



Tropentag, September 18-21, 2016, Vienna, Austria

“Solidarity in a competing world —
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World Café: A Key Method to Link Disciplines in International Research

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Abstract

Interdisciplinary research has become a key principle in research on real-world problems such as food security and climate change adaptations, integrating the knowledge and skills of scientists of multiple disciplines, institutes and cultures in order to find viable solutions. Usually a participatory research approach is applied in order to also ensure stakeholder involvement.

While participatory research methods are manifold, few methods such as interviews and focus groups are highly popular to obtain stakeholder knowledge. We introduce and discuss the ‘World Café’ as additional research method. While the ‘World Café’ is widely used as an assessment tool in community development and organisational change processes, it certainly has not found its way into standard text-books of qualitative research.

We introduce the ‘World Café’ as a participatory method of data collection for a large group of participants and discuss potential strengths and weaknesses in comparison to other well-established methods in the qualitative research tradition: semi-structured interviews and focus groups. We link our research to the food security project Trans-SEC that aims to improve the food situation for the most vulnerable rural population in Tanzania, and targets a variety of local and regional key stakeholders. The project consortium is composed of more than 100 scientist and non-scientists from different institutions and countries.

As key result, we evaluated ‘World Café’ as a method that complements other research methods. It helps exploring and innovating as well as verifying themes with a large number of participants and it is therefore ideal for the field of interdisciplinary and international agricultural research. Furthermore, it is a method that does not only produce data for the researcher but also benefits the participants as it facilitates dialogue and mutual learning.

Keywords: Food Security, interdisciplinary research, participatory research, qualitative research, World Café