



Tropentag, September 20-22, 2017, Bonn

“Future Agriculture:
Socio-ecological transitions and bio-cultural shifts”

Participatory Video Proposals: A Tool for Empowering Farmer Groups in Transdisciplinary Innovation Processes?

PAMELA NGWENYA, MARIA JOSE RESTREPO RODRIGUEZ, RAÚL FERNANDEZ, BRIGITTE KAUFMANN

German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (DITSL), Germany

Abstract

With the intention of developing more democratic processes of knowledge production to support innovation processes, a critical methodological approach was developed within the frame of two transdisciplinary “research for development” projects in Kenya and Tanzania. In the discovery phase of the transdisciplinary projects, five smallholder farmer groups were invited to apply for action funds to co-develop innovations to enhance livelihoods. Employing participatory video (PV), groups applied for the grants using a ‘video proposal’. Group members collaboratively produced videos representing their problems, aims and innovation plans. The underlying motive of this approach was to strengthen the role and the decision-making power of the farmers in the research process, to support them in jointly conceptualising innovation processes, while at the same time creating a ‘space of inclusion’ in which power relations could be renegotiated.

However, power and empowerment are fuzzy concepts and have been variously theorised in terms of “power-over”, “power-to” and “power-with”. With regard to these three modalities, this presentation critically examines how power relations were affected by the PV proposal process with particular attention to: i) researcher-participant relations, ii) intra-group relations, and iii) group-community relations. We then critically address the question: “in how far are PV proposals a tool for empowering farmer groups in transdisciplinary innovation processes?”

A qualitative approach was employed to gain insight into farmers’ perspectives. This included 40 semi-structured interviews and 5 narrative interviews. Initial observations conveyed the process as contributing to empowerment with regard to enhancing group ‘capacities to act’, in terms of strengthening group members’ pride in, control over and sense of ownership of their innovation processes. However a more critical understanding of power enables one to highlight the context-specific limitations to empowerment, including issues of patronage, gender norms, project longevity and economic circumstances. In conclusion, the method presented can serve as a useful tool for supporting transformative processes of knowledge co-production and action research, and has cautionary possibilities for supporting empowerment processes.

Keywords: Empowerment, farmer groups, innovation processes, methods, participatory video, trans-disciplinarity