

Participatory agricultural research – Personal journeys

Compiled and documented by Terry Clayton at the ‘Participatory Agricultural Research: Approaches, Design and Evaluation’ (PARADE) workshop, Oxford, 9-13 December 2013

These ‘personal journey’ stories were written by participants at the PARADE workshop held in December 2013. They are heartfelt and eloquent testaments to the potential that PAR approaches and tools have for transformative change, not just within the communities where we work, but within our own lives.

Researchers come to PAR from a surprising range of backgrounds, everything from IT and physics engineering to medieval history. That people from such varied origins find so much value in PAR approaches and tools speaks to their wide versatility and adaptability.

action research	ethno-botany	physics
agricultural extension	farming systems	physics engineering
agricultural sciences	forestry	plant ecology
agro-ecology	geography	political science
animal sciences	horticulture	rangeland ecology
anthropology	IT engineering	rural development studies
artificial intelligence	mathematics	sociology
biophysical science	medieval history	social simulation
cognitive sciences	negotiation support	social work
complex systems	ornithology	soil science
conservation biology	participatory	water & forest engineering
crop research	modeling	watershed management
economics		
environmental management		

Valentine J. Gandhi

How I came to PRA

I was an IT engineer and a chance meeting of a migrant worker's family being mistreated for not having 3 rupees to pay for a train ticket, broke the bubble I was living in. So I moved to Development, did my Masters in Social Work, which was a very community based course and later PhD in Economics and Sociology. Both of these were with migrant workers and their livelihoods and how it was affected by HIV/AIDS. It was a time migration was looked at as a negative impact alone and all studies on HIV/AIDS looked at it from an epidemiological point of view.

I started applying participatory tools and mixed it with the sense making methodology which helped me see the problem the way the migrants viewed it, and sure enough powerful messages came out, like they don't necessarily migrate for money ,they did not consider it negative, they migrated to escape from Caste or other structural aspects which blocked their progress and kept them without dignity within the village. This is one example, and I saw during my time in the field in India with ICRISAT and World Bank, and later last 5 years with UNDP and USAID in Africa, how powerful participatory research is, that it makes you work with the people rather than on them.

Now I am back in the CG with IWMI in Ethiopia and it's because of participatory research tools I am able to come up to speed working with farmers and local partners in getting to know ground realities quicker than any research paper or model or a publication. PAR has been a life changing experience for me in making me an efficient and effective researcher focusing on outcomes and opened my eyes to see the holistic view of issues in the field.

Nicole Lefore

I first used participatory research methods in my previous work with political and large-scale public education campaigns for behavior change in West Africa. We would not even consider trying to develop an intervention without first undertaking participatory research. We needed to understand – in the words and context of real people themselves - what they know, how they came to know that, and what they needed to know to adapt and engage as policies and market conditions changed. There was no other way to capture that information than to go directly to people.

Within the CGIAR, I led a project that took a participatory action research approach that used PAR methods. We formed a learning alliance around learning questions identified by implementers of agricultural water projects. We used PAR tools and approaches to jointly learn how to improve engagement within communities and between communities and other stakeholders to increase the benefit of irrigation investments to livelihoods. I saw how farmers came up with innovative ways to improve their lives beyond just irrigation infrastructure. In Upper Quashni in Ethiopia, a farmer organizations achieved policy change by having a child read a poem to decision makers about the importance of roads to the lives of people using irrigation. With that small act, they went from potatoes rotting in piles to loading them onto trucks to take to markets. Because of their policy intervention, other communities are getting roads as well, giving them access to markets, and education and health facilities. Few methods would have led to such solutions - participatory approaches provided that space for innovation.

Using PAR is satisfying as a research for development scientist, because you can see change happening even as research is still underway. The impact may be 'anecdotal' as far as the scientific community is concerned - but it does not make it any less real. Yes, PAR can make doing the research, and publishing it, much more challenging, but grappling with the challenges

have made me a better researcher. And anyway, I get more satisfaction from impact at a local level than I would from 'impact' in publishing. That's what PAR means to me – it's what keeps me motivated to continue contributing to the research that underpins agricultural development.

Floriane Clement

How did you come to PAR?

I think PAR came to me rather than I came to PAR. Participatory approaches form an important component of geography and rural development studies, so it naturally came into my way as I was a PhD student.

Where did you start from?

I started using basic Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools such as focus group discussions, transect walk, participatory mapping and ranking exercises during my PhD. I then moved to approaches which give more power and control to farmers over the production of knowledge such as participatory video.

How has 'doing' PAR changed you?

I feel the use of PAR in my research approach has practically broadened my sense of the role and position of researchers. I think that researchers are never neutral as it is assumed in some scientific disciplines. Researchers are always part of what they are studying and agents of social change. Using PAR allows me to think over this in a more in-depth way by experiencing it on the ground.

Pepijn Schreinemachers

How did you come to PAR?

I joined a research project that had PAR in its agenda and its approach. I learned about it from my colleagues.

Where did you start from?

From scratch. I was taught about PAR as at university as part of qualitative research approached in sociology and anthropology.

How has doing Par changed you?

I don't think it has changed me. Perhaps it made me more open for alternative approaches and more critical of research and development. I see it as one approach that can be applied in certain situations not as a solution for everything.

Panomsak Promburom

Where did you start from?

Farming systems research project, inter-disciplinary team when PRA and human agroecosystems approaches were employed at Khon Kean University. Then experienced more as a research intern at East West Center. Studied a master's degree at Chiang Mai University, Agricultural systems programs, which is about systems approaches and an inter- and multi-disciplinary research teamwork.

I studied farming systems research (animal science) at Khon Kean University in Thailand and graduated in 1989. After graduation I worked briefly as a research intern at the East-West Center. I got involved in a network of researchers promoting Rapid Rural Appraisal (Chambers).

I got connected with CIRAD via a joint research on companion modelling for resilience water management (CPWF PN25). Being trained along the project period training sessions within two years and also did my PhD dissertation research funded by CPWF PN25 budget. CPWF selected our approach to implement in Mekong. The research output/outcomes were heard by many people in the CPWF. Then I got invited to share/learn in a workshop in Addis Ababa, then PAR here at Oxford.

How has participatory research changed you?

Over time, my idea of what is “the bigger picture” has expanded a lot.

Murat Sartas

I graduated from [university] in [year] with a degree in economics.

I attributed change to how rigorously I applied mainstream economic research methodologies.

After working for some time in the field, I began to think that when it comes to bringing about change, ‘research’ is only part of the picture. If you want to change things you have to talk to people, listen to people.

As an administrator, I think it's important to wear many hats. I'm an administrator AND a researcher.

If researchers have no personal stake in the research process, there isn't likely to be a lot of

Peter Thorne

Participatory research has given me, personally, two things I think; greater breadth and content to the more “scientific” work I was originally involved in and the chance to peer into other peoples’ lives. I believe the latter is good for the spirit in terms of perceiving the similarities in values and basic humanity that exist between people of different backgrounds and life exposures and in terms of the differences that we need to address in order to interact and basically live together.

As a researcher, I believe that being fairly hands on in PAR whilst also working on the development of simulation models, really shaped my direction. As my career progressed I became much more interested in delivering the decision making capacity that is inherent in many models back to farmers rather than narrowing down the experience in order to generate a publication. This has required a number of top down perspectives as well but racially would not have been possible for me without the context given by PAR.

Finally, my first engagement with PAR was in 1992 in the mid hills of Nepal where farmer practice highly integrated crop-livestock systems in a fragile and changing environment.

I remember asking a farmer how he might adapt his farming practices if it was not possible to include livestock. He looked at me rather incredulously and said simply that, without livestock it would be impossible to farm. If this taught me anything then it was the danger of framing issues from an exogenous perspective. I continue to ask stupid questions to this day.

Birgit Boogaard

The first time I actually used PAR was in my PhD research. Departing from the idea that people know best what they want and how society should look like. Using it in other projects over time it confirmed my ideas that these are very wise people (while being illiterate with education on the topic) I learned so much from the people in the field. It is a very humbling experience.

It made me realize again and again that research is about these people. It is not about me, or my publications. It is about *them*. and finding creative ways to support them in ways that suit them. It made even more humble in my work and careful in our interventions. Constantly questioning myself if it does good to the people, or actually harms or worsens the situation. It made me feel very thankful for having the opportunity to work with so many different and beautiful people.

Annet Abenakyo Mulema

How did you come to participatory action research? Where did you start?

My involvement in PAR started when I was an undergraduate student at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. My training in agricultural extension exposed me to participatory approaches of doing research. More so, I was mentored by a professor who was so much obsessed with the concept of participation and participatory approaches and he influenced my thinking about doing research and working with others in research. After my graduate program, my first job was with the International Center for Tropical Agricultural (CIAT), in Kampala, Uganda. I was involved in the Enabling Rural Innovation (ERI) program and the principle approach was co-production of change. Since then, my approach towards research has involved co-production of knowledge, innovation and social change.

How has doing PAR changed you?

PAR has changed my attitude toward the beneficiaries of research including farmers, private sector, extension, etc. There has been a shift in attitude from considering participants especially farmers, as recipients of knowledge and technologies but as partners who are integral to the whole process of change. I have also learned to be patient when doing research or development work because communities do not change overnight. Change in behavior takes ages, let a lot change at personal level but also change in the cultural context. Besides this, working in rural communities with resource poor farmers has also exposed me to actual realities, be more critical in my work and challenge some of the recurrent assumptions especially about gender. I do not take things for granted. I have come to appreciate who I am and what I have achieved in life because there are people out there who wake up in the morning and are never sure of whether they will even have a meal in a day. I have also come to learn that to achieve PAR, then I have to nurture respect for, and openness to the community in which the research is taking place. To me PAR is all about negotiation...everything has to be negotiated e.g. your position as a researcher/developer/professor/mother...name it. Nevertheless, I have come to love what I do.

Clovis Kabaseke

How did you come to PAR?

By background I am a Forester, Ornithologist, Ethno-botanist, Farmer, Horticulturist and all these compelled me to master in Agro-Ecology . In agro Ecology I was introduced to wide systems thinking which is greatly associated with the interrelationships and interconnectedness and interactions of elements and activities in their communities and ecosystems. The best way of understanding these is by embracing and respecting participatory approaches.

Where did you start from?

My active involvement with PAR started in Medenine, Djerba, Tunisia in May 2012. This is when I started my training in companion modeling at the invitation of Dr. Nils Ferrand of IRSTEA, the author of WAT-A-GAME. This training has progressively enabled me to 'participatory' design

Mpanga game (a participatory tool for INRM which is exhibiting a lot of potential of positively changing the mind-set of communities in the Rwenzori region)

How has “doing” PAR changed you?

Participatory Action Research has clearly demonstrated to me my position in society and in the general ecosystem. I am but just a small component of a very complex system. I behave and act in compliance with the dynamics of the wider society and environment with which I interact. PAR has made me understand that to live well requires to properly observe, understand, collaborate with and contribute to the social, economic and environmental dynamics of my community. Synergies within the community are the ones that can effectively and efficiently create sustainable and feasible solutions to the challenges and issues that confront the community and the environment. This has taught me to embrace the “wide systems thinking approach” as opposed to only focusing on particular elements. Consequently I am currently committed to learning how to balance the skills of observing, listening, probing, and judging.

Rein van der Hoek

How did I come to PAR?

I was exposed to some tools when I was working in a farming systems project in Zambia (around 20 years ago), doing PRA exercises with farmers in different communities to characterize the farming and livelihood systems, identify constraints and opportunities. At that time, a large part of my research activities consisted of on-farm trials, researcher managed, without much farmer participation.

Some years later I got the opportunity to do a PhD at the department of Innovation and Extension of the University of Hohenheim as part of a project implemented by CIAT in Honduras. At that time, participatory research was very fashionable, both with Hohenheim as with CIAT.

Where did I start from?

My focus was forages, and I decided to work with small farmers in approximately 10 communities, leaving up to them whether to participate in on-farm trials with mostly new varieties, and how to implement these trials. During 2 years (three growing cycles) I followed the farmers, and I collected data on both research modalities and agronomic results. The process generated useful information on reasons why farmers participated in this activity (demanding labour, land, some other inputs), the ways they experimented and gave some insights why farmers adopt (or not) forage based technologies.

How has it changed me?

I have become much more aware of farmers perceptions in relation to experimenting and technology adoption, and also of the interface between farmers and (outside) research like myself. I also realize that there is still a lot of work needed on understanding adoption processes, incentive mechanisms, etc. and I continue to stress this wherever opportune. Finally,

I have become convinced of the need for participatory approaches and methods, but we still need to find ways how to scale these processes in a cost-effective way.

Adrian Bolliger

I spent 7 months in a small and very isolated village in Tanzania as part of my MSc research. The research was focussed on nutrient cycling in maize-pigeonpea intercrops and in the field this involved measuring and collecting leaf litter from various varieties of pigeonpea grown on 30 farmers' fields. This did not actually take much time on a daily basis (I just made and installed litter traps that I emptied on a fortnightly basis). I was dropped off in the village by some staff from a NARS. They stayed for three days to make sure I was set-up in a local household, and then left again, not to come back for another month. I was entirely 'alone' as the only person in the village and was not from the community. Nobody could speak any English, and I had no Kikaguru (local language) skills and only a few words of Kiswahili under my belt. At first I nearly went mad. The villagers popped by the first few days to say hello, but then quickly lost interest as we could only really communicate with smiles and nods and '*ndio*'s. So I had nothing to do and nobody to talk to. Gradually I learnt a bit more of the local language, and I asked the farmers if I could take part in their activities (planting, weeding, harvesting, but also collecting firewood, cooking, etc.). Although it was initially frustrating, in the end, I felt that I got a much richer appreciation of the rhythm of life in the village, and as such, a better understanding of what was important, and that this translated favourably into my capability to do relevant research.

Thom Alexander

How did you come to PAR?

I was convinced that research had produced many options for farmers to deal with problems OR capitalize on opportunities in agriculture. The bottleneck in my view was not the availability of options, but the information about options available to farmers. This made me realize that I would make a difference if I engaged with farmers and stakeholders, experiment and evaluate options and share information with a larger audience. The engagement translated into working with farmer organizations, extension, NGOs, radios, seed enterprises and national research in a range of participatory approaches (participatory variety selection, farmer field schools, innovation and RⁱⁿD platforms etc.) to make information and inputs available on a large scale.

Where did you start from?

I've started from biophysical science and research in plant ecology and conservation biology at the free university of Amsterdam. I found a PhD opportunity with Wageningen in an agriculture-related field in Mali, West Africa doing mainly on-station research. After my PhD research I realized that I want to make a difference for farmers in the developing world and started working as an associate professional officer in the CGIAR system (ICRISAT-Bamako).

How has “doing” PAR changed you?

I’ve learned a lot about the diversity of farming systems in the dryland tropics and their opportunities and constraints. I’ve realized that if research is not based on a clear need identified with stakeholders, it cannot lead to change. I’ve also learned that farmers and local communities have knowledge of their systems that is mostly complementary to scientific knowledge and this implies that involving them in the research and project cycle from the start, will lead to more relevant, sustainable and economically viable results. I also realized that there is a strong need for innovation at higher level than farm and field. Therefore I’m motivated to partner with organizations that have capacity in institutional, landscape and policy level innovations.

Abrami Géraldine

I was trained as a physics engineer so I could have ended up building nuclear power plant but within my “living systems physics” specialization I looked for an internship dealing with ecosystems modeling and I got one in the CIRAD team which is developing the Companion Modeling approach. I did not actually do any kind of participation at that time but I was trained in including humans in a model and considering heterogeneous practices and perspectives. Since then I’ve been keeping working with this ComMod crowd of people and I have been involved as a modeler in various PAR projects.

So I started from nothing but no theoretical or practical knowledge neither in social or political science, nor action research, nor agriculture.

I would say that besides giving me a chance to open my mind to various kinds of mindset, cultures and social contexts, the major change that PAR has brought to me is trying to make science dealing with uncertainty, unknown and moving perspectives.

Nils Ferrand

How did you come to PAR?

The essence of values and rationales is deeply embedded into our culture and its linguistic expression. French language deserves to be used here. It’s part of the ethics of participation. <...> ma maman et mon papa, sociologues, m’ont expliqué il y a longtemps que les humains comptent plus que les choses, et que les relations, échanges, solidarités, déterminent la complexité des croyances, valeurs et finalement des actions, et que le monde en découle. Ce que le monde impose aux hommes est finalement minoritaire dans la souffrance et le bonheur des gens. D’autre part, la recherche prend sa valeur quand elle agit sur le monde et le monde est déterminé par les représentations des acteurs. Enfin la critique des schémas de pouvoir sont les déterminants ultimes de l’équité, et la capacité restituée aux acteurs de penser et agir dans le monde en conscience des causes et conséquences est le préliminaire de la réalisation d’objectifs d’émancipation et de satisfaction équitable des besoins humains.

Where did you start from?

Curriculum? Physics, mathematics, Water & Forest engineering, artificial intelligence, negotiation support, cognitive sciences, complex systems, social simulation, reasoning agency reasons, action research, participatory modeling, activism in environmental management. My first PAR project (1993) was looking at the multi-stakeholders land use planning processes for linear infrastructures and we developed a participatory design process and tool for spatial negotiation, with an online web version already in 1995 (SANPA). I was among the people who act in the CSDM Collaborative Spatial Decision Making group (NCGIA I17) which very early worked on combining GIS and participation. Later I supervised PhD in this field and worked in 14 European projects dealing with it.

How has “doing” PAR changed you?

Made me meet and understand better many people from their internal socio-environmental dynamic. Makes me exist in my institution and provoke some few changes and improvements!

Tracy Baker

I came to PAR while doing my PhD in Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management. Because I had come into physical sciences from a more socially oriented background, via jobs I had as well as my initial undergraduate degree in Philosophy, I was quite shocked that there was such a disconnect between science and people. Through the works of philosophers and scientists such as Popper, Russell, and Dawkins, I had come to a perception that science held some sort of key to humanity's success. This is where I started from: wondering where are the people in the science and why don't the people listen to the science?

I began exploring participatory methods as part of my dissertation work. At this stage in my life, it had not occurred to me that there was a chasm between people and science. What I learned in my study of natural sciences was that indeed science has allowed us understand many processes in the world around us and that this knowledge has the power to transform in many positive ways how we love and interact with the environment.

What I learned through PAR was that I, and therefore many of the farmers I was working with, already had some intuition or knowledge about many aspects of the natural world around us just by the fact that we lived in the world, woke up and walked outside each day. People know much more than we think they know or give them credit for. It's true that sometimes we "know" things but with false reasoning, but that's OK because the whole philosophical process of science is driven by this notion.

I would have to say that most importantly I learned that I needed people and the natural exchange of different types of knowledge that takes place when I am with them to improve my science far more than they needed me to "solve" their problems.

Martha Cronin

How did you come to PAR?

PAR seemed like a natural and logical way to engage in the kind of research issues I was interested in. It seemed to me the only way to engage with a community and understand the drivers affecting natural resource management and the community driven opportunities for addressing land degradation.

Where did you start from?

I started in Medieval history – there was no one to ask the questions that most interested me – such as how did the forest policies of the time affect different communities (monastic, peasant and aristocracy) there were only tantalizing hints which could be derived from the legal records. I went into environmental anthropology and agroforestry to look at these issues more closely in a modern context where attitudes to resource management have changed – but the methods of enforcement have stayed the same.

How has doing PAR changed you?

It has complicated my political ideologies quite a bit through exposure to different people's perspectives. It has pushed me to engage and react to issues happening on the ground and in the field site. It has also made me more insecure about stating certainty – I am happier to dwell in the uncertainties and gaps in knowledge which a PAR approach can identify.

Amanda Harding

My engagement with participatory approaches stems from my own sense of who I am and where I fit within my community and with the wider world. My personal search and acute awareness of inequity and injustice. I've always been a supporter of the underdog, I've always been on the side of person who "has not" rather than "has" and have always had a clear sense of my own privilege - education, exposure, engagement ... Growing up in a large family always in motion where each of us had to fight for space, show our worth but also respect, listen and love also gave me an early sense of the value of listening, of conversation and of perspective.

My very first experience travelling to the South at the age of 19 on my own confirmed and propelled me further in this direction. Arriving in Delhi on my way to a rural development programme in UP I met with the programme's director. I was young, naive, and extremely intimidated by this larger than life leader and nationally respected change agent. He sent me on my way with instructions on which train to take, then the following train, then the bus and eventually the road to walk to the Benwasi Sewa Ashram.

He gave me a handwritten note introducing me to his wife. And then his final words, cold, stern and very clear - nothing like the welcoming warm words of comfort I had hoped for:

"If I see you in two weeks when I get to the Ashram, all well and good. If you have left by then I won't be surprised. If you stay for many months you must make that choice. But, be clear

within yourself you are not here to help. You are here to listen, to learn and to grow." How right he was. I stayed for six months.

And since then I have had the immense privilege to listen, to learn and continue to grow. To recognise the power, the beauty and insights that each of us has to offer. And through that the value of enabling each of the voices and their joint conversations.

Jean Emmanuel

Who did you come to PAR?

I was looking for some crazy intellectual adventure after a long mathematical desert crossing. And to bridge my different interests and concerns (among which, tinkering).

Where did you start from?

Understanding Nils.

How has 'doing' PAR changed you?

It didn't. It's not about changing me, but finding something that's make me feel at the right place.

Jo Cadilhon

How did I come to PAR?

My French father still quotes Virgil to me (Georgiques, II, 458): *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, agricolas* (Oh how happy those farmers would be, if only they knew how lucky they are).

Where did you start from?

First year at agricultural sciences university (AgroParis Tech). Agronomics teachers taught us how important it was to walk through the farm with farmers to see for ourselves, and through the farmer's eyes, the problems they were facing in the actual location where it had to be solved.

MSc in agricultural systems also at AgroParis Tech with 6 months of in-depth interviews with Vietnamese farmers to synthesize all the components of the landscape and farming systems in a small area in Southeast Vietnam.

How has 'doing' PAR changed me?

Developed immense respect for the viewpoint and knowledge of all people I meet.

Marc Schut

How did you come to PAR?

I was sensitized to PAR during my studies at Wageningen University, where it was solidly embedded in the university curriculum.

Where did you start from?

I started from studying how participatory approaches (FFS in Ecuador) are differently applied by different organizations (research, development, government, NGO) and what are the consequences and underlying drivers of this diversified application.

How has 'doing' PAR changed you?

During my PhD-research, I conducted participatory action research in support of a multi-actor working group that was developing sustainability criteria for biofuel production in Mozambique. I gained valuable experiences in working with different groups of people (researchers, policymakers, commercial and smallholder farmers, private sector, NGOs) and gained better understanding of the drivers that influence the creditability, legitimacy and relevance of research in addressing complex agricultural problems.

Britta Kolowski

How did you come to PAR?

When I joined CIP in 2008 I found that elements of participatory evaluation were integral part of the variety selection protocols both of potato and sweet potato. I thought this a very good element, and so it proved to be because we released 5 potato varieties and 7 varieties of orange fleshed sweet potato in Angola in 2013.

Where did you start from?

The participatory approach allowed me to involve farmers, customers and any other stakeholders into the selection process of newly introduced varieties from the earliest stages of evaluation, in this case from the first evaluation trials in 2009.

How has "doing" PAR changed you?

For me PAR is a method to gather additional data which allow to better aim interventions and products such as varieties etc at the needs of the recipients and the environs in which they live and work. In the PARADE workshop I learned that PAR has a somewhat wider vision, and I am reflecting on this.

Saa Dottoh

I was trained as an agricultural economist with special interest in agricultural production economics and quantitative analysis. My PhD was on computer simulation of irrigated production systems in Nigeria and my preferred area of teaching was quantitative methods and econometrics.

I got into using participatory processes when I was a consultant to UNICEF-Nigeria on Food and Nutrition Security Monitoring and Evaluation while lecturing at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The experience I got was that most of the food security and nutritional problems on the field could hardly be answered with very high level quantitative analysis of even cross sectional field data. I realized that there was need to dialogue quite closely with household members to understand HOW to address most of the problems they faced.

In 1994 I got back to my own country Ghana and continued working on Food and Nutrition Security issues with UNICEF-Ghana and other organizations while lecturing at the University for Development Studies in Tamale, Ghana. The University for Development Studies, which was only a year old in 1994, was mandated to be community-oriented and to emphasize on problem-solving pedagogy in its curriculum. That made it easy for me to continue to practice participatory approaches. I also got to work closely with agriculture-oriented NGOs in northern Ghana and they had adopted participatory technology development (PTD) methods.

“Doing” PAR has made me respect very much the rich knowledge farmers and community members have with regards to not only agriculture but livelihoods in general. I believe I have learnt more from farmers than they have learnt from me. I believe agricultural development has not made the desired progress in many developing countries because of the lack of effective and meaningful integration of farmers’ and researchers’ knowledge.

Lotte Klapwijk

How did you come to PAR?

I came to PAR (heard about it), when I was hired as a consultant for IITA in 2012 to prepare a workshop on trade-off analyses, which took place last February (2013). My work started with reading literature, creating an inventory of the different methods to do a trade-off analyses and participatory approaches were of course among them.

Where did you start from?

I have a BSc in Animal Sciences from the applied university in Delft, and an MSc in Forest and Nature Conservation from Wageningen University. A course in agroforestry led me to a thesis in the field of tropical agriculture, which in turn led me to where I am now; about to start my Phd within the HumidTropics.

How has ‘doing’ PAR changed you?

Since my professional career is relatively short, I have not yet executed PAR. But as I mentioned above, I will probably make my first steps as a Phd student next month, and was therefore eager to join the PARADE workshop, to learn and hopefully be able to apply very soon!

Nadia Bergamini

How did you come to PAR?

I'm a biologist/ecologist and I work with an anthropologist. I came to PAR thanks to the guidance of my supervisor. I had never heard about PAR before. My previous research was on observation of natural elements, collection and interpretation of data, no human element really came into the picture.

Where did you start from?

I started by working on projects dealing with agro-biodiversity and its conservation on farm (in situ), first working at the farm level to, characterize the farms and inventory the diversity that existed, then moving into the more social aspects trying to understand why certain crop varieties were conserved and used by the farmers going deeper into the traditional knowledge associated with the farming and use of such diversity.

How has 'doing' PAR changed you?

I feel closer to the farmers and other stakeholders we work with, understanding better their needs and perceptions of their reality. I'm not interested in pure research anymore. I see it more as an instrument that can help in collaboratively finding acceptable solutions. I believe that people who are convinced that PAR is a powerful instrument are a certain type of person and not everyone can use PAR.