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**Stakeholder Involvement in Research, Extension, and Training:  
Option or Necessity**

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**Abstract**

The term stakeholder dates back to the early 1700. These were persons entrusted with the stakes of bettors. Nowadays, the term stakeholder and attention to their participation in research, extension and training (RET) are very popular. Most development agencies, research organizations, NGOs, and government departments declare that stakeholder involvement is part of their work. However, stakeholders and participation, that are addressed in the papers and posters prepared for this thematic group, are very general terms, nebulous and fuzzy, with varying meanings. This keynote paper provides an overview of stakeholder involvement in RET, presents major methods, tools and techniques and discusses key challenges.

The rapid evolution of stakeholder involvement in research and extension in the 1980s and 1990s resulted from the critique of the linear innovation model as the dominant research and extension paradigm (CHAMBERS and JIGGENS 1987). Weak linkages between agricultural research and technology transfer as a major bottleneck in agricultural technology systems resulted in the development of a knowledge system perspective. Consequently, farmers, farmers' organizations, extension organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educational institutions, research institutions, private companies, markets, and policymakers are now seen as (active) participants in a single agricultural knowledge and information system (AKIS) (ROELING 1990).

Participatory approaches or so-called learner-centered approaches in adult training developed in parallel to the evolution towards a knowledge system perspective. While traditional teaching methods, e.g., didactic teaching, emphasized the transfer of knowledge, messages or content-pre-selected by outside specialists, participatory training focuses more on the development of the human capacities to assess, choose, plan, create, organize and take initiative (SRINIVASAN 1993).

To get specific on the term participation the multi-dimensional conceptual model developed by COHEN and UPHOFF (1980) is used to describe and analyze stakeholder participation. It is based on three basic questions. **(1)** What kind of participation takes place? There are different stages and levels of a project or program such as decision-making, implementation, consequences, and evaluation. **(2)** Who participates in them? **(3)** How does the process of participation take place? The basis, form, extent, and effects of participation add a qualitative dimension to the evaluation of participation. As a result, participation can have a broad range of meaning. Nine main forms of participation, from passive participation to self-mobilization, are presented (PRETTY 1995).

Who participates is closely related to the question of who are the stakeholders. According to BAWDEN (2002) four types can be distinguished. **(1)** Owners — who represent the

powerful in the sense that they have considerable influence on the situation? **(2)** Community of beneficiaries — who are the community of beneficiaries who are the assumed ‘focus’ of the intended transformation? **(3)** Actors — who are the actors that need to be involved in the actions for change? And **(4)** Guardians — who speaks as guardians of the interests of those who cannot speak for themselves?

Stakeholder participation has many advantages but also some limitations. Theoretically, participation is about greater effectiveness and improves sustainability of development projects and programs. The impact on the efficiency due to higher transaction costs is less clear. Examining analytical studies on the role of ‘participation’ for development, PRETTY (1995) concluded that participation is one of the critical components of success in irrigation, livestock, water and agricultural projects. However, the literature also identifies many physical, social, political, and economical conditions that can limit or hinder success (DEARDEN et al. 1999).

Based on a literature review, a study of experiences of the Cornell International Institute for Food, Agriculture and Development (CIIFAD) that focused on stakeholder participation and the authors’ personal experiences in a multi-stakeholder project in sub-Saharan Africa, the paper highlights and focuses on ten key challenges of stakeholder involvement.

1. Relationships are not static. They evolve over time or change, as do the expectations of individuals and institutions involved.
2. Get the science right. Participatory methods, tools and approaches can be high-quality social science research and there are ways to prove the trustworthiness of findings. Using participatory methods also requires highly skilled persons to implement the approaches appropriately.
3. Find the optimal — not maximal — level of participation of stakeholders. Clearly determine who participates and who not and on which levels and at which stages. The key criteria should be that it is useful and beneficial to all stakeholders involved.
4. Involve key stakeholders. What is required to motivate all key stakeholders to actively participate?
5. Address conflict situations. A win-win situation is less likely than competing or conflicting interests. Decisions have to be made and someone has to take responsibility. But roles and responsibilities should be clear.
6. Limit complexity. There is a certain level of complexity at which projects can become counterproductive. Projects should be kept simple and remain realistic in what can be achieved.
7. Keep transaction costs low. Participatory approaches entail the danger of high transaction costs for stakeholders as well as project management and control, which may not result in greater benefits for the participants.
8. Scale-up to regional and national levels. Success (long-term) of participation will depend on the ability of scaling-up rather local successes.
9. Institutionalize participatory approaches. What is required to institutionalize participation to make changes sustainable?
10. Implement what you preach. How participatory are institutions (i.e., donor organizations, international centers, international universities) themselves that promote participatory approaches?

Stakeholder participation in RET is a very convincing concept for the success of local development projects, but very complex and difficult to implement. Stakeholder involvement is a necessity but how much participation in what aspects of a project depends on whether or not it is important, useful and beneficial.