

# Institutionalizing Farmer Participation and Empowerment Through Grassroots Research and Innovation



Pamela A. Custodio  
Department of Science Communication  
College of Development Communication  
University of the Philippines Los Banos

## Participation as development approach

- Not so novel
- Accepted practice and have been accommodated as an approach by development organizations
- The *vogue*

<http://www.adb.org/participation/toolkit-handbooks.asp>

“Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions, and resources which affect them”

- World Bank 1996

## In UPLB

- Farmer-Scientist Training Program
- Isang Bagsak
- ALL in CBNRM

## The Notion of Participation

Many interpretations (White 1994)

- “Euphoric”
- “Kaleidoscopic . . . changes color and shape at the will of the hands in which it is held”
- “seen from the eye of the beholder”
- Shaped by the “hand of the power holder”

“Participation is a rich concept that means different things to different people in different settings. For some, it is a matter of principle; for others, a practice; and for still others, an end in itself. All these interpretations have merit.”

- World Bank Participation Sourcebook

## The Notion of Participation

The attached concept of 'local' and 'partner'

- Local involvement
- Local ownership
- Local control
- Local partners

## Research interest: the notion of participation

"How participatory is participatory?"  
(Castillo, 1983)

Under-theorized (Huesca, 2000)

## **STAKEHOLDERS' NARRATIVES OF PARTICIPATION IN GRASSROOTS RESEARCH AND EXTENSION IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE**

*"I can only answer the question 'What am I to do' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"*  
-Alasdair MacIntyre  
*Beyond Virtue (1981)*

### Conceptual/ Theoretical Premises

- Not all can be measured
- Draws from the discourses of understanding and interpretation, suspicion and vulnerability
- At the intersection of the critical and postmodern

### Conceptual/ Theoretical Premises

#### Critical Theories

- Power
- Paolo Freire  
“intercommunication”
- Jürgen Habermas  
“communicative action”

### Conceptual/ Theoretical Premises

#### Critical Theories

- Power
- Dialogue
- Participative action
- Emancipation
- Empowerment

### Conceptual/ Theoretical Premises

#### Postmodern ethos

- Knowledge & language
- Text & conversation
- Discursive
- Reflexive
- Narrative

## Methodology

“language as the central means by which we carry our lives together – carrying the past into the present to create the future”. (Gergen, 1999)

“science as organized knowledge is also communicatively constituted” (Craig 1999; Lindlof 1995; Anderson and Calas 1987)

## Conceptual/ Theoretical Premises

Communication as constitutive of social realities (Craig, 1999)

- Communication as nature of reality
- Communication as knowing & structuring knowledge

## Methodology

Qualitative & communicational lenses

- Social phenomenon is seen from a communication perspective
- Social phenomenon is knowable in communication
- Social phenomenon investigated using a communicational approach

## Methodology

Greimas' Semio-Narrative Theory

- Organizational communication
- Used to operationalize the link between sense-making, organizing and narrating
- Four phases of narrative to structure an organization

## Methodology

### Greimas' Semio-Narrative Theory

- Manipulation – breach that initiates the narrative (assumptions are surfaced)
- Competence – subject mobilizes a series of helpers to overcome obstacles and opponents
- Performance – fulfillment of the quest
- Sanction – subject is rewarded or blamed for succeeding or failing in the mission

## Methodology

### Narrative (Cooren, 2001)

- Storytelling as legitimizing process
- Storytelling as socialization process
- Storytelling as sense-making
- Has a beginning, middle, end

## Methodology

### Reflexive, co-authoring

- Research is co-authored by the researcher and the research
- Stories were constructed in text and conversation
- Can assume that the research itself is participatory
- Surface muted voices

## Method

### Data and data sources

- Texts from conversations and documents
- Stakeholders as storytellers

## Method

### Finding the stories, narrative(s)

- Conversations-as-interview
- Find embedded stories of participation (surface the notion of participation through iterative reading of transcripts and documents)
- Structure narrative(s) of participation

## Scope of the study

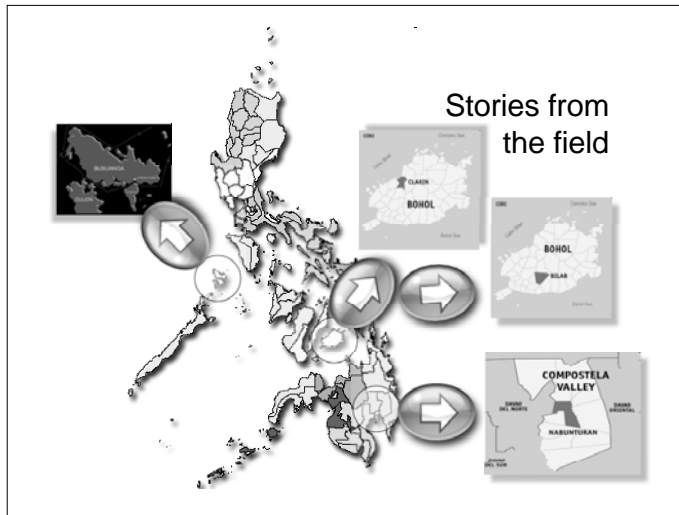
- Farmers who have trained in farmer field schools (FFS) using participatory sustainable agriculture approaches
- Interest in the notion of participation
- Inquiry framed in the qualitative – narrative lens; studies narratives
- A communication study, “communication as constitutive of social realities”

## Focus on recurrent stories, texts & language

- Focus on manipulation, what started the story/narrative of participating in grassroots rice breeding
- What constitutes institutionalization of farmer participation and empowerment as told in farmer stories of participation?

*“So as I reflect on a way of talking I essentially bring to the table the voice of another community. The two communities meet within me, I become a conduit for mutual understanding.”*

*– Kenneth Gergen  
on discourse and emancipation  
“An Invitation to Social Construction” (1999)*



## “Mayroon” story

“..naga-breeding kuntahay ko aron nay akong kaugalingon na kuan kaugalingon nahong binhi..”

– Nang Francng

*“I breed rice so that I have my own seeds to plant”*

## “Akin” story

“Usa ran a akong gi-breed unja hago bitaw ning mag-breed....unya gigam-anan nako siya ug akong ngan..”

– Nang Francng

*“I was able to cross one [rice] line...and I gave it my name”*

## “Akin” story

“.. kay nakamugna na man mig binhi para sa among basakan...kuan na, sa akong pangalan. Radix ang akong angga...Radix Breeding Lines...”

– Mang Radix

*“...we were able to develop rice for our farm...in my name. Radix is my nickname...Radix Breeding Lines...”*

## “Atin” story



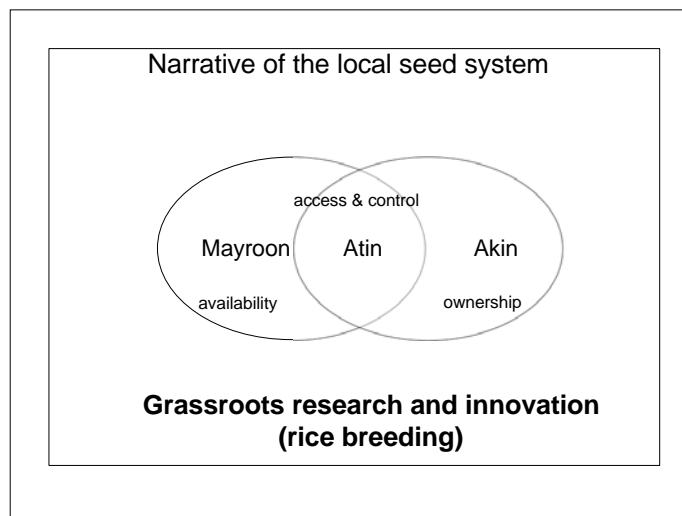
- Collective action
- Community Seed Registry
- Campagao Farmers Production and Research Association (CFPRA)



## “Atin” story

- Local seed systems
- Seed barter - accessibility
- Grassroots rice plant breeding – research and production
- Focus on integrated pest management and organic farming - sustainability





## Towards building participative institutions

- Farmers' rights
- People's organizations in on-farm research and production
- Local partnerships
- Local gene bank
- Recognition of farmer-bred rice lines
- Support of LGU through policy

## Issues in research and innovation

- Elite institutions
- Validity
- Quality
- Top-down flow of innovations
- Source to receiver

## Implications

- Legitimacy and acceptability of grassroots research
- Priorities and focus of local government (e.g. MAO and DA)
- hybrid rice and GMOs of agri-biotech corporations)
- Policy (Plant variety protection act vs open access seeds)
- Land reform (tenants, agrarian reform communities)

Thank you for listening. ☺

Pamela A. Custodio  
Department of Science Communication  
College of Development Communication  
UP Los Banos  
[www.devcom.edu.ph](http://www.devcom.edu.ph)  
[pacustodio@devcom.edu.ph](mailto:pacustodio@devcom.edu.ph)