

PRACTICE ABSTRACT

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In practice-oriented agricultural research projects a direct impact for the farmers is often desired – by the donor, the partnering farmers and even often by the researchers themselves. However, the reality of 4-to-5-year research projects shows that expectations are not always met. Researchers often walk a fine line between having to provide ‘products’ that are sufficiently novel to still require development and at the same time dealing with the request by ‘end-users’ that these innovations should be market-ready and usable.

If the product is not novel enough the consortium runs into the issue of seemingly marketing an existing product. Still, new development is not implementable right away. And then, there is the jargon. Scientists are trained to communicate with their research peers in specialized channels such as peer-reviewed journal articles and scientific conferences. This language is not meant to be accessible by communities outside their specialists let alone lay people. Scientific products such as models are often highly complex and are very difficult to explain and/or understand. Nevertheless, when product development is to happen in collaboration with end-users through co-creation processes a certain level of understanding by practitioners such as farmers is needed.

In our WATERAGRI workshops the project consortium made an effort to (1) host local workshops in the 9 different case study countries in local languages, (2) invite participants in a targeted manner with a view to enticing those that are knowledgeable, interested and open-minded to provide product-design feedback, and (3) provide ample pre- and post-workshop information to workshop participants about what to expect (aim) and what the research team will do with the received feedback (results and follow-up). We experienced that clearly defining on what elements of the product the researchers need feedback on, can significantly help all parties involved in feeling more satisfied with the process.