, Iran, Peru, Germany and UK

Chapter highlights:

This chapter shows how the co-creation of knowledge for food sovereignty was part of a participatory process driven by a transformative logic of changing society – rather than just interpreting it. A diversity of complementary participatory methods – including citizens' juries and participatory video – were used to locate practice in an overarching, flexible, open-ended, inclusive, and iterative process of action and reflection for change.

It describes how three groups of traditional peoples are engaged in power-equalizing research in different geographical regions, including how local communities document their knowledge and share it with the rest of the world.

The authors discuss the importance of engaging in knowledge production from the perspectives of traditional communities, - respecting cognitive justice and other processes that give the least powerful actors more significant roles than before in the co-creation of knowledge.

They also describe how participatory action research can have a positive impact at several levels, including policy making, which has a direct influence on the lives and environment of the people conducting the research.

Keywords: Autonomous food systems, biocultural diversity, participatory action research, cognitive justice, food sovereignty.

7.1 Introduction

Between January 2000 and June 2015, the Sustaining Local Food Systems, Biodiversity and Livelihoods initiative[1] has collaborated directly with local peasant farmers and Indigenous communities in regenerating biodiversity-rich farming and locally controlled food systems in India, Iran and Peru. The long-term participatory action research seeks to analyse how – and under what conditions – decentralised governance, peasant and citizen participation, and capacity building can help sustain local food systems, biodiversity and livelihoods in the face of rapid social and environmental change.

The co-authors of this paper have accompanied this action research process as participants and co-enquirers in different countries: Alejandro with Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Andes, Satheesh with women peasant collectives in the drylands of south India, Taghi in the territories of Indigenous nomadic tribes of pastoralists in Iran, and Michel as overall coordinator providing conceptual and methodological support in each country as well as facilitating local to global links and farmer exchanges for mutual learning across the globe. Here we highlight a few experiences from the perspective of accompaniment, walking together and thinking together about some of the diverse actions and innovations co-produced with local food providers.

Respectful methodologies and processes for transformation

Guided by a common vision and a commitment to respectful participatory processes, this global initiative unfolded in different ways in each region. Local partners were able to decide on the processes, methods and timeframes they felt were most appropriate to their own unique situations.

This type of power-equalising research involves both researchers and non-researchers in close cooperative engagement, jointly producing new knowledge, with mutual learning from the process. Actors involved make sense of the world through efforts to transform it, instead of simply observing and studying peoples' actions and views about reality, in the hope that meaningful change will happen somewhere further down the road. As such, this form of action research is a significant reversal from dominant roles, locations and ways of knowing.

In each situation, participatory action research was the methodology of choice and the main way of knowing and learning together, i.e. a cycle of reflection–action–reflection largely controlled and decided by the peasants and Indigenous communities themselves (Fals Borda 2006, Fals Borda and Rahman 1991).

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1 The Sustaining Local Food Systems, Biodiversity and Livelihoods initiative was funded by the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Netherlands, Oxfam-Novib, The Christensen Fund, The New Field Foundation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Between 2000 and 2012, this initiative was coordinated and facilitated by Michel Pimbert at the UK-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

New knowledge was co-constructed by combining a range of hybrid methodologies and tools from different traditions and locations, each tailored to local needs and goals. These plural and hybrid methods included the following:

- Participatory learning and action methods, visualisation in participatory programmes, and community and participatory video
- Community radio and teleconferencing technology
- Multi-actor learning groups at different scales
- Scholarly studies for peer review publications and working papers
- Peasant-led audits and assessments of national policies and research programmes
- Peasant exchanges for mutual learning within and among countries
- Methods for deliberative and inclusive processes: citizens' juries, scenario workshops, future search, multi-criteria mapping
- Intercultural dialogues rooted in principles of cognitive justice
- Collective recovery of history through the use of prophesies and myths (where community processes and practices are communicated through myths) and traditional forecasting and back-casting techniques and indigenous information coding traditions
- Methodological exchanges between regions to enhance mutual learning and development of a robust research process
- Extended peer reviews to co-validate research outcomes in specific contexts
- Policy and media dialogues at a national and global level to bring local voices into decision making processes and wider debates on the public good

From the start of this process in 2000, all co-authors of this paper have worked with peasant farming and Indigenous nomadic pastoralist communities and their local organisations, making sure that at each stage those communities were able to say whether they wanted to slow down or not, whether they needed more information, and whether they were happy with the process. In the end the decisions about what activities to pursue and prioritise were made by the communities themselves. It was up to local partners and communities to decide exactly what activities would be most helpful in their situation. Most of the time, the main roles of Alejandro, Satheesh, Taghi and Michel were to listen, facilitate, support, catalyse action, offer a menu of choices after searching for policy and technical information which communities asked for, and secure funds for mutual learning on topics such as participatory video film making in which women from India trained Indigenous Quechua women in Peru (Box 7.1).

As facilitators, we (Alejandro, Michel, Satheesh and Taghi) considered peasants and citizens engaged in this action research to be knowledgeable actors with the ability to

Box 7.1. Women learning to use video through knowledge exchange

Following a request by the Quechua communities to better document their indigenous knowledge using video, a collective of women peasant video film makers from India were able to visit these communities in the province of Cusco (Peru), in the Potato Park created in 2001 by these Indigenous communities to conserve bio-cultural diversity. The Indian women shared their experiences using video, not only to record events, but also to look back and analyse, and to edit and make the choices on how to present information to people outside their community. The 12-day peasant exchange for mutual learning was a rich encounter for all those who took part. The Potato Park Women's Video Collective increased their knowledge of the research process and the project overall and its outcomes in the drylands of Telengana, from where the Indian peasant women had travelled. Following this peasant exchange in March 2002, the Video Collective worked with the Potato Park communities and barefoot technicians to document traditional knowledge, making documentaries that show how the park came into being and why a rights-based approach can help sustain local livelihoods, diverse food systems and culture as well as biodiversity – from genes to whole landscapes.

Figure 7.1. A community video film maker recording a village level participatory analysis by women farmers in Telengana (India). Photo credit Pastapur Yesu. Figure 7.2. Quechua woman filming a community meeting in the province of Cusco (Peru). Photo credit M. Pimbert

be centrally involved in both the 'upstream' choice of strategic research priorities and the design of innovations, as well as in their 'downstream' implementation, spread and regulation. We were aware that viewing food providers and other citizens as knowledgeable actors is, in and by itself, an important safeguard in promoting more power-equalising research. Empathy, respect and solidarity with fellow human beings are important prerequisites here. Without these enabling values, enduring prejudiced views undermine the possibility of seeing ordinary citizens as knowledgeable actors (Box 7.2).

Box 7.2. Disabling attitudes and behaviours undermine action research for transformation

In our conversations, we often spoke about how disempowering mindsets, attitudes and behaviours undermine people's knowledge and capacity for co-enquiry. For example, Alejandro gave us many examples of the enduring racist and prejudiced attitudes experienced by Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems in Peru when discussing issues of biodiversity, rights and culture with 'educated' decision makers and scientists of Spanish descent. Referring to everyday life in India, Satheesh would tell us how many urban-based middle-class researchers and decision makers believe that small-scale family farmers, women in particular, are backwards and ignorant – and that these peasants and food processors are a relic of the past that should be dispensed with as fast as possible. Taghi also described how in Iran, Indigenous nomadic pastoralists and their biodiversity-conserving practices are marginalised by powerful modernising forces in government and research. Deep-seated de-humanising attitudes based on a feeling of superiority for abstract knowledge learned in university courses and blind application of modern, yet outmoded methodologies, such as those used for assessment of carrying capacity of rangelands and forests, prevent respectful intercultural dialogue and action research for transformation towards sustainable and just food systems. New respectful approaches, such as 'non-equilibrium ecosystems', have shown most classical concepts of rangeland ecology to be erroneous and the indigenous knowledge of nomadic pastoralists to be far closer to reality. Although the fact of seasonal migration has shown itself to be valid ecologically for some 12,000 years, all modern approaches completely ignore this fundamental reality in indigenous rangeland and forest management systems.

7.3 Research processes and outcomes grow out of each other

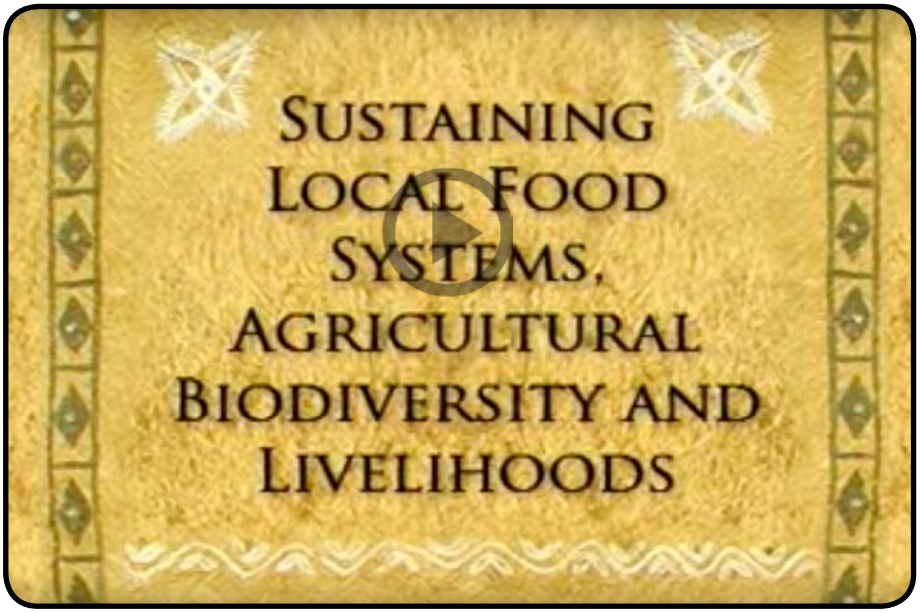
Grounded in a bottom-up approach, this participatory action research has advanced by combining traditional knowledge systems with modern science, strengthening agro-ecological production and biodiverse food systems, and spreading peasant-led innovations through horizontal networks and federations of small farmers, Indigenous tribal pastoralists, other Indigenous peoples and food consumers/citizens. Working as co-researchers with activist scholars and practitioners of action research, the farming and Indigenous communities in India, Iran and Peru have developed new institutions and technologies to feed communities sustainably and to influence public policy. Examples of the key peasant-led innovations that emerged through this process of action research are described briefly here.

The drylands of southern India

Here, women peasant collectives from the Deccan Plateau have created an alternative grain distribution system, parallel to that of the national government. While the government ships rice and wheat from green revolution industrialised farms to feed this drought-prone region, the new village granaries are supplied with locally grown millet, sorghum and chickpeas.

Women farmers organised into *sanghams* – village-level associations of poor, often low-caste and non-literate women – have restored degraded lands by reviving traditional drought-resistant crop varieties and farming systems adapted to the dry soil, eliminating the need for heavy chemical inputs and softening the impacts of droughts (Srinivas and Abdul Thaha 2004).

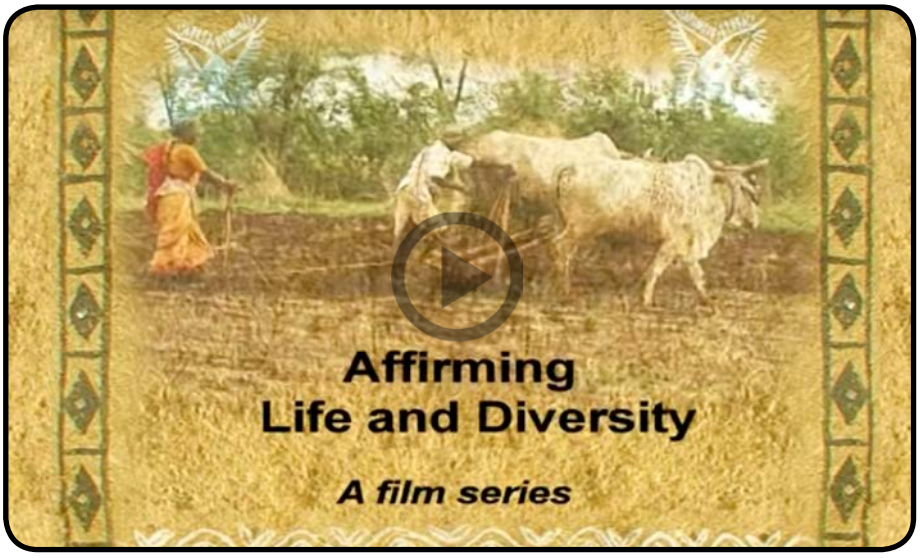
The women themselves manage the grain stores and offer subsidised food to the poorest households, deciding collectively how this safety net should be applied as part of an alternative public distribution system. The women peasants have enhanced local food and nutrition security as well as community self-organisation for resilience to climate change. Their empowering experience is vividly captured in a video film made by members of the women *sanghams*.



Video 7.1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7HHhZwX9pg

Community video was an integral part of this participatory action research in which both process and outcomes were filmed through the eyes of marginalised women and other small-scale farmers. A total of 12 videos were produced by a collective of women peasants, including the story of the *sangham* women's visit to Quechua farming communities in Peru described in Box 7.1 (http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/6033/In-the-Lap-of-Pacha-Mama--Bhootali--Mother-Earth - video 7.2) and a film on the participatory development of a millet machine (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIXmnq-zBAw - video 7.3). All 12 videos are distributed as the Affirming Life and Diversity film series (DDS Community Media Trust *et al.*, 2008).

Video 7.2. *http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/6033/In-the-Lap-of-Pacha-Mama--Bhootali--Mother-Earth*



Video 7.3. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulXmnq-zBAw*

Rangelands in Iran

Nomadic tribal organisations are advocating the co-management of rangelands with the government, using indigenous knowledge and new insights from the science of non-equilibrium ecology to adapt to the impacts of climate change in fragile agro-ecosystems (Box 7.3).

Box 7.3. Re-empowerment of Indigenous nomadic tribes in Iran leads to policy influence

In Iran, there are over 100 Indigenous nomadic tribal confederacies and some 600 independent tribes. Prior to the start of our work the various governments had engaged in three different periods of forced and/or induced sedentarisation of the tribes within the last century. The ancestral domains of the tribes, consisting of rangelands, forests, wetlands and other natural resources, were nationalised by government decree under questionable circumstances and only temporary use rights were granted. Land grabbing by government and the private sector have become the order of the day ever since. An investigation by the Centre for Sustainable Development (CENESTA) showed the top 10 myths about indigenous nomadic pastoralism to be wrong (Farvar 2003). Indeed, Indigenous nomadic tribespeople are among the oldest conservationists on earth. The 2004 and 2008 International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) resolutions on Mobile Indigenous Peoples (IUCN, 2009) have unequivocally acknowledged this fact. These resolutions, which make up IUCN policy, were a partial result of the work done. The co-enquiry in question led directly to recognition that the entire territory of each Indigenous migrating tribal unit constitutes an 'Indigenous peoples and community conserved territories and area' (ICCA) (www.iccaconsortium.org). In this manner, we have a unique situation due to the customary hierarchical structure of Iranian tribes, of nested ICCAs; at each level, tribal organisational units have their associated customary territory, together making up the area of the larger unit's territory.

As a primary result of the co-enquiry, a system was adapted for the reinforcement and formal registration of the tribes and tribal confederacies in order to make the government recognise the tribes and tribal customary structures. The statutes of each tribal unit registered are based on the customary structure and governance system of the tribe. A further step in the formal recognition of the territory-based tribal ICCAs is provided by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), with the assistance of the ICCA Consortium. WCMC is affiliated with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and keeps the universal database of protected areas. It has agreed to register ICCAs declared by Indigenous peoples and local communities. This is a great achievement for these groups everywhere. Another achievement resulting from the project is that ICCAs are now eligible for inclusion in the national obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) ten-year global strategy for biological diversity (Aichi Targets for protected and conserved areas by 2020). CBD published guidelines for the recognition of ICCAs in 2012, with a publication on the ICCA Consortium including a substantive case study on Iran (CBD 2012).

In addition to these global policy impacts, organised and federated Indigenous nomadic tribes in Iran are significantly influencing national policy. An example is their collective participation in redefining a new comprehensive natural resource management law that is due to be submitted to parliament by the government in 2018.

Finally, the team of Cenesta and the Union of Indigenous Nomadic Tribes (UNINOMAD) has been documenting the resilience of Indigenous nomadic tribes in the face of severe climate change. For example, the Abolhassani tribe has reinvented dryland agriculture, producing cash and fodder crops that help to avoid grazing pressure on the natural rangelands. Their practices have mitigated the risks of severe and frequent droughts and outmigration.

Sources: M. Taghi Farvar. Mobile pastoralism in West Asia— myths, challenges and a whole set of loaded questions… Tehran & Gland, CENESTA. IUCN/CEESP Policy Matters No. 12, September 2003 (pp. 31-41). http://earthcharter.org/invent/images/uploads/IUCN%20Resolutions%202004%20Congress%20ALL.pdf and IUCN (2009). Resolutions and Recommendations. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, vi + 158 pp. (https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/WCC-4th-005.pdf). Convention on Biological Diversity. Recognising and Supporting ICCAs: Global overview and national case studies. CBD Recognition Guidelines Series No. 64. Edited by Ashish Kothari, *et al*. Montreal, 2012. (http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-64-en.pdf and http://www.cbd.int/protected/ts64-country-case-studies/).

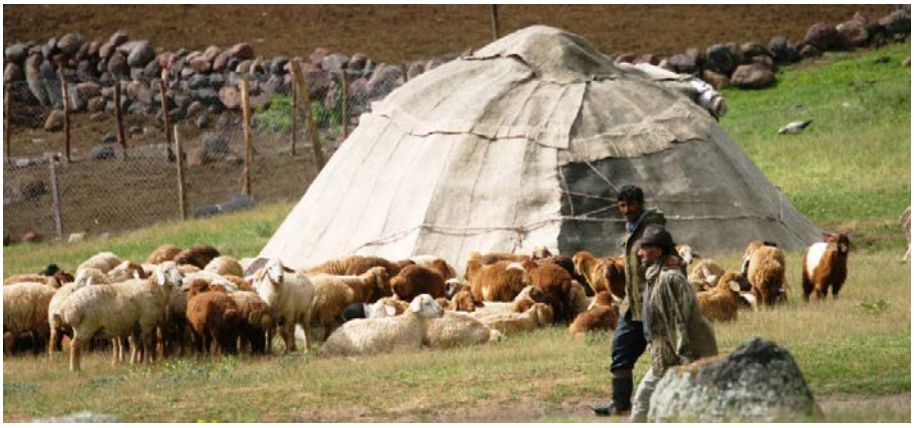


Figure 7.3. Shahsevan cold climate tent, summer pastures & flocks. Cenesta photo credit.

Figure 7.4. Participatory Action Research, Bakhtiari Tribal Confederacy. Cenesta photo credit.

Figure 7.5. Men & women share the milking equally in the Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy. Cenesta photo credit.

Figure 7.6. Qashqai tribal confederacy seasonal migration. N. Kasraian photo credit.

Figure 7.7. Qashqai tribes people learning to deal with maps. Later they will be creating their own participatory GIS maps to use in defence of their lands and territories. Cenesta photo credit.

The Potato Park in Peru

Early work in Peru led to the opening of the Potato Park in 2001. It is now well known internationally as a biocultural heritage territory and managed by Quechua communities. These groups grow more than 1,400 potato varieties in an important centre of crop diversity, thereby sustaining the socio-cultural systems that have created and preserved this biodiversity.

This participatory action research has systematically affirmed Indigenous peoples' biocultural rights and contributed to sustaining the capacity of agriculture and food systems to adapt to change by actively guiding crop evolution in the fields and landscapes of the Potato Park. Indigenous Quechua groups have extended the approach to several new community-managed areas, nationally and internationally. They are now seeking to link these into 'food sovereignty corridors' stretching across the landscape. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=If_Ym5tYNRI (video 7.4).

Video 7.4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=If_Ym5tYNRI

A rights based approach has created effective and proactive processes that support human rights and good governance (Argumedo and Pimbert 2005). The Potato Park was instrumental in the implementation of the first national Ordinances banning genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (http://dglocal10.blogspot.com/2009/01/ordenanza-contra-biopirateria-en-cusco.html) and biopiracy (https://biocultural.iied.org/national-and-local-policy-and-law-protecting-biocultural-heritage) in Peru.

Potato Park farmers were also the first group of communities to deposit their potato seeds in the Global Vault of Svalbard, exercising their right to self-determination (http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-12493970). Tools for protecting rights over their traditional knowledge, such as biocultural protocols based on traditional resource rights principles, have been developed and implemented (http://pubs.iied.org/16528IIED.html).

Quechua cosmovisions have informed the development of new concepts around biocultural heritage and solidarity economy based on reciprocity. Rural women's organisations now manage a polycentric network of barter markets that is important for local food sovereignty and nutrition (Marti and Pimbert 2006). Quechua communities have also successfully negotiated with the International Potato Centre for a repatriation agreement on the return of more than 450 of their traditional potato varieties. These are now used in farmer-led participatory research on climate change adaptation (info.ippca.org), with local communities developing innovations to defend their Andean crops and indigenous knowledge against biopiracy (Argumedo and Pimbert 2006).

The park has been proactive in creating a strong network of territory-based organisations, focusing on conserving agrobiodiversity locally thus linking local and global constituencies for ecologically sustainable development, rejecting industrial farming and defending local livelihoods (http://www.iied.org/indigenous-mountain-communities-call-governments-support-traditional-knowledge-based-adaptation).

Global action

Globally, our participatory action research became increasingly rooted in the normative framework of food sovereignty as early as 2001. For example, the *prajateerpu* (people's verdict) was a participatory process designed to allow the people most affected by the Vision 2020 for food and farming in Andhra Pradesh to shape a vision of their own. The deliberative process combined citizens' juries and scenario workshop methods with safeguards, such as an oversight panel and witnesses as well as widespread use of the media. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABuezlaQ9ew (video 7.5).

Prajateerpu was effective in linking excluded local voices and visions of food and farming futures with national and international policy making. After critically reviewing the evidence presented to them, the members of the farmers' jury – most of whom were women – offered a broad vision of a very different future compared to the one planned for them from above (Pimbert and Wakeford 2002). Their vision for the future of food and farming was widely shared by the media and the entire process had a significant impact on development policies in the State of Andhra Pradesh and beyond, including the UK Government's overseas aid priorities for Andhra Pradesh (www.prajateerpu.org).

Video 7.5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABuezIaQ9ew

Throughout India, the policy impacts of *prajateerpu* inspired civil society organisations, peasant networks and activist scholars to organise other citizens' juries on topics of major importance for small-scale peasant farming in India. For example, the *Raita Teerpu* (farmers' verdict), which took place in the State of Karnataka in 2009, focused on the priorities and governance of agricultural research. The *Raita Teerpu* brought peasants (especially women) together with dalits and Indigenous people from different parts of Karnataka in a single platform to assess the benefits of ongoing agricultural research in India. It helped them to debate and analyse the relevance of research for small-scale and marginal peasants. After carefully listening to evidence presented by specialist witnesses from government, the private sector, research institutes, activists and the peasants themselves, the jury of marginalised small-scale farmers and landless farm workers presented their policy recommendations to decision makers and the media in Bangalore, the capital of the State of Karnataka (http://www.raitateerpu.com).

The extensive use of media (radio, television, newspapers, recordings in local languages, etc.) before, during and after the *Raita Teerpu* ensured that over 10 million households followed these citizen deliberations and heard the jury's recommendations on what kind of agricultural research is needed for marginalised peasants who represent the majority of the population in Karnataka and rural India (http://www.raitateerpu.com). In turn, the food and farming futures envisioned by marginalised peasants, Indigenous peoples and pastoralists from dryland India were fed into the international forum on the governance of agricultural research (www.excludedvoices.org).

Last but not least, the initiatives in West Africa, Latin America (www.excludedvoices.org) and Europe (www.agroecologynow.com) linked with Raita Teerpu continue to have an enduring and significant influence on the global food sovereignty movement.

Box 7.4. The Saint Ulrich workshop on democratising agricultural research for food sovereignty and peasant agrarian cultures

The *Raita Teerpu* is part of the Democratising Food and Agricultural Research initiative, which focuses on the transformations needed for the democratic governance of food systems and, more specifically, on the potential role for citizens in rethinking food and agricultural research for the public good. Since 2007, this initiative has unfolded in the Andean Altiplano (Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru), South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka), West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal) and West Asia (Iran and Jordan). In September 2013, the partners of this initiative organised an international workshop to share lessons and reflections learned from Africa, Asia and Latin America with a wider community of European peasants, policy makers and representatives of the donor community. Known as the Saint Ulrich workshop on democratising agricultural research for food sovereignty and peasant agrarian cultures, this international workshop brought together 95 participants from a total of 17 countries. Over 55 per cent of workshop participants were peasants, and the other participants were activists, progressive scholars and representatives from local government, donor organisations, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the Global Forum on Agricultural Research. About half the participants were women.

The video film entitled 'Imagining research for food sovereignty' highlights the outcomes of the workshop deliberations. See http://www.excludedvoices.org/st-ulrich-workshop-democratising-agricultural-research-food-sovereignty-and-peasant-agrarian-culture (video 7.6).

Video 7.6: http://www.excludedvoices.org/st-ulrich-workshop-democratising-agricultural-research-food-sovereignty-and-peasant-agrarian-culture

At all times, this initiative has emphasised participatory and people-centred processes in sustaining local food systems, diverse ecologies, rights to self-determination, livelihoods and culture. In the language of sustainable livelihoods, the research

partners focused on the relationship between livelihood outcomes and the role of transforming structures and processes, such as organisations, institutions, knowledge, laws and policies that transform assets (natural, physical, financial, human, social, cultural) into those outcomes. Examples of indigenous transforming structures and processes in Peru include the development of community-to-community and peasant-to-peasant learning:

- Networks based on the principle of Ayni (reciprocity). Exchange is promoted through the sharing of information, practices and learning processes.
- Barefoot technicians, who are elected by their own communities, network with other communities and create opportunities to share and transfer traditional knowledge and innovations.
- The consolidation of local grassroots enterprises. These groups are anchored in Andean principles of reciprocity and a local definition of well-being (*buen vivir* or *sumaq kausay*), and work using the principles of Andean economy with the goal of reinforcing local food systems and self-determination.

Such transforming structures and processes produced outcomes that, in turn, often became new processes in further cycles of participatory action research for transformation towards just and sustainable food systems.

7.4 Theory of change

From the outset, this participatory action research was designed to directly empower communities to claim and implement more just and sustainable agri-food systems. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening local organisations and the federations they form to build countervailing knowledge and power. By linking local voices, experiences and co-constructed research evidence to public and private sector policy processes, this action research has informed debates and helped shape better policies and institutions. The process has created safe spaces to build capacity, knowledge, mutual understanding and alliances between different actors, using different formats for different audiences. In each country, the participatory action research process has combined local knowledge and cutting-edge science to develop alternative models and reframe dominant narratives, policies and practices for food, agriculture and land use. This approach has promoted local food systems and short food webs that are rich in biological and cultural diversity, that are decentralised and democratically controlled, and that combine equity with community and socio-ecological resilience.

In many ways, our theory of change also emphasises open-ended and emergent processes of transformation. We (the co-authors and local community members engaged in co-enquiry) never had clear plans in the form of logical frameworks and blueprints – and fortunately none of the donors that supported this action research asked for detailed log frames and five-year plans. As participatory action researchers

engaged in dynamic processes of emergent complexity and a praxis of emancipation, we did not care for the need to identify clear deliverables and measurable results years in advance. Although we were aware of the cutting-edge nature of our action research, we were not wholly focused on achieving research excellence and producing academic papers for top journals. Undertaking critically reflective work that was meaningful and relevant to local communities in search of social justice and ecological sustainability was always more important for us. While we were committed to methodologically rigorous research to generate valid and high-quality knowledge, we also valued flexibility and open-ended journeys with local communities. Our overall approach had much in common with the Theology of Liberation's commitment to *Se hace el camino al andar* (making the road by walking) and the Zapatista communities' *caminar preguntando* (to walk asking questions). We remain committed to this approach today as we (Alejandro, Michel, Saheesh and Taghi) continue to work and stand with the local communities with whom we have chosen to travel.

7.5 Lessons for the future: implications for policy and practice

This long-term participatory action research on sustaining local food systems, biodiversity and livelihoods offers some lessons and pointers for the transformation of agricultural research and development at a time when there is growing recognition that 'business as usual' is no longer an option (IAASTD 2009, EU SCAR 2012). For example, more open and respectful intercultural dialogue is needed to transform the dominant paradigm of food and agricultural research into alternatives for development and human well-being. Individuals and groups belonging to different cultures can come together to co-construct new knowledge and this can lead to transformative action. But genuine and effective intercultural dialogue and co-creation of knowledge must be based on processes that give the least powerful actors more significant roles than before in the production and validation of knowledge. The following enabling factors are important in this regard.

Free prior and informed consent, jointly developed rules of engagement and a mutually agreed code of ethics

In all countries, we first asked local peasant and Indigenous communities working with the Deccan Development Society (DDS), the Andean Association for Nature and Sustainable Development (ANDES) or CENESTA to carefully assess whether and how they wanted to engage in this collaborative research. Participants adopted an ethical code, emphasising that institutional partners would support local people in undertaking and owning the research and outputs, and established a steering group including people chosen by the communities. It is particularly noteworthy that, as part of the process of free prior and informed consent, women sangham members in India argued that they should use digital video to document the process and communicate findings to non-literate community members.

Formation of safe spaces for intercultural dialogue

These are non-threatening spaces in which actors can gain confidence and discuss, analyse, mobilise and act on the basis of a shared vision. These spaces are typically located in settings that are familiar to the communities (e.g. villages, fields, or nomadic tents and camps) and they rely first and foremost on local languages for analysis and deliberations (outside researchers receive translations). Creating and nurturing such safe spaces is essential to promote intercultural dialogue and mutual learning, and to embrace the experience, expertise, fresh thinking, energy and perspectives of hitherto excluded actors, including women and youth. But such popular spaces may also reproduce both overt and subtle forms of exclusion in the absence of a conscious social commitment to politics of freedom, equity and gender inclusion.

Reversals from normal professional roles, behaviours and attitudes

Change must begin with the self, from within. This culture of reversals from normal practice puts the perceptions, priorities, judgment and knowledge of members of Indigenous and local communities at centre stage. It consciously seeks to reorient and change the disempowering mindsets, attitudes and behaviours that undermine people's knowledge and capacity for co-enquiry (see Box 7.2).

Cognitive justice – acknowledging the right for different knowledge systems to exist

The idea of cognitive justice emphasises the right to the coexistence of different forms of knowledge and their associated practices, livelihoods, ways of being and ecologies. As Visvanathan argues, cognitive justice is "the constitutional right of different systems of knowledge to exist as part of a dialogue and debate". This implies the continued existence of "the ecologies that would let these forms of knowledge survive and thrive not in a preservationist sense but as active practices" (Visvanathan 2005). It is noteworthy that the successful protection of biocultural heritage in the Potato Park in Peru has grown out of local communities' affirmation of their sovereign right to sustain their entire knowledge system, including the landscape and territories that renew biodiversity, culture and livelihoods (see Box 7.5).

Extended peer review and different gatekeepers of knowledge

Power-equalising research relies on a more inclusive and plural process of co-validation of knowledge that brings together representatives from different knowledge systems (western scientific, indigenous, local) in extended peer communities. These communities validate knowledge and can include scientists as well as members of Indigenous and local communities, including men and women of different age groups, classes, castes and ethnic groups. Under conditions of open-ended uncertainty and rapid change, all these different knowledge holders (e.g. peasants, livestock keepers, modern scientists) have a legitimate and useful role to play in deciding what constitutes

Box 7.5. Indigenous communities claiming cognitive justice in Peru

The concept of indigenous biocultural heritage territories (IBCHT) grew out of power-equalising research and has guided the successful community-led initiative known as the Potato Park in Cuzco, Peru. Located in a biodiversity hotspot for potatoes, the park is an IBCHT centred on the protection of potato biodiversity and related knowledge. The area is home to more than 4,000 varieties of potato as well as other traditional crops including quinoa and oca. The Potato Park provides an alternative approach to protecting traditional knowledge. It protects not only intellectual knowledge, but also the landscape, biological, economic and cultural components of knowledge systems, thereby halting loss of traditional knowledge as well as misappropriation of it. Communities' collective control over their knowledge has been strengthened by systematically affirming the holistic and indivisible nature of their rights to land, territories and self-determination. Cognitive justice is being claimed as the concept of IBCHT is increasingly recognised in national and international negotiations on the protection of biodiversity and knowledge.

Source: Argumedo and Pimbert (2008).

valid knowledge in a particular context. We recognise here that there is a plurality of legitimate perspectives on every issue. Each actor has partial and incomplete knowledge, modern scientists included. The academic and narrow disciplinary-based peer review system, with its privileged power to decide what is true science, is no longer seen as the only legitimate and relevant route to deal with the challenges of the 21st century. Today, we all face open-ended uncertainties associated with a fast-changing world under the influences of environmental and climate change, the spread of new diseases, unstable markets and political change.

Communicating for change

This should not be seen as the sole prerogative of communication professionals working in public and private scientific and policy research institutes or agricultural extension departments. There is a need for a new communication praxis and appropriate allocation of resources that emphasises the devolution and dispersal of power. Advances in new communication technologies (digital video camera, radio, the mobile or smart phone, the internet), as well as in popular theatre, mapping and visualisation techniques, offer new opportunities to decentralise and democratise the production of knowledge and communication messages. These trends allow even remote village communities to share stories and messages that can influence policy and practice at local, national and international levels.

Flexible and long-term funding

For donors, the innovations sprouting from grassroots initiatives underline the need to move away from rigid blueprint project planning and short-term funding. Flexible funding, open-ended learning by doing, commitment to long-term collaboration and 'handing over the stick' to local people are vital in regenerating diverse food systems and harvesting their benefits for ecosystems, economies and human wellbeing.

7.6 Conclusions

Many of the methodologies, processes and outcomes of this participatory action research continue to inform the development of the food sovereignty paradigm and the search for autonomous food systems. Power-equalising research that strengthens local organisations' capacity for voice and agency, inclusive participatory methods such as citizens' juries for policy making, extended and flexible timeframes for iterative cycles of action research, transmedia knowledge mobilisation, and many other of the co-enquirers' innovations described here offer practical means to regenerate a diversity of sustainable food systems, enhance justice and social–ecological resilience, and deepen democracy. More broadly, our transformative approach affirms a grassroots post-modernism (Esteva and Prakash 2014) based on a radical pluralism that honours and nurtures cultural diversity by enabling many paths to the realisation of self-defined aspirations.

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